

The Historical Stories of the Acts of the Apostles

Lesson 9 Acts 13:13 – Acts 15:5

First missionary journey continues – John Mark leaves the team at Perga

Acts 13:¹³ Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

Leaving Paphos and the Island of Cyprus, Paul and his companions set sail for Perga in the province of Pamphylia, a 210 mile voyage. In ruins now, Perga was the capital of Pamphylia on the Cystrus River about seven miles from the Mediterranean Sea.

Luke reports that John Mark left the team in Perga, most likely setting sail on another ship headed for the ports of Caesarea or Joppa. We do not know why John Mark leaves the team, but his departure infuriates Paul. Later, Paul formally charges John Mark with desertion.¹⁴² From Perga, the team travels 85 miles by land to Pisidian Antioch.

First Missionary Journey (continues)			
Departure	Arrival	Miles	Via
<i>Antioch</i>	<i>Seleucia</i>	20	<i>land</i>
<i>Seleucia</i>	<i>Cyprus/Salamis</i>	150	<i>water</i>
<i>Cyprus/Salamis</i>	<i>Paphos</i>	80	<i>land</i>
Paphos	Perga	210	water
Perga in Pamphylia	Pisidian Antioch	85	land

Acts 13:¹⁴ But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

We must not confuse Pisidian Antioch with the city of Antioch in Syria. This Antioch is in the province of Pisidian just northwest of the province of Pamphylia. Antioch of Syria is 300 miles to the southeast of Pisidian Antioch.

Pisidian Antioch was home to a large community of Jews. From the time the Jews entered the Promised Land, the Law was read in the synagogues each Sabbath. In 163 BC, Antiochus Epiphanies forbade its reading and the rabbis replaced the reading of the Law with the reading of the prophets. Antiochus Epiphanies tried to destroy Judaism. In 146 BC Judas Maccabeus became the leader of a band of Jewish warriors which was formed by his father in earlier years. Judas successfully defeated Antiochus Epiphanies and restored the temple. With the restoration of the temple, Judas instituted the reading of both the Law and the prophets each Sabbath day. On the Sabbath, Paul and his team enter the synagogue and quietly join the proceedings as is his custom. In every synagogue after the reading of an Old Testament passage from both the Law and the prophets the rabbis invite anyone to speak on the subject. Knowing that the rabbi will give the opportunity to speak, Paul patiently waits for his turn to reason with the people.

¹⁴² Acts 15:39

Pisidian Antioch

Acts 13:¹⁵ And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." ¹⁶ And Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand, he said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: ¹⁷ "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. ¹⁴³ ¹⁸ "And for a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹ "And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance-- *all of which took* about four hundred and fifty years.¹⁴⁴ ²⁰ "And after these things He gave *them* judges until Samuel the prophet. ²¹ "And then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. ²² "And after He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.'¹⁴⁵ ²³ "From the offspring of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, ²⁴ after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵ "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not *He*. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' ²⁶ "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the word of this salvation is sent out. ²⁷ "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled *these* by condemning Him.¹⁴⁶ ²⁸ "And though they found no ground for *putting Him to* death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. ²⁹ "And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. ³⁰ "But God raised Him from the dead; ³¹ and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. ³² "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, ³³ that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'THOU ART MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE.'¹⁴⁷ ³⁴ "And as for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY *and* SURE blessings OF DAVID.'¹⁴⁸ ³⁵ "Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*, 'THOU WILT NOT ALLOW THY HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.'¹⁴⁹ ³⁶ "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay; ³⁷ but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. ³⁸ "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him

¹⁴³ Exodus 6:1, 6

¹⁴⁴ Deut 7:1; Joshua 14:1

¹⁴⁵ Psalms 89:20; 1 Samuel 13:14; Isaiah 44:28

¹⁴⁶ Psalm 107:20

¹⁴⁷ Psalm 2:7

¹⁴⁸ Isaiah 55:13

¹⁴⁹ Psalm 16:10

forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. ⁴⁰"Take heed therefore, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon *you*: ⁴¹'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.' " ¹⁵⁰

In just 589 words, Paul presents a beautiful monologue tying together the historical words of the Old Testament and the patriarchs with the facts of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The Jews in the synagogue are amazed at the truth in Paul's words and want more information.

Acts 13:⁴²And as Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath. ⁴³Now when *the meeting* of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.

Following Paul and Barnabas out of the synagogue, the Jews beg Paul to return to the synagogue and continue teaching about the Savior. Paul's message is well received and many become believers. For the first time, these Jews begin to understand the importance of their national heritage in the eternal purposes of God.

Acts 13:⁴⁴And the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and *began* contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.

On the third Sabbath, the crowds in the synagogue are enormous, including Gentiles because *nearly the whole city* has assembled to hear Paul. When Luke speaks of the Jews' contradicting the words of Paul, he is probably speaking of the rabbis of the synagogue or Jews who have been influenced by the rabbis. Either way, Paul and his team are speaking in the synagogue as guests of the leadership, and when they are denied that privilege, they cannot legally continue to speak in that setting. No doubt, the rabbis are in the habit of indulging in blasphemous, unkind, personal defamation when Christians are involved making it plain to Paul and Barnabas that they have gone beyond the limits of pure Judaism by including the Gentiles in the faith.

Acts 13:⁴⁶And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷"For thus the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU SHOULD BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.' " ¹⁵¹
⁴⁸And when the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰But the Jews aroused the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and

¹⁵⁰ Habakkuk 1:5

¹⁵¹ Isaiah 49:6

instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ⁵¹But they shook off the dust of their feet *in protest* against them and went to Iconium.

Over the next few weeks, the word of salvation spreads throughout the Gentile community in Pisidian Antioch and they are thrilled to become part of the church. The Jewish community remains jealous and defiant as they watch full-blooded Jews interact with Gentiles in both personal and social settings.

The rabbis enlist the Gentile women who have embraced the Jewish faith to persecute Paul. It is well documented that women held strong positions of power in public life in Asia Minor. They were appointed as magistrates and commissioners of the public games. The rabbis are shrewd enough to enlist the men from the community to help with the persecution. These men are not officials of the community; rather, they are prominent men in the community attached to the Gentile women who are addicted to the Jewish faith. When the persecution grows to a dangerous point, Paul and his team leave town and travel by land to Iconium, 80 miles to the east.

First Missionary Journey (continues)			
Departure	Arrival	Miles	Via
Pisidian Antioch	Iconium	80	land

Iconium

Acts 13:⁵²And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. **Acts 14:**¹And it came about that in Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a great multitude believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.

The first opportunity to speak in the synagogue brings great gains for the church from all walks of life. Luke's wording in this passage may indicate that Paul has made a tactical adjustment to his message as a result of the problems in Pisidian Antioch. However, Paul's message is not wholeheartedly accepted in Iconium.

Acts 14:²But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles, and embittered them against the brethren. ³Therefore they spent a long time *there* speaking boldly *with reliance* upon the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands. ⁴But the multitude of the city was divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. ⁵And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, ⁶they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; ⁷and there they continued to preach the gospel.

The struggle in Iconium grows over many days and perhaps even months as indicated by Luke who says, "therefore, they spent a long time there speaking boldly."¹⁵² Perhaps Paul and Barnabas are able to extend their stay because Paul is performing incredible miracles among the people. Over time, the Jews turn the

¹⁵² Acts 14:3

Gentiles against Paul and his team. Soon, it is clear that plans are being made to harm them. Paul hears of the plans and makes the decision to leave the city, traveling through the province of Lycaonia to two towns in the province of Galatia.

It is interesting that for the first time, Luke addresses Paul as an apostle. The apostles were appointed by Christ as witnesses of His ministry, as well as His death and resurrection. Certainly, Paul is a witness to each facet, including his appointment by Christ on the Damascus road. In the letters that Paul will later write, he lays claim to his apostleship on par with the remaining eleven.¹⁵³

First Missionary Journey (continues)			
Departure	Arrival	Miles	Via
Iconium	Lystra	20	land
Lystra	Derbe	60	land

Lystra

Acts 14:⁸And at Lystra there was sitting a certain man, without strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. ⁹This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze upon him, and had seen that he had faith to be made well, ¹⁰said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and *began* to walk. ¹¹And when the multitudes saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." ¹²And they *began* calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³And the priest of Zeus, whose *temple* was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. ¹⁴But when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out ¹⁵and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you in order that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM.¹⁵⁴ ¹⁶"And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; ¹⁷and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." ¹⁸And *even* saying these things, they with difficulty restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.

The healing of the lame man in Lystra causes an explosion of activity from the temple of Zeus in Lystra. It is amazing to see the joyful abandon of the people and the high priest of the false religion. In a heartbeat, the followers of Zeus proclaim Paul and Barnabas as gods. Such desire for a god is rarely seen in Christianity or Judaism. The Jews had been looking for the Messiah, but they rejected Him when He arrived. With little success, Paul tries to correct the situation and teach the Zeusites about the truth of the Lord Jesus. By 300 AD, the Christian church had lost its liberty in the Lord and began structuring itself into an institution rather than a living body.

¹⁵³ 1 Corinthians 9:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:8; Galatians 1:1, 16-18

¹⁵⁴ Exodus 20:11; Psalm 146:6

The stoning of Paul in Lystra

Acts 14:¹⁹ But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. ^{20a} But while the disciples stood around him, he arose and entered the city.

Paul's rejection of the praise from the followers of Zeus offends the people. When the Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrive, they convince the people of Lystra and the temple of Zeus to stone Paul. The stoning is not complete and Paul is not dead. His team and the new believers in the city watch as he stands to his feet. Paul returns to Lystra for the night and then makes the three day trip to Derbe, 60 miles to the east of Lystra.

Derbe

Acts 14:^{20b} And the next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. ²¹ And after they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed *with fasting*, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. ²⁴ And they passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. ²⁵ And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia; ²⁶ and from there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. ²⁷ And when they had arrived and gathered the church together, they *began* to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. ²⁸ And they spent a long time with the disciples.

It is the last new town visited by the team on their first missionary journey. After preaching the gospel and establishing a new church in the city, Paul and his team retrace their steps to the coast and then sail to Antioch in Syria. Notice that Paul and Barnabas have a purpose in returning to each city, the selection of leaders from the elders in each church to be the pastors.

First Missionary Journey (Complete)			
Departure	Arrival	Miles	Via
Antioch	Seleucia	20	land
Seleucia	Cyprus/Salamis	150	water
Cyprus/Salamis	Paphos	80	land
Paphos	Perga	210	water
Perga in Pamphylia	Pisidian Antioch	85	land
Pisidian Antioch	Iconium	80	land
Iconium	Lystra	20	land
Lystra	Derbe	60	land
Derbe	Lystra	60	land
Lystra	Iconium	20	land
Iconium	Pisidian Antioch	80	land
Pisidian Antioch	Perga	85	land
Perga	Attalia	10	land
Attalia	Antioch Syria	300	water
Total Miles		1260	

Back in Antioch, in the church that commissioned them for their missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas give a full report of their efforts and successes over the past four years, especially in bringing Gentiles into the faith. After a year or more, Jews from Judea arrive and begin to teach a disturbing doctrine.

A disturbing Jewish Christian teaching in Antioch

Acts 15:¹And some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ²And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

The Christian Jews from Judea are beginning to institutionalize the church with the manmade ancient Mosaic Jewish regulations and traditions. Their teaching in Antioch attempts to restrict the Gentiles, requiring them to become fully Jewish before allowing them full membership in the church. Paul and Barnabas are resolutely against the teaching. The church in Antioch fails to accept Paul's position and sends the missionary team to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with all the apostles and church leaders there.

The 300 mile journey to Jerusalem

Acts 15:³Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. ⁴And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. ⁵But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses."

The countries of Phoenicia and Samaria are encouraged by the addition of Gentiles to the church since most of the people in these areas are considered Gentiles by the Jews. Upon arrival in Jerusalem in 50 AD, the source of the restrictive doctrine is discovered. It has been propagated by the converts to Christianity from one of the strictest Pharisee segments of the Sanhedrin.