

## *Acts 1 Study and Discussion Questions*

### *Lesson Four: Paul's First Missionary Journey and the Jerusalem Council – Acts 13-15, Galatians*

Read Acts 13-14 after scanning the questions below.

- 1) Begin tracing Paul's first missionary journey on the map provided with this lesson (you will use this map again in Lessons Five and Six). In order to distinguish Paul's first journey from his second and third journeys, either use a different color pencil or pen to trace each journey or mark one with a solid line, one with a dotted line, and one with dashes. Acts 13-14 describes only Paul's first journey. **Barnabas and Saul, accompanied by John Mark, traveled from Seleucia to Cyprus (Salamis and Paphos, places on the island of Cyprus). From Cyprus, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia (where John Mark left them) and traveled on to Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra (where Paul was stoned) and Derbe (where a large number were converted). They then returned through Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch (strengthening the new converts), Perga and Attalia, from where they sailed back home to Antioch.**
- 2) While reading these two chapters, list:
  - a) the ways that Satan opposed the advancement of the Gospel message (either stated or implied). **The sorcerer Elymas opposed Paul and Barnabas, trying to turn the proconsul from the faith (13:8). Jews who refused to believe poisoned the minds of the Gentiles in Iconium (14:2) and Lystra (14:19). The crowd in Lystra sought to worship Paul and Barnabas (14:11-13).**
  - b) the words, phrases, or events that show the power and effect of the Gospel. **The Holy Spirit authorized and commissioned Barnabas and Saul for the work (13:2, 4). The proconsul wanted to hear the word of God (13:7). Paul's rebuke to Elymas for opposing the Gospel resulted in Elymas' immediate blindness and the proconsul was amazed and believed (13:11-12). Many followed Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch, eager for more information, and on the following Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear them (13:43-44). "All who were appointed for eternal life believed" (13:48). "The word of the Lord spread through the whole region" (13:49). The disciples in Pisidian Antioch were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (13:52). The effective speaking of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium resulted in belief by many (14:1). The Lord confirmed the message by miracles (14:3). A cripple responded in faith to Paul's message and was healed (14:8-10). Paul had an unexplained and amazing recovery from stoning (14:19-20). Many disciples were won at the preaching of the good news in Derbe (14:21). Paul and Barnabas reported back to their home church "all that God had done through them and how he opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27).**
  - c) the ways Paul and Barnabas suffered in order to spread the Gospel message in obedience to the Lord. **The sorcerer Elymas opposed Barnabas and Saul (13:8). They suffered abuse from the jealous Jewish leaders (13:45, 50; 14:19). The women of high standing and leading men of Pisidian Antioch persecuted them (13:50). A plot to mistreat and stone Paul and Barnabas in Iconium resulted in their flight (14:5-6). Paul was stoned in Lystra (14:19).**
- 3) How will your discoveries about the presentation of the Gospel in Acts 13-14 change the way you respond to the commission you have received to be Jesus' witness (Acts 1:8)? **Personal sharing**

Read Acts 15.

- 4) What concern brought Paul and Barnabas into dispute with some Jews from Jerusalem who were stirring up controversy (see also Galatians 1:7, 2:4, 6, 12; 4:17; 5:12)? **The "circumcision party" was comprised of self-important Pharisees who claimed to be disciples of Christ (Acts 15:5, Galatians 2:4, 6) and were zealous for the Law of Moses (Acts 15:5) but acted without authorization from the apostles (Acts 15:24). The question of the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts was raised when the "circumcision group" stirred up trouble in Antioch (Acts 15:1, Galatians 5:12) and Galatia (Galatians 1:7), insisting that Gentile converts had to follow all of the requirements of the Mosaic Law and become circumcised.**

- 5) Briefly summarize:
- a) the essence of Peter, Barnabas (with Paul), and James' messages with regard to this question. Peter said that God had fully accepted the uncircumcised Gentiles and had demonstrated it by granting them the Holy Spirit. Barnabas (and Paul) argued that God's acceptance of the uncircumcised Gentiles was evidenced by the powerful work He was doing among them. James concluded that since God had clearly chosen to include the Gentiles, the believing communities should avoid making difficult demands on them (such as circumcision) but rather, ask the Gentiles to simply make a few concessions in order to prevent them from offending their Jewish fellow-believers (whose consciences were sensitive to the Law of Moses).
  - b) how these men determined God's will in the matter. The leaders of the young church determined God's will in this matter by considering God's actions (past and present [15:7-9, 12, and 14]) and the teachings of Scripture (15:16-18).
- 6) Describe the outcome of the Jerusalem Council. Two representatives of the leadership in Jerusalem, Judas and Silas, accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their return to Antioch and carried a letter from the apostles. The letter commended Paul and Barnabas and asked the Gentile Christians not to be burdened by any special requirements but to make three concessions: abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from sexual immorality, and from eating blood and the meat of strangled animals (all of which were well-known to have been of special offense to the Jews.) Sexual immorality was so common among pagan Gentiles that new converts may not have immediately recognized it as sin. But this requirement may have referred to Levitical laws about marrying close relatives (Leviticus 18:6-20). The disciples in Antioch were glad and were encouraged and strengthened by Judas and Silas.
- 7) How have you determined God's will for your life in the past and how does this compare to the manner in which the disciples determined God's will (Question 5b)? **Personal sharing**

Read Galatians 1-2.

- 8) Apparently, Paul felt compelled to correct two accusations that had been leveled against him, one regarding his person (see especially Galatians 1:1, 11-12, 20; 2:7-9) and one regarding his message (see especially 2:15-16 [further elaborated in chapters 3 and 4]). Try to determine the nature of these two accusations. Paul felt compelled to defend both his authority as a true apostle and his message that justification comes through faith, not law (legalism/works). Apparently the circumcision party (also known as Judaizers) had discredited Paul's authority and his message to the Galatians.
- 9) Why was it important for Paul to defend himself on these matters? What does this teach you about when it is appropriate to defend yourself? Paul defended himself for the sake of the new believers in Galatia. If they came to believe (as apparently they had) that Paul was not qualified as a true minister of the Gospel (without apostolic authority behind his teaching), they would doubt the Gospel message he had presented to them. If they doubted Paul's message of justification by faith alone, they were susceptible to false teaching, such as that circumcision or other works (adherence to the Law) was necessary for salvation. The firm foundation of the faith of this young church would crumble. Believers are not ordinarily to defend themselves but rather, to trust their defense to God. However, if any personal attack casts a shadow on the authenticity of our message (the Gospel) or threatens the good reputation of the Church, then we ought to present a reasonable defense. Paul's defense was not for his own sake but theirs.

Read Galatians 3:1-5:12.

- 10) The following statements and questions will help you trace Paul's reasoning in Galatians 3.
- a) According to Galatians 3:8, what promise did God give Abraham (first given in Genesis 12:3)? **"All nations will be blessed through you."**

- b) Reread Galatians 3:17, in which Paul reminds us that the Law of Moses was not given to Israel until 430 years *after* God gave His promise to Abraham. Now, examine Galatians 3:6. What was Abraham's response to God's promise, a response that "was credited to him as righteousness" (in other words, a response that resulted in Abraham's salvation)? **Abraham believed God.**
- c) Now reread Galatians 3:16. In whom did God fulfill the promise He gave Abraham? **Christ.**
- d) We could summarize the teaching of Paul by saying that:
- Just as Abraham was saved when he **believed** God's promise concerning the blessing of all **nations** through His Seed (descendant), who is **Christ**, up to the day in which Paul wrote, and still today, a person is considered righteous by God on the basis of their genuine, life-altering **belief**.
  - According to Galatians 3:19, the Law of Moses was put into effect to keep **transgressions** (sin) in check (verse 25 says the Law was our *paidagōgos* [strict governess]).
  - The practice of circumcision, like every work of the **Law** (3:10), would never help a person acquire salvation. Jews and Gentiles alike are children of God by **faith** (3:26).
- 11) What terms does Paul repeatedly contrast to clarify the doctrinal issue he was addressing:
- a) Galatians 3:18, 21; 5:4 **Grace** (or **Promise**) versus **Law**
  - b) Galatians 3:2-3, 23; 6-9, 11 **Belief** (or **Faith**) versus **Law** (flesh; striving)
  - c) Galatians 4:22-26, 31; 5:1, 4 **Freedom** versus **Slavery**
- 12) Examine the contrasting terms in Question 11. How does it feel to you to live the Christian life each day? More like the first term in each group or more like the last term? Can you identify something specific that pulls you toward living under the second set of terms? **Personal sharing**

Read Galatians 5:13-6:18.

- 13) What important principles are taught in Galatians 5:13-18 and why would Paul have wanted to follow up his lessons with these exhortations? **One principle was that liberty does not mean license. After all he had taught in Galatians concerning freedom from the Law, he feared that some readers might take liberty for license. The Law does not save us, but that does not mean we can indulge in sin and do whatever we want. We are still obligated to live according to a righteous standard. Secondly, Paul exhorts us to serve one another in love (the Greek word he used ["serve"] also means "be a slave"). Paul exhorted believers to make love of others their primary motive in determining what they ought to be free to do or not do. A guiding question to determine whether we will exercise our freedom must be asked: Will any other believer be offended or stumble in their faith if I exercise this particular freedom? Third, Paul told us that the only way we could do these things is to live by the Spirit.**
- 14) Make a list of the phrases between Galatians 5:16 and 6:10 that summarize the way Paul encourages "free," faith-filled believers to live. **"Live by the Spirit" (5:16), "...crucify the sinful nature" (5:24), "Carry each other's burdens" (6:2), "...sow(s) to please the Spirit" (6:8), "...do good to all people" (6:10).**
- 15) Which verse in Galatians 5:13-6:18 exhorts you with regard to a particular situation you are currently facing? How does it help? **Personal sharing**