



Acts of the Apostles
A DEEP DIVE INTO THE BOOK OF ACTS.

WEEK 8

CLASS BY PASTOR GLYN NORMAN

Summary of 11:19-12:24

- Christians associated with Stephen were persecuted and scattered to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, sharing the gospel first with Jews, but then in Antioch to Greeks also. Many turn to the Lord.
- Barnabas and Saul teach there for a year. Followers of The Way first called Christians in Antioch.
- King Herod arrests and kills James. This pleases the Jews so...
- Peter is arrested, put in prison and then an angel miraculously engineers an escape
- the “James” referred to in v17 is James son of Alphaeus (or Jesus’ brother) not James brother of John who was killed in 12:2
- Herod moves to Caesarea, gives a public address, people acclaim him as a god... “v23 “Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down and he was eaten by worms and died.”
- The word of the Lord continues to spread

Paul and the first missionary journey Acts 12:25-14:28

1. The Mission on Cyprus and John Mark’s departure

• 13:6-11 the encounter with Bar-Jesus.

• probably presented himself as the Jewish spokesperson in opposition to the Christian evangelists, trying to enhance his own reputation. Involved in sorcery and magic, even though they were officially banned in Judaism.

• Paul’s “punishment” of Bar-Jesus is similar to his own confrontation with Jesus, a curse of temporary blindness spoken in biblical language

v12 • the significance of the conversion of Sergius Paulus

- a turning point and a new policy in the mission to Gentiles
- they could be approached with going “through” Judaism first
- Luke presents this as the key point of this missions trip:

Acts 14:27 On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

Acts 15:3 The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad.

- even though Cornelius had earlier been converted, and his conversion seems as genuine by the Jerusalem church, this had not resulted in an outreach to the Gentiles. Perhaps it was seen as an acceptable aberration, which wouldn't happen too often.

2. At Pisidian Antioch Acts 13:14-52

- a typical pattern of Paul's ministry is established: (note: now Paul, not Saul and see v9)
 - an initial proclamation in the synagogue to Jews and Gentile proselytes
 - when this is refused, a direct ministry to Gentiles
 - this pattern is repeated in every city Paul visits, except Athens
- his ministry expresses an equality before God:
 - there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles in condemnation (Rom 2:1-3:20)
 - there is also no difference in access to God (Rom 3:21-31)
 - even though Israel did have an initial great advantage (Rom 3:1-2; 9:4-5)
 - Paul still had a great desire for his own nation to come to Christ (Rom 9:1-3; 10:1)
- This is Paul's gospel, the one he identifies himself with, (Rom 16:25; Gal 1:11-2:10) and can be characterized as:

“a direct approach to the Gentiles is valid and they can be fully accepted as Christians.”

This is Paul's mystery:

Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly.

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Eph. 3:2-6

- the welcome in Antioch (13:14-15)
 - a typical synagogue service would have contained:
 - the Shema (Hear O Israel, The Lord...)
 - the Shemoneh Esreh (liturgy of 18 benedictions, blessings or prayers)
 - a reading from the Law
 - a reading from one of the prophets
 - a free address or sermon given by any competent Jew there
 - a closing blessing
 - Perhaps Paul's attire identified him as a Pharisee and was the cause of the invitation offered to him to speak
- Paul's synagogue sermon at Antioch (13:16-41)
 - the first of three missionary sermons in Acts
 - in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (13:16-41)

- in Lystra outside the city gates (14:15-17)
- before the council of Ares in Athens (17:22-31)
- each sermon is obviously on a précis (summary) of what was said, as they can be read in 30 seconds to three minutes, and it is sure that he spoke for longer than that.
- there is enough evidence to show that though he had a basic gospel, he altered its presentation according to the audience
- his exhortation begins with a resume of Israel's history – a common pattern, previously demonstrated in Acts by Stephen
- a four point confessional which for Jews summarized the essence of their faith:
 1. God is the God of the people of Israel
 2. He chose the patriarchs for himself
 3. He redeemed his people from Egypt, leading them through the wilderness
 4. He gave them the land of Palestine as an inheritance
 (plus, sometimes, a mention of God's choice of David as king, and the promises made to him and his descendants.)
- Paul mentions all of these as part of the redemptive plan of God for his people.
- the mention of "son" from 2 Sam 7 will act as a bridge for his Christian proclamation
- Paul connects David and Jesus – in the line of David (see Isa 11:1-16)

- a four point confession of the essence of Christianity:
 1. Jesus was crucified
 2. They "laid him in a tomb"
 3. "God raised him from the dead"
 4. He was seen after his resurrection by many witnesses, who now speak of what they have seen

Question: if you had to compose the message of Christianity in 4 points, what would it be?

- Paul quotes three OT passages with messianic overtones:
 - Ps 2:7
 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.
 - 2 Sam 7:6-16
 - Isa 55:3 with Ps 16:10
- He is joining together OT redemptive history, and the history of Jesus and showing how they relate and have messianic significance.
- The call to repentance:

Hab. 1:5 "Look at the nations and watch — and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told.
- the varying responses (13:42-45)

- interest from some, but a week later, suspicion and a full realization of the consequences of what Paul was preaching. Using their synagogue like a common town hall, they were prepared to speak directly to Gentiles without referring them first to Judaism.

- to the Jews first, then the Gentiles (13:46-52)
 - v46 Paul asserts his new policy “To the Jews first, but also to the Gentiles”
 - the missionaries were the fulfillment of the promise of Isa 49:6 which Paul quotes here:

Isa. 49:6 (he says: It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept.) I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” (interesting tactical [tactful?] omission of the first part of the verse)

3. At Iconium, Lystra, Derbe and the Return to Antioch (14:1-28)

- Iconium – as usual to the synagogue first, but persecution quickly followed, stirred up by the Jews who “poisoned the minds” of the Gentiles – the opposition is serious enough that they come to the conclusion that they should leave and travel to Lystra and Derbe

- Lystra – population was mostly uneducated Lycaonians who spoke their own language.

- Paul starts by speaking to the crowd, so probably no synagogue there.
- the healing is similar to Peter’s miracle in Acts 3 but the sequel is different
- thought to be gods come down in human form – the reason why the preparations for a sacrifice got so far may be because they didn’t understand the Lycaonians and what they were planning to do
- they are horrified by the blasphemy and tear their clothes, trying to make the people understand them.
- Paul sermon, on the negative side, speaks of the futility of idolatry, and positively in the proclamation of the one true God.
- the argument is suited to his hearers. he does not quote Scripture or the history of Israel (as was appropriate as Pisidian Antioch) nor philosophy (which will be appropriate in Athens) but appeals to the revelation of nature. (see Romans 1:20)

Question: how would you even begin to explain Christianity in today’s society in the USA when most people do not even have a basic understanding of the Christian story, have probably never read the Bible nor accept it as a reliable source...

- he suggests an unfolding of divine plan to them (in the past...but now...). Though Christ is not mentioned by name in this summary, it is hard to believe that Paul’s message did not end by pointing them to the latest revelation of God’s salvation in Jesus.
- Jews come from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, setting the people against them (if they are not gods, then they are imposters?) and Paul is stoned almost to the point of death. (See Gal 6:17 – marks from the stoning?)
- Derbe and the return to Antioch (14:21-28)
 - Derbe was a successful ministry, winning over many.

- the return, which happened without trouble, suggests that they went to those who were already converted, and did not go public again, trying to win new converts and risking the wrath of the people
- they encourage the believers, telling them that suffering is part of the package
- they report back that God has “opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” and minister there for another year