

LESSON 6

ACTIVITIES IN ANTIOCH, JERUSALEM, AND CYPRUS

ACTS 11:19–13:12

Introduction

The door of the Church had been opened wide enough to receive selected Gentiles. Only God-fearers who had embraced Judaism but had not been circumcised were permitted to enter the membership of the churches. Partial blindness, caused by prejudice, prevented the Jewish Christians from inviting Gentiles into the Church until a special manifestation of God's approval occurred at Caesarea. Cornelius and his family were endowed with the gift of tongues by the Holy Spirit in order to demonstrate to the Jewish Christians that they had been approved by God as Kingdom citizens.

The early response in Jerusalem to the Gospel of Christ began to wane. Persecution caused the Christians to scatter, and wherever they went they preached. In the latter part of Acts, Jerusalem lost her position as the centre of Christian growth and influence. As long as the Apostles were related to the Jerusalem Church, she continued to have a primary voice in doctrinal questions, but the numerical centre of growth shifted from Jerusalem to other areas.

The Christians continued to struggle with the questions of the relation of Christianity to Judaism. Christianity had originated within the religion of the Jews, but would it be able to reform Judaism or would it have to separate from Judaism? Important factors which created tensions between Jewish and Christian leaders were—

1. the acceptance of the Messiahship of Christ and the spiritual birth into the Kingdom;
2. the attitude towards non-Jews entering the Kingdom;
3. a sense of responsibility and commission to carry the Gospel to Gentiles.

Because of their background in Judaism, the early Jewish Christians did not agree fully on the position which they should take concerning these factors. They called a Church Council in Jerusalem to discuss these issues when it became evident that many Gentiles would be born into the Kingdom and would seek entrance into the Church.

Gentile Conversions in Antioch

Acts 11:19-30

How the Gospel was carried to Antioch (vv. 19-21)

Luke points out that Peter recognized in the conversion experience of Cornelius that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles meant God had included them in salvation. Since they were born into the Kingdom of God, they must not be hindered from public identification through baptism with the name of Jesus Christ. The initial preaching to Gentiles was by Philip, one of the Seven. The Church was prepared to recognize the salvation of the Gentiles as the result of Peter's experience with Cornelius. Perhaps the Church first considered the salvation of Cornelius and his family as an exception to instead of an indication of God's plan for Gentiles.

God is able to accomplish His will even through negative and

List three factors which created tension and caused Jewish Christians to separate from Judaism.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

What experience caused Peter to recognize that God had included Gentiles in salvation?

(the conversion of Cornelius)

unhappy experiences. When persecution which arose at the time of Stephen's death scattered the disciples from Jerusalem, some travelled as far as Phoenicia and Antioch. Luke shows how the witnessing in Antioch was connected to the preaching of Stephen. The refugees at first sought out Jewish communities with which to share their faith. Men from Cyrene in North Africa had been present on the Day of Pentecost to hear the Gospel. Christians went to Cyprus as the result of the persecution.

Several years appear to have separated the events of verses 19 and 20. Shortly after the death of Stephen, the Gospel continued to be spread only among Jews. Several years later men from Cyprus in the Mediterranean and Cyrene in North Africa, who were influenced by Stephen sometime before, travelled to Antioch in Syria. These men witnessed to Gentiles. The witnessing in Antioch to Greeks appears to have taken place after the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch and Cornelius.

Barnabas' visit to Antioch (vv. 22-24)

The Church in Jerusalem was not fully convinced that God had accepted the Gentiles into the Kingdom. They sent a representative, Barnabas, to investigate the report that large numbers of Gentiles were turning to the Lord. The fact that Barnabas was chosen as the Church's representative indicates that he was mature and dependable. Luke emphasizes again that Barnabas was a man of faith who was willing to accept God's plan. When he witnessed the grace of God being extended to the Gentiles, he rejoiced and encouraged the work to continue.

Saul's instruction at Antioch (vv. 25-26)

So many people were added to the Lord that additional help was needed to instruct them. Barnabas departed for Tarsus to find Saul. They both returned to Antioch and gave instructions to the new converts for a year. The Gentile converts would have needed extensive teaching since they did not have a knowledge of the Old Testament.

The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch by those outside the Church. The basic word expressed the Hebrew idea of Messiah and the Latin suffix indicated "a partisan of." Christians are "Partisans of the Messiah."

Christian sharing during the famine (vv. 27-30)

Agabus and other prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch and predicted that a severe famine would come over all the world. Luke notes that it took place during the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41-54). The Roman historians Suetonius and Tacitus indicate that famine did occur during the reign of Claudius. Josephus, the Jewish historian, mentions famines in Jerusalem about A.D. 44-48. Unless Luke did not place Chapter 12 chronologically, the famine to which Agabus referred must have occurred before Herod's death in A.D. 44.

The new Gentile Christians expressed the genuineness of their faith by sending a contribution to relieve the poverty of the Jewish brethren in Judaea. The Christians in Jerusalem may have been affected more seriously by the famine because of economic discrimination against them by non-Christian Jews. The purpose of the offering may have been two-fold:

1. An expression of love to those in need;
2. An attempt to relieve the tension between the Jews and themselves.

Saul and Barnabas were the logical representatives to take the contribution to Judaea. They were Jews; therefore, they would be accepted by the brethren in the Church of Jerusalem. Barnabas was respected greatly by the Jerusalem Christians. Both were regarded highly by the Gentile and Jewish Christians in An-

The refugees at first sought out _____ communities with which to share their _____ .
(Jewish, faith)

Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and witnessed to _____ .
(Gentiles or Greeks)

Barnabas was sent to _____ by the Church in _____ to investigate the response of the _____ to the Gospel.
(Antioch, Jerusalem, Gentiles)

Barnabas and Saul instructed the new converts in _____ .
(Antioch)

Where were the disciples first called Christians? _____ . The word Christian means "P _____ of the M _____ ."
(Antioch, Partisan, Messiah)

List two purposes of the offering given in Antioch for the Jerusalem Christians.
1. _____
2. _____
(Compare your answer with the text.)

tiach. They took the offering to the elders in Jerusalem. Elders were the mature men of the synagogues who served as synagogue leaders. The Church appears to have used the term also to designate her leaders. The term is interchangeable with bishop in the Pastoral Epistles (cf. Titus 1:5, 7). It is also synonymus with pastor and bishop in Acts 20:17-28.

Renewed Persecution in Judaea
Acts 12:1-25

Luke returns to the story of the Jerusalem Church. The brief introduction to the Church at Antioch shows that the momentum of growth had shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch.

The persecution by Herod (vv. 1-5)

The Twelve had been imprisoned at the time of Stephen's death but had escaped martyrdom. After a time of peace, a third assault was brought against the Church by Herod. Because of their foreign ancestry, the Herods had never been popular with the Jews. Herod Agrippa was the grandson of Herod the Great. His father Aristobolus had been executed in 7 B.C. by Herod the Great. Since Herod Agrippa had been brought up in Rome and was a friend of Emperor Caligula (A.D. 37-41), Caligula made Herod king of the Tetrarchy of Philip and later of Galilee and Peraea. Judaea and Samaria were added to his reign after he helped Claudius (A.D. 41-54) gain approval from the Roman Senate as emperor. In order to gain favour with the Jews, Herod used the conflict between Jews and Christians. He executed James and arrested Peter.

The action of Herod and the reaction of the Jews showed that Christians had fallen into disfavour with non-Christian Jews in Jerusalem. Perhaps the word had spread that Peter had entered the house of a Gentile. Herod beheaded James, the brother of John and the son of Zebedee. Peter was arrested and imprisoned during the feast of unleavened bread. The Passover and feast of unleavened bread were closely related as one festival. Actually, the seven days of unleavened bread followed the Passover, but Luke refers to the eight days of celebration as the Passover. Agrippa was careful not to violate customs of the Jews; therefore, he stayed the execution of Peter until after the festival.

The miraculous deliverance of Peter (vv. 6-16)

The Church believed in the power of intercessory prayer. The Christians believed that God had the power to release Peter from prison. Their prayers were honoured, and Peter was delivered despite the tight security of the squads of soldiers who were guarding him for each of the four three-hour watches during the night. Peter was chained to two soldiers, and another two guarded the doors of the prison. Peter was sleeping soundly when the angel appeared in the cell and instructed him to "get up quickly." Luke includes the account of the physical blow on Peter's side to awaken him in order to portray his courage and faith. Peter was sleeping soundly the night before his execution!

Peter's chains fell off, and he followed the angel through the doors and out of the prison. Luke notes that the iron gate which led into the city opened of its own accord. The angel departed when Peter entered the street.

Peter's deep sleep and the rapid, astonishing events of his deliverance left him dazed. After convincing himself that he was not dreaming, he recognized that the Lord had delivered him from Herod's execution. He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where the Church was gathered and praying. At first, the disciples continued to participate in temple and synagogue services of worship, but they met also in private homes for study, prayer, and fellowship. These homes played an

Who were the elders in the early Church?

_____ The term elders is synonymus with _____

_____ and _____

in other New Testament writings.

(leaders, bishop, pastor)

Herod executed (beheaded) James and arrested Peter in order to gain favour with the _____

(Jews)

The early Church believed in the power of _____ prayer.

(intercessory)

increasingly important role in worship and fellowship as the Christians separated from Jewish worship and customs. Mary's house was probably the regular meeting place for the early Christian community. It may have been the place where Jesus ate the Last Supper with His disciples and where the disciples assembled after the ascension.

Rhoda, a servant girl, answered Peter's knock at the gate. She recognized his voice but, in her excitement, failed to open the gate. She rushed back to the group which was praying and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. They refused to believe her and accused her of being insane. She insisted that Peter was present. In their unbelief, the group concluded that it must be Peter's guardian angel. The Jews believed that a guardian angel resembled the person whom he protected. The continued knocking of Peter caused the disciples eventually to open the gate. They were amazed when they saw him. They had prayed for his deliverance which was an action revealing that they believed in God's power. Or was it a prayer which expressed an attitude of helplessness rather than faith? Had they really expected God to answer their prayers or were they praying as modern men do?

Peter's report and departure (vv. 17-19)

After Peter gained entrance into the house, he motioned with his hand to gain the attention of those assembled. He described how the Lord had delivered him from prison and told him to "go show these things unto James, and to the brethren" (12:17). Peter did not tarry to see if the Lord would miraculously deliver him a second time. He departed for another place.

The James mentioned in 12:17 was the leader of the Jerusalem Church. We know that he was the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19). The fact that his name is specifically mentioned indicates that he was then the leader of the Jerusalem Church. The Apostle James had been put to death by Herod. The identity of the "brethren" is not known. Perhaps some of the other Apostles were included among them. After this incident, the Apostles as a group disappear from Luke's narrative. On the few occasions Luke returns to the story of the Church in Jerusalem, James is the leader.

It is uncertain where Peter went. The Roman Catholic Church claims that he went to Rome where he became the first bishop. There is no evidence to support this claim. Papias, the early second century Church Father, stated that Peter preached in Rome; however, Peter was present for the Jerusalem Conference in A.D. 49 (Acts 15) and is not mentioned by Paul in the letter to the Romans about A.D. 56. Neither does Luke mention Peter in his record of Paul's arrival in Rome in A.D. 60. Frank Stagg notes that when Paul reached Rome, evidently no Apostle had been there, for the Jews came to him for a dependable account of "this sect".¹ It is possible that Peter worked in rural areas in Palestine until Agrippa's death in A.D. 44.

Herod and the soldiers were greatly disturbed by the escape of Peter. It is likely that they faced the question of the hand of God in Peter's deliverance and the possibility of their interference with the work of God. Nevertheless, Herod had the guards, who were on duty at the time of Peter's escape, executed.

The death of Herod Agrippa (vv. 20-23)

Luke includes the account of Herod's death to show that Yahweh is in control of history. In his pride, Herod had assumed

Mary's house was probably the meeting place for the early_____.

(Christians)

Who was the leader of the Jerusalem Church?

_____ According to Galatians 1:19, he was the brother of_____.

(James, Jesus)

List three arguments against Peter's having gone to Rome.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(He was present at the Jerusalem Conference in A.D. 49. Paul did not mention him in his Roman Epistle. Luke did not mention him in the record of Paul's arrival in Rome in A.D. 60.)

¹ *The Book of Acts*, p. 131.

the role of God and had ignored his Creator. Herod was involved in a dispute with the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon. It was advantageous for the people of those cities to seek a reconciliation since they were economically dependent on Herod's territory. Negotiations for reconciliation involved Blastus, the king's chamberlain. It appears that the people were ready to recognize Herod as king. During the observance of a festival to the Emperor Claudius, Herod put on his royal apparel and began delivering an address to them. To flatter him, the people cried out, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." Because of his pride and ambition, Herod did not reject the claim. Josephus (*Antiq.* XIX. viii. 2) indicates that during the speech Herod looked up and saw an owl on a rope. He interpreted this as an evil omen, and began to suffer severe stomach pains which continued for five days. Luke considered his death to be the punishment of the Lord because he did not give God the glory. Luke probably included the incident to show that God punishes those who afflict the Church and hinder the growth of the Kingdom. God had promised through the prophets that He would come with vengeance and He would save His people (Isa. 35:4). Luke shows that God's promises are sure.

A Summary Account
Acts 12:24-25

Another problem faced by the Church, the threat of persecution by political authorities, was solved with the death of Herod Agrippa. The Christians were able to witness freely, and "the word of God grew and multiplied."

Luke returned to the narrative which he left off at 11:30. Acts 12:25 is a transitional statement which shows the conclusion of the mission of Barnabas and Saul in Jerusalem and their return to Antioch for the next mission. John Mark, the son of Mary in whose house the Church assembled, accompanied Barnabas and Saul to Antioch.

Missionary Outreach to Cyprus
Acts 13:1-12

Introduction

Acts 13 actually is the beginning of the second major division of the Book. The activities of the first part centred primarily in Jerusalem. Witnessing was directed towards the Jews; however, Luke included accounts of several incidents which prepared the way for the great mission to the Gentiles. As the Gospel moved from Palestine and Syria into other Roman provinces, the disciples continued to attempt to win Jews, but the most significant gains were among the pagans. It eventually became obvious that the Christians would not be able to continue association with the synagogue services. Judaizers forced Christianity to separate completely from Judaism.

The beginning of Acts featured the Twelve and their witnessing in Jerusalem. The second phase was reached in Acts 6 when the Seven were ordained. Under the leadership of the Seven, the Gospel was taken to Samaritans, proselytes and God-fearing Gentiles. The influence of the Seven prepared for the next phase of development in which the Gospel was taken to pagan Gentiles.

The leaders at Antioch (v. 1)

Acts 13 opens with a listing of five "prophets and teachers" at Antioch. The Twelve and the Seven drop into the background and Luke follows the activities of two of the five leaders of Antioch. Barnabas, who was originally from Cyprus, has already

Herod Agrippa's death was punishment for his failure to deny the _____

claim that he was a _____.

(Phoenicians', god)

How did the Church benefit from Agrippa's death?

(They were able to witness freely and the word of God grew and multiplied.)

The stages in the spread of the Gospel were:

1. The Twelve witnessing to _____ in _____.

2. The Seven witnessing to _____, _____, and _____ Gentiles.

(Jews, Jerusalem, Samaritans, proselytes, God-fearing)

been introduced by Luke in connexion with the work in Jerusalem. Luke has previously indicated that men of Cyprus and Cyrene who were "scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen" (11:19-20) came to Antioch and witnessed to the Greeks. *Barnabas* had brought *Saul* from Tarsus to help teach the new Christians in Antioch.

Simeon, called Niger (black), was perhaps from Africa. He may have been one of those from Cyrene. The name is Latin which was the language of Cyrene in North Africa. *Lucius* is specifically identified with Cyrene. *Manaen* had some close connexion with the family of Herod Antipas. Three of the five prophets and teachers are introduced but not mentioned again. Luke implies that they continued the work at Antioch as prophets and teachers.

The Church at Antioch had more capable leaders than were absolutely essential while other parts of the world were being neglected. The strategy of God revealed through the leadership of the Holy Spirit was for the more capable leaders to separate from the established Church and to begin new work. Unfortunately in our day the strategy has been reversed. Too often leaders with excellent preparation and abilities remain in the large, established churches and send the inexperienced to begin missions. It is interesting to speculate whether the Kingdom of God would make more rapid growth if the well-trained and experienced pastors would establish the new work as Saul and Barnabas did.

The plan for outreach from Antioch (vv. 2-3)

The Church at Antioch was sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The disciples became convinced, along with Barnabas and Saul, that God's plan was for the Church to release Barnabas and Saul from responsibilities and to send them to do missionary work. Saul had been chosen as the Apostle to the Gentiles at the time of his conversion. He was teaching Gentile converts in Antioch, but God's plan included regions beyond Syria.

In the call to mission service, not only the individual but the entire Church should sense the conviction of God's leadership. In Antioch, the Church shared in the decision of God's call to her members for special ministry. The Church continued to share in the ministry of Barnabas and Saul by ordaining and sending them forth to their new work. Some interpret the antecedent "they" in verse 3 to be the "prophets and teachers" of verse 1; however, it seems more reasonable that the "Church" of verse 1 is the antecedent of "they." It is unlikely that the three prophets and teachers ordained two who had been numbered with them for a new ministry.

T. P. Smith suggests that the laying on of hands should not be interpreted as ordination but as the blessing of the Church upon the two men appointed for a specific function or task.² He fails to explain the distinction between ordination and the appointment of men for special functions or tasks. Ordination includes the blessings of the Church and the pledge of support to those called for a special ministry. The laying on of hands in Jewish ceremonies symbolized the passing of the sins of the repentant worshipper to the animal which was to be sacrificed. In ordination, it symbolizes the corporate body of the Church

The third stage in the spread of the Gospel was the witnessing of two of the five leaders

of _____ to _____ Gentiles.

Name the two. _____, _____

(Antioch, pagan, Barnabas, Saul)

Name the other three leaders at Antioch.

_____, _____, _____

(Simeon, Lucius, Manaen)

What was the Antioch Church's strategy in spreading the Gospel?

(The more capable leaders went from the established Church and began the new work.)

Who ordained Barnabas and Saul? _____

(the Church)

² Acts. *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. X (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1970), p. 80.

sharing her life in the Holy Spirit through the special ministry of her appointed members. Through this ceremony the life and ministry of the Church were represented in the special ministry of Barnabas and Saul. The Holy Spirit working through the Church and the individual lives of her members established the participation of the total body through the ministry of each of its members. F. F. Bruce points out that the act of ordination or laying on of hands did not qualify Barnabas and Saul for the work to which God had called them, but by this means the whole Church expressed her fellowship with the two in their recognition of the divine call.³

The mission on Cyprus (vv. 4-12)

After the Church released them from their responsibilities in Antioch to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Saul sailed to Cyprus. They embarked from Seleucia, a seaport city about sixteen miles from Antioch, and travelled 130 miles by sea. The two landed at Salamis and began preaching in the synagogues of the Jews. John Mark accompanied them, and he is described by Luke as their *huperetes* which is usually translated "minister." The word was used by the Jews to refer to the person in the synagogue school who gave instruction in the Scriptures. The task of John Mark seems to have been to drill the new converts in the account of the teachings and activities of Jesus. Since the New Testament could be produced only by hand and writing material was expensive, very few written records of the sayings and activities of Jesus would have been available. Probably Mark guided the new converts in the memorization of the important Words of Christ.

Although Luke does not mention a specific Christian group, there may have been Christians on the island when Barnabas and Saul arrived. Luke states in 11:19 that some of the refugees preached on the island. Perhaps Barnabas had a special desire to go to Cyprus because it was his home.

It appears that if there had been Christians on Cyprus, they would have been only among the Jews. Barnabas and Saul may have desired to share the view of the Church at Antioch concerning the reception of Gentile members. After Barnabas and Saul had travelled 90 miles across the island to Paphos, the capital, they met the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus who invited them to preach the Word to him. Barnabas and Saul were immediately opposed by Bar-Jesus, the spiritual adviser of Sergius Paulus. Bar-Jesus means "Son of Jesus" (Joshua). Luke describes him as a Jewish false prophet and magician. He opposed Barnabas and Saul because he feared that he might lose his standing with the proconsul. He attempted to discredit the message of Barnabas and Saul and to turn the proconsul away from the faith. The Holy Spirit had directed Saul and Barnabas to Cyprus, and His presence was adequate to meet the need of the hour. Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?" (13:10—NASB). The false prophet was blinded. The incident recalls the experience of Saul on the road to Damascus.

Luke states that Sergius Paulus believed, but it is impossible to know whether he was converted or not. After his spiritual adviser had been made blind by the hand of the Lord, he could not very well deny that Barnabas and Saul possessed a superior religious power.

Through ordination, the life and ministry of the _____ were represented in the special ministry of _____ and _____.

(Church, Barnabas, Saul)

John Mark's task was to instruct the new _____ in the _____ and _____ of Jesus.

(converts, teachings, activities)

Why did Bar-Jesus oppose Barnabas and Saul?

(He feared he might lose his standing as the spiritual adviser of Sergius Paulus.)

³ *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1951), p. 254.

Luke notes that Saul was also known as "Paul". His Hebrew name was Saul, and His Roman name was Paul. With the witness to the Roman proconsul, Paul began his mission to the Gentiles. It is fitting that he should be called by his Roman name. In previous Scriptures, Barnabas has been mentioned first. From the time Paul took the leadership in preaching to Sergius Paulus, his name is mentioned first by Luke which indicates that he became the leader of the group.

In this Scripture, Saul's name becomes _____, and his name is mentioned _____, before Barnabas', which indicates he became the leader.

(Paul, first)

Home Study Assignment

Basic study (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. List three factors which caused Jewish Christians to separate from Judaism.

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

2. To what group of people did Christians from Cyrene and Cyprus witness in Antioch?

3. Give the reason for Barnabas' first trip to Antioch. _____

4. What does "Christian" mean? _____

5. List the two purposes of the offering taken at Antioch for Jerusalem. (1) _____

(2) _____

6. Why did Herod Agrippa behead James and imprison Peter? _____

7. Where did the early Church meet? _____

8. Who became leader of the Jerusalem Church? _____

9. What was the occasion of Agrippa's death? _____

10. List the stages of the spread of the Gospel. _____

11. What was the strategy at Antioch for spreading the Gospel? _____

12. Who ordained (laid hands on) Barnabas and Saul? _____

13. What was the task of John Mark? _____

14. Why did Bar-Jesus oppose Saul and Barnabas? _____

15. How do we know when Paul became the leader of the missionary group? _____

Supplementary activities (Levels 2 and 3):

1. List the arguments for and against Peter's presence in Rome.
2. List the possible reasons Barnabas and Saul went to Cyprus.
3. On the map in the Appendix, locate the cities Barnabas and Saul visited and write in the names. In your notebook keep a list of the activities and events which happened at each city.

Advanced activities (Level 3):

1. Read pages 124 to 139 in *The Book of Acts* by Frank Stagg.
 2. Explain the connexion of the conversion of Greeks at Antioch and Stephen's ministry. Who were the Greeks?
 3. How do Luke and Josephus differ concerning Herod's death?
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Seminar Discussion

1. What is the purpose of ordination?
2. How can the missionary strategy used at Antioch be applied in your country?
3. What were the three or four major phases in development of the early Church?