

CONCERNING THE WAY

April 5, 2010

LESSON 97: THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES



Chapter 12

In the last two chapters we saw God begin a great move among the Gentiles. This is a big turning point in Acts. This next section confirms Israel's rejection of their Messiah, and you will see the focus turn to the Gentiles.

Acts 12:1-2 About that time, Herod arrested some people who belonged to the church and mistreated them. (2) He even had James the brother of John killed with a sword.

And so the period of peace, spoken of in Acts 9:31 that began with the conversion of Saul, ends with the first martyrdom of an apostle. This Herod was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod I (Herod the Great), and this took place during Passover week in A.D. 44. This James was not the brother of Jesus, but the apostle James, brother of John. "Killed with a sword" means he was probably beheaded. It is interesting that James, son of Zebedee, was the first of the apostles to be martyred, where John, his brother, outlived all the rest, writing the last book of the Bible while imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos. Jesus had told both James and his brother John that they would drink the same cup of suffering He did (see Matthew 20:20–23). For James, this suffering was execution. For John, it was torture and exile.

Acts 12:3-4 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter too. (This took place during the feast of Unleavened Bread.) (4) When he had seized him, he put him in prison, handing him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him. Herod planned to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

Herod was a people-pleaser. Executing James was such a hit with the people, he decided to go for an encore by arresting Peter, the third time Peter has been imprisoned in the book of Acts.

A squad of soldiers was four men, so they used sixteen men to guard Peter. This shows you Peter's stature (he was known as the leader of the church) and how paranoid Herod was about him escaping. He remembered Peter's escape in chapter 5, and wanted to make sure that didn't happen again. The guards were probably deployed like this: Two were chained to Peter, one on each side and two were standing guard outside. The four squads probably were each on guard for six hours each. After the public trial, I'm sure Herod planned to have Peter executed just like James.

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in prison, but those in the church were earnestly praying to God for him.

"Earnestly" means the church was praying constantly for Peter. What they were praying for agreed with the will and plan of God, so what we see next is a powerful answer to all of that prayer:

Acts 12:6 That very night, before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, and guards in front of the door were watching the prisoners.

Peter so trusted the Lord that he was sound asleep the night before his trial! He did not fear for his life because Christ had said he would live to an old age (John 21:18). We should never fear for our lives in any situation because we know God is always in control (Psalm 121). We can completely trust Him. Though we don't have the assurance that we will live long lives, we know that God will protect us through thick and thin, and when we have completed the work He has given us to do in this life, He will take us home, whether we are young or old.

Acts 12:7-9 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on his side, woke him up, and said, "Get up quickly!" His chains fell from his wrists. (8) Then the angel said to him, "Tuck in your shirt and put on your sandals!" He did this. Then the angel told him, "Put on your coat and follow me!" (9) So Peter went out and began to follow him, not realizing that what was being done by the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision.

The angel "tapped" Peter? This isn't a very good translation of the Greek word. It actually means a heavy blow. So the angel had to really smack Peter hard to get him to wake up! Peter, still groggy from sleep, thought he was dreaming.

Of course, we can ask the question, "Why was Peter's life spared while James's life was taken?" We just don't know. We have to depend on the sovereign will of God. If we believe that God is good and wise, we can trust that what He allowed to happen was part of His wise plan for the good of all of His people, even if it doesn't make sense to us. The simple truth is that James had done all that God wanted him to do, but Peter still had work to do for the Lord.

Acts 12:10-11 They passed the first guard, then the second, and came to the iron gate that led into the city. It opened by itself for them, and they went outside and proceeded one block when the angel suddenly left him. (11) Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I'm sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod and from everything the Jewish people were expecting!"

The angel led Peter through two more guard posts without being seen, and then opened the strong iron gate of the prison, and Peter was free!

The last part of verse 11 is interesting. At this time the majority of the Jewish people were rejecting the gospel. Many had accepted Christ, but most Jews were rejecting Christ and turning against Peter and the apostles. They were disappointed the next day when they found out there would be no execution.

Acts 12:12 When Peter realized what had happened, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where a large number of people had gathered and were praying.

Of course, the church met in groups in different homes – there were no church buildings. Peter knew there would be people there, so it must have been a place where people regularly gathered to worship. Tradition even says that it could have been the place where Jesus and the disciples had their last supper in the upper room, and had served as sort of headquarters for the apostles after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension.

Mary must have been a widow since her husband is not mentioned. Her husband must have been wealthy, maybe a member of the Levitical aristocracy, to own a home large enough to hold many believers.

Mary's son John Mark is a known figure in Acts – in 12:25, 13:5, 13:13, 15:37-39. And he is the writer of the gospel of Mark. He may not have been there at the time, because verse 25 says that he returned to Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas. Peter, in 1 Peter 5:13, seems to say that he was the one that led Mark to Christ, since he calls him "my son". It is believed that Mark wrote his gospel from the memories of Peter.

Acts 12:13-15 When he knocked at the outer gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer it. (14) On recognizing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that she didn't open the gate but ran back inside and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. (15) The other people said to her, "You're out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. Then they said, "It's his angel."

Imagining this picture makes you chuckle - it's pretty comical. Poor Peter! He's left standing there while the people inside, who were praying for his release, are arguing over whether it's him or not. They're not showing much faith, are they? They were having a shouting match with Rhoda, calling her looney, or nuts. It looks like they assumed that he had been executed already, because they decided it was his angel. They may have not had much hope in what they were praying because James had not been rescued.

This shows the common Jewish belief in personal or "guardian" angels – angels who are assigned to individual people (also Genesis 48:16, Psalm 34:7; 91:11, Daniel 10:21, Matthew 18:10, Hebrews 1:14). They believed that angels would sometimes assume a human appearance, and even look like the person he is guarding. They weren't saying it was his ghost or spirit, but his angel. There is no Scriptural basis anywhere for the pagan belief that those who die still linger as ghosts.

Acts 12:16-17 Meanwhile, Peter kept on knocking and knocking. When they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. (17) He motioned to them with his hand to be quiet, and then he told them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. He added, "Tell this to James and the brothers." Then he left and went somewhere else.

By this time, he was probably pounding on that door. If they would have just let him in immediately, they could have avoided the big squabble! The James Peter is referring to is the brother of Jesus, who had become a leader in the Jerusalem church by this time.

Then Peter mysteriously leaves, to find a place he can hide from the authorities for a while. This is the last we see of Peter in Acts except for an important statement he makes on the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

Acts 12:18-19 When morning came, there was a great commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. (19) Herod searched for him but didn't find him, so he questioned the guards and ordered them to be executed. Then he left Judea, went down to Caesarea, and stayed there for a while.

Of course, it wasn't the guards' fault that Peter escaped, but a pagan like Herod was not going to believe that anything supernatural happened, so he blamed the guards and had them executed, which was standard procedure. It's no wonder there was a "great commotion" among the soldiers – they knew their lives were on the line. So God judged these guards for their part in all this, but the one who was really responsible is about to get what's coming to him:

Acts 12:20 Now Herod had been in a violent quarrel with the people of Tyre and Sidon.

So they came to him as a group. After they had won over Blastus, who oversaw security for the king's sleeping quarters, they asked for a peace agreement because their country depended on the king's country for food.

Tyre was a city and seaport on the coast of Phoenicia; Sidon was an ancient Phoenician royal city on the coast between Berytus (today's Beirut) and Tyre. We don't know what the dispute was between Herod and these people, but they realized they needed to make peace, because Herod controlled their food supply.

Acts 12:21-23 Therefore, at a set time Herod put on his royal robes, sat down on the royal seat, and made a speech to them. (22) The people kept shouting, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man!" (23) Immediately the angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give glory to God, and he was eaten by worms and died.

This delegation from Tyre and Sidon, knowing the king's huge ego, were buttering him up, even calling him a god. Herod just ate it up, and God immediately struck him down, and the worms ate him up. What a wonderful little story Luke puts in here!

The historian Josephus, in his *Antiquities*, says that Herod Agrippa I died at Caesarea in A.D. 44. The account by Josephus, while not identical to Luke's account, is similar in many ways: On the second day of a festival, Herod Agrippa appeared in the theater with a robe made of silver. When it sparkled in the sun, the people cried out flatteries and declared him to be a god. The king, carried away by the flattery, saw an owl (an omen of death) sitting on a nearby rope, and immediately was struck with severe stomach pains. He was carried off to his house and died five days later.

The two stories do not really contradict each other. While Luke says that Herod was immediately struck down by an angel, his death could have come several days later. "Eaten by worms" is understood to be ten to sixteen inch intestinal roundworms, which feed on intestinal fluids, causing bowel obstruction, frequent vomiting, and eventually death. It sounds gruesome, but it wasn't unusual back then. This was the end of the line of Herods that ruled in Israel. He had a teenage son, Agrippa II, but the Roman emperor Claudius appointed a Roman procurator over Israel instead.

It seems a strange thing to include in Acts, but the Holy Spirit wanted us to know that leaders of countries are only allowed to blaspheme God for so long. No matter how evil we see some of the leaders of nations are today, we can be sure that God will strike them down, according to His perfect timing. This should be a comfort to us, when we see even our own leaders reject the truth of Jesus Christ. They will not go unpunished.

Acts 12:24-25 But the word of God continued to grow and spread. (25) When Barnabas and Saul had fulfilled their mission, they returned to Jerusalem, bringing with them John who was also called Mark.

Apparently Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), and also a close friend of Peter. As I mentioned before, the early church fathers say that much of what he wrote in his gospel came from Peter.

With the death of Herod, persecution of the church let up and it thrived for the next few years. However, the severe famine predicted by Agabus in chapter 11 happened during that time, and it was hard on the Jerusalem church. Verse 25 tells us about the actual deliverance of the collection taken up by the Antioch church for the Jerusalem believers at the end of chapter 11.

James, the half-brother of Jesus, now becomes the leader of the Jerusalem church. Peter, although he did spend some time there as we'll see in chapter 15, spent most of the next two decades, until his death in A.D. 64-66, travelling throughout the major centers of the Roman Empire: Antioch (Galatians 2:11, Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:12), Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:1, and Babylon (1 Peter 5:13). Of course, church tradition also says he spent time in Rome. He also continued to visit the churches that had already been established in Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and other areas in Israel. But Luke chooses to end the story of the adventures of Peter here, and begin telling about the adventures of Paul.

Chapter 13

Now the focus of the book of Acts turns from Peter to Paul. That sort of makes sense, because Peter was the leader of the original apostles and the church in Jerusalem, which was predominantly Jewish. But now Israel as a nation has rejected Jesus as their Messiah and God turns His attention to the rest of the world. To do that, He chose Paul to carry his message to the Gentiles. This chapter and the next are about Paul's first missionary journey. The church at Antioch now became the base of operations for Saul's ministry. Jerusalem was still the mother church, but the missionary church was Antioch.

Acts 13:1 Now Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius from Cyrene, Manaen, who grew up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul were prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch.

We know Barnabas already, but who are these other guys? Simeon was probably from North Africa, since the name Niger means someone "dark-complexioned". This shows that the early church did not discriminate by skin color! Lucius must have also been from North Africa, because that's where the city of Cyrene was located. Some ancient texts say that Lucius was actually Luke the physician, who wrote Acts and the gospel of Luke, and who first met Paul here at Antioch. Manaen is even more interesting since he apparently had been close to Herod. The Greek here can either mean a close friend or even a foster brother. This Herod is Herod Antipas, the ruler who governed Galilee from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39, and he's the guy who had John the Baptist beheaded. I would like to have known more about Manaen, but we're not told any more. Notice how varied the backgrounds of the leaders of this church were!

These three men, along with Saul and Barnabas, were prophets and teachers. Remember that "prophets" does not always mean being able to foretell the future, although some, like Agabus in Acts 11:28, did have that gift. A prophet was like a super-teacher. God gave them revelation so they could teach doctrine. So you had teachers who taught from the existing Old Testament scriptures, and prophets who did that but also had special divine revelation because the New Testament had not yet been written. Paul was obviously one of those, since he wrote most of the books in the NT about doctrine.

Acts 13:2-3 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set Barnabas and Saul apart for me to do the work for which I called them." (3) Then they fasted and prayed, laid their hands on them, and let them go.

Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement", was a Levite (from the tribe of Levi) from the island of Cyprus. He is the one that introduced Paul to the Jerusalem church and was sent by the church there to Antioch.

The Holy Spirit is not just a power of God, He is a person. He spoke to this group, most likely through the mouths of the prophets, chose Barnabas and Saul, and sent them out. The verb “set apart” (aphorizō) is used of three separations in Saul’s life—at his birth he was separated to God (Galatians 1:15); at his conversion he was set apart for the gospel (Romans 1:1); and in Antioch he was separated for a specific service.

Acts 13:4-5 After they had been sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went to Seleucia and from there sailed to Cyprus. (5) Arriving in Salamis, they began to preach God's word in the Jewish synagogues. They also had John to help them.

Salamis was a city on the southeastern coast of the island of Cyprus. It was a commercial center and had a thriving Jewish population. John Mark, who was obviously a young man, served as an apprentice or assistant to Barnabas and Saul, and possibly acted as secretary as well.

It was very wise to preach in the synagogues. It continued the practice of the Jews receiving the gospel first (Romans 1:16; Acts 13:48; 17:2; 18:4, 19; 19:8). And Gentiles who attended the synagogues (“God-fearers and “proselytes”) would be more open to the gospel because they would already be acquainted with the Old Testament and its teaching of the coming Messiah.

This was Paul’s practice throughout Acts, and he makes it clear in his epistles that it was of theological importance that he always go “to the Jews first” (Romans 1:16). Why? First of all, he had an overwhelming passion for his people, as you can read in Romans 9:1-5 and 10:1, even saying he was willing to go to hell himself if it would mean saving the Jews. And even though his commission was to the Gentiles, he believed that his Gentile witness would ultimately lead to Jewish salvation (Romans 11:11-14). Also, he knew (and Peter had established in Acts 3:19-20) that the launching of the coming messianic kingdom was dependent on Jewish response to the gospel. Finally, Jesus Himself promised that the world would not see Him again until the moment the Jews in Jerusalem cry out to Him “*Baruch ha ba b’shem Adonai*,” “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Matthew 23:39).

Even if the town Paul was visiting was too small to have a synagogue he would first find a Jewish place of prayer (Acts 16:11-13). Even though he was the apostle to the Gentiles, Jewish evangelism was always still important to him.

Acts 13:6-7 They went through the whole island as far as Paphos, where they found a Jewish occult practitioner and false prophet named Bar-Jesus. (7) He was associated with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, who was an intelligent man. He sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.

Paphos was a city on the southwestern coast of Cyprus. It was the seat of the Roman proconsul. “Bar-Jesus” just means he was the son of a man named Jesus. “Jesus”, the Greek or Latin form of “Joshua”, was a common name in Israel, and so it was actually “son of Joshua”. You would see many people whose names were in that form, like Bar-Jonah, or Bar-David.

The proconsul was the Roman official who ruled over a province, usually under the control of the Roman senate. This man, having heard that Barnabas and Saul were men of God, wanted to hear their message. By the way, archaeologists have found a first century inscription, dating from A.D. 52-53, which confirms Sergius Paulus was a real person and he was the proconsul during this time.

Acts 13:8-11 But Elymas the occult practitioner (that is the meaning of his name) continued to oppose them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. (9) But Saul, also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked him straight in the eye (10) and said, "You are full of every form of deception and trickery, you son of the devil, you enemy of all that is right! You will never stop perverting the straight ways of the Lord, will you? (11) The Lord is against you now, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a while!" At that moment a dark mist came over him, and he went around looking for someone to lead him by the hand.

Saul is certainly acting like an Old Testament prophet here (see Jeremiah 5:27; Genesis 32:11; Proverbs 10:7; Hosea 14:9), and he gives his first prophecy, telling the man he will be struck blind. He calls him Bar-Devil (son of the devil). This is a strong rebuke against someone is totally opposed to the way of God. Satan was working through Elymas to keep the proconsul from believing in Jesus, but the Holy Spirit was working through Saul, and God slapped Satan down. The truth is spreading to another part of the world, to a person who could have a large influence in his area, and there is opposition by Satan. But God has His way.

Some see the blinding of Elymas as a picture of what was happening at this point to the nation of Israel. (Acts 28:26-27, Romans 11:25) Gentiles became the primary object of the gospel, and God temporarily turned from the Jews and judged them for rejecting Jesus. Also, the fact that Luke goes from using the name "Saul" to now using "Paul" for the rest of the book is significant. Saul was his Jewish name, Paul his Gentile name. The focus of his ministry turns to Gentiles. Some think Paul actually changed his name at this point, saying that he changed it from a Jewish name to a Christian name, but that's not true. Paul was always his Roman name (Paulus), and it was no more "Christian" than Saul was. He most likely just started going by Paul because he was ministering in Roman areas to many Gentiles.

Acts 13:12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was astonished at the Lord's teaching.

The "Lord's teaching" was the teaching about the Lord Jesus that Paul was giving. The Holy Spirit was obviously working on the proconsul, and he becomes a believer. No one comes to Christ without the Holy Spirit drawing them and opening their eyes. This incident begins a whole new theme in Acts. The Jews are rejecting and opposing the gospel, but it is being accepted by Gentiles. Paul has become the "light to the Gentiles" (verse 47).

Acts 13:13 Then Paul and his men set sail from Paphos and arrived in Perga in Pamphylia. But John left them and went back to Jerusalem.

Perga was a city in the province of Pamphylia near the southern coast of Asia Minor. The journey from Paphos to Perga is about 105 miles. John Mark's decision to leave will become an issue between Barnabas and Paul in chapter 15. We don't know why he left them, but Paul was not happy about it, he felt that Mark was abandoning them.

Acts 13:14-15 They left Perga and arrived in Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. (15) After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue leaders asked them, "Brothers, if you have any message of encouragement for the people, you may speak."

This Antioch (not the Antioch in Syria) was a city in Pisidia about 100 miles north of Perga. It was both

a Roman colony and the seat of military and civil authority in Southern Galatia. You had to journey over the Taurus Mountains to get there, since the city was 3,600 feet above sea level.

In a 1st century synagogue, it was customary, after reading a selection from the Torah and the Prophets, for a sermon or lesson to be given, usually on the scriptures that were read. Saul and Barnabas were probably recognized as leading rabbis from Jerusalem, so they were invited to speak. They do not know what they're getting into!

Acts 13:16-20 Then Paul stood up, motioned with his hand, and said: "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen! (17) The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors and made them a great people during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with a public display of power he led them out of there. (18) After he had put up with them for 40 years in the wilderness, (19) he destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan. Then God gave their land to the Israelites as an inheritance (20) for about 450 years. "After that, he gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel.

We have an excerpt from Paul's first sermon in Acts here. His audience is adherents to Judaism, so he doesn't have to convince them that there is a one true God, but like Stephen in front of the Sanhedrin, he starts with a history lesson. I love the term "put up with them" in verse 18. God put up with the Israelites, instead of destroying them, like He was tempted to do after their disobedience.

Acts 13:21-23 When they demanded a king, God gave them Kish's son Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin, for 40 years. (22) Then God removed Saul and made David their king, about whom he testified, 'I have found that David, the son of Jesse, is a man after my own heart, who will carry out all my wishes.' (23) It was from this man's descendants that God, as he promised, brought to Israel a Savior, who is Jesus.

Whoa, you can just see the heads in the room lifting at this! What is he saying? He is saying that the promised son of David who will save Israel has come, that Jesus is the long prophesied Messiah.

Acts 13:24-26 Before Jesus' appearance, John had already preached a baptism of repentance to all the people in Israel. (25) When John was finishing his work, he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not the Messiah. No, but he is coming after me, and I am not worthy to untie the sandals on his feet.' (26) "My brothers, descendants of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, it is to us that the message of this salvation has been sent.

We see by what Saul says in verse 26 that there were Gentiles in the synagogue that day, those are referred to by Saul as "those among you who fear God". John the Baptist must still have been well known to Jews throughout the Roman Empire, almost two decades after his ministry, because Paul assumes his audience knows who he is talking about.

Acts 13:27-29 For the people who live in Jerusalem and their leaders, not knowing who Jesus was, condemned him and so fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. (28) Although they found no reason to sentence him to death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. (29) When they had finished doing everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and placed him in a tomb.

What were the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath? Well, it would have been prophecies of the Messiah, and specifically passages such as Isaiah 53. The Jews should have

known better, because the prophecies of the Messiah were read to them each week in the synagogue.

Acts 13:30-37 But God raised him from the dead, (31) and for many days he appeared to those who had come with him to Jerusalem from Galilee. These are now his witnesses to the people. (32) We are telling you the good news: What God promised our ancestors (33) he has fulfilled for us, their descendants, by raising Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm, 'You are my Son. Today I have become your Father.' (34) God raised him from the dead, never to experience decay, as he said, 'I will give you the holy promises made to David.' (35) In another Psalm he says, 'You will not let your Holy One experience decay.' (36) For David, after he had served God's purpose in his own generation, died and was buried with his ancestors, and so he experienced decay. (37) However, the man whom God raised did not experience decay.

Saul quotes Psalm 2 in verse 33, Isaiah 55:3 in verse 34, and then Psalm 16:10 in verse 35, pointing out that Jesus is the Son of God spoken of in Psalm 2, the one that receives the promises given David, and the one that would not experience decay.

It is also significant that Paul called it "the second psalm," just as we do today, thus showing us that the chapter divisions in the book of Psalms were not put in by medieval scholars, but were there from the beginning.

Acts 13:38-39 "Therefore, brothers, you must understand that through him the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, (39) and that everyone who believes in him is justified and freed from everything that kept you from being justified by the law of Moses.

Justification is a legal term meaning "declared innocent" It is a legal declaration that a person is acquitted and absolved. It is by justification that a person is considered righteous and acceptable by God. The death of Christ was the payment of our sin debt, so that we might be forgiven. The Law of Moses never justified anyone.

Acts 13:40-41 So be careful that what the prophets said does not happen to you: (41) 'Look, you mockers! Be amazed and die! For I am performing an action in your days, one that you would not believe even if someone told you!'"

Saul quotes Habakkuk 1:5 here. And the irony is, of course, that Saul is now telling them.

Acts 13:42-43 As Paul and Barnabas were leaving, the people kept urging them to tell them the same things the next Sabbath. (43) When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who kept talking to them and urging them to continue in the grace of God.

Their message did have an impact on many of the Jews and Gentiles there.

Acts 13:44-45 The next Sabbath almost the whole town gathered to hear the word of the Lord. (45) But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to object to the statements made by Paul and even to abuse him.

These are the Jewish leaders of the town that rejected the message of Paul and were jealous of the

popular reaction of the town. The “abuse” was verbal, as in slandering.

Acts 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas boldly declared, "We had to speak God's word to you first, but since you reject it and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we are now going to turn to the gentiles.

This is an important turning point. Even though some of the Jewish people believed Paul's message, apparently the leaders were not, and the Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul and Barnabas, makes the statement that they are now going to turn to the Gentiles. This would be a shock to 1st century Jews who thought that only they could receive God's promises. The Gentiles' reception and the Jews' rejection of the gospel is, from here on, a recurring theme in Acts.

I'm sure that Paul hoped, as he says in Romans 11:11-14, that the Jews would be provoked to jealousy and eventually respond to the gospel. This is, in fact, how many Jews have come to Christ.

Acts 13:47-49 For that is what the Lord ordered us to do: 'I have made you a light to the gentiles to be the means of salvation to the very ends of the earth.'" (48) When the gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord. Meanwhile, all who had been destined to eternal life believed, (49) and the word of the Lord began to spread throughout the whole region.

In verse 47 Paul is making an allusion to Isaiah 49:6. Don't miss the end of verse 48. Some are destined, or elected for eternal life, and some are not. This is the doctrine of predestination, which is strongly taught in the Bible.

The gospel was spreading rapidly throughout the region, because many Jews had spread out from Israel, and therefore many of these towns had synagogues. Those synagogues served as a public place where the gospel could be preached, both to Jews and Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas were not the only ones that were traveling around preaching, they're just the ones that Luke is telling us about. There were many other disciples that also went to areas throughout the Roman Empire to spread the Word of God.

Acts 13:50-52 But the Jews stirred up devout women of high social standing and the officials in the city, started a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their territory. (51) So Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. (52) Meanwhile, the disciples continued to be full of joy and the Holy Spirit.

Shaking the dust off their feet was a symbolic act commanded by Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 10:14, Mark 6:11, and Luke 9:5. It was a gesture that showed a complete break of fellowship and renunciation of responsibility for the person or community. They had presented the truth of the gospel, it had been rejected, so they had no responsibility for the judgment that would fall on the town. Iconium was a city in Lycaonia about 90 miles east southeast of Antioch. It was the easternmost city of Phrygia.

Paul and Barnabas and the rest of the disciples, even though their message was being rejected by many and they were being persecuted, were full of joy because they knew that they had preached the message and the Holy Spirit was working.

Paul's First and Second Journeys

