

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 47

I. Exposition of Chapter Fourteen (Continued).

A. Verses 21-22 – “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting *them* to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’”

1. After departing from Lystra, they come to Derbe and have great success. They “...made many disciples...”. It’s probable that, once again, there was no synagogue in Derbe and Paul and Barnabas preached in the public square as they did in Lystra. There’s no record of any opposition in Derbe as there was in previous cities. Stanley Horton suggests it may be because their enemies may have thought Paul was dead.¹ A “disciple” is not just someone who accepts Jesus as Lord through a prayer but is defined as: “to be a follower or a disciple of someone, in the sense of adhering to the teachings or instructions of a leader and in promoting the cause of such a leader”²

2. “...they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch...” – After what they went through in these cities, it took great courage to go back into these cities. This is where the boldness given by the Holy Spirit works in the life a believer. They could have taken a much shorter route back to Antioch Syria but they didn’t.

“Tarsus, Paul’s hometown, was only about 160 miles farther on from Derbe, but the two apostles retraced their steps in Asia Minor in order to confirm the churches so recently established.”³

3. “...strengthening the souls of the disciples...” – The word “strengthening” means; “to cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief”⁴ This is something that Paul made sure was accomplished in other places – cf. 15:32, 41; 18:23. Also see Colossians 2:7; James 5:8; II Peter 1:2. Regarding the word “souls” here, Dr. Utley makes it clear:

“The term soul is used in the sense of the person or their mental activities. This is not the Greek concept of every person having an immortal soul, but the Hebrew concept of soul as a way of referring to a human being.”⁵

4. “...exhorting *them* to continue in the faith...” – The word “exhorting” simply means “encouraging”. They were encouraging them to “continue in the faith”. The word “continue” means; “to persevere” and “to remain.”⁶ This implies that it’s possible to not “continue”, “persevere” and “remain” in the faith. Regarding the use of the word “faith” here, Grant Osborne states:

“Encouraging them to remain true to the faith”: ‘Faith’ here is both the Christian faith, remaining immersed in the truths of the faith, and persevering in trusting God more deeply in their lives. Faithfulness and vigilance are needed in every age.”⁷

5. “...and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’” - This goes along with the idea of “persevering”. Paul wants these new disciples to realize from the beginning of their walk with God that there will be trials. Jesus said there would be trials (John 16:33). See also II Timothy 3:10-12; 4:17-18; James 1:2; I Peter 4:12-14. The idea of that through tribulation we’ll enter the kingdom of God does not mean we have to go through them in order to enter heaven, but means that along this journey, up to the time we enter heaven (the kingdom of God), there will be trials.

B. Verse 23 – “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

1. “So when they (Paul and Barnabas) had appointed elders in every church...” – The word “elders” refers to those who more spiritually mature. At this early stage of the church, we can’t be certain what criteria the apostles used in order to appoint certain ones. It’s probable that the elders may have been, at least in part, Jewish believers who were once elders in a synagogue prior to this. As time progressed, the Holy Spirit, through Paul gave more specific qualifications (cf. Titus 1:5-9)

¹Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 256.

²Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 469.

³Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 392.

⁴Louw and Nida, 677.

⁵Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 177.

⁶Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, (AMG Publishers; Revised edition, 1993)

⁷Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 264.

2. **“...and prayed with fasting...”** – This may have been done due to Paul and Barnabas’ experience as we saw recorded in **13:2**. When the prophets and teachers **“ministered to the Lord and fasted”**, the Holy Spirit gave guidance.
3. **“...they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”** – The idea of **“commending them to the Lord”** is that they entrusted them to the Lord. This implies that they believed they had done everything the Lord wanted them to do and now they could leave them in the Lord’s hands.

C. Verses 24-28 - The Return trip home to Antioch in Syria. – They traveled all the way back home through much of the area that they had gone before. It specifically states that they **“...preached the word in Perga...”** (verse 25) but didn’t mention any results. Dr. Bob Utley writes: **“The highland province of Pisidia is just north of the coastal province of Pamphylia. Perga was the chief city of the region. Paul apparently only passed through this city earlier (cf. 13:13), but now returned and preached the gospel (cf. v. 25).”**⁸

1. This time they did not go back through the Island of Cyprus. Regarding this Utley states: **“They did not return to Cyprus. Barnabas will return after the dispute with Paul over John Mark (cf. 15:36–39).”**⁹
 a. Barnabas was a native of Cyprus. (cf. 4:36).

2. **Verse 26** – Shows that they returned back to Antioch Syria. **“...commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.”** The word **“commended”** here is not the exact same word found in **verse 23** but is related to it. This word means; **“to hand over to or to convey something to someone, particularly a right or an authority”**¹⁰ In other words, they were handed over to God’s grace to accomplish the task they were sent to do.
3. **Verse 27** – **“Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.”** – The church gathered was, and is, part of God’s plan. In this case, the apostles gave their report – their testimony of all God had done during this **“First Missionary Journey”** of Paul and Barnabas. Regarding all of this, Dr. Stanley Horton writes:

“Therefore, they gathered the church together and ‘reported all that God had done through them.’ That is, they told of the great things God had done as they worked as fellow laborers with Him. To the Gentiles also He had ‘opened the door of faith.’ (The Gk. has ‘a door’ [NASB], not ‘the door,’ here.) That is, He brought about circumstances and opportunities that enabled many Gentiles to come to faith in Jesus. Then the two apostles remained ‘a long time’ with the disciples. That is, they resumed a ministry of teaching and help in the assembly of believers for several months, probably as much as a year.”¹¹

II. Exposition of Chapter Fifteen.

A. Conflict over Circumcision and the Law.

1. **Verse 1** – **“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’”** – We may have thought that this issue would have been settled in the account of Peter with Cornelius and his family in **chapter 10** and Peter’s explanation in **11:1-18** but there were still some Jews holding onto the necessity of the law. Thomas Constable explains:

“The increasing number of Gentiles who were becoming Christians raised a problem within the church. What was the relationship of the church to Judaism? Some Christians, especially the more conservative Jewish believers, argued that Christianity was a party within Judaism, the party of true believers. They assumed that Gentile Christians, therefore, needed to become Jewish proselytes, which involved being circumcised and obeying the Mosaic Law.”¹²

2. Dr. Stanley Horton makes some interesting points:

“These teachers, called “Judaizers” by modern commentators, did not deny that these Gentiles were believers baptized in the Holy Spirit. But the salvation they had in mind was the ultimate salvation whereby we shall receive our new bodies (at the Rapture) and be changed (cf. Rom. 13:11, ‘Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed’). What these Judaizers were really saying was that the Gentile believers must be circumcised and come under the old covenant of Moses’ law; otherwise, they could not be heirs of the promises that are yet to come. By this they also implied that Gentile believers would lose the salvation they had already received if they did not become Jews and undergo circumcision.”¹³

⁸Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 179.

⁹Ibid.,

¹⁰Louw and Nida, 566.

¹¹Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 259.

¹²Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019), 301.

¹³Horton, 261.