

Survey of Biblical History – Part 1: Creation to Christ

#24 - THE EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH

Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-14:28 - AD 46-48)

1. Paul and Barnabas Set Apart (Acts 13:1-12)

The Church in Antioch of Syria some 300 miles north of Jerusalem had become a new center of the growing Christian faith. It was very missions minded and sought to spread the faith into the far reaches of the Roman Empire to the north. The church set apart Paul and Barnabas on the first mission to these regions of the Roman Empire. They worked their way across the Mediterranean to the island of Cyprus and the cities of Salamis and Paphos preaching in the synagogues, Paul's custom of in all his church-planting efforts. While in Paphos they encountered a sorcerer who opposed them. Paul pronounced a curse of blindness upon him. However, the Roman proconsul believed the gospel message as the first convert of the mission.

2. The Mission at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:13-52)

Soon the missionaries made their way to the city of Antioch in Pisidia. Again, they came to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Paul used the OT to show how Jesus the Christ must die and rise again for the forgiveness of sins. Many Gentile proselytes and a few Jews believed. They packed the synagogue the next Sabbath, but the main Jewish contingent opposed them, so they turned to the Gentiles. Paul quoted from the OT again (vs. 47; see Isa. 42:6; 49:6). The Jews expelled the missionaries from their area, but the Holy Spirit prospered their work.

3. The Mission in Galatia (Acts 14:1-28)

The missionaries moved southeast into the Galatia region. The same pattern emerged in the city of Iconium. Many Jews and Gentiles believed, but the unbelieving Jews stirred up opposition, dividing the city. So, they moved further southeast to the cities of Lystra and Derbe of the sub-region of Lycaonia. In Lystra Paul healed a crippled man and the residents began to proclaim him and Barnabas as gods (Hermes and Zeus who reported visited the city once incognito and were turned away). Paul sought to dissuade them from worshipping them but to no avail. Then the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came stirring up everyone and then stoned Paul thinking him dead. But the missionaries escaped to Derbe, preached the gospel there and many came to faith. Finally, they traced their way back through each of the cities they visited, strengthening the newly formed churches and appointing elders. They returned to Antioch with a report. It was about this time that James, the brother of Jesus and pastor of the Jerusalem church wrote the first letter of the NT to scattered Jewish believers in the region of Judea, Samaria and Syria.

The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35 - AD 48-49)

A group of converted Pharisees from Judea came to Antioch, Syria and Cilicia and began teaching new Gentile believers that they needed to be circumcised in accordance with the Law of Moses in order to be truly saved. Paul and Barnabas argued against these men, and it was deemed important enough to warrant a trip to the Jerusalem church to discuss the matter with the Apostles and elders there. The church agreed to address the matter with an official decree having the stamp of authority of the Apostles and elders. The decree stated that no such commands were to be heeded except the need to abstain from certain immoral and ritual practices associated with paganism. This decree demonstrated the need to bring unity to all the newly formed churches. Eventually, this teaching from converted Jews who came to be known as Judaizers infected the Galatians churches of Paul's first mission. When reports came to Paul of the dire impact this had on those churches, he wrote his first letter, the epistle to the Galatians addressing the problem. Salvation is by faith, not works of personal righteousness (Gal. 2:16).

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Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:30-18:22 - AD 49-51)

1. Division over John Mark (Acts 15:36-41)

Along with false teaching, personal conflict threatened the Church. As Paul and Barnabas began a second mission to Roman provinces of the north, a dispute arose about taking John Mark who abandoned the first mission. Their disagreement led Barnabas to take Mark and Paul took Silas.

2. Return to Planted Churches (Acts 16:1-5)

Paul and Silas began by returning to the churches of the first mission. They met a young man named Timothy who was highly spoken of in all the churches. Paul had Timothy join them.

3. The Mission in Macedonia (16:6-17:15)

Paul received a vision in Troas (ancient Troy?) of a man from Macedonia beckoning for help.

A) Philippi (Acts 16:11-40). They made their way to Philippi, a Roman colony. The city did not have enough men (ten) to form a synagogue, so they went to the place of prayer along the riverside where women had gathered. They established a church in the home of Lydia, a well-to-do patroness. Paul encountered a demon-possessed slave girl and cast the demon out of her. This removed her ability of fortune-telling and profit-making for her masters. Thus, Paul and Silas were dragged before the authorities for stirring up the city with their strange teachings. Both were beaten and imprisoned. While praying and singing that night, an earthquake destroyed the prison. Paul proclaimed the gospel to the desperate prison guard and he and his family believed. The two were released and continued teaching the Philippian church.

B) Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). They moved on to Thessalonica where Paul preached Christ for 3 Sabbaths. Many Gentile proselytes and women believed, but the Jews largely rejected the message. They stirred up the city and its magistrates, but Paul and Silas were not harmed.

C) Berea (Acts 17:10-15). Paul and Silas escaped further trouble and snuck away to nearby Berea in the middle of the night. Once again, they went to the synagogue with no reason not to expect the same response (but see vs 11). However, the Jews from Thessalonica came to stir up the city against them. Paul was sent to Athens while Silas and Timothy were delayed a while.

4. The Mission in Achaia (Acts 17:16-18:16)

A) Athens (Acts 17:16-34). Athens maintained the cultural traditions of ancient Greece.

Although Paul spoke with Jews and Gentile proselytes in the local synagogue, he also spoke to pagan religionists and philosophers in the Areopagus. Paul used the light of God's revelation in nature and the human conscience as a bridge to the gospel. Many mocked his proclamation of Christ, but a small number came to faith.

B) Corinth (Acts 18:1-17). Paul then came to Corinth, known for its paganism and worldliness. He met a Jewish couple from Rome named Aquila and Priscilla who were tentmakers like Paul. They stayed together while he preached in the synagogue. He may have led them to faith in Christ. The ruler of the synagogue came to faith and many others. Paul remained for a year and half. The unbelieving Jews tried to persuade the magistrate to punish Paul, but to no avail. Paul wrote two letters to the Thessalonians after receiving a glowing report from Timothy and Silas.

C) Ephesus and Home (Acts 18:18-22). Paul eventually left for home by way of Ephesus in Asia Minor across the Aegean Sea. Priscilla and Aquila came with him. Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue but could not remain long. He wanted to get to Jerusalem for the next Jewish feast but promised to return. He came to the church in Caesarea before going to Jerusalem. After the feast he went down (north) to Antioch again, his home base.