



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Acts 13:1 through 21:17

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.” (Acts 16:5)

BACKGROUND

Jesus had said His followers would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8). Persecution had caused the believers to be scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, and even into neighboring territories (Acts 11:19). By A.D. 44, the Roman Empire provided conditions conducive to expanded preaching of the Gospel around the eastern end of the Mediterranean world and westward to Rome, the capital. Paul was to lead this movement. Throughout his three missionary journeys, described in chapters 13 through 21 of Acts, the Holy Spirit guided by selecting the Apostle's fellow workers, signifying Paul's destinations, and directing decisions regarding the new churches.

Chapters 13 and 14 describe Paul's first and shortest missionary journey, circa A.D. 46-47, which began in Antioch, Syria. With the clear direction of the Holy Ghost, Paul and his co-worker, Barnabas, traveled initially to the island of Cyprus, and from there into the regions of Pamphylia, Pisidia, Lycaonia, and Galatia. Their method of evangelism was to preach first in the town synagogues, but when many of the Jews rejected Christ, the missionaries recognized the Holy Spirit's leading to witness to the Gentiles. It was on this first journey that Saul began to be referred to as Paul, his Grecian name, possibly in order to identify more closely with the Gentiles he was attempting to reach.

Chapter 15 describes the first session of the Early Church leaders held in Jerusalem (often called the Jerusalem Council), which probably occurred about A.D. 50. In the mixed Jew-Gentile church of Antioch, dissent and confusion had arisen regarding compliance with Jewish Law. In Jerusalem, converted Pharisees insisted that Gentile converts observe the Law. However, when Peter, Paul, and Barnabas related their experiences, including the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit on Gentile believers, the council concluded that Gentile converts should not be compelled to adhere to Jewish rites. This significant decision removed a potential barrier to the expansion of the Gospel into the Gentile world. Paul and Barnabas, along with others, took a letter summarizing this conclusion to Antioch.

Paul's second missionary journey, described in Acts 15:36 to 18:22, began approximately three years after the conclusion of his first trip. Paul was accompanied by Silas on this second trip, and this time they set out by land rather than sea. Their purpose was to revisit the churches in Galatia, encouraging them in the Lord. Paul also added Timothy, a convert from Lystra, to the team.

Chapter 16 records that in Troas, the Holy Spirit changed Paul's plan of continuing on to Asia. The vision of a man saying, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us,” was an indicator of the Spirit's leading. In Philippi, a Roman colony and the largest city in Macedonia, the missionaries were arrested, beaten, and put into stocks in an inner prison. However, as they sang praises to God at midnight, an earthquake shook the prison, the doors opened, and the shackles came off all the prisoners. This led to the salvation of the jailor and his whole household.

Chapter 17 states that Paul and Silas went next to Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia, and from there to Berea and Athens.

In chapter 18, Paul continued on to Corinth, which was a city of great immorality. There the Apostle met Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tentmakers who became Paul's helpers in the Gospel. Paul stayed in Corinth for over eighteen months, during which time he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Then he returned to Ephesus, finally traveling back to his starting point in Antioch.

The record of Paul's third missionary journey is found in Acts 18:23 to 21:17. After a time in Antioch, Paul traveled back to the regions of Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen the saints. In Ephesus, Paul met with some believers who had not heard of the Holy Ghost, knowing only the water baptism of John. After Paul's instruction, they were water baptized according to Jesus' baptism and shortly thereafter, received the infilling of the Holy Ghost.

Chapter 19 relates that Paul remained in the area of Ephesus for two years, edifying the saints, preaching, and performing miracles in the name of the Lord.

Chapter 20 continues the record of Paul's travels. During this period, he wrote his second epistle to the saints at Corinth, and his epistle to the Romans. As his trip drew to a close, the Apostle traveled on to Miletus where the elders from Ephesus bid him a tearful goodbye, knowing they would not see Paul again on earth. Though warned by disciples in Tyre and Agabus in Caesarea that trouble awaited him in Jerusalem, Paul was led by the Spirit to continue on to that city, thus concluding his third missionary journey.

QUESTIONS

1. Acts 13 marks a milestone in Christian history, as Saul (later called Paul) and Barnabas were commissioned by the Holy Spirit to set forth on the first missionary venture into Gentile territory. What were the two men doing when they were chosen? Why do you think this is significant? Acts 13:1-3

2. The Early Church did not start or grow by its own efforts or enthusiasm. The early believers were empowered and directed by God's Holy Spirit. What role did the Holy Spirit have in the appointment of Barnabas and Saul? Acts 13:1-4

3. Paul and Barnabas traveled for about two years on this first missionary outreach to the Gentiles, and covered many miles. After evangelizing in Galatia, the two could have finished their trip by returning through Paul's hometown of Tarsus. It would have been simpler and safer to do so. Instead, however, they retraced their steps and revisited the churches where they had been, going back into the very areas where they had been violently opposed and persecuted. According to Acts 14:21-23, what was their purpose in doing this?

4. The meeting of the Council of Jerusalem, described in chapter 15, is one of the great turning points in the Book of Acts. What issue was brought before the Council, and why was the decision they made so significant?

5. Chapter 16 records that while the missionaries were in Philippi, opposition arose when a demon-possessed slave girl was delivered. Paul and Silas were taken before the magistrates, and then beaten and placed in stocks in the inner prison. At midnight, however, the two men prayed and sang praises to God. While we may never be beaten and imprisoned for our faith, we will experience trials of some nature. What are the benefits of keeping a spirit of praise, even in hard circumstances?

6. In view of the shameful treatment Paul and Silas had endured in Philippi, preaching the same message at their next stop in Thessalonica took God-given courage! Still, they went ahead and taught boldly in the synagogue of that city, making it clear that the Jewish ceremonial way of being reconciled to God was obsolete and that Jesus was the promised Messiah. While some believed, others of the Jews stirred up a mob. What accusation was leveled against the missionary team? Acts 17:6

7. In chapter 17, we read that Paul visited Athens, the intellectual and cultural center of the ancient world, where he began his sermon on Mars Hill by referencing an altar with the inscription "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD." Based on Acts 17:16-21, how would you describe the men of Athens? In what ways do you think they were similar to people in the "Christian" society of our day?

8. In his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, recorded in Acts 20:18-35, Paul warned of grievous wolves and false prophets who would attempt to destroy the church. The admonition Paul gave is good today. What two key words in verse 31 give us a vital clue regarding how to avoid being led astray by any "grievous wolf"?

CONCLUSION

Paul's missionary journeys took the Gospel to regions along the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. New churches were started, and new believers began to mature and grow in their Christian lives. Paul was able to conclude his third missionary journey with joy, and with a testimony proclaiming the grace of God. In spite of intense opposition, he had been faithful to the souls of both Jews and Gentiles. Now his heart's desire was to spread the Gospel in Rome.