

WEDNESDAY BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Christ Church, Crouch End Hill

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No: 32

Acts Chapters 13-15

Read Acts 13:1-5

- What was the scene when the Spirit spoke to the leaders at Antioch?

- How could the Spirit speak in your worship times?

- Cyprus is a 150-mile sail from Seleucia, and was Barnabas' home (4:36). What might these two men be thinking and feeling as they go?

Introduction to Acts 14

RESPONDING TO OPPOSITION. This chapter gives us several features about the opposition early Christians faced that can be instructive to us today. While many things have changed since the first century, there are many similarities between the way people opposed the gospel and its proclaimers then and the way they do so now. The way the church responded to opposition can also be instructive to us. (1) Just as the people of Iconium were divided over the gospel (v. 4), communities today can also become divided when we share the gospel with them. This is in keeping with the words of Christ, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34).

(2) We find these bold proclaimers of the gospel taking evasive action and fleeing from places of danger (v.6; cf. v. 20). They were certainly not timid, for even after the Gentiles were stirred up and their minds poisoned (v.2), Paul and Barnabas "spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord" (v. 3). But when staying on would do more harm than good, they left the area.

Read Acts 14: 1-25

- What can we learn from Paul and Barnabas as people started to call them gods because of the miracle that God performed through them?

- What impression do you have of Paul in verses 19-20?

- Seeing Paul and Barnabas' courage, faith and endurance, how are you challenged to serve the Lord more completely?

- The people Paul and Barnabas encountered along the way interpreted the gospel through their own lenses, even calling them Hermes and Zeus. How do people you know interpret the gospel by their own prejudices and beliefs?

- What was one of the biggest misunderstandings about Christianity you had to overcome before you could believe?

Introduction to Acts 15

CHRISTIAN CRISIS AND TALKS. Paul and Barnabas' missionary trip seems to have the effect of bringing into focus a smouldering tension within the early church—a tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

From the outset, the church at Antioch was made up of many Gentile believers (11:20-21), and now they are pro-actively sending missionaries to Gentile cities, in which many more Gentiles are becoming Christians.

This has sparked a debate over just how Jewish these Gentile believers have to be. Some believers from the Pharisee party are saying that Gentile Christians need to be circumcised—that is, they need to become Jews in order to be fully Christian. Crisis talks are called in Jerusalem, and from these a very clear message is sounded. “We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (15:11).

This shines the spotlight on a wonderful truth about the risen Christ. It is a truth already sounded in other parts of Acts:

“EVERYONE who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (2:21); “through him EVERYONE who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (13:38-9).

Read Acts 15: 1-25

- What problem arise after Paul and Barnabas’ trip (13:39; 15:1,5); and do you think this is a serious issue?

- In the church circles you grew in, what were some of the extra-biblical rules imposed on you; or what cultural manners and morals were expected of you?

- What other things would these teachers say are necessary for the Gentiles to do (vv1,5; see Mark 2:16, 24, 7:1-5)?

- As a strict Jew, why would these things be important to you?
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- What do the following people say regarding the necessity of Gentiles to be circumcised.
 - Paul & Barnabas (v.2, 12); Peter (v. 6-11); James (v.13 –21)
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Conclusion

This study contains three keys to understanding and responding to opposition. (1) The first is a sad one, in that the gospel does sometimes divide communities. For this reason even some Christians are not enthusiastic about evangelism. They feel conversion is desirable, but if it is going to cause so much disruption to families and societies, they ought to downplay its importance. Yet when we realize the supreme worth of an individual and of his or her salvation, and when we realize that we are carrying the message of ultimate importance from the Creator to his creation, we are challenged to persevere despite the cost. (2) We must also take into consideration the mood of the people, realizing that sometimes unnecessary harm can be done by our staying in a situation where a mob mentality has taken over and reason will not prevail. (3) It seems that when Paul and Barnabas came back to these cities where opposition had developed, they came in a new role-to strengthen believers.

You cannot evade the hardship of the cross and expect to win the prizes of the kingdom. In his memorable essay "Joy Will Come in Its Own Time," A.W. Tozer writes: Christ calls men to carry a cross, we call them to have fun in his name. He calls them to forsake the world; we assure them that if they but accept Jesus the world is their oyster. He calls them to suffer; we call them to enjoy all the bourgeois comforts modern civilization affords. He calls them to self-abnegation and death; we call them to spread themselves like green bay trees or perchance even to become stars in a pitiful fifth-rate zodiac. He calls them to holiness; we call them to a cheap and tawdry happiness that would have been rejected with scorn by the least of the Stoic philosophers.