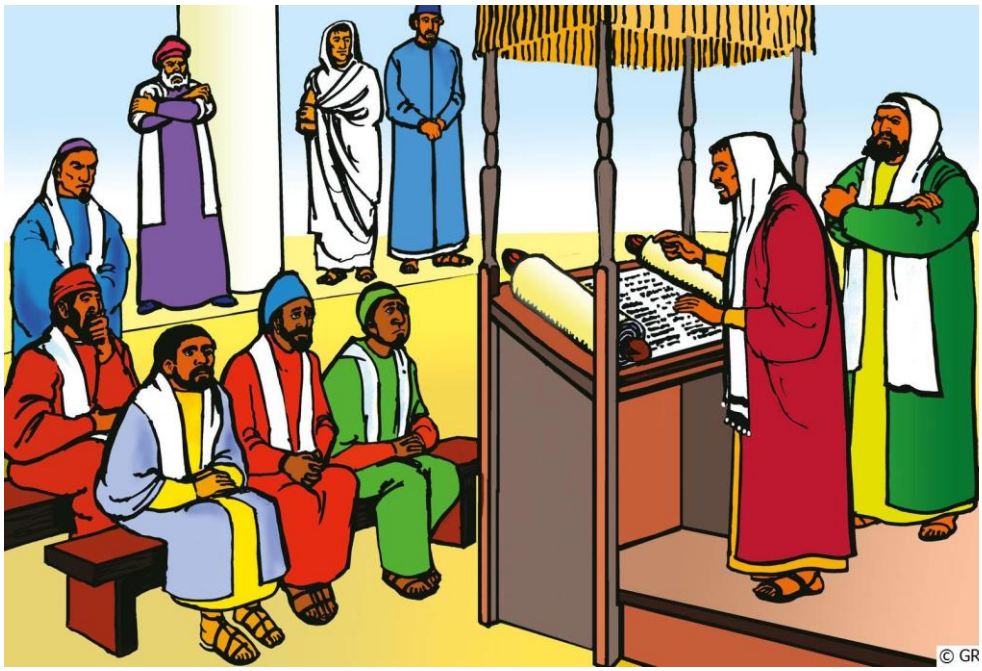
The Early Church of Jesus Christ

A Bible teaching commentary
on the Acts of the Apostles
in easy-to-read English

Written by Fred Morris



Paul preaches about Jesus Christ

Acts Unit 8 of 12

Chapters 14:1-15:41

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Unit 8: Chapter 14:1 to 15:41.

Acts Chapter 14.

Miracles And Persecution.

In Iconium, Paul preached to the Jews with great power. A great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. Other Jews did not like this and stirred up trouble, especially against the Gentile believers (14:2). The people were divided. Preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ often divides friends and families. Some believe and others do not (Matthew 10:21 to 23). Some are afraid to follow Jesus.

Paul and Barnabas stayed a long time there (14:3). They did not 'grow weary doing good' (Galatians 6:9). There were many believers in that city. The Good News of Jesus changed their lives. But after hearing of a plan to kill the two apostles, they moved away (14:6). They left behind believers who were strong in their faith in God and His Son, their Saviour.

Paul and Barnabas travelled to Lystra and Derbe. They preached boldly and God worked miracles through them.

In Lystra, the crowds saw a man healed and they became excited. They believed in pagan gods and spirits. So they called Paul and Barnabas by the names of Greek gods (14:12). There was a temple to Greek gods in that city.

A pagan priest wanted to sacrifice animals to Paul and Barnabas. Paul stopped him doing this. He told the people, "We are only human like you... turn away from these worthless things and worship the living God" (14:15).

Then Jews from Antioch-in-Pisidia made the crowds angry and they stoned Paul. They thought he was dead and dragged him outside the city but God saved his life.

Conversions Through Preaching the Good News.

The next day Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe (14:20). Here, many believed the Good News of Jesus Christ (14:21).

Paul and Barnabas then returned to the new churches planted in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch-in-Pisidia. They encouraged the new believers there (14:22 to 23):

- They helped them to become strong in their faith.
- They taught them to believe the truth of God.
- They warned them to expect many troubles.
- They appointed church leaders (elders).
- They prayed for God to protect them.

Paul and Barnabas learned to trust God for the work He had begun.

After a long journey, Paul and Barnabas went back to their home church in Antioch-in-Syria. They told the believers all about the wonderful things that God had done (14:27).

God used Paul and Barnabas to plant churches. The prayers of their sending church in Antioch were answered. There were miracles of healing and deliverance from persecution. There were many conversions especially among Gentiles. The believers in Antioch were part of the purpose of God to reach the world.

Paul and Barnabas stayed there a long time with the disciples (14:28). There were other jobs for him to do in the church.

Acts Chapter 15.

The Meeting of Church Leaders in Jerusalem.

Men from Judea came to the church in Antioch and told the believers: "Unless you are circumcised... you cannot be saved" (15:1). Circumcision is the Jewish custom of removing the spare skin from the male sex organ when a baby boy was 8 days old. God instructed Abraham to do this to all the boys of his family as a sign of His special covenant or agreement with the Jews (Genesis 17:11). Paul taught that faith alone saved men, so some Jewish believers and non-Jewish believers argued against each other about the need for circumcision rules.

Because of the disagreement, the church elders in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to the church leaders in Jerusalem. Titus also went to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1). They all went to ask Peter and James and the church elders what to do (15:2).

On the way they spoke to other Jewish believers in Christ. These people were pleased to hear that the Good News of Jesus Christ was received by Gentiles (15:3). But in Jerusalem, some of the believers were Pharisees. They were not pleased. They wanted to keep the old ways of religion, including circumcision.

In Jerusalem, James and the apostles welcomed Paul and the others. Then Pharisees in the group stood up and said

that all believers should obey the Law of Moses and be circumcised (15:5). Peter answered, "God, who knows the heart... accepted the Gentiles by giving the Holy Spirit to them... He made their hearts pure because of their faith" (15:8). Peter believed it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved... "Those who are not Jews are saved in the same way" (15:11).

Then the church leaders listened quietly to Paul and Barnabas. They spoke about the signs and wonders God did among the uncircumcised Gentiles in the towns of Asia Province.

Later Paul wrote, "God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ" (Ephesians 2:8). "Salvation is the free gift of God because of what Christ Jesus our Lord has done" (Romans 6:23). Many false religions say that you must work hard and obey religious laws to get to Heaven. Paul said: "Your salvation does not come from anything you do. It is God's gift. It is not based on anything you have done… but by the blood of Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 2:8 to 13). First we are saved and then we desire to do works of faith.

"The words of the prophets agree with this," James answered (Acts 15:15). He used words from the prophet Amos who told of a time when God will bless all the nations through Jesus Christ. "This means all the non-Jews who belong to Me" (Acts 15:17; Amos 9:12). Then James warned the church leaders "not to make it hard for the non-Jews who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19). He also wanted all the apostles to remember to care for the poor (Galatians 2:10).

The church leaders in Jerusalem wrote a letter to the non-Jewish believers in Antioch-in-Syria. They sent it with Judas, Silas, Paul and Barnabas (15:22 to 23). Two were church leaders from Jerusalem; two were church leaders from Antioch. In the letter they said that they were sorry that some of the Jewish believers had upset the non-Jewish believers.

This letter brought unity among the believers and made everyone happy (15:31). Jesus prayed to Father God for unity among believers (John 17:26).

Their message in the letter (15:24 to 29):

- recognised there was a problem;
- apologised for any upset;
- confirmed their trust in the work of Paul and Barnabas;
- shared what the Holy Spirit said in Jerusalem;
- warned against eating all food offered in Satan and idol worship;
- offered other spiritual and moral advice.

Judas and Silas stayed in Antioch until peace was restored.

Like James, we must become part of the answer to the prayers of Jesus for Christian unity (John 17:17). That is, between young and old believers, believers of different cultures and also new and traditional believers. This must be done in love as seen today through the purposes of God in the Old and New Testaments.

The Missionary Work of Paul Grows.

Soon after this Paul wanted to go back to the new churches in Cyprus and Asia. Barnabas agreed but wanted to take his young cousin Mark with them (15:37). Paul did not want to take Mark with them. So Paul went with Silas to Asia and Barnabas went with Mark to Cyprus. This disagreement was caused by the refusal of Paul to trust a young believer who left their earlier missionary journey (13:13). Mark was the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) so Barnabas trusted Mark. However, Paul and Barnabas did not agree.

Paul's second missionary journey from Jerusalem via Antioch to Galatia and Asia provinces (Turkey-in-Europe), Macedonia and Achaia (Greece)

We know very little after that about Barnabas, but Mark later worked for Paul (Philemon 24). Mark also wrote his gospel about the teachings and ministry of Jesus. At the end of Paul's life, he asked Mark to help him (2 Timothy 4:11).

When Christian leaders disagree, it is better for both to go their separate ways. This avoids dividing the Church. Paul and Barnabas did not divide the believers – they went their separate ways and got on with the work of preaching and teaching the Good News.

God used them both to plant new churches. The truth of God about Jesus spread further and further using the good roads and ships the Romans built.

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