

**1181 Paul's first journey continued and Jerusalem council - Acts(14)1–(15)12
(by Whirlwind)**

First, we discussed how Paul and Barnabas were forced to flee from Iconium to Lycaonia. Second, we spoke about Paul's healing of a man who had been lame from birth in the city of Lystra. Third, we discussed the incident where Paul was nearly stoned to death and the establishment of elders by the two of them. Fourth, we briefly touched on the final leg of Paul's first missionary journey. Finally, we addressed the first council of Jerusalem and its background, noting once again that the order of names in the Bible usually carries significance.

Please note: This article is based on the Sunday (3/15/26) topicwise Bible study, but with expansion. Unless otherwise specified, verses refer to those in NASB95. If past articles are referenced, they can be found on our website, '<https://a-christian-voice.com/>', under 'On spiritual understanding about life.'

1. Paul and Barnabas fled from Iconium to Lycaonia

"In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks. But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren. Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands. But the people of the city were divided; and some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; and there they continued to preach the gospel."(Acts 14:1-7)

Although we mentioned last time that Paul and Barnabas had declared their intention to turn to the Gentiles (see Acts 13:46-47), we see that in Iconium they still went into the Jewish synagogues together. What they preached in Iconium led many Jews and Gentiles to believe in the Lord. However, we see that the unbelieving Jews eventually succeeded in stirring up the crowd against them, intending to stone them. This plan clearly failed, but the apostles consequently fled to Lycaonia.

Therefore, when Christians face persecution and have the opportunity to flee, they should do so. This is just as the Scripture says, "...And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."(Acts 8:1) This was actually an act of obedience to God, because the gospel was thus spread. If you still have doubts about this, did we not see an angel directly rescue Peter from prison? (See Acts 12:4–11) The angel helped Peter escape!

We saw that their many days of preaching in Iconium were effective because they relied on the Lord. The Lord also performed signs and wonders through their hands, and we saw

that the purpose of these signs and wonders was to confirm His message of grace, just as the Scripture says, "...the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands."(Acts 14:3)

2. The incident of Paul healing a lame man in Lystra

"At Lystra a man was sitting who had no strength in his feet, lame from his mother's womb, who had never walked. This man was listening to Paul as he spoke, who, when he had fixed his gaze on him and had seen that he had faith to be made well, said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped up and began to walk. When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they raised their voice, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us." And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them."(Acts 14:8-18)

When we see the word "fix the gaze," we know something significant is about to happen. This instance shows us that a person filled with the Holy Spirit can see the faith of others. The Holy Spirit also healed a man who had been lame from birth through Paul's words, just as Paul himself said, "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed."(Romans 15:18) So, from a human perspective, the crowd assumed Paul was the one doing these things and regarded Barnabas and Paul as gods. Note that Barnabas's name is listed first here; this reflects the crowd's perspective. It also explains why they behaved this way, for they believed Barnabas was Zeus and Paul was Hermes. The apostles were aware of their own status; they made it clear that they were merely human, sent to preach the gospel to them so that they might turn to God. They briefly spoke of some of God's works, but "Even saying these things, with difficulty they restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them."(Acts 14:18)

3. Paul's near-fatal stoning and the appointment of elders

"But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. The next day he went away with Barnabas to Derbe. After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples,

encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."(Acts 14:19–23)

This account records that only Paul was stoned by the incited crowd, while Barnabas was unharmed because Paul had taken the lead in speaking. Moreover, according to God's will, his subsequent ministry had nothing to do with Barnabas. As we shared earlier, during Paul's second missionary journey, "Barnabas wanted to take John, called Mark, along with them also. But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord."(Acts 15:37–40)

Even though Paul was nearly beaten to death—at the very least, he had fainted, otherwise people would not have thought he was dead—he still went into the city to show the disciples that he was unharmed. This was also the first fulfillment of the Lord's words to Ananias: "But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.""(Acts 9:15-16)

Paul knew in advance that he would suffer, yet he still chose to follow the Lord. Throughout his life, he indeed endured many sufferings, just as he said when he had to defend his status as an apostle: "Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches."(2 Corinthians 11:23–28)

The reference here to "the Jews thirty-nine lashes" stems from the Law, which states: "...it shall be if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall then make him lie down and be beaten in his presence with the number of stripes according to his guilt. He may beat him forty times but no more, so that he does not beat him with many more stripes than these and your brother is not degraded in your eyes."(Deuteronomy 25:2-3) To avoid showing degrading for their brother, the Jews would administer thirty-nine lashes; that is, even if they accidentally gave one extra lash due to a miscount, it would still remain within the limit of forty. Therefore, Paul received the most severe punishment the Jews could impose.

"When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."(Acts 14:23) These were the

elders appointed during Paul's first missionary journey. Clearly, these elders had not been believers for very long, but appointing elders was necessary, just as Paul did later: "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you."(Titus 1:5) Although it is not explicitly stated here that these elders were filled with the Holy Spirit, they were clearly people filled with the Holy Spirit and endowed with the gift of leadership. For after Paul had traveled through that region, he came to Ephesus; where he met some disciples and learned that they had received only John the Baptist's baptism of repentance. When they heard Paul's message, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then "...when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying."(Acts 19:6) He does not choose those who are not filled with the Holy Spirit. Moreover, He clearly states, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."(1 Timothy 5:17) Therefore, these elders are people filled with the Holy Spirit and endowed with the gift of leadership.

Here we must also discuss fasting. Fasting is the Lord's command, for the Scripture says, "Then the disciples of John came to Him, asking, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."(Matthew 9:14-15) The bridegroom refers to Jesus Christ. In obedience to God, we should fast when we are able to. However, if you have stomach problems and cannot fast, do not force yourself, "...for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."(1 Samuel 16:7)

"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."(Matthew 6:17-18) The "reward" mentioned here does not mean that God will necessarily grant you power; rather, it means that God will reward you in His own way, for God has absolute sovereignty. This certainly includes granting you power, but the teaching that one should fast specifically to obtain power is erroneous.

Someone might say, "[But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.]"(Matthew 17:21). Doesn't that mean we must fast to gain the power to cast out this kind of demon? No. Let's look at the context: "Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."(Matthew 17:19-20) So it was the disciples' lack of faith. Jesus was able to cast out that demon, but this merely illustrates that Jesus often fasted, because such incidents could happen at any time.

So what is the purpose of fasting? To pray and seek God's will. Here is an example: "And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers."(Luke 2:36-37) She truly knew God's will, for "At that very moment

she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."(Luke 2:38)

We also see another example early on: "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.""(Acts 13:2) "Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."(Acts 13:3) This is similar to the following: "When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."(Acts 14:23)

4. The final leg of Paul's first missionary journey

"They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a long time with the disciples." (Acts 14:24–28)

The "Antioch" mentioned here refers to the Antioch from which they had set out, not the Antioch in Pisidia mentioned in Acts 13:14. This passage briefly describes the final leg of their missionary journey and their return to the original Antioch to share with the congregation "...all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."(Acts 14:27) So "...they spent a long time with the disciples."(Acts 14:28) Until "...the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue."(Acts 15:2)

5. The first council in Jerusalem and its background

"Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles."(Acts 15:1-12)

The reason for the first council of Jerusalem was the question of whether to require circumcision for Gentiles. The Scripture makes this very clear; please read the passage for yourself, and we will say no more. They were not idle along the way: "...describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren."(Acts 15:3)

When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were welcomed, and they reported all that God had done with them. We see that the church at that time had apostles and elders; in fact, the apostles were also elders, although the Bible explicitly names only Peter and John as elders, as the respective passages state: "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed."(1 Peter 5:1) and "The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth."(3 John 1:1) Since "what God tells us through Bible is consistent," the other apostles must also have been elders.

Note that before the congregation debated the matter, "The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter."(Acts 15:6) This is because they were the leaders of the church and needed to reach a certain—though not definitive—consensus beforehand. Only then did the debate ensue. After much discussion, Peter expressed his opinion, which essentially was not to place a yoke on the disciples' necks that our ancestors and we ourselves could not bear. Please refer to his discussion in the text; we will not elaborate further on this point.

The result was that during the debate with the assembly, "All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles."(Acts 15:12) Note that here again, Barnabas is listed before Paul. Although Paul was the primary speaker during his first missionary journey, it was ultimately the Holy Spirit who arranged it: "...Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."(Acts 13:2) Indeed, when recounting events, Barnabas should be the primary focus. Therefore, the order of names in the Bible usually carries significance; when the order changes in a meaningful way, we should pay special attention to the reason behind it.