



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

LESSON 13 – STUDY QUESTIONS ACTS 14:1-15:41

DAY ONE

1. What thought from the Reflection from last week (Lesson 12) or Father McBride's commentary was particularly meaningful to you?

Read Acts 14:1-10

2a. In last week's lesson, at the beginning of their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas evangelized many Jews and Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia, but were expelled from the city. As today's passage opens, they have arrived in Iconium, a city 80 miles to the south. According to verse 1, what did they do there which was similar to their previous experience, and what happened as a result (verse 1)?

b. In verse 2 we see that the unbelieving Jews have again stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. As a reminder, who are the brothers?

3a. Rather than being deterred by the unbelieving Jews, Paul and Barnabas stayed for a long time in Iconium. From the first part of verse 3, record Paul and Barnabas' courageous reaction.

b. What did the Lord do, according to the end of verse 3, to confirm the teaching of Paul and Barnabas?

4a. Briefly describe how the situation escalated and what Paul and Barnabas did in response to the danger as described in verses 4 to 6.

NOTE: This is the first time Luke uses the title "apostles" for anyone other than the original twelve chosen by Jesus.

b. In verse 7 we see how Paul and Barnabas reacted when they arrived in Lystra and Derbe. What did they do there?

5a. In verse 8 we find Paul preaching in Lystra, and a man crippled from birth sat and listened to him. According to verses 9 and 10, what actions did Paul take?

b. What two things did the man do in response to Paul's command at the end of verse 10?

6. CONNECTION: The good news preached by Paul and Barnabas created serious opposition among the communities, and yet they persevered in their ministry. The Lord honored the perseverance of Paul and Barnabas by granting signs and wonders to be done through them. Often we don't recognize the signs and wonders that God grants us when we, too, persevere in His work. Why are we surprised by His great love, shown through the miracle of answered prayer? Spend a moment and recall a sign or wonder from God that happened to you or someone you know. Did you recognize it at the time? Describe the situation for your small group.

Read and record Matthew 13:17 and begin your prayer - gratefully!

DAY TWO
Read Acts 14:11-20

7. As today's lesson begins, Paul had just cured a cripple. When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they cried out in the Lycaonian language. What were they saying, and by what names were they calling the apostles (verses 11 and 12)?

8. A temple of Zeus was just outside Lystra, and the priest of Zeus had heard of the miracle. What actions did he take and what did he and the crowds want to do (verse 13)?

9a. What did Paul and Barnabas do and why do you think they would do that (verse 14)?

b. Briefly summarize what they said to the people in verse 15.

10a. Paul explained to these Gentiles that God had allowed the nations to follow their own ways in the past (verse 16), but in fact there is only one true, living God, who has always shown His goodness to all the nations. Record Paul's beautiful description of some of the things that “witness” to God’s goodness mentioned in verse 17.

b. The crowd continued to be enthusiastic, but their reaction was still not what Paul wanted. Based on verse 18, what did Paul’s listeners want to do that was unacceptable?

11. The Jews from Antioch and Iconium followed Paul and Barnabas to Lystra and turned the crowds against them. According to verse 19, what did the angry mob do then?

12. Paul's service to the Lord was not completed. Describe the outcome of the stoning and what Paul did next, according to verse 20.

13. CONNECTION: Paul and Barnabas' missionary efforts have been met with everything from stoning to adulation. Some people have even tried to worship them. Most people would have been tempted to accept the accolades offered, or even begun to believe what was said about them. Have you ever felt like taking credit for the talents and gifts God has blessed you with? Whether it is a good job, great talent, or good looks ... sometimes we forget the source of our blessings. What are some ways that we can be mindful of God's gifts to us each day?

Read and record James 4:10, and write a prayer today thanking God for all of His gifts.

DAY THREE

Read Acts 14:21-28

14a. After Paul and Barnabas had proclaimed the good news, and made many disciples in Derbe, they retraced their steps. First they returned to Lystra, then to Iconium and Antioch. What two things did the presence of Paul and Barnabas accomplish, according to the first part of verse 22?

b. Record the powerful message they gave the believers at the end of verse 22.

15a. Part of Paul and Barnabas' mission on this first journey was to appoint leadership among the converts they had made. According to verse 23, what two things did they do for these new churches?

b. The word appoint in Greek means "to stretch forth hands." Record the following passages in which leaders are appointed:

1 Timothy 4:14

Titus 1:5

16a. The return journey continued through Pisidia, Pamphylia, Perga, Attalia, and finally back to Antioch, where their journey began (verses 24-26). From verse 26 and Acts 13:2-4, describe in your own words how they had been sent off from Antioch.

b. What did they do and what did they relate when they arrived in Antioch, according to verse 27?

17. Verse 27 refers to a "door of faith." The use of the word door is symbolic throughout the New Testament. Read and record the following passages which reflect on doors or gates as faith pathways or opportunities:

Colossians 4:3

Revelation 3:20

18. CONNECTION: We learn in verse 28 that Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch for quite some time after their long missionary trip. They came home (to the church of Antioch) where they must have been able to rest and enjoy loving fellowship with fellow believers. Nevertheless, each community of believers which they had helped to create was also their home, part of the Body of Christ. Recall a time in which you were in a strange city or country, and yet you found a church just like the one at home and/or brother and sister believers who welcomed you. Describe your experience for your small group and whether you have welcomed others in this same way.

Read and record 1 Corinthians 12:13, and pray for unity in Christ across the world.

DAY FOUR
Read Acts 15:1-21

19a. While Paul and Barnabas were staying in Antioch, some people from Judea came down to Antioch and were preaching to the “*brothers*” there (verse 1). What traditional Jewish custom were they teaching as a requirement for conversion to Christianity?

b. What was the reaction of Paul and Barnabas, according to the beginning of verse 2?

20a. This controversy caused much dissension and debate among the Jewish Christians, so Paul, Barnabas, and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem. For what purpose were they appointed (end of verse 2)?

b. Paul and Barnabas were sent on their way by the church. Where did they visit on their way to Jerusalem and what happened on their trip (verse 3)?

21a. When they arrived in Jerusalem, Paul and his company were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, and they told all that God had done with them (verse 4). A group of believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees strongly objected. According to verse 5, what did they say was necessary?

b. The apostles and elders met to consider it carefully (verse 6). After much debate, Peter stood up to speak. For each of the verses 7 - 10, BRIEFLY note the significant point Peter made or the question he asked:

Verse 7:

Verse 8:

Verse 9:

Beginning of Verse 10:

22a. In the second part of verse 10, Peter referred to the law of Moses as the “*yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear.*” (For more information, refer to Matthew 5:17-18 and Galatians 3:23-26.) What does Peter's statement about the yoke mean in your opinion?

b. In verse 11, Peter stated decisively, as the head of the church, how Jews and Gentiles will be saved. Record his statement.

NOTE: The Council of Jerusalem (A.D. 49) was convened to examine the status of Gentile believers. The decision to forego circumcision was a decisive break with the national religion of Israel and shows that the Church is (1) a covenant community distinct from Judaism and (2) a catholic community that embraces all nations. (Extracted from the Ignatius Study Bible, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 41).

23a. Peter's words had a quieting effect on the assembly. They listened to Barnabas and Paul's stories of all that God had done through them among the Gentiles. When they finished speaking, James, who had succeeded Peter as the leader of the church in Jerusalem, spoke up (verses 12-13). Record his words from verse 13.

b. James reminded the assembly that Peter's words agreed with the teachings of the prophets (verses 14-15). To support this he quoted the prophets Amos and Isaiah. Record one or more phrases from verses 16, 17 or 18 that confirm Peter's arguments.

NOTE: The dwelling of David refers to the kingdom of David established in the land of Israel around 1000 B.C. David's son, Solomon, succeeded him and built the grand temple in Jerusalem, and extended his rule to other nations, but Solomon fell away from the Lord and the tribes of Israel split apart and the Gentiles broke away; thus, the "dwelling of David" fell. James tells the Council that the restored dwelling will also extend to the nations under the kingship of Christ. The dwelling is no longer a temple, but a heavenly throne for David's royal heir, Jesus Christ.

24a. In verse 19, James states that he has made a decision. Record his words.

b. In order to make fellowship possible between Gentiles and Jewish believers, James required the Gentile converts to forego some of their pagan ways and follow rules shared by Moses (verse 20-21). Record from verse 20 the four basic rules he required them to follow.

25. CONNECTION: Ironically, James (who had been reluctant to accept Gentiles), now realizes that Old Testament prophets proclaimed that all the nations would gather together under the kingship of Jesus Christ the Messiah. James did not ask the Gentile believers to give up all of the traditions or pagan ways, but did require them to follow the four Torah rules applicable to both aliens and Jews. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Peter and James found a way to bring both groups together. Have you ever found yourself unwilling to give up a tradition that you treasured which put you in conflict with loved ones or friends? Describe the situation, and how you came together through prayer.

Read and record Psalm 22:27 and begin your prayer today in worship of the God of all nations.

DAY FIVE
Read Acts 15:22-29

26. As today's lesson begins, the apostles and elders had come to a resolution. What did they then decide to do with the consent of the whole church? Give the details you find in verse 22.

27. The rest of today's passage reveals the contents of the letter that was sent to Antioch. According to verse 23, what two groups signed the letter and why do you think it was important to let the Gentiles know that both of these groups were sending this information?

28. Verse 24 explains why the letter was written to the church of Antioch. Using your own words explain the reason.

29. Who were the four people sent with the letter (verses 25 to 28)?

30. Verses 28 and 29 go straight to the heart of the matter, telling the believers in Antioch that they, too, should follow the essential rules of abstinence James gave the Gentiles. To whom did this seem good and what would happen if the believers kept these rules?

31. CONNECTION: For many the word obey is indeed a 'four-letter word.' Paul and the others at the Council of Jerusalem knew there was only one truth and one authority given by Jesus and that the myriad rules of the Old Testament were superseded by the New Covenant. The letter we read in today's passage (which implements the findings of the Council) stresses a brotherly feeling, yet conveys a firm tone of authority. It can be difficult for any of us to accept authority, and the virtue of obedience is not held in particular esteem in today's society. Describe a positive aspect of obedience and how it relates to a stronger faith and family.

The Virgin Mary is a role model for us of obedience to God's will. Read and record Luke 1:38 and write a prayer today asking for the humility and strength of our Blessed Mother.

DAY SIX
Read Acts 15:30-41

32a. Today's passage begins the story of Paul's second missionary journey. The apostles were sent to Antioch for a specific reason and they wasted no time accomplishing it. What was the mission, according to verse 30?

b. How was this received by the members of the church at Antioch, and how did the disciples Judas and Silas help them (verses 31 and 32)?

33. According to verse 33, after Judas and Silas had been in Antioch some time they were sent back "in peace" to Jerusalem (verse 34 is omitted in the NRSV; however, in some other editions, verse 34 says Silas remained in Antioch). What did Paul and Barnabas continue to do and with whom did they do this (verse 35)?

34a. "*After some days*", Paul had an idea that he expressed to Barnabas. What was Paul's idea (verse 36)?

b. In verses 37 and 38 we learn that this idea would have a dramatic effect on their relationship. Describe in your own words what happened.

35a. Verse 39 tells us that the disagreement became so sharp that they parted company. Despite this, both Paul and Barnabas continued their work. Briefly describe where each went, what they did, and who accompanied them (verses 39 and 40):

Barnabas:

Paul:

b. Today's lesson ends with a comment on Paul's success. Read and record verse 41.

36. CONNECTION: This must have been a difficult time for Paul and Barnabas considering their "sharp disagreement." Have you ever experienced a "sharp disagreement", dispute, or difference of opinion with someone close to you and then found with time and God's love that these things worked together for good? Share with your small group how you or your loved one was able to reach past hurt and realize the relationship was more important than the disagreement.

Read and record Matthew 5:23-24 and begin your prayer today realizing that we are called to forgive and love each other, and that by the grace of God, even difficult and hurtful situations can result in a blessing!

Let thoughts of “*all things working together for good for those who love God*” lead you into prayer.

After completing this lesson, read Chapters 14 and 15 (refer to pages 94–102 in the edition copyrighted in 1992 by Our Sunday Visitor or pages 107-120 in the edition reprinted in 2013 by Saint Benedict Press) in the *Meditation and Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* by Alfred McBride, O. Praem. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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