



Meeting With God Bible Reading Notes

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Week One A Historical Study - Acts 11-15

How did the Christian faith spread from being a small group of Jewish believers to become a major world religion? What sort of people did God use? How did they set about the job? What was the message they preached? And how much of their Jewish culture was essential for people who became Christians? All relevant questions for us, as we think about passing on God's message to others!

The Acts of the Apostles is Luke's second book, showing how the church spread after the events of Jesus' life and death recorded in his Gospel (see Acts 1:1-2).

Day 1. A small start?

Acts 11

Peter was called to account by the Jerusalem church for his actions in associating with Gentiles and preaching the gospel to them. Verses 1-18 are his explanation (you can read the full story in ch.10). Note: Verse 6 refers to 'unclean' animals which Jews did not eat (Leviticus 11).

1. What points does Peter particularly emphasize in his account? Why?
2. What might have prevented Peter from telling these Gentiles about the gospel? What causes us to miss some of our opportunities to share our faith with others?
3. The church in Antioch was to be Paul's base for each of his three missionary journeys. What sort of church do you think it was (vv.9-30)? Make a list of the things you can find out about it from this passage.

PRAY: Guided by your answers to question 3, pray for your cell group, and for your own part in it.

Day 2. A mission begun

Acts 13:1-14:7

Read the passage, concentrating on finding out how Paul and Barnabas set about their job. We will look at the sermon (vv.16-41) in detail in the next study.

Note: Verses 16,26. 'Godfearers' is a technical term for Gentile adherents of Judaism who had not been circumcised.

This missionary campaign was initiated by the Holy Spirit who guided the church at Antioch to set apart two of their leaders for service. The whole account is frustratingly silent about the way the Spirit's leading came, both initially, and to Paul

and Barnabas in some of their decisions.

1. From the passage, make a list of the factors which determined which towns they visited, and when.
2. They seem to have started by preaching in the synagogues in each place. This may have been partly from a theological conviction (see Romans 1:16, but also Acts 9:15), but can you think of any other possible reasons?
3. How would you summarize Paul and Barnabas' strategy?
4. Is there anything in Paul and Barnabas' method of working to help you in the situations you meet at work, college, where you live, etc.?

PRAY for the guidance of the Holy Spirit for yourself, and also for other Christians you know who are particularly concerned to spread the gospel.

Day 3. A sample sermon

Acts 13:16-41

This is an example of one of Paul's evangelistic talks, given to a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles who attended the regular meetings of the synagogue.

1. Summarize the main points of Paul's sermon. What was the major theme Paul wanted these people to learn? What response was he hoping for?
2. Paul starts his sermon with a potted history of Israel, and uses the Old Testament to demonstrate some of his points. Why does he do this?
3. Would this approach work with your non-Christian friends? What sort of approach could you use to interest them in the gospel?

PRAY for opportunities to talk to them about the gospel, and to find out what they think about God.

Day 4. A case of mistaken identity?

Acts 14:8-28

In Lystra Paul and Barnabas encountered a town which apparently had no synagogue. There was a local legend that Zeus and Hermes had once visited the area and were entertained by an aged couple who were unaware of their identity. Perhaps the crowd were trying not to repeat that mistake! Paul's speech here (vv.15-17) is very different from the sermon at Antioch. Can you think of any reasons for the different emphases?

1. Paul and Barnabas obviously thought that visiting young churches was worth the risk of returning to places where they'd been ill-treated (v.21). Why was it so important?
2. Would their warning (v.22) be one that you would give to young Christians today? What help and advice might be appropriate?

It was obviously right that the church that had sent Paul and Barnabas on their way should have a report of their doings, and be able to share in the praise and thanksgiving to God for all that had been achieved.

PRAY John & Rachel McDonough from our church are serving God in Paraguay. Spend some time now praying for them. You can arrange to receive their prayer letter, or find some other information, so that you could pray for them regularly.

Day 5. A big issue resolved

Acts 15:1-35

About ten years after Cornelius and his family were converted, the problem of the Gentile Christians' relationship to the Jewish Law was brought to a head when men came to Antioch saying that circumcision, the mark of God's covenant (Genesis 17:9-14), was necessary for salvation. Since these men came from Judea it was obviously important to settle the issue at its source, in Jerusalem.

1. What did Peter say about how people are saved? What conclusions are we meant to draw from this?
2. James was regarded as the leader of the Jewish Christians, so his opinion was crucial. What point is he making by quoting Amos' prophecy (vv.16-18)? James' suggestion in v.20 (see also v.29) was probably a compromise, asking the Gentiles to refrain from doing things that would be particularly repulsive to Jewish Christians in order to maintain good fellowship. It seems that the Antioch church was happy to accept this ruling (v.31).
3. In v.19 James is saying that we should not put any unnecessary barriers in the way of those who want to become Christians. Are there any things we do or say which might make it harder for our friends to become Christians?

This is a moving account of God's overruling in the life of one family. It teaches much about our heavenly Father's care.

PRAY for yourself and your non-Christian friends,, that you will understand the barriers to them coming to faith and will have wisdom in responding to them.

Weekend

You may know quite a lot about Paul (if not, read the account of his conversion in Acts 9), so why not try and find out a bit about Barnabas?

As well as references in these chapters you could look at Acts 4:36-37; 9:27; 15:36-41 and Galatians 2:13.

What were his special gifts? Try and summarize his contribution to the growth of the church.

PRAY for the various outreach ministries of the Church: Oasis Coffee Shop, Little Steps, Christians Against Poverty Debt Centre, and our Food bank. **Thank God** that we are becoming known as a Church that cares for those in need, and that we have found favour in the eyes of the County Council Community Support Team among others. **Thank God** for his continued provision for our financial needs to sustain our various ministries.