

Chapter 30: God is No Respector of Persons

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1. The Book of Acts Continued

As we continue our exploration of the writings of Luke, we begin our lesson re-visiting the issue of the gospel being taught to the Gentiles. During the last lesson [NT#29], Philip had gone to Samaria and while there he had taught the gospel to the Samaritans and experienced great success. You will recall that Peter and John (Acts 8:14), had travelled to Samaria in order to bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost upon the new converts. This gave official confirmation regarding the validity of Philips' missionary work.

Robert J. Matthews explains,

“The Samaritans of New Testament times were the descendants of a mixed lineage, resulting from intermarriages of the Israelites with the people of the land as early as 8th century B.C. The Jews of Judea looked with disdain upon the Samaritans, refusing to respect them as true Israelites. The apostolic mission to these people, therefore, was a new dimension in the missionary outreach, as they went to a people partly of Israel, but not Jewish. In a sense, the mission to the Samaritans is a *half-step* toward taking the gospel to non-Israelitish people. The Samaritans had the law of Moses and practiced circumcision, thus their entry into the church did not raise any new questions about the law [by the Jewish converts to Christianity].”¹

As we continue our reading of Acts, we now learn of Peter, as the leader of the Church, receiving a vision by the Lord. This will clarify for him the gospel of Jesus Christ is to be taught to all people, Jew as well as non-Jew. Following his vision, he proceeds to teach and baptize Cornelius and his family. This opened further the door for the missionary work to the Gentiles.

King Herod called Agrippa, carries on the persecution of the members of the Church. His Grandfather, Herod The Great, was responsible for the death of many infants at the time of the Savior's birth in Bethlehem. His Father, Herod Antipas, was the ruler who put John the Baptist to death and met with Jesus prior to His being crucified. Herod called Agrippa, will now order the death of James, the brother of John, one of the senior members of the twelve Apostles. He will also order Peter be put in prison.

Saul will from this point forward be referred to as Paul in the scriptures. He will be ordained an Apostle and, with Barnabas as his companion, will serve his First mission to the Gentiles.

The Prophet Joseph Smith left us this description of the Apostle Paul:

“He is about five feet high; very dark hair; dark complexion; dark skin; large Roman nose; sharp face; small black eyes, penetrating as eternity; round shoulders; a whining voice, except when elevated, and then almost resembled the roaring of a lion; He was a good orator, active and diligent, always employing himself in doing good to his fellow man.”²

As we come to know Paul as a missionary and his writings, we will now be better able to see him within our mind.

It is upon Paul and Barnabas' return that Paul will attend the Jerusalem Council. It will be an effort on Paul's part to gain clarification in the Church regarding the necessity of non-Jewish converts being required to be circumcised.

We turn now to the specifics events we have noted in our effort to further our understanding of the book of Acts.

2. Peter and Cornelius: God is No Respector of Persons

As previously noted, the gospel was to be taught, according to the Lord's directive prior to His ascension, “in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). In the subsequent conversions in Samaria as well as the conversion of the man from Ethiopia, it is understood that these individuals had previously been converts to Judaism and, therefore, had conformed their lives to the law of Moses. Peter's encounter with Cornelius, who was Roman centurion, was to open the door yet further regarding membership in the Church.

We learn the following regarding Cornelius.

Acts 10:1-2

1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band.

2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.

Cornelius, was a centurion, or a Roman Officer.

Smith's Bible Dictionary states,

“The legion [which consisted of 3000 to 6000 men] was subdivided into ten cohorts (“band”. Acts 10:1), the cohort into three maniples and the maniple into two centuries, containing originally 100 men, as the name

implies, but subsequently from 30 to 100 men, according to the strength of the legion...One of these cohorts was named the Italian, Acts 10:1, as consisting of volunteers from Italy.”³

He was a devout man, meaning he revered God to whom he frequently prayed. He also imparted of his substance to those in need. In his desire to know the will of the Lord concerning his family, he sought heavenly direction through both prayer and fasting.

Acts 10:30-32

**30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold a man stood before me in bright [white?] clothing,
31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.
32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter;...**

What was the nature of the prayer that Cornelius was offering he would be blessed with a heavenly vision, and he would be directed to send for Simon, Peter?

Acts 11:13-14

**13 ...Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter;
14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy household shall be saved.**

The purpose of Cornelius' fast and prayer was to learn what he and his family needed to do in order to receive salvation from their sins? The angel told him to send for Peter who was one of the Lord's administrators on the earth. Peter held the authority not only to teach the principles of the Gospel, but following their baptism could then bestow upon him and his family the gift of the Holy Ghost.

2.1. Vision of Cornelius

This vision occurred during the ninth hour or around 2 pm in the afternoon. An angel appeared to him with a message to him from God.

Acts 10:4-6

**4 ...Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.
5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one, Simon, whose surname is Peter.
6 ...he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.**

The response of Cornelius to the visitation by an angel was “he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord?” (Acts 10:4). After his initial fright at the appearance of a Heavenly messenger, Cornelius then sought direction from the angel.

We learn of Cornelius humility and sincere desire to follow the directive of the Lord. In the morning, he dispersed three men to go to Joppa as directed by the angel. Two were household servants and a devoted soldier chosen from those who were closest to him and most trusted (see Acts 10:7).

2.2. Vision to Peter

While Cornelius is in the process of seeking guidance and direction from the Lord, we learn the Lord's servant was also being prepared for their visit. Peter had gone to the housetop at the sixth hour, approximately 11 a.m.,

to pray. While there, he had become hungry. While he was waiting for his food to be prepared, he “fell into a trance” (Acts 10:10).

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“Sometimes prophets go into *trances* in connection with the receipt of visions. That is, they are so completely overshadowed by the Spirit that to all outward appearances normal bodily functions are suspended.”⁴

While in the trance, the individual is completely focused on the message they are receiving. Therefore, their attention is often suspended regarding the events surrounding them.

Acts 10:11-15

11 And [Peter] saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit [bound] at the four corners, and let down to the earth:

12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God that cleansed, that call not thou common.

The vision that Peter experienced while in a trance, as well as the directive, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15) was repeated three times. It is of interest to note that “Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he has seen should mean...” (Acts 10:17), however, the Lord’s directive was clear.

Acts 10:19-20

19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

It appears that the meaning of the vision was not clear to Peter in the beginning, however as he met with Cornelius and his household, it became clear to him why he had been brought to his home.

Acts 10:28, 33-35

28 And he [Peter] said unto them [Cornelius and his household] Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or come unto one of another nation; but God had shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.

33 ...Now therefore are we [Cornelius and his household] here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:

35 But in every nation he that feareth [reverence] him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.

It has been confirmed in Peter’s mind, by the Spirit, the Lord has directed him to this household as they have been prepared to hear the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This family is unique for they are not Jews by religion or conversion, but are instead Gentiles.

Peter proceeds to teach them regarding Jesus Christ and his mission.

Acts 10:38-40

**38 How God [the Father] anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.
39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree [crucified].
40 Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly.**

2.3. Cornelius' Conversion

Peter now taught Cornelius and his family the principles of the Gospel beginning with faith in Jesus Christ, His divinity and His resurrection, the principle of repentance and of baptism and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost, as a testifier of truth, fell upon them and bore witness to them the truthfulness of the principles that Peter was teaching.

Acts 10:47-48

**47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?
48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.**

Having heeded the witness of the Holy Ghost, Cornelius and his household then sought to be baptized. Following their baptism, they would have hands laid on their head bestowing upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Joseph Smith states,

“There is a difference between the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before he was baptized, which was the convincing power of God unto him of the truth of the Gospel, but he could not receive the gift of the Holy Ghost until after he was baptized. Had he not taken this sign or ordinance upon him, the Holy Ghost which convinced him of the truth of God, would have left him.”⁵

The LDS Bible Dictionary states,

“The significance of Cornelius’s baptism is that he was probably the first gentile to come into the Church not to have previously been a proselyte to Judaism...

“The baptism of Cornelius and his fame marked a new dimension in the work of the Church in the New Testament times, since it opened the way for the gospel to be preached to the gentiles directly, without going by way of Judaism. It is notable that this major event in the missionary activity of the Church was done through the ministry of Peter, the chief apostle, who held the keys of the kingdom of God at the time on the earth.”⁶

The actions of Peter and the implication upon the membership of the Church was not without objection amongst some members in Jerusalem. Peter reasoned with them by sharing the events that had transpired as he met with Cornelius and his family. He concluded with his witness.

Acts 11:17-18

17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?

18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

The missionary work continues to spread to the areas surrounding Judea. Converts were found in Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch. In fact, it will be in Antioch that the disciples will first be referred to as Christians (see Acts 11:25). Barnabas will go to Antioch as a representative of the Church leadership to oversee the missionary work there. Barnabas will also go to Tarsus where Saul has been preaching and invite him to come to Antioch to assist him with the missionary work there.

For a while, peace is restored in the Church, and the gospel will be preached to the Gentiles. The issue of full acceptance of the Gentiles into the Church by some will continue to simmer as we will later discuss.

3. Further Opposition Against the Saints

3.1. King Herod has James Killed

King Herod called Agrippa will continue to carry on the work of persecuting the Church and he has James, the brother of John, put to death (see Acts 12:2). James is one of the senior members of the Twelve Apostles. Herod will also order the arrest and imprisonment of Peter, the chief Apostle.

3.2. Peter Put in Prison

Acts 12:4

4 And when he [Herod] had apprehended him [Peter], he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers [detachments of four men each] to keep him; intending after Easter [Passover] to bring him forth to the people.

One can be certain that the desire of this evil king was to have Peter put to death.

It is noteworthy the extent that Herod has gone to in order to ensure that Peter does not escape from prison.

Acts 12:6

6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.

One would judge from the above arrangement that he was extremely concerned that Peter might escape from his internment!

Acts 12:7-11

7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.

8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.

9 And he went out, and followed him [out of the prison]; and [Peter] wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

10 When they were past the first and second ward, they came to the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.

11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

It is noteworthy that after the angel delivers Peter from prison, his mission has been accomplished and he departs without a further word. I am also stuck by the similarity of a vision with the occurrence of an actual event as Peter who has experienced both manifestations, is unsure as whether he has had a vision or actually been freed from prison.

Finding himself alone on the street, he goes to the home of a member of the Church where many of the members of the early Church had gathered to offer prayers on Peter's behalf.

Acts 12:13-14

**13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel come to hearken, named Rhoda.
14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.**

Those in attendance did not believe the witness of the young woman, even suggesting that she was viewing "his angel" (Acts 12:15). It is apparent that no one believed Peter would be freed from the prison where he was being held.

Acts 12:16-17

**16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.
17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold the peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.**

It is important to understand that "James" to whom Peter is referring is James, the half-brother of Jesus.

George A. Horton, Jr. states,

"The James referred to is not the brother of John whom Herod Agrippa I had killed...but is thought to be the brother of Jesus who, tradition says, became the Bishop of Jerusalem. The latter may explain his key role in the Jerusalem Council."⁷

3.3. King Herod Killed by Angel

King Herod called Agrippa is infuriated with the fact that Peter was not available for execution. As a result, he has his keepers put to death (see Acts 12:19).

While in Caesarea where he has a palace, he made an oration unto the people. He was so eloquent in his communication that the people shouted, "It is the voice of god, and not of man" (Acts 12:22). Herod did not correct his subjects for their exhortation, but instead revealed in it. As a result, he sealed his own fate in the eyes of God.

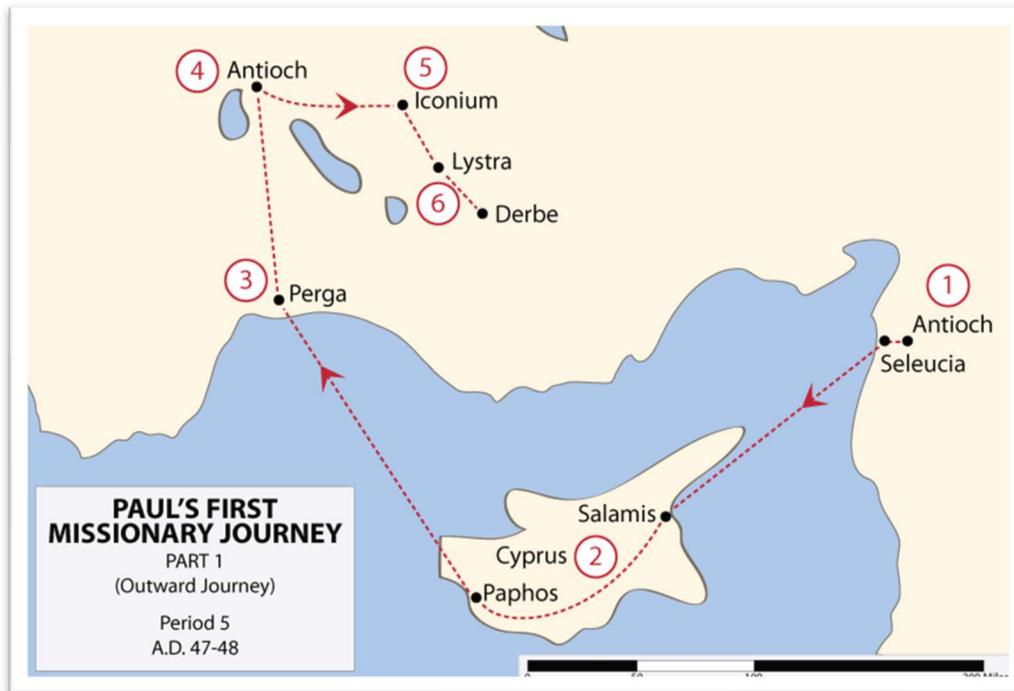
Acts 12:23

23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

With the passing of King Herod Agrippa I, the scriptures noted, “But the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24). The work of the Lord continues to go forth despite the persecution that the members and its leaders have experienced.

4. Paul, With Barnabas, Serves First Mission to Gentiles

Saul and Barnabas are amongst those serving as missionaries for the Church in Antioch. While the authorities are visiting Antioch, it is determined that Barnabas and Saul should be called on, what we would refer today, a full-time mission. This means that they will be absent from their families for a defined period of time and will be called to labor full-time in the service of the Lord. During the time of their service, they are representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ and are subject to the direction of those called to minister the missionary work in their area of labor.



Summary of events during Paul's First Missionary Journey (Part 1. The Outward Journey):

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Antioch (in Syria) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Saul labored in Antioch two years. B. Barnabas and Saul were called to preach. 2. Cyprus <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Saul converted Sergius Paulus. B. Saul blinded Elymas the sorcerer. 3. Perga <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. John Mark left and returned to Jerusalem. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Antioch (in Pisidia) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Paul's discourse in the synagogue. B. Paul's illness. C. Paul and Barnabas are expelled from Antioch. 5. Iconium <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Paul and Barnabas preached a long time with much success here. 6. Lystra <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Paul healed a cripple. B. The people thought they were gods. C. Paul was stoned. |
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Reference⁸

Acts 13:2-4

2 As they [Church authorities] ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away [on their missions].

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

It is not stated who in the Church hierarchy was involved in calling Barnabas and Saul to serve missions, but without the proper authority from Peter and others, this action would not have been taken. We can assume that once they accepted the call to serve, they were then set apart and Barnabas was given the necessary authority to teach, baptize and confer the gift of the Holy Ghost.

4.1. Paphos on Isle of Cypress

Upon their arrival at Salamis on the isle of Cyprus, just as Jesus had previously done, they go to the Jewish synagogue (see Acts 13:5). They then crossed the isle to Paphos. It is at Paphos that they are invited to meet with Sergius Paul who “desires to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:7).

Duane S. Crowther notes

“**Sergius Paulus**—He was the Roman proconsul, or governor of the isle of Cyprus, in Saul’s day. Saul’s preaching of the gospel to him was the first known presentation of Christianity before a Roman civil authority.”⁹

It is while Saul and Barnabas are teaching Sergius Paulus, that Elymas the sorcerer, attempts to thwart their efforts.

Acts 13:8

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

We can be assured that Saul rebuked his efforts and warned him of the consequences if he continued his opposition to the work of the Lord. Elymas, serving the devil, did not stop, but instead only intensified his efforts to undermine the work of the Lord.

Acts 13:9-11

9 Then Saul (who also is called Paul), filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

We learn an important lesson from Saul’s encounter with Elymas. Acting as the Lord’s authorized servant entitles him to be the recipient of the gift of the Spirit. Here he receives direction and guidance in both word and action. A point of reference is, from this point in the scriptures, Saul will be referred to by Luke as Paul.

Bruce R. McConkie states regarding Paul rebuke,

“Harsh words these! But why not? Elymas sought to keep the Roman pro-counsel, for such was his rank and status, from receiving the gospel and becoming an heir of salvation. Hence, he was engaged in Satan’s work. What a crime it is in the sight of Heaven to teach false doctrine and thereby keep men from salvation.”¹⁰

Acts 13:12

12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

Having the prerequisite faith, when the curse of blindness is given to Elymas, the deputy receives an additional witness of Paul’s message to him. He knows for himself, by a witness of the spirit, the words of salvation he has been taught are true.

We learn that following their arrival at Perga in Pamphylia, that John Mark departs from them and “returned to Jerusalem” (Acts 13:13). The reason is not given for his departure, but Paul’s feelings toward him will continue to simmer and will later affect his relationship with Barnabas.

4.2. Antioch of Pisidia

Paul and Barnabas depart Perga and arrive in Antioch in Pisidia [Usually referred to as Pisidian Antioch in order to distinguish it from Antioch in Syria.] As usual on the sabbath day, they go to the synagogue. Paul is invited to speak.

Paul begins with the History of Israel to King David. He then tells them that through the seed of David, “God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus” (Acts 13:23). Then he tells them regarding the mission of John [the Baptist] who prepared the way of Jesus. Paul states,

Acts 13:26

26 Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God [non-Jews], to you is the word of this salvation sent.

He told them when Jesus came to those “that dwell at Jerusalem and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day” (Acts 13:27), they condemned Him to death. He then arose and appeared to many “who are his witnesses unto the people” (Acts 13:31)

Acts 13:32-33

**32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,
33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again;...**

Paul concludes his discourse with the following admonition.

Acts 13:38-41

38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets;

41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

Paul, using Jewish history and the words of the prophets, taught them regarding the mission of Jesus Christ. However, because they did not understand the scriptures, Jesus was put to death by the Jews. He rose from the dead and appeared unto many. Because of His death and resurrection, man can gain forgiveness of their sins without following the law of Moses. They did not understand the law of Moses had been given to lead them to Christ, and had now been fulfilled. No longer did they need to follow its precepts as Christ taught a new covenant. To many Jews, this meant they were no longer God's covenant people. The fact that the gospel was now being taught to the despised Gentiles was a bitter concept for them to accept. For many, it was unacceptable.

Acts 13:44-45

44 And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.

45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

Paul and Barnabas now spoke to those gathered to hear their message.

Acts 13:46-47

46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you [Jews]: but seeing ye put it from you [hold on to your traditions?], and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light to the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

As one might imagine, the reception of the Gentiles and the Jews differed greatly to their message.

Acts 13:48-49

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

49 And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

The Gentiles rejoiced in the message and many accepted the principles of the Gospel [Faith in Jesus Christ, Repentance, Baptism, and reception of the Gift of the Holy Ghost] and became converts to the Church of Jesus Christ. The response of the Jews was dramatically different.

Acts 13:50

50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

The Jews of Pisidian Antioch are incensed the gospel is now being taken to the Gentiles. They now attempt to silence the messengers by stirring up persecution against them and rejecting them from the area.

4.3. Labors in Iconium

Paul and Barnabas now arrive in Iconium. They go to the synagogue and addressed both the Jews and the Greeks that were gathered there.

Acts 14:1

1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

It is likely that the message that Paul and Barnabas taught in Iconium was similar to the message they had taught in each of the synagogues they had visited, beginning in Salamis on the Isle of Cypress. It is important to understand it is not the message that differs, but the receptivity of the people in the different areas to the promptings of the spirit. Those who are receptive, embrace the message of truth with joy and happiness. Those who are offended by the message, especially those who persecute the messenger, align themselves with the adversary of all truth and thus seek to reject and then silence the words from being spoken. It was true when the message was being delivered by Jesus Christ. It is also true with those who serve as His servants.

While there are many in Iconium who receive the message of Paul and Barnabas, it is the unbelieving Jews who take action.

Acts 14:2-4

2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders, to be done by their hand.

4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

Paul and Barnabas are not strangers to persecution, but the work must go forth in spite of the response of the people. As faith is developed, they are able to perform wonders on behalf of the people. They have been called to testify of the truth to all nations.

Each individual who hears the words of these two men will have to decide whose side they are on. In the city, it appears that the citizens are divided down the middle. In the final analysis, there are really only two choices: We chose either the Lord and His messengers or we chose to follow the devil and along with him seek to silence the messenger. It is the same choice today each person has to make when they hear the teachings of the gospel. Ultimately, no one will be able to continue to be neutral.

It is of interest to note that at this point in Acts, Paul and Barnabas are referred to as “apostles” (Acts 14:4).

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“**The apostles]** Luke, for the first time, so designates Paul and Barnabas. All of the brethren in the Church who knew by personal revelation that Jesus was the Christ, meaning who had testimonies given by the Holy Ghost of his divine Sonship, were witnesses of the Lord...Only Barnabas, Paul, Matthias, James the Lord’s brother, and the original Twelve are singled out to carry the apostolic appellation. The clear inference thus is that the name is being reserved for those who were ordained to the office of apostle in the Melchizedek Priesthood and therefore that Paul and Barnabas were members of the Council of the Twelve, having filled vacancies in the normal course of events. President Joseph Fielding Smith has written: ‘Paul was an ordained apostle, and

without question he took the place of one of the other brethren in that Council.’ (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, Vol. 3, p.153).”¹¹

Acts 14:5-7

5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them.

6 They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about:

7 And there they preached the gospel.

4.4. Near Disaster in Lystra

It is important to keep in mind that before Paul and Barnabas, or any other holder of the priesthood, could perform works of healing or wonder, it is necessary that the people have sufficient faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. As noted previously, faith precedes the miracle, not the reverse. When they initially came to a city or village, they would begin their efforts by testifying of Jesus Christ as being the Son of God, and of His death and resurrection. This was followed by their teaching the principles of repentance, baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost. As the Holy Ghost then bore witness to the listener of the truth of their message, those with faith were then prepared to receive even greater manifestations of the spirit. As noted, in the cities they entered, “they preached the gospel” (Acts 14:7).

Acts 14:8-10

8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who never had walked:

9 The same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

What a wonderful day it was for this man! He who have never been able to walk but because of his faith in Jesus Christ and due to the authority that Paul held, he was able to have his legs healed and walk for the first time.

The response of the people to the man’s healing, based upon their false beliefs, was that this miracle occurred because Paul and Barnabas were “gods” themselves, not representatives sent from God, to teach them the truth.

Acts 14:11-13

11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.

12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

It appears that these individuals had built the foundation of their religious beliefs upon Roman mythology.

Adam Clarke states,

“The heathens supposed that Jupiter and Mercury were the gods who most frequently assumed the human form, and Jupiter was accustomed to take Mercury with him on such expeditions. Jupiter was the supreme god of the heathens, and Mercury was by them considered the god of eloquence.”¹²

Once Paul and Barnabas learned of the false conclusions of the people, they immediately took action to dispel any misunderstanding of their being gods.

Acts 14:14-18

**14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people crying out,
15 And saying, Sirs, who do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:
16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.
17 Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.
18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.**

For the moment it appears that peace has been restored. The people had heard the message Paul and Barnabas had share with them. They were themselves not gods, but had come to teach them about the living God who is the creator of the heaven and earth and provides for the seasons. He also provides the rain that enables their crops to grow so that they have food to eat thereby enabling them to care for their families. In the past, God had allowed their own beliefs, but now they had come as witnesses to bring them His truth.

Tragedy soon strikes Paul. Those Jews, who were opponents of Paul and Barnabas from the cities of Antioch and Iconium, persuaded the people to rise against Paul and stone him. Being successful in their efforts, Paul is considered dead, and is then carried to the outskirts of the city (see Acts 14:19). As the disciples and Barnabas gathered around his body, both in prayer and in mourning, a miracle occurred.

Acts 14:20

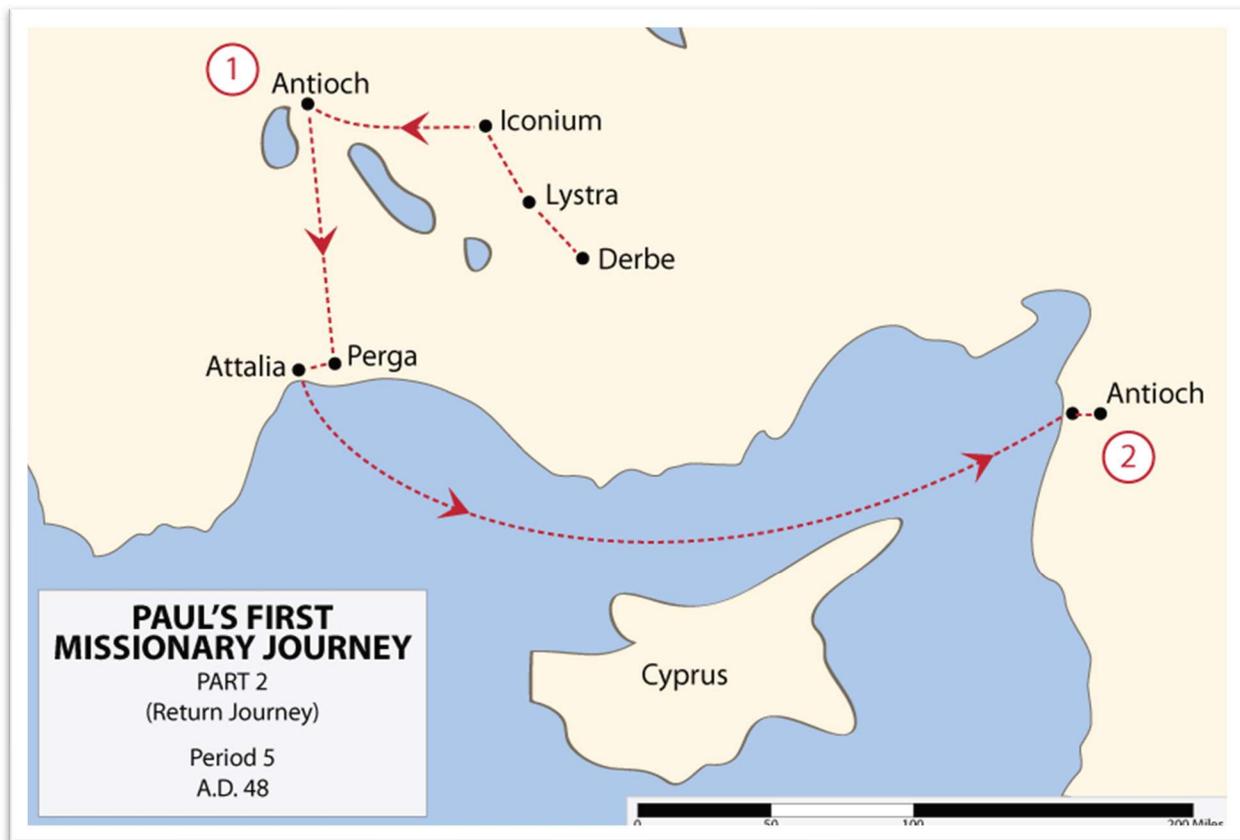
20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him [Paul], he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Through the prayers of the disciples, and the authority exercised by Barnabas, Paul is restored to life. He is made whole from his injuries. He then returns to the city and bids good-bye to those who have now become members of the Church.

Bruce R. McConkie states,

“Without question Paul’s recovery was miraculous. The natural presumption is that Barnabas raised him from death or near death. But however, the miracle occurred—stoned, bruised, and deemed death—Paul would not have been ready to travel the next day without divine intervention.”¹³

Paul and Barnabas now depart from Lystra. They proceed to Derbe and then return again to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. From Antioch they travel to Perga in Pamphylia and then to Attalia where they return by boat to Antioch in Syria.



Summary of events during Paul's First Missionary Journey (Part 2. Return Journey):

1. Antioch (in Pisidia)
 - A. Paul and Barnabas exhorted their disciples and ordained elders in every church.
2. Antioch (in Syria)
 - A. Paul and Barnabas gave their missionary report.
 - B. They abode in Antioch.

Reference¹⁴

What is their purpose in returning to each of the cities they had previously visited, including those where they had experienced persecution?

Acts 14:22-23

22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.
23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Paul and Barnabas had brought these new converts into the Church and then established churches in each of the cities. They had also formed a relationship with them of true brotherhood. They had witnessed the changes that had come into their lives as they had embraced the gospel and the joy and happiness they now experienced. They did not know when they would see them again. It was, therefore, their foremost desire that

the new members continue to build upon their new found faith so they may become steadfast and immovable when faced with the tribulations that would come in their lives. Paul and Barnabas then called, presented the names to be sustained by the members, and then set apart those individuals who would provide the leadership the new converts would need in order to remain faithful.

Surely, as they entered and then departed from each of the cities where they had preached, they would have experienced an array of emotions from joy to sorrow. It would have been joyful for them to see the new converts and to learn about their progress in the gospel. It would also have been sad to leave as during their meeting with the people they had formed attachments that would have a lasting impact upon their own lives. Paul and Barnabas had done what they could do in order to plant the seeds of faith among the people. Now it was up to others to help the individuals nourish and strengthen their faith.

Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch in Syria to their loved ones for a time of rejoicing and celebration. They meet with members and shared experiences regarding the work that had been initiated among the Gentiles at the Church in Antioch.

Acts 14:27-28

**27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.
28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.**

Robert J. Matthews summarizes Paul's First Missionary Journey,

"Acts 13-14. Began and concluded at Antioch of Syria. Approximately 1,400 miles. Occupied at least one year, around A.D. 47-48. No known epistles."¹⁵

His companions were Barnabas and John Mark.

5. The Jerusalem Council

5.1. What is the Issue?

Acts 15:1

1 And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren [at Antioch], and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

The issue of circumcision was important to the Jews and was a requirement for those who converted to Judaism. It was a token of God's covenant with Abraham. It had been an essential symbol of Judaism throughout her history. It served as an outward token to all Jews of their inward covenant with God and signified that they were His chosen and elect people. It separated them from all other people of the earth. To many, the new Church of Jesus Christ was essentially an extension of the Jewish faith and all converts, including Gentiles, must participate in this ritual.

Acts 15:2

2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

The issue was, ‘Were all converts to the new Church of Jesus Christ, including the Gentiles, required to be circumcised? Under Peter’s revelation, the gospel could be taught to the Gentiles, but some continued to believe that converts must consent to being circumcised.

Upon the arrival of Paul and Barnabas at Jerusalem, they were “received of the church, and of the apostles and elders...” (Acts 15:4).

Not all welcomed them warmly. There were those who saw Peter and Barnabas as opponents to their beliefs, rather than fellow brethren in the Church.

Acts 15:5

5 But there rose up certain [former members] of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them [Gentile converts], and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

You will recall the beliefs of the Pharisees as noted in Chapter 1 in volume 1.

Obert C. Tanner states,

“The Pharisees opposed not only the Greek culture, but all foreign influences. They were strict observers of the Law...The Pharisees held that the decisions made by their prominent men since the time of the writing of the Old Testament were as binding as the Old Testament itself. They were the ones who had built up the hundreds of rules and regulations...”¹⁶

Acts 15:6-7

**6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.
7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up,...**

We see the Apostles and leading authorities of the early Church coming together. Each is given the opportunity to express their feelings regarding the matter being considered. Peter, the Senior Apostle, expresses his feelings.

Acts 15: 7-11

**7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.
8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;
9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.**

Peter had confirmed the word of the Lord that converts to the early Church would not be required to keep the law of Moses, including circumcision.

Paul and Barnabas are now given an opportunity to report their missionary experience with the Gentiles and they share "...what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (Acts 15:12).

5.2. What is the Resolution?

James, the half-brother of Jesus and likely the Bishop of the early Church in Jerusalem, speaks on behalf of the leaders of the Church.

Acts 15:14-15, 19-20

14 Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.

15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written,

19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

It would appear that James, who is conducting the meeting, has just read the decision that had been unanimously reached by the Apostles regarding this important matter. This matter will then be presented to the church membership for sustaining by the members of the Church.

The Guide to the Scriptures clarifies the meaning of sustaining or common consent,

"Jesus Christ stands at the head of his Church. Through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he directs Church leaders in important actions and decisions. However, all Church members have the right and privilege of sustaining or not sustaining the actions and decisions of their leaders."¹⁷

It is determined "to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them" (Acts 15:22-23), confirming the decision of the Apostles regarding this matter of doctrine.

The message of the letter states,

Acts 15:28-29

28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well, Fare ye well.

5.3. What Problems Remain?

Robert J. Matthews notes,

"The decision of the Jerusalem council was not as definitive as it might have been. The decree was directed only to the Gentiles of Antioch and Cilicia and vicinity. Although it declared that

Gentiles did not need circumcision for salvation, it said nothing about whether the Jewish members of the church should or should not circumcise their children. Thus, it did not settle the matter for all people, especially for a people as legalistically oriented as were the Jews.

“In addition, although the decree did touch somewhat upon the matter of circumcision, it did not deal forthrightly with the larger issue of the law of Moses and whether it was fulfilled in Christ and hence was no longer binding upon the people. This ambiguity seems to have been duly noted by the Jewish segment of the church in Jerusalem, for when Paul returned to Jerusalem at the end of his third journey (about A.D. 60), he found many of the church members still ‘zealous of the law.’ They pointed out to Paul that the Jerusalem council directs its decree only to the gentiles, and not to the Jews. (See Acts 21:17-25).

“The reason for this ambiguity in the decree of the council is not clear, but perhaps the Brethren did not wish to overly offend the Jewish population of the church. They wanted the gentiles to be properly received, but they didn’t want to lose the Jewish Christians in doing so.”¹⁸

It often takes time for revealed principles to become fully incorporated into the lives of the members so the individual may be in full compliance with the current revelations of the Church. It is not uncommon that the Lord gives his members time to correct the incongruity in their lives with current Church policy, before disciplinary action occurs. An example is the law of Tithing. It was given by revelation to Joseph Smith on July 8, 1838. It states, “And this shall be the beginning of tithing of my people” (Doctrine and Covenants 119:3). It had been a law that had begun with Adam and Eve and had continued with their righteous descendants. It had been reiterated by the Prophet Malachi to ancient Israel. (See Malachi 3:10). Beginning in 1838, it was revealed as a law to the Church.

Unfortunately, this directive of the Lord had not been fully embraced by the members of the Church. During the time that Lorenzo Snow served as the Prophet of the Church, the Church experienced severe financial problems that were a great concern to him. In May, 1899, President Snow felt inspired to travel to St. George where they were then experiencing a severe drought. He was unclear to him as to the purpose of his visit, but following the Lord’s inspiration, he made the trip by train and then wagon. It was as he was speaking to those who were assembled for the special meeting that the Lord revealed to him that if the members would be diligent in paying their tithing, He would pour out blessings upon them. At the conclusion of the meeting, President Snow instructed the Twelve Apostles to go forth and teach the law of Tithing in all the areas of the Church. (See *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Lorenzo Snow*. Intellectual Reserve, 2012, 157-159).

It is certain those who began to live this law before 1899, received special blessings for their obedience in comparison to those who did not do so until later.

When the members in Antioch received the visiting authorities, who had come from Jerusalem to announce the decision, “they rejoiced for the consolation” (Acts 15:31).

Silas, one of the visiting authorities, made the decision to remain in Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, along with many others, “teaching and preaching the word of the Lord” (Acts 15:35).

We conclude this lesson as Paul discusses with Barnabas the possibility of going again and “visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do” (Acts 15:36). This will set the stage for Paul’s Second Missionary Journey.

6. Conclusions

We conclude this lesson with a reflective look at the events that Luke has recorded in his writing of this section of the book of Acts.

We first learned of Peter's meeting with Cornelius and the vision he received regarding missionary work would be open to the Gentiles. We witnessed the Lord's hand as He individually prepared Cornelius and Peter, for their momentous meeting. It was a meeting that not only changed their lives, but also the lives of many others of their day, including ours.

We noted the continued opposition by the ruling authorities to the growth of the church in Jerusalem and the actions of King Herod called Agrippa I. A second martyr, James, the brother of John, was called to give his life for the sake of the Gospel. Peter, the chief Apostle, is put in prison as the persecution continued.

We traveled with Paul and Barnabas as Paul serves his First mission to the Gentiles. They experienced persecution as they traveled through the cities resulting in Paul being stoned to death or near death in Lystra. Miraculously, through the power and authority held by Barnabas and in the Name of Jesus Christ, Paul is raised from the dead.

As they continue their labors, many Gentile converts come into the early Church as the word spreads to other areas of the land. The joy and happiness are great for Paul and Barnabas as they came to love and care for the people.

We addressed the proceedings of the Jerusalem Council and the results that the Gentiles in Antioch and surrounding areas did not have to be circumcised in order to gain salvation. In this process, we saw the inner workings of the leaders of the Church as they met and sought the Lord's direction regarding this matter of doctrine. Though it was an important step, it did not answer the full question. That would have to wait for another day.

We concluded with Paul's proposal to Barnabas that they go once again and visit the cities where they had first taught the people the gospel and see how they were progressing. Here is where we will begin our next chapter.

Footnotes

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- ¹ *Unto All Nations: A Guide to the Book of Acts and the Writings of Paul*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975, 8.
- ² *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976 [1977], 180.
- ³ *Smith Bible Dictionary*. Revised and Edited by F.N. and M.A. Peloubet. Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1986, 56.
- ⁴ *Mormon Doctrine*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, [Second Edition], 802.
- ⁵ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976, [1977], 199.
- ⁶ LDS Bible Dictionary in *Holy Bible*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1979, 650.
- ⁷ “Concern, Correction, and Counsel” in *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 6. Edited by Robert L. Millet. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987, 105, Note #2.
- ⁸ Duane S. Crowther. *The Gospel Rolls Forth*. Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1999, 74. Map recreated by Jeff Dangl.
- ⁹ *The Gospel Rolls Forth*. Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1999, 75.
- ¹⁰ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971, [9th Printing, 1976], 123.
- ¹¹ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971, [9th Printing, 1976], 131.
- ¹² *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible*. Abridged by Ralph Earle. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967, [Nineteenth Printing March, 1991], 996.
- ¹³ *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971, [9th Printing, 1976], 133.
- ¹⁴ Duane S. Crowther. *The Gospel Rolls Forth*. Bountiful, Utah: Horizons Publishers, 1999, 81). Map recreated by Jeff Dangl.
- ¹⁵ *Behold The Messiah*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994, 323.
- ¹⁶ *The New Testament Speaks*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1935, 25.
- ¹⁷ Common Consent. *The Guide to the Scriptures*. Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 2001.
- ¹⁸ *Unto All Nations: A Guide to the Book of Acts and the Writings of Paul*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975, 21.