



ACTS 10–15

REVELATION LEADS EARLY CHRISTIANITY
TO EXPAND TO THE GENTILES

INTRODUCTION

This section of six chapters are filled with stories demonstrating how the early disciples dealt with day to day hard issues—most specifically the challenge of sharing Christ’s gospel with non-Israelites. The change that was required to become a Christian was only the beginning. Continued meekness and humility to foster spiritual inspiration at every level was necessary for the early saints. We see the church membership grappling with difficult issues and then grappling with the challenge of following their leaders. Acts of the Apostles continues to testify that the apostles’ actions—including missionary work, miracles, ministering, and wrestling with hard procedural changes—testified of Jesus’ organization and the Spirit’s revelation. These scriptures also find parallels in the Book of Mormon, and in our own time.

ACTS 10

Cornelius' Visitation by an Angel

Acts 10:1-8

Acts 10:1 “At Caesarea . . . a man named **Cornelius, a centurion . . . [of] the Italian Regiment**” (BSB) A centurion was a Roman military leader of a group of 50 to 100 soldiers.¹ A centurion’s base pay was 3,750 denarii (one denarius was the daily minimum wage), which was fifteen times the pay of a private legionary. This gave centurions plenty of extra money to give to the poor. The New Testament mentions five centurions.² Cornelius, together with six other centurions, belonged to the Italian regiment or cohort. As the title suggests, it was made up wholly or partially of Italians (meaning they were Roman citizens).³

CAESAREA

Caesarea lies on the Mediterranean coast, 33 miles north of Joppa, and 60 miles north-west of Jerusalem. In 12 years, King Herod rebuilt and renamed the city. He added a magnificent port, aqueduct, hippo-drome, and amphitheater. It became the home of Roman governors, Pilate, Festus, Felix, and capital of Palestine after Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. The population was half Jewish, half Gentile.

Photo of Caesarea Maritima by Abraham Graicer. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Acts 10:2 “He and all his family were devout and God-fearing” (NIV) In the first century BC, “God fearer,” became a technical term that specifically referred to Jews who converted to Christianity in most respects, except circumcision (as it was a life-threatening proposition for adult males). They believed in monotheism, lived most of the Law of Moses, and were often wealthy and educated. “In the Diaspora there was an increasing number, perhaps millions by the first century.”⁴ These semi-converts were welcomed as part of the synagogue (Acts 2:5). This means they obeyed the Law of Sacrifice and sought to learn more about the Law of the Lord.

Cornelius’ family and “household” included servants and slaves (the average middle-class family had eight servants or slaves).⁵ Most of the ancient households shared the same religious beliefs as those of the patriarch of the home. Cornelius and his household were generous, helped the Jews with many charity deeds, and prayed regularly.

Acts 10:3 “the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision . . .” (ESV) The ninth hour, or 3:00 p.m., was the hour of prayer and the lighting of the incense in the temple (as discussed in Acts 3:1). Other biblical angelic visitations also occurred at this hour (Daniel 9:21, and Zacharias in Luke 1:10–11). All three of these angelic visitations began with the angel calling the person they visited by name.

“an angel of God come in and say to him, ‘Cornelius’” (ESV). In the Gospels, angels come at the birth and the death of the Lord. They are described as looking like shining men. Modern revelation also sheds light on angels’ identities, roles, and what they look like.

What is an angel?

- Pre-existent spirits: Moses 5:6
- Translated beings: Mormon 8:11
- Spirits of “Just [hu]mans made Perfect”: D&C 76:66–19; 129; Hebrews 12:122–124
- Resurrected Personages: D&C 13; 110
- Righteous mortals: JST Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18

Why do they come?

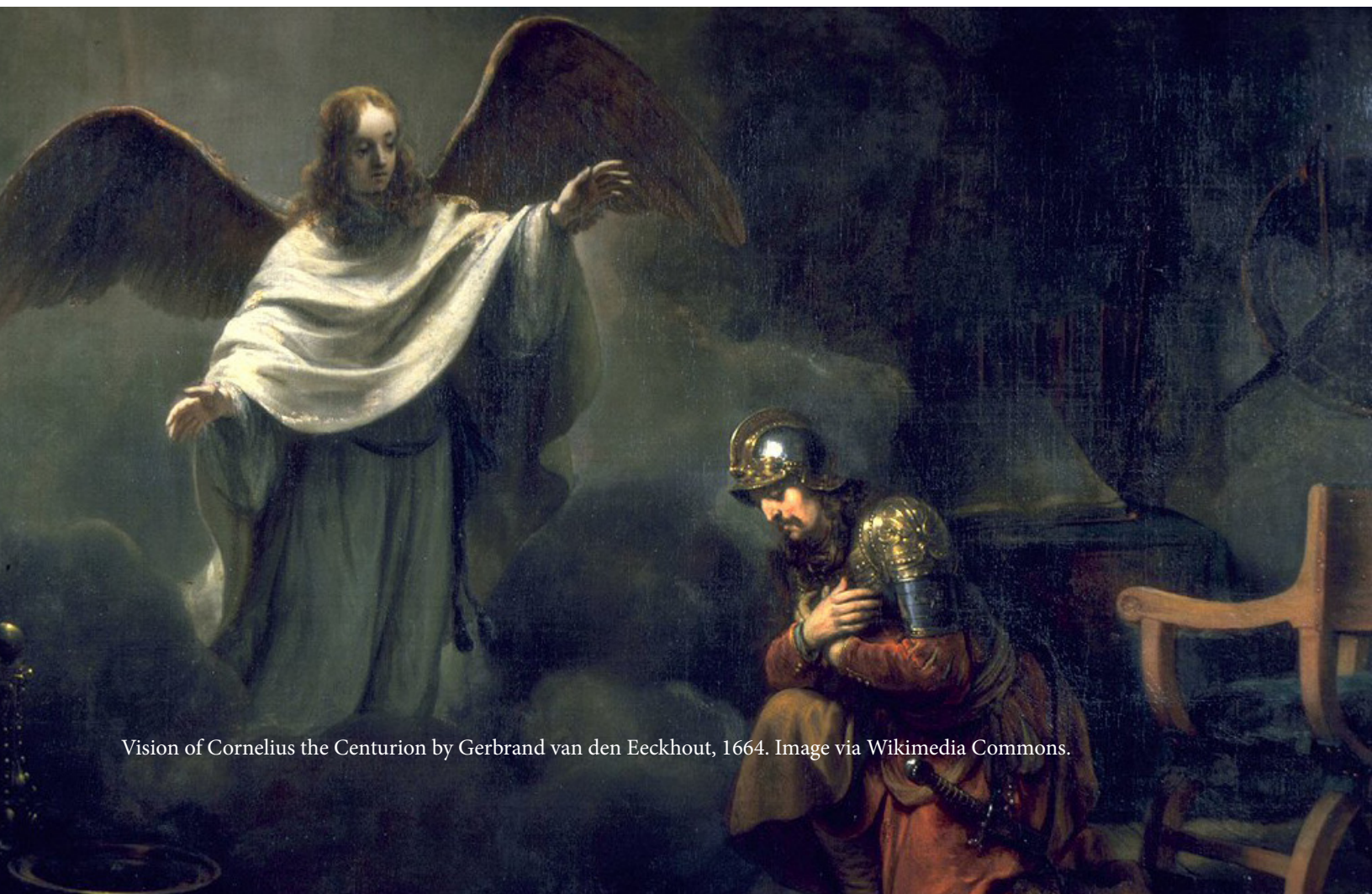
- Deliver messages: Luke 1:11–38
- Minister to mortals: Acts 10:3–8
- Teach: Mosiah 3:1–4
- Call to repentance: Moroni 7:31
- Give priesthood keys: D&C 128:20–21
- Save someone: 1 Nephi 3:29–31; Daniel 6:22

- Guide: Genesis 24:7
- Gather the elect: Matthew 13:41; 24:31, Mark 13:27

What do they look like?

- “His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow” (Matthew 28:3).
- “A young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment” (Mark 16:5).
- “Two men stood by them in shining garments” (Luke 24:4).
- “A personage standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor. He had on a loose robe of most exquisite whiteness. It was a whiteness beyond anything earthly I had even seen; nor do I believe that any earthly thing could be made to appear so exceedingly white and brilliant. His hands were naked, and his arms also, a little above the wrist; so also, were his feet naked, as were his legs, a little above the ankles. His head and neck were also bare . . . Not only was his robe exceedingly white, but his whole persona was glorious beyond description, and his countenance truly like lightning” (JS—H 1:30–32).

Acts 10:4–6 “he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? . . . call for one Simon . . . surnamed is Peter” The majority of scriptural accounts of angelic visitations begin with the fear of the recipient. The ESV translation is,



Vision of Cornelius the Centurion by Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, 1664. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“terror,” and the NASB, “alarmed.” Even in that scared state, Cornelius knew that this was a representative of God and asked what was needed. This is another great question to ask in prayer and when trying to understand the Spirit’s promptings. The angel answered him by acknowledging Cornelius’ faithful service and honoring it as a memorial offering to God Himself (Matthew 25:40).

The angel could have told Cornelius what to do, but instead he sent him to Peter. (The Greek word for, “surname” meant: “to put a name upon, to surname; to permit one’s self to be surnamed.”) The process is part of the teaching and learning of everyone involved. God is often most concerned about our learning and growth. The Prophet Joseph Smith explained, “No wonder the angel told good old Cornelius that he must send for Peter to learn how to be saved: Peter could baptize, and angels could not, so long as there were legal officers in the flesh holding the keys of the kingdom, or the authority of the priesthood.”⁶

Acts 10:7–8 “Cornelius . . . called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier . . . to Joppa” Cornelius immediately obeyed the angel. He instructed him not to go himself, but to send “men.” We do not know if any of these three men were Jewish, but this would also require more faith on Peter’s behalf. It was a thirty-mile trip south along the sea coast from Caesarea to Joppa where Peter was staying.

Peter’s Vision

Acts 10:9–16

Acts 10:9–10 “Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour . . . he fell into a trance” While hungrily waiting for his mid-day meal, Peter went onto the rooftop to pray and fell into a trance. The Greek word for “trance/*ekstasis*” is different than a “dream/*enypniois*” or “vision/*horama*.” Trance is similar to a vision, and means, “displacement, a throwing of the mind out of its normal state, bewilderment, ecstasy, distraction or disturbance of mind caused.” Luke uses the same word for a Divine communication in describing Paul’s vision in the temple (Acts 22:17–21). Another prophet who fell into a trance was Balaam in Numbers 24.

Acts 10:11–13 “. . . saw the sky opened . . . all kinds of four-footed animals . . . a voice came to him, ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat!’” (NASB) Peter’s trance appeared as a puzzle to him. The animals he saw descending on a sheet included unclean animals prohibited by the Law of Moses. Israel’s dietary laws are found in Leviticus 11:1–47 and Deuteronomy 14:1–21 (no pork, shell fish, blood, etc.). Since the time of their wanderings in the wilderness, Israelites had not eaten anything these scriptures defined as “unclean.” The maze of confusing ideas required Peter to grapple with the Lord’s message. Like a riddle, it was intentionally given so that Peter could grow in his understanding line upon line. The process of analyzing allowed new ideas to tumble around and allowed him to be more flexible and willing to change in order to understand the Lord’s will. As he did so, he learned that the Lord’s message was not only necessarily about foods, but also about people.



Acts 10:14–15 “I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean” As the vision or trance was repeated for Peter, the Lord taught him to change the definition of what was “unclean” or “common.” This is exactly the problem with modern revelation—it requires us to change, and grow from where we are to where the Lord wants us. We may have thought that what we knew was the whole truth, but Joseph’s restoration repeatedly taught the saints that there is always more to learn, more to change, and more to our covenants.

Acts 10:16 “This happened three times” (ESV) The Lord often does things in triplicate. Angel Moroni repeated his message three times in one night to the seventeen-year-old Joseph Smith (JS—H 1:30–47). Jesus’ allowed Peter to express his love for the Lord three times, and called him to feed His sheep three times (John 21:15–17). In 3 Nephi 11:3–5, the same voice is heard three times before it is understood. The Lord called the Israelites to appear before Him three times a year (Exodus 23:17). Repetition must be needed for our understanding and memory. Three is also is

a sign of a sure witness (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; 1 Corinthians 13:1).

Peter Welcomed a Messenger from Cornelius

Acts 10:17–23a

Acts 10:17–18 “While Peter was puzzling over the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius . . . approached the gate” (BSB) God’s timing is nothing short of miraculous. As we look at God’s timing throughout the scriptures and in our lives, we find carefully placed events and interactions that facilitate learning and growth. A significant part of God’s teaching and miracles, is the timing of the experience. Sometimes, our preparation is the key to His timing. When we have learned enough, we can see the miracle of His timing. Throughout the process, we can trust the timing of His omniscient plan. Peter’s delayed lunch became part of God’s plan for that day.

Acts 10:19–20 “The Spirit said . . . go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them” Peter did not understand his vision or trance until after he obeyed the Spirit’s prompting to follow Cornelius’ three messengers for thirty miles. Yet he received the spirit of discernment to know he could trust these men. The Lord teaches in

varied and interesting ways. He fosters ways for us to figure things out with the help of the Spirit. For example, in young Nephi's vision of the Tree of Life, the angelic guide repeatedly asked him questions such as, "What desirest thou?", "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" and "Look!" (1 Nephi 11:10, 19, 21). To understand Divine revelation requires active learning. By having to put in personal effort to see how the puzzle pieces fit into place, humans are often more invested and more determined to follow God's direction (D&C 9:7-9).

Peter's Visits and Testifies to Cornelius' Household

Acts 10:23-43

Acts 10:21-22 "Here am I . . . Why have you come? . . . A holy angel instructed him" (BSB) The messengers relayed their message with faith and were rewarded with Peter's willingness to travel with them. Still not fully understanding God's intent, Peter followed the three men with faith hoping to understand over time. Peter's willingness became a witness to the three Caesareans that they were on the Lord's errand. Jesus command given on the Mount of Olives to teach all nations, was about to be understood in a new way (Matthew 28:19).

Acts 10:23 "he invited them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went . . . and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him" The meal was served to the three extra guests who spent the night before they escorted Peter on their return journey. Peter also invited other male disciples, "brethren" to join the missionary trip. Peter may have felt the need for witnesses, or others to help teach the Good News.

Acts 10:24 "The following day . . . Cornelius . . . had called together his relatives and close friends" (NIV) Peter and his group made the return thirty-mile trip in one day. By the time they arrived that night, Cornelius had prepared and gathered other seekers after truth to hear Peter's message. We can see why the Lord chose and prepared the meek and influential Cornelius as the catalyst for this revelation to the early church.

Acts 10:25-26 "Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter . . . said, "I am only a man myself" (NIV) The eager convert gave an honorary greeting aligned with the customs of the day, but Peter refused any hint of worshipping another human. Cornelius was not necessarily worshipping Peter, but honoring the heavenly authority that had sent Peter to him. But Peter knew that Jesus and the Law of Moses taught: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Luke 4:8; Deuteronomy 6:13).

Acts 10:27-29 ". . . It is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile" (NIV) Peter referred to a custom that was added after the Jews returned from Babylon. The oral laws claimed that a Jew became ritually unclean if he visited the house of a Gentile, or even came "into close contact with one."⁷

"But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean" (NIV) Peter connected his vision of the unclean animals with this missionary opportunity to learn that God can change what was once unclean.

This was a blessing of the atonement that had implications beyond Peter's vision. The expansion of the gospel to all children of God restored the earlier plan given to Adam and Eve's posterity (Moses 6:3–6). God works with us in interesting ways. This tearing down of the exclusionary status quo of the Lord's elect from birthright to a willingness to follow Him had far reaching implications. The Lord's message, just like His atonement, was not limited (as Calvin taught), but opened the doorway for all humanity to learn of Jesus on either side of the veil.

Acts 10:30–31 “four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed . . .” Before Luke recorded the Cornelius' account for the second time, he wrote text that sounds as though the seeking centurion was still fasting—but only in the KJV and four other less-used translations.⁸ In contrast, twenty modern English translations all explain that he was “praying.” This leaves readers to question if Cornelius were actually without food (and possibly drink) for that extended period of time.

“ . . . we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” Cornelius and his interested colleagues put their total trust in the Lord's anointed, just as the angel had directed two days before. Their hearts were open, soft, and ready to learn. This is a motivating example on how to prepare for every divinely-called meeting. With such meekness and yearning to learn, the Spirit of the Lord can be poured out in other gatherings of saints.

Acts 10:34 “God is no respecter of persons” Peter's statement has interesting implications in Greek. The word roots suggest that God is no acceptor of the “mask” or outward appearance.

Acts 10:35 “in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (ESV) The universality of the atonement is one of its most beautiful aspects, especially when this truth is added to the restored doctrine of vicarious ordinances and teaching for those who did not have a chance to understand the gospel during their life. We in the Restoration are alone among Christians who believe this scope of God's grace.

Acts 10:36–37 “the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ” (NIV) Peter began teaching how God used the Israelites as his servants to first carry the news of God's peace through the Savior. This is the first time that the Book of Acts has attached peace to the gospel message of Christ's mission. Yet, John the Baptist hinted at it when he said the Messiah would come to baptize with fire (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16). That referred to the baptism of the Spirit, and a witness of the Spirit is peace: “did I not speak peace to your mind? . . . What greater witness can you have than from God?” (D&C 6:23). Additionally, the timing of Peter's emphasis of peace was fitting. The peace of God's plan corresponded to the opening of all nations and peoples to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. This Good News had the potential to bring peace to those nations that may join in the spreading of the gospel to all peoples.

Acts 10:38 “You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good . . .” (NASB) Peter referred to God the Father’s divine “anointing” of Jesus, with the Spirit. But as the same word means Messiah and Christ it also speaks of God endowing the Messiah with the power of the Spirit. Jesus received this anointing by the Spirit in full measure, which facilitated His many miracles and fostered His messages of truth. Anointings are also mentioned in Acts 4:27; Hebrews 1:9; and Psalms 45:7.

Acts 10:39 “We are witnesses . . .” Peter, as an eye witness, had an extremely powerful witness. His fellow disciples from Joppa may have also been eye-witnesses. All who receive the Spirit’s witness can testify with faith that Jesus is the anointed Son of God who became our Redeemer.



St Peter and Cornelius the Centurion by Bernardo Cavallino, 1640s. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“they put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree” The phrase was discussed before (Acts 5:30). It refers back to Deuteronomy 21:22–23, “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged [is] accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee [for] an inheritance.” This type of death was an unclean death for a Jew, because the blood stayed in the body. Is this significant? Christ suffered the most humiliating death possible for a Jew and the most painful for a Roman, so that He could go below all things.

Acts 10:40–41 “us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead” (NIV) Peter’s testimony emphasized the physical nature of Jesus’ resurrected body—He was not just a spirit because he ate and drank. This was an important differentiation at that time because philosophers taught that the spirit was purer than the body. It was good to leave the body behind and become a spirit again after death. They felt anything corporal was not eternal. Yet Jesus came back with a body. To a Greek that did not make sense. Why would one want to remain tethered to and punished with a body? These ideas had infiltrated much of the world including the Epistles (1 Corinthians 7–10).

Acts 10:42–43 “He [Jesus] commanded us to preach . . . that he is the one whom God appointed as judge . . . [and] everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness” (NIV) Not only were all the OT prophecies fulfilled concerning the Promised Messiah and the Suffering Servant, but now Jesus has become the Judge for the living

and the dead to determine how well humanity believed the prophets' witness. Peter also added the qualifier, that forgiveness comes from "belief/*pisteúō*," which is defined as "conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative."⁹

God Gives the Holy Ghost to Gentiles

Acts 10:44-48

Acts 10:44-45 "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all . . ." The Spirit again acted as God's agent to testify of truth. Peter's group of Jewish disciples, and Cornelius' group of eager converts received an outpouring of the Spirit witnessing that the Spirit of God had poured out blessings and gifts upon the meek Gentile disciples. Both groups had been praying to know God's will, and both received God's witness at that time.

Acts 10:46 ". . . speaking in tongues and exalting God" (BSB) Peter's colleagues were astounded. The Spirit that the Roman converts felt was a great witness of one of the gifts of the Spirit. After years of working with the Lord, the Apostles received the gift of tongues while preaching at the Temple, 50 days after Jesus' death, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:3-4). Yet God gave the gift to Cornelius and his kin before their baptism! In our dispensation, the first time Joseph Smith heard the gift was when he met Brigham Young for the first time in 1832.¹⁰

Observing this miracle broke down a segregating wall that had come from a misunderstanding of God, His people, and their neighbors. Jesus cut down all false traditions and thoughts throughout His mission, and continues to help disciples do the same as we draw to Him. The gift of tongues was such a visible gift that it could not be denied. The chief Apostle discerned that the gift was from God.

Acts 10:47-48 "So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (BSB) Peter admitted that as God had blessed the Gentile investigators with the Spirit, how could they be denied the first baptism by water? The experience was so beautiful that Cornelius invited Peter and his fellow disciples to stay in Caesarea for a few days. The disciples no doubt used that time to nurture the faith of Cornelius' group. The disciples added to their understanding of the ancient Law of Sacrifice and teach them Jesus' higher laws as part of the Law of the Gospel.

ACTS 11

The Gospel Spreads to the Gentiles

Acts 11:1 "Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God" News traveled quickly and the disciples in Jerusalem were aghast. Peter had moved forward with unhesitating faith in the divine manifestation, but his colleagues of the circumcision did not share his enthusiasm. They were appalled that Peter had eaten with "uncircumcised" men.

ORAL LAWS

Oral Laws interpreted and micromanaged the Mosaic Law. They were developed by rabbis who claimed they were first given to Moses orally, but were not written down until centuries later. Thousands of extra laws grew as a figurative fence or buffer zone around their beloved Law of Moses. In addition to the 613 commandments in the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament), rabbis systematized ten thousand commandments to govern Jewish life. For example, the fourth commandment includes a prohibition against work on the Sabbath. So, rabbis itemized thirty-nine definitions of work, which then grew into hundreds of applications.

Right: Moses with the Tables of the Law by Pieter Gaal, 1803. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Acts 11:2 “Uncircumcised men” referred to any non-Jewish male, and “circumcised” meant covenant people. By the time of the New Testament, Jews who followed the *oral law*¹¹ would not eat with anyone “unclean,” which was interpreted as “uncircumcised.” The title had taken on a broader use and was used for all other infractions of the Mosaic Law that made one unclean (i.e. not washing hands was labeled, “uncircumcised”).

Eating a meal with someone was nigh unto making a covenant with them. (This is in part because, without silverware, they touched the same foods from the same serving dishes.) Jewish table fellowship had been carefully crafted into their culture for centuries. Originally, Exodus 12:48, commanded that no uncircumcised male could eat the Passover. But the overzealous had expanded its application into hundreds of oral laws by the time of the New Testament.¹²

The immediate implication meant that Gentile converts joined the disciples for their weekly reenactment of the Lord’s Supper (the sacrament was a meal at the time). This unified table of fellowship was difficult for some of the disciples because it breached deeply ingrained social and racial segregation in the Jewish society. The problem grew into one of the major concerns for early disciples who welcomed Gentiles into the fold, and which was discussed at the Jerusalem Council a few years later (Acts 15).

Acts 11:4–15 “Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story” (NIV) or “gave them details point by point” (JB). Luke’s version that nearly identically repeats Peter’s vision account signals that this is of pivotal importance. In chapter 10, the story following the vision with Peter traveling to Caesarea and meeting Cornelius is much shorter in the retelling. Also, the first time Luke wrote the first account was in third person, and in chapter 11 he wrote it in first person.

Acts 11:16 “I remembered what the Lord had said . . .” Peter recalled that the Lord told them in His forty-day ministry (Acts 1:5), that they would be baptized with the Spirit. Luke repeats it again as a second witness to testify that when Cornelius’ family and friends received a dramatic gift of the Spirit, it was God’s sign or witness that they were worthy of baptism.

Acts 11:17 “What was I that I could withstand God?” Peter was able to say this now after learning a very hard lesson. He did not feel this way at the Last Supper when he did not believe Jesus’ should to be killed nor that he could ever deny Him. But after both happened, his heart softened. As the chief Apostle, he responded to this prompting with complete faith, even without understanding how. He stood up to his peers defending God’s witness. The young boy Joseph described his feelings with similar words: “who am I that I can withstand God” (JS—H 1:25). Cornelius and the other converts believed the same.

Acts 11:18 “When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God” What a great example of following counsel! As the Jews had had centuries of feeling that they were the chosen people, it was new for them to realize that God would grant repentance and Eternal Life to the Gentiles too. Unfortunately, some of them did not remain submissive as we read in Acts 15–26.

The Church in Antioch

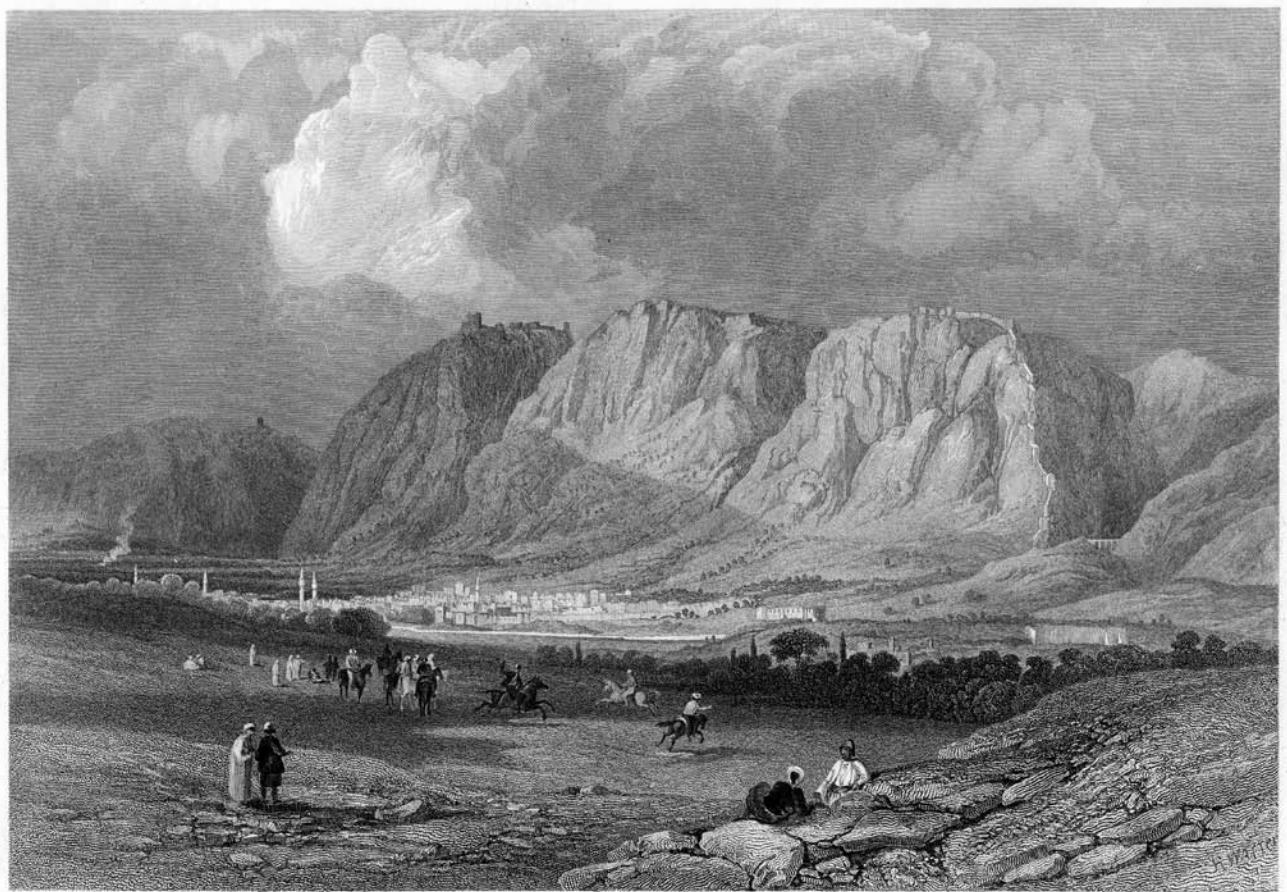
Acts 11:19 “Meanwhile, those scattered by the persecution . . . sp[oke] the message only to Jews” (BSB) The early persecution of the Jerusalem saints that initially seemed like a devastating set back became a blessing in disguise. With Peter’s new revelation, all those scattered disciples were in the best places possible to spread the gospel to the Gentiles. Ironically, Antioch at the time was the third largest metropolis of the Roman world. It was 350 miles north of Jerusalem, the imperial Legate of Syria, and the capital city with a population of 800,000 people. The well-to-do city lay on the northern slope of Mt. Silpius, 16 miles from the coast, with a winding river plain, lots of trees, and 15% of its population were Jewish. Jews congregated there when King Antiochus gave them security.

Herod the Great rewarded the people of Antioch for their kindness toward the Jews by paving two and a half miles of street with white marble blocks (ca. 10 BC). The Jewish donations for the Temple from Antioch showed their wealth. Josephus records that one of their synagogues was adorned with the spoils from the Solomon’s

Temple. One of Antioch's missionaries was Saul, who contributed to the Christians' scattering. He then served in his home town of Tarsus as a missionary to his fellow Israelites (Acts 9:30). At this point, all the preaching through the Diaspora, was still only to the Jews and Samaritans (Acts 1:8; 8:1). But that was soon to change.

Antioch, Syria was the third largest metropolis in the Roman world. It was a wealthy city on the northern slope of Mt. Silpius, 16 miles from the coast and 350 miles north of Jerusalem. The city included a winding river plain and lots of trees. It was the imperial Legate and capital of Syria, with a population of 800,000 people. Fifteen percent of the population were Jewish. As Greece conquered the Mediterranean King Antiochus gave Jews security there. In ~10 BC, King Herod the Great thanked the people of Antioch for their kindness toward Jews by paving two and a half miles of street with white marble blocks. The Antioch Jews donated generously for the Temple. Josephus records that one of their synagogues was adorned with the spoils from Solomon's Temple.

Below: Antioch in Syria from the North West engraving by William Miller after H Warren from a sketch by Capt. Byam Martin R.N. published in The Imperial Bible Dictionary. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Engraving by H. Warren from a sketch by Capt. Byam Martin R.N. published in The Imperial Bible Dictionary.

Acts 11:20 “But some of them . . . went to Antioch . . . to the Greeks as well, proclaiming the good news” (BSB) Jewish-Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene (capital of Libya) opened the missionary work to the Gentiles in Antioch. Another translation for “Grecian” is gentile. Over the centuries since Israelites were relocated by the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Jews (which referred to all Israelites at the time of the New Testament¹³), incorporated themselves into the Hellenized society while remaining a distinct people.

Acts 11:21 “a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” Proselyting to the Gentiles prospered in Antioch, because the “hand of the Lord” was with them. As a result of the success, the church sent an apostle there to confirm the gift of the Holy Ghost. In the New Testament, not every apostle is a member of the Twelve, so we do not know for sure if Barnabas was this apostle or not. Also, the word “apostle” in Greek means “one sent” so here it could refer to someone with a mission call, someone with an apostolic calling, or one of the Twelve. It appears that the New Testament uses the word apostle for more than the Twelve. Paul and Barnabas are not called apostles until Acts 14:14, and 1 Thessalonians 2:6.

Acts 11:22 “the church . . . in Jerusalem . . . sent forth Barnabas to . . . Antioch” Luke introduces the generous Levite, Joseph Barnabas from Cyprus, and tells of when he gave land to the church in Jerusalem for their united order (Acts 4:36–37). His surname meant, “son of exhortation,” obviously a great missionary title. Being a native of Cyprus, he would have already been familiar with customs in the Diaspora.

Acts 11:23–24 “he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord . . .” (NIV) Barnabas found the Gentile converts full of the Spirit. Luke regularly reminds his audience that it is the Holy Spirit that directs the leaders of the church through revelation, not the brethren initiating their own ideas. Barnabas’ advice applies to all disciples in every dispensation: “cleave unto the Lord” (KJV) or be “steadfast,” with “full purpose” (RSV) to build the kingdom. Barnabas served as a type of mission president in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

Acts 11:25 “Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul” (BSB) Barnabas was the one who initially accepted Saul when other disciples were reticent to believe the sincerity of one who had persecuted the church. Barnabas had introduced Saul to the Apostles. Now Barnabas wanted his help in Antioch. Barnabas had to travel about 90 miles to Tarsus to call Saul to the Antioch ministry as either a missionary companion or counselor. Their reunion must have been sweet for both of them.

Acts 11:26 “for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people” (NIV) It is in Antioch with *Barnabas* that Christians are first called by that title (at least in that dispensation—it was used earlier in the new world in a different language in Alma 46:13–15). Paul served with Barnabas for a year-long mission.

Acts 11:27 “in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch” The word “prophet” had a broader definition in the New Testament than in the Old Testament or in modern times. In the second half of the New Testament, John calls anyone a prophet who has a testimony of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior (1 John 4:2–3; Revelation 10:19), and Luke calls one who has the gift of prophecy a prophet (Acts 11:28). Throughout the New Testament, the Greek word used for “prophets” such as Isaiah and Jonah means a “foreteller, an inspired speaker.”

Acts 11:28 “Agabus . . . through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius)” (NIV) Agabus was a Jewish disciple from Jerusalem who also prophesied of Paul’s imprisonment (Acts 21:10). This famine was confirmed by Josephus in approximately AD 46–48, which coincided with Claudius Caesar’s reign from AD 41–51.¹⁴ Famines and droughts hit Jerusalem especially hard because it was land-locked and food prices were three to six times higher in the city

than in the country. Profiteers exploited the desperate situation and prices soared.¹⁵ Furthermore, the famine and shortages coincided with the political change from Roman rule to a Jewish kingdom that persecuted Christians (AD 41–44 King Agrippa I—the father of King Agrippa II who speaks with Paul in Acts 25:13–26:32). All of this confirms that it was a blessing for most of the disciples to have left Jerusalem earlier, and that God loves and protects those who understand that He is omniscient and chose to follow Him.

Acts 11:29–30 “The disciples . . . provide help for the brothers and sisters living in Judea . . . by Barnabas and Saul” (NIV) The generous Christians in Antioch gathered funds or perhaps supplies for the suffering Saints in Jerusalem. They also suffered from political changes at this time from Herod Agrippa I. It sounds like our Fast Offerings, humanitarian aid programs, and the Perpetual Education Fund. This extra welfare trip to Jerusalem cut Barnabas and Paul’s mission to only one year. The 350-mile one-way trip journey probably took nearly three weeks. We call this Paul’s first Gentile mission, though he had already been serving in Tarsus.



ACTS 12

James Killed and Peter Imprisoned

Acts 12:1-5

Acts 12:1 “King Herod reached out to harm some who belonged to the church” (BSB) King Herod Agrippa I ruled Palestine from AD 41–44. For the Jews in Jerusalem, it was a “golden era.” It was the first time in forty years, that they did not have a Roman governor. However, it was not a golden era for Christians as they were harshly persecuted. Herod Agrippa’s son (Agrippa II) ruled parts of Palestine after AD 50 (Acts 25).¹⁶

HEROD AGRIPPA I

Herod Agrippa I was the grandson of King Herod the Great (builder of the temple) through his Jewish wife Mariamne I. To avoid the sword that fell on most of King Herod’s offspring, his guardians sent him to Rome at age six shortly before his grandfather’s death. He was educated in Rome, and grew up accustomed to luxury. He was constantly in debt and known as a notorious spendthrift. In AD 37, one of his close friends, Caius, became Caesar Caligula. That relationship opened a way for Herod Agrippa I to receive a position in the Middle East. Four years later, in AD 41, when Claudius became the emperor, Agrippa I was given charge over the same kingdom that his grandfather Herod the Great had ruled (BC 37-1AD). Palestine had not been unified under a Herodian king in over 40 years. Agrippa I was a pious Jew and an advocate of the Law of Moses. The Pharisees praised this rule, but it led to violent Christian persecution. He died in AD 44.



Agrippa I, from “*Promptuarii Iconum Insigniorum*”, Published by Guillaume Rouille (1518?-1589). Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 12:2 “he killed James the brother of John with the sword” The New Testament includes three men named James:

1. James the Son of Zebedee and Salome, the brother of John the Beloved, and one of Jesus’ Twelve Apostles.
2. James the son of Alphaeus, also a member of the Twelve Apostles.
3. James son of Joseph and Mary, the half-brother of the Lord, and author of the Epistle of James.

The first James, son of Zebedee, became the second Christian martyr after Stephen. He was probably beheaded. As an endowed Apostle, we believe he was not killed until his life's work was finished.

Acts 12:3 “because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also” Peter was imprisoned for the second time. It was a busy time in Jerusalem, as Luke includes, that it was during the feast of “Unleavened Bread,” meaning the week after the Passover. This must have been poignant as the Jews took Jesus at the same springtime holiday nearly a decade earlier. The young church felt the renewed pain of the Lord's departure due to James' death and the fear that Peter's imprisonment would lead to his death as well.

Acts 12:4 “guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out to the people after the Passover” (BSB) Agrippa I, must have heard about Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison the first time (Acts 5:19), because he placed a heavy guard of sixteen men to watch his cell. (A squad was four guards—one for each watch of the night). Usually one squad was sufficient—one watched while the other three slept—but apparently, they were worried about Peter escaping again. “Passover” comes from the Greek word, “*Pascha*.” The KJV translated it as Easter, but those celebrations did not begin for years to come.

Acts 12:5 “Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying” (NIV) There is extra power in unified prayer. We assume that the persecution associated with James' martyrdom (the son of Zebedee and Salome), affected the Christians pilgrimage to Jerusalem that Passover. We know that later Paul often arranged his travel to return to Jerusalem in time to join the Jewish feasts. But due to the heightened persecutions, the Christians may have stayed away that spring. There must have been some members of the church still in Jerusalem, though, who may have gathered together for prayer and possibly their safety (Acts 12:12).

Peter's 2nd Miraculous Rescue from Prison

Acts 12:6-19

Acts 12:6 “Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance” (NIV) The night before Herod had hoped to bring Peter to trial, God sent another angel to change the course of history. No matter how tight the security, God will protect His anointed ones.

Acts 12:7-9 “an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. ‘Quick, get up!’” (NIV) Peter must have been very, very tired to sleep through the angelic light and physical jostling. Even then, he thought it was a dream. (For more on angels see Acts 10:3.)

Acts 12:10 “They passed the first and second guards . . . the iron gate . . . opened for them by itself . . . When they . . . walked the length of one block, the angel suddenly left him” (BSB) The Lord's intervention is inter-

esting, as it is restricted to the minimum of what is needed. Once Peter was out of harms' way, he was expected to walk on his own. Divine intervention fosters the most growth possible. Humans are expected to do our part and learn from our own experience.

Acts 12:12 “he came to the house of Mary the mother of John . . . Mark; where many were gathered together praying” This Mary is the mother of John Mark (who is mentioned eight times in the New Testament). She was wealthy enough to house a large group of saints in Jerusalem. This was probably the “house church” where the saints met to reenact the Lord’s Supper. John Mark is traditionally thought of as the scribe of the Gospel of Mark. He was the cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10), junior companion of Paul and Barnabas who went home early from his mission (Acts 13:5, 13), and Peter’s companion later (1 Peter 5:13, “very useful in serving me ... my son”).



Liberation of St. Peter by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, 1665.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 12:13–16 “he knocked at the door . . . Rhoda . . . Recognizing Peter’s voice . . . ran in and reported . . . But Peter continued knocking” (ESV) While the group of praying saints were dumbfounded with Rhoda’s report of hearing Peter’s voice, with their sleep deprivation, and the darkness of the night, it took them awhile to think of going out to the front gate. This story of Peter knocking for help and the maid forgetting to open the door, reminds me of the way I communicate in prayer sometimes. Sometimes I do not listen long enough to open the door and get the full answer.

Acts 12: 17 “Peter motioned with his hand for silence, and he described . . .” (BSB) The group must have broken into pandemonium with cheers and praises. Peter motioned for them to be quiet so that he could get a word in edgewise. He was still wisely cautious about disturbing other Jewish captors. He recounted the miracle and left instructions.

“Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this” (NIV) Peter wanted James, the brother of Jesus, to be notified. By studying across Acts and the Epistles, it appears that James was serving in a role similar to a Dis-

strict Leader or Bishop in Jerusalem.¹⁷ As a local authority, he had jurisdiction even then. Not all the saints were gathered together, but Peter wanted both the men and women of the church informed of this saving miracle.

“he left for another place” (NIV) The saints communicated with each other and knew where they were. But we are not told where Peter went. Tradition claims he left Jerusalem, but he was back in Jerusalem by Acts 15. Peter’s apostolic call included traveling as we read in Acts 10:23–24; 1 Corinthians 9:5, Galatians 2:11. This is the end of Luke’s discussion of Peter and the missions in Judea and Samaria in the book of Acts.

Acts 12:18–19 “there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. . . Herod had [them] put to death” Herod’s action to execute the guards who lost their prisoner was standard Roman protocol—as harsh as it sounds.¹⁸ Peter escaped, but the guards were killed because of it. Without trusting in a better afterlife, this seems unfair. However, God prepared a place for these guards to learn and continue progressing in the next world (D&C 138). God’s love motivates all he does (Moses 1:39; Romans 8:35–39).

Herod’s Death

Acts 12:20–24

Acts 12:19b–20 “Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon . . .” Herod Agrippa I went to visit the beautiful costal city and sumptuous palace that his grandfather built. Luke illustrates the cantankerous nature of Agrippa I, with this short account of his cruelty to Gentiles as well as to Christians. According to Josephus, Agrippa I placed an embargo from Egypt. Even though Tyre needed to import their food, Agrippa would not allow it. Josephus also described an envoy from Tyre being turned away.¹⁹

Acts 12:21–23 “Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he...died” (NIV) Luke’s story of Agrippa’s death dates the death of James and Peter’s second imprisonment to 44 AD.

Barnabas and Saul Sent Off

Acts 12:24–25

Acts 12:24 “the word of the Lord grew and multiplied” It is significant that even in times of persecution and great tribulations, the Lord moves His work forward. We grow when we trust in Him during our trials.

Acts 12:25 “Barnabas and Saul returned . . . and took . . . Mark” When Barnabas and Saul finished their “ministry” in Jerusalem, they returned the 350 miles back to Antioch. Luke wrote as if Barnabas were the senior companion. He also brought a third companion from Jerusalem, his nephew John Mark, the son of the wealthy Jerusalem homeowner, Mary. As we know that Barnabas donated land for the Jerusalem saints to live the united order, it is feasible that Mary’s home was part of that family property (Acts 4:36–37).

It was important for Saul and Barnabas to be in Jerusalem at that time. Did they visit their families, or did their families relocate to Antioch? Was the 700-mile round-trip needed to pick up their new missionary companion, John Mark? In addition to these potential reasons, one thing stands out in the text. It was important for them to be in Jerusalem at the death of James and imprisonment of Peter. This may have been the time when Barnabas and Saul were called to the apostleship. We do not know if either were ever members of the Twelve. (They may have served as “Assistants to the Twelve” as repeated in the mid-twentieth century.)

From that point forward, the Book of Acts moves ahead to Paul’s next three missions to the Gentiles as an “apostle” or “one sent” to witness of Jesus Christ. They are called Paul’s three Gentile missions, but he has already served in Tarsus and Antioch. We do not know if they are included as part of his three apostolic missions. The text does not number them that way, but most maps and commentaries refer to the next mission as Paul’s first.

BARNABAS AND PAUL’S MISSION

Acts 13–15

Return to Antioch

Acts 13:1 “in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers” The list begins with Barnabas and ends with Saul for emphasis. None of these people were mentioned earlier with the prophets who came from Jerusalem (see notes on Acts 11:27). They appear to act as local church leaders and were well known to the writer: “Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch.”

Acts 13:2 “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul’” (NIV) The five as “prophets and teachers” fasted for direction and received inspiration to send Barnabas and Saul to proselyte in Cyprus. When Jesus was on the earth, He told His disciples they did not need to fast while He was there (Matthew 9:14), but now that He is gone, they do fast for further revelation—and Luke highlights it twice in two sentences. We learn in Acts 13:5 that John Mark also went with them to Cyprus.

Acts 13:3 “they . . . prayed, and laid *their* hands on them . . . [and] sent *them* away” This is the second example in the Acts of using the laying on of hands as an example of setting someone apart with authority (Acts 6:6).

Cyprus

Acts 13:4 “they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed . . .” Barnabas and Saul had to travel about sixteen miles to the coast, and then sail approximately 100 miles to the port town of Seleucia, in eastern Cyprus. As Cyprus was Barnabas’ homeland, he knew the local language, or dialect, and customs (Acts 3:36). Cyprus was



The conversion of Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus, 1542.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

the home of many Jews, and Barnabas probably had contacts there.

Acts 13:5 “they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews” Luke uses the phrase “the word of God,” 26 times in the New Testament. The phrase usually can be substituted with the word “gospel” or the gospel message of Jesus. Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark established a pattern as they arrived at each new town. They began their missionary efforts at the Sabbath services in the local Jewish synagogue. They felt it was important to give their Jews the first chance to hear the gospel message in each town. This was in keeping with Jesus’ prophecy, the “first shall be last; and the last first” (Mark 10:31).

“and they had also John to *their* minister” or “to assist them” (ESV), or “helper” (NIV). This is John Mark, introduced in Acts 12:12.

Acts 13:6 “They traveled through the whole island . . . [and] met a Jewish sorcerer” (NIV) The missionaries started at the largest city on the east side of the island and moved 100 miles west across the island to the Roman capital of the west, Paphos. The sorcerer and “false prophet,” Bar-jesus, was the Greek name of “son of Joshua,” who also used the name, Elymas (Acts 13:8).

Acts 13:7 “The deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus . . . desired to hear the word of God” The Greek word for “deputy” is also translated, “proconsul” (RSV, NIV, JB, NAS) and “Governor” (NEB). Luke describes this government official as a seeking prudent man who asked for the missionaries. The order of Barnabas’ and Saul’s names suggests Barnabas was still the senior companion.

Acts 13:8 “The sorcerer . . . opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith” (NIV) Peter also encountered a sorcerer, Simon Magnus, in Acts 8:9–20. Did Luke include this story to show that Paul is doing the same thing that Peter did? If so, then it may also pattern Jesus’ miracles of exorcism (Luke 4:31–37; 8:26–39; 11:14–23). Luke’s structure opens up more meaning to his message. The repeating examples testify that they are all working with God’s direction and power.

Acts 13:9 “Saul, (who also *is called Paul*), filled with the Holy Ghost . . .” Luke makes the change from referring to Saul by his Hebrew name, to the name he used as Roman citizen, the Latin transliteration, Paul. The timing of this event in the text follows Saul’s efforts to proselytize a Governor named Paul. From this point on, he is only referred to by his Roman name, Paul, including by his own epistles.

Acts 13:10 “O child of the devil and enemy of all righteousness! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery” (BSB) Whenever the Lord has an important work, Satan’s tries to counterfeit and confuse it. The sorcerer, Elymas, was a puppet for Satan to “pervert the way of the Lord.”

Acts 13:11 “the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind . . . for a season” The Lord’s punishment given through Paul’s voice had an interesting history for him (Acts 9:9). Paul knew exactly what it felt like to be blind “for a season.” When he experienced this same proof of God’s hand, it had a powerful effect on changing his heart. We are not told the effect it had on Elymas though, only that he went to find “some to lead him by the hand.”

Acts 13:12 “the deputy . . . believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord” The deputy/proconsul/governor already had faith (Acts 11:7–8). He was not seeking a sign, but the miracle strengthened his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Image of the coast of Cyprus by Dimitris Vetsikas from Pixabay



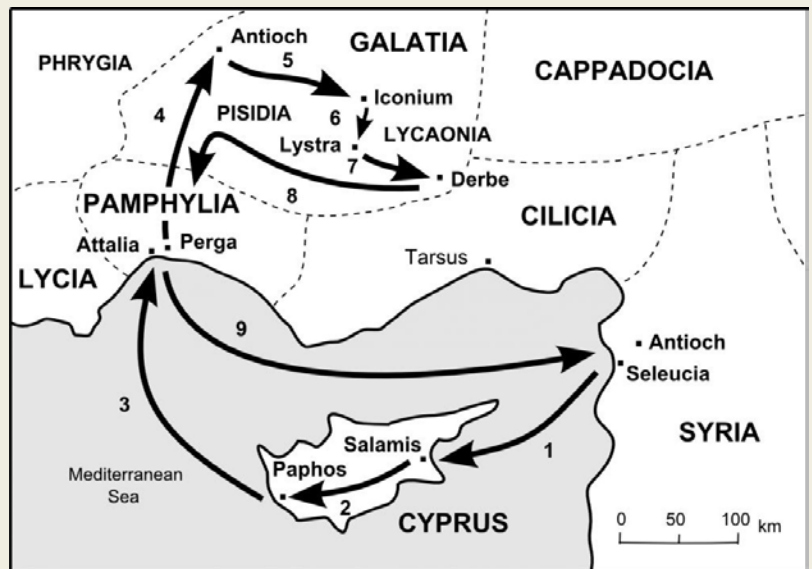
Paul and Barnabas Leave Cyprus for Galatia

GALATIA

Galatia: A landlocked region of Asia Minor made up of a collection of cities with separate political governments. This became an advantage to the Apostles, as they could escape from one jurisdiction to another. The Galatians' population migrated from three European-Gaul tribes in 278 BC. Other peoples joined them, including Israelites. In 25 BC, Caesar Augustus annexed the province into the Roman Empire.

ANTIOCH

Antioch (Pisidia): A garrison town built on the Anthios River in central Asia Minor just north of Lake Limnai. It was also the hometown of Paul's Christian convert, Serguis Paulus, in Cyprus.



Acts 13:13 “After setting sail from Paphos, Paul and his companions came to Perga” (BSB) From now on Luke refers to Paul first, as if he were the leader. None of the timing of this chapter is clearly attached to an historical event so we estimate that these events occurred sometime between AD 44 and 48 AD. We never know how long they stayed in one place or another. Luke is not writing a history, but a theology laced with vignettes from history. Geographically, this verse covered a lot of space and conversely, must have taken a lot of time. The map of the eastern Mediterranean shows that they left the island of Cyprus and sailed north to modern day Turkey.

“John departing from them returned to Jerusalem” The important message in this verse is that something happened to Barnabas' young cousin, John Mark, in Cyprus so that he needed to return home early from his mission. We did not know what caused his departure—illness, family needs, persecution. As a Jew raised in Jerusalem, preaching to the Gentiles may have been a struggle, too, and certainly a complete paradigm shift. Whatever the cause was, the New Testament follows the young John Mark growing and becoming a beloved companion of Paul's and Peter's in the future.

Acts 13:14 “they came to Antioch in Pisidia” Paul remains in modern Turkey of ancient Galatia for the rest of his mission. In two short sentences Luke traces their dangerous 240 mile boat ride from Cyprus to Perga, a port in modern day Turkey, and then inland, traversing the next 180 miles due north to Galatia, stopping at a small town also named, Antioch (not to be confused with the huge city Antioch in Syria that was their mission headquarters).

If we do not pause and reflect, we may take for granted how integral the Roman organization and network of ports, harbors, roads, lodging, and availability of foods were that made the missionaries’ travel possible. Paul and Barnabas became familiar with the eastern Mediterranean and beyond. Sea travel was facilitated by the creation of an amazing water-proof cement and sea going cargo ships.

Yet all travel was still very dangerous and costly. Physical ailments plagued travelers—including, hunger, thirst, dysentery, blisters, cracked calluses, sun burn, diseases carried by bug bites, and, long term, dehydration, lameness, and cataracts. The New Testament rarely even mentions the cost, but we see a glimpse of the financial sacrifice that missionary work required from snippets like these: “These women were ministering to them out of their own means” (Luke 8:3; also Matthew 27:55), and “because [Paul] was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked” (Acts 18:13; also 4:35). Paul’s and Barnabas’ wealth was spent in the service of God.²⁰

Antioch Synagogue Service

Acts 13:14b–15a “went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading . . .” In Jewish weekly synagogue worship they stood to read the weekly section of scripture (both from the Law and the Prophets) and then, sat to discuss them. (Their seated position showed respect to the higher nature of the text than their own opinion.) We saw an example of this in Luke 4:16–21.

Acts 13:15b–16 “, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak” (NIV) Paul and Barnabas, as visitors, would have had a chance to speak or give their opinion on the scripture passages. Paul carefully addressed two groups in his audience:

“Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, (1)Men of Israel, and (2)ye that fear God, give audience” (parentheticals added) Paul referred to the (1)native Jews, and the (2)worshipping proselytes who were not circumcised. As mentioned earlier, at this time the title, “God fearers” or those who “fear God,” was a technical term. Paul repeated both groups carefully in the middle of his sermon as well (Acts 13:26). The separation was crucial to the missionaries’ message—that all can share the same history, all are alike to God, and all can receive full blessings through Jesus’ atonement.

Paul's Synagogue Sermon

Acts 13:17-41

Acts 13:17 “**The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers . . .**” This begins the longest synagogue speech of Acts (28 verses). Luke did not write a micro-history of Israel, but instead recorded examples of history incorporated into sermons that pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. (Similar sermons probably occurred in conjunction with each of the summary verses, Acts 13:5, 46). Luke's type of writing could only work in a church with consistent doctrines and practices.²¹ Paul recounted the mighty and divine power that led the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Acts 13: 18 “**He endured their conduct for about forty years in the wilderness**” (BSB) This brief summary of Israel's 40 years in the wilderness emphasized Moses' suffering, as “bore with them” (RSV), and “endured their conduct” (NIV). In review, the number 40 was a general statement in Hebrew of much time and was symbolic of a purification period (i.e. 40 days fasting, 40 days of rain for Noah, purification period 40 days after a male is born, etc.)

Acts 13:19–23 “**. . . God gave them judges until the time of . . .**” (NIV) Paul covered 450 years of Israelite history from when they entered the Promised Land and were organized under judges, until Samuel called King Saul. In Paul's historical run through, King David was not the usual stopping point, but only quickly referenced as “of this man's [David's] seed” as introduction for the great message of “a Saviour, Jesus,” as the promised “son of David.”

Acts 13:24–25 “**John preached repentance and baptism . . . there is one coming after me**” (NIV) This reference to John the Baptist allows us to see how far his influence was that even a Jewish audience in Galatia knew him. It also suggests that a text of John the Baptist's saying had been distributed before the Gospels were written.

Acts 13:26–30 “**. . . they knew him not . . . yet desired . . . that he should be slain . . . But God raised him from the dead**” By condemning Jesus, the Jews fulfilled the Psalms and Isaian prophecies related to the promised Messiah.

Acts 13:31 “**He was seen for many days by . . . witnesses**” (NHBT). This refers to Jesus' multiple appearances during His “forty-day ministry” that followed His resurrection. During that time the Lord taught His leaders and disciples how to carry on and build His church.

Acts 13:32–35 “**God hath fulfilled . . . as it is also written in . . .**” As a strict Pharisee and student of Gamaliel, Paul would have known his scriptures well (Acts 22:3). After his conversion, he had a keen interest in finding scriptures that were fulfilled by Jesus as the Savior of the World. As the Law as given to lead them to Jesus, the scriptures were filled with typology (Galatians 3:24).

Acts 13:36–37 “David . . . was buried . . . But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay” (NIV) Paul went back to their beloved King David to remind them that even their greatest king “died” and was “buried” (JB), but God restored Jesus to a perfect incorruptible resurrected body.

Acts 13:38–39 “. . . through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed” (BSB) Some Jewish rabbis taught that obeying the Law was the means of redemption; other rabbis held to the saving graces of their blood line as children of Abraham. Yet their scriptures had taught that salvation comes from outward and inward cleansing (i.e. Leviticus 16:30; Psalm 51:2; Jeremiah 33:8; Ezekiel 36:25).

Acts 13:40–41 “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken in the prophets” (ASV) Paul ended with a warning from previous prophets who foretold the destruction of those who reject the Redeemer: Isaiah 29:14; Ezekiel 33:9; Habakkuk 1:5; and Malachi 3:1; 4:1.

Acts 13:42–43 “The Gentiles sought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath” (AKJV) Paul’s sermon was especially appreciated by the “God fearing” Gentiles who wanted to hear more. There were also Jews who “followed Paul and Barnabas” after the meeting, and the missionaries “urged them to continue in the grace of God” (BSB).

Acts 13:44–45 “The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord” (ESV) Every missionary’s dream: a church service full of investigators! Unfortunately, the large crowd triggered envy and the Jews contradicted Paul and Barnabas. Their envy came from pride. Rather than meekly listening, it led them to competitiveness. One sin seems to lead to a worse sin, and theirs’ moved from envy to “blaspheming.”

Acts 13:46–47 “Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles” (NIV) Paul and Barnabas got fed up with the prideful Jewish closed-mindedness and focused their efforts on the Gentiles.

Acts 13:48 “As many as believed were ordained to eternal life” (JST) Joseph Smith changed the order of two words, “believed” and “ordained.” By putting *belief* first, it created a very different doctrinal message. Everyone can choose to be chosen. In over 30 English translations, belief is a byproduct of God’s decision: “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (KJV). This stems from the Calvinistic bent of exclusionary election and predestination. The order of those two words is fundamental to the restoration. Individuals have the power to act and believe. We can choose to believe in Jesus’ atonement. If we exert enough belief, whether in this life or in the next, it will lead to faith strong enough to act and internalize God’s teachings. Then the Savior’s cleansing power becomes efficacious and allows disciples to return to the presence of God. Eternal Life is another way of saying God’s life (D&C 132:24; Moroni 7:41; etc.).

Acts 13:49–50 “The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jewish leaders incited . . . **persecution**” The opposition always works harder against important causes. This missionary work was paramount to the history of the world and after-world. We need not fear though. God knows the end from the beginning and He will always conquer. Satan and his devils will be bound by the righteousness of the saints when Christ comes to reign.

Acts 13:51 “they shook off the dust of their feet against them” Paul and Barnabas were following Jesus’ instructions which we discussed previously in Matthew 10:14; Mark 6:11; Luke 9:5; 10:11. This sign was used early in this dispensation, D&C 24:15, but is discouraged now.

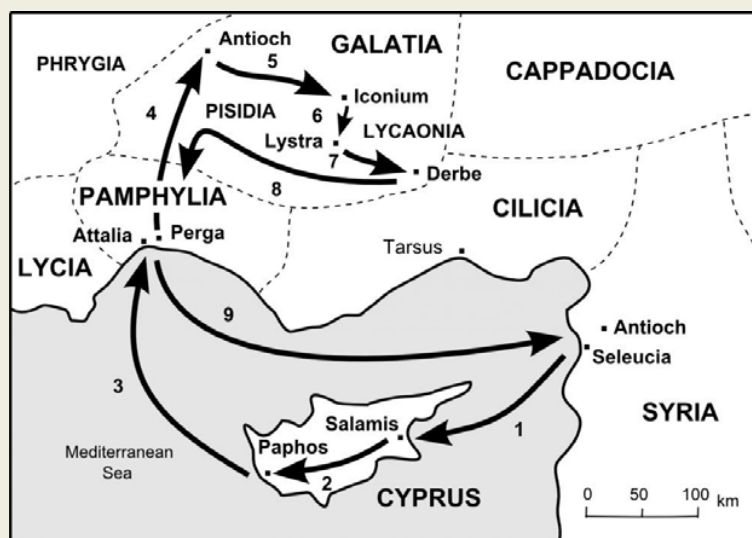
Acts 13:52 “the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost” In spite of trials, God blessed the disciples with joy and an internal penetrating witness of the Holy Ghost.

PAUL FINISHES THE GALATIA MISSION WITH BARNABAS

GALATIA

1. **Iconium:** A city built up around an oasis in the midst of 80-miles of grazing plains. Two main highways crossed near the water source.

2. **Lystra:** After it became part of the Roman province of Galatia, Romans built a 19-mile road south to connect Iconium. It was the hometown of Lois, Eunice, and Timothy (2 Tim 1:5; 3:15).



3. **Derbe:** 60-miles SE of Iconium; coins inscribed, Claudioderbe, honored the Emperor. Mentioned four times in Acts 14:6, 20, 16:1; and 20:45.

Paul and Barnabas at Iconium

Acts 14:1-7

Acts 14:1 “In Iconium . . . into the synagogue of the Jews . . . a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” Paul and Barnabas arrived at the beautiful oasis city of Iconium. They continued the practice of beginning their missionary efforts at the local Synagogue. Luke refers to the “God Fearers” or the believers in Moses’ God who attend synagogue worship, as the “Greeks.” The missionaries had great success with a great number of both Jews and Gentiles receiving the fulfillment of the Law through Jesus.

Acts 14:2 “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds . . .” (BSB) Repeatedly, Luke describes how the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles to anger, or “poisoned their minds.” Faith can be poisoned. As we look at the whole scripture cannon, the worst enemies are the inside rebels (i.e. Judas Iscariot, Absalom, the Zormanites, William Law and the producers of the “God Makers”). Those who should be the most sympathetic become the bitterest enemies.

Acts 14:3 “Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord . . . perform[ing] signs and wonders” (NIV) Luke leaves out the details, but summarizes their work of teaching and healing with gifts of the Spirit. Their miracles confirm that the conversion and faith of the new Christians were sincere enough to enable the Spirit to work among them. The faith of the two missionaries must be joined by their congregation for such “signs and wonders” to occur.

“the message of his grace” or “the word of his grace” Paul and Barnabas specifically focus their preaching on the Lord’s gift of “grace/charisma.” Grace is God’s free gift or an undeserved favor. It is a spiritual endowment of power that cleanses individuals and edifies the church. The Book of Mormon teaches what grace is and how we can receive it:

- 2 Nephi 2:24 “It is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved”
- Moroni 10:32 “Love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God”

Acts 14:4 “the city was divided, and indeed some were with the Jews, but some with the apostles” (BLB) The Jews aroused much of the city against the Paul and Barnabas. This is the first reference where Luke calls these two missionaries “apostles/apostolois.” In Greek, *apostolos* means: “a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with order.” Yet in the New Testament, Christian apostles are those who:

1. Have seen the resurrected Lord,
2. Received His commissioned to testify of that witness, and
3. Received an ordination.

Apostle in Greek: *Apostolos*

“a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with order”

Paul and Barnabas were probably called during their recent trip to Jerusalem (Acts 11:30). At that time, we only know of one vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve from James’ martyrdom. Either another apostle died that we are not told about, (nor does it fit the historical record which tracked and detailed each apostle’s death²²), or Barnabas and Paul were both commissioned as “apostles / one sent,” with potentially neither, or only one, serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. (This could explain why Luke changed his order from “Barnabas and Paul,” to consistently listing Paul first.) The New Testament may use apostle for more than just the members of the Twelve. Perhaps some were called apostles and acted as assistants-to-the-Twelve. As both Paul and Barnabas are full-time missionaries, both keep Antioch of Syria as their home base (not Jerusalem), and we never hear that a first presidency is organized. We assume that as the church grew, there were apostles called who were not members of the Twelve. Paul’s and Barnabas’ apostleship is again mentioned in Acts 14:14. Paul also refers to his apostolic authority in nine Epistles.²³ A Christian definition of apostle is: one who has seen the resurrected Lord and who has been commissioned to testify of that witness.

Acts 14:5–6a “an assault made . . . to use *them* despitefully, and to stone them” Paul and Barnabas were there long enough for the citizens to design a plot to mistreat and stone them. They either raised a mob to stone the apostles, or used the “legal” system to threaten stoning. In either case, the rumors were intercepted and the apostles fled the jurisdiction. Luke never goes into detail about their hardships, trauma, discouragement of the missionaries and saints, but just “carries on.” This suggests that Luke wrote after a period of time where he had the perspective to step back and see God’s hand in history.

Acts 14:6b–7 They . . . fled unto Lystra and Derbe. And there they preached the gospel” When the apostles were first called on missions, Jesus warned them that they would face persecution. He even instructed them: “when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another” (Matthew 23:10). Paul and Barnabas did just that as they went forty miles away to the district of **Lystra** (under King Antiochus IV), which was dominated by old pagan religions. Nevertheless, Paul and Barnabas found a community ripe enough to receive the gospel.

Paul and Barnabas in Lystra

Acts 14:8–20

Acts 14:8 “. . . a cripple from his mother’s womb” The story of Paul calling on God’s healing power for the disabled man “who could not use his feet” (RSV) is remarkably similar to the earlier account with Peter. Luke includes parallel stories (and even phrases), to demonstrate that Paul was an apostle like Peter, by words and works. Going one step further, the apostles followed the example of their Master Jesus’ healings.

Healing of a Lame Man

JESUS

John 15:1–18
Matt 9:1–8; Mark 2:1–12;
Luke 15:17–26

PETER

Acts 3:1–8

PAUL

Acts 14:8–12

Parallel Experiences Recorded for Peter and Paul

PETER

Acts 3:1–8
Acts 5:14–15
Acts 8:18–23
Acts 9:36–40
Acts 12:6–7

PAUL

Acts 14:8–12
Acts 19:11–12
Acts 13:6–11
Acts 20:7–12
Acts 16:25–26

Acts 14:9–10 “Paul . . . looked intently at him and having seen that he has faith to be healed . . . Paul called out, ‘Stand up on your feet!’ And the man jumped up” (BSB) Jesus commanded the Twelve and the Seventy on their first missions to heal the sick and cast out devils (Matthew 10:7–8; Luke 10:9). Also, all four Gospels close with the Lord’s charge to preach and heal. Luke includes examples of the apostles fulfilling these two mandates. Additionally, the apostles followed the Lord’s example in many healings, as this man had “faith to be healed.” He joyfully “leaped” or “sprang up,” as did Peter’s enthusiastic restored man (KJV, ESV).

Acts 14:11 “saying in Lycaonian, ‘The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!’” (ESV) The apostles may not have understood the local dialect. Most of their conversations were probably in Greek. But this accounts for why Paul and Barnabas were not initially aware that the crowd tried to worship them as idols (Acts 14:14).

Acts 14:12 “they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius” (most of the English translations use the Greek equivalents: Zeus and Hermes). Barnabas was larger so he was Jupiter / Zeus. From this slender evidence stems the speculation about the appearance of Paul as being short and slight, which was even published in Bible dictionaries in the 19th Century. This may have also been the source of Joseph Smith’s description of Paul, as it is similar: “Paul is about five feet high, [with] very dark hair, dark complexion, dark skin, large Roman nose, sharp face, small black eyes-penetrating as eternity, round shoulders, and a whining voice, except when elevated, and then it almost resembles the roaring of a lion. He was a good orator.”²⁴

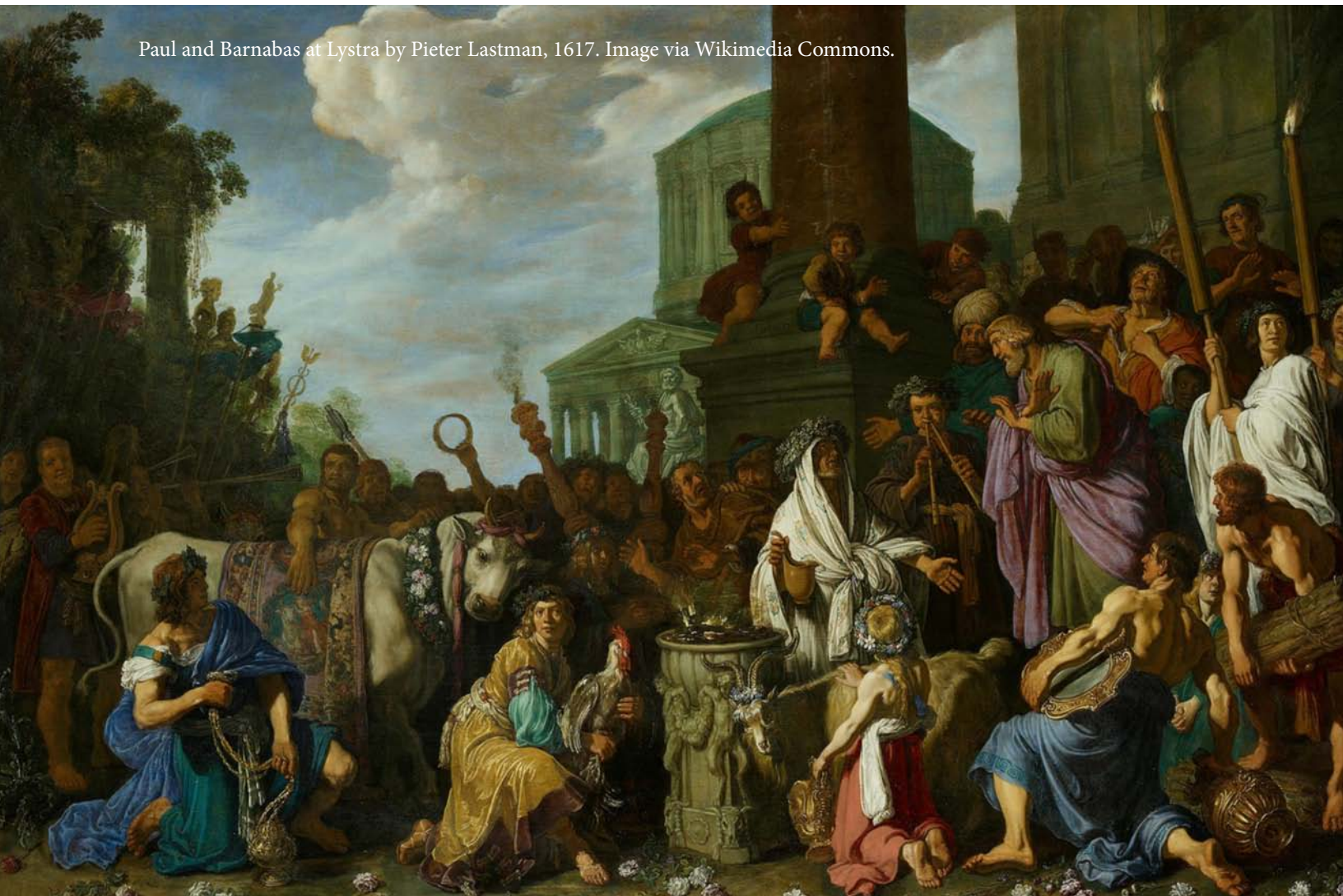
Acts 14:13 “the priest . . . being just outside the city . . . brought oxen and wreaths to the gates . . . to sacrifice” (BLB) This pagan priest who had led oxen decorated with garlands to the gate of the city or temple is seen in Roman mosaics and other art work, suggesting it was entrenched in the ritual of Roman sacrifice.

Acts 14:14 “when the apostles . . . heard . . . they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out” It sounds as if the confused apostles did not realize what the crowd was doing, but as soon as they saw, they tried to stop it as idolatry. They had begun to preach to the people before the healing (Acts 14:7), but the locals who called them gods, had not understood the healing. Paul’s gift of a healing miracle—their first introduction—appeared high-jacked.

Acts 14:15–18 “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you” (NIV) Paul and Barnabas offered a passionate plea to the Lysterians to worship the Creator not fellow humans. The message was enough to restrain them, but they are not converted enough to defend Paul and Barnabas from what happened next.

Acts 14:19a “But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city” (NASB) Jewish opponents of Christianity hounded the proselyting apos-

Paul and Barnabas at Lystra by Pieter Lastman, 1617. Image via Wikimedia Commons.





bles. Paul had enemies persecuting him during much of his ministry (Acts 9:23–25; 13:50; 17:13; 21:27–30). Stoning in the Jewish practice under the Law of Moses had a protocol as discussed in Acts 7:58.²⁵ We are not told what happened to the larger Barnabas. Was he able to defend himself? This stoning may have been mob violence, or a Jewish punishment for blasphemy or being false prophets (Deuteronomy 13:1–10; 17:2–7; 18:20–22). This became one of twelve major forms of persecutions that Paul endured as a missionary.²⁶

Persecution not only followed Paul, but most of the early Christians. Looking back through the scriptures we find most prophets beginning with Noah in the Bible and Lehi in the Book of Mormon were harassed or hunted for their beliefs. Most early members of the Restoration likewise suffered for their beliefs. It appears that living prophets are attacked more often than dead prophets. Our Savior set the example for suffering as Hebrews 2:10 reads: “to make perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.”

Acts 14:19b–20 “supposing he had been dead . . . the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city” The text does not go into detail, but the “stood round about,” could refer to the disciples forming a prayer circle, or offering Paul a blessing. Whatever happen, the supposedly-dead Paul was healed by the power of God enough to walk back to town, and over the next days he travel nearly sixty miles to Derbe. The fact that Paul returned to the city suggests that the stoning was mob action, not sanctioned by the legal system.

Paul and Barnabas Preach at Derbe

Acts 14:21–22

Acts 14:21a “They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples” (NIV) The missionaries had great success in Derbe, but Luke only summarizes with one sentence about the apostles’ experience there. Nothing is said about further persecution either. Perhaps the angry Jews from the neighboring cities did not know that Paul was alive. Derbe was the most eastern city they visited on that mission to Galatia. If they had continued further, just over 100 miles southeast, they would have come to Paul’s home town of Tarsus. But, we assume the Lord inspired them instead to return to visit and strengthen the new converts from the past year or two.

The Two Apostles Return to Antioch in Syria

Acts 14:22–25

Acts 14:21a–22 “Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples and encouraging them to continue in the faith” (BSB) This was a bold and courageous undertaking by the missionaries—to return to the very places where “certain Jews” were trying to kill them (Acts 14:19). But, the apostles’ return visits were very important. They clarified that conversion alone was not the key to salvation. Paul and Barnabas sacrificed to retrace their steps because it was vital to strengthening their converts (which Paul later wrote about in Ephesians 4:12). Undoubtedly their young flock needed leadership and teaching. It appears that those early saints were also persecuted, because the apostles’ first message was:

“We must endure many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (BSB). The missionaries spoke from first-hand experience about the value of suffering tribulations for the kingdom.²⁷ Their sacrifices for the saints must have been a source of encouragement. Our first parents were told that life would be filled with pain, thistles, and sweat, but the blessing of a Redeemer would make it all worthwhile. That hope of the Redeemer was the missionaries’ message. Enduring and sacrificing for God’s kingdom became the themes that Paul returned to in his Epistles as well (Romans 12:1, 12; 1 Corinthians 4:12; 13:3; etc.). Revisiting the newly baptized members became a crucial pattern that Paul repeated at the close of his other missions. Obviously, he considered growth in the gospel as much a critical part of salvation as conversion.²⁸

Acts 14:23 “they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord” This verse identified the missionary procedure of organizing churches with local priesthood leadership. The missionaries’ first visits to each city included preaching, healing, and baptizing. But, on their return visits, the apostles “*ordained elders*,” or priesthood leaders. We also learn that women served as missionaries, teachers, healers, prophetesses, and ordinance workers in Paul’s Epistles (Philippians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 11:2, 5, 11; 12; Titus 2:3; etc.).²⁹ Even with the apostles’ visit and leadership organization, we learn in Paul’s letter to the Galatians that some converts were led astray by false teachers (Galatians 1:6).

The apostles most likely gathered with the saints in “house churches.”³⁰ Luke had mentioned earlier examples in Acts 1:13–14; 2:46; 12:12; etc., and later Paul expressed thanks in his correspondence for the people who opened their homes for worship and missionary work.³¹

Missionary Return and Report to the Church at Antioch

Acts 14:26–27

Acts 14:24–27 “They gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (BSB) Paul and Barnabas returned to their home base in the large city of Antioch in Syria (350 miles north of Jerusalem). The apostles gave their missionary homecom-

ing address there because that was the church they were called from, or “where they had originally been commended” (NEB). And in vs. 27 the translation for rehearsed is “declared,” (RSV), “reported” (NEB), or “gave an account.” (JB).

Ac14:28 “they abode long time with the disciples” Luke summarizes without a timeframe as he was not present and writes as a second-hand source.

ACTS 15

Approximately AD 49–50

The Dispute over Circumcision

Acts 15:1–4

Acts 15:1 “Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch . . .” (NIV) The Jewish vernacular honored the sacredness of their temple on Mt. Moriah. That is, that everywhere one went in the world from Jerusalem was said to be going down. Even though Antioch was due north, because the phrase referred to leaving the holy city, it was said they were going down. This group from Jerusalem were the Jewish-Christians who felt that Christianity represented only additional teachings or an addition to the Law of Moses, not a fulfillment of the Law. They felt strongly that all Christians should live the Law of Moses as well as Jesus’ teachings of baptism, etc. Paul and Josephus called these people, “Judaizers.”³² They have already been referenced in Acts, and will continue to be a problem for the rest of the Book of Acts and throughout many Epistles.

“Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved” (NIV) When Peter received the revelation to open Jesus’ message to the Gentiles (Acts 11), the gift of the Spirit cleansed the converts through their faith, justifying the Gentile Cornelius’ entrance into the church without circumcision. However, for the Jewish-disciples, this became a different issue as more and more Gentiles became Christians. Initially, the church incorporated a few Gentiles into a largely Jewish-Christian community. But, when Barnabas and Paul (and other apostles we presume) began converting whole congregations (or even stakes) of Gentiles, it became another issue.

As an outgrowth of their first full preaching to the Gentiles, the issue came to the forefront. The Judaizers or “circumcision party” were far more realistic in their fears that Christianity would become separate from Judaism and become a Gentile religion. This actually happened. Within three centuries, Christianity looked quite alien to Judaism. This was especially the case after AD 70 when Titus destroyed the Jerusalem temple and the rabbis relied more heavily on their interpretation of the Law of Moses and their oral laws, than on the redemptive focus of the Temple.³³

Acts 15:2 “Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them” The dispute in Antioch of Syria was not just a local issue—it affected the whole church. An uncomfortable truce was not the solution; rather, the Antioch congregation took the question to the inspired authorities in Jerusalem for an answer. The 350-mile trip to Jerusalem was planned to rectify the problem. Luke recorded that “*others*” joined Paul and Barnabas on this trip to Jerusalem. In Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, he says that he felt inspired to go through revelation (2:2). Furthermore, Galatians 2:3 includes that one of Paul’s traveling companions was the Gentile convert, Titus, who came along as a “test case.” It was shrewd to bring a converted uncircumcised Gentile with him to remind the leaders that this was about individuals, not an arbitrary policy. Likely, some of the Jewish



The ancient city of Jerusalem with Solomon’s Temple, ca. 1871. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Christians in Jerusalem had not met many Gentile converts and could only say, “You are not a Christian because you do not agree with me.” (We face the same problem in our definition of “Christian” and the “Trinitarian Christians” today.) Paul and Barnabas hoped that feelings or reactions could be modified after the Jewish Christians met and heard the testimony of a committed Gentile convert.

Acts 15:3–4 “On their arrival in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and apostles and elders, to whom they reported . . .” The Antioch contingency who traveled with Paul and Barnabas visited and ministered to the saints from “Phenice and Samaria,” as they traveled south. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they first met with the church leaders. According to Galatians 2, this was a private meeting with the Twelve to “Return and Report.” Then, they came to the Jerusalem Conference/Council with all the elders. This is a significant point. Paul and Barnabas chose to privately discuss the issue first with Peter. Otherwise eye-ball to eye-ball public confrontations “usually prove little more than near-sightedness.”³⁴

The Jerusalem Council may have been the most important meeting held since the Lord’s forty-day ministry. They worked out decisions that allowed Christianity to move beyond Judaism and spread “to the ends of the earth” (Mark 13:27). We are fortunate to have two accounts of this meeting. Acts 15 is more simplified and Galatians 2 is Paul’s eyewitness account, albeit a little defensive. Galatians also reports that the Council was fourteen years after Paul’s first visit to Jerusalem. This means the Council was held in AD 49 or 50 (give or take a year).

Jerusalem Conference/Council

Acts 15:5–21

Acts 15:5 “. . . the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and . . . observe the Law of Moses.’” (NASB) The debate between the two factions sounds heated. Everyone at the conferences was Christian, including those of the “sect of Pharisees.” Unfortunately, we do not hear their arguments, except for the general issue of circumcision and the Law of Moses. Originally, circumcision was the token of the covenant between God and Abraham. Jews at the time of the New Testament saw it as a badge of their faith. They failed to understand that circumcision was only the token, not the covenant. The covenant was still intact. The purpose of the Law was to prepare them for their Messiah. Accepting Him was the goal, not the Law of circumcision.

Acts 15:6 “The apostles and elders met to consider this question” (NIV) Luke’s detailed report opens the council room for readers to see revelation in action. We get a glimpse of how church procedure unfolded.

Acts 15:7–9 “when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said . . .” A lively discussion ensued in which, no doubt, Paul played a verbal part. Then the chief Apostle, Peter, returned to his thrice-repeated vision of the unclean animals, where God taught him “What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy” (Acts 10:15; NASB). The Lord’s message was clear.

Acts 15:10–11 “why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” Peter explained that Christ freed mankind from many Mosaic ordinances, which freed Israelites from the heavy, detailed demands of the lower Mosaic Law. This does not mean that Christians

should minimize what disciples should do. The modern Protestant interpretation of this issue may go to another extreme where ordinances and baptism are purely symbolic—only an “outward sign of an inward grace.”³⁵ Looking back at Peter’s message, he stressed God’s approval of Cornelius (and consequently, all Gentile converts), by the Spirit falling upon him.

Acts 15:12 “The multitude kept silence . . . Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought” Once their leader spoke, the discussion ended. Then Barnabas and Paul shared an enrapturing account of miracles from their mission in Galatia. Luke sandwiches the missionary report in between the important discussion by the Jerusalem leaders, Peter and James. While in Galatians 2, we read more about Paul’s ideas, by reading between the lines of both accounts, we get a larger perspective.

James’ Summary

Acts 15:13–21

Acts 15:13 “after . . . James answered, saying, “Men, brothers, hear me . . .” (BLB) This James is the half-brother of Jesus (not James the brother of John the beloved, whose martyrdom is in Acts 12:2–20). This James did not follow Jesus in His mortal ministry (John 7:5) but became a vibrant church leader in Jerusalem after the Lord’s resurrection (Acts 12:17; 21:18; Galatians 1:19; and possibly 1 Corinthians 15:7). The Book of James claims his authorship. Tradition claims that he became the Bishop in Jerusalem. As such, he probably conducted the meeting and voiced, or read, the verdict of the Twelve to the Council.

Acts 15:14–18 “Simeon hath declared . . .” or Simon Peter, the chief Apostle who just spoke. The original is written as a command, as he read an order for future policy. He then quoted an Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in this situation, Amos 9:11–12 (which is also similar to Deuteronomy 28:10; Isaiah 43:7; 45:21; etc.).

Acts 15:19 “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles . . .” (NIV) We do not know if James was still reading what Simeon Peter “declared,” the Council’s verdict, or giving his concluding testimony.³⁶ The sentence stated that Gentiles should obey only the moral laws and keep a non-blood dietary restriction. It only applied to the Gentile converts. No decision was made about Jewish Christians living the Law of Moses (but it will be discussed in Acts 21:20).

Acts 15:20 “write to them to abstain from . . .” (ESV) The challenge of applying this new protocol plagued the church for the rest of the New Testament. The leadership of the Jerusalem Council had made a decision, but it was hard for some Jewish-converts to internalize and accept it. Of all 613 commandments in the Torah and the 10,000 oral laws that the rabbis taught, only four commandments were retained. There were no longer kosher laws, no segregation laws, no micromanagement of the Sabbath, and no circumcision. To join the disciples of Jesus, converts basically just needed to follow what Jesus did and taught, and one other thing.



Left: St James the Brother of the Lord by Tzangarolas Stephanos, 1688. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

“the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood” (ESV) Of the four specific items that were retained from the Law of Moses, two were also taught by Jesus, and one repeated the same principle. The Council included abstaining from:

1. Idolatry
2. Sexual Immorality
3. Eating blood (Leviticus 17:10–16)
4. Eating things strangled (which meant the blood was still in them).

The Judaizers must have felt this as a blow. It required a paradigm shift from their previous philosophy, which some made, but others did not. Those who did not accept the Council’s decision, plagued Paul’s missionary work for the rest of his life. This issue reappears in most of his letters. To study the Epistles, especially Paul’s letters, requires a clear understanding of the Judaizer’s challenge.

As Christianity spread to the Gentiles, the problem was not if their faith in Jesus was sufficient to receive salvation, nor was there an issue with performing sacrificial ordinances. Instead, the problem was a question of whether Gentile converts to Christianity still needed to obey the Law of Circumcision and all its corollary Laws.³⁷

Acts 15:21 “We must remember that the Law of Moses has been preached in city after city for many years”

(CEV) Sections of the Torah or Pentateuch were read every Sabbath in the Synagogue and then discussed. Almost every city in the Roman Empire had at least one Jewish congregation, which met in large homes or a synagogue. They read, debated, and memorized their “Law and the Prophets.” The Old Testament was not canonized yet, so the Jews referred to basic sections of their scriptures. “The Law” was the first five books of Moses, their Torah or Pentateuch; “The Prophets” were writings of prophets from both the northern and southern tribes between the time of Joshua to the present; “The Writings” were their historical records, the Proverbs, and Psalms.

Sending a Documentation from the Jerusalem Council

Acts 15:22–23

Acts 15:22–23 “Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church . . .” The decision appeared to be accepted by everyone. At least Luke’s account sounds as if “the whole church” in Jerusalem, or at least everyone at the Council, was initially in agreement to move forward with the new procedure of not requiring Christians to live the Law of Circumcision. However, it was a complicated and delicate issue that took decades to incorporate.

“They chose Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, two leaders . . . and sent them with this letter” (BSB) The two leaders from Jerusalem (and possibly others) accompanied Paul and Barnabas and their group from Syria, 350 miles back to Antioch to deliver the verdict of the Conference to the saints there. We do not hear more of Judas Barsabbas, but Silas becomes well known as Paul’s next companion.³⁸

Having this emissary from Jerusalem join the Antioch group to deliver the Council’s letter is one of the reasons why we wonder if Paul and Barnabas were another form of “apostle” rather than members of the Twelve. If they were members of the Quorum of the Twelve, why would they need two respectable elders to read the verdict of the Jerusalem Council and back up their story? Only if they were chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas for protection or to make their journey easier would this make sense. The text sounds as if Judas Barsabbas and Silas were the voices of authority from Jerusalem.

“To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings” (NIV) The letter began with greetings to the local saints in southeastern Asia Minor. In most English translations, this greeting is to the “brethren,” but the New International Version (NIV) consistently follows the Greek more closely when it comes to gender-exclusive language. Usually the NIV translates, “brethren,” as “brothers and sisters,” and here as “believers.” (The NIV saves the word “brethren” for the church leaders.) This inclusion of women in worship was a significant change with Christianity. The example of Jesus and the Apostolic church offered a much larger role for women than the culture of the day. Most religious ritual in the ancient world was restricted to men.³⁹ Yet Jesus and the Apostolic church empowered women’s worship—especially in comparison with ancient practices of that day. It is worth checking with the NIV or a Greek text to see how inclusive early Christianity was to women.

Reading the Letter from the Jerusalem Council to the Gentile-converts

Acts 15:24–29

Acts 15:24 “we have heard, that certain . . . [men] have troubled you . . . saying, Ye must be circumcised” Luke may have had a copy of the circular letter for the churches abroad and quotes it directly here. It brought a message of peace. Historical information suggests that the majority of the members in the Christian churches in Syria and Antioch were probably Jewish-Christians at this stage.⁴⁰ This is why they had problems with the Judaizers who misrepresented Peter and Paul’s message for years.

Acts 15:25–26 “. . . having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul” (NASB) The letter introduced its purpose and the two representatives from Jerusalem, and kindly honored Paul and Barnabas with the adjective, “*beloved*.” It also reaffirmed that at the Council there was unanimity with the decision that would be announced, which was to not require the relics from the Mosaic laws including circumcision.

Acts 15:28 “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us . . .” (ESV) The leaders wanted to make sure everyone knew that their decision included revelation. Both their minds and a spiritual witness to their hearts were in agreement. This ruling had powerful implications for the Twelve. The apostles and other Council members felt inspired to go beyond their scriptures to reverse Moses’ lesser law in favor of Christ’s higher law. In Richard Lloyd Anderson’s words, “not past scripture but new revelation was the foundation of the Church of Christ . . . past scriptures are a guide to truth, but living prophets give new scripture.”⁴¹

Acts 15:29 “That ye abstain from . . . fornication” Luke again repeats, as a second witness, the same four impurities that Christians should continue to avoid (Acts 15:20). The Greek word translated in the KJV as “fornication” is “*pornea*,” the root for pornography. It included all forms of sexual immorality: incest, adultery, harlotry and homosexuality. The letter concludes with the encouraging words: if the saints will keep these four moral and dietary laws, “ye shall do well. Fare ye well.”

The Believers at Antioch Rejoice

Acts 15:30–35

Acts 15:31 “When the people read it, they rejoiced at its encouraging message” (BSB) Luke only includes the positive reception of the news from the church leaders here, but over time, the opposition party is more vocal.

Acts 15:32 “Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers” This is another example of how the word “prophets” is used differently in the New Testament. Here it agrees with John’s definition: “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10). Across

the Bible we find prophets and prophetesses in a range of people with a range of gifts from: those who testify, predict the future, speak for the Lord, give moral and ethical direction, and lead. Jesus was also seen as a prophet. Prophecy was one of the gifts of the Spirit and became a part of worship.

False prophets also lived at the time (Acts 13:6; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1; Revelation 2:20, etc.). The Prophet Joseph taught that anyone who testifies of Jesus as the Christ has the gift of prophecy.⁴² In the last phrase of this verse, the KJV uses the word “confirmed” while other translators communicate the Greek as “strengthen, reestablish, support further.” This does not appear to mean that the saints received the ordinance of confirmation as used in the restoration.

Acts 15:33–35 “after they had tarried . . . they [left] . . . in peace . . . Notwithstanding . . . Silas . . . Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch” When it was time for the Jerusalem contingency to make their return trip back to Jerusalem, Silas chose to remain in Antioch to build the kingdom of God with Paul. The section on Silas is not found in many Greek texts.

Paul’s Second Mission as an Apostle

Acts 15:36–41

Acts 15:36 “**Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached . . .**” (NIV) This is a chapter break in some Bibles as it begins the planning for Paul’s next missionary expeditions. I presume Paul and Barnabas want to share the news from the Jerusalem Council with their converts and minister to the new branches as they can.

Acts 15:37–38 “Barnabas wanted to take along John Mark” (CSB) Barnabas wanted to bring his relative, John Mark, again with them as a junior companion. But, unfortunately, Paul disagreed strongly. Luke records Paul’s view point, which leaves the readers with only one side of the story. Luke writes the story as a way to show the end result; it helped the work to cover more territory and be the best for missionary work.

Acts 15:39–40 “Their disagreement was so sharp that they parted company. . .” (BSB) The result of the contention was that they divided up. Barnabas and John Mark went to his home-island, Cyprus, to strengthen the church there, while Paul took Silas and went through Syria to Paul’s homeland, Cilicia, to strengthen the new members in Galatia.

Acts 15:41 “He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches” (ESV) This is the beginning of Paul’s next Gentile mission as an Apostle. Some scholars feel that it is an extension of his second mission, and others a third, or even fourth mission. For simplicity sake we will refer to it as the third.

Header Image: Peter's vision of a sheet with animals, from Acts 10; illustration from Henry Davenport Northrop, "Treasures of the Bible," published 1894. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. In the Roman army a century (50–100 soldiers) made up 1/60 of a legion. A cohort or regiment was made up of 10 centuries having the potential of 600 soldiers or 1/10 of a legion. A legion was ten cohorts with the potential of 6,000 soldiers.
2. Matthew 8:5, 8, 13; 27:54; Mark 15:39, 44, 45; Luke 7:6; 23:47.
3. Michael P. Speidel, "The Roman Army in Judaea under The Procurators: The Italian and the Augustan Cohort in the Acts of the Apostles," *Ancient Society*, 13/14 (1982): 233–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44080154> (accessed 6-28-19). "From the reign of Herod the Great to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70 the garrison of Judaea comprised one cavalry regiment of Sebasteni . . . and five cohorts of infantry, among them at least one cohort of Sebasteni. . . It was Roman recruiting practice from the beginning of the empire to enroll local recruits in auxiliary regiments no matter where the unit had been raised originally." The author has evidence for gravestones that the Italian cohort at Caesarea included Roman citizens. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIX, 176. From AD 59 the military was mainly Caesareans and Sebasteni. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 1.1. After the death of Agrippa I in AD 44, Palestine became annexed to Syria.
4. A. T. Kraabel, "The Disappearance of the 'God-Fearers,'" *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions*, 28, no. 2 (1981): 113–114. doi:10.2307/3270014 (accessed 6-29-19).
5. Heshy Zelcher, *A Guide to the Jerusalem Talmud* (Universal Publishers, 2002), 92. "The middle class citizens often owned eight slaves, the rich from five hundred to a thousand, and an emperor as many as twenty thousand." I choose to use "servant / slave," as they were the same word, and in the Jewish and Roman world, servitude was not for life (Jews released after seven years, and Romans at age 30–35), but was more like a middle age serf.
6. Joseph Smith, Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. 264; quoting *Times and Seasons* 3.905.
7. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Acts of the Apostles* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1998), 461.
8. Darby Bible Translations, Aramaic translation in English, Webster Translation, and Young's Literal Translation.
9. Thayer, *New Testament Greek Lexical Dictionary*.
10. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 1.297. "I [Joseph,] received a visit from Elders Joseph Young, Brigham Young, and Heber C. Kimball of Mendon, Monroe County, New York. They spent four or five days at Kirtland, during which we had many interesting moments. At one of our interviews, Brother Brigham Young and John P. Greene spoke in tongues, which was the first time I had heard this gift among the brethren; others also spoke, and I received the gift myself."
11. *Mishnah, Avoth*, 1:1. An example of one of the oral laws to ensure one kept the Sabbath holy: One could spit on a rock, but not on the dirt as that was cultivating. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John 1–XII* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 371.
12. Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1971). 118. "In the east even

- today, to invite a man to a meal was an honour. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood and forgiveness.”
13. For example, the prophetess Anna in Luke 2: 36, was from the tribe of Asher, and Saul from Benjamin (Philippians 3:50).
 14. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 1.3–2.5. “. . . Claudius Caesar . . . Around this time lived queen Helena of Adiabene . . . her arrival was of great help to the masses in Jerusalem; for there was a famine in the land, that overtook them, and many people died of starvation.” Evidence of a multiyear famine continues in the same account.
 15. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem at the time of Jesus*, 121–122.
 16. There were six “Herod’s” who held political authority in Palestine throughout the New Testament writings.
 17. Galatians 1:19; 2:9, 12; Acts 15:13; 21:18. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX.9.1.200, refers to him as “James, the brother of Jesus, who was call the Christ.”
 18. Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), Acts 2:19.
 19. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIX.8.2, 343.
 20. John W. Welch, *Charting the New Testament*,
 21. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 45–46.
 22. Historical accounts record the martyrdom by each of the original ten apostles (Judas Iscariot hung himself, and John the Beloved has not died). Peter: Crucified upside-down in Rome, ca. AD 64; James son of Zebedee: beheaded ca. AD 44; Andrew: crucified; Philip: crucified ca. AD 54; Bartholomew: crucified; Matthew: halberd ca. AD 60; Thomas: spear; James son of Alphaeus: beaten by club, after crucified and stoned; Jude: crucified; Simon the Zealot: crucified.
 23. Paul refers to his apostleship in: Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 9:1–2; 15:7–9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 2:2; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1.
 24. Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, ed, *Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 59. Spelling updated by Kent Jackson, *Joseph Smith’s Commentary on the Bible*, 149.
 25. The victim was taken outside the city, where the first witness would throw the victim off a cliff or ramp (built about twice a man’s height), so that the victim fell on his or her back. If the victim fell on his or her face, the first witness would have had the responsibility of turning him or her over. If still alive, a second witness would throw a large rock at the victim’s heart. If the blow did not kill the victim, then other men took rocks, removed their outer cloaks to have more freedom to throw their stones, and then aimed them at the victim until death resulted. (For more see Acts 7:59–60.)
 26. 2 Corinthians 11: 23–27 “Five times whipped with 39 lashes, 3 beatings with a rod, often imprisoned, once stoned, 3 shipwrecks, left in the ocean all night and day, plus perils “in journeyings often, [in] perils of waters, [in] perils of robbers, [in] perils by [mine own] countrymen, [in] perils by the heathen, [in] perils in the city, [in] perils in the wilderness, [in] perils in the sea, [in] perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” But Paul didn’t mention being bitten by a poisonous snake from Acts 28:3–5.
 27. Neal A. Maxwell, *Conference Report*, April 2002.
 28. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 55.
 29. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapters 2–4. In the

KJV it is difficult to see how many times women are encouraged to teach, preach, pray, and serve in the church, because the use of “man” included both genders as human. There are over twenty verses that encourage female service teaching and using the gifts of the Spirit to build the kingdom in the NT.

30. Everett Ferguson, ed. *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd Ed (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2013), 546.
31. 1 Corinthians 16:19; “Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house;” also see more examples of homes used for church service: Acts 16:14, 40; 20:7–12, 20; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 1:11; and Philippians 1:3–7; 4:1. The New Testament speaks of four valiant women who organized and opened their homes for house-churches: Mary of Jerusalem, Chloe, Lydia, and Priscilla.
32. Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, XVIII.2.
33. Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 306–308.
34. *Ibid.*, 307.
35. Robert Millet, *Studies in Scripture* (SLC, UT: Desert Book, 1987), 112.
36. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:146. There are examples in our modern church history when someone other than the person holding the directing power was appointed to act as president and presided over a conference.
37. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 51.
38. Silas is also known as Silvanus in 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12. Judas Barsabas may also be related to the person mentioned in Acts 1:23.
39. There were a few exceptions like the six women chosen as Vestal Virgins, and those women needed to act as prostitutes for fertility rituals.
40. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 309.
41. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 53. His quote continues, “What guided the apostles was not the New Testament, for their acts created it. The Bible does not make the true the true church, but the true church made the Bible.”
42. Smith, *History of the Church*, 3:28, 30; 5:232. From January 1, 1843, “If any person should ask me if I were a prophet, I should not deny it, as that would give me the lie; for, according to John, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; therefore if I profess to be a witness or teacher, and have not the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus, I must be a false witness; but if I be a true teacher and witness, I must possess the spirit of prophecy, and that constitutes a prophet” (*Ibid.*, 5:215).