

## Episode #1220 Acts 14 Part 3-The Return to Antioch

I. Acts is unique in the New Testament. Rather than the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, it focuses on what came after, when the Lord had ascended back into heaven. The Lord left His disciples with many commands to carry out, and Acts tells us how they did them.

II. In chapter 14 of Acts, we were following the movements of Paul and Barnabas as they traveled in Lycaonia proclaiming the gospel. After their ministry in Lystra and Derbe, they started to return to the cities they had ministered in, traveling in reverse order to back up the work that had been cut short by persecution.

III. Completing the First Apostolic Journey. Acts 14:21-28.

A. Verse 23. They appoint elders in every church.

1. The *King James* made it *ordained* again, and they translated twelve words by ordained. This word means appoint = Greek *cheirotoneo*, to designate by stretching out or pointing with the hand. What Paul did here is he designated by pointing out certain men, and they became elders.
2. Elders = Greek *presbuteros*, meaning representatives. An elder is simply a representative. It is not a religious office; it is a political office as a rule. There was no separation of church and state in Jewish thought, and they had elders as community leaders, not just religious ones. The Jews had elders and families had elders, and an elder was simply a representative. That is what the word means.
3. "In every church" = Greek *kat' ekklesian*, "according-to (the) ekklesia." The ekklesia were the men who had a position out of others in the city, and so these were men who already were entrusted with leadership positions. So they had designated representatives, according to the outcalled. Not in every outcalled, but according to every outcalled. These accorded with the outcalled. There were quite a few people in this company who were the outcalled here. Because of the position of both Paul and Barnabas, they wanted a representative. So they designated certain men according to the outcalled. Then Paul will deal with this man, this man will deal with the group, the group will deal with this man, and this man will deal with Paul. That makes this one Paul's elder. Not the church elder, but Paul's elder. And this is in harmony with the outcalled. This is something anyone who interacts with many groups who follow his teaching might have. You might have someone you keep in contact with from the group, and when the group wants to know about you, he passes on what he heard from you to them. What Paul was making here was his own representatives. They would also first receive letters from Paul if he sent them. If there were problems in the city they couldn't handle, these were the ones who should contact Paul.
4. Paul and Barnabas then pray and fast with them, seeking the Lord's care for them. Then, they commend them to the One they had believed in.

B. Verse 24. Leaving Antioch, they continue to retrace their steps through Pisidia and Pamphylia.

C. Verse 25. They had passed through Perga before (Acts 13:13-14), but had not stopped to proclaim the word. It was where John Mark left them. Maybe the same problem that discouraged him prevented them from speaking the word there? Now they do

- proclaim it. We do not learn how successful they were. Attalia = “Yah’s Due Season,” an odd name for a Gentile city in Pamphylia. A coastal town where they could find a ship.
- D. Verse 26. They stop retracing their steps, as they do not return to Cyprus, but sail directly back to Antioch in Syria, their home base. Their mission is complete. The work was hard, the opposition was strong, but the Spirit had been with them the whole way, and their enemies had not been able to stop them, even by stoning. Mark 16:20 was fulfilled. So we saw in Acts 13:1-3 they started out from Antioch. They made this long journey, directed by the Holy Spirit. When they returned, they were back in Antioch once more. Their work had been fulfilled. Their mission was over.
  - E. Verse 27. They gather the ekklesia of Antioch, and report all that God had done with them. “Their” work was really God’s work, and they were just His agents. They were not “missionaries” like today, but apostles, commissioned by God to perform His tasks on His behalf. God had opened the door of faith to the nations. These nations had not been part of the Lord’s ministry on earth, but now were allowed to believe. These nations included mostly Jews in the synagogues. However, as we saw in Pisidian Antioch, they even included some Gentiles as well, who believed when the door was opened to them.
  - F. Verse 28. With their mission complete, they must wait for God’s leading before starting another. For now, they remain in their home base of Antioch with their fellow disciples for “a long time.” *The Companion Bible* suggests two and one-half years.
- IV. Acts 15:1-3. Must They Be Circumcized?
- A. Acts 15:1. A problem arises among the believers in Antioch. This chapter is not as simple as most people think. There are real problems here.
    - 1. They were “coming down” from Judea to Antioch because Antioch was downhill from Judea, even though it was far north. Judea is also the center of God’s plans, so to leave it is to go “down.”
    - 2. They teach you must be circumcised according to the custom of Moses in order to be saved. Does this mean they wanted Gentile believers to be circumcised in Antioch?
    - 3. We have had no evidence of Gentiles believers in Antioch. Many Israelites, both who spoke Aramaic and who spoke only Greek, had believed. Until Paul’s mission after he left Antioch, though, we have no evidence that any Gentiles believed, other than Cornelius’ household.
    - 4. Notice it does not say “unless you are circumcised,” but “unless you are circumcised after the manner of Moses.” Thus we come upon the first fact that we have to face, and this sets before us the first problem for honestly understanding what is taking place in this chapter.
    - 5. We must realize that if we had lived at this time and could have surveyed this scene, we would have known of Jews who had been circumcised according to the law of Moses. Men like Paul had been circumcised according to the law of Moses. He describes himself as an “eighth-day circumcised one” in Philippians 3:5, and therefore he had been circumcised according to the law of Moses. There were other Jews who lived outside the land of Israel who had not been circumcised according to the manner of Moses, but had been circumcised according to the manner of Abraham.

- a. In Israel, there was first of all Abrahamic circumcision, for circumcision came long before the law, and that could best be designated as Abrahamic circumcision. Abraham was first given circumcision four hundred years before Moses. Genesis 17:9-14. All Abraham's male descendants were to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth, and all who belonged to his household, even foreign-born servants. This was a simple, family matter, done by the head of the family at the command of God. We would call that Abrahamic circumcision.
  - b. Four hundred years later when the law was given, certain other requirements were laid upon them. Moses' circumcision is set forth in Leviticus 12:1-8. There is no change in how circumcision was done. The father would do it in the household. Luke 1:59. Then the mother was to be purified for thirty-three days afterwards, and then the parents were to bring an offering to the priest to make an atonement. What the offering was depended upon how wealthy or poor the family was. The change Moses gave was not in the circumcision, but in the offering made afterwards. The Lord Jesus Christ was circumcised in this way, and His parents brought to the temple two, young turtledoves, which was all they could afford. That was the manner of Moses. This required the temple and a functioning priesthood. Ancestral Israelites living far outside the land of Israel could all keep Abraham's circumcision. The circumcision given by Moses could only be performed in or near the land of Israel. For those who lived months away from the temple, only the wealthy could afford to do this, and even then travel was dangerous.
  - c. There were other Jews who had never been circumcised in any way, and of course there were the Gentiles who had never been circumcised in any way.
6. Now the question would come up as to what did this have to do with? The more that we consider it and the more that we think about it, the more we conclude that this had to do with Jews who had been circumcised after the manner of Abraham, but these were coming down and saying unless you have been circumcised after the manner of Moses you cannot be saved. Many who lived outside the land of Israel were circumcised after the manner of Abraham, but not after the custom of Moses. Those from Judea, living the very closest to the temple, were often very zealous for a more "complete" circumcision. They said a circumcision without the offering afterwards didn't really count, and those who did this had to be circumcised over again!
  7. Now there was a very important thing here, for strictly speaking the neglect of Mosaic circumcision was a sin of omission. We can speak of sins of commission and sins of omission, and to neglect being circumcised with the full law of Moses performed afterwards was a sin of omission. The question was: did Jesus Christ die for that sin, or was it necessary for this person to make up for that sin by being circumcised after the custom of Moses and to start keeping all the rest of the law after he believed? This was a very moot

question. Did Jesus Christ die for the sin of omission when a Jew failed to be circumcised after the manner of Moses and keep all the law?

8. Their argument was even if you had been circumcised after the manner of Abraham, which is about the only way one could be circumcised far away from the temple and the land of Israel, unless they could travel to Jerusalem to take care of the rest of the law, you could not be saved. They were insisting on circumcision after the manner of Moses, with the full keeping of the law afterwards. But remember that circumcision began four hundred years before Moses, and it began with Abraham.
9. To demand Mosaic circumcision would just about cut the new believers outside the land off from God, since they lived so far from the temple they could not access it as many times as it was necessary to do to keep the law, and so they could not really live up to the promise of Mosaic circumcision, which was a promise to keep all the rest of the law.

V. Conclusion: Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch and present a report on what God had done through them among the nations to which they had been sent. The leaders in Antioch hear and approve. They do not immediately return to the work, but remain in Antioch for several years. During this time, some come to Antioch insisting that circumcision after the manner of Moses is necessary. Most come to the quick and dirty solution that this was about being circumcised, but it rather was about Abrahamic circumcision and Mosaic circumcision, about living a personal life for God versus keeping the law of Moses. We will find out what they did about this important issue in our next program.