

Acts 14b – 15a

21 After successful ministry and the founding of a church in Derbe, they went back through the cities they had just ministered in, including where Paul had been stoned, Lystra. Only the grace of God and love for the new converts could overcome the fear of going back to where you had been stoned and left for dead. Later in Paul's ministry, he will look back on this trip, the persecution, and the deliverance. 2Timothy 3:11

22 They wanted to be sure they were grounded in the faith. Colossians 1:23; Matthew 28:20 (make disciples)
They warned them of the hardships of entering the Kingdom. Is that part of our message today? Should it be? Why or why not?

23 The word "elders" (*presbyteroi*) is plural. Patterning the structure after the synagogue and the house churches in Jerusalem (11:30), they chose out a group of men in each city who were equals and who fit the criteria of Titus 1 and 1Timothy 3 to lead the church. (Titus 1:5) How has this pattern changed in today's churches? How does the plurality of elders protect the local church body?

24-26 Going back through Perga, this time it mentions that they preached there. Attalia, five miles downstream, was the harbor for Perga. This was probably the same port they arrived at when they came from Cyprus.

27-28 Back in Antioch Syria, they must have reported all that the Lord had accomplished, the conversions, the miracles, and the churches that had been planted. It was probably a few months to a year that they stayed. During this stay, Paul heard of the Judaizers (Christians that taught that you must keep the Law) subverting the new converts in Galatia. This is when he wrote the book of Galatians. Galatians 1:6-8

15:1-2 Jews always welcomed Gentile converts, provided that they were circumcised and made an effort to keep the Laws of Moses. Circumcision was the main sign that a person was no longer a Gentile but had joined the covenant people of God. Now that Gentiles are converting in large numbers, the old guard (believers that had been Pharisees) is wondering why Paul and Barnabas aren't staying with such an essential part of Judaism. (Genesis 17:10, 13-14) They went so far as to follow up on their converts and insist that salvation was not complete without the Law. In what ways does the church have the same problems today?

When they came to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas got into some heated debates with them. They had not been authorized by Jerusalem (verse 24) but since

they were from HQ, their arguments carried weight. This was not a peripheral matter that they could agree to disagree on, but essential to the beliefs of the early church. Notice that Paul and Barnabas were appointed with other disciples to go to Jerusalem. By whom? The elders of the Antioch church. Even though they were being used so mightily by God, they still did not make decisions on their own but followed the joint leading of the elders.

15:3 The 300 mile journey would take almost a month. Along the way they stopped at churches that had sprung up and shared with them the testimonies of their missionary trip. News of conversions and new churches does thrill our hearts and heaven. Luke 15:5-7

4 The Apostles and elders rejoiced at their testimony. The apostles are the witnesses of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The elders are the leaders of the local house churches. Together they will decide what they believe to be the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Next week we will go over the debate and decision of the council, a decision that would effect the church through the ages and confirm the teachings of the Apostle Paul.