

Acts 13–16: First Missionary journey

Last week we saw the resurrected Christ reveal his authority to Saul, commissioning him as his apostle to the gentiles (Acts 9). Then a Roman officer (Cornelius) and his people became part of the community where the Holy Spirit has taken up residence, much to the astonishment of Peter and the Jerusalem church (Acts 10–11).

Any questions or thoughts on previous chapters before we move on?

Acts 13: Antioch sends Barnabas and Saul/Paul

Tonight we'll see Saul of Tarsus setting out on his first missionary journey as Paul the apostle. In the region we call Türkiye, Barnabas and Paul proclaimed the good news that Jesus is God's anointed ruler for all people.

Commissioning Barnabas and Saul (13:1-3)

Antioch in northern Syria was a thriving church. It's where followers of the heaven-anointed king (the *Christ*) were first called *Christians* (11:26).

In this church were *prophets and teachers* (13:1). Prophets hear what the heavenly king is saying to his earthly realm. Teachers help people find their place in the on-going story of God in the world.

Acts 13:2–3 (NIV)

² While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas

and Saul for the work to which I have called them."³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

What strikes you about how the Holy Spirit was leading this church?

- How did Holy Spirit speak to the church? Why did they need to hear this if Holy Spirit had already spoken to Barnabas and Saul?
- What's the significance of *placing their hands on them*? (See also Acts 8:17; 9:12, 17; 12:17; 19:6; 28:8.) What responsibility was the Antioch Church taking on by *sending* Barnabas and Saul?



"Paul's first missionary journey." Zondervan Atlas of the Bible, (Zondervan, 2010), 225.

- This is the only time Acts describes the church *worshipping*. Why isn't this a bigger theme? What were they offering to their Lord as worship?
 - *Prayer* is everywhere in Acts, but the only other reference to *fasting* is 14:23. Why did they fast twice here? Is there anyone they might have given their food to (compare Isaiah 58)?
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Cyprus (13:4-12)

On the island of Cyprus, they attempted to share the good news of King Jesus with a government official, but *a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet* (verse 6) interfered:

Acts 13:9–12 (NIV)

⁹ Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰ “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹ Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.”

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹² When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

Do you think Paul may have remembered his own blindness for three days when he first saw Jesus? (9:8-9) Have you ever heard of anyone else doing this? (2 Kings 6:18). When would you do something like this?

Did you notice the switch from *Saul* to *Paul* in verse 9? Just as people from Asia sometimes take on an English name when they come to Australia, people in the Roman Empire sometimes had a Jewish name and a Greek one (e.g. Tabitha Dorcas in 9:36). Paul now uses his Greek name Paul, rather than his Jewish name Saul.

Antioch in Pisidia (13:13-52)

There's another Antioch in a region of southern Türkiye called Pisidia. We refer to this one as Pisidian Antioch (verse 14) to distinguish it from Syrian Antioch.

Luke gives us an outstanding summary of the message Paul proclaims. His audience consists of *fellow Israelites and you gentiles who worship God* (verse 16), so he starts with the Jewish story:

- The exodus founded Israel as God's nation (verses 17-19).
- Judges implemented God's reign until they asked for a king (verses 20-22).
- From King David, God has brought to Israel the Saviour he promised, Jesus the great king proclaimed by the prophet John (verses 23-25).
- Paul is now announcing the divine rescue to those who fear God across the world, for the Jerusalem rulers wrongly condemned and executed him (26-29).
- God raised him up from the dead, fulfilling his promises to his people (30-31).

The resurrection of the Davidic kingship is what God had promised:

- Psalm 2:7 proclaims the Davidic king as Son of the heavenly sovereign (verse 33);
- Isaiah 55:3 proclaims the restoration of the David kingship after it fell (verse 34);
- Psalm 16:10 proclaims God's promise to preserve David's kingship (verse 35);
- Habakkuk 1:5 proclaims God's methods as astounding, difficult to believe (v. 41).

Here's the heart of Paul's message:

Acts 13:38-39 (my translation)

³⁸ So, let it be it known to you men, my family, that through him, to you release from sins is announced, ³⁹ even from all that prevented you being set right in the Torah of Moses.

How do you understand the gospel as Paul proclaimed it in Acts 13:16-41?

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Many believed (verse 42). Others reacted out of fear of losing their power (verse 45). Paul now turns to those who had never been part of God's covenant people (verse 46).

Acts 13:46-48 (NIV)

⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.

⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us:

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." [Isaiah 49:6]

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honoured the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.

This becomes the pattern of Paul's approach: speak to his own people first, and then go to the gentiles.

All who were appointed for eternal life: does this phrase (in verse 48) imply that God chooses which individuals are to be saved, and consequently which individuals to are damned? There has been considerable debate on this topic for the last 500 years.

But *appointed for eternal life* need not be about individuals. It could be describing what God has opened up for us in Christ for both Jews and gentiles. People have choice: Jews can *reject* it, treating themselves as not worthy of eternal life (verse 46), and gentiles can trust the one appointed for eternal life (verse 48).

The notion of election in Luke is not worked out in the sense of a predestination of the individual. "Ordained to eternal life" is a Jewish expression.⁸

⁸ Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 106.

Acts 14: Galatia

Iconium (14:1-7)

Today, Iconium is called Konya. It's Türkiye's fourth largest town. In New Testament times, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were part of the Roman province called **Galatia** (see map on page 39). Paul later wrote a letter to the Galatians.

What they did and how people responded is a pattern wherever they go:

Acts 14:1-7 (NIV)

¹ At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. ² But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³ So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.

⁴ The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. ⁵ There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. ⁶ But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷ where they continued to preach the gospel.

What's the pattern of ministry they follow? Who do they speak to first?

Why do some people believe and others react? Is that what we can expect too?

Lystra (14:8-20)

Misunderstandings occur when what's said and what's heard don't match. A word like "God" can mean different things to different people.

For Paul and Barnabas, God is the Jewish God, the creator who is sovereign over everyone. The good news is that this God is setting the world right through his Anointed (the Christ). They demonstrate this good news when they heal someone:

Acts 14:8-10 (NIV)

⁸ In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. ⁹ He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰ and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

The people of Phrygia and Galatia had a completely different understanding of God:

Acts 14:11-13 (NIV)

¹¹ When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!"

¹² Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³ The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

John Stott explains what these people believed:

The supreme god Jupiter (Zeus to the Greeks) and his son Mercury (Hermes) once visited the hill country of Phrygia, disguised as mortal men. In their incognito they sought hospitality but were rebuffed a thousand times. At last, however, they were offered lodging in a tiny cottage, thatched with straw and reeds from the marsh. Here lived an elderly peasant couple called Philemon and Baucis, who entertained them out of their poverty. Later the gods rewarded them, but destroyed by flood the homes which would not take them in. It is reasonable to suppose both that the Lystran people knew this story about their neighbourhood and that, if the gods were to revisit their district, they were anxious not to suffer the same fate as the inhospitable Phrygians. Apart from the literary evidence in Ovid, two inscriptions and a stone altar have been discovered near Lystra, which indicate that Zeus and Hermes were worshipped together as local patron deities.⁹



Hermes (the messenger) and Zeus (the chief Greek god)

Australia has a couple of centuries of Christian heritage, but we can't assume people think of the one revealed in Christ when they hear the word *God*:

- "God" may mean the energy of the universe rather than a being (Buddhism).
- God may be a revelation from a different source (Mohammed for Muslims).
- God may refer to part of the cycle of life: Brama the creator, Vishnu the preserver, Shiva the destroyer (Hinduism).
- God may be *the force*, the battle with *the dark side* (for Star Wars fans).
- God may be ourselves, each with our own superpower (the Marvel universe).

Have you ever been misunderstood as you talk about God? What's your experience?

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The search for God is often about a search for inner peace, and there are many paths:

- Peace may come from meditation, the internal journey to escape the pain of the world and our attachment to it (Buddhism).
- Peace may come from surrender, accepting whatever happens as the will of Allah (Islam).
- Peace may come from going with the cycle of life, for karma ensures that justice comes to all in the end (Hinduism).
- Peace comes from God reconciling the world to himself and to each other in Christ (Christian view).

⁹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 230–231.

For the people of Lystra, peace came by keeping the gods happy. Take care of the gods, and they'll take care of you. If you didn't, the gods would be angry. That's why they're making these food offerings (sacrifices) to Barnabas and Paul.

So how do Barnabas and Paul respond?

Acts 14:14–18 (NIV)

¹⁴ But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵ “Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. ¹⁶ In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷ Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” ¹⁸ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.

Paul and Barnabas wanted to say, “There's only one living God, so everything you're doing for your worthless gods is a waste of energy” (verse 15). But they did not want these people's misguided enthusiasm to turn into misguided terror.

The living God is neither domineering nor vindictive. The nations turned away from him, but he never turned away from them (verse 16). He let them go, but he continued to provide for everyone: *rain* from the heavens, *crops* in their seasons, plenty of *food* to eat, and *joy* to fill your hearts—even when you never gave him a thought (verse 17).

Is that how God treats people who don't honour him? Why don't Barnabas and Saul make these people afraid of God so they will make decisions for Christ?

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Interesting how people respond: If you're not a god, you must be the devil (vv. 19-20).

Return to Antioch in Syria (14:21-28)

After *making many disciples* in Derbe (verse 21), Paul and Barnabas set out for the return trip to Antioch in Syria (the church that sent them).

They revisit the churches they'd established. To *strengthen the disciples and encourage them to remain true to the faith*, they said (verse 22):

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,”

How is that helpful? What does it mean for us *to enter the kingdom of God*? Is this about individual salvation, or about God's reign returning to earth? Why must we *go through many hardships* for this to happen? How does this relate to Paul and Barnabas' experience? How does it relate to our experience?

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Acts 15: Jerusalem council

God is raising up a kingdom in the leadership of his Christ. This kingdom is already far more expansive than the one King David ruled as he represented God's kingship in the Sinai covenant. As well as Jews and Samaritans, Christ's kingdom includes officials from foreign governments: at least one Ethiopian, soldiers from the Italian Regiment in Caesarea, and the proconsul of Cyprus.

The *ekklesia* (church) is gathering around King Jesus in Damascus and Antioch in Syria, Antioch in Pisidia, and Iconium, Lystra and Derbe in southern Galatia. This mix of Jews and non-Jews have to figure out how to do life together as God's people.

What these Jews and gentiles have in common is an allegiance to Christ, the Jewish Messiah. What they don't have in common is a heritage from the Sinai law.

For centuries the Jewish people have been under gentile rule. To ensure they did not lose their identity, they focused on the crucial boundary markers of the covenant law:

- **circumcision:** initiating male children into the covenant community.
- **Sabbath:** no work on Sabbaths and feast days
- **kosher:** eating only with others who followed the food laws (as in Acts 11:3)
- **ethnicity:** not intermarrying with gentiles (e.g. Ezra 10)

Circumcision was the boundary marker of the covenant people even before Sinai:

Genesis 17:12, 14 (NIV)

¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a **foreigner**—those who are not your offspring.
... ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be **cut off** from his people; he has broken my covenant."

If the Galatians and Syrians wanted to join the Jews as part of God's covenant community, must they be circumcised?

Acts 15:1 (NIV)

Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

The Jerusalem council (15:1-18)

The Antioch church divided over this question, *in sharp dispute and debate* (verse 2). They sent delegates to Jerusalem *to see the apostles and elders about this question*.

Pharisees promoted Torah-obedience as the path to restoring the fallen kingdom (Deuteronomy 30:2-3). So, the Pharisees who followed Jesus said, "*The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses*" (15:5).

Acts 15:7–11 (NIV)

⁷ After much discussion, **Peter** got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.

⁸ God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹ He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? ¹¹ No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

Do you recall how God showed Peter that he had chosen to include the gentiles in his people? (verse 7) If God has *purified their hearts by faith* without regard for the Jew/gentile distinction, are gentiles cleansed apart from the Law (verse 9)?

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Does that mean the Sinai covenant is no longer in force for Jews either? Has God established a new covenant in Christ, one that rescues both Jews and gentiles on the basis of God's generosity (grace) in providing Jesus our Lord (verses 10-11)?

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Barnabas and Paul recount how God miraculously confirmed their message as they called gentiles to give Christ their allegiance (faith):

Acts 15:12 (NIV)

¹² The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

James is the final speaker. This is probably Jesus' brother, since James the apostle is dead (12:2). James summarizes what Peter said, and compares it with Scripture:

Acts 15:13-17 (NIV)

¹³ When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles.

¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ “After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it,

¹⁷ that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,

even all the **Gentiles** who bear my name,

says the Lord, who does these things.’ [Amos 9:11-12]

If God has *chosen people from the Gentiles* (verse 14), then God's people are no longer just the descendants of Jacob. Simon Peter is right. The prophets confirm it.

Amos spoke to Israel in the time of the divided kingdom. Assyria captured Israel and settled gentiles there (2 Kings 17:24). That's why Amos said the restoration of the northern kingdom would bring gentiles under divine kingship in a son of David.

James understands the promise of Amos as fulfilled in Jesus. God raised up the fallen kingship of David when he raised Jesus out of death and gave him the throne. In him, God is restoring his kingship over the earth, including *the gentiles who bear my name*.

Gentiles are not becoming Jews (15:19-35)

James formulates a conclusion (verse 19-21). They agree, so they commit this conclusion to writing to explain their answer to the churches:

Acts 15:28-29 (NIV)

²⁸ It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

This is nothing like the many chapters (books!) of laws God gave Israel in the Sinai covenant. It's not like the covenant God gave to Abraham for his descendants.

It's closer to the first covenant God made with humanity (Genesis 8:20–9:17). After the flood, God accepted Noah's offering, replanting the world with the blessings he gave Adam. Confronting the issue of violence, God permitted people to eat animals but not to eat blood. With a covenant, God committed to never give up on reigning over all the people of the earth, regardless of how difficult we might make it for him.

So now the Sinai covenant is no longer the basis for acceptance as God's people. With the new covenant in Christ, God fulfills **all** his previous covenants:

- his covenant with David that his son would reign forever (2 Chronicles 13:5),
- his covenant with Israel at Sinai, establishing them as God's agents to the nations (Exodus 9)
- his covenant with Abraham that identified his descendants (Genesis 15, 17)
- his covenant with all the people of the earth (Genesis 9).

Gentiles are not becoming Jews; they're not joining the Sinai covenant nation.

Jews and gentiles together are becoming citizens of a new kingdom, based on allegiance to Christ the king (faith), not obedience the Sinai Law (works).

That's the argument Paul develops in his letter to the Galatians.

Take some time to consider what this means for us.

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Paul and Barnabas fall out (15:36-41)

So, we're all good now? Everyone is in agreement?

Unfortunately, our human struggles divide us more than theological issues do:

Acts 15:36-41 (NIV)

³⁶ Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." ³⁷ Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, ³⁸ but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the

work.³⁹ They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus,⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord.⁴¹ He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Paul doesn't want to be encumbered with someone who couldn't cope with the pressure, when people wanted to kill them (14:5, 19).

Barnabas the encourager (4:36) wants to give John Mark another chance, like he did with Paul (9:26-27). Mark may have deserted them, but Barnabas won't desert Mark.

So who was right? Luke doesn't judge; he just reports that they went separate ways.

I like to think that Paul may have softened his stance later in life (2 Timothy 4:11).

Acts 16: Philippi

Paul and Barnabas have established the first churches beyond Syria. These new believers faced pressures from Jewish families who rejected Jesus as Messiah, from Pharisees who insist they need to become full-Jews and obey the Sinai Law, and from others who fear that the whole community will suffer if these people refuse to worship their traditional gods.

That's a lot of pressure, and someone needs deliver the letter from the Jerusalem council (16:4). So, *Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and ... went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches* (15:39-41).



Paul's Second Missionary Journey, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, (Zondervan, 2010), 228.

The gospel reaches Europe (16:1-15)

We're following Paul on his second missionary journey (16:1–18:22). As well as Silas, others join Paul, including Luke who includes himself in the "we" (from 16:10).

They revisit southern Türkiye (Cilicia, Galatia, Phrygia). Paul wants to go north to Bithynia, but *during the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."* (verse 9).

Macedonia is northern Greece, the region where Alexander the Great was born. The good news now travels to Europe for the first time.

Their first European convert was a Greek businesswoman named Lydia who already worshipped the Jewish God (verse 14). She was baptized, along with her household, and she provided hospitality for Paul and his companions (verse 15).

Who's in charge in Philippi? (16:16-24)

Philippi was proud of its status as a leading *Roman colony* (verse 12). But this city also had a dark side: people living in slavery to others and to evil powers. One of these slaves was used as a fortune-teller, *earning a great deal of money for her owners* (verse 16). The evil spirit within her was constantly distracted by Paul's presence.

Acts 16:18-21 (NIV)

¹⁸ She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.

¹⁹ When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar

²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."

By the authority of King Jesus, Paul freed someone who was doubly enslaved—possessed by slave-owners and an evil spirit. In doing so, Paul reveals what's wrong with the world held by human rulers, where the economy determines what's right.

"Why doesn't the Bible condemn slavery?" you might ask. Like Jesus, Paul spends no effort fighting the governments of this world. He just sets a slave free in Jesus' name.

Later Paul reconnects a slave with his Christian master, asking Philemon to treat Onesimus "*no longer as a slave, but better than a slave as a dear brother. ... Welcome him as you would welcome me*" (Philemon 16-17). That changes the world.

God never called us to fix the injustice of the worldly governments. God calls us to be the alternative, demonstrating life under the leadership of Christ.

Australia's legal system is based on Britain's, where *possession is nine-tenths of the law*. It's biased towards protecting ownership, not people. Possession is evil when a person or a spirit possesses another human being.

The customs of the kingdom of God are unacceptable to the wealthy and powerful whose rights the world's legal system protects (verse 21). That's why Paul and Silas are arrested, flogged, and jailed (verses 22-23). It's the conflict of two kingdoms.

Confrontation between powers (16:25-40)**Acts 16:25–26 (NIV)**

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose.

Does praise set the prisoner free? That's often how this text is preached, but I doubt Paul would agree. Next time he was in jail, he did not say, "Just sing praise and our chains will fall off!" That approach only leads to disillusionment.

Paul doesn't even run! God opens the door, and Paul stays? Why?

Do you remember what happened the guards when Peter was released? (12:19). Paul cares about the jailor. The guy works for the government that locks up King Jesus' servants, but Paul convinces the other prisoners to stay too. "*Don't harm yourself! We're all here!*" Paul assures the jailor (verse 28).

"*What must I do to be saved?*" the jailor asks (verse 30). Given that he was about to run himself through (verse 27), do you think he meant this literally or metaphorically?

Paul tells the jailor to give his allegiance (his trust) to Jesus as *Lord* (verse 31). "Lord" was a title Caesar claimed. Paul asked this guy—the guy who worked for Caesar's government in this leading Roman colony—to recognize someone else as Lord. Isn't that what got Paul locked up in the first place? His crime was: "*advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice*" (verse 21).

Paul gets a change of accommodation. The jailer takes Paul and Silas home, sharing his house and food with them. He washes wounds (from the beating), and Paul offers to wash the jailer too. *Immediately he and all his household were baptized* (verse 33). The Christ has turned enemies into brothers.

Next morning, the magistrates order Paul and Silas to be released (verse 35).

Acts 16:37 (NIV)

But Paul said to the officers: "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out."

Paul could have saved himself a lot of pain by playing his Roman citizenship card the previous night. He didn't, because his sufferings highlight the difference between how human rulers protect their power versus God's anointed ruler.

So why play the citizenship card now? It's a clever move. What the jailer did—taking the prisoners home to care for them—is really suspect. He'll be in trouble now. But if the magistrates have mistreated a Roman citizen, then the jailer who treated them well becomes the hero. By playing his citizenship card now, Paul turns his new brother into the hero who saved the night!

Reflection

What stands out to you from Acts 13–16?

Meditate on how Barnabas and Paul were misunderstood at Lystra (Acts 14:11). How do your friends and acquaintances understand the word “God”? What can you do to connect with people who have very different understandings of what “God” might be like?

How is the Old Testament Law relevant to Christians today? Do we need to keep the Sinai Law that God gave Israel when he established them as a nation under his rule? Or are we under a completely different covenant now, one established in Christ that makes Jews and gentiles together the people of God? How does Acts 15 help answer that question? Are we set right with God by complying with the requirements of the Law, or by giving our allegiance to God's Messiah (by faith)?

Why doesn't the New Testament condemn slavery? Shouldn't we highlight the injustices that are so prevalent and damaging, demanding people are treated better? Is there any point trying to fix the governments of the world? Or do we concentrate all our efforts on promoting Christ's leadership and becoming the kingdom where his reign is known in the world? What will change the world long-term?

In the words of Michael Bird and Tom Wright:

Here's the tension: when do we appeal to Caesar and submit to governing authorities, and when do we tell Caesar we must obey God rather than human authorities and pray for the government to fall into divine judgement? Can we disobey divinely instituted government? Can that disobedience even go so far as passive and active resistance?¹⁰

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Please read Acts 17–20 for next week.

¹⁰ Michael F. Bird and N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Powers: Christian Political Witness in an Age of Totalitarian Terror and Dysfunctional Democracies* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2024), 107.