

# Acts 13-14 – Judaizer Controversy

By Ed Stevens -- *Then and Now Podcast* --Jan. 15, 2012

## INTRODUCTION:

- A. Last time you (Mike) asked a couple of questions which I promised to answer at the beginning of the program this week:
1. *Your most memorable moments in 2011?* The Kansas City conference in June, the Garrettsville seminar in September, and especially our exhibit booth work and preterist fellowship meeting in Napa California in November. It is always great to get together with fellow preterists from around the country.
  2. *The most profound new thing you learned in 2011?* Reading Hegesippus and realizing that Eleazar b. Ananias was probably the Man of Sin talked about in 2 Thessalonians 2.
- B. We dealt a little bit with the first missionary journey of Apostle Paul, just before the outbreak of the Judaizer controversy in Antioch. I did not cover that missionary journey in any detail, so I want to pick back up there and discuss it a little more, so that we see the significance of that Gentile missionary trip before we look at the Judaizer controversy that occurred in Antioch soon after they returned from that journey.

**AD 44 – Great Famine** began “upon the whole world” (Acts 11:27-30). It was particularly severe in Palestine, so the (Gentile) Antioch church sent relief funds to the (Jewish) church in Jerusalem through the agency of Barnabas and Saul. Both Luke (Acts 11:27-30) and Josephus mention this famine. It occurred near the end of Fadus' and at the beginning of Alexander's procuratorships.

**Apr - 44 – James** (brother of John, son of Zebedee) was killed by Herod Agrippa I. This was partial fulfillment of Jesus' prediction to both James and John about their martyrdom before the Parousia (cf. Matt. 20 and Mark 10). Peter was also arrested, but an angel rescued him out of prison (Acts 12:1-23). Here again, we see another miraculous intervention by God through His holy angels into the affairs of the Jews and the Christians. This kind of miracle cannot be explained away by the skeptics and allegorists without unraveling the whole supernatural fabric of the Christian religion. There is no reason for a Preterist to deny these miracles, or explain them away. They are the very proof that Christianity is the truth. Without those miracles, Christianity becomes just another worldly philosophy with no more power to redeem us than any of the other pagan philosophies and religions.

Arthur Ogden suggests that Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem for the feast, at the time when James and Peter were arrested. He bases this on the idea that it was customary for Paul and Barnabas (who was a Levite) to attend the festivals, and that this would have been especially appropriate at this time when there was a famine in Jerusalem and the Christians in Antioch needed to send them relief. After Barnabas and Paul had delivered the contribution to Jerusalem, they then returned to Antioch with John Mark, where not long afterward the Spirit called them to their first

missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3).

**Jun 44 – Agrippa I died.** Soon after Agrippa had been to Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost, where he killed James (the brother of John) and arrested Peter with the same intention (but an angel rescued Peter out of prison), he returned to his palace in Caesarea. The book of Acts (12:20-23) tells us that Agrippa delivered a speech to an audience filled with people from Tyre and Sidon, who flattered him in hopes of winning favors from him. They kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man." Because Agrippa did not give God the glory, Luke says "an angel of the Lord struck him, and he was eaten by worms and died. Josephus does not mention the "angel of God," but otherwise seems to harmonize well with the account in Acts [*Antiq* 19.343-350 (19.8.2)]. Since his son (Agrippa II) was too young to rule (only 17 yrs old), Claudius appointed a Procurator instead (Fadus AD 44-46). [*Antiq* 19.362 (19.9.2)] But Claudius did not give the procurator the right to appoint high priests. That right instead went to Agrippa's brother, Herod of Chalcis, who went to Emperor Claudius in Rome to petition for it (and got it).

### **Paul's First Missionary Journey (AD 45)**

**AD 45 – Paul's First Missionary Journey (AD 45-48).** According to Ogden and others, this first missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul lasted at least three years (AD 45-48). They took **John Mark** with them. They traveled to the island of **Cyprus** first, which is not far from Antioch, and was where Barnabas came from originally. [You will want to have your Bible Maps or Bible Atlas available as we study these missionary journeys.] Barnabas and Saul preached and made disciples throughout the whole island of Cyprus (from Salamis to Paphos). It was in Paphos that they encountered **Elymas the magician** (a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus) who was trying to influence the governor of the island away from the gospel (**Proconsul Sergius Paulus**). But Saul (who was also known as Paul), filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, struck him blind (Acts 13:9-11). The governor was converted. Then "Paul and his companions" proceeded by boat back to the mainland and landed at the port city of **Perga** in Pamphylia. It seems that it was here in Perga that **John Mark left them**, and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13; 15:38). But we see him back in Antioch later when Paul decided to go on his second missionary trip (Acts 15:37-39). We have to wonder what John Mark must have said about his experiences with Paul and Barnabas on Cyprus to the leaders in Jerusalem. We do not know if he said anything critical of Paul and Barnabas or not, but it is interesting that not long after this a group of Judaizers, supposedly sent from James in Jerusalem, came to Antioch and were teaching the Gentile Christians that they needed to be circumcised and keep the Law. Did John Mark come back to Antioch with this group of Judaizers? We do not know. Luke does not give any hint of a connection between these events, and neither does Paul in the book of Galatians. But Paul was certainly deeply disturbed about John Mark's decision "to desert them and not go with them to the work" (Acts 15:38).

From Perga, "Paul and his companions" went to the other Antioch (in Pisidia). There

is a noteworthy shift in the narrative of Luke at this point (Acts 13:13). Up until now, it was always "**Barnabas and Saul**." Saul's name was changed to "Paul" on the island of Cyprus (or shortly thereafter), evidently after his conversion of Proconsul Sergius Paulus. We do not know whether or not that name change had anything to do with the fact that the Proconsul's name was also "**Paul**" (Sergius **Paulus**). Luke uses that new name (Paul) for Saul from that time onward in the Acts narrative. Luke also begins using "**Paul and Barnabas**" from this time forward, in place of "Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 13:13 and 13:43). Paul becomes the leader of the pack from this time onwards.

It was in **Pisidian Antioch** that Paul got the chance to speak in a synagogue. He preached a long sermon, which was well received. They invited him back the next Sabbath. Practically the whole city assembled to hear Paul preach, but the Jews were jealous and contradicted everything he said. This is when Paul said that he would instead preach to the Gentiles. Evidently a number of Gentiles there in Pisidian Antioch believed, along with others in the whole region (Acts 13:48-49). But the Jews stirred up a persecution against them and drove them out of their district. Paul and Barnabas appropriately, as Jesus had taught them to do, shook the dust off their feet in protest against them, and then went to **Iconium**. Here also, Paul and Barnabas made a fast track to the local synagogue and began evangelizing. And they made some converts there, which stirred up a persecution against them, causing them to flee to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region, where they continued to preach the gospel (Acts 14:5-7). It was at **Lystra** that Paul healed the man "lame from his mother's womb." This so amazed the people of Lystra that they thought Barnabas was Zeus and Paul was Hermes (Greek gods). The people were barely prevented from performing sacrifices in honor of them (Acts 14:18). The Jews from neighboring cities came there and caused trouble for Paul and Barnabas. Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But he got up and walked away. The next day they went to **Derbe**. After they had made many disciples there, they then **backtracked** through all the cities where they had made disciples (**Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch**) to strengthen them and encourage them to continue in the faith. They appointed elders for each of those churches (Acts 14:23) and prayed with fasting for them. They then passed through Pisidia and came to **Perga** (in Pamphylia). After preaching the Word there, they went down to **Attalia**, where they boarded a ship headed back to Antioch (of Syria) where they had originally been sent out. When they arrived in **Antioch**, they gathered the saints together and reported all that the Lord had accomplished **among the Gentiles** through their ministry. Then Luke says that after this they "spent a long time with the disciples" in Antioch.

**Jun 49 – Judaizers came to Antioch** – Now think about what had happened on the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. Everywhere they went, they preached to the Jews first, and gave them first right of refusal, before they went to the Gentiles. It was the Jews who resisted it, and stirred up persecution against them. The Gentiles were very receptive to the gospel. This must have made a huge impact on Paul and Barnabas, to see their own Jewish brethren so reluctant to accept the

truth, while the Gentiles were completely open to it. They had seen the **Holy Spirit confirm their work** among the Gentiles by signs and wonders. Paul and Barnabas were absolutely convinced by their experiences on that missionary trip, that God was saving the Gentiles without circumcision and Law-keeping. There was no doubt in their mind. Now here they were, back in Antioch, after returning from that mission trip, and along comes "some men from Judea teaching the [Gentile] brethren" that they **must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses** (Acts 15:1). Luke said that Paul and Barnabas "**had great dissension and debate with them.**" I suspect that is an understatement (Acts 15:2). However, this controversy was not able to be settled there at Antioch. The Judaizers evidently did not accept Paul and Barnabas as authorities in the matter, so the issue would have to be resolved by the apostles and elders at the mother church in Jerusalem. The Judaizers appealed to a higher court, in fact, the **Supreme Court of the whole church** in that day, which was the Jerusalem church overseen by Peter and the other apostles and elders. Since the Judaizers claimed to be following the teaching of James and the other leaders in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas would need to go up to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles and Elders concerning this issue. They took "some others" with them as witnesses to back them up.

It is interesting that non-Christian Jews had to go from Jerusalem to the Roman court in Antioch to resolve their political disputes. But here we see the Christians going from Antioch to Jerusalem to resolve their dispute. Just the opposite direction. On the way to Jerusalem they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles on their recent missionary journey, which brought much joy to all the brethren in the churches of Phoenicia and Samaria (Acts 15:1-3).

This would be the first **Church Council** in church history, and it could not have been over a more critical issue for the future of the church. If the council had decided in favor of the Judaizers, there would have been no future for the church after AD 70. But the evidence that Paul and Barnabas presented, about how the Holy Spirit had worked with them in their preaching among the Gentiles, was decisive. It is marvelous to see how God providentially worked through all these events to secure equal status for Gentiles in the Church.

We Gentiles today simply do not have a clue how important this issue was to the first century church. It is a ho-hum issue to us today. But to them, especially the Jewish Christians, it was a critical issue. Their future depended on this issue being clarified. Next time we will study this first Church Council in more detail.