

A Westerly Wind

As I am writing this study, I can almost see a wind blowing across the pages of my Bible and swirling over the maps of the Eastern Mediterranean – Israel, Asia Minor, Greece and onward. Our study this week brings us to Antioch where the Spirit will establish a new church of Hellenistic believers, (where they are given the name “Christians” for the first time) and are beyond the reach of the religious leaders in Jerusalem still intent upon persecuting the followers of Christ. Antioch will become the home base for Paul as he takes the Word out on his first missionary journey, which will depart in the course of this week’s homework.

The Word Spreads to the Gentiles

Our lesson today takes us to Antioch where the growing number of Christians necessitates the formation of a church. After Jerusalem, the church in Antioch played the greatest role in the spread of Christianity in the 1st century. Antioch itself was the largest city in the Empire, ranking behind Rome and Alexandria. It was a center of commerce and trade linking Rome to the eastern reaches of the empire. Home to a large population of Jews, and a broad range of cultic pagan religions, it was a cosmopolitan city where not only the exchange of goods took place, but also ideas and culture. Antioch was open to the movement of the Holy Spirit as the gospel spread among Jews of the Diaspora as well as God-fearing Gentiles. The church in Antioch would become Paul’s home base for his missionary travels throughout the Roman Empire. Our lesson today focuses on the formation of that church.



Read Acts 11:19-30, 12:24-25 and answer the following questions.

Which Christians traveled to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch? Were they Hebraic or Hellenist? And to whom did they first share the gospel?

Those who went from Cyprus and Cyrene to Antioch began to speak to whom?

Who was sent from Jerusalem and why?

Why do you think Barnabus sought out Saul to bring to Antioch?

What did they do?

What did the Prophet Agabus predict?

- 🔥 What was the response of the church in Antioch? Why is this response appropriate and what debt of gratitude might provoke such a response? In verse 29 it says that the disciples in Antioch provided for their “brothers” in Judea. What does the word “brothers” indicate regarding their relationship to the believers in Judea?

When Barnabus and Saul returned from their relief mission to Jerusalem, who did they bring with them? (12:25)

In this passage where do you see evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in the Body of Christ?

This young church was a mix of Hellenist and Hebraic Jewish believers, as well as Greek “God-fearers”. Antioch was a cosmopolitan city drawing people from across the empire. The believers in this city were the first to be called Christians, or “Christ-ones”, likely because their faith was the unifying factor of this group of people from diverse back grounds. Likely they had little in common as far as culture, race, and even language in this diverse and cosmopolitan city. Their shared faith in Christ brought them together, and the presence of Barnabus and Saul united them further as they learned more about the life and teachings of Christ, as well as the fulfillment of the Torah. Barnabus himself was a Diaspora Jew from Cyrene and so was Saul, although originally from Cilicia. These men no doubt had a strong spirit-led motivation to spread the Gospel not only among the Diaspora population, but also among the Gentile God-fearers as well. It is at this point that Saul begins using the Greek name Paul as he moves and works among the primarily Greek speaking populations of the Roman Empire. Even his language changes depending upon the nature of the group with whom he is speaking. The use of the title “Lord Jesus” and the word “Lord” in reference to God (verses 20-21, 23) reveals a sensitivity to speaking to Gentile believers versus Jewish, a reflection that Gentiles comprised a greater number of the church members. Describing Jesus as “Messiah”, a Jewish term would have been difficult for Gentiles to fully comprehend in its messianic terms – a concept unknown to Gentiles, but Jesus being called Messiah carries deep, and at times contentious, meaning among Jews. The term Lord, while also applied to pagan gods, was a concept readily understandable to the Gentiles. Lord meaning master¹. The same word, *kyrios* (lord), was used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Torah, for the

¹*kyrios*—properly an adjective, signifying "having power" (kuros) or "authority," is used as a noun, variously translated in the NT, "'Lord,' 'master,' 'Master,' 'owner,' 'Sir,' a title of wide significance, occurring in each book of the NT save Titus and the Epistles of John.—Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

Hewbrew *Adonai* and *Elohim*. Jesus himself appropriated the title Lord, or *Kyrios* in Matthew 7:21, 22; 9:38; 22:42-45; Mark 5:19; Luke 19:31 and John 13:13.²

As the church grew in numbers it not only was able to support its own community but became strong enough to send monetary support to the mother church in Jerusalem during the famine. A series of droughts during the reign of the Emperor Claudius (AD 41-54) caused food shortages throughout the Roman Empire.³ The prosperous city of Antioch, which drew its affluence from commerce and trade, established a wealthy church. In turn that church was able to send Barnabus and Paul to Jerusalem on a mission of mercy for the mother church in their time of desperate need.

We see the presence of the Holy Spirit at work through Barnabus, himself described as being “*full of the Holy Spirit and faith*” in wisdom he sought out Saul in Tarsus, bringing him back to Antioch to teach the new believers there. New believers need the constant encouragement and teaching from those who are mature in their faith. We see that these two men were there for a full year teaching the new believers and the church continued to grow. The new believers were grateful for the presence of these leaders from Jerusalem. If it wasn’t for their constant presence and teaching many would likely have fallen away from the faith and the church would weaken. The life-altering gift of the Gospel message – salvation from sin and life everlasting – prompted a heart-felt desire to help and support the church in Jerusalem in their time of need. The persecution of Christians in Jerusalem, felt by both Hellenist and Hebraic believers, put these believers at even greater risk during the famine. Not only were many imprisoned by the Jews and Romans, but also ostracized from the community making it difficult to purchase necessities like food and fuel in the market place. The presence of the Holy Spirit among the Body of Christ united the brethren in Antioch with those in Jerusalem. Not only was there a debt of gratitude, but a true sense of love and relationship between diverse believers, kindled no doubt by an abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

Appointed to Eternal Life

Our scripture passage today marks a significant shift in the book of Acts. Up until this point the main focus of evangelization had been directed at Jews, with the inclusion of Gentile God-fearers taking a minor role. With the establishment of the Antioch church, the greater number of Gentiles coming to faith in the Lord Jesus surpassed the number of Jewish believers. As the number of Gentile believers grew, it became more and more apparent that Jesus’ mission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth meant taking it to the Gentiles. The Antioch church prepared and supported Paul and Barnabus to take the Gospel abroad founding new churches, just as the Antioch church had been established. The book of Acts, from this point forward, becomes a record of Paul’s witness “*to the ends of the earth*” as directed and empowered by Jesus in his words to his disciples in Acts 1:8.

² Apparently intending it in the higher senses of its current use, and at the same time suggesting its OT associations.—Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

³ Life Application Bible Commentary



Read Acts 13:1-52 and answer the following questions.

Our first verse mentions five leaders in the Antioch church, from their names and descriptions, what can be surmised about them?

- Barnabus (Acts 4:36)
- Simeon, called Niger
- Lucius of Cyrene
- Manaen, (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch)
- Saul

During a time of prayer and fasting what did the Holy Spirit make known?

Name the places Barnabus, Saul and John Mark traveled on their journey. Highlight this portion of their journey on your map.

The three first went to the island of Cyprus. In Salamis where did they first preach?

In Paphos, who sent for them and for what reason?

What did Paul, under the influence of the Holy Spirit prophesy⁴ to the sorcerer Elymas (aka, Bar-Jesus, v. 6)?

What is the significance of the blinding for Elymas? And for Sergius Paulus?

⁴ Prophecy means to speak on behalf of the Lord. The Holy Spirit spoke through Paul on this occasion.

What do Jeremiah 29:13 and Psalm 145:17- 20 tell us about God and those who seek him? How does this apply to Paulus?

The Antioch church was filled with members from diverse backgrounds as evidenced by the five leaders mentioned. Despite their diversity they worked as one through the power of the Holy Spirit. These men discerned through disciplined worship, prayer, and fasting that it was time for Barnabus and Saul to do the work they were called to do. Led by the Holy Spirit they departed for Cyprus, where Barnabus was originally from. Upon arriving in Salamis, the largest city in the eastern part of Cyprus and home to a large number of Jews, Barnabus and Saul proclaimed the Word in the synagogues (notice the plural, synagogues, not just one synagogue). Barnabus and Saul gave God's message of salvation through Jesus first to the Jews, but also to the God-fearing Gentiles attending the synagogues. These Jews and God-fearers would be a ripe harvest already knowing the Torah and anticipated Messiah

In Paphos, the Roman God-fearer Sergius Paulus earnestly sought to know more about God. He is described as intelligent and hearing that Barnabus and Saul were traveling in the area, sought them out. This man was also attended by a sorcerer by the name of Bar-Jesus, or Elymas. Bar-Jesus is a Hebrew name meaning "son of Jesus". But this man was no true son of God, as he opposed Paulus turning him from the faith. Saul, in a fierce reprimand, accused him as being not a son of God, but a "*child of the devil and an enemy of all that is right*" (literally, "righteous"). Instead of being filled with the Holy Spirit this man was "*full of... deceit and trickery*" (trickery translated from the Greek: *rhadiourgias*, meaning "unscrupulous mischief, work that easily deceives⁵, and villany"⁶). This man perverted the righteous ways of the Lord. He embraced sorcery, seeking the power of demons leading to all kinds of deception and distortions of the truth. No doubt he was also receiving financial compensation, and possibly power and prestige by his association with the Roman proconsul. In opposing Paulus from coming to faith, he was opposing God. Pretending and proclaiming to know truth, Saul announced the Lord's judgment and sentence against Elymas: blindness. Just as he had been blind to truth and righteousness, he would become physically blind, unable to see the "*light of the sun*" for a time. While Saul's own blindness resulted in repentance and acceptance of the truth, we are left to wonder at Elymas' fate. As no conversion of the sorcerer is mentioned, perhaps he never did accept the truth. The miraculous blinding of Elymas destroyed his power over Paulus, and for Paulus, confirmed the truth of what he was hearing about God. The power of God and the Holy Spirit is more powerful than the superstitions, trickery and even power of demons sought those who oppose God. We see God's judgment against those who oppose him and purposefully lead others astray, using magic and sorcery.

⁵ BKC

⁶ Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words


What we are left with in this narrative is the conversion of one prominent Roman official who sought to know God. Just as the Holy Spirit led Peter to the home of Cornelius, we see the Holy Spirit leading Barnabus and Saul to Paulus. God heard the earnest desire of this Roman to know more about Him and responded to it. God brought Saul and Barnabus to him to receive the truth and to remove the obstacle, Elymas, preventing him from coming to know God.

From Paphos, Barnabus and Saul (now going by the Greek name Paul) travel to Perga in Pamphylia, and then on to Pisidian Antioch. Not the same city as Antioch in Syria, Pisidian Antioch was a smaller city, with a large Jewish population. Who did Paul address in his speech at the synagogue? (v.16)

How were Paul and Barnabus first received by the Jews in this city? (v.42)

What was Paul and Barnabus reception on the following Sabbath? What was the response of some of the Jews? Why do you think they felt this way? (v. 45, 50)

When the Jews turned against them, to whom did Paul and Barnabus turn to share the Gospel? What was their response?

 Despite persecution in the region of Pisidia, what happened? What does this tell you about the presence of the Holy Spirit? (v. 49)

Paul, Barnabus and John Mark sail on to Perga in Pamphylia, no doubt following the lead of the Holy Spirit. From there Paul and Barnabus travel on to Pisidian Antioch; and scripture tells us John Mark returns to Jerusalem.⁷ On the Sabbath Barnabus and Paul attend synagogue and are invited to share a “*message of encouragement for the people*” (v.15). At first their message is met with great interest and enthusiasm, and they are invited to speak again the following Sabbath. In just one week, news of their message of forgiveness and the coming of the messiah spread throughout the region.

⁷ Scripture doesn't tell us why John Mark returns to Jerusalem at this time. Possible reasons being (1) this was the original plan; (2) he changed his mind about participating in this endeavor; (3) dispute with Paul over the apparent change in leadership – Barnabus appeared to be the leader in Cyprus, but then in Pamphylia Paul appears to take the lead; (3) he may not have been upto the rigors of travel after and illness – Galatians 4:13 alludes to the fact that all three may have been ill at this point; (4) dispute with Paul – Paul implicitly accused John Mark of lacking courage and commitment and refused to take him on a future journey (Acts 15:37-38) although this breach appears to be healed as he grew to respect John Mark (Colossians 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:11). -- LABC

When they came to speak at the synagogue the following week “almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the lord” (v.44). It is likely that as word spread of Paul and Barnabus’ speech the preceding week, the predominantly Gentile city came forth to hear this message, filling the Jewish synagogue with God-fearing gentiles. We are told the Jewish leaders saw the crowds and were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against Paul’s message. The Jewish leaders attacked Paul’s message on theological grounds “abusively”, translated from the Greek, *blasphēmeō*⁸, meaning reviling or railing at; speaking contemptuously of God or sacred things. We are told they speak this way because they are filled with jealousy: jealousy that Paul speaks so eloquently and knowledgeably of scripture, he intoxicates the crowds with his words and draws large numbers of people, persuading them that Jesus is the Messiah. We are told Paul and Barnabus responded boldly, a hallmark of the presence of the Holy Spirit upon the two disciples as they preached the truth -- a stark contrast with the Jewish leaders who are “filled with jealousy”, rather than with the Spirit. These Jews chose not to hear the truth sent by the Holy Spirit and failed in their assigned work to be “a light to the gentiles...bring[ing] salvation to the ends of the earth” (v.47). When they rejected the Gospel, it was time for Paul and Barnabus to bring it to the Gentiles themselves.

The Gentiles respond with gladness, honoring (literally, “glorifying”) the word of the Lord and came to faith in Jesus as their Savior. Those Gentiles who were “appointed for eternal life” (v.48) took an active role in believing Paul’s message, accepting the promise of forgiveness and committing themselves to Christ. Their active faith combined with the work of the Holy Spirit convicting them of their need for forgiveness and receiving God’s grace. The combination of their choosing to accept this truth in response to the movement of the Holy Spirit is what allows them to be *appointed* to eternal life. What the Jews had rejected was given to the Gentiles and they were “appointed” (Grk. *tetagmenoi*, a military word meaning “assigned or appointed”⁹) by God a place in his kingdom. This sets the pattern that Paul would follow through all of his missionary journeys: preach first to the Jews and God-fearers, and then to the Gentiles keen to hear and receive the truth.

Their mission in Pisidian Antioch was a mixture of success and opposition. Paul and Barnabus were forced to leave the region as the Jewish synagogue leaders incited some of the powerful figures of the city against them, “stirring up persecution against them” (v.49). Both the Greek historians Josephus and Strabo comment on the fact that many God-fearing women attended synagogue and even went so far as to become proselytes. The mentioned “leading men” of the city are not clearly identified, but evidently were powerful enough to force Paul and Barnabus to depart.¹⁰ The narrative does end on a positive note: “the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (v.52) leaving behind a remnant of Gentile converts.

⁸ Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

⁹ LABC

¹⁰ NAC

Paul and Barnabus Travel Through Galatia

Today we will finish Paul's First Missionary Journey as we follow him through Galatia. As you prepare to study our scripture passage today, pray the Lord will open your heart and mind to receive a fresh understanding of his ways and the movement of the Holy Spirit.



Read Acts 14:1-28 and answer the following questions.

Write down the places Paul and Barnabus traveled after departing Antioch in the region of Pisidia. Highlight this portion of their journey on your map.

What happened when Paul and Barnabus preached in Iconium?

How did the Lord confirm the message of grace presented by Paul and Barnabus?

How did the non-believing Jews and Gentiles respond?

What did the disciples do?

In Lystra, what did Paul do for the crippled man?

What had Paul know about the man as he looked directly at him?

What happened when the crowd saw Paul heal the crippled man?

How does Paul describe God's prior self-revelation to the people of Lystra?

Personal Reflection


Paul makes a similar case in Romans 1:20. According to these two passages, and Psalm 19:1-6, what is the response we can give when people question about those who have never heard of Jesus Christ and their eternal fate?

When Paul and Barnabus heal the crippled man in Lystra they are immediately taken for gods in human form, in particular Hermes and Zeus who were widely worshiped in Galatia. Their response to the Lycaonians attempt to worship them is the exact opposite of Herod's response in Acts 12:22-23 where Herod accepted such accolades. Paul and Barnabus respond in a thoroughly Jewish manner, tearing their clothing and denying the honor and praise. We see that Paul and Barnabus barely convince the crowd not to follow through with their planned sacrifices in their honor. It appears that Luke does not record the full speech made by Paul because he makes no explanation of salvation and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. But if we skip down to v. 20, there is a mention of disciples – plural, rendering aid to Paul. Luke may not have spent much time recording all the events of evangelizing to the people of Lystra, but evidently some time was spent among them.

Where did the Jews come from that incited the crowds to stone Paul?

What affect did Paul and Barnabus have in Derbe?

Why was it important for Paul and Barnabus to go back to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch?

 Why would God allow new believers and even those mature in faith like Paul and Barnabus to suffer persecution? What good comes from these trials?

Upon their arrival home, what did Paul and Barnabus do?

Verse 19 tells us, “[t]hen some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over.” The Jews who persecuted and drove Paul and Barnabus from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium have followed them to Lystra, travelling some 110 miles from Antioch! Their vehemence underscores their opposition to Paul and Barnabus’ ministry. Paul is stoned and dragged out of the city and left for dead. With care and compassion the newly discipled Christians in Lystra, gather around him and support and minister to his needs. The love of Christ clearly in their hearts as they do not shy away from Paul, attacked and stoned by a murderous crowd intent on killing him for his persistent evangelism. Paul and Barnabus depart for Derbe the next day.

The Lord is clearly with Paul and Barnabus as they determinedly pursue their ministry. We are told “[t]hey preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples” (v.21). Their hardships and resolve to proclaim the gospel are rewarded. They easily could have returned home from

Derbe to Syrian Antioch at the conclusion of their time there, it would have been a shorter route home, but devotion to their ministry and obedience to their call to carry the word to the Jews and Gentiles ready to receive it meant returning home the way they came. Undeterred by the persecution in Lystra and Iconium, Paul and Barnabus choose to return through those cities to encourage and strengthen the disciples there. These churches needed strengthening and encouragement; they saw firsthand what happened to Paul and Barnabus in their ministry. Obedience and commitment to faith in Christ brought about hardship and suffering for these early churches. They would be targeted by Jews for their faith in Jesus Christ. Before departing Paul and Barnabus established churches in those cities, appointing elders, *“and with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord.”* Not only was evangelism of importance, but so is establishing a spirit-led team of leaders who could help the young church grow. Only by the protection and grace of the Holy Spirit would these young churches not only survive, but also flourish.

Upon their return the home church in Syrian Antioch, Paul and Barnabus gave a report of *“all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”* (v.27). Evidently a report for the Jerusalem church was not immediately addressed. Paul and Barnabus remained in Antioch for a long time. Paul’s *Letter to the Galatians* was written to the converts won on this journey. It is believed he wrote the letter to the Galatians soon after this visit in 48-49 AD. In that letter he refuted the claim that non-Jewish Christians couldn’t be saved unless they followed all the Jewish laws and traditions. In his letter he defended the concept that salvation is through faith not human effort (Galatians 3:3-5). When word of the successful missionary journey did reach the Jerusalem Church, it sparked a debate of what was required of Gentile believers and the Jewish law, the subject of Acts 15.

Conflict in Antioch

Paul is barely settled back in Antioch when men from Judea come teaching in Antioch. The ideas the Judean believers are teaching bring conflict into the church in Antioch, comprised primarily of Greek believers. The conflict that begins here will lead to one of the most important conventions of believers in the early church, the Council of Jerusalem in 50AD. As you will discover as we study our passage today, this conflict resolved an issue that could have destroyed the early church. With wisdom, prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Peter and James divert a course that could have been catastrophic to the spread of the Gospel. Take a few minutes to present yourself before the throne of God and ask the Lord to bless you in his Word today.



Read Acts 15:1-35 and answer the following questions.

What were the men from Judea teaching that brought Paul and Barnabus into dispute and debate with them?


Precisely what is it these men are teaching regarding salvation?

"Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be _____."
(v.1)

Read Acts 14:3. According to Paul's previous teachings, and Luke's statement in Acts 14:3, salvation comes by what? The Gospel is a message of God's _____, and he even affirmed Paul's teachings with miraculous signs and wonders.

What do you think is the crux of the dispute between Paul and Barnabus and the teachers from Judea?

Look ahead to verse 24, what does the Jerusalem church reveal about these men from Judea?

 What steps did the church in Antioch and Jerusalem do to resolve this conflict?

1. V. 2b-3 _____

2. V. 4 _____

3. V 6-12 _____

4. V. 16-18 _____

5. V. 13-21 _____

6. V22 _____

What four laws did the Jerusalem church decide that Gentile converts must observe and abstain from?

Three of things they were to abstain from had to do with dietary issues: Food offered to idols, the meat of strangled animals and blood. What do you think is the purpose of refraining from these items? (See Leviticus 17:10-14)

Why do you think it was necessary for James to insist on abstaining from sexual immorality? Obviously, it is condemned by the Jews as immoral and therefore would also have been condemned by the Christians, as well. (See Exodus 20:14, 17; 22:19; Leviticus 18:6-20)

What significant Jewish Rite was not required? (Hint: it is not overtly mentioned, but see Romans 2:25-29.) Why do you think this was not required by the Jerusalem Council?

How and by who was the Council's decision communicated to the Antioch church?

Paul would write to the Ephesian church: *“For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8-9). The key to salvation is faith in Christ's saving grace and work on the cross. Any attempt of man's work to earn salvation by his own efforts will fall short. God affirmed this truth through the signs and wonders as mentioned in Acts 14:3. The miraculous speaking in tongues at Pentecost for the Jews (Acts 2) and more to the point, as evidenced in the Gentile Pentecost of Acts 10, the gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift of God's grace, not man's achievement.

The men from Judea came preaching a different gospel with no authority from the Jerusalem church (v.24). Their doctrine was firmly grounded in Judaism. They claimed to be believers, but their

message taught that faith in Christ's work was not sufficient. They were teaching a false doctrine not endorsed by the church. The faction of the Judaizers was likely scandalized by the idea that Gentile believers could enter into fellowship with Jews. Their idea of table fellowship was abhorrent to them if it meant socializing with "unclean" Gentiles. They believed that the Gentiles were not acceptable to God (and therefore the Jewish community) until they fully converted to Judaism through the Jewish proselyte initiation process. Their perception of the necessity of becoming a Jew first, before entering into table fellowship with Jewish believers, was a natural progression of faith from their standpoint. After all, the first believers were Jewish, Jesus was Jewish, and the faith grew out of Judaism. What they could not accept or comprehend was that God did not put the legalistic burden of the law on the Gentiles. Remember, most of the legalistic constructs of the Pharisees of the day was a system they created themselves. The burden was not placed on the Jews by God, but by zealous Pharisees. The required rite of circumcision for Jews, although directed by God (Gen 17), would not be required of Gentiles. This rite was a major stumbling block for Gentile believers and its requirement would likely have greatly inhibited the number of converts. Paul would address this topic more directly in his letter to the Romans.¹¹

Peter supports Paul's view in verses 6-11 stating, *"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 made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith"* (v.8-9). The scriptures provide no evidence that Peter ever required Cornelius and his household (Acts 10); or the Antioch church to submit to the Jewish proselyte practice. As we will see in Paul's future journeys and missionary work he doesn't require this process of new Gentile believers, either. This departure from the proselyte procedure becomes a cause for concern and a divisive issue for the more traditional Jewish Christians. They face a dilemma in fellowshiping with the Gentile Christians and thereby becoming defiled themselves through contact with fellow believers.

The Jerusalem Council settles this dispute by requiring new converts to adhere to only four basic restrictions: *"to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood"* (v. 20). Three restrictions have to do with consuming food. The first restriction is self-evident: *"food polluted by idols"* was food used in idol worship. Theoretically, if one was consuming such food, one was participating in idolatry. Meat from strangled animals had to do with food preparation. The Lord clearly delineates the proper method of preparing meat for consumption. It must be drained of its blood (Leviticus 17:13). Blood is the life force of the animal, it is symbolic of life. The Lord places a claim on an animal's blood for himself. That life force is sacred to him alone, and he allows for an animal's life to be poured out in atonement for sin. Pagan idol worship also included consuming blood. For example the blood of a bull was believed to give you the strength of a bull. Consuming blood was at the very least in defiance of God's law and at worst it was an abominable act of idol worship. The fourth restriction, abstaining from sexual immorality, has its roots in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14, 17) and the Laws of Moses (Exodus 22:19). Sexual immorality not only had to do with the Lord's prescription for healthy relationships, but also with idolatry. Idol worship focused around sexual relations of all types- with prostitutes (male and female), as well as animals. Antioch and many of the Gentile cities were known for the sexual immorality and

¹¹ Romans 2:25-29

morality standards in those centers would have been very different compared to Jewish standards. These four restrictions point to the heart of man's relationship with God as established in the Mosaic Covenant and rooted in the most basic of tenants of Judaism. James' concluding his statement, "*For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath*" (v.21) is a reminder that the Books of Moses had been taught since the beginning, and that these four restrictions were grounded in that teaching. The four restrictions set forth by the Jerusalem Council were not adding anything new to the teachings of Moses or the teachings of the Church. They were at the heart of the faith and should not come as a surprise to anyone. They were essential to maintaining the covenant relationship between man and God.

Our passage concludes with Judas and Silas strengthening and encouraging the church in Antioch with the letter from the church in Jerusalem outlining their verdict and providing sound teaching of the Word of the Lord. These final verses are in direct opposition to our opening verses where the teachings of the un-authorized Judean men brought discord and dissension to the church in Antioch. Silas and Judas bring healing, encouragement, strengthening and peace.

Personal Reflection

Throughout our study this week we saw a contrast between those filled with jealousy (Jewish synagogue leaders and Judaizers) or deceit (Elymas) versus the disciples filled with the Holy Spirit. As you reflect back on our reading this week, consider the "fruits" born of those filled with the Spirit and those filled (or more accurately, consumed by) things other than the Holy Spirit. How does scripture describe what is created by these influences?

What are you filled with? What do you leave in the wake of your words and actions?