

# NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

## Lesson 27

### Acts — Part 5

#### Paul's First Missionary Journey and the Apostolic Decree

#### Chapters 12:25 - 16:5

## I. BACKGROUND

Luke's second book sets out the start of the church with the promised Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The Church has spread throughout Judea, Samaria, and even into Antioch. The faithful have come from the Jews until Acts chapter 10. There, the Gentile Centurion Cornelius and his household believed in Christ and were baptized in his name. The first Gentile conversion came through Peter. It was in Caesarea by the sea. Peter returned to Jerusalem and told the church what had happened. At first, the church was concerned that Peter had gone into the home of a gentile and eaten. However, when the church heard how God was at work, they rejoiced.

Subsequently, Paul rejoined the narrative when Barnabas sought his help in Antioch teaching with the church there. Paul and Saul brought famine relief to Jerusalem from Antioch and it is there where we pick up this week's narrative.

## II. TIMELINE

A reasonable timetable of key New Testament events relevant to Acts<sup>1</sup> is:

Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost	April-May 30
Conversion of Saul of Tarsus	c. 33
Paul's first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem	c. 35
Death of James, son of Zebedee; imprisonment and escape of Peter; death of Herod Agrippa I	Spring 44
Famine in Judea; Paul and Barnabas sent with relief from Antioch	c. 46

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WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY COVERED ACTS 1:1 THROUGH ACTS 12:24 IN CLASS. THAT BRINGS US TO THIS POINT IN THE TIMELINE. THE EVENTS COVERED TODAY RANGE FROM THE SPRING OF 44 WHEN HEROD AGRIPPA DIES TO ABOUT 49 A.D. WHEN THE APOSTOLIC COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM OCCURS.

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<sup>1</sup> The timeline is derived with modification from that given by F.F. Bruce in his commentary, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 1951.

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First Missionary Journey (Paul and Barnabas to Cyprus and Asia Minor)	47-48
Paul writes Galatians	c. 48
Apostolic Council at Jerusalem	c. 49
Second Missionary Journey (Lystra, Derbe, Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth)	c. 49-50
Paul writes Thessalonian Epistles	late 50
Paul in Corinth	Fall 50-Spring 52
Galiio becomes proconsul of Achaia	July 51
Paul's hasty visit to Palestine	Spring-Summer 52
Paul at Ephesus	Fall 52-Summer 55
Paul writes First Corinthians	Spring 54
Paul's sorrowful visit to Corinth	Spring or Fall 54
Murder of Silanus, proconsul of Asia	late 54
Paul writes Philippians	late 54 or early 55
Paul sends Titus to Corinth and Timothy to Macedonia	early 55
Paul in Troas	Fall 55
Paul in Macedonia and Illyricum	Winter 55-Fall 56
Paul writes Second Corinthians	56
Paul in Corinth	Winter 56-57
Paul writes Romans	Early 57
Paul's arrival and arrest in Jerusalem	May 57
Paul detained at Caesarea	57-59
Paul sails for Rome	Sept.-Oct. 59
Paul in Malta	Winter 59-60
Paul arrives in Rome	February 60
Paul writes Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians	c. 60-61
Death of James the Just in Jerusalem	61
End of Paul's Roman detention	Late 61 or early 62
Destruction of Jerusalem	70

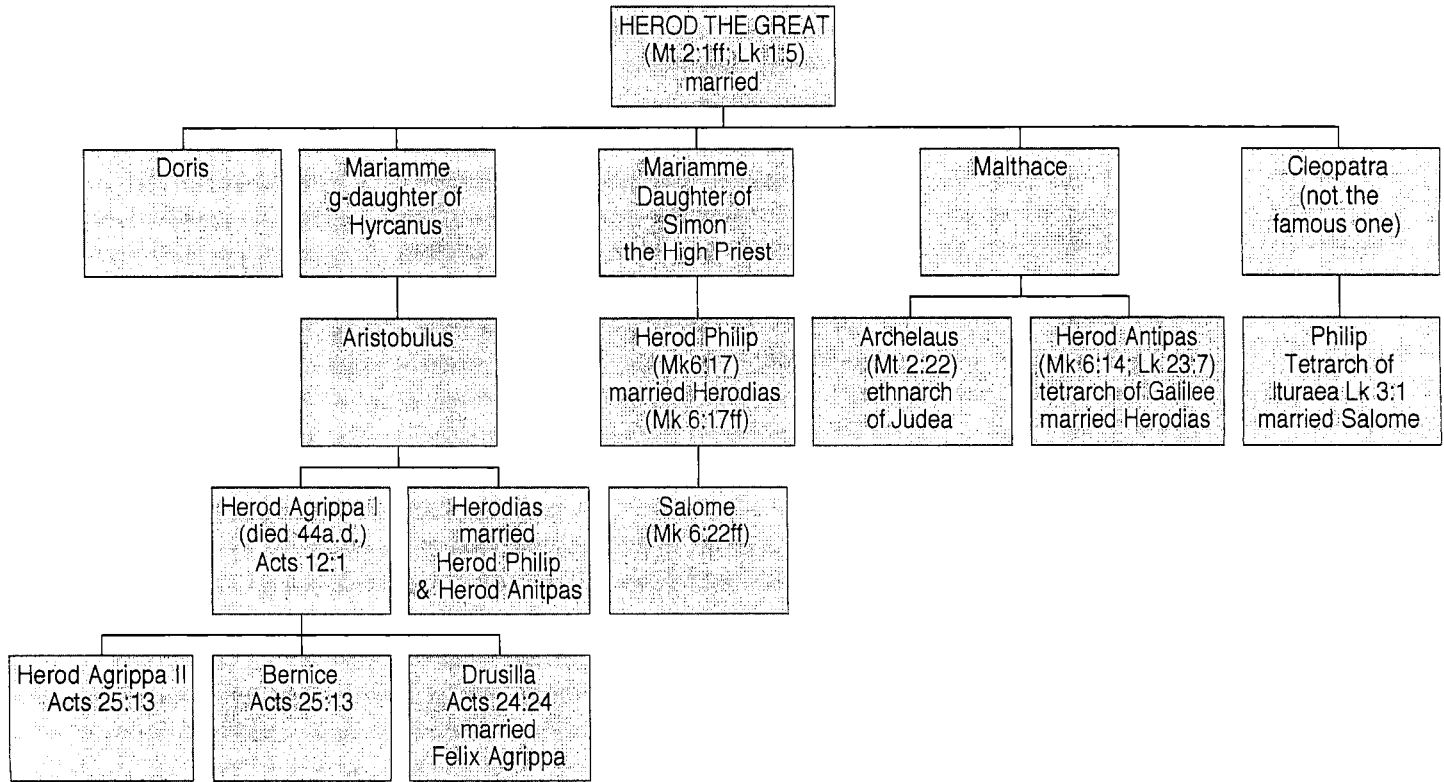
As we look at the five year stretch over Luke 12:25-16:5, we cover the time period where the strong indications are that Paul wrote his letter to the church in Galatia (around 48).

### III. THE TEXT

Acts 12:25 set the stage for the missionary Journey. Paul and Barnabas have finished in Jerusalem, and they set out to return to Antioch taking John Mark with them. Most likely, this is the same Mark mentioned in Colossians 4:10, which would make him Barnabas's cousin.

The Christians at Antioch included prophets and teachers. Luke names several including "Manaen" (who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch). This addition is an interesting one on Luke's part. The Greek

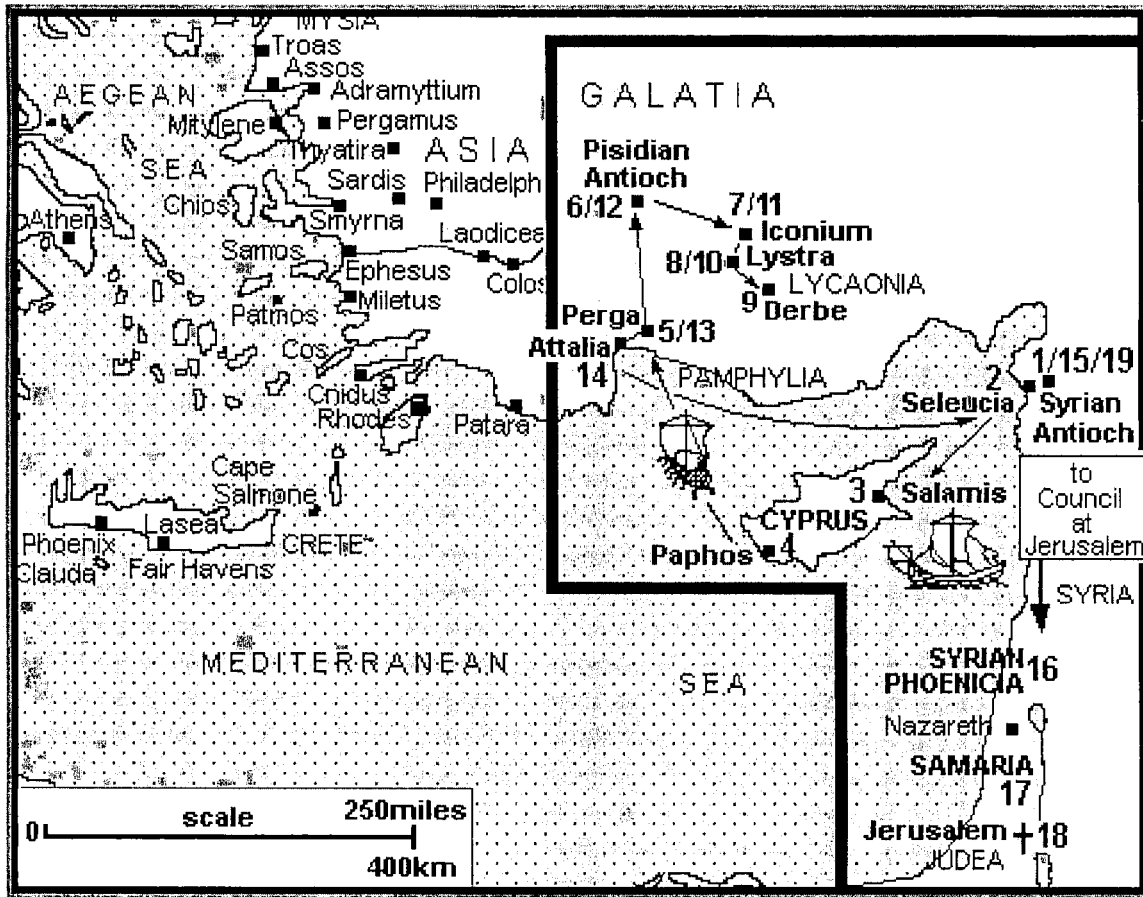
for "brought up with" is *xxxx suntuophos*. This title was given to boys who were the same age as princes and were brought up in the court with the princes. With the help of Josephus, we can give a good family tree of the various "Herods" we read about in the New Testament.



Herod the Tetrarch was Herod Antipas, the youngest son of Herod the Great, who had ruled Galilee from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D. God's kingdom and grace are delineated in the difference between these two boys brought up as companions and friends. Herod Antipas goes on to behead John the Baptist and participate in the killing of Jesus, while Manaen becomes a Christian leader in the Antiochan church whose name is set out for the ages in Acts.

The Holy Spirit leads the church at Antioch to send Barnabas and Saul to do mission work abroad. The two of them went to the harbor at Seleucia and sailed to the island of Cyprus.

The map below gives us orientation to this journey:



From Syrian Antioch to the Mediterranean seaport of Seleucia, Paul and Barnabas sailed to the Cyprian town of Salamis. They took John Mark with them as a "helper" (13:5). The N.I.V. loses some of the import of Mark's role by translating him as a "helper." The word Luke uses is xxxx (*huperetes*) which means "attendant" or "minister." Luke used the same word in Luke 1:2 speaking of the things that were "handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word." Mark should probably be included as one of the eyewitnesses who were a servant of the word. A number of scholars believe that Mark was taken along to provide eyewitness accounts of a portion of the life of Christ.

In Salamis, Paul, Barnabas, and Mark went to the Jewish synagogues proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ. They went across the island teaching to the port town of Paphos. While at Paphos, the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus, sent for Paul and Barnabas to hear the word of the Lord. Sergius had a Jewish sorcerer named Bar-Jesus (Aramaic for "son of Joshua") also called "Elymas."

Elymas attempted to poison any real listening that the proconsul might offer to the gospel. For this action, Paul rebuked him sternly. Paul looked at him and declared, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of

everything that is right!" (13:10) Paul then declares Elymas blind by the hand of God, and immediately blindness settled on Elymas as a mist. Seeing this occurrence, the proconsul believed with amazement at the teaching about the Lord.

The missionaries sailed from Paphos to Perga, in modern day Turkey. In Perga, Mark left to return to Jerusalem. From Perga, they went inland to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath, they went into the synagogue and read from the Old Testament. The synagogue rulers invited them to speak. Paul stood and spoke to the Jews and Greek who were attending as "God fearers." Paul started with the Egyptian bondage and walked through Jewish interaction with God, emphasizing the rule of King David as a man after God's heart. Paul then spoke of John the Baptist and the one whose sandal John was not worthy to tie. In speaking then of Jesus, Paul explained that the Jerusalem rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in "condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophet that are read every Sabbath" (13:27). Paul then explained the crucifixion and resurrection with multiple quotations from the Old Testament (Psalms, Isaiah, and Habakkuk).

The listeners were fascinated with what they heard and asked Paul and Barnabas to stay and speak again the next week. A number also went with Paul and Barnabas after the service to discuss things with them more. The next week, a good bit of the town showed up to hear them. The Gentiles' great interest made a number of the Jews jealous. The Jews talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Paul and Barnabas answered those Jews forcefully saying, "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" (13:46). Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6 as his reference that God "made you [Jesus first and foremost, but in this sense also Paul] a light to the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

The Gentiles were excited to hear this news. They listened to Paul and Barnabas and "all who were appointed for eternal life believed" (13:48).

Luke tells us that the message spread throughout the region, but the Jews incited a number of men and women of high standing to expel Paul and Barnabas from the region. As they were leaving, Paul and Barnabas "shook the dust from their feet in protest" (13:51) and went to Iconium. Luke lets us know that the believers were not left alone. Rather, they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

In Iconium, as was their habit, Paul and Barnabas went first to the synagogue. They spoke effectively there and a great number of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles believed. God worked a number of miracles there in

confirmation of the message being preached. While a number of Jews and Gentiles believed, there were also a number who did not. A plot to stone Paul and Barnabas developed and, hearing of it, Paul and Barnabas left for the nearby towns of Lystra and Derbe.

In Lystra, Paul saw a man lame from birth who was crippled in his feet. Paul saw the man's faith and ordered him to stand up and walk. The man did so, stunning the crowd. The crowd thought Paul and Barnabas were part of the Greek pantheon of Gods. Barnabas, they figured, was Zeus. Paul, because he did all the talking, they figured was Hermes. The priest of Zeus even brought animal sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas.

Paul and Barnabas tore their own clothes and explained to the crowd that they were not gods, but just ordinary men. Paul and Barnabas were bringing a message to the crowd to believe in the one true God who in fact was worthy of worship. Paul explained that this God had let nations go their own way in the past, but not without the kindnesses of rain, food, and joy. The people still wanted to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas until some Jews came from Iconium and "won the crowd over" (14:19). Paul was stoned and dragged outside of town believed dead. Paul eventually got up, went back into town, and stayed the night. The next day, Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe.

In Derbe, a great number of people believed. Paul and Barnabas left from there returning to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. In each place, Paul and Barnabas strengthened the disciples, appointed elders for the churches, and committed them to God with prayer and fasting.

Paul and Barnabas then preached in Perga and the coastal town of Attalia before sailing back to Syrian Antioch. Upon arrival in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas gave a full update and report of all God had done.

These churches where the missionary journey took place are part of a region called Galatia. These people were "Galatians." There is considerable discussion among scholars about when Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians. I share the view of those who place the epistle before the conference detailed in Acts 15. That means that Paul would have written the Epistle in this time range, shortly after completing his trips through the towns.

Rather than continue much further in Acts, we are going to set up the information attendant to writing Galatians at this time and then spend a few weeks looking at the epistle itself. We will then return to the Acts narrative.

Acts 15 sets out the roots of the issue that prompted both the Jerusalem Conference and a good bit of the information in Galatians. Some Jewish Christians had come from Jerusalem to Antioch to teach the Gentile converts that "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (15:1). This brought Paul and Barnabas in sharp disagreement and debate on the issue. Ultimately, Paul, Barnabas, and others went to Jerusalem to confer with the church on the issue. The core issue was one of faith or works. Ultimately, the issue boiled down into whether salvation came to those who both converted to Judaism and its legal requirements followed by an acceptance of Jesus, or whether acceptance of Jesus alone, without the Jewish conversion, was enough. The arguers for Jewish conversion held forth on several issues beyond the circumcision itself. They argued Jewish dietary laws and other legal requirements should be imposed on the Gentile converts.

The debate ensues with the church as the various positions are set out. Ultimately, Peter stands and states profoundly that God knows the hearts of people, God set out the conversion of the Gentiles, and why should the church try to burden the Gentiles with a law that none of the Jews were able to keep themselves. "Why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?

No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are" (15:11).

The church makes the ultimate decision that the Gentiles did not have to become Jews to become Christians. The church did write the distant churches a letter urging them to abstain from meat polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, and from strangled animals and blood.

Paul and others headed back to Antioch where they delivered the letter. It brought joy to the people, and some of the Jerusalem entourage taught and strengthened the church with more words of encouragement.

Some time later, Paul wanted Barnabas to go back and visit the churches they started on the first missionary journey. Barnabas wanted to bring his cousin John Mark along. Paul strongly disagreed based on Mark leaving them at Perga the prior time. Ultimately, Paul and Barnabas split, with Barnabas and Mark going to Cyprus, and Paul taking Silas and going up through Syria and Cilicia.

When Paul reaches Derbe and Lystra, he met a disciple named Timothy (his mother was a Jewish Christian and his father was a Greek.) Paul took Timothy with him, but not until after circumcising him to stop Jewish interference at Timothy's attending with Paul.

#### **IV. GALATIANS**

Paul will explain the interrelation between the law and grace in this outstanding book. We will explore the history Paul unfolds early in the book on the church's controversies regarding these issues. We will then look at Paul's explanations and teachings before returning to the Acts narrative.

#### **V. POINTS FOR HOME**

1. God is in Control.
2. Mission Work is God's Work.
3. There is Room for Disagreement.
4. There is a place for Resolution.
5. Even God let's us use our Minds!
6. Jesus Alone.
7. Watch for Great Surprises.