

5 Acts Lesson 5 Chapters 12-13-14.

12:1. This Herod is the third prince of that name to appear in the New Testament. He was a grandson of Herod the Great, who built the new temple of Jerusalem and was responsible for the massacre of the Holy Innocents (cf. Mt 2:16); he was also a nephew of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee at the time of our Lord's death. Herod Agrippa 1st was a favorite of the emperor Caligula, who gradually gave him more territory and allowed him to use the title of king. Agrippa I managed to extend his authority over all the territory his grandfather had ruled: Roman governors had ruled Judea up to the year 41, but in that year it was given over to Herod.¹

12:7–10. The angel of the Lord stood by him. This extraordinary event, which must be understood exactly as it is described, shows the loving care God takes of those whom he entrusts with a mission. They must strive to fulfil it, but they will “see” for themselves that he guides their steps and watches over them.

12:12. He went to the house. John Mark was Barnabas' cousin (cf. Col 4:10). He will accompany Barnabas and Paul on the first missionary journey (cf. 13:5) up to when they enter the province of Asia (cf. 13:13). Despite Paul's not wanting to have him on the second journey (cf. 15:37–39), we find him later again as a co-worker of the Apostle (cf. Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11) and also as a disciple and helper of Simon Peter (1 Pet 5:13). Church tradition credits him with the authorship of the Second Gospel.

12:15. It is his angel. The first Christians had a very lively faith in the guardian angels and their God-given role of assisting men. In the Old Testament God reveals the existence of angels; on various occasions we see

¹ *The Acts of the Apostles*. (2005). (pp. 98–115). Navarre Bible Dublin; Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.

them playing an active part (cf., for example, Gen 48:16; Tob 5:21; etc.). In the apocryphal books of the Old Testament and in writings composed between the two Testaments (which flourished around the time of Christ's life on earth) there are many references to angels. Our Lord spoke about them often, as we can see from the Gospels.

“In many parts of Sacred Scripture it is said that each of us has an angel. Our Lord affirms this when he speaks about children: ‘in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father’ (Mt 18:10). And Jacob refers to the angel ‘who freed him from all evil’. On this occasion the disciples thought that the angel of the apostle Peter was approaching” (St Bede, *Super Act. expositio*, ad locum).

12:17. Report this to James. Not James the son of Zebedee, who had been martyred (12:2), but James the relative of Jesus who became the second leader of the Jerusalem church². According to Flavius Josephus, this James was stoned to death by order of the Sanhedrin (*Jewish Antiquities*, 20, 200).

13:1. Now there were in the Church at Antioch. This new church at Antioch in Syria, north of Judea, has among its leadership prophets and teachers, two of the ecclesial ministries often listed by Paul. When speaking of the Jerusalem church, Luke mentions offices such as apostles, presbyters, and the Seven (probably deacons, see 6:3); but in describing church leadership in Antioch, he focuses more on ministries that arise from charisms: prophecy and teaching. (Ibid. pp. 201-203)

An interesting point is that teachers did not necessarily have to be priests or preachers. The *Letter to Diognetus* describes the ideal Christian teacher: “I do not speak of passing things nor do I go in search of new things, but, like the disciple of the apostles that I am, I become a teacher of peoples. I do nothing

² Kurz, W. S. (2013). [*Acts of the Apostles*](#) (P. S. Williamson & M. Healy, Eds.; p. 197). Baker Academic.

but hand on what was given me by those who made themselves worthy disciples of the truth” (11, 1). (**Ibid.** Navarre pp.102-103)

13:2. While they were worshiping. The leaders’ zeal to be under the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit is shown in their **worshiping the Lord and fasting**. The Greek verb for worship, *leitourgeō* (from which “liturgy” is derived), is often used in the Septuagint for priestly ministry in the temple (see Exodus 28:35; 1 Sam 2:11) and may imply liturgical celebration, including the Eucharist. As they worship, **the holy Spirit** gives the leaders a prophetic directive: **“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul.”** Though the nature of **the work to which** the Spirit has **called them** is not explained here, the story that follows makes clear that it is an evangelizing mission.

13:4–14:28. Sent forth by the Holy Spirit. This first missionary journey took Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, to Cyprus and central Galatia, in Asia Minor. He left Antioch in the spring of 45 and returned almost four years later, after preaching Christ to both Jews and Gentiles wherever he went. St Luke’s account, which covers chapters 13 and 14, is sketchy but accurate

13:9. Saul also known as Paul. Luke uses the name “Paul” instead of “Saul” for the first time in verse 9, making the transition by simply writing **Saul, also known as Paul**. The most common explanation for the two names is that Saul is his Jewish name (after King Saul, the first Israelite king); Paul (meaning “little”) is his Roman name. (**Ibid.** p. 207) He did not do this at God’s bidding, as in the case of Abraham (cf. Gen 17:5) or that of Peter (cf. Mt 16:18), to show that God had given him a new charge or mission. He was simply following the eastern custom of using a Roman name when it suited. Paul is the Roman name for Saul, and from now on he uses it instead of Saul.

13:11. You will be blind. Paul’s punishment of Bar-Jesus, Elymas, is one of the few punitive miracles in the New Testament; in fact his purpose is not so much to punish the false prophet as to convert him. “Paul chooses to convert

him by means of a miracle similar to that by which he himself was converted. The words ‘for a time’ is not the word of one who punishes but of one who converts. If it had been the word of one who punishes it would have left him blind for ever. He punishes him only for a time, and also to win over the proconsul” (St John Chrysostom, *Hom. on Acts*, 28).

13:29–31. But God raised him from the dead. The empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Jesus to his disciples are the basis of the Church’s testimony to the resurrection of the Lord, and they demonstrate that he did truly rise. Jesus predicted that he would rise on the third day after his death (cf. Mt 12:40; 16:21; 17:22; Jn 2:19). Faith in the Resurrection is supported by the fact of the empty tomb (because it was impossible for our Lord’s body to have been stolen) and by his many appearances, during which he conversed with his disciples, allowed them to touch him, and ate with them (cf. Mt 28; Mk 16; Lk 24; Jn 20–21).

13:31. For many days he appeared. The original group of Galilean disciples are Jesus’ witnesses before the people because they can vouch for the continuity between what he did and taught during his public ministry and what his followers have been saying about him since his resurrection. In the Church’s teaching to this day, belief in what Jesus did and said, and in his resurrection from the dead, depends on the testimony especially of the twelve apostles.

13:32–33. We ourselves are proclaiming. Paul includes himself among a second group of witnesses who are extending the testimony to Jesus throughout the world. We ourselves, in continuity with Jesus’ early Galilean followers, are proclaiming this good news to you, the listeners in Antioch of Pisidia. This good news is that what God promised our ancestors, literally, “fathers,” he has accomplished for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. Jesus’ resurrection fulfilled the promise to David mentioned in verse 23 above, that God would raise up a savior for Israel from David’s descendants.

Because the risen Jesus is an eternally living son of David whose reign will never end, he unconditionally fulfills the promise that David's throne will stand forever (2 Sam 7:13). Jesus' resurrection is the center and key to God's plan of salvation.

Jesus' resurrection also fulfills God's oracle in the second psalm, "You are my son; this day I have begotten you." That psalm originally referred to the new king in the lineage of David who was declared God's adopted son at the moment of his enthronement. Now this royal psalm is fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah, risen and enthroned in heaven so as to share God's dominion over the whole world. Psalm 2 is a reminder that Jesus' unending reign makes salvation available to all people in all times.

13:34–35. I shall give you. Paul alludes to God's promise to his people through Isaiah—"I shall give you the benefits assured to David" (Isa 55:3)—and connects it with David's expression of trust in Ps 16:10 (in its Greek translation): "You will not suffer your holy one to see corruption." This implies that Ps 16 is in some way a promise not only for David but also for all God's people.

13:36–37. Now David after he had served. David served the will of God in his lifetime, literally, "in his own generation," but he did see corruption: he died and remains dead. Therefore Ps 16 must be a prophecy that looks beyond David to his descendant, Jesus, who did not see corruption because God raised him up. Jesus "served the will of God" in a preeminent way. Now, risen and eternally living, Jesus is able to serve the will of God by saving and ruling not only his own generation but also all people until the end of time. Peter's Pentecost speech made a similar argument based on Ps 16. (**See Handout on the Davidic Covenant**)

13:38–40. You must know. God's promise to David is fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins that is now available through him. That forgiveness of sins is made possible by Jesus' death and

resurrection is at the heart of the preaching of the gospel, as in Peter's speech in Acts 5:30–31: God raised Jesus and exalted him “at his right hand as leader and savior to grant Israel repentance and forgiveness of sins.”

Whereas Paul's Letters often speak of “justification,” Luke usually prefers to speak of “forgiveness of sins,” often related to repentance. What observance of the law could not accomplish, Christ accomplished: in him every believer is justified, that is, brought into right relationship with God. (*Ibid.* Kurz pp. 214-217)

13:46-47. Both Paul and Barnabas. Even if Israel had been faithful to God's promises, it would still have been necessary to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. The evangelization of the pagan world is not a consequence of Jewish rejection of the Word; it is required by the universal character of Christianity. To all men Christianity is the only channel of saving grace; it perfects the Law of Moses and reaches out beyond the ethnic and geographical frontiers of Judaism.

Paul and Barnabas quote Isaiah 49:6 in support of their decision to preach to the Gentiles. The text referred to Christ, as Luke 2:32 confirms. But now Paul and Barnabas apply it to themselves because the Messiah is “light for the Gentiles” through the preaching of the apostles, for they are conscious of speaking in Christ's name and on his authority. Therefore, probably here “the Lord” refers not to God the Father but to Christ.

13:51. They shook the dust from their feet. A traditional expression; the Jews regarded as unclean the dust of anywhere other than the holy land of Palestine. Our Lord extended the meaning of the phrase when he told the disciples he was sending them out to preach, “If anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet” (Mt 10:14; cf. Lk 9:5). This gesture of Paul and Barnabas echoes what Jesus said and amounted to “closing the case” or putting on record the unbelief of the Jews

14:4 He who is not with me is against me. As is often the result of Christian witness in Acts, **people of the city** of Iconium are **divided** between those who side with **Jews** who opposed them and **others** (both Jews and Gentiles) who accept the message of **the apostles**. This is the first time Luke refers to Paul and Barnabas—or anyone other than the Twelve—as apostles, “those who are sent” (see also v. 14). Luke usually equates “apostles” with the original Twelve (Luke 6:13). But like the Twelve, Paul and Barnabas have been sent by the risen Lord. (*Ibid.* Kurz p. 223)

14:8–10. There was a lame man sitting. “Just as the lame man whom Peter and John cured at the gate of the temple prefigured the salvation of the Jews, so too this cripple represents the Gentile peoples distanced from the religion of the Law and the temple, but now brought in through the preaching of the apostle Paul” (St Bede, *Super Act. expositio*, ad loc.)

14:16 In past generations. A common theme in Luke-Acts is that God’s saving plan allows for a time of divine tolerance of religious errors. For example, Jesus prayed on the cross, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Paul makes a similar reference to an earlier time of divine forbearance of ignorance, this time for non-Jews: “In past generations he allowed all Gentiles to go their own ways.” This implies that in the present generation, now that the good news of Christ is being announced, God is changing how he relates to the Gentile world. Paul will say more about this in his next speech to Gentiles, at Athens (Acts 17:30–31). (*Ibid.* pp 227-228)

14:20–22. He got up and entered the city. St Paul is not cowed by persecution and physical suffering. He knows that this crisis is the prelude to abundant spiritual fruit, and in fact many people in this region do embrace the Gospel.

Even though St Luke records the progress and success of the word of God, he also shows that its preachers certainly encounter the cross (cf. 13:14, 50).

The Gospel meets with acceptance everywhere—and also with opposition. “Where there are many laurels”, St Ambrose says, “there is fierce combat. It is good for you to have persecutors: that way you attain more rapid success in your enterprises” (*Expositio in Ps 118*, 20, 43). The apostles have no difficulty in pointing to events to show the disciples that suffering and difficulties form part of Christian living.

14:23. They appointed presbyters. Providing permanent local leadership to guide the new churches after the founders moved on was essential to Paul’s missionary task. Thus he and Barnabas appointed presbyters for them in each church. The word presbyter means “elder,” which implies that new church leaders were chosen from among the more mature and reliable converts, as later recommended in 1 Tim 3:1–9 and Titus 1:5–9. At the beginning these leaders were likely found among Jewish believers, whose knowledge of Scripture and adherence to biblical morality would have been a major advantage.

Paul and Barnabas seek the Spirit’s guidance in commissioning the new leaders through prayer and fasting, following the example of Jesus, who fasted before he began his ministry and prayed before choosing his apostles (see Luke 4:2; 6:12). (**Ibid.** Kurz p. 230)

14:24–26. Paul and Barnabas return to Syrian Antioch, taking in the cities they have visited—in reverse order: Derbe, Lystra, Icononium, Pisidian Antioch and Perga. At the port of Attalia they take a ship for Syria and arrive shortly afterwards in Antioch. Their journey, which began around the year 45, has taken four years.

Despite the animosity and persecution they experienced in these cities, the two missionaries do not avoid returning. They want to complete arrangements for the government of the new churches and to consolidate the faith of the disciples. The possible risks involved do not cause them any concern. (**Ibid.** Navarre pp. 113-115)