

Reading Schedule for April 23-29, 2018

I think the key is found in chapter 13 as the church decided to send Paul and Barnabas on a missionary adventure for the sake of the Gospel. Previously, the church had been scattered and the Gospel spread beyond Jerusalem. But it would take intentionality to reach the ends of the earth with the message of Jesus Christ. Paul and Barnabas are the beginning of a missionary movement that still exists today.

April 23 - Acts 11:1-18: "So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" (v.17) Peter used the same word as presented when Cornelius was converted in Acts 10:47. In Acts 8:36, the same words were used of the Ethiopian eunuch at the time of his conversion. God was on the move and no man should stand in the way of the conversion of the Gentiles. I remember reading a book on missions that was entitled, "Ride the Wave." God has always been about expanding his church to the ends of the earth. No one should try to prevent it or stand in the way of God's inclusive heart to reach every tribe, tongue or nation. There was a church in Jerusalem, and they rejoiced that the Gentiles had put their faith in Jesus Christ and were given the life of the Spirit. How do you respond to the inclusive message of the Gospel?

April 24 - Acts 11:19-30: ". . . and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." (v.26) Some have suggested that the title of being a Christian has lost its meaning. However, the description is still very real and means to be like Christ. Most likely, followers of Christ were given this name by the unbelieving public in Antioch. It reminds me of Acts 4:13, which says that Peter and John were recognized as having been with Jesus. There is no doubt that the affection for Christ among the believers was their greatest distinction. To be Christ-like is the greatest accolade we can receive. As the saying goes, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to prove that it was so?" How are you growing in Christ-likeness?

April 25 - Acts 12:1-25: "When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, 'Peter is at the door!'" (v.14) Rhoda is remembered for her blunder, and gives the story a touch of humor in light of the intensity of Peter's imprisonment. Even the believers did not expect Peter to be standing at the door where they were staying. There is always a question about why James was killed and Peter was released. I do not know the answer to that question. There will always be aspects of life that you do not know the answer. They will only be revealed in heaven. The Lord took James home, and yet he rescued Peter so that he could continue to have an impact for the Gospel. The fact is that Peter's life was in the hands in the Lord, and God was not through with him yet. When your time is up as your days are numbered, the Lord will take you home. Until then, he has a purpose for you. How would you describe your God-given purpose?

April 26 - Acts 13:1-12: "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" (v.2) This is the verse that I referred to in the introduction. The proclamation of the Gospel had already begun among the Gentiles with fruitfulness. Now the Spirit led the church to send Paul and Barnabas on a wider mission, even beyond the borders of Syria. Acts 1:8 is being accomplished by the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. There is a lesson about missions here, but there is also a lesson about listening to God. While they were worshipping, praying and fasting the Holy Spirit spoke to them. You all know this is the importance of the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of Paul and Barnabas as they launch out

as two missionaries for the cause of Christ. They are sent by the Holy Spirit, they are filled with the Holy Spirit, and they are led by the Holy Spirit. I want the same for you. We are on a mission for Christ, and the Holy Spirit's ministry in our lives is essential to being fruitful. How are you challenged by the call of missions?

April 27 - Acts 13:13-52: "Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: 'Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!'" (v.16) I want you to notice that Paul's sermon begins with Old Testament history, preparing them to hear about the mission of Jesus Christ, as well as an invitation to believe. Paul uses the word "justified," which we know means to be declared innocent or right in God's sight. Jews sought to deal with their sin through living by the law of Moses. But the law cannot free a person from sin, not only because all people fail to keep it, but also because it was never designed to bring about atonement for sins. Only the one who believes in Christ and his saving sacrifice is free from sin and acceptable to God. Paul is boldly proclaiming the Gospel message in a way that those who were hearing it would receive it best. His main audience at this point are the people of Israel. Paul would then begin to speak to the Gentiles, but the Jews would become jealous. As throughout history, the Gentiles more readily received the Gospel than those of Jewish descent. Their missionary launch had begun with great excitement. What stands out to you in this preaching event?

April 28- Acts 14:1-28: "Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead." (v.19) The Holy Spirit told the church to send out Paul and Barnabas on a mission to reach people with the Gospel. That meant that everywhere they went there was great success. NOT TRUE! There was Jewish opposition and it will continue on for several chapters. The Jews traveled a long distance to persuade the crowds. I love the statement that the disciples gathered around Paul and he rose up after being stoned. The action is so brutal that they could see no life sign in Paul, but he was raised up. This miracle almost goes unnoticed. He tells the disciples that they will have to go through many tribulations as part of serving God and defending the Kingdom. I made a note to myself that the movement of the Gospel since the early church has not been birthed in comfort. Opposition, persecution and challenges have been evident every step of the way. Yet, God's work has prevailed through his Son Jesus Christ. He has given courage to men like Paul and Barnabas throughout history. What aspect of this chapter did you identify with the most? Why?

April 29 - Acts 15:1-21: "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?" (v.10) Jewish rabbis would often refer to the law as a yoke. Peter's reference to the yoke here is not just to circumcision, but to the whole of the Mosaic Law. By speaking of the law as an unbearable yoke, he was not denying that the law was not God's gift to Israel. Rather, he was arguing that Israel was unable to fulfill it perfectly and that salvation could not be obtained through the law, which we read clearly in Romans 2:17-24. Only one means of salvation exists for both Jew and Gentile; that being God's grace through his Son Jesus Christ. Paul refers to the law as a yoke of slavery in Galatians 5:1. But for the Christian, Jesus calls us to take on his new yoke, which is easy and light. In fact in Matthew 11:29 he says, "Learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart." So too, the leaders of the church did not want to burden the Gentile believers with the yoke they could not bear. How do you respond to this strategic point in the church, as believing Gentiles were "grafted in" as the children of God?

PRAYER: We are commissioned for a mission. Pray that as God's "sent ones" we will eagerly look for opportunities to share His message.