

Reading Schedule for May 8-14, 2017

This is a very significant section in the Book of Acts because the church sends Saul (Paul) and Barnabas to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles. These are not well-known cities, nor do we read about them any further than the Book of Acts, but they respond to the Gospel in chapters 13 & 14. Obviously, there is opposition as well. Something that is shocking is that there is a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas that is so significant that they part ways. There will not be complete harmony until we enjoy the unity of heaven forever. May these readings inspire you.

May 8 – Acts 12:1-25: “You’re out of your mind,” they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, “It must be his angel.” (v. 15) The prayers of this group of believers were answered, but when their answer arrives at the door, they don’t believe it. That is one of the most compelling storylines in this reading today, in my opinion. How often do we pray and don’t really expect God to answer our prayer?! I’m also encouraged by the fact that God took care of Peter. Peter would be protected by God, because that was God’s plan. However, James, one of the disciples, was put to death. Our lives are in God’s hands. How do you respond to this reading?

May 9 – 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) I told you this was the beginning of the missionary launch of the church. Believers were scattered to Judea and Samaria, as it says in Acts 8. But Paul and Barnabas would sail to distant countries so that they could share the truth of Jesus Christ. They would begin in the Jewish synagogues of these cities, with the message of Jesus as the good news would change many lives. We will read about that in the next few days. How do you respond to the missionary call that intends for us to share the Gospel with the whole world? What is your part?

May 10 – Acts 13:13-52: “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.” (v.48) The Jewish people rejected the message of Christ, but the Gentiles were eager to hear. Some have suggested that Paul’s thorn in the flesh was the opposition that he would continue to experience from the Jewish leaders. It says in verse 50 they stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from that region. The Jews had very little love for the Gentiles, and yet the message would go forth in a powerful way among the Gentile world. You are one such person, being a Gentile. What do you learn about the missionary endeavor of Paul and Barnabas that applies to your life? How might you increase in Spirit-led boldness to share Christ with others?

May 11 – Acts 14:1-28: “Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” (v.23) This is the plan of the church, that leaders would be overseers of God’s good work. Everybody is important in the church, but leadership is a very significant calling. The strength of New Harvest will be based on the quality and depth of our leaders. Churches grow under Spirit led leaders. Pray for our church leaders and support them. We have seven elders who are serving right now.

There are other elders who have been on our governing board, and they play a very important role, even as they are a part of our church body still today. I want to encourage you to pray for Ben, Clark, Craig, David, Elvon, Ian and Randy as they serve as overseers in our church. How do you respond to this chapter about spreading the Gospel in Galatia?

May 12 – Acts 15:1-21: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.” (v.19) I remember reading in First John that God did not intend for his commandments to be burdensome. And then Jesus said that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. If the Gentiles were given excessive demands and challenges in the very beginning of their faith, they would get discouraged easily. Practicing our faith is very important; living out the principles of God’s Word is an essential part of the Christian life. But these Gentiles were just coming to faith. What should be their requirements? The judgment of the leaders was to not make it difficult for them. They should not worship idols; they should not practice sexual immorality; they should not eat the blood of strangled animals. So the grace given the new Gentile believers helped them to grow unhindered. This is a very important principle in the missionary endeavor even today. We are not asking people to be Americans – we are asking people to be Christians. May this principle prevail still today as we help people come to personal faith in Jesus Christ. Does it make sense to you? Why?

May 13 – Acts 15:22-41: “They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus . . . (v.39) Every time I read the division and separation between Paul and Barnabas, it is upsetting to me. Maybe it is because I have had a few of these experiences over the years as a Pastor. The disagreement can be used of the devil to weaken the church. But God was at work, and he even used this conflict to strengthen the missionary endeavor so that there were two teams proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles. Later, John Mark would become a vital part of Paul’s ministry (Colossians 4:10). There is a sense that Paul and Barnabas reconciled as well. What else did you notice in this reading? What is a very important response when relationships are severed?

May 14 – Acts 16:1-15: “During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” (v.9) We mentioned, in our study of II Corinthians, that Paul had visions and revelations from God. This is one such vision. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide us. Paul obeyed the vision he received and responded with complete trust. God’s plans for you are the right plans. I pray that the Lord will guide you in all your ways. A very important part of that is trusting in him. In Psalm 25, David prayed these words, “Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” (25:4, 5) How do you respond to your need for the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Happy Mother’s Day!

Prayers: Pray for our families, that we would have the right blend of tender and tough love so that our marriages and our family life might be a reflection of God’s presence to others.