



THEMES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

WEEK SEVEN: WORKING TOGETHER

Sounds simple! We should not despair that we find this difficult at times. Different views, different priorities, and very normal humans; it can be a recipe for disaster. However, there is one sure way of moving forward together and this is through **prayer**. It is through prayer that we can experience the guidance of the Holy Spirit

Acts 11:19-26: We learned in Study No.6 how the persecution of Stephen had caused a scattering of the early church as far afield as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch but they preached only to the Jews. However, there were some from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and preached Jesus to the Hellenists (natives of the Greco-Roman world who spoke Greek). When the leaders in Jerusalem heard, they sent Barnabas, this good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, to see what was happening. When we too are full of the Holy Spirit, we recognise others who share our faith. We should, like Barnabas, encourage them to continue with the Lord.

The last two verses are so important. It was the start of a joint ministry with Saul and Barnabas as they preached in Antioch for a whole year, and “...*the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*”

As Christians, prayer should be the bedrock of our lives. Read **Acts 13:1-3**.

- What important lesson do we learn from these verses?
- If we want God to use us, perhaps we should do likewise.

Read Acts 13:13-45: (Notice that from this point he is no longer referred to as Saul, but becomes known as PAUL)

We read from verses 13-41 a clear explanation by Paul, of how the scriptures predicted the coming of Jesus and how what happened at his death, fulfilled these words. The Gentiles begged Paul to come and preach again the following Sabbath, so keen were they to hear more about this man Jesus. That Paul’s words had a great impact is borne out by the fact that on the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.

Look back to Study No.4 where we saw the new ministry of the Church, no longer was the Gospel seen only for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles.

- How did Paul explain why they were preaching the word of God to the Gentiles?
- What was the response of the Gentiles to this clear teaching of Paul?
- Read verse 51 and then read [Matthew 10:14](#).

[Read Acts 14](#)

- When we read about what happened at Antioch, Iconium and then the situation in Lystra, we see the pattern that was to be Paul's life. In Study No.2, we have the account from 2 Corinthians 11:23-39, of the sufferings of Paul.
- Despite everything that had happened, we read how they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. How do you react to verse 22?

[Read Acts 15:1-29](#)

God was doing a remarkable work through the Apostles (and Paul is included in that group), but Satan will always seek to disrupt the growth of God's Kingdom.

Under Jewish law it was required that every male child be circumcised on the 8th day after their birth. This was a sign of the covenant that God had already given to Abraham, that his seed would be as the sands of the sea and that God would greatly bless them. It became part of the Mosaic law (Leviticus 12:3).

But Paul talks about the need for circumcision of the heart. When we become a Christian we in effect make a covenant with God acknowledging that we are prepared to have a change of heart and Paul refers to this in Galatians 6:12-15. We no longer have a sinful heart but one that has been forgiven. It means we must cut out of our lives the things which are not pleasing to God; and that can be a painful and difficult experience.

- Remember [Acts 10](#) and the account of Peter and Cornelius. What was the message Peter brought to the leaders in Jerusalem?

In Acts 15, we read of dissension occurring because some of the Jews were teaching that unless converts were circumcised according to the custom of Moses, they could not be saved. They thought that converts from paganism would weaken the moral standards of the church. Not surprisingly when Paul and Barnabas heard about this, they were most unhappy and decided to go to Jerusalem to help bring about an acceptable resolution.

Once we see the importance of testimony. It is not enough to have a 'head knowledge', it must be a matter of experience which brings about changed lives. Peter spoke to the Jewish Council and then Barnabas and Paul testified as to the wonderful work God had done through them among the Gentiles.

The Apostle James stood and spoke to the people that the Gentiles should not have to be circumcised but asked that they abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality and from things strangled, and from blood. The outcome was *The Jerusalem Decree* (verses [22-29](#)).

In verses [36-41](#), we learn that despite all that God had worked through them, Paul and Barnabas had a falling out. Barnabas wanted to take John also called Mark (he the writer of the third Gospel) with them, but Paul thought him unreliable and so sharp did their disagreement become they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus and Paul chose Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia. They later become reconciled.

- Pray that God will keep us focused on him and that the Holy Spirit will enable us to put aside our differences and work together to build the Kingdom of God.

Prayer: Help us Lord to remember we are all part of one body and that our focus should always on you and not ourselves.

