

THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

SESSION 47 | ACTS 14:23-15:3

ACTS 14:19-28 | PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY CONCLUDES

- Verses 19-22 included in session 46
- Verse 23 –
 - While these words can be used to support multiple Elders in local churches, it is a weak argument.
 - A literal translation would be, "Having appointed elders by assembly...they commended them to the Lord."
 - The fact that they appointed multiple Elders can be proven by the grammar. However, whether they appointed multiple Elders in each congregation cannot be proven by the Grammar (nor disproven).
 - In making a determination of the matter, one should consider that Paul, in giving instruction to Timothy, always referred to an Elder in singular, yet always referred to Deacons in plural. If the Elders were a group in the church, it would seem that Paul would have referred to both groups as groups.
 - The word **ordained** is χειροτονέω [cheirotoneo]. It is a compound of *cheir* and *teino*, which is "hand" and "stretch out," respectively. This implies a vote, selecting the elders "by the uplifted hand."
 - Note that in Acts 13:48 we were told that, of the Gentiles, **as many as were ordained to eternal life believed**. In that verse, we noted that the word there was τάσσω [tasso] which is "to set in order."
 - The English word **ordained** is used in both circumstances. In neither circumstance (nor anywhere in Acts) is the word used in a Calvinistic sense.
 - This is only the second time we see **elders** in a non-Jewish sense in the book of Acts, and the word is only seldom used in the Pauline scriptures (four times). Elders are certainly given a role in the local assembly but are not "celebrity status" by any means.
 - This is the only time that **fasting** is seen in a Christian assembly in the book of Acts (it appears in Acts 27:9 in a Jewish context).
 - It is only seen eight times in the entire New Testament, and only once in Pauline writings in connection to prayer (1 Cor. 7:5). Paul uses it two other occasions in discussion of trials he has endured, but it is likely not a spiritual exercise but rather a physical torment he had to suffer through.
 - Strangely, from such scant discussion hundreds of "how to fast" books have been written.
- Verses 24-28 –
 - Two things are of theological importance in this historical note.
 - First, Paul and Barnabus had a "sending church" and reported back to that church.
 - The church may or may not have paid their expenses, but the team seems to be responsible to that local church.
 - There was no denomination or hierarchy, simply a local church sending a missionary team.
 - While this historic example is not enough to build a doctrine, it is a precedent found in the Scripture for the sending of missionaries.

- Second, Paul and Barnabus reported to the church at Antioch that God **had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles**.
 - Almost every preacher teaches that the door of faith was open to the Gentiles at Acts 2, yet the Scripture actually shows it being opened during Paul’s first missionary journey.
 - The *ecclesia* at Antioch was a Jewish congregation sending Jewish missionaries to Jews, instructing them about Jesus as Messiah.
 - It was in the midst of this journey that God made a new revelation to Paul. Had the Antioch assembly already known that God had long ago **opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles**, there would be no need for this bit of information.

ACTS 15:1-3 | THE CONFRONTATION AT JERUSALEM: THE ISSUE

- Verse 1 –
 - A few background notes to this chapter:
 - The dating of Acts 15 is typically placed about 48-50 AD (thus a full 15 years after Pentecost, using traditional dating, and even more using the other dating methods).
 - The length of time between Pentecost and any discussion about being free from the law speaks to the fact that the Pauline mystery, which included freedom, did not come at Pentecost, but much later.
 - Books like James (and probably Matthew and Mark), and possibly others were written prior to this time, and thus do not reflect the theology of the Acts 15 decisions.
 - This incident is recorded by Paul, written first-hand in Galatians 2:1-14, where we are told that Paul went because of revelation (v. 2) and that this was the first time he spoke **the gospel which I preach** to the Apostles and the assembly in Jerusalem.
 - The **certain men which came down from Judaea** were not sent directly by the assembly at Jerusalem. Rather, they were **false brethren** according to Galatians 2:2.
 - The teaching of these **certain men** was clear: *circumcision according to Mosaic law was required for salvation*. This was diametrically opposed to Paul’s Gospel.
- Verse 2 –
 - Galatians 2:2 says that Paul went **by revelation**. Here, however, we see that Paul and Barnabus were appointed by the church at Antioch to go.
 - This “conflict” helps us to recognize that **by revelation** is a reference to the revelation Paul had received (i.e.: the mystery). This aligns with the Greek of Galatians 2:2, which says, “according to revelation.” The church at Antioch sent Paul (and associates), and the revelation was the subject of the meeting to which he was being sent. This Jerusalem council would be the first time there is a discussion of the old group (apostolic) of the new revelation.
- Verse 3 –
 - The **great joy** which was displayed by **all the brethren** appears to be among Jewish congregations (such as the one at Antioch). This goes against the modern scholars who teach us that the Jews had a prejudice against the Gentiles. Even Jerusalem and the Apostles will soon receive the message with joy.
 - It is only the **certain men** (v. 1) who are **false brethren** (Gal. 2:2) who are causing the dissension.