

The First Persecution

Lesson Twenty-Seven

Acts 9-14

As the young church grows, new leaders emerge and old leaders continue to grow and learn. This lesson will cover the experiences of two of the most active leaders in the early church. These men are Peter and Paul. Peter was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus. Paul came to faith in Jesus after Jesus had ascended into heaven. His story is very amazing and will be studied in this lesson.

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

Acts 9

The first time that Saul is mentioned in the Bible is in the account of the death of Stephen. Saul is the young man at whose feet the people place their clothes while they proceed to stone Stephen. In the next chapter of Acts, Saul is again mentioned. This time he is busy hunting down Christians in order to have them taken away to prison. This man is a true enemy of the new church. However, God has big plans for this very man. God will use him to take the Gospel message throughout many regions of the Roman Empire.

Read Acts 9:1-2 for further insight into the type of person Saul was before the Lord came into his life. (Slide 1)

What does Saul want to do? Take Christians to prison

In which city does Saul wish to do this? Damascus

God has other plans for Saul. Saul thinks he is traveling to Damascus to find Christians in order to have them imprisoned. God has other plans for this journey.



As he journeyed, he came near Damascus. Suddenly there shone about him a light from heaven. 2 He fell to the earth and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute." And he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what will You have me do?" The Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you shall be told what you must do." The men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. They led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. He was three days without sight and neither did he eat nor drink.

Who speaks to Saul? Jesus

What is wrong with Saul after this encounter? He is blind

Where is Saul to go? Into the city (Damascus)

What does Saul not do for three days? Eat or drink

The Lord must also prepare someone for the work of taking in Saul, the dreaded persecutor of the church. **Read Acts 9:10-19** to see whom the Lord chooses and how He goes about getting him ready for the arrival of Saul. (Slide 3)

Who is to go help Saul? Ananias

What is Ananias' first response? Fear, reservation, surprise

What does God tell Ananias? Go. God has a special task for Saul – to take the Gospel to Israel and the Gentiles

Will Ananias do as the Lord has instructed him? yes

What is the first thing Ananias does for Saul? Heals his eyes (restores his sight)

What is the second thing Ananias does for Saul? Baptizes him

Saul begins his work very quickly. The reaction he gets from the believers is one of astonishment and fear. His reputation has proceeded him, and the believers are a little hesitant to fully embrace him. But they soon see he is indeed one of them and work to assure his safety.

Then for several days Saul was with the disciples who were at Damascus. Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed. The Jews took counsel to kill him. But their plans were made known to him. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night and let him down in a basket 4 by the wall. When Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join himself to the disciples. But they were afraid of him and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas 5 took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how he had seen the Lord on his journey, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.



So Saul was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. He spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Grecians. They went about to slay him. 6 When the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus. 7 Then the church had rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria and were edified. Walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the church grew in numbers.

Why does Saul not stay in Damascus? The Jews want to kill him

Who helps Saul escape? Disciples (believers)

How does he escape? He is let down the side of the outer wall in a basket

Where does he go? Jerusalem

What does he try to do? Find the apostles

What happens? They do not want to meet him

Who befriends Saul? Barnabas

Why must Saul leave Jerusalem? Jews are trying to kill him

What kind of "rest" does the church enjoy? From persecution

THE HEATHEN CENTURION CORNELIUS

Acts 10

The apostles and disciples spent their time in the synagogues of the Jews trying to persuade and convert Jewish people. God also intended that they reach out to Gentiles. This will be made clear to Peter.

Read Acts 10:1-8.

Is Cornelius a Jew? no

What is he? A God-fearing Gentile

Does he have faith in Jesus? no

What does Cornelius see? An angel

What does the angel tell him? Go, send for Peter

Does Cornelius do this? yes

Peter and the other disciples of the Lord still followed the Law of the Jews. They did not eat anything that was considered unclean, and they did not associate with Gentiles. This is all about to change. **Read Acts 10:9-23. (Slide 8, 9)**

What does Peter see in this vision? A sheet full of animals

What does the voice tell him to do? Kill and eat

How does Peter respond? No, Lord, -- he has never eaten anything unclean

What is he told? Do not call anything unclean that God has made clean

How many times does this happen? three

This vision is given to prepare Peter for the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church. Gentiles were considered "unclean" by Jews. They were not allowed into the main parts of the temple. Jews were not to eat with a Gentile or be the guest of a Gentile. The vision has to do with more than simply animals. It prepares Peter so that he will not hesitate to go to the house of a Gentile and share the news of the Lord with him.

Who have arrived? *Cornelius' three messengers*

What does Peter ask the men to do? *Be his guests*



Cornelius waited for them and had called together his relatives and near friends. As Peter was coming in, 10 Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. He said, "We are present to hear everything God had commanded you to tell us." Then Peter opened his mouth and said, "Of truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. You know the word that God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all), whom they killed. God raised Him up on the third day, and He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that it is He who was ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead. To Him the prophets give witness, that through His name whoever believes in Him shall receive remission of sins.

Of whom does Peter speak to Cornelius and his family? *Jesus*

Read Acts 10:44-48 to see what happens after Peter finishes.

What happens? *The Holy Spirit comes upon them*

What is the evidence of this? *They speak in tongues*

What does Peter order to be done? *Have them baptized*

PETER'S DELIVERANCE

Acts 12

Peter and the other disciples spend much of their lives enduring persecution for their faith. Some are killed. The Lord protects some of them miraculously. Peter is the recipient of one such miraculous deliverance.

Now, about that time, Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex some who belonged to the church. He killed James, 11 the brother of John, with the sword. Because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter, also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. When he had apprehended him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four squads of four soldiers to keep him, intending after Passover to bring him forth to the people.

Which apostle is killed? James

Who is responsible? Herod

Whom does Herod take as prisoner? Peter

How many men does Herod have guard Peter? sixteen

Read Acts 12:5-10 for details of the miracle. (Slide 12)

What does the church do for Peter? They pray

Who comes to Peter in the cell? An angel

What happens? Peter is unchained

What does Peter think is happening? He thinks it is a vision

Where does the angel take Peter? Out of prison

And when Peter had come to himself, he said, "Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent His angel and has delivered me out of the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jews."



*When he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. As Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in and told how Peter stood outside the gate. They said to her, "You are mad." But she insisted that it was Peter. Then they said, "It is his angel." But Peter continued knocking. When they had opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. **13** But he, beckoning to*

them with the hand to hold their peace, declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. He said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." He departed and went into another place.

To whose house does Peter go? Mary the mother of John (Mark)

What does Rhoda fail to do that leads to confusion? Open the door (gate)

What does Peter tell them to do? Tell the disciples what has happened

An escape from prison was not to be taken lightly. The guards of a prisoner were held responsible for that prisoner. The guards who were guarding Peter are in deep trouble. **Read about it in Acts 12:18-19.**

What happens to the guards? They are killed

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 13, 14

At about the time Saul began his work with the Gentiles, he began to be referred to as Paul. Paul was a Roman name and therefore a Gentile name. As Saul began to move into Gentile territory in his mission he used the name Paul as this would be more comfortable for the people not of Jewish descent, who would be hearing the Gospel.

Paul will make three missionary journeys in his career. These journeys are for the purpose of spreading the Gospel message to the Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire. Paul will also make a fourth trip. This is his trip to Rome when he is under arrest and being taken there to make his appeal to Caesar. Even on this trip, Paul does not stop doing the work to which the Lord has called him. In this section, the first of Paul's missionary journeys will be studied.

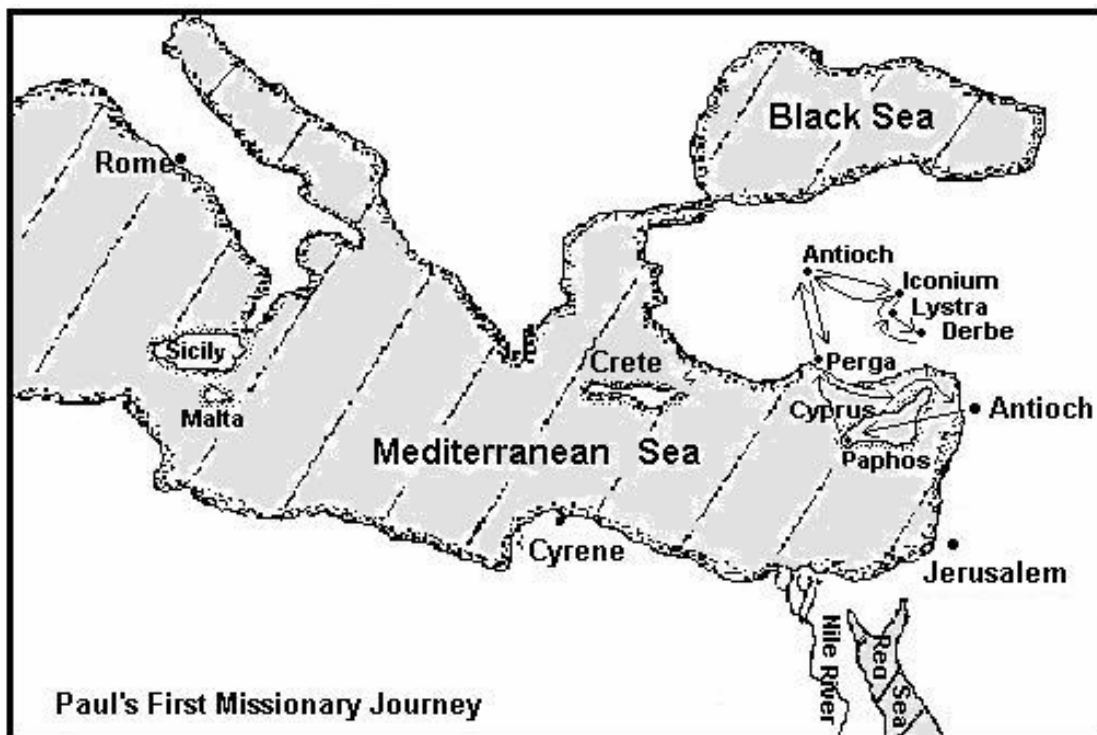
*Now there were in the church at Antioch, where the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians, certain prophets and teachers. As they worshiped the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Separate Barnabas and Saul **14** for the work to which I have called them." When they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. They sailed to Cyprus.*

Where are the followers of Jesus first called "Christians"? Antioch

What are the disciples doing in Antioch? 1.) worshipping 2.) fasting

Whom does the Holy Spirit select? 1.) Barnabas 2.) Saul

Where do these men go first? Cyprus



Refer to the map throughout the lesson. It shows the various locations mentioned in the text of this lesson, and it shows the route of the first of Paul's missionary journeys. This first missionary journey took about two years to complete. The dates of this trip are around A.D. 46 - 48.

Paul has many adventures on each of his journeys. **Read Acts 13:6-12** for the details of an episode that illustrates the way in which God uses Paul to bring people to faith. This scene takes place on the island of Cyprus. **(Slide 15, 16)**

Who is the proconsul? *Sergius Paulus*

For whom does he send? *Barnabas and Paul*

Who tries to turn the proconsul from faith? *Elymas*

What will happen to the sorcerer according to Paul? *He will be blind for a while*

Is Paul right? *yes*

What is the result of the blindness of Elymas? *The proconsul comes to faith*

Please note that the false prophet's name was Bar-Jesus. The word "Elymas" is a term meaning "sorcerer" or "magician" or "wise man." He probably gave this name to himself.

Now when Paul and his company left Paphos, they came to Perga, in Pamphylia and from there to Antioch, in Pisidia. They went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and preached the glad tidings of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. When the Jews had gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles asked that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Many of the Jews and religious Gentiles followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. The next Sabbath day almost the whole city came together to hear the Word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy and spoke against those things that were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

Who asks them to come back and speak the next Sabbath? *Gentiles*

Do many people come to hear Paul and Barnabas the next Sabbath? *yes*

Who oppose Paul and Barnabas? *The Jews*

Why? *envy*

Paul and Barnabas have brought the Gospel message to the Jews along with the Gentiles in hopes that they will come to faith. However, many of the Jews do not want to hear what they have to say. The Gentiles are much more receptive. **Read Acts 13:46-52** to see how Paul and Barnabas respond to the situation.

Why must they speak the Word of God to the Jews first? The Jews were God's chosen
people

How do the Gentiles respond to the Gospel message? With gladness and faith

To whom do the Jews turn in their effort to get rid of Paul and Barnabas? influential
leaders

Are they successful in removing Paul and Barnabas? yes

Where do Paul and Barnabas go? Iconium

*In Iconium Paul and Barnabas stayed a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord. But the multitude of the city was divided. Part held with the Jews and part with the apostles [Paul and Barnabas]. When there was an assault made by both the Gentiles and also the Jews to stone them, they fled to Lystra and there they preached the Gospel. There sat a certain man at Lystra, a cripple from his birth, who never had walked. **17** The same heard Paul speak. Paul, steadfastly beholding him and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he leaped and walked.*

Why do Paul and Barnabas leave Iconium? Threats of stoning

Where do they go? Lystra

What does Paul do for the crippled man? Heals him

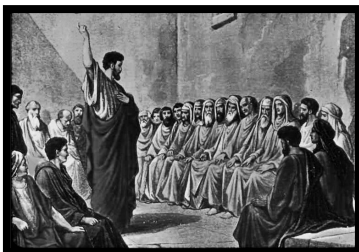
The response to this miracle is overwhelming and misplaced. **Read Acts 14:11-18. (Slide 18)**

Who do they think Paul and Barnabas are? Zeus and Hermes

Why are bulls and wreaths brought to the city? To sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas

Will Paul and Barnabas let them do this? no

This crowd of people seems so impressed with Paul and Barnabas. They believe them to be gods. However, it does not take much to have them turn on them.



*And there came there certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, **19** drew him out of the city supposing he was dead. **20** However, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city. The next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the Gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to*

*Lystra and to Iconium and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith. They told them that they must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. They ordained elders in every church and passed throughout Pisidia and Pamphylia and then sailed to Antioch, **21** from where they had started.*

What happens to Paul in Lystra? He is stoned

Why? Jews from Antioch and Iconium came and caused trouble

Is this missionary journey successful in planting new churches in the communities that Paul and Barnabas visit? yes

REVIEW

1. Before his conversion, for what is Paul famous? Persecuting Christians
2. Is Paul readily received by the disciples in Jerusalem? no
3. Who befriends Paul in Jerusalem? Barnabas
4. What does Peter's vision mean? The Gentiles can have the Gospel
5. To which Gentile does Peter go? Cornelius
6. What is the result of Peter's visit? Salvation
7. Which of the apostles is killed by Herod? James
8. Who is taken prisoner? Peter
9. What happens to him? He escapes; he is freed by an angel
10. Who are called to do missionary work? Barnabas and Paul
11. How many missionary journeys does Paul make? three
12. How long does the first journey take? Two years
13. Is the first missionary journey successful? yes

