



St James Woodley - Resources for Journey through Acts (Part 2)

Chapters 13-21 May – July 2020



Week 2: Back to the future



SETTLING

A “sliding doors moment” is when, faced with a decision,, you choose a course of action and as a consequence all that follows on from it. It might be about the person you married, or the person you didn’t, taking or refusing a job, spending out on something or saving the money. Reflect for a few moments about one such decision you have made and consider what you have to give thanks for and also if perhaps you have any regrets.

FOCUSING

Read Joshua 24 vs 1-28. Joshua is nearing the end of his life and has assembled the people of Israel to make clear what they need to do. They have a decision to make (vs 15). Spend some time quietly thinking about the stages in your own faith journey, about those who helped you, pointed you in the right direction or perhaps challenged you about your next step. Give thanks for those who have played a significant role in your life.

Joshua reminded the Israelites of Gods faithfulness in the past and recognised the temptations they continued to face, of turning to “other Gods”. Joshua chose” *as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.*” The Israelites chose to “*serve and obey*” God (vs 24).

Use the next few minutes to consider where you currently stand in relationship with God and be open to making any adjustment that you feel may be necessary.



Acts Chapters 13 and 14 – The First Missionary Journey (Cont.)

Read Acts 13 vs 13-14. Imagine Paul and Barnabas, strolling along the water front at Paphos, and considering their options. A fishing trip perhaps? What about a Whale Watching excursion or a cruise around the bay with complimentary drinks? They have choices but settle on a one-way ferry ride, back to the mainland and to the town of Perga. Once there, John Mark decides to head for home, a decision that had significant consequences – but more of that another day!

There doesn’t seem to be a “blue print” for this Missionary Journey; so, having “done” Cyprus, they decide to head for the mainland. The author Nick Page observes that things had gone well with the Roman Pro-consul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus and it may have been advice from him that helped them to choose where to go next. His family were quite prominent in the important Roman centre of Pisidian Antioch and so he

might have suggested that there would be a good next stop for them and the possibility of “just mention my name when you get there”, an additional positive influence on their decision.

Paul and Barnabas are clearly intent on getting to Pisidian Antioch giving no time to Perga or anywhere else on the 100 miles long trek, up through the Taurus mountains, to the town of Pisidian Antioch.

Read Acts 13 vs 15-22. On arrival at the Pisidian Antioch synagogue, on the Sabbath day, Paul is invited to speak and launches into a brief (by Paul’s standards) recap of Jewish history. This was obviously a good move and helped the Jews listening to feel assured that Paul was one of them and his message would be worth listening to.

Remembering what God has done in the past is a significant feature of the Jewish experience (e.g. their festivals such as Passover) and is also important for Christians. Reflect for a moment on ways in which God has featured in your past experience and why recalling them is of value and importance today.

Read Acts 13 vs 23 -31 Having set the historical context and presumably assured his listeners, Paul then proceeds to forge the all-important link to Jesus. For the Jews listening, this may well have been a new and strange teaching. Paul, as we shall see later in the series, uses this mechanism of linkage of people’s context and experience, to introduce the gospel message. Do we perhaps have something to learn here when it comes to our sharing the gospel today?

Read Acts 13 vs 32-41 With the “ground prepared” and the “foundations laid” Paul then explains what the “good news” of Jesus is all about. Paul uses scripture in doing this. Why might that have been important on this occasion and is it something that we need to do as well? Why, might we find doing it difficult and might those who hear us also struggle?

Read Acts 13 vs 42-52 The outcome of it all is that some are excited by Paul’s teaching and embrace with enthusiasm the gospel message spreading it throughout the region. Others are far from happy, especially when they saw gentiles responding to the gospel and (vs 52) *being “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”* In our own situation, new ideas and change are often not warmly welcomed. Try and fathom why this is.

Those who were unhappy reacted strongly and, in the end, drove Paul and Barnabas away from the city. It seems that there will always be those who choose to reject the gospel message. Today we also find this hard to handle. How might we best cope with such disappointment?

So, Pisidian Antioch brought Paul and Barnabas joy and sorrow, acceptance and rejection but undaunted, they move on to Iconium.



Use the prayer time today to talk over with God any decisions that you have to make in the near future, entrusting them to his care and wisdom. Seek His guidance and at the same time consider the role of “good sense” and perhaps the helpful counsel of others.

Bring to God your concerns about the current situation and how things might change in the future in your own life, in church and in the life of the nation.

Pray for any you know who struggle with Christian things. Ask for God’s wisdom in sharing with them and finding the way to “link” to where they currently stand.

Despite their apparent rejection of the gospel, pray for individuals, and our wider society, that like Paul himself their “eyes” might be opened to the light and love of Jesus.