

ST ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

COME, JOIN THE CONVERSATION!
ON
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Lesson Plan for Thursday – March 21, 2013
Resource Book – Kerygma Series - *“into the world”*
Chapter 9 – *“Antioch and Jerusalem”*

Our Objectives this week:

1. To continue the study of the phenomenal spread of Christianity after Pentecost.
2. To grasp the importance of teaching in the congregations at Antioch and Jerusalem and to relate this to the place given to education @ SAKLC.
3. To compare the compassionate response to need as narrated in Acts 11:27-30 with that of congregations today and especially SAKLC.
4. To summarize Herod’s persecution of the young church and Luke’s description of the results of that effort.

Sharing Christ’s Peace and Opening Pastoral Prayer:

SECTION I - Acts 11:19-26 (CEB)

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered as a result of the trouble that occurred because of Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. They proclaimed the word only to Jews. ²⁰ Among them were some people from Cyprus and Cyrene. They entered Antioch and began to proclaim the good news about the Lord Jesus also to Jews who spoke Greek. ²¹ The Lord’s power was with them, and a large number came to believe and turned to the Lord.

²² When the church in Jerusalem heard about this, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw evidence of God’s grace, he was overjoyed and encouraged everyone to remain fully committed to the Lord. ²⁴ Barnabas responded in this way because he was a good man, whom the Holy Spirit had endowed with exceptional faith. A considerable number of people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ Barnabas went to Tarsus in search of Saul. ²⁶ When he found him, he brought him to Antioch. They were there for a whole year, meeting with the church and teaching large numbers of people. It was in Antioch where the disciples were first labeled ‘Christians.’”

Questions directly related to this text:

1. Why was Barnabas sent to Antioch?
2. What did he discover there?
3. What did he do as a result of that discovery?

For further consideration:

- 1) Read 'Initial Comments' in Resource 9A (paragraphs 1-3)
- 2) Consider these two quotes by Resource Book author, Dr. Carol Miller:
 - a) *"The Jerusalem church has the right, the responsibility, and the living tradition necessary to judge what is going on in the name of Jesus."* (pg. 71)
 - b) *"There is a definite body of knowledge and experience which defies the Christian faith. Conversion is the beginning of lifelong learning and sharing of that knowledge in the context of the Christian community."* (pg. 72)

General Discussion:

1. From your knowledge thus far of the early church, what do you think the Jerusalem church would require of the new congregation?
2. To what extent are these requirements appropriate?
3. What 'body of knowledge and experience' make up the content of faith instruction @ SAKLC?
4. How does this content compare with what might have been important for Barnabas and Saul's teaching in Antioch?
5. What is the place of Christian education in SAKLC's priorities?
6. For which age groups are the most opportunities available @ SAKLC? Are opportunities needed for others?
7. What does SAKLC do to instruct new members?
8. What does SAKLC do to nurture adults who have been members for some time?

SECTION II - Acts 11:27-30 (CEB)

"²⁷ About that time, some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, Agabus, stood up and, inspired by the Spirit, predicted that a severe famine would overtake the entire Roman world. (This occurred during Claudius' rule.) ²⁹ The disciples decided they would send support to the brothers and sisters in Judea, with everyone contributing to this ministry according to each person's abundance. ³⁰ They sent Barnabas and Saul to take this gift to the elders."

Meet: **AGABUS** - a Christian prophet of Jerusalem, who is twice mentioned in Acts.

(1) Here, we find him at Antioch foretelling "a great famine over all the world." This visit of Agabus to Antioch took place in the winter of 43-44 AD, and was the means of urging the Antiochian Christians to send relief to the brethren in Judea by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. Two points should be noted.

(a) The gift of prophecy here takes the form of prediction. The prophet's chief function was to reveal moral and spiritual truth, to "*forth-tell*" rather than to "*foretell*"; but the interpretation of God's message sometimes took the form of predicting events.

(b) The phrase "*over all the world*" (practically synonymous with the Roman Empire) must be regarded as a rhetorical exaggeration if strictly interpreted as pointing to a general and simultaneous famine. But there is ample evidence of severe periodical famines in various localities in the reign of Claudius and of a great dearth in Judea under the procurators Cuspius Fadus and Tiberius Alexander, 44-48 AD, which probably reached its climax circa 46 AD.

(2) In Acts 21:10 f we find Agabus at Caesarea warning Paul, by a vivid symbolic action (after the manner of Old Testament prophets; compare Jeremiah 13:1; Ezekiel 3; 4) of the imprisonment and suffering he would undergo if he proceeded to Jerusalem.

(3) In late tradition Agabus is included in lists of the seventy disciples of Christ.

(4) Note Dr. Miller's comment about Agabus in your Resource Book (pg.73) – "*The proof of a converted life is in compassionate living.*" Do you agree?

General Discussion:

1. What is the link that holds these widespread congregations together?
2. What examples can you give of present-day congregations showing compassion for one another?
3. What links, if any, encourage these relationships in denominations? Ecumenically?

SECTION III - Acts 12:1-19 (CEB)

¹About that time King Herod began to harass some who belonged to the church. ² He had James, John's brother, killed with a sword. ³ When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he arrested Peter as well. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ He put Peter in prison, handing him over to four squads of soldiers, sixteen in all, who guarded him. He planned to charge him publicly after the Passover. ⁵ While Peter was held in prison, the church offered earnest prayer to God for him.

⁶ The night before Herod was going to bring Peter's case forward, Peter was asleep between two soldiers and bound with two chains, with soldiers guarding the prison entrance. ⁷ Suddenly an angel from the Lord appeared and a light shone in the prison cell. After nudging Peter on his side to awaken him, the angel raised him up and said, "Quick! Get up!" The chains fell from his wrists. ⁸ The angel continued, "Get dressed. Put on your sandals." Peter did as he was told. The angel said, "Put on your coat and follow me." ⁹ Following the angel, Peter left the prison. However, he didn't realize the angel had actually done all this. He thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself. After leaving the prison, they proceeded the length of one street, when abruptly the angel was gone.

¹¹ At that, Peter came to his senses and remarked, “Now I’m certain that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod and from everything the Jewish people expected.” ¹² Realizing this, he made his way to Mary’s house. (Mary was John’s mother; he was also known as Mark.) Many believers had gathered there and were praying. ¹³ When Peter knocked at the outer gate, a female servant named Rhoda went to answer. ¹⁴ She was so overcome with joy when she recognized Peter’s voice that she didn’t open the gate. Instead, she ran back in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate.

¹⁵ “You’ve lost your mind!” they responded. She stuck by her story with such determination that they began to say, “It must be his guardian angel.” ¹⁶ Meanwhile, Peter remained outside, knocking at the gate. They finally opened the gate and saw him there, and they were astounded.

¹⁷ He gestured with his hand to quiet them down, then recounted how the Lord led him out of prison. He said, “Tell this to James and the brothers and sisters.” Then he left for another place.

¹⁸ The next morning the soldiers were flustered about what had happened to Peter. ¹⁹ Herod called for a thorough search. When Peter didn’t turn up, Herod interrogated the guards and had them executed. Afterward, Herod left Judea in order to spend some time in Caesarea.”

For your further consideration: read **Resource 9B** – An overview of Herod Agrippa I

General Discussion:

1. What did Herod hope to accomplish by Peter’s arrest?
2. What message does Luke convey with the story of Peter’s escape?
3. What are some of the threats or barriers to living the Christian life today?
4. How is the contemporary church coping with these obstacles?

SECTION IV - Acts 12:20-25 (CEB)

²⁰ Herod had been furious with the people of Tyre and Sidon for some time. They made a pact to approach him together, since their region depended on the king’s realm for its food supply. They persuaded Blastus, the king’s personal attendant, to join their cause, then appealed for an end to hostilities. ²¹ On the scheduled day Herod dressed himself in royal attire, seated himself on the throne, and gave a speech to the people. ²² Those assembled kept shouting, over and over, “This is a god’s voice, not the voice of a mere human!” ²³ Immediately an angel from the Lord struck Herod down, because he didn’t give the honor to God. He was eaten by worms and died.

²⁴ God’s word continued to grow and increase. ²⁵ Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch from Jerusalem after completing their mission, bringing with them John, who was also known as Mark.

General Discussion:

1. This passage is a postscript to the preceding passages. In it Luke describes the demise of an important enemy of the church:
 - a) Note the reason Luke gives for Herod's death (vss. 22-23)
 - b) Note Luke's conclusion in vs. 24
2. Compare this passage with others in The Book of Acts that report the continuing spread of the Gospel:
 - a) **Acts 2:47b "The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved."**
 - b) **Acts 6:7 ⁷ God's word continued to grow. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased significantly. Even a large group of priests embraced the faith.**
 - c) **Acts 9:31 Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. God strengthened the church, and its life was marked by reverence for the Lord. Encouraged by the Holy Spirit, the church continued to grow in numbers.**
3. Luke's clear intent is to show that the Gospel message continues to spread like wildfire, even in the face of persecution. Rulers are brought low and cultural divisions disappear in the grand sweep of the Holy Spirit!

Closing Pastoral Prayer

NEXT SESSION: Thursday, April 4, 2013 (*note one-week break for Maundy Thursday!*)

CHAPTER 10 – "Barnabas and Paul" RESOURCE BOOK – pages 78-85

Read: ACTS 13:1 – 15:35

SAKLC Bible Study 2013.03.21 hjm

BOOK OF ACTS STUDY – RESOURCE 9A

SOME INITIAL COMMENTS ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

In this session we are going to pay special attention to “The Twelve” ratifying the work that is being done “out in the field.” Be alert to the reality that Christianity’s spread is not a matter of some winning personality going out and gathering a following around oneself, teaching and preaching whatever seems to be “selling.” (*...like many of today’s tele-evangelists and mega-church leaders!*) Christianity in the first century AD had a specific content. Those who are added to the faith had to be instructed properly in that faith. They needed nurture so that they could grow in all that it means to be a believer. At every new direction – Philip to the Samaritans, Saul’s conversion, Cornelius’ inclusion in the church, and later Paul’s missionary journeys – the Twelve at Jerusalem decided if the events were in line with Christian teaching.

You may have family members and/or friends who contend that while they ignore the church entirely, they have their “own” faith. They mean to say that they give assent to what they think the church believes and teaches. Sometimes in conversation with such folk, one discovers that their “faith” is of their own construction; sometimes, at specific points, it may be self-contradictory and has little to do with the true Christian faith. Even clergy persons and active church members are sometimes heard defending a family member’s inactivity by saying that the inactive person is a better person than they are themselves; the implication being that the church exists to make people “better” or “nice”!

For the writer of the Book of Acts of the Apostles, vibrant membership in a Christian congregation was crucial, not only because the congregation did the work of Christ, but because that is where believers were taught the faith – a faith that saves, a faith that makes sense. It was in the church that private ideas and rationalizations were challenged and corrected. Today’s church must constantly correct its own course by the kerygmatic faith of Scripture. Therefore, never underestimate the importance of a church’s teaching ministry!

A second major thrust in this session is the giving of charitable donations. Gentile-Christian converts responded with generous hearts when news came from Jerusalem about their Jewish-Christian counterparts and the desperate situation being faced there. The emphasis in this section of Acts is the compassionate giving of one Christian congregation to another. The theme of caring for others, particularly those of *“the household of faith,”* is strong in the New Testament. Compassionate giving of money and necessities to those in need remains a visible sign of conversion!

“One another” is a term used both by Jesus and Paul to designate fellow Christians. The term is most often found in connection with caring about and supplying the needs of others of the faith. The church is seen, herein, as a network of congregations; each with a stake in the success of the other, as a chain is dependent on the strengths of each link.

In both his Gospel and Acts, Luke has a great deal to say about the wrong use of money. But that does not mean that Luke has no use for it at all. On the contrary, it is not money that is evil but the wrong use of money and the idolatry of money. In Acts, Luke shows us how the right use of money and possessions can be used to further the Gospel message.

RESOURCE 9A

SAKLC 03-21-2013 hjm

BOOK OF ACTS STUDY – RESOURCE 9B

HEROD AGRIPPA I

Vital Statistics:

- Where – Jerusalem
- Occupation – Roman appointed King of the Jews
- Relatives –
 - Grandfather – Herod the Great
 - Father – Aristobulus
 - Uncle – Herod Antipas
 - Sister – Herodias
 - Wife – Cypros
 - Son – Herod Agrippa II
 - Daughters – Bernice, Marianne, Drusilia
- Contemporaries –
 - Emperors Tiberias, Caligula and Claudius
 - Peter, James, other apostles

Accomplishments & Strengths:

- Generally considered to be a capable administrator and negotiator
- Managed to maintain good relations with Jews living in his region and with Rome

Weaknesses and mistakes:

- Arranged the murder of the apostle, James
- Imprisoned apostle Peter, with plans to execute him
- Allowed the people to praise him as a god

Lessons from his life:

- Those who set themselves against God are doomed to ultimate failure
- There is great danger in accepting praise that only God deserves
- Family traits can influence children toward great good or great evil

COMMENTARY:

For good or for evil, families have a lasting and powerful influence on their children. Traits and qualities are passed on to the next generation and often the mistakes and sins of the parents are repeated by the children. Four (4) generations of the Herod family are mentioned in Scripture. Each leader left his evil mark. Herod the Great murdered Bethlehem's children. Herod Antipas was involved in Jesus' trial and had John the Baptist beheaded. Herod Agrippa I murdered the apostle James. Herod Agrippa II was one of Paul's judges.

Herod Agrippa I related fairly well to his Jewish subjects. Because he had a Jewish Grandmother of royal blood (*Marianne*) he was grudgingly accepted by the people. Although as a youth he had been temporarily imprisoned by the Emperor Tiberius, he was now trusted by Rome and got along well with the Emperors Caligula and Claudius.

An unexpected opportunity for Herod Agrippa I to gain new favor with the Jews was created by the Christian movement. Gentiles began to be accepted into the church in large numbers. Many Jews had been tolerating this new movement as a sect within Judaism, but its rapid growth alarmed many of them. Persecution of Christians was revived and even the apostles were not spared. James was killed, and Peter was thrown into prison.

But soon Herod made a fatal error. During a visit to Caesarea, the people called him a god and he accepted their praise. Immediately, Herod was struck with a painful disease and he died within a week.

Like his grandfather, uncle, and son after him, Herod Agrippa I came close to the truth but missed it. Because religion was important only as an aspect of politics, he had no reverence and no qualms about taking praise that only God should receive. His mistake is a common one. Whenever we are proud of our own abilities and accomplishments, not recognizing them as gifts from God, we repeat Herod's sin.

BOOK OF ACTS - RESOURCE 9B
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