

## SLOW FOOD BIBLE STUDIES: ACTS 13 and 14 (27 studies)

Paul and Barnabas travelling through Cyprus, Pisidia and the wild uplands of Galatia (c46-48 AD/CE) may seem a far cry from the routine life of the teacher or homemaker, but we can share their heart for mission and often find their situation yielding valuable insights into our own. Whether Acts is *prescriptive* (laying down principles that should be followed for success in Christian work today) or *descriptive* (merely providing a historical narrative of the experiences of a small team of workers in the first century) is much debated. John Stott says helpfully that 'a narrative's didactic purpose is not always apparent within itself and so often needs interpretative help from elsewhere in Scripture' (see *Message of Acts* pp11-12 for some balanced conclusions on this question).

Useful commentaries include John Stott *The Message of Acts* (BST 1991); Tom Wright *Acts for Everyone Part 2* (SPCK 2008); Howard Marshall *Acts* (Tyndale 1980); Conrad Gempf on *Acts* in the *New Bible Commentary* (IVP 4<sup>th</sup> ed. 1994). Two background studies well worth getting hold of are: Michael Green *30 Years that Changed the World* (IVP 1993, 2002) and the classic study by Roland Allen *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (Eerdmans 1912, with 1960 foreword by Lesslie Newbigin). Maps relating to these chapters may be found on the Internet (Google e.g. 'Lystra') or in a good Bible Atlas.

**Lead-in** Write a short character-sketch of Barnabas. Would you say that he and Paul were temperamentally well-matched? *Acts* 4:36-37; 9:26-31; 11:19-30; 12:24-25.

**Acts 13:1-3** How have I been called to the work I am doing? *Isa* 6:8; *Jn* 15:16; *1 Thess* 5:24.

**Acts 13:4-8** What opportunities do I have to bring God's word to people? *Jer* 36:5-6, 21-24; *Phil* 1:12-18; *Col* 4:3-4.

**Acts 13:9-12** In what ways have I detected the power of God at work in my support? *Isa* 55:11; *Mk* 6:1-6; *Mk* 16:15-20; *Acts* 8:4-8.

**Acts 13:13-15** Imagine you are in the shoes of John Mark: why might you have turned back at this point? *Other refs to Mark in the NT: Mk* 14:51 (?); *Acts* 12:12, 25; 15:36-40; *Col* 4:10; *Philem* 24; *2 Tim* 4:11b; *1 Pet* 5:13; *Mark* 1-16 (!).

**Acts 13:16-20a** As I look back over my own personal history, can I see God at work in my earlier years? *Dt* 32:10-14; *Isa* 49:1-2; *Heb* 12:9-11. Note on v18: an alternative reading for 'endured their conduct' is 'cared for them' – both ideas may be intended.

**Acts 13:20b-22** Whether or not I am in a position of leadership, is my aim to please the Lord? *Ps* 40:6-8; *Rom* 12:2; *1 Cor* 4:4-5.

**Acts 13:23-25** What can I learn from John the Baptist about preparing the way for Christ? *Isa* 40:3; *Mal* 3:1-4; *Jn* 3:30; *1 Cor* 3:5-9.

**Acts 13:26-29** 'They have the sound of the gospel in their ears, but not the sense of it in their heads, nor the savour of it in their hearts' (Matthew Henry). How far is the cross 'the message of salvation' (v26) to me? *1 Cor* 1:18; 2:2; *Gal* 2:20; *Rev* 12:11.

**Acts 13:30-31** If I have never seen the risen Christ, how large a part can the Resurrection play in my witness to him? *Jn* 20:29; *Acts* 26:22-23; *Rom* 10:8-10.

**Acts 13:32-37** Do I read the OT as an academic exercise (e.g. to collect a few cross-references) or to find Christ? *Isa* 26:8; 43:11-12; *Jn* 5:39-40.

**Acts 13:38-39** If I had been a Jew listening to Paul's message, what might have been my reaction? *Lk* 18:9-14; *Gal* 3:10-14; *Heb* 8:8-12; 9:11-15; 10:4.

**Acts 13:40-41** If some people are never going to believe, what is the use of going on telling them? *Mt 13:11-17; 1 Th 2:1-16.*

**Acts 13:42-43** Is God's grace the mainspring of my devotional and public life? *Hos 14:1-9; Mt 18:23-35; 1 Tim 1:12-14.*

**Acts 13:44-45** If I have experienced unpopularity as a result of standing for my Christian convictions, how far could that be due to 'jealousy' (v45) on the part of others, and how seriously should I take it? *Mt 27:18; Acts 17:5; Gal 1:14, 4:16-18, 5:20.*

**Acts 13:46-48** Is it unscriptural to set priorities in our mission strategy? *Lk 2:30-32; Jn 6:37; Acts 18:4-8; 1 Cor 9:19-22; 2 Tim 2:8-10.*

**Acts 13:49-52** Why do religion and faith tend to come into conflict? *Jn 16:2-3; Acts 26:9-11; Rom 14:17.*

**Acts 14:1-3** How different were the apostles' initial experiences at Iconium from those at Pisidian Antioch? What can I learn from this about opportunities in God's service? *Acts 19:8-10; 1 Cor 16:9; Gal 3:26-29; Phil 2:27-30.*

**Acts 14:4-7** If all Christians are in some sense professional missionaries, and if missionaries tend to arouse opposition, what level of opposition am I currently experiencing – and why? (I may wish to think of others whose situation is known to me.) *Jn 16:33; Rom 8:17; 1 Pet 2:19-21.*

**Acts 14:8-10** Can God work through my words today? *Lk 9:1-2, 10:9; Rom 10:17; Gal 3:2, 5.*

**Acts 14:11-13** Is there a latent spirituality in the non-Christian mind which leads people to seek Christ? *Job 23:3; Mt 2:1-2; Jn 1:9-11; Acts 17:22-28; 2 Cor 4:1-6.*

**Acts 14:14-18** In witnessing to my faith in God, do I lay enough emphasis on his Creatorhood? *Acts 17:30; Rom 1:18-23; 1 Tim 6:17b.*

**Acts 14:19-20** 'If God has work for me to do, I cannot die' (Henry Martyn). What can I learn from this serious attempt on Paul's life? *Mt 10:28-31; 2 Cor 4:9; 2 Tim 3:11.*

**Acts 14:21-22** Does my experience confirm that membership of the kingdom involves both fruitfulness and suffering? *Jn 15:8, 20; Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 3:12; Rev 1:9.*

**Acts 14:23-25** How and why are (church) leaders chosen? *Jn 21:15-17; Acts 20:28-30; 1 Tim 4:11-16; 1 Pet 5:1-4.*

**Acts 14:26-28** What is the relation between God's grace and human endeavour in the work we do for Christ? *Ps 127:1-2; Jn 15:5; 1 Cor 15:10.*

**Follow-up** In the light of P and B's experience of opposition and misunderstanding from both Jews and Gentiles, try to identify the traditions and assumptions which some others might feel are being disturbed by your particular witness to Christ. *Rom 10:1-4; Gal 6:11-16; Eph 4:17-24; 1 Pet 3:13-17.*

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