

Week beginning Monday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021

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### **Acts 15. A major disagreement resolved at the Council of Jerusalem.**

In spite of the welcome given to the Gentile Cornelius in chapter 11, a group of Christian Jews from Judea came to Antioch to inform the Gentile Christians that to be saved they must become Jews through circumcision. Paul and Barnabus fiercely opposed this teaching. To get an authoritative ruling on this vital matter they went to consult the Apostles and leaders in Jerusalem. At the Council of Jerusalem after a wide ranging discussion Peter retold his story and Paul and Barnabus told how Gentiles had responded to the Christian message, all speaking from their experience. James, Jesus' brother, spoke from the scriptures, concluding that only faith in Jesus was required. The Council decided that Gentiles were asked not to have anything to do with pagan worship. Note the care taken to inform the gentile churches about this vital decision. Paul & Barnabus fell out over John Mark!

### **Acts 16. The Gospel comes to Europe.**

From now on the story follows Paul's missionary adventures. However when we visited northern Cyprus in 2018, we found evidence of John Mark's influence at the ruined basilica of St. Auxibus. Paul, assisted by Silas, revisited the churches founded on his previous journey. Paul shared the Jerusalem declaration with the churches. At Lystra, Paul recruited Timothy, a gentile with a Jewish mother. Timothy was circumcised, enabling him to fit in with the synagogue congregations Paul was preaching to. In Philippi the work was based in the home of Lydia, a rich gentile convert. Enjoy the story of what follows when Paul heals a slave girl.

### **Acts 17. Different cities, different approach, but always suspicion about a new teaching.**

The Jews of Thessalonica, a Roman city, were zealous for their ancient traditions. In Berea they were eager to investigate. v11. Trouble and a hasty escape in both cities. When in Athens, Paul preaches in the market place about Jesus' and is made to explain this new teaching to the city council. To the pagan audience Paul begins with their experience of God the creator but talk of the resurrection is a step too far.

### **Acts 18. Paul stays 18 months in Corinth preaching first to the Jews then to the Gentiles.**

Paul needed a reassuring dream to continue his ministry in Corinth, a busy port and a cosmopolitan Roman colony. Note the members of his team. Gallio, the Roman governor 52/53 AD regarded Christians as a Jewish sect and no threat to the Emperor. Paul called briefly at Ephesus, promising to return, made an uneventful visit to Jerusalem, went back to his home church of Antioch then was off on his travels revisiting the churches of Galatia. I wonder what Pricilla and Aquila needed to explain to the gifted preacher Apollos who knew all about Jesus but still lacked something vital. vv25 & 24.

### **Acts 19. Paul's peaching in Ephesus effects pagan worship and the economy!**

When Paul arrived in Ephesus he found a group of Christians who had never heard of the Holy Spirit, which they received when Paul laid hands on them. Paul spent over two years in Ephesus, briefly in the synagogue, then in the community, where there were miraculous displays of God's power. It is dangerous to mess with powers you don't understand, vv13-18, and costly to abandon magical practices vv19-20. Paul realised he must visit Rome: v21. Faith in Jesus threatened the city's reputation as a special centre of pagan religion and the local pilgrimage industry.