

Acts of the Apostles

Week 14: Acts 9:32-43; 11:19-30

Aeneas and Tabitha (9:32-43)

- Peter is traveling “about the country” which likely includes parts of “Judea, Galilee, and Samaria” as mentioned in 9:31.
 - o Verse 35 makes it clear that he is in Lydda and Sharon, names that indicate a coastal plain from Lydda toward Carmel.
 - o This is somewhat in the same area that Philip was ministering in earlier.
- Peter heals a man named Aeneas who has been paralyzed for eight years (vv 32-35).
 - o The name is Greek, but he may have been a Jew. This was a mixed area, and it wasn't uncommon for people to have both Jewish and Greek names (Paul/Saul).
 - o The Greek may mean he's been paralyzed since he was eight.
 - o Peter heals him in the name of Jesus Christ (v 34).
 - o Peter's healing of Aeneas echoes Jesus' healing of the paralytic in Luke 5:17-16 including the command to take up his mat – a sign of healing.
 - o The people in the area turn to the Lord in response to this healing (v 35).
- Peter raises a lady named Tabitha (Dorcas/Gazelle) from the dead.
 - o Tabitha lived in Joppa (modern Jaffa) 12 miles from Lydda on the coast (v 36).
 - o There is already a group of Christian women there including Tabitha.
 - o Tabitha is described as a woman of good works and charitable deeds making her highly esteemed in Jewish virtues.
 - o When Tabitha died, they washed her body and placed it in an upstairs room perhaps indicating that they may have had hope Peter could raise her from the dead (v 37).
 - o When Peter arrives, he enters the room full of mourning widows who all show him the clothes Tabitha had made – which they may have been wearing (v 39).
 - o Peter follows the example of Jesus and sends everyone out of the room, prays, and then calls on the dead woman to rise (v 40; see Luke 8:41-56; Mark 5:21-24, 35-43 for parallels).
 - o Like in the healing of Aeneas, news of Tabitha's resurrection spreads and people praise the Lord (v 42).

The Church at Antioch (11:19-30).

- After recounting Paul's conversion and Peter's encounter with Cornelius, the story returns briefly to the larger church which was last seen being persecuted and scattered throughout the region (8:2-4).
 - o As the church spread to places outside of Judea, those congregations were chiefly comprised of disciples who had scattered in the previous persecution and, eventually, Greeks who began being converted (vv 19-20).

- This spread of the gospel to the Gentiles appears to be more organic than what occurred with Peter and Cornelius.
 - It does not seem apparent that these new converts felt any compulsion at this point to follow Jewish law, setting up a future conflict with the Jerusalem church.
 - The separation of the church from the synagogue is beginning at this point.
- These early churches grew rapidly because “The Lord’s hand was with them” (v 21).
- Luke focuses the story on Antioch (vv 22-30).
 - Barnabas moves from Jerusalem to Antioch to support the work there proving to be a man of great encouragement and faith (vv 23-24).
 - This move should not be seen as an attempt by the Jerusalem church to dominate the young congregation in Antioch.
 - Rather it appears that the Jerusalem church wants to support the church in Antioch in its new growth.
 - Under his leadership many people were brought to the Lord (v 24).
 - Barnabas could have squelched the movement of the Spirit in Antioch.
 - Instead, he remained open to the Spirit as he guided these young believers.
 - Barnabas’s ministry extends to Saul.
 - Barnabas went looking for him in Tarsus – perhaps he saw the potential for Paul’s ministry in Antioch. He likely needed help.
 - Barnabas mentored him for a year in Antioch.
 - Antioch becomes the first place the disciples are called Christians (v 26). The name may have initially been used as a ridicule. It is not used frequently by NT writers who prefer terms like saints, disciples, and brothers and sisters. Christians eventually came to embrace it.
 - During this time some prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem (v 27).
 - Prophets were charismatic preachers who led the congregation in both the exhortation of scripture and foretelling the future.
 - One named Agabus predicted a famine allowing the disciples to form a plan of help for fellow Christians in Judea (v 28).
 - There was a large famine in Judea in AD 46.
 - Paul and Barnabas were tabbed to deliver the gift (v 30).
 - This is the first use of the word elders in the book of Acts and indicates a developing system of leadership in the early church.
 - It is difficult to pinpoint this delivery of food with statements Paul makes in his own letters about traveling to Jerusalem and delivering offerings but may coincide with Paul’s language in Galatians 2:1-10.

Sources

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