

TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
IHOP BIBLE STUDY

10 Topic: "Saul and Barnabus to the Greeks" -- with commentary

Acts 11: 19 – 30, "The Church in Antioch;" Acts 12: 1 – 19a, "Peter's Miraculous Escape from Prison;" Acts 12: 19b - 25, "Herod's Death."

The purpose of the Book of Acts is to record the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Vision and Ministry of Peter and Paul. **Today's study is the 10th of 20 lessons.**

A contextual statement:

Interestingly, *The Interpreter's Bible* makes the following observation. In the book of Acts, "The Lord is not returned, but in the meantime the word of God is being carried on by the church. The Gentile mission is itself the eschatological action of God." (*The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1971. p. 730.)

This I want to affirm as our perspective. **We will study this book from the perspective of the in-breaking of the Holy Spirit.** This puts us out on the cusp of a deep and foreboding spiritual hole that is eternally deep. The Holy Spirit is that intuited presence within us that urges us to "Jump." "Jump!" To take this leap of faith means to surrender ourselves to the eternal deeps. The discovery, to which I can personally testify, is that this deep, dark, mysterious hole is the place where God lives within us. As we lose control of everything— our-selves, our relationships to neighbor and to God— then we can discover that God really does sustain us. But the experience is like falling, and it is not entirely comfortable. But it works.

Read the assigned scripture.

Special Feature: In light of our continuing discussion on a Gut Trip Analysis of the miraculous, the Tuesday morning IHOP Bible Study began devotions by reading from Julien Green's book *God's Fool: The Life and Times of Francis of Assisi, the chapter of the story of "The Big Bad Wolf,"* (Peter Heinegg, translator. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985. pp. 218 - 220.) The following is an excerpt.

Because St. Francis was loved and respected by animals and nature, "The simple fact is that beasts loved him. Did they see in him an aura of love that our eyes can't discern—perhaps in the form of the halo we see only in the portraits of saints, something that worked on them and made them happy?" (218.)

Francis set out for Gubbio, Italy because a very large wolf was terrorizing the people, having killed and eaten several of the villagers. Our Friar Minor confronted the animal to scold him and called for its repentance. Afterward, he brought the wolf back into the city of Gubbio where he admonished the villagers for fearing "the red maw of a ferocious beast," instead of the hell fires. He charged with repentance.

Green closes this chapter, "A new life began for both Gubbio and the wolf, who became the pet of all the townspeople, entering their houses and making himself at home. Alas, he enjoyed this delightful existence for only two years. He

was heartily mourned, and buried in a chapel dedicated to Saint Francis. In 1873 workers raising a flagstone uncovered his skull, which testified in its own way to the prodigy and glorified his first human friend." (220.)

Our discussion is summarized:

My first question was, "Did this really happen?" An early response was, "This is legend." A subsequent comment was, "Well, if this is legend, then what about the miracles of Peter in the Book of Acts. Are they legends too?"

Deeper into the reflection, I observed that these kinds of comments represent Head Trip Analysis where we make the miracle of St. Francis into an object to be studied. Then, I noted that in Gut Trip Analysis, miracles—from whatever source—are assumed to have happened. Even though they can not be substantiated, the process of potentiality always allows for things happening that we can't understand.

After this assumption is made, then the next question concerns our intuited responses about the experience of those involved. "What was the experience of St. Francis?" The observation was made that Francis already considered himself dead to this world and was not afraid of the wolf.

"What was the experience of the wolf? The animal was confronted by an unusual human in which its animal senses could detect no threat. Therefore, it was comfortable.

"What was the experience of the townspeople?" They were relieved of their fear, took the animal into their care and regularly fed him and made him a pet.

Concerning a Gut Trip Analysis: An analysis begins with the experience of those involved when the assumption is made that the event did happen. Quickly, the conversation moves into a study of the significance of what happened. Clearly, this demonstrates the value of Gut Trip Analysis.

I. Acts 11: 19 – 30, "The Church in Antioch"

A. Use your Bible maps to locate Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (note there are two Antioch's.)

WS: (Much of the following references The Abingdon One-Volume Bible Commentary, p. 743.)

In these cities were populated with both Jews and Gentiles. In Luke's mind, the expansion of Christianity spread slowly from Jerusalem outward to Samaria (Tyre and Sidon), and then on the Palestinian Joppa, Caesarea, and then to the Greek center in Antioch. Antioch was a very pagan and commercial center.

B. Vs. 22: What is the concern of those in Jerusalem, what was Barnabus assigned to do, and what is the significance of his report?

WS: Barnabus is a native of Cyprus where he preached "The Lord of their lives." He was given the status of an Apostle—which can be compared to being a District Superintendent in the United Methodist tradition.

C. Vs.26b: Use your Bible Commentary to research the statement “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

WS: The commentary notes that this statement is not universally accepted because some manuscripts change the form of this announcement. Some note that the word “Christian” takes the form of “Christ,” while other manuscripts take the form of the Greek word “Chrestus” which translates as “good people.” It is not clear if the early Christians gave themselves this name, or it was imposed by others. One IHOPer noted that in the early days, this term may have been a derisive word, something like the term “methodist” was applied to the Wesley brothers—and friends—for their methodical ways.

D. Vs. 27 – 30: Report on the significance of what Agabus reports.

WS: Agabus was called a “prophet.” He is associated with one who is an evangelist, or a charismatic leader. The other ecclesiastical designation is “elder” who is one given administrative duties.

II. Acts 12: 1 – 19a, “Peter’s Miraculous Escape from Prison”

A. Vs. 3b: What is the significance that this takes place during the “Feast of Unleavened Bread.” Passover is associated with the miracle of freedom and the release from Egyptian captivity. One IHOPer observed that Luke is using the process of mirroring the Old Testament.

B. Vs. 5 – 10: Again, we have a miraculous escape take place. Provide a Gut Trip Analysis of what happens here.

WS: My question to the IHOPers was, “In light of Gut Trip Analysis, how do we work this puzzle?”

First, we assume it is an actual event.

Second, we explore the feelings and experiences of those involved: Peter, the prison guards, Herod.

Next, we observed vs. 11, “Peter came to himself.” And vs. 12, “When this dawned on him.” These phrases seemed descriptive of his cognitive and emotional state.

C. Vs. 11 – 17: Certainly, this is one of the most curious events in the book of Acts. Read it and enjoy the irony.

III. Acts 12: 19b - 25, “Herod’s Death.”

A. Vs. 20: Locate Tyre and Sidon on your map. What is the significance of these towns? What is their concern, and what is the effect of this for Herod?

WS: Tyre and Sidon are coastal towns. They are Phoenician cities from which these captains of the sea launched their reputations as captains. These coastal towns depended on Jerusalem to provide them grain, and discovered themselves dependent on their relationship with Herod.

Herod’s death is occasioned by his pride. As a Jewish ruler, he dressed himself in silver clothing, and when he spoke, the people associated him as a god.

The reward for this deed is found in the deed itself. One can assume that such associations are wormy deals for which Herod paid the price. The commentary observed that this means of death is a typical mode of death for tyrants during this time.

Alright folks, talk to me.