

## ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

### XXXV. The Apostolic Precedent Of Strengthening New Believers

(Acts 14:20-28)

#### I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 14:20-28 records how Paul and Barnabas took steps to strengthen the new converts they had led to Christ on their first missionary journey. This activity set a very important example for missionary work in Church History, one that is often neglected today to the harm of the Church, so we study the passage for our insight:

#### II. The Apostolic Precedent Of Strengthening New Believers, Acts 14:20-28.

- A. When Paul and Barnabas finished evangelizing at Derbe, they were only about 160 miles west of Paul's hometown of Tarsus, but instead of continuing east to Tarsus, they retraced their steps of over 700 miles by land and 500 miles by sea "to confirm the churches so recently established," Ibid., p. 392-393; Acts 14:20-26.
- B. This work to finish what they had started with evangelism involved several significant actions, Acts 14:22-26:
  1. First, the apostles ministered to pastor the new converts into becoming strong in the Lord, Acts 14:22:
    - a. The apostles "strengthened" (*episterizo*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 300) the "souls, inner man" (*psuche*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 473; Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 901-902) of the disciples whom they had led to Christ, Acts 14:22.
    - b. This ministry involved "urging, encouraging, exhorting" (*parakaleo*, Ibid., U. B. S. Grk. N. T.; Ibid., Arndt & Gingrich, p. 622-623) the new converts to continue in the faith regardless of facing persecution, informing them that God's program involved letting His people face much tribulation before entering into Christ's coming Messianic Kingdom on earth, Acts 14:22. (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 392)
    - c. These truths would have involved theological training on relying on the Holy Spirit for the power to face persecution, instruction on the angelic conflict behind such persecution and future Bible prophecy about the rapture and Christ's Kingdom.
    - d. Since the apostles urged, encouraged, and exhorted, a lot of pastoral application of Scripture was done to nurture these new converts to be encouraged and motivated to grow strong in the Lord!
  2. Furthermore, the apostles provided needed organization by ordaining elders in every church, praying with fasting and commending them to the Lord on whom they had believed, Acts 14:23 with Acts 13:2-3. For application today, this would involve establishing a Statement of Faith, church by-laws and local church government of a Board of elders/deacons and an adequate structure for church meetings. (Hebrews 10:25)
  3. Then, passing through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia and preached the Gospel at Perga before getting on a boat at the seacoast town of Attalia to sail back to Antioch from where they had been sent out by God's commissioning on their first missionary journey, Acts 14:24-26. The apostles continued to evangelize where they went, presumably also discipling the new converts since they apparently had time to be with them without being forced to flee as in other cities they had visited in their first missionary journey.

***Lesson:*** Paul and Barnabas retraced the steps of their first missionary journey to strengthen the inner man of the people they had evangelized by urging, encouraging, and exhorting them with theological teaching, by pastoral encouragement and exhortation to grow strong in the Lord amid tribulation, and by organizing them by ordaining elders in every church, looking to the Lord to guide them as church leaders. The apostles did not cease to present the gospel to unreached areas as at Perga, but they were careful to strengthen those they had evangelized.

***Application:*** (1) Though God calls missionaries to evangelize the lost, missionaries, mission boards and sending churches must see the importance of CONTINUED, QUALITY FOLLOW-UP with new converts especially with today's great lack of Bible knowledge in the society that contrasts with the higher level of Bible knowledge of many Jewish converts that the apostles evangelized! Failure to do adequate follow-up work has often led to the closing of churches in some Third World areas and in some areas here in America! (2) The ministry needed for helping new converts TODAY then must involve (a) teaching Scripture that applies it to life in an urging, encouraging and exhorting manner (b) along with theological training and (c) pastoral encouragement and exhortation (d) over TIME, that new believers might be established in the Lord. (e) Such a ministry requires that the discipler be spiritually mature and trained to handle Scripture correctly and adequately! (1 Timothy 4:12-16; 2 Timothy 2:15)