



Leaders Note

Acts 13: 14- 52 Acceptance and Rejection go hand-in-hand?

Thought

Wherever the Gospel is preached, displayed or lived out it is certain that you must accept this; although some may accept the Gospel it is likely that some others will reject it. The key is to ensure that we are encouraged by the acceptance and not deterred by rejection. We can never allow our message to be defined by those who reject it. We just need to assume that they are just not ready...yet!

Context

They travelled inland to Antioch of Pisidia

Pisidian Antioch was founded by Seleucus I Nicator about 281 B.C. It was situated a hundred miles north of Perga on a lake studded plateau some thirty-six hundred feet above sea level. The foothills between Perga and Pisidian Antioch largely ruled out any extensive east-west traffic until one reached the plateau area, but following the river valleys one could move northward from the Pamphylia area. On the plateau Antioch stood astride the Via Sebaste, the Roman road from Ephesus to the Euphrates. The city had been incorporated into the expanded Roman province of Galatia in 25 B.C. by Augustus, who at that time imported into it some three thousand army veterans and their families from Italy and gave it the title of Colonia Caesarea. Antioch was the most important city of southern Galatia and included a rich amalgam of Greek, Roman, Oriental, and Phrygian traditions. Acts tells us that it also had a sizable Jewish population.

As many as were appointed for eternal life believed

Though often a matter for intense debate over the centuries, the term “chosen” was intended to be an assuring, liberating ground of truth (you can see it developed at more length in Paul’s writings in Ephesians 1:3-14 and Romans 8:28-30 among other places). The fact that God chose us before we were even born should cause us a collective sigh of relief. Whether we believe that some are chosen and others not or whether we believe we are inheritors of Christ’s ‘chosenness’ (meaning that, potentially, all can be chosen. My preference) should not cause arguments. We should rejoice that we are wanted.

They wiped the dust from their feet

The Jewish custom here reflected was the shaking out of one’s garments and brushing off the sandals to remove all “gentile” dirt and contamination. For Paul and Barnabas to do this before an unbelieving Jewish community would have been a very strong statement — something along the lines of “the only ‘gentiles’ I see around here are you.” Most likely it was not appreciated.

The synagogue

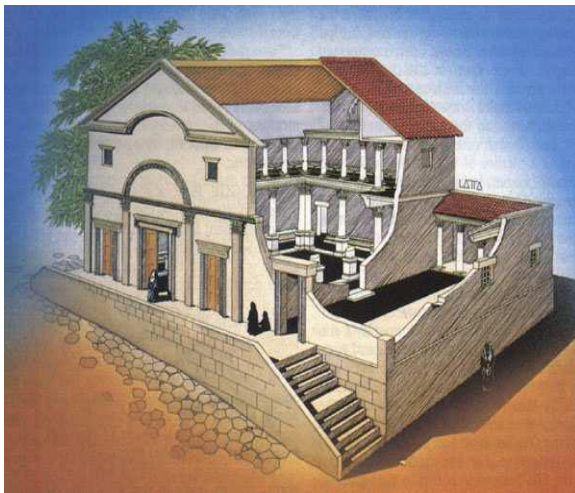
“Synagogue” simply means “gathering.” As an institution among the people of Israel, it most likely had its origin during the Babylonian captivity after the destruction of Solomon’s temple in 586 BC. As centres of Jewish faith, synagogues were formed around ten families who gathered for two primary purposes: to pray and to read the Scriptures. The synagogue housed the scroll of the Law (Torah) and the other scrolls that made up the Hebrew scriptures. The scriptures were read through systematically, year after year — being read in the original Hebrew and then translated, often with immediate commentary, in the common language (in first century Israel, probably Aramaic).

The meeting room in a synagogue consisted of stone benches along the walls, with an open space in the middle for a “pulpit” or platform from which to read the scriptures. Only adult males were allowed in the meeting — women and children were generally confined to a gallery or balcony from which they could quietly observe.

The general pattern of a synagogue service such as Paul and Barnabas attended was probably along these lines:

1. Recitation of the Shema (“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one...” Deuteronomy 6:4)
2. Prayers (men standing, lifting up hands, heads covered with a prayer shawl)
3. Reading from the Torah (with translation and on the spot commentary and discussion — they didn’t come for a sermon, but for what we would call Q&A)
4. Reading from the Prophets (same as with the Law)
5. Benediction — “word of blessing” or encouragement (generally delivered standing with outstretched hands). This is probably where Paul was asked politely if he would like to close the service — and what a closing he gave!

An artist’s depiction of what a synagogue may have looked like.





Learning Session

Read the passage above and then ask this question; ‘What’s the most ambitious “mission” you’ve ever embarked upon — whether it took you across the street or around the world? What happened?’ Allow a couple of folk to share their stories to the group and then break up into discussion groups to address the following questions:

- What kind of reception did they initially receive in the synagogue in Antioch?
- Having started with the Exodus story, Paul now visits the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. Why do you think he is dwelling on all this?
- How could people who knew the Bible so well and heard it read to them so often miss the very one it was pointing to all those years — and in fact fulfil those very prophecies/promises by rejecting Jesus? What warning do you see here?
- Which do you find more challenging — sharing Jesus and his message at home or across the world? Why?

Have a feedback session after about 10 minutes. Hopefully the different groups will come up with some good points. Essentially we want to stress that we should never take someone’s response to the Gospel (good or bad) personally. Everyone is at a different stage in their spiritual walk in this world; our job isn’t always to convert. Our job is to be led by God to do or say something that helps them take one step closer to Jesus. Their reaction is their responsibility, not ours.

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