

Session 22: Acts 8:5-15:35

- Saul, who was complicit in the stoning of Stephen, and who sought to “lay waste” Christianity, is miraculously converted by Christ on the road to Damascus. Ironically, he who had plotted to lead Christians in chains back to Jerusalem for persecution was instead led meekly by the hand into Damascus to become a Christian (Acts 9:1-19).
- In His mysterious Providence, God had chosen Saul to be an “elect vessel” or “chosen instrument” to gather the gentiles (nations) into the Kingdom of God/Church.
- **Note that early Christianity was simply called the Way (Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4, 24:14,22), as early Christians claimed Christianity to be the Way prophesied by Isaiah, in which Yahweh, through His Christ (Messiah-King), would effect a new Exodus by leading His People along a new “way” from sin to salvation.**
- Paul preached that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah-King) **AND** the Son of God (2nd Person of Most Holy Trinity) (Acts 9:20-31).
- **Because we Christians now live in the New Covenant, instituted by Christ in the Precious Blood of the Eucharistic chalice at the Last Supper**, the ritual/ceremonial/Mosaic law of the Old Covenant is now obsolete. Therefore, standards for ritual purity, especially as regards separation from gentiles and eating only kosher foods, are obsolete (Acts 10:9-33).
- **As Judaism had been the One True Faith, now Christianity, which recognizes Jesus to be the long-expected Christ, is the One True Faith. Thus, Christianity is the continuation and fulfillment of Judaism. That which is discontinued in Christianity was either temporary (ex. ritual laws) or types (ex. circumcision, Temple sacrifices, et cetera).**
- The disciples in Antioch were “preaching the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20). **To say that Jesus is “Lord” is to say that He is “God”.**
- When Peter was miraculously freed from prison by his Guardian Angel, the incredulous disciples first thought it was Peter’s Guardian Angel appearing as Peter, and so they exclaimed, “It is his angel!” (Acts 12:15). **Here we see that the early Christians had a very lively faith in Guardian Angels, as should we.**
- At Antioch of Syria, the Holy Spirit spoke to Church leaders while they were **worshipping** (*leitourgeo*) and fasting (Acts 13:2). The Greek word *leitourgeo*, typically translated as “worshipping”, was used in the Old Testament to refer to liturgical actions of priests and levites in the Temple. **Therefore, in Acts 13:2, St. Luke, by using the word *leitourgeo*, implies that the Church was worshipping God through liturgical actions, through the Liturgy, which was the shorthand expression among the early Church Fathers for the Eucharistic Liturgy.**
- Sent by the Holy Spirit and the Church leaders, Paul embarks upon his 1st missionary journey with Barnabas. They sail to the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea (Acts 13:4-12), then to Antioch of Pisidia in southern Galatia (Acts 13:13-52), then to Iconium (Acts 14:1-7), then to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:8-23), then sailed back to Antioch of Syria (Acts 14:24-28).

- At Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:13-52), Paul and Barnabas were present at a synagogue service, which is essentially the **Liturgy of the Word**, with Scripture readings (law and the prophets), homily or sermon by rabbi or by visiting rabbi, Creed (Shema), and prayers and benedictions. Of course, in the New Covenant, there is added the **Liturgy of the Eucharist**, which is distinctively Christian, as it is the Last Supper, following Christ's command, "Do this in memory of me."
- Preaching in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia, Paul quotes from the Greek version of the prophet Habbakuk, **whereby scoffers who reject the Christ of God will perish, referring to damnation** (Hab 1:5).
- Paul and Barnabas were driven out of Antioch of Pisidia because the unbelieving Jews were jealous that they were preaching to the gentiles **salvation through faith in Christ, not through the Law of Moses** (Acts 13:50).
- At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas continued preaching, even working miracles, until threatened with stoning by the unbelieving Jews, at which time they left for Lystra.
- At Lystra, the unbelieving Jews stoned Paul. But miraculously, Paul, who was either dead or left for dead, rose up and re-entered the city (Acts 14:20).
- Paul exhorted the disciples to continue in the faith, **"saying that through many tribulations/trials/sufferings we must enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22)."** Essentially, to be saved, the Christian must persevere in faith, carrying his cross.
- **The first Church Council was the Council of Jerusalem in 49 AD, which was convened to determine the status of gentile believers crowding the Church.** Some insisted that gentile converts be circumcised to complete their Christian initiation (Acts 15:5), **but the Council rejected circumcision of the flesh as an obsolete work of the Law of Moses, as it was a type, a foreshadowing, of Baptism, which is circumcision of heart, by which one is given the saving grace of Christ, by which one is given the Holy Spirit** (Col 2:8-15).