

13 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 13:51-52

LESSON
Shake off the dust

VERSE 51

*But they shook off the dust
of their feet against them, and
came unto Iconium.*

The Jewish custom of shaking off dust from one's feet signified the shaking off of that which was contaminated, which they believed the dust from Gentile lands they had trod on to be. It was a sign of disapproval and disassociation.

When Jesus sent out His 12 Apostles to the Jews to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, He knew the apostles and their message would find a mixed reception among the house of Israel. Where they were rebuffed, they were to leave and shake off the dust of their feet "for a testimony against them" [Mark 6:11].

When the Jews in Antioch rejected their teaching and presence, Paul and Barnabas also shook off the dust of their feet against them, and departed for Iconium. This symbolic gesture by God's servants was a sign of judgement and rejection of these trouble-makers and opposers of the Gospel, who were ironically Jews. Little wonder that the Son of God had remarked during His ministry that "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house."

We should realise from today's reading that the Gospel message we carry is not one readily received by this world. Society for the most part will be unreceptive and uninterested. Many near and dear to us will reject it. But let us not be persuaded to give up easily on them. Rather persevere in planting, watering and prayer for them and let the Lord of the harvest give the increase. Salvation is of the Lord, for even as the apostles departed, we see that Gentiles in Antioch who had received the apostles' message were filled with the Holy Spirit and joy in their salvation.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
GENESIS 13
MATTHEW 13

PRAYER

Lord, open the hearts of loved and dear ones to receive Your saving grace. Give us perseverance, wisdom and courage to witness, and cause our lives to reflect the love of God for them. Amen.

15

14 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 14:1

LESSON
Gospel
in Iconium

VERSE 1

*And it came to pass in
Iconium, that they went both
together into the synagogue of
the Jews, and so spake,
that a great multitude
both of the Jews and also of
the Greeks believed.*

Two things Christians may be certain of when carrying out the Gospel ministry: First, society at large will reject both our message and even our persons. Second, the Lord will never lack a place of ministry for those who desire to serve Him and He will direct their steps and provide the needful.

When the door closed to Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch, the Lord directed them to Iconium. As was their custom, their first place of call was the Jewish synagogue, where devout Jews, Gentile proselytes (converts to Judaism) and others interested in the Jewish faith would congregate. There, these ministers of the Gospel would find a ready audience to share their message of the love and saving grace of God through the Messiah spoken of in their Scriptures, something familiar yet inscrutable to most, manifested in this God-Man Who had walked and worked among them – the Divine Son of God and sinless Son of Man Who was rejected, crucified, resurrected and ascended to heaven. The prophecies and signs in their Scriptures which had spoken of such a Person had been fulfilled, and this generation would be among the earliest beneficiaries of a new age wherein God's Holy Spirit would be sent to dwell in every believing heart.

By God's providence, many in Iconium believed. The faithful declaration of truth will always reap the harvest of hearts that this God of the impossible has exactly purposed and prepared in His sovereign will. His workings have not changed. Christians today are just to be as faithful in proclaiming the Gospel as Paul and Barnabas were.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
GENESIS 14
MATTHEW 14

THOUGHT

God's Word will never return to Him void but will accomplish that which He pleases and it will prosper them to whom He sends. Hence Paul planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. [Isaiah 55:11, 1 Corinthians 3:6]

15 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 14:2

LESSON
Stirring up evil

VERSE 2
*But the unbelieving Jews
stirred up the Gentiles,
and made their minds evil
affected against the brethren.*

This world is the active domain of Satan. He is called the prince of this world. Here, he has one last opportunity to wreak havoc and inflict death among mankind. From the early days of the serpent in Genesis 3:15 to this second millennium, his hatred of the Gospel of grace is manifested through his minions, both demons and man.

Unbelieving Jews seeing the message of the apostles being proclaimed and accepted by their own and Gentiles were filled with satanic rage and hatred. They stirred up unbelievers against their believing brethren. Even today, we are no strangers to these wiles of the devil which he works through people's hearts and minds. False accusations, malicious lies, wicked slander, hurtful gossip, casting aspersions are all too common weapons in the arsenal of God's enemies to maim and undermine His work and His servants. But this is to be expected. Jesus had forewarned them. They were not to be surprised when the world hates and persecutes them. They will suffer tribulation. Such happening was exactly as foretold. And yet the Lord said, "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

This truth was Paul and Barnabas' source of strength in the face of great adversity. This must also be our source of power and endurance against the world's opposition. The prince of this world and all of his have not changed, but their time is limited. Our God has not changed either but He is eternal. He is the same yesterday, today and forever and no weapon formed against Him shall prosper. "This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD."

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
GENESIS 15
MATTHEW 15

THOUGHT

There is no substitute for the faithful and forthright proclaiming of the Gospel for the sinner to be saved. Read Romans 10:13-17.

16 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 14:3

LESSON

Word of grace,
signs and wonders

VERSE 3

*Long time therefore abode they
speaking boldly in the Lord,
which gave testimony unto the
word of his grace, and granted
signs and wonders to be done
by their hands.*

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
GENESIS 16
MATTHEW 16

THOUGHT

Despite the hostility and evil actions against their preaching [v. 2], Paul and Barnabas persevered. They did not withdraw, soften or compromise their message in order to please the people and officials. They continued to preach “boldly in the Lord”. Their boldness was from God to Whom they would have prayed fervently as their brethren did – “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word” [Acts 4:29].

Paul and Barnabas stayed and continued to preach faithfully, comforting and strengthening the believers in their new-found faith. They were instruments in the Lord’s hand as they laboured for Him. The Lord was preaching through them. The “Word of Grace” is the Gospel – to which the Lord Himself “gave testimony” (witness). They were so yielded and surrendered to the Lord that He could use them to speak His Word of Grace. To further authenticate the ministry of His servants, “The Lord ... granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands” [v. 3]. He is the source of all truth, goodness and blessings – the power to create, to heal and to save.

Today we thank God that His Word is complete in the Holy Scriptures. God does not require us to perform signs and wonders in order to convert unbelievers – but we are to faithfully proclaim the Gospel – the “Word of Grace” – “... for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth ...” [Romans 1:16]

May we ever be fully surrendered and yielded to Christ so that He is pleased to use us as His instruments and ambassadors to win souls for Him.

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. – 2 Corinthians 5:20

17 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 14:4-5

LESSON
Divided city

VERSE 4
*But the multitude of the city
was divided: and part held
with the Jews, and part
with the apostles.*

The faithful and persistent preaching of Paul and Barnabas brought about a sharp division among the populace of the city even as the word of God took effect in the hearts of sinful men.

“For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” [Hebrews 4:12]. Whenever the Word of God is preached, there can only be two responses from its hearers – acceptance resulting in repentance unto salvation, or rejection and rebellion unto eternal damnation.

Some sided with the Jews who opposed the Gospel while others sided with the apostles. The Gospel is like a sword dividing even friends and families – true to Christ’s prediction that He came not to send peace upon earth but rather divisions [Matthew 10:34-39]. The same message of the cross, faithfully preached, brings life to the believer but death to the rejecters [2 Corinthians 2:14-16]. The enemies of the apostles (unbelieving Jews, Gentiles and rulers), their hatred having reached its boiling point, plotted to murder them by stoning. Even as their forefathers had killed the prophets whom God had sent in times past, the enemies of the Gospel were now determined to kill the apostles. Such is the desperate wickedness of hardened and unregenerate hearts [Jeremiah 17:9].

Let us always be mindful of the Lord’s servants labouring in the mission fields suffering oppression and persecution. Let us remember them in prayer, supporting and encouraging them in every practical way.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
GENESIS 17
MATTHEW 17

ASSURANCE

Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also.
– John 15:20

19

18 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 14:6-7

LESSON
They preached
the Gospel

VERSE 7
*And there
they preached the Gospel.*

Paul and Barnabas' retreat from Iconium was neither an act of cowardice nor dishonour but an act of prudence invariably guided by the Holy Spirit. They were prepared to suffer persecution, beatings and even death if necessary for the Gospel's sake. Satisfied that their work was done here, they now turned to other cities to stake new ground for Christ. They acted according to Christ's injunction to His disciples [Matthew 10:23]. To persist in Iconium and resist the enemies would possibly only result in unnecessary and untimely martyrdom and would have abruptly and prematurely terminated their Gospel work. Paul, endeavouring to fulfil his mission to the nations completely, would wisely avoid death. If required, he would take necessary measures - flight by night or even legal appeal - to prolong his fruitful labour [Philippians 1:22]. May God grant such wisdom to His servants even today.

In Lystra and Derbe, Paul and Barnabas found safety. Surely God is our refuge and shelter in the time of storm and trouble [Psalm 46:1] - a "higher rock" [Psalm 61:2] "to whom we can fly". Though they quit the spot, they did not quit the job. True to their calling "there they preached the Gospel".

The Gospel message of "Christ crucified" [1 Corinthians 2:1-5] declares:

1. The glory of His person as the God-man mediator [1 John 1:1-3]
2. The efficacy of His work as the sinner's substitute [Isaiah 53:10-11]
3. The universal sovereignty of His dominion [Hebrews 10:12-13]

This must always be our only message to the world.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
GENESIS 18
MATTHEW 18

THOUGHT

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. - Romans 1:16a

19 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 14:8-10

LESSON
Miracle
in Lystra

VERSES 9-10

*The same heard Paul speak:
who steadfastly beholding him,
and perceiving that he had
faith to be healed,
Said with a loud voice,
Stand upright on thy feet.
And he leaped and walked.*

There being no synagogue in Lystra, Paul preached itinerantly. On the street one day, he wrought a miraculous cure on a crippled Gentile. This man “having heard Paul speak”, was touched in his heart and believed. He possessed faith that the power behind the Word could surely make him whole again. Paul “steadfastly beholding him” perceived his faith and commanded the cripple to get up. Immediately, he “leaped and walked” when before, no man was able to help him.

While Paul commanded the action, it was God Who empowered the outcome. Peter, earlier on outside the temple in Jerusalem, had similarly healed a Jewish cripple [Acts 3:1-9]. Whenever and wherever the Word is preached – the synagogue, the street, by the river, the classroom, from the pulpit [Acts 16:13] and to whomever – Jew or Gentile, man or woman, young or old – it is the Word of Life unto salvation.

These two cripples from birth were helpless and hopeless until they tasted the sweet grace of God’s deliverance. Whether in Jerusalem or Lystra, the leaping of the lame signals fulfilment of God’s promise to open blind eyes and deaf ears, to make the lame walk and the mute able to shout with joy [Isaiah 35:5-6, Luke 7:22]. We, though born physically whole, were spiritually dead until the life-giving Spirit of God quickened us.

Let our hearts exult in the joy of our salvation as we walk in the light of His Word. May we always use the faculties that God has blessed us with to bear a good witness for him and to serve Him faithfully.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
GENESIS 19
MATTHEW 19

THOUGHT

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. – Romans 12:1

20 JANUARY

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 14:11

LESSON

The gods are here

VERSE 11

*And when the people
saw what Paul had done,
they lifted up their voices,
saying in the speech of
Lycaonia, The gods are
come down to us
in the likeness of men.*

The miraculous healing of the cripple by Paul had such a great impact (albeit negative) upon the populace of mostly Lycaonians and Greeks. The whole city was full of excitement and confusion believing their gods had come to them “in the likeness of men”.

Steeped in Greek mythology with all its false man-invented deities, the people attributed the miracle to their gods, and believed that Barnabas and Paul were the incarnation of Jupiter and Mercury. They saw the miracle but disregarded the message. If only they had remembered and believed Paul’s teaching, they would have given the glory to the One Who was the true and living God. Such are hearts which are hardened and eyes blinded by Satan who deceived these people then and continues to do the same today [Romans 1:20-23].

Unbelievers are superstitious and trust their “fate” and destiny to false beliefs. Like these superstitious Lycaonians and Greeks, unbelievers throughout history idolise and often regard man as gods, for their achievements in science, technology, human philosophy, business, entertainment, sports and other things. They believe they are in control of their own fate and destiny. God has no place in their lives. They inflate themselves in self-worship which is idolatry. Even worse are those who profess to be “Christians” but wilfully pervert God’s Word according to their whims and fancy to justify a sinful lifestyle. May the Lord help us never to fall into such sins of idolatry.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
GENESIS 20
MATTHEW 20

THOUGHT

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. – Romans 1:22-23