Saul July 15

A Helping Hand

 Persecution forced the believers to scatter – some went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch telling the message to Jews only. Acts 11:19b. The number of believers grew and the news of the church at Antioch reached the church in Jerusalem, they decided to send Barnabas to Antioch.

 Barnabas arrived to find enthusiastic, blessed believers. – Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and many people were brought to the Lord. Acts 11:24. There was a lot of work to be done so Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul, the two of them worked together in Antioch for a whole year preaching and teaching. – It was at Antioch that the believers were first called Christians. Acts 11:26b.

 A prophesied famine struck Judea, Saul and Barnabas sent money to the churches there to help their fellow believers.

 The Lord, Saul and Barnabas made quite a team, preaching, teaching and helping others. We, too, can team up with the Lord to help others, not only spiritually but also with money, there are thousands less fortunate than we are that need our help. We so often freeze up when money is mentioned, but we can help missionaries with our money to help others spreading the Word and medical help in places we could not possibly go.

VERSE FOR TODAY: They did this, then, and sent the money to the church elders by Barnabas and Saul. Acts 11:30.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Help me, O Lord, to be generous with the money you have blessed me with, help my money to make a difference in spreading your word.

King Herod July 16

Royal Persecutor

 King Herod Agrippa I, the ruler of all Palestine, launched a campaign against the Christians. Among his first acts of persecution – He had James, the brother of John put to death by the sword. Acts 12:2. With that he won approval of the Jews so he went on to have Peter arrested and jailed. This happened during the Passover so Herod was going to hold him until the festival was over, then put him on trial – So Peter was kept in jail, but the people of the church were praying earnestly to God for him. Acts 12:5. We see the power of prayer, Peter was guarded by sixteen guards and was even chained between two guards but during the night an angel came and told him to rise and dress, then lead him out to the street, Peter thought he was dreaming but when the angel left him he was really free!

 Peter went to Mary’s house but he servant girl, Rhoda as so excited to see Peter she left him at the door knocking, the others answered the door, Peter told them of his release, then left them.

 In the morning when Peter was nowhere to be found, Herod had the guards questioned and killed. Herod left Judea and went to Caesarea, later, during a speech the people exclaimed Herod as a god, an angel of the Lord struck Herod down because he dishonored God; Herod was eaten by worms and died.

 We must always realize that we cannot make it without the Lord, and to always give him the honor and glory in everything.

VERSE FOR TODAY: Meanwhile the word of God continued to spread and grow. Acts 12:24.

PRAYER THOUGHT: May I always give you the honour and glory, O Lord, and help your word to spread and be strong.

Saul and Barnabas July 17

The Call

 At Antioch in Syria, - While there were serving the Lord, and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul, to do the work to which I have called them.” Acts 13:2. Saul and Barnabas did not just decide to take the journeys but the Lord through the Holy Spirit called them to this service.

 The changing of Saul’s name to Paul is first mentioned – Then Saul – also known as Paul …. Acts 13:9a.

 Their first stop after sailing from Seleucia was Cyprus, where Paul ministered to Sergius Paulus, the governor of Cyprus, but there was a magician named Bar-Jesus, who kept interfering with Paul, changing the truths of the Lord into lies for the governor. Paul turned to the magician – and said, “You son of the Devil! You are the enemy of everything that is good…The Lord’s hand will come down on you now; you will be blind and will not see the light of day for a time” Acts 13:10a, 11. Indeed Elymas (his name in Greek) did fall blind and left in confusion, trying to find someone to lead him.

 We, too, maybe groping in darkness trying to find someone to lead us, the Lord is waiting patiently to show us the light and to lead us on paths of righteousness.

VERSE FOR TODAY: When the governor saw what had happened, he believed; for he was greatly amazed at the teaching about the Lord. Acts 13:12.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Help me, O Lord, to know when you are leading me in witnessing so that I can be successful and not just rambling on my own.

The First Journey July 18

In Antioch

 Paul and Barnabas sailed to Perga, and went up to Antioch in Pisidia where on the first Sabbath Paul spoke in the synagogue, he traced God’s involvement with His people from Egypt thru the Prophets, King David, John the Baptist, the coming of Jesus prophesied, his birth, death and resurrection. – We want you to know, my fellow-Israelites, that it is through Jesus that the message about forgiveness of sins is preached to you; and that everyone who believes in him is set free from all the sins from which the Law of Moses could not set you free. Acts 13:38, 39.

 The next Sabbath Paul and Barnabas spoke again in the synagogue, in spite of Jews’ jealousy and insults, - But Paul and Barnabas spoke out even more boldly: “It was necessary that the world of God should be spoken first to you. But since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we will leave you and go to the Gentiles.” Acts 13:46.

 Here once again we have the people handpicked by God to receive the salvation of Jesus rejecting it and thus giving the way for the Gentiles to receive eternal life.

 The Jews stirred up trouble for Paul and Barnabas and ended up throwing them out of the region.

 We know this did not stop or even slow down Paul and Barnabas in their spreading of the word, we must not let doubters, scoffers discourage us from witnessing.

VERSE FOR TODAY: The word of the Lord spread everywhere in that region. Acts 13:49.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Help me, O Lord, never to be discouraged in your work but to keep the faith and rely on your strength.

Paul July 19

The Rest of the Journey

 Paul and Barnabas went on to Iconium speaking boldly of the love of God and winning many converts, but again there were the ones that refused to believe and Iconium became a divided city from which Paul and Barnabas had to flee for their lives.

 They went on to Lystra and Derbe. In Lystra Paul healed a new believer of his lameness and the people thought their god Zeus had become like men, they even were going to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, it was hard to convince the people not to offer sacrifices to them – “Why are you doing this? We ourselves are only human beings like you! We are here to announce the Good News, to turn you away from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven, earth, sea, and all that is in them…” Acts 14:15.

 Some Jews showed up from Antioch and Iconium, they stoned Paul, leaving him for dead, but he wasn’t and left the next day for Derbe where they won many to the Lord. Then they backtracked to Antioch in Syria encouraging the new converts on the way.

 We need encouragement and strength that can come from other believers, that’s where the worship service can give us the inspiration we need to face another week in the Lord.

VERSE FOR TODAY: They strengthened the believers and encouraged them to remain true to the faith. Acts 14:22a

PRAYER THOUGHT: Help me, O Lord not just to take but also to give strength and encouragement to others.

The Meeting July 20

Law vs. Grace

 In Antioch some men showed up – and started teaching the believers, “You cannot be saved unless you are circumcised as the Law of Moses requires.” Acts 15:1b. Paul and Barnabas tried to talk against this teaching, which resulted in an argument in which nothing was resolved so Paul and Barnabas and some other believers went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles.

 After the apostles discussed the matter at length Peter concluded – “…No! We believe and are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they are.” Acts 15:11. Paul and Barnabas gave a report of their journey – The whole group was silent as they heard Barnabas and Paul report all the miracles and wonders that God had performed through them among the Gentiles. Acts 15:12.

 At the insistence of James a letter was drawn up to the believers which guidelines were set down about not eating meat offered to idols, strangled animals or blood also to keep themselves sexually moral.

 Paul, Barnabas, Judas, and Silas went to Antioch with the letter – When the people read it, they were filled with joy by the message of encouragement. Acts 15:31.

 It is good for us, too, not to get up in dos and don’ts, just to follow the example of Christ and remember the Grace of God saves us.

VERSE FOR TODAY: He made no difference between us (Jews) and them (Gentiles); he forgave their sins because they believed. Acts 15:9.

PRAYER THOUGHT: Thank-you, O lord, for your grace it lifts the burden of rules and lets us live more freely in your love.

Paul and Silas July 21

The Second Journey

 Paul and Barnabas talked about a second journey – Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us go back and visit our brothers and sisters in every town where we preached the word of the Lord, and let us find out how they are getting on.” Acts 15:36. They disagreed about taking John Mark with them again, he went with the first time but turned back early. After the disagreement Paul chose Silas and went through Cilicia helping to make the churches stronger. Barnabas and John Mark sailed for Cyprus.

 Paul and Silas went on to Derbe and Lystra where they met Timothy, a believer, who was raised as a Gentile but was circumcised before going with Paul and Silas so that no questions could be raised later.

 They delivered the letter that was drawn up by the Apostles in Jerusalem meeting to the churches and told them to heed the guidelines. – So the churches were made stronger in the faith and grew in numbers every day. Acts 16:5

 They made a sweeping pass through Asia because the Holy Spirit would not let them preach there so they went straight to Troas where Paul received a vision to go to Macedonia so they left immediately for Macedonia.

 We must learn to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

VERSE FOR TODAY: As soon as Paul had this vision, we got ready to leave for Macedonia, because we decided that God had called us to preach the Good News to the people there. Acts 16:10

PRAYER THOUGHT: Thank-you, O Lord, for the Holy Spirit to guide, comfort and help us. Help me to follow the Spirit’s lead.

The Second Journey July 22

In Philippi

 Paul and Silas sailed from Troas to Macedonia and went on to Philippi on the inlet. They spent several days there, on the Sabbath they met on the river bank with a religious woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, she heard the Good News about Jesus and her entire household was baptized.

 A second woman Paul and Silas encountered was filled with an evil spirit which allowed her to tell fortunes and made a lot of money for her owners. After several days of the evil spirit’s harassment – Paul became so upset that he turned around and said to the spirit, “In the name of Jesus Christ I order you to come out of her!” The spirit went out of her that very moment. Acts 16:18b. This ended her ability to tell fortunes and the income for her owners so they had Paul and Silas arrested. After a public “trial” the officials had Paul and Silas whipped and imprisoned in stocks in an inner cell. At midnight amid singing and praying there was an earthquake that opened up the jail, stocks and chains. When the jailer saw this he was about to kill himself because it would have meant death for him if there were any prisoners missing, but Paul stopped him saying everyone was still there, realizing it was a miracle he wanted to know what he must do to be saved.

 A bad situation turned out to be a witnessing opportunity; we must learn to use all situations as opportunities to witness.

VERSE FOR TODAY: They answered, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-you and your family.” Acts 16:31

PRAYER THOUGHT: May my belief in you be of the saving quality and help me to witness in all situations.