

Acts 13- Paul's first Missionary Journey

THEME: First missionary journey of Paul.

We come now to the final major division of the Book of Acts. It is the Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles to the uttermost part of the earth. This section includes chapters 13–28.

You will remember that the key to the book is the fact that Jesus said, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me” (Act_1:8). This was not a command to the church as a corporate body but to you and me individually. This witness was to go out to Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria, and then to the uttermost part of the earth. During the Jerusalem period we saw that the gospel went to the Jews, and the church was 100 percent Jewish—no Gentiles. During the next period we saw the gospel go to the Samaritans and we saw the conversion of some Gentiles. Now the gospel moves out officially on its way to the ends of the earth.

On its way to the ends of the earth the gospel came to my ancestors and to your ancestors. Today you and I are the beneficiaries of the fact that someone went down the road of this world to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. You and I ought to be in the business of taking the gospel down beyond where we are to some who have not heard.

In this surge of the gospel beyond the boundaries of Simon Peter we find that Paul becomes the dominant leader and Peter disappears from the scene. God had used him mightily. Now Paul is the dominant one whom God will use.

As you will see by the map (p. 158), Paul begins his journey with Barnabas. The first stop is the island of Cyprus, the home of Barnabas. They cross the island, then set sail from Paphos to go over to Perga in Pamphylia. Then they enter the interior of Asia Minor, which is now Turkey, and go into the Galatian country. They visit Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe; then they return through Attalia, and then sail back to Antioch. - McGee

Barnabas and Saul Sent Off

Act 13:1 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

A church had been formed in Antioch, as we learned in chapter 11. Instead of having one man designated as the minister or pastor, this assembly had a plurality of gifts. Specifically, there were at least five prophets and teachers. As mentioned previously, a prophet was a man specially gifted by the Holy Spirit to receive revelations directly from God and to preach them to others. In a real sense, the prophets were mouthpieces for the Lord, and could often foretell coming events. Teachers were men to whom the Holy Spirit had given the ability to expound or explain the Word of God to others in a simple and understandable manner.

The names of the prophets and teachers are given as follows:

1. Barnabas. We have already been introduced to this splendid servant of Christ and Paul's faithful co-worker. Here he is mentioned first, perhaps because he was the oldest in the faith, or in service for Christ.
2. Simeon who was called Niger (nye-jer). We judge from his name that he was a Jew by birth, perhaps from an African Jewish community. Or perhaps he adopted the name Niger (black or swarthy) for convenience in working with Gentiles. Of course, he may have been black, as the name would suggest. Nothing else is known of him.
3. Lucius of Cyrene. He was probably one of the men of Cyrene who came to Antioch first, preaching the Lord Jesus (Act_11:20).

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4. Manaen (same as the OT name Menahem). He is listed as one brought up with Herod the tetrarch. It is interesting to think of one who had lived in such close relationship with the wicked Herod Antipas being one of the earliest converts to the Christian faith. The title, tetrarch, indicates that Herod ruled over a fourth part of his father's kingdom.

5. Saul. Although mentioned last in this list, Saul was to become a living embodiment of the truth, "The last shall be first."

These five men illustrate that the early church was integrated and color-blind as far as man's skin is concerned. "A new measuring stick has been brought into being it is not who you are but whose." – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

These prophets and teachers had gathered together for a time of prayer and fasting, probably with the entire church. From the context, it appears clear that the expression, they ministered to the Lord, means they spent time in prayer and intercession. By fasting, they denied the legitimate claims of the body so as to give themselves more undistractedly to spiritual exercises.

Why had they come together to pray? Is it unreasonable to believe that they convened this meeting because of a deep burden for the evangelization of the world? The record does not indicate that it was an all-night prayer meeting, but the implication certainly is that it was of a more serious and prolonged nature than the usual "prayer meeting" of today.

As they prayed, the Holy Spirit definitely instructed them to separate ... Barnabas and Saul for the specific work which He had in mind. This, incidentally, is a very definite proof of the personality of the Holy Spirit. If He were nothing but an influence, it would be inconceivable that such language as this could be used. How did the Holy Spirit convey this message to the prophets and teachers? Although no definite answer is given, it is likely that He spoke through one of these men who were prophets —either Simeon, Lucius, or Manaen.

Barnabas is mentioned first here, then Saul. But when they returned to Antioch, the order was reversed.

This verse is of tremendous practical importance in emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit in the guidance of the early church, and the sensitivity of the disciples to His leading. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 13:3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

After the Holy Spirit had thus revealed His will, the men continued to fast and pray. Then the three (Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen) laid hands on Barnabas and Saul. This was not an official act of "ordination" as is practiced in Christendom today where a church official confers ecclesiastical status on a subordinate. It was simply an expression of their fellowship with these two men in the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them. The idea of ordination as a rite which confers exclusive authority to administer the "sacraments" and perform other ecclesiastical duties is unknown in the NT. Barnhouse comments:

A great error in our modern way of doing things is to expect one man to possess all the necessary gifts for leadership. Thus, a church may have several hundred members but only one pastor. He is supposed to be able to preach, comfort and so on. In fact, of the eight gifts mentioned in our text (Rom_12:6-8) seven are usually

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considered to be the functions of the ordained minister, while the eighth is the function of the congregation. And what one gift is left to the congregation? It is that of paying the bills. Something is out of order here.

Someone may ask if I am suggesting that laymen should preach. Without question, when a layman has a grasp of the Scriptures, he should exercise his gift and preach at every opportunity. The growth of laymen's movements is significant and is a step in the right direction—back to the New Testament way of doing things.

It should be remembered that Barnabas and Saul had already been in the work of the Lord for about eight years before this time. They were not novices in the service of Christ. They had already experienced the “ordination of the Pierced Hands.” Now their fellow-servants at Antioch were simply expressing their identification with them in this special commission to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

The words, they sent them away, are more literally, “they let them go” or “set them free” for the work. – Believers Bible Commentary

Barnabas and Saul on Cyprus

Act 13:4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

The important thing is that they are sent forth by the Holy Spirit. They were led by the Holy Spirit of God. They went down to the seacoast town of Seleucia and sailed from there. – McGee

With this verse begins what has commonly been known as Paul's First Missionary Journey. The record of this journey extends to Act_14:26. It was concerned chiefly with evangelizing Asia Minor. The Second Missionary Journey carried the gospel to Greece. The Third Missionary Journey included return visits to the churches of Asia Minor and Greece, but it was chiefly concerned with the Province of Asia and the city of Ephesus. Paul's missionary labors covered a period of about fifteen years.

(In tracing Paul's journeys, we shall indicate the places visited by printing the entire name in capital letters the first time it is mentioned on any particular journey.)

From Antioch in Syria the two intrepid servants of Christ first went down to SELEUCIA (pronounced sel-you'-shi-a), a seaport about sixteen miles from Antioch. From there they sailed to the island of CYPRUS.

Act 13:5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant.

After landing at SALAMIS (sal'-a-mis), on the east coast of Cyprus, they visited various synagogues and preached the word there. It was a custom in the synagogues for any Jewish man to be given the opportunity to read or expound the Scriptures. John Mark, at this time, was serving as their assistant (not “minister,” as in the KJV). In going to the synagogue first, Barnabas and Saul were fulfilling the divine injunction that the gospel should go to the Jew first, then to the Gentiles. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 13:6-8 Now, when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

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From Salamis they worked their way across the entire length of the island to PAPHOS on the west coast. Salamis was the chief commercial city of the island. Paphos was the capital.

There they met a Jewish false prophet and sorcerer named Bar-Jesus (meaning Son of Jesus or of Joshua). Somehow this sorcerer had become closely associated with Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul or administrative officer of the island. The latter is described as an intelligent man. When this man ... called for Barnabas and Saul to come to him so he could be instructed in the word of God, the sorcerer tried to interfere; he was probably satanically inspired to hinder the gospel.

In verse 8 his name is given as Elymas, meaning "wise man." It was, of course, a dreadful misnomer. – Believers' Bible Commentary

It would appear that their ministry didn't have much success at Salamis. At least no record is given of any fruit from their ministry. They cross over the Isle of Cyprus to the other side of the island. In Paphos they encounter this opposition, which is actually satanic, through a sorcerer who had a tremendous influence on the Roman deputy, the governor of that island, Sergius Paulus.

This is satanic opposition. This man had the governor under his influence. Unfortunately, there are a great many rulers today who are under the influence of all kinds of cultism which is in opposition to the Word of God and in opposition to the gospel. – McGee

Do we as believers get discouraged too easily? Not it appears they had little success at the first stop, and now Satan's attack is coming. It would have been easy to doubt their calling and fear of rejection cripple their ministry before it gets going.

Act 13:9-10 Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?"

Here his name is changed. Why was he called Paul? The name Paul means "small or little." Some think that he took that name as an act of humility, that he no longer wanted to bear the proud name of Saul. It is possible he took the name of the governor, Sergius Paulus, who was his first convert. – McGee

Note that in this narrative (v. 9) Luke begins using Saul's Gentile name, Paul, rather than his Jewish name, Saul. The use of the name, Paul, signals the increasing outflow of the gospel to the Gentiles. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Realizing that Sergius Paulus was an earnest seeker of truth, and that the sorcerer was an enemy of the truth, Saul openly rebuked him in unsparing terms. Lest anyone might suspect that Saul was speaking in the energy of the flesh, it is explicitly stated that he was filled with the Holy Spirit at the time. Fixing his eyes intently on the sorcerer, Saul accused him of being full of all guile and all fraud. Nor was Saul deceived by the name Bar-Jesus; he tore away that mask and labeled Elymas as a son of the devil. The magician was an enemy of all righteousness, working ceaselessly to distort the truth of God. – Believers' Bible Commentary

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Act 13:11 And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

Then, speaking with the special disciplinary authority vested in him as an apostle, Saul announced that Elymas would be stricken with blindness for a time. Because he had tried to keep others, such as the proconsul, in spiritual darkness, he himself would be punished with physical blindness. Immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he groped his way around, trying to find someone willing to lead him by the hand.

Elymas might be taken as a picture of the nation of Israel, not only unwilling to accept the Lord Jesus, but seeking to prevent others from doing so as well. As a result, Israel has been judicially blinded by God, but only for a time. Eventually a repentant remnant of the nation will turn to Jesus as Messiah and be converted. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 13:12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

I call your attention to the fact that Paul had the sign gifts of an apostle. When he went over there to Paphos, he couldn't ask them to turn to the New Testament. There was no New Testament for him to preach from or for them to turn to. He couldn't preach from the Epistle to the Romans because he hadn't written it yet. They couldn't turn to the Gospel of John because John hadn't written it yet. So how will they recognize his authority? It is by the sign gifts. Today, the New Testament is written. We are now given a different way to recognize authority. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed" (2Jn_1:10). This doctrine is in the Word of God, in the New Testament.

Probably the sorcerer had been doing some fancy tricks by the power of Satan. In that day a false prophet could probably heal and perform other miracles by the power of Satan.

Paul has his authority from the Lord Jesus Christ. He absolutely dominates the sorcerer by his message of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sergius Paulus comes to the light. He has been in spiritual darkness but now believes and is astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. – McGee

The proconsul was obviously impressed by the miraculous stroke from God, but he was even more impressed by the teaching which had been given to him by Barnabas and Saul. He became a true believer in the Lord Jesus, the first trophy of grace on the first missionary journey. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Paul and Barnabas at Antioch in Pisidia

Act 13:13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

The fact that Paul has now taken the place of prominence is indicated by the words Paul and his party. From Paphos they sailed northwest to PERGA in PAMPHYLIA (pam-fil'-i-a). Pamphylia was a Roman province on the southern coast of Asia Minor. Perga was its capital and was located seven miles inland on the River Cestros (Kestros).

It was when they reached Perga that.

John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. Maybe he didn't relish the thought of taking the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul considered his withdrawal such a defect in service that he refused to allow Mark to accompany

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him on the second journey. This caused a sharp cleavage between Paul and Barnabas, resulting in their taking separate paths as far as future Christian service was concerned (cf. 15:36-39). Eventually, Mark regained the confidence of the Apostle Paul (2Ti_4:11).

No further details are given as to the visit to Perga. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 13:14-15 *But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."*

Paul follows his method of going first to the synagogue. Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, and they established synagogues in the cities in which they had settled. When visitors would come from Jerusalem, since they would want word from the religious center, they would invite the visitor to say something. This always afforded a marvelous opportunity for the apostle Paul. He certainly took advantage of it here.

This sermon which Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia is one of the great sermons, in my opinion; yet it is generally passed by today. It is the first recorded sermon of Paul, preached in the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. When they asked Paul whether he would like to say something, you can be sure that he wanted to say something. That was his whole reason for being there. - McGee

Act 13:16-20 *Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment. "After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.*

One would conclude from this introduction that there were some visitors there—probably Gentile proselytes. Notice that Paul is doing the same thing that Stephen did before the Sanhedrin. He recounts Israel's history as a nation. - McGee

Act 13:21-28 *And afterward they asked for a king; so, God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID THE SON OF JESSE, A MAN AFTER MY OWN HEART, WHO WILL DO ALL MY WILL.' From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus— after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.' "Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death.*

After recounting their history, he will present to them the person of the Savior.

These people apparently had heard of John the Baptist. Now Paul will get down to the nitty-gritty.

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As Paul is reviewing their history, he is pointing out that all this was done as a fulfillment of prophecy. They were fulfilling the prophets at the very same time they were reading them! They read without understanding what they were reading. - McGee

Act 13:29-31 *Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people.*

You will notice that the core, the heart of every sermon preached in the New Testament, is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the message. Simon Peter preached it; now Paul the apostle preaches it. There is not the slightest disagreement in the message of these two men. Don't tell me these two men disagreed. They did not! - McGee

Act 13:32-33 *And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.'*

This Old Testament reference, Psa_2:7, does not refer to the birth of Christ; it refers to the resurrection of Christ. "This day have I begotten thee"—not begotten in the virgin birth but actually in the resurrection from the dead. - McGee

Act 13:34-35 *And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID.' Therefore, He also says in another Psalm: 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION.'*

Paul enlarges upon the Resurrection. He is citing the same thing that Simon Peter did on the Day of Pentecost. - McGee

Act 13:36-39 *"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption. Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

Now he is pinning this thing down. He is explaining the significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is actually asking them for a decision to believe on the Lord Jesus. - McGee

Act 13:40-45 *Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you: 'BEHOLD, YOU DESPISERS, MARVEL AND PERISH! FOR I WORK A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL BY NO MEANS BELIEVE, THOUGH ONE WERE TO DECLARE IT TO YOU.' " So, when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now, when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost, the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.*

Here is his appeal to them. He urges them not to reject the message. There were Gentiles there who said, "We would like to hear this same message." There must have been much discussion of Paul's message. The next Sabbath Day almost the entire city was there to hear Paul preach. This time there was a big commotion because the leading religious rulers of the synagogue opposed Paul and Barnabas. - McGee

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Act 13:46-49 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I HAVE SET YOU AS A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES, THAT YOU SHOULD BE FOR SALVATION TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.' " Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.

Here is the recurring pattern. The gospel is preached to the Jews first; they reject it; so, they turn to the Gentiles with the good news. - McGee

Act 13:50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

In spite of the opposition of the Jews, the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the surrounding region. This further aroused the opposition party to hinder and obstruct. The Jews stirred up some devout ... women who had become converts to Judaism and were prominent in the community to agitate against the missionaries. Also, they used the chief men of the city to further their wicked purposes. Such a storm of persecution was stirred up that Paul and Barnabas were forcibly evicted from the area. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 13:51-52 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

In accordance with the instructions of the Lord (Luk_9:5; Luk_10:11), they shook off the dust from their feet and moved on to ICONIUM. However, the incident was not interpreted by the Christians as a defeat or a retreat, for we read that they were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Iconium, located east and south of Antioch in Asia Minor, today is called Konya. – Believers' Bible Commentary