

20. Paul and Barnabas Take the Gospel to Asia Minor: Acts 13

Acts 12 closed with Barnabas and Paul returning to Antioch, taking John Mark with them. Acts 13 marks a new beginning in the spread of the gospel, as Paul and his companions embark on Paul's first missionary journey. On this journey, Luke will write in the third person, indicating that he did not accompany Paul and Barnabas. However, by the second journey, Luke speaks in the first person, indicating that he was with Paul. Acts 16:10 Luke uses *we* and *us*: "10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

Paul and Barnabas Sent

Acts 13:1-3

1 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

The church at Antioch had in her membership inspired prophets. The notes on Acts 8 fully discuss how the apostles imparted spiritual gifts in the early church. Here we see these prophets and teachers actually at work in the early church. A brief review is in order. Paul describes the purpose of these inspired people in Eph 4:11-13:

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Uninspired evangelists (preachers), pastors (also called elders, overseers, and bishops), and teachers continue in the church today. However, those whose work depended on inspiration of the Spirit ceased. Paul taught this explicitly in 1 Cor 13:8: "8 Love never fails. But where there are **prophecies, they will cease**; where there are **tongues, they will be stilled**; where there is **knowledge, it will pass away**." [Emphasis added.]

The Spirit, through these inspired men, directly ordered that the church set aside Barnabas and Saul to the work that is to follow – their first missionary journey. The role of the church in Antioch is extremely important, relating both to the oversight of the work they were to do and to the support of that work. Rom 10:14-15 further explains the obligation of churches to send:

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent?

Acts 13:4-5

4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. 5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

The Holy Spirit, who ordered the church, is the one who actually sent them. Thus, the author of the order was the Holy Spirit with the church executing that order. They sailed from the seaport of Seleucia to Salamis on the island of Cyprus.

Paul and Barnabas in Paphos

Acts 13:6-11a

6 They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7 who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas

and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10 "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? 11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun."

Paul's First and Second Journeys



In Paphos, they met two people of very different motivation. The Jewish sorcerer, named Bar-Jesus or Elymas, had a financial stake as an attendant to the proconsul. On the other hand, the proconsul wanted to hear the word of God. Therefore, Elymas tried to oppose the preachers and turn the proconsul from the faith. Paul was vehement in his response, calling him a son of the devil and the enemy of everything that is right. In John 8:44, Jesus had also criticized the Jews for a similar heart:

44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Peter had used similar language in describing the fallen Simon in Acts 8:21-23:

21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

Such language is reserved for those who pervert the “right ways of the Lord.” For all this, Elymas was going to be blind for a time.

Acts 13:11b-12

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. 12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

Immediately, he was blind. The proconsul was witness to the miracle, but he was amazed at the teaching of the Lord. Once again, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.” People today might say, “If I could just see a miracle.” Miracles in the New Testament only confirmed the word of God. The wonder of wonders is the good news of Jesus risen from the dead, our sins washed away by his blood, and a hope of life eternal for those who believe and obey. Now that is a miracle of great amazement.

The proconsul follows the same path as those on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. When they heard the gospel, they were pricked in their hearts. When the Samaritans heard Philip preach in Acts 8:22, they believed: “22 But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” When the eunuch heard Philip preach Jesus, he immediately responded in Acts 8:36, ““Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?” Immediacy and urgency are always the watchwords in conversion—once it happens, the response follows quickly. Paul is an excellent example of what must follow belief of the gospel in Acts 22:16: “16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” So it was with the proconsul.

Perga in Pamphylia and Pisidian Antioch

Acts 13:13-15

13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. 14 From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. 15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."

From Paphos on Cyprus, they landed at Perga, where John turned back. The notes on Acts 12:25 discuss the turning back of John, Paul's refusal to take him on the second journey, and John's eventual restoration as Paul's true and faithful fellow worker.

As will be the custom, Paul and his companions went to the Jews first, finding them at the synagogue on the Sabbath. The leaders asked them to speak. The sermon that Paul now preaches ranks with Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost and Stephen's sermon in his defense and in the defense of the gospel. The sermon is a comprehensive statement of why the Jews should turn to the gospel.

Paul Preaches

Acts 13:16-20a

16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! 17 The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, 18 he endured their

conduct for about forty years in the desert, 19 he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. 20 All this took about 450 years.

Paul covers 450 years of Jewish history in these 89 words. Of course, Men of Israel and Gentiles who worship God would know this history, which was read on the Sabbath days in the synagogues.

Acts 13:20b-22

"After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. 21 Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. 22 After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

In this brief paragraph, Paul covers the time of the judges to David, the king after God's own heart. The people who asked for a king, departed from God's plan in 1 Sam 8:4-8:

4 So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. 5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. 7 And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king."

Paul quotes 1 Sam 13:14 where God speaks of David as a man after his own heart: "14 But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

This is the first recorded sermon where Paul addresses a joint Jewish and Gentile audience on his journey. The only other place that "after my own heart" appears is prophetically speaking of shepherds (elders, bishops) in the church, the New Jerusalem, when Jew and Gentile alike gather. Jer 3:14-17 reads:

14 "Return, faithless people," declares the Lord, "for I am your husband. I will choose you . . . and bring you to Zion. 15 Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. 16 In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the Lord, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. 17 At that time, they will call Jerusalem the Throne of the Lord, **and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the Lord.**

As Paul addresses this joint audience, the old covenant has passed away, and the new covenant includes all nations. In the next chapter, Paul will fulfill this prophecy as he appoints elders (shepherds, overseers) in every church. Acts 14:23 reads, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust."

That shepherds and elders are these men after God's heart is evident in Acts 20:17; 28:

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church. . . .

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Acts 13:23-25

23 *"From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. 24 Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. 25 As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'*

Paul's sermon turns to the Savior Jesus, born of the seed of David, just as God had promised. He tells them of the work of John who was by his own admission less than Jesus. John had forecast the coming of Jesus and prepared his way. In Acts 19:4-5, Paul explains the insufficiency of the baptism of John:

4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 13:26-31

26 *"Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. 27 The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. 28 Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. 29 When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead, 31 and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.*

As in all the sermons recorded in Acts, Paul's sermon preaches the good news of the death, burial, resurrection, and appearance after death of Jesus: They executed him, they laid him in a tomb, but God raised him from the dead. Because of his appearances on many days and in many places, there were many witnesses among the people.

Thus, Paul preached the gospel just as the other preachers, and he outlined it for us in 1 Cor 15:1-8:

15 Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Acts 13:32-36

32 *"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers 33 he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:*

*"'You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.'*

34 *The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words:*

"'I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.'

35 *So it is stated elsewhere:*

"You will not let your Holy One see decay."

36 *"For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. 37 But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.*

The good news is clearly stated: God fulfilled his promise to the fathers by raising up Jesus; he will never see decay; but David did see decay.

Acts 13:38-41

38 *"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. 40 Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:*

41 *"Look, you scoffers,
wonder and perish,
for I am going to do something in your days
that you would never believe,
even if someone told you."*

Through this Jesus, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to us and we are justified from everything. The law of Moses could not do this. Be careful. Scoffers will wonder and perish.

Acts 13:42-43

42 *As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. 43 When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.*

The people wanted to hear more and asked them to speak further on the next Sabbath. Many Jews and devout converts followed them.

The Jews Become Jealous of Paul and Barnabas

Acts 13:44-47

44 *On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.*

46 *Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us:*

*"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."*

With almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord, as one might expect, the Jews were filled with jealousy and spoke abusively about what Paul preached. According to Paul, these Jews rejected the word of God, and in doing so, considered themselves unworthy of eternal life. Therefore, it is so today: to reject the word of God is to reject eternal life.

Paul turned to the Gentiles fulfilling the prophecy that salvation was to go to the ends of the world.

Acts 13:48

48 *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*

There are two wonderful phases in this verse: *they honored the word of God* and *who were appointed to eternal life*. To honor the word of God is to take it into the heart and obey. Peter explained in 1 Peter 1:22-23:

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Purification from sins and the new birth depend on the living and enduring word of God, but that word must be honored by obeying it. Those who do obey the truth are those who have been appointed for eternal life. Paul explained this appointment by God through his word, the gospel, in 2 Thess 2:13b-15:

. . . from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through **belief in the truth**. 14 He called you to this through **our gospel**, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the **teachings** we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

Acts 13:49-52

49 *The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. 51 So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*

In hindsight, the results of this first major effort in Asia Minor seem predictable. Remembering the parable of the sower (Matt13:18-23) shows how the word of God spreads. The spread here was apparently like the spread in Acts 8 when the persecuted Christians went everywhere preaching the gospel. The jealous Jews stirred up the important people – women of high standing and leading men – against Paul and Barnabas. Having been expelled from the region, they shook the dust off their feet in protest. When the Lord gave the limited commission, he told the disciples to do this very thing in Matt 10:14-15:

14 If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. 15 I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

Finally, the disciples who were left behind in Pisidian Antioch were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit – an exact replay of what Peter said should happen in Acts 2:38: “38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” In Acts 3:19-20, Peter describes this joy as times of refreshing: “19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus.” Upon his conversion, the eunuch rejoiced in Acts 8:38-39:

38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

What wonderful and exciting events Luke records for us in Acts 13.