

The Acts of the Apostles

LESSON 17

Barnabas and Saul Sent Out on First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-3)

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. 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.” 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

The Antioch Church had come to a place of maturity. Local ministries had now been raised up and placed into position. There were prophets, teachers, and there were other elders (by implication).

Where did these ministries come from? We know Saul was a teacher and Barnabas was a prophet. It appears that like begets like. The church plant was ready to become a church planter. They were willing to send out their best to the nations.

Notice several things about this commissioning of Saul and Barnabas. It seems to have taken place in a prophetic assembly.

- There were prophets on hand (Compare Acts 11:27).
- It was a special season of fasting and prayer.
- It was in the context of worship and ministry to the Lord.

It was a commissioning and not a calling to ministry. They already knew what their calling was (Acts 9:15-16). They now receive the official laying on of hands and sending. This appears to have been part of the plan all along. It was a commissioning by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:4).

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

To be authorized by the local leaders through the laying on of hands is to be authorized by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit backs up the official actions of church leadership (Mt. 18:18).

Ministry on the Island of Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12)

Their ministry in Cyprus was to the Jew first (vs. 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.

We will come back and talk about John Mark later.

Barnabas and Saul follow the game plan “to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16; See also Acts 13:46).

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. Romans 1:16

Barnabas and Saul would search out for a synagogue whenever they came into a new region (Acts 13:5, 14, 42). The synagogue was a perfect place to establish a beachhead for future expansion. Synagogues were established in most cities throughout the Roman Empire. The exception to this would be Rome itself and other Roman colonies or model cities such as Philippi (Acts 16:12).

The synagogue was structured very much like the New Testament local churches would be structured elders with a senior or chief elder (Acts 18:8). The synagogue used the same Scriptures that the New Testament local churches would use (Acts 13:27). The synagogue was filled with people who were anticipating the coming of the Christ, the Messiah (Acts 18:5).

Their ministry in Cyprus involved a confrontation with the kingdom of darkness (vs. 6-11).

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, 7 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. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 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? 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.

In many regions where the apostles went preaching the Gospel they had to deal with the “strong man” of the region. The strong man was an instrument of Satan who had been used to keep the people in bondage to the spirits of darkness. For Philip in Samaria, it had been Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-13). For Barnabas and Saul on the island of Cyprus it was Elymas (or Bar-Jesus) a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet.

Barnabas and Saul had an opportunity on Cyprus to speak to an influential and intelligent proconsul named Sergius Paulus.

The apostles understood that if you want to unlock a region to the Gospel the best way to do it is start from the top and work down. Often those who preach the Gospel start with a ministry to the “down and outer.” For the best result we should never neglect the “up and outer” or those people who carry natural authority. Sometimes we can be intimidated by their position and, yet

they are people with real needs as well. They can open the door to those under their charge.

- The Philippian jailer had the power to open the door to his entire household (Acts 16:31-34).
- Sergius Paulus had the power to open the door to an entire island.
- Those of Caesar's household could unlock the door to Caesar's realm (Phil. 4:22).

Statistics have shown that if a child is the first member of a family to become a Christian the likelihood of the whole family coming to Christ is less than ten percent. If the mother is the first member of a family to become a Christian, the likelihood of the whole family coming to Christ is about twenty percent. But if the father is the first member of the family to become a Christian the likelihood of the whole family coming to Christ is over ninety percent.

This same principle works in any realm including governments, businesses, or families.

Barnabas and Saul were resisted by Elymas who sought to keep people from believing the Gospel. Once again the power of the kingdom of God overruled the power of the kingdom of darkness. Saul being filled with the Holy Spirit pronounced natural blindness upon Elymas on top of his already spiritually blind condition.

Their ministry in Cyprus had a great result (vs. 12).

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

I don't really know if it was the teaching that astonished the proconsul or the display of the power of God that accompanied the teaching.

Ministry at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:13-41)

The ministry team of Barnabas and Saul moved quickly from Cyprus through Perga to Antioch of Pisidia. Several significant things took place here. John Mark returned home to Jerusalem. We will discuss this in a later lesson. Saul became Paul from this point on (Compare Acts 13:9 and 13:13).

Saul was well-known in Jewish circles (not by sight but by name). He may have changed his name to minimize any negative effect that it might have as they ministered in the synagogues of the Jews.

The team became Paul and Barnabas rather than Barnabas and Saul from this point on (Acts 13:7 with 13:46). Saul's obvious gifts and abilities had made room for him. Barnabas was a great encourager who had the grace to allow this to happen smoothly.

They went to the synagogue on the Sabbath where they were invited to speak (vs. 14- 15). Paul was a well-educated man and most likely had certain robes that distinguished him as a rabbi. It

was common for the ruler of the synagogue to invite visiting rabbis to speak or address the congregation. Such visitors were usually welcomed as a breath of fresh air and as those who could report on what was transpiring in other places of the world.

Paul preached a message that recounted Israel's history from Moses to Christ (vs.16- 41).

Blessing and Conflict at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:42-52)

The team experienced both positive and negative things in relation to their ministry at Antioch of Pisidia.

There were positive things that happened.

- The Gentiles who heard about the message preached begged to hear it as well (vs. 42).
- Many of the Jewish people responded favorably to Paul's message (vs. 43).
- The following Sabbath nearly the whole city came out to hear them (vs. 44).

There were some negative things that happened.

- The Jews who did not believe were envious of the crowds (vs. 45).
- The Jews who were envious contradicted, blasphemed and opposed the work that Paul and Barnabas were doing (vs. 45).
- Paul responded by taking his focus off of the Jews and turning it to the Gentiles (vs. 46).

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." It should be noted that we judge ourselves when we reject the word of the Lord to us.

The results ended up both positive and negative.

- Many of the Gentiles believed and the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region (vs. 48-49).
- The apostles were expelled from the region by the persecution of the Jews (vs. 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. Paul's greatest opposition came from those who should have been the most ready to receive.

The apostles reacted in two ways. First, they shook the dust off their feet and moved on to Iconium (vs. 51). But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and came to Iconium.

They did not take the rejection personally. They did not let it slacken their pace. They determined to preach where the door was open.

Jesus Himself had given His disciples this instruction (Mt. 10:11-15).

Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!

Second, they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (vs. 52).

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

The First Missionary Journey Mapped Out



The above map covers the period from Acts 13:4 through to Acts 15:35 inclusive of the first missionary journey and the trip to Jerusalem for the council meeting (follow numbers 1-19 for order of journey).

The Pattern of the Antioch Church

Key verses relating to the Antioch Church:

- Acts 8:1 – In one sense we could say that this was the first church that Paul started.
Acts 11:19-30 – The official beginning of the Antioch Church
- Acts 13:1-3 – The first missionary thrust from the Antioch Church

History and Background of the Antioch Church

These are the beginnings of a church that became very influential for well over 500 years. Some of the giants among the early church fathers led this great church, including Ignatius.

There was no city, apart from Jerusalem, that was so intimately connected with the history of the Apostolic Church. After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the church at Antioch became even more dominant. It was a church that, at its height grew to a place of over 100,000 in membership with over 3000 people on staff.

Because of the Jewish nature of the Jerusalem Church, and because of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., it is fair to say that Antioch became the first church to really model true New Testament Christianity and it became the pattern church for the world.

Twelve Characteristics of an Antioch Church the Antioch Church was:

- An Evangelistic Church (Acts 11:19-20)
It was started by believers who were fleeing for their lives, but who could not cease to share the good news wherever they went. It was birthed in a spirit of evangelism.
- A Teaching Church (Acts 11:26; 13:1)
It was a church committed to the intense training of its membership. Barnabas and Saul taught intensely. Teachers were raised up. Leaders from Antioch were used to keep doctrinal purity in the emerging church and history records that it established a theological seminary for the training of church leaders.
- A Multi-Cultural Church (Acts 11:20; 13:1)
It was a church that was a blending of races and cultures, much more than Jerusalem. They extended the Gospel beyond the Jewish community including men of Cyprus and Cyrene (Northern Africa). Their leadership included Lucius of Cyrene.
- A Team Ministry Church (Acts 13:1)
They believed in the five-fold ministry and practiced Team Ministry.
- A Spirit-Anointed Church
They believed in the gifts of the Spirit and had a special touch of the grace of God on all that they did. There was healing, deliverance and prophetic gifts in operation.

- **A Prophetic Church**
They made a strong place for prophecy in the church. Jesus was the head of this church and His voice through prophecy was important in guiding and directing the mission of the church. As a result, it became a place where prophets were raised up and a place where the prophets' ministry was respected.
- **A Generous Church**
They were willing to respond to a prophetic word about famine affecting Judea by sending relief money to "the mother church" years before the famine came (up to four to five years before).
- **A Worshipping Church**
They were a church that understood their function as priests unto God. They knew how to "minister unto the Lord".
- **A Praying Church**
They made it a priority to set aside seasons of prayer and fasting to hear the voice of the Lord to the church.
- **An Equipping Church**
They believed in the raising up of leaders. They believed in the laying on of hands for commissioning. They believed in prophetic assembly and body ministry where every member has a place of function.
- **A World Church**
I am sure they had a vision for their city, but they also had a vision for the world. Antioch became the center for world missions and church planting teams. The Book of Acts only gives us the record of one of these teams, but we know that there were other teams doing the same thing.
- **A Respected Church**
Antioch became respected as a model for New Testament Christianity. It became a pattern for other churches to follow.

It became a place where church disputes were settled. Several church councils were held in Antioch, and it was considered one of the top five churches in the world for many centuries to follow.