

Paul's First Missionary Journey

Memory Text: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:38, 39)

Setting The Stage: The persecution that broke out in Jerusalem after Stephen's death caused a number of Jewish believers to flee 300 miles north to Antioch (Acts 11:19). As capital of the Roman province of Syria, Antioch was third only to Rome and Alexandria in significance. Its population, estimated at 500,000, was very cosmopolitan, making it an ideal location not only for a Gentile church but also as the starting base for the worldwide mission of the early church. It was from Antioch that Paul launched all three of his missionary trips.

Maybe some five years had passed between Paul's post-conversion visit to Jerusalem and the invitation by Barnabas to join him in Antioch. What was Paul doing all of those years? Based on comments in Gal. 1:21 it's likely he was preaching in the regions of Syria and Cilicia. However, the church in Antioch blossomed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And it was here that the disciples of Christ were first called Christians (Acts 11:21-26).

"The name was given them because Christ was the main theme of their preaching, their teaching, and their conversation...It was God who gave to them the name of Christian. This is a royal name, given to all who join themselves to Christ." (Acts of the Apostles, p. 157)

Paul's labors at Antioch with Barnabas strengthened him in his conviction that the Lord had indeed called him to do a special work among the Gentiles. The Christian church was now entering an important period in its history. The work of proclaiming the gospel message among the Gentiles was now to be prosecuted with enthusiasm and vigor; and as a result the church was to be strengthened by a large harvest of souls. The gospel to every "nations, kindred, tongue, and people" was soon to be realized. From this point on, the rest of the book of Acts focuses on the missionary journey's of Paul.

Sunday – Salamis & Paphos

Acts 12:25-13:12

Acts 12:25-13:4. Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark, the author of the gospel of Mark and the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10), went back to the church in Antioch after their visit to Jerusalem. While ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit,

no doubt through the prophets, commanded that Paul and Barnabas be separated to the work God had planned for them.

Role of the Holy Spirit. The emphasis on the role the Holy Spirit played in the separating and the sending reveals how the church went about their work in that time—at the direction of God. It seems the church didn't make any formal plans until the Holy Spirit indicated His intentions. Then the church responded rather than initiated. The early church moved where the Holy Spirit moved. What a lesson for us to learn!

Has the Holy Spirit spoken about the work we are to do? Certainly! Hasn't the Lord spoken through His prophets in His Word and the Spirit of Prophecy? Are we as eager to do the Holy Spirit's bidding today as those in Antioch were? Wouldn't we be a lot further along if we did God's bidding rather than our own? That's how our church was led in its early days. Why would we do anything less today and refuse to listen to the gentle prodding's of the Holy Spirit?

Ordination. The idea of ordination is very biblical. More than just an act of consecration, Paul and Barnabas's ordination was *"a public recognition of their divine appointment to bear to the Gentiles the glad tidings of the gospel... Thus they were authorized by the church, not only to teach the truth, but to perform the rite of baptism and to organize churches, being invested with full ecclesiastical authority... It was an acknowledged form of designation to an appointed office and a recognition of one's authority in that office. By it the seal of the church was set upon the work of God."* (Acts of the Apostles, p. 161, 160)

God Works Through His Organized Church. *"The circumstances connected with the separation of Paul and Barnabas by the Holy Spirit to a definite line of service show clearly that the Lord works through appointed agencies in His organized church... God has made His church on the earth a channel of light, and through it He communicates His purposes and His will. He does not give to one of His servants an experience independent of and contrary to the experience of the church itself. Neither does He give one man a knowledge of His will for the entire church while the church—Christ's body—is left in darkness. In His providence He places His servants in close connection with His church in order that they may have less confidence in themselves and greater confidence in others whom He is leading out to advance His work.*

"There have ever been in the church those who are constantly inclined toward individual independence. They seem unable to realize that independence of spirit is liable to lead the human agent to have too much confidence in himself and to trust in his own judgment rather than to respect the counsel and highly esteem the judgment of his brethren, especially of those in the offices that God has appointed for the leadership of His people.

"Those who are inclined to regard their individual judgment as supreme are in grave peril. It is Satan's studied effort to separate such ones from those who are channels of

light, through whom God has wrought to build up and extend His work in the earth...For any worker in the Lord's cause to...think that his light must come through no other channel than directly from God, is to place himself in a position where he is liable to be deceived by the enemy and overthrown." (Ibid. pp. 163, 164)

Acts 13:4-12. The traveling trio made their way to Seleucia, 15 miles west of Antioch, then sailed on to Cyprus. Its population was largely Greek, and it claimed Aphrodite, or Venus, as its patron goddess. Her chief center of worship was at Paphos, which was known for the immorality of the prostitute-priestesses of her temple. The trio started their work in Salamis, then made their way to Paphos. It was here that they met Elymus, a sorcerer, who sought to interrupt the work of the missionaries.

Opposition to the Work. There will always be those who seek to stand in opposition to the work of God. Nehemiah had been sent of God to build the wall around Jerusalem and to build up the people of God, and he met fierce opposition. But like Paul and Nehemiah, we are to stand firm at our posts in the fear of God and in the power of His might, even if the opposition comes from those who should know better. At times we must even rebuke those opposing the work of God if we would save some. Elymus was struck blind and as a result Sergius Paulus couldn't deny the power of God and accepted the gospel!

Monday – Pisidian Antioch, Part 1

Acts 13:13-41; 2 Corinthians 4:7-10

Acts 13: 13. From Cyprus, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga, in Pamphylia, on the southern coast of modern Turkey. Before they moved on to Antioch in Pisidia, Luke notes two significant changes: Paul becomes the leading figure (up until here, Barnabas always is mentioned first) and Luke stops using Paul's Jewish name and starts referring to him only as "Paul". This is probably because from now on Paul finds himself mostly in a Greco-Roman environment.

Luke also records John Mark's return to Jerusalem. Why did he leave so early? "Mark was intimidated and, losing all courage, refused to go farther and returned to Jerusalem" (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 170). God never promised it would be easy. Paul knew from the very beginning that his service for Jesus would involve a lot of suffering, but he learned to rely entirely on God's power. And we must too.

2 Corinthians 4:7-10: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

Acts 13:14-41. The missionary team left Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. Here they went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and were afforded the chance to

share a word of encouragement to the congregation. What an opportunity! And Paul took advantage of it.

The sermon is divided into three parts: the election of Israel and the kingship of David (Acts 13:17–23); Jesus, a descendant of David, would bring salvation to Israel (Acts 13:24–37), and a warning against rejecting the salvation that is offered through Jesus (Acts 13:38–41).

How To Share Truth. Paul’s first recorded sermon reveals a successful method in sharing the truth. Instead of going straight to his main point, he first establishes common ground with his audience—the election of Israel and the kingship of David. He then builds on this shared belief by introducing Jesus, of the seed of David, as the Savior of Israel, using David’s own writings to establish this. Lastly, Paul appeals to his listeners to make a decision for Christ, the only one who can provide forgiveness for sins.

We can learn from this method when sharing Christ and His truth with others can’t we? Paul understood human nature, and we must too. People prefer to discover things for themselves, rather than being told what to do. Taking a similar approach as Paul used allows the listeners to hear the truth for themselves. It also has potential to remove prejudice and barriers, which creates a learning atmosphere to discover truth.

Tuesday – Pisidian Antioch, Part 2

Acts 13:38-52; Galatians 2:16; Romans 8:3, 4

Acts 13:38, 39. The climax of Paul’s sermon brings us to the core of Paul’s message—forgiveness and justification are available only through Jesus, not through Moses’ law. He doesn’t say that the law has been abrogated. He simply highlights its inability to perform what the Jews expected it to do; namely, justification. But only Jesus can justify. And justification leads to obedience.

Galatians 2:16: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

Romans 8:3, 4: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

Acts 13:42-52. A great number in the synagogue received Paul’s message and wanted the Word of God to be preached again the following Sabbath. But there was great opposition to the message, but Paul was quick to remind these religious

leaders that they had been given an opportunity to receive the truth, but being now despised by them the truth would go to the Gentiles. Interestingly, even though being persecuted, the Bible records that the disciples were filled with joy. The only explanation for this is that were also filled with the Holy Spirit.

Wednesday – Iconium

Acts 14:1-6

Acts 14:1-6. Again, Paul and his companions meet a marked degree of success preaching Christ in the synagogue in Iconium, but they also met with stiff opposition from the jealous and envious Jews who were seeking to discourage the Gentiles. This didn't deter the bold missionaries who stayed in the city for a while continuing to proclaim the risen Christ. The more success they experienced however, the more opposition they faced, to the extent that part of the city were for Paul and his companions, the other part were against them. And this created no small contention.

False and exaggerated reports by the opposing Jews led the city authorities to worry about possible insurrection. The word was out that the disciples of Christ were seeking to attach as many people as possible to themselves for secret and nefarious purposes. Of course this was untrue, but the city officials were extremely cautious of Paul and his companions, bringing them in often to answer to the charges. But they could not condemn the missionaries, because they could see that their teachings would lead people to be virtuous, law-abiding citizens, improving the overall morals and order of the city. *Police chief visit in ME regarding student LE's.*

So bent on destroying Paul and his friends, the religious leaders led the ignorant mob into a frenzy and claimed to the city authorities that the missionaries were responsible. Their lives were in danger. Learning about it through friends, Paul and his companions left for Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia.

Thursday – Lystra & Derbe

Acts 14:6-28

Acts 14:6-10. “There they preached the gospel” to this overwhelmingly pagan and superstitious people. There was no synagogue in Lystra, but some scattered Jews lived there, not enough to create any trouble for Paul, however. This simple phrase in v. 7 doesn't entirely capture what Paul preached to these worshippers of Jupiter. But the pen of inspiration goes into more details:

“The apostles endeavored to impart to these idolaters a knowledge of God the Creator and of His Son, the Saviour of the human race. They first directed attention to the wonderful works of God—the sun, the moon, and the stars, the beautiful order of the recurring seasons, the mighty snow-capped mountains, the lofty trees, and other

varied wonders of nature, which showed a skill beyond human comprehension. Through these works of the Almighty, the apostles led the minds of the heathen to a contemplation of the great Ruler of the universe.

“Having made plain these fundamental truths concerning the Creator, the apostles told the Lystrians of the Son of God, who came from heaven to our world because He loved the children of men. They spoke of His life and ministry, His rejection by those He came to save, His trial and crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension to heaven, there to act as man’s advocate.” (Acts of the Apostles, p. 180)

While preaching about Christ’s healing power, they noticed a crippled man who hung onto every word of the apostle. In sympathy toward this man, Paul asked him to stand. As his faith held onto his words, the man stood to his feet. It was a divine miracle!

Acts 14:11-19. The crowd was so impressed by the miracle that they mistook Paul and Barnabas for gods—Barnabas for Zeus, the supreme god of the Greek pantheon, and Paul for Hermes, Zeus’s attendant and spokesman. In fact, the people wanted to offer them sacrifices. Paul positively denied having any divinity. But the people would not be dissuaded. To add insult to injury, some of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to stir up the people against the missionaries. As a result Paul was stoned and left to die.

Acts 14:20-28. Surrounded by his friends who were mourning his supposed death, Paul arose and stood to his feet with praise for God upon his lips that he would be counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake. The next day they headed for Derbe to preach Christ. Many were to led to accept Him as their Savior. From there Paul and Barnabas headed back to the cities were they had just come from to “confirm the faith” of the new believers, encouraging them to remain faithful.

“As an important factor in the spiritual growth of the new converts the apostles were careful to surround them with the safeguards of gospel order. Churches were duly organized in all places in Lycaonia and Pisidia where there were believers. Officers were appointed in each church, and proper order and system were established for the conduct of all the affairs pertaining to the spiritual welfare of the believers.” (Acts of the Apostles, p. 185)

Eventually, they made their way back to Antioch, from whence they came, and shared with the believers all that the Lord had done through them and for them. Great must have been the rejoicing when they learned that God had opened up the door of faith among the Gentiles.

Friday – Further Thoughts

“In all their missionary endeavors Paul and Barnabas sought to follow Christ’s example of willing sacrifice and faithful, earnest labor for souls. Wide-awake, zealous, untiring, they did not consult inclination or personal ease, but with prayerful anxiety and unceasing activity they sowed the seed of truth. And with the sowing of the seed, the apostles were careful to give to all who took their stand for the gospel, practical instruction that was of untold value. This spirit of earnestness and godly fear made upon the minds of the new disciples a lasting impression regarding the importance of the gospel message.” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 186)