



The Church at Antioch Sends Out the First Missionaries - Acts 13

Introduction

Up to this point in time, Jerusalem had been the center of Christian work, but now Antioch in Syria began to take prominence as the hub of missionary outreach. Chapter 13 records the first Spirit inspired and directed missionary campaign. Previously, there had been serendipitous outreach as a result of persecution, but now the church at Antioch officially initiated and authorized an overseas mission. Barnabas and Saul were sent out to evangelize the provinces of the Roman Empire. Their first campaign, recorded in chapters 13 and 14, took them to the Island of Cyprus and southern Galatia in Asia Minor. Heading into Roman territory, Saul chose to be called by his Roman name, Paul.

Because Jews were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, Saul found synagogues in many of the cities he visited. He used the synagogues as a platform for his preaching, a natural place to begin since the gospel was to go to the Jews first. But there were also Gentile proselytes in the synagogues and God-fearers who had knowledge of the Scriptures. Some of these responded enthusiastically to Saul's message. Chapter 13 marks a pivotal change of emphasis from preaching to the Jews to preaching to Gentiles.

Outline of Acts 13

- I. Call of the Holy Spirit in Antioch - Acts 13:1-4
- II. Confrontation at Paphos- Acts 13:5-12
- III. Desertion by John Mark in Perga- Acts 13:13
- IV. Gladness of the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch - Acts 13:14-52

I. Call of the Holy Spirit in Antioch - Acts 13:1-3

The church at Antioch was gifted with many prophets and teachers. Luke names five of them, men of diverse backgrounds who worked together in unity. Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus. Simeon also called Niger, which means black in Latin, was probably dark complected. Some believe he may have been the Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross (Matthew 27:32). Lucius of Cyrene (in northern Africa) was probably one of the first to preach the gospel at Antioch (Acts 11:20). Manaen had been a member of the court of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Jerusalem in Jesus' time. Saul, the last mentioned, was a highly educated Jew and also a Roman citizen. God had drawn together quite a variety of men to lead the Antioch church. It is good for brothers in Christ to work together in unity.

A. God's Call - Acts 13:1-2

As these prophets and teachers ministered in the church and sought God's will through prayer and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke to them. This shows that the Holy Spirit is not just a "force" or an "influence." He is a personality who guides the church, making God's will known to those who actively seek it. In this instance, the Holy Spirit probably spoke through one of the prophets. The message was, "*Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.*"

B. Commissioning by the Church - Acts 13:3

After further prayer and fasting, with sensitivity to the Spirit's leading, they blessed Saul and Barnabas by laying hands on them. This was to confirm God's direction, given by the Holy Spirit and commission them to go out in anticipation of what the Spirit would do. What an exciting time this must have been!

C. Sending Barnabas and Saul - Acts 13:3-4

The two missionaries were sent out by the church, but more importantly, they were sent out by the Holy Spirit. They first travelled to Selucia, a seaport about 15 miles west of Antioch. From there they sailed to the island of Cyprus.

II. Confrontation at Paphos - Acts 13:5-12

The missionary company landed in Salamis, the largest city on the eastern coast of Cyprus. There they preached the gospel in the synagogues. Apparently there were a large number of Jews in Salamis because there was more than one synagogue. John Mark, who had returned to Antioch with Barnabas and Saul after their trip to Jerusalem (Acts 12:25), was serving as their assistant on this trip.

A. Arriving at Paphos - Acts 13:5-7

The missionaries traveled across the island to the city of Paphos, probably preaching the gospel in towns along the way. Paphos was the capital of the province and also the center for worship of the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite. The proconsul, or governor, an appointee of the Roman Senate, was an intelligent man named Sergius Paulus. It was common for high-ranking officials to have magicians and astrologers among their attendants, and a Jewish sorcerer named Bar-Jesus was associated with Sergius Paulus.

B. Meeting the Sorcerer - Acts 13:7-8

Sorcery was forbidden to Jews (Deuteronomy 18:10), but Bar-Jesus was a sorcerer. He falsely claimed to be a prophet. His other name, Elymas, is probably Arabic, meaning "the wise," equivalent to the Greek "magos," translated "sorcerer" here. However, it is evident that Bar-Jesus was neither wise nor skilled at sorcery.

C. Called by the Proconsul - Acts 13:7-12

Sergius Paulus called for Barnabas and Saul, desiring to hear the word of God. However, Elymas did all he could to oppose the missionaries and discourage Sergius from believing. He may have feared the loss of his job if the proconsul accepted the gospel message.

1. Paul rebukes Elymas - 13:9-11

In 13:9, Saul assumed his Roman name, Paul, which would be more appropriate than the Hebrew, Saul, as he ministered to the Roman world. From this point on we will refer to him as Paul.

In response to Elymas' opposition, Paul was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, giving him boldness and wisdom to deal with the evil confronting him. He looked intently at Elymas and spoke directly to him. The Holy Spirit gave him just the right words to say.

a. Elymas exposed - 13:9-10

Paul's words revealed that Elymas was an impostor, an evil deceiver. He was not Bar-Jesus, which means "the son of salvation," but a "*son of the devil*." He was an enemy of everything that is right, perverting the way of salvation with his evil corruption.

b. Elymas judged - 13:11

Paul pronounced a judgment of temporary blindness on the evil Elymas. "He shut his eyes, the eyes of his mind, against the light of the gospel, and therefore justly were the eyes of his body shut against the light of the sun; he sought to blind the proconsul, and therefore was himself struck blind." (The Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry). Perhaps with his eyes blinded, Elymas was able to see the true light.

2. The proconsul believes - 13:12

Notice that Sergius Paulus was not amazed at Elymas being struck blind. He was amazed at the teaching of the Lord. It was not the display of power that led this intelligent man to believe. It was the gospel message of the crucified Christ that touched his heart and changed his life.

III. Desertion by John Mark in Perga - Acts 13:13

At this point, Paul seems to have taken over leadership of the missionary group, as Luke now refers to them as *Paul and his party*. Leaving Paphos, they sailed to Perga, the capital of the Roman province of Pamphylia on the southern coast of Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. John Mark left and returned to his home in Jerusalem. Later, in Acts 15:37-38, it becomes clear that Paul was displeased and felt Mark had deserted them.

We are not told why Mark left, but there are several possible reasons. He may have been homesick, returned home to care for his mother who was possibly a widow (Acts 12:12), or the prospect of traveling over the rugged, mountainous roads may have discouraged him. Whatever John Mark's reason, we are not to judge but simply remain faithful, courageous, humble, and joyful in whatever capacity God has called us to serve.

IV. Gladness of the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch - Acts 13:14-52

Leaving Perga, Paul and Barnabas traveled 100 miles north through the Taurus mountains to Pisidian Antioch, the main city of the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia. It is to be distinguished from Antioch in Syria, the city from which they had been sent.

A. Preaching in the Synagogue - Acts 13:14-42

As they had done previously at Salamis, the missionaries went to the synagogue, and because it was the Sabbath, they sat down and listened to the reading of the Law and the Prophets. Visiting teachers were welcome to address the congregation, so Paul stood and spoke, addressing the men of Israel and the God-fearing Gentiles who were there to worship God.

1. Paul's sermon - Acts 13:16-42

In his sermon, Paul explained that Christ is the culmination of God's dealing with Israel, both Christ's resurrection and His rejection by the Jews were fulfillments of prophecy, and Christ is the only way to forgiveness and justification. In closing, he appealed to his listeners not to repeat the error of the Jews in Jerusalem who had rejected Jesus.

a. Christ is the culmination of Old Testament prophecy - 13:16-25

Paul explained all that God had done for Israel, from choosing them to sending Jesus Christ, the Savior.

- God chose Israel to be His people.
- He exalted them in the land of Egypt.
- He brought them out of Egypt by His power.
- God put up with them for forty years.

- He destroyed seven nations of Canaan.
- He distributed the land to the people of Israel.
- He gave them judges to deliver them.
- He gave them a king when they asked for one.
- He raised up David, a man after His own heart.
- He raised up a Savior for Israel -- Jesus.
- He sent John the Baptist to call Israel to repent.

b. Christ is the fulfillment of prophecy - 13:26-37

Paul again addressed his audience, forcing home the application of all he had said, *"to you the word of this salvation has been sent."* Paul appealed to them not to ignore their opportunity of salvation by following the example of the rulers and people in Jerusalem. Like Peter (Acts 2:23,36; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:39) and Stephen, (Acts 7:52) Paul blamed the Jews for killing Jesus (Acts 13:27-28), and like Peter, he acknowledged they did it in ignorance. Compare Acts 3:17 and 13:27.

(1.) Christ was condemned by the Jews - 13:26-29

The people and rulers of Jerusalem had condemned Jesus to death without cause. In doing so, they had unwittingly fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. They condemned Jesus to die because *"they did not know Him,"* and they did not even know *"the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath."* They did not understand who Jesus was because they failed to recognize the prophecies in Scripture concerning Him. They killed Him and put Him in a tomb.

(2.) Christ was raised from the dead by God - 13:30-31

In contrast to the evil perpetrated by the Jews, *"God raised Him from the dead"* (Acts 13:30; as also stated by Peter in Acts 2:24; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40). This was confirmed by those witnesses who saw Him, namely the apostles and others who were His close followers (Luke 24:33-48; Acts 1:22; 2:32; 5:32).

(3.) Christ is the fulfillment of God's promise - 13:32-37

God had promised to raise up a Savior from the seed of David (Acts 13:23). Paul used three Old Testament prophecies to show 1.) Jesus was the promised seed, 2.) David's son was to be raised from the dead, and 3.) He was indeed raised. Paul's argument is very similar to Peter's on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:24-32).

Psalm 2 is understood to refer to the Messiah. Paul used verse 7 of that Psalm to show that Jesus is called God's Son because God raised Him from the dead. The term "begotten" pictures the bringing forth of Jesus

from the dead. Very simply, Psalm 2:7 might read — *"Today, in raising You from the dead, I am declaring that You are My Son."*

The next two prophecies support the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Paul asserted in Acts 13:34 that God raised Jesus from the dead, *"No more to return to corruption"*, meaning that He will never die again. Isaiah 55:3, *I will give you the sure mercies of David*, shows that the blessings and promises made to David are applied to his Son. Paul quotes one of the greatest promises from Psalm 16:10 which states that David's Son would not see corruption. This Psalm could not apply to David because David died, so it must refer to his promised descendant, Jesus Christ, whom God raised up. David served only his own generation and then his body died and decayed. Jesus was raised from the dead to live forever and serve all generations!

c. Christ - the way to salvation - 13:38-49

Having proved his point, Paul proclaimed two blessings available as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection: forgiveness and justification. Everyone who believes receives forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7) and is justified (acquitted from guilt and accepted as righteous in God's sight). *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Paul pointed out that it is impossible for a sinner to be justified by the law of Moses, but Jesus gives complete justification (Romans 3:21-22; 5:18-19; Galatians 2:16-17).

d. Believe or be judged - 13:40-41

Paul warned against impending judgment by applying the words of Habakkuk 1:5. The original warning concerned Israel's judgment by the Chaldeans. Those who refused the warnings by Habakkuk were judged. An even greater judgment would befall those who refused the message of salvation Paul presented.

B. Response to Paul's Sermon - Acts 13:42-44

There was great excitement about Paul's message, particularly among the Gentiles. They requested that Paul preach again on the next Sabbath. Many Jews and proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, receiving further teaching and encouragement. By the next Sabbath, almost the whole city had heard about Paul's sermon and the synagogue was overflowing with Gentiles who wanted to hear the word of God.

C. Turning to the Gentiles - Acts 13:45-52

1. Jealousy of the Jews - 13:45

When the Jews saw the crowds of people, they were

filled with envy. They had obviously never experienced such a turnout for their own preaching and could not stand to see so many people coming out to listen to Paul. They did not try to hide their discontent. They openly opposed Paul by contradicting and abusively condemning his message.

2. Repudiation of the Jews - 13:46-47

With boldness, Paul and Barnabas answered the Jews. Their response made four points.

- a. The Jews were necessarily first to receive the word of God - 13:46

By the providence of God, Jesus the Savior had come through the Jews. Salvation was for everyone, but for the Jew first (Romans 1:16). That is why Paul had gone to the synagogue to preach his message.

- b. They had judged themselves - 13:46

The Jews had rejected the word of God. In their unbelief, they had passed judgment upon themselves and declared themselves unworthy of eternal life.

- c. The missionaries would turn to the Gentiles - 13:46

The gospel message was for everyone. From now on Paul would preach it to the ones who were eager to hear, the Gentiles.

- d. The missionaries were following God's command - 13:47

Paul's use of Isaiah 49:6 can be taken two ways. In the original passage, Jesus is the *light to the Gentiles*, and He is the salvation of the whole earth. Paul also uses the Isaiah passage to refer to himself and the other missionaries who were going out as lights to the Gentiles for the purpose of taking *salvation to the ends of the earth*. The missionaries were an extension of the ministry of Christ, spreading the gospel throughout the world. Are you a light to those who do not know Christ? How can you be a light by your words and actions?

3. Gladness of the Gentiles - 13:48-49

"The Gentiles cheerfully embraced that which the Jews scornfully rejected" (The Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry). By God's grace, the Gentiles believed unto eternal life and their belief brought glory to *the word of the Lord*. It is only by God's grace that anyone is appointed to eternal life. If it were by anything that we could do ourselves, the glory would go to us instead of to *the word of the Lord*. John 10:28-29 and 17:1-2 clearly show that only God grants eternal life.

The word of the Lord was further glorified by being spread throughout the whole region.

4. Shaking off the dust - 13:50-51

Not only did the Jews reject the gospel, they tried to inhibit its spread by persecuting Paul and Barnabas and forcing them to leave the city. To their shame, even some influential women were rallied to join in the effort to drive out the missionaries. Keen insight and wise judgment are necessary when choosing causes to support.

Paul and Barnabas shook the dust of Pisidian Antioch off their feet as they left town. It was a Jewish custom to shake the dust of a pagan town from one's feet when returning home as a symbol of cleansing from the uncleanness of sinners who did not worship God. The Lord Jesus had instructed his disciples to do it as a testimony against the towns which would not receive the gospel (Luke 9:5 and 10:10-11).

5. Filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit - 13:52

In spite of the persecutions, the disciples were joyful. The Holy Spirit was actively at work in their lives and fruit was being produced! See Galatians 5:22.

Applications

1. When problems arise, are you filled with despair or with the fruit of the Spirit?
2. When the Antioch church leaders sought God's will, they prayed and fasted. Have you ever prayed and fasted before making an important decision? There is evidence in the New Testament that prayer and fasting helped the believers be more sensitive to the will of God. Is there some situation in your life right now which might benefit from prayer and fasting?
3. When Paul was confronted by the evil of Elymas the sorcerer, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and knew exactly what to say and do. How can you rely more upon the Holy Spirit in dealing with the evils you encounter every day?
4. Can you imagine how encouraged Paul must have been after preaching his message in Pisidian Antioch? Both Jews and Gentiles were approaching him and begging for more. The next Sabbath the synagogue was filled with people from all over town. What can you draw from this to help encourage your pastor or Bible teacher?
5. Some Jews were envious of Paul because his message filled the synagogue with people, something they had probably never experienced. Are you envious of the success of others? Instead of acting like the Jews, what could you do to encourage the success of someone else?