



THE SPREAD OF PENTECOST

WEEK 10
02.07.16



FOCUS VERSE

Acts 13:2

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

LESSON TEXT

Acts 13:1–13

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

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus:

7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Revival spread to the uttermost parts of the earth to win “as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39).



CULTURE CONNECTION

As Doors of Faith Open

Returning to Antioch after their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas reported to the believers what great things God had accomplished through them “and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). What the Lord did in the first century He is doing again in the twenty-first century. What Paul called “a door of utterance” (Colossians 4:3) has either been opened or is in the process of being opened in many nations of our world today.

These are opportune times when we may need to leave where we have been—perhaps a place of relative security—to enter a place of service. As Paul expressed it, there is “a great

door and effectual . . . opened” but “there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9). These are desperate times, challenging times, when anything that can be shaken will be shaken. Though we may feel insufficient and ill-prepared in ourselves, our great God is more than sufficient to strengthen us.

The Lord opens doors before us in order to set men free. We are to step through those open doors and reach those for whom Jesus died. Christ’s power will be with us as we go with confidence in His Word. It is His grand purpose that we “proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).

OUTLINE

- I. THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE JOURNEY**
- II. THE COMPLICATIONS OF THE JOURNEY**
 - A. Dealing with Delusion
 - B. Dealing with Difficulty
 - C. Dealing with Decisions
 - D. Dealing with Danger
- III. THE CONCLUSION OF THE JOURNEY**
 - A. The Great Needs They Saw
 - B. The Good News They Shared

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

In the natural world, fire is a power that brings ruin and renewal, and in the spiritual there are certain similarities. John the Baptist and Jesus Christ compared the outpouring of the Holy Ghost to a fire burning in the hearts of men—to convict and to cleanse them of sin, to empower and to embolden them to live for God. Like a raging conflagration, whipped by a turbulent wind and sweeping along the tall grass of an open prairie, the Spirit of God transforms what it touches. It has been said

in reference to the deliberately set and controlled prairie fire, “Without destruction there is no rebirth.”

After the Day of Pentecost the consuming flame of the gospel rapidly swept across much of Asia, Europe, and Africa. It began in the upper room in Jerusalem as the disciples heard the sound of a mighty rushing wind and saw tongues of fire sitting upon each of them as “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). In that hour something wonderful ignited within the hearts of the 120 who had waited in faith and anticipation. An amazing transformation took place. The power of God fell on the disciples much like the mantle that fell on the shoulders of the prophet Elisha. These believers had seen mighty miracles of healing and deliverance during the ministry of Jesus Christ, but this baptism of Holy Ghost went well beyond anything they had personally experienced, and they worshiped with newfound joy.

The early church was born in the fire, and it would not be satisfied to live in the smoke. Two of the firebrands of those formative years were Paul (at first called Saul) and his

companion Barnabas. Both men were talented teachers; both would have been fluent in the Greek language; and both had ministered to the growing church in Antioch of Syria. As the work there had continued to grow, Barnabas had seen the need for Paul's help in strengthening that church. For "a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people" (Acts 11:26).

Today's lesson is a study of the fourteen-hundred-mile expedition commonly known as Paul's first missionary journey. For a time John Mark traveled with Barnabas and Paul, but the young man left them at Perga to return to Jerusalem. Although there were great dangers and difficulties along the way, there were also incredible victories.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Acts 13 marked a dramatic turning point in the history of the church. Antioch became the missionary headquarters of the Christian faith. The great emphasis became the conversion of Gentiles rather than Jews, who often became hostile to the gospel. Paul became the most influential Christian leader and the greatest founder of new churches.

I. THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE JOURNEY

Antioch of Syria was a prosperous commercial city three hundred miles north of Jerusalem and thirty miles from the Mediterranean Sea. (There is also an Antioch of Pisidia mentioned in Acts 13.) The population of Antioch of Syria consisted of Syrians, Greeks, Jews, and Romans. When persecution had intensified after Stephen's stoning, numbers of Christians fled from Judea to Antioch (Acts 8:1; 11:19). Acts 11:19 states these believers preached to the Jews only, but the next verse says some from Cyprus and Cyrene also shared the apostolic message with the Greeks. God began to work in an extraordinary way. "And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:21).

Everything written in these chapters of the Book of Acts indicates the body of believers in Antioch was a highly effective force for God. A team of prophets and teachers—Barnabas,

Simeon, Lucius, Manean, and Saul—worked effectively to strengthen this church. The Gentile believers probably outnumbered the Jewish brethren. No doubt there was a greater openness to other backgrounds and cultures here than would have been found in Jerusalem. Most likely powerful gifts of the Spirit would have been in operation. Obviously the Christians in Antioch were willing to obey, as well as to hear, whatever God might say to them.

And God did speak to them. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2).

Regardless of what might have seemed the loss of some of their key members, the Christians of Antioch responded with humility to the specific command of the Lord. "And when they had fasted and prayed, and had laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:3). Without question God has special ways of blessing a church that shares their leaders and their talents with others.

For the awesome task that lay ahead, the Holy Ghost had chosen two men with outstanding qualifications and a singular purpose. The first named in verse two was Barnabas, and for a time it appears he took the lead. But eventually Saul became the chief spokesman. What a difference when individuals know God has selected them for the work of the ministry! Such knowledge helps to dispel fear and frustration. There is nothing to compare to the divine call that burns within the human heart when God speaks to us. The prophet Jeremiah, facing great opposition, had decided to preach no more. However, he proclaimed, "His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jeremiah 20:9).

II. THE COMPLICATIONS OF THE JOURNEY

From Seleucia, an important seaport near Antioch, Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark sailed to Cyprus, a voyage of some eighty miles. It seems natural for the apostles to go to Cyprus because it was the native land of Barnabas, and a number of believers had

previously fled to that island during the time of persecution.

A. Dealing with Delusion

Even as the wind drove their ship on a southwesterly course, the Holy Ghost drove Barnabas and Saul. Something was burning within the hearts of these first missionaries that neither trial nor opposition could quench.

Arriving at the ancient port city of Salamis, Barnabas and Saul (also called Paul), with the help of John Mark, began preaching in the Jewish synagogues. The existence of several synagogues in this city on the southeastern shore of Cyprus indicates a large Jewish population lived there. The apostles preached to the Jews, but there is no mention of ministering to Gentiles in Salamis.

Traveling by land along the entire southern coast of Cyprus, the missionaries came to Paphos. Here Barnabas and Paul came face to face with the power of witchcraft, for "they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus" (Acts 13:6). Two formidable forces, both vying for the minds and hearts of men, were about to clash in a spiritual battle that would turn Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of Cyprus, to the Lord.

When the governor called for Barnabas and Paul that he might hear the word of God, Barjesus (or Elymas as he was also called) opposed the apostles. Elymas recognized the influence he had with Sergius Paulus would soon dissipate if these Christians had their way. But Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, took command of the situation. "O full of all subtilty and all mischief," Paul thundered at the sorcerer, "thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10). At Paul's word the false prophet was stricken with blindness for a time. The governor, amazed at the teaching of these apostles, became a believer.

B. Dealing with Difficulty

John Mark's departure from Paul and Barnabas must have been a heavy blow to the plans of the two older apostles. For whatever reason, when they arrived in Perga, the capital of Pamphylia, a province in Asia

Minor, John decided to return to Jerusalem. Paul, with good cause, was always sensitive to being forsaken by coworkers while laboring for the Lord. We can almost feel the apostle's pain as, toward the end of his life, he wrote regarding another man, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica" (II Timothy 4:10).

John Mark had such great potential! A close relative of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) and a son of Mary, a godly woman of prayer in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12), Peter had doubtlessly won him to the Lord (I Peter 5:13). John Mark would later prove his worth in the gospel work (II Timothy 4:11), but at this critical stage he had stumbled badly. Paul was so disheartened by John Mark's leaving that Paul later refused to take him on a second missionary journey.

C. Dealing with Decisions

Traveling northward from Perga, Paul and Barnabas arrived at Antioch of Pisidia, a city in southern Asia Minor. Seleucus Nicator had founded the city, naming it and a number of other cities after his father, Antiochus.

It was no coincidence the two itinerate preachers arrived at the synagogue in Antioch on a particular Sabbath day, for it was all in God's perfect will and timing. The Lord had been waiting to reveal Himself in a greater manner to the sincere congregants who had gathered to worship and to pray in this sanctuary. As was usual on the Sabbath Day, portions of the Law and the Prophets were read, but then the rulers of the synagogue invited the two newcomers, who were obviously Jewish, to offer words of exhortation to the people. The stage was set. Something truly dramatic was about to happen. The assembly was now to hear the glorious message of redemption, the message that transforms lives from sin, from guilt, and from shame.

On this day in Antioch the worshipers heard a message they had never heard before. They had heard, of course, of God's provisions for Israel, of His deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, of His victories over the inhabitants of Canaan, of Saul, and of David. Paul spoke of all these, but then he told these

Jews and these God-fearing people of a Savior who had been sacrificed according to Old Testament prophecies. However, this Jesus had risen from the dead, never to see corruption. Through this Jesus, Paul affirmed, “is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 13:38). What the law of Moses could not do, that is, justify man before God, had finally been accomplished through Jesus Christ. Even as Paul declared this message to be one of glad tidings, he warned his audience of the severe consequences of unbelief.

Just as the Word of God is “sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow” (Hebrews 4:12), the gospel often causes a sharp division between the godly and the ungodly. Jesus had declared, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law” (Matthew 10:34–35).

A schism in the synagogue regarding Paul’s revolutionary message soon became apparent. When the meeting ended, a large number of Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, and on the next Sabbath nearly everyone in the city came to hear Paul’s message of the gospel. This response greatly angered many of the Jews, and in their envy they openly opposed the apostles and spoke with contempt of the gospel Paul had preached.

The rejection of the message by many of the Jews was a major turning point in the ministry of Paul and Barnabas. Since the Jews had so vehemently rejected the message of Christ and salvation, the apostles stated they had first been required to preach to the Jews but now they would “turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). It was not that the missionaries would cease to preach to Jews in other areas. (See Acts 14:1; 17:1–2.) However, now they would minister wherever and whenever the fields were ripe and ready for harvest.

This was both a vital decision and a wise decision. As a result the Gentiles received the gospel with gladness, and “the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region” (Acts 13:49).

D. Dealing with Danger

Expelled from Antioch, the apostles went to Iconium. Though they must have wondered what lay ahead for them, they traveled to this city in central Asia Minor with gladness. Acts 13:52 says, “The disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.” They were confident in their calling, certain of their message, and secure in the knowledge Christ would go with them.

These bold ambassadors for the Lord once again went into the Jewish synagogue. Powerful preaching brought about powerful conviction, and a great number of Jews as well as Greeks believed.

As in Antioch, the unbelieving Jews stirred up trouble. They influenced the Gentiles, causing them to become hostile toward Paul and Barnabas. But despite the opposition, Paul and Barnabas spent a long time in Iconium, speaking courageously about the Lord, and God performed signs and wonders confirming their message. The city became divided in opinion, some siding with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made to stone Paul and Barnabas, they escaped to the cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding area.

The apostles could never be quite sure where their preaching would lead them. It could lead them to a revival; it could lead them to a riot; it could lead them to both. Their words often brought out the best or the worst in those to whom they spoke. As Paul preached in Lystra, faith rose up in a man who had been crippled from birth. Paul, directing his words to the crippled man, cried out, “Stand upright on thy feet” (Acts 14:10). Immediately the man began leaping and walking.

So impressed were the people that, in their superstition, they declared in their Lycaonian language that Barnabas was Jupiter, and Paul was Mercury come down in flesh. (Jupiter was worshiped as the supreme god in this city, and Mercury, his companion, was considered to be the spokesman of the gods.)

At first the missionaries may not have understood what was happening, but when the priest of Jupiter brought oxen and garlands and would have made sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, the apostles took action. Tearing

their clothing and running among the crowd, the two men emphatically declared they should not be worshiped but worship belonged to the living God. Even then they found it difficult to convince these religious zealots their gods had not come down in person.

However, the attitude of many of those in Lystra soon changed from wanting to defy the apostles to wanting to destroy them. When some of the Jews came from Antioch and Iconium to oppose Paul and Barnabas, they successfully turned a crowd against the disciples. Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. Was this to be the end of this man's astonishing and productive ministry? No! As a number of disciples stood by, Paul rose up and returned back into the city. Although we do not know specific details of what took place that day, we know God came on the scene in His mighty power. The next day Paul and Barnabas made their way to Derbe.

III. THE CONCLUSION OF THE JOURNEY

One of the most remarkable things about this journey was that after the missionaries had preached and taught many in the city of Derbe, "they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch" (Acts 14:21). Who could have blamed Paul and Barnabas if they had bypassed these cities on their way home? In these places they had faced rejection, persecution, and death. Lesser men might have gone another way, taking the shorter route to Tarsus and then on to Antioch of Syria. But these apostles were not only individuals with tremendous courage; they were also individuals with tremendous concern.

A. The Great Needs They Saw

The work the missionaries undertook on their way back to the coast was organized and thorough. They realized the new converts would need to be strengthened and encouraged to stand during the difficult times of trial and persecution. These new Christians, so recently involved in heathen practices, were surrounded by enemies. They would face

some of the same oppressors Paul and Barnabas had faced, so the apostles counseled them "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Aware they would soon be leaving these converts behind, the apostles were burdened to do what they could to leave a strong foundation. Because there was a need for trustworthy leadership, Paul and Barnabas "ordained them elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). From this point on, it became Paul's practice to leave overseers in the works he founded "to feed the church of God" (Acts 20:28). He knew his responsibility was to plant; others would water, and then God would give the increase. There could be no questioning of the apostles' sincerity. They prayed with fasting for the believers, and not knowing if they would ever see them again, "commended them to the Lord" (Acts 14:23).

While they had gained a beachhead, the missionaries realized much more needed to be done. They revisited Perga, preaching there, and moved on to Attalia, a seaport on the Mediterranean. From there they sailed back to Antioch, the place where their journey had begun.

As we go forward, we make a remarkable discovery: God goes with us.

B. The Good News They Shared

The hunger of the Gentiles. Few things will encourage and bless a church more than a glowing report of how the Lord has moved in a foreign field. To hear how hungry hearts have responded to the gospel and how the power of God has radically changed people's lives has a way of raising faith and expectation. Such news gives a local church a new perspective. It supplies a clearer view of what great things God is doing and thus what He can do in the future.

Any question was now dispelled as to whether the Gentiles in these distant parts would respond to the gospel message. At Antioch of Pisidia, after having heard the truth for the first time, the people had “begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath” (Acts 13:42, ESV).

The salvation of the Gentiles. When Paul and Barnabas returned to the church at Antioch that had sent them on their missionary journey, what joy the saints surely felt as they heard of the great things that had happened! Paul and Barnabas “rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). It had been a new venture with new challenges and new victories, and through it all the Lord was with the disciples. Truly God had visited “the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14).

No doubt Paul and Barnabas related how Sergius Paulus, the proconsul on Cyprus, had opened his heart to God; how at Antioch of Pisidia almost the whole city had turned out to hear Paul’s preaching; how at Iconium many Jews as well as Greeks believed; and how the Lord had moved in the cities of Lystra and Derbe. What a compelling story this was of miracles, persecution, and triumph!

The door of salvation opened to all. For hundreds of years Abraham’s seed had held

the concept that “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). But now the door of salvation had swung wide open to include Gentiles. Sometime later Paul wrote to the Ephesians that although they had once been far off, they were now “made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13). What the Law could not do, and what human prejudice would not have allowed, grace and mercy had finally accomplished.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

In a very real sense we are all on a journey; if we are children of God, we have a mission to perform. Someone is waiting to hear the words of life—someone without true knowledge of the living God, someone who may be deeply religious but terribly lost. And as we go forward, we make a remarkable discovery: God goes with us. He touches the heart of the neighbor who speaks a foreign language and of the stranger who lives across town. Jesus said, “Go . . . and, lo, I am with you always” (Matthew 28:19–20).

We discover as we go that God does the spectacular. He heals the broken in health and the broken in spirit. As His mighty, transforming power moved upon the waters in the beginning, so it can move on human hearts in these end times. ■

REFLECTIONS

- How would you describe the church at Antioch of Syria?
- What qualities evident in Paul and Barnabas marked them as great missionaries?
- What obstacles did they face, and how did they handle these obstacles?
- What plan for outreach did the missionaries originally follow, and why did this change?
- What does Paul’s first missionary journey teach us about God’s faithfulness?