

Bible Stories

1st MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 13:1-4

October 28, 2023

Prologue

- Acts 11:19-30 - *Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and also told the Greeks good news about Jesus. The Lord was with them, and a great number of people believed. News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he saw the evidence of the grace of God, he encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.....*

Acts 13 is sort of the dividing line of the book. In the first 12 chapters most of the new church's movements are centered in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Now, there will be a major shift outward, "to the ends of the earth." While the Good News had spread as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, most of the missionary effort outside of Palestine will come from Paul and the remainder of Acts will focus on his 4 journeys.

We begin in Syrian Antioch. There we find Barnabas and Saul worshipping with other believers. The Holy Spirit instructed the congregation to set Barnabas and Saul aside for a special work.

The 1st Missionary Journey Begins - Cyprus

John Mark joined Barnabas and Saul and they headed for Cyprus. They landed at Salamis and proclaimed the message in the Jewish Synagogues. They traveled the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jew, Bar-Jesus (also known as Elymus, which means "magician"). He was a false prophet and sorcerer, who attended Sergius Paulus, the Proconsul of the island.

Sergius Paulus, "an intelligent man," sent for Saul and Barnabas because he wanted to hear the Word of God. Elymus came to the meeting and tried to influence Sergius against Saul and Barnabas. Saul (also called Paul) fixed his gaze on Elymus: "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? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind. You will be unable to see the light of the sun for a period of time."

Immediately, Elymus was blind and had to be led out of the room – Sergius Paulus believed and was amazed at the teaching about the Lord!

It is here that Saul begins to go by Paul.

- Being both a Jew and a Roman citizen, our man in Cyprus had 2 names: a Jewish name, Saul, "asked for or prayed for" and a Roman name, Paul, "the small one".

As a good Jew, Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin, it would make sense for him to use his Jewish name. However, after he was converted and set aside for mission work, it makes sense for him to choose to be referred to as Paul. He was traveling farther and farther into the Gentile world, where a Roman name would have allowed Paul to approach those who might not have been so inclined to listen to a Jew.

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John Mark left them to return to Jerusalem.

From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch.

Antioch Pisidia

On the Sabbath Day, they went to the Synagogue. After a reading of the Law and Prophets, the synagogue rulers invited Paul and Barnabas to speak. Paul stood up: "Men of Israel," He began. {Acts 13:16-41}

After giving a brief history lesson, Paul concluded his speech by saying, "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: '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. (quoting Habakkuk 1:5)'"

Paul and Barnabas were invited back the next Sabbath.

On the next Sabbath, nearly the entire city came to the synagogue to hear Paul speak. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to speak against what Paul was saying. Boldly, Paul and Barnabas responded: "We had to speak the word of God to you first, but since you reject it and don't consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord commanded us to do: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

When the Gentiles heard these words, they praised God and many believed.

The word of the Lord spread, but the Jews incited the leading citizens of the city against Paul and Barnabas. They were persecuted and eventually expelled from the region. They shook the dust off their feet in protest and went to Iconium.

- *Acts 13:52 - And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*

Iconium

As usual, Paul and Barnabas went to the local synagogue on Sabbath. They spoke the Word of God boldly and as a result, both Jews and Gentiles believed.

Some Jews refused to believe and stirred up the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas. Never-the-less, they spent quite a long time in Iconium and their preaching was confirmed by many signs and wonders. Meanwhile, the non-believing Jews caused trouble and division in the city. Paul and Barnabus learned of a plot to stone them, so they fled Iconium and went to Lystra and Derbe in the district of Lycaonia.

Lystra

In Lystra, Paul and Barnabas continued to preach about Jesus. In the crowd was a man who had been lame all his life. He watched and listened intently to Paul's preaching. One day, Paul looked directly at the man and said, "Stand up!" Immediately, the man stood up and began to walk. The crowd was stunned! Someone in the back shouted, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us!" The crowd erupted and began to call Barnabas, Zeus and Paul, Hermes (because he was the spokesman). The crowd desired to worship the 2 men, so the priests from Zeus' temple brought bulls and wreaths to the city gate to perform a sacrifice.

Paul and Barnabas were horrified. They tore their clothes and rushed into the crowd, shouting, "Why are you doing this? We are only men - like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them....." They spoke forcefully, but even so, they had difficulty restraining the crowd who were determined to worship them.

The opposition to Paul and Barnabas were equally determined to put a stop to their activities. Jews from Antioch and Iconium came all the way to Lystra and turned the crowd against Paul and Barnabas. The same crowd who wanted to worship them, now picked up stones. Paul was stoned, dragged outside the city and left for dead. While the disciples stood around him, Paul got up and went back into the city.

The next day he and Barnabas went to Derbe. There they preached about Jesus and many were converted.

When their time in Derbe ended, they went back the way they had come - returning to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch.

They strengthened and encouraged the disciples and appointed elders for each church.

Later they made their way back to Perga and then down to Attalia. From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch.

- *Acts 14:27-28 - On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They stayed there a long time with the disciples.*

What do we do with this story?

We can be tempted to respond to Paul and Barnabas as the citizens of Lystra did, "The gods have become like men and have come down to us!" And we often do worship at the feet of Paul because of his deep and profound letters in the New Testament – we think him "other worldly."

Were they men of great character? Yes.

Were they bold and unafraid? Yes.

Did they have many natural abilities? Yes.

Were many won to Christ through their preaching? Yes.

Were they exactly who God needed to reach the Gentile world? Yes.

But let us never forget Who the real Hero is – the Holy Spirit.

It was the Holy Spirit who instructed the believers in Antioch to set Paul and Barnabas aside for a special work, "because I have called them."

It was the Holy Spirit who sent them to Cyprus.

It was the Holy Spirit (through Paul) who dressed down the sorcerer, Elymas, in front of Sergius Paulus.

It was the Holy Spirit who filled the disciples with joy even in the midst of persecution in Antioch Pisidia.

It was the Holy Spirit who healed and restored Paul's broken body in Lystra.

There was a Radiant Power – in the Person of the Holy Spirit – that accompanied Paul and Barnabas wherever they went.

A.W. Tozer – The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life and light and love. In His uncreated nature He is a boundless sea of fire, flowing, moving ever, performing as He moves the eternal purposes of God....

It is my prayer that we will see the Holy Spirit as He is and that we will begin to expect the same boundless sea of fire that Paul and Barnabas experienced.