

Apostle Paul & Barnabas Anointed for Missionary Work

Acts 13:1-12 (Vv. 1-3)

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I. Historical Background and Biblical Context

Acts 13 recounts the calling of Saul and Barnabas to missions beyond Syrian Antioch and their travels to the island of Cyprus and up to the heart of modern-day Asia Minor (Eastern Turkey). The spread of the Gospel in earlier chapters of Acts was often the result of persecution. Saul and Barnabas faced opposition, abandonment and slander.

Most of what we know about Barnabas comes from the Book of Acts. Acts 11:24 described Barnabas as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith who brought a great number of people to the Lord. When he saw how Paul, then still known as Saul, had become a fervent follower of Christ, Barnabas took the then unknown disciple under his wings and introduced him to the other apostles in Jerusalem. These apostles were afraid of Paul/Saul's past actions, but Barnabas vouched for him. The church grew steadily under their leadership, both in size and finances. While the two later disagreed over a ministry colleague and parted ways, their efforts for Jesus Christ netted tremendous results and helped spread the Gospel far and wide.

This chapter begins with the Holy Spirit setting the two aside for ministry to the Gentiles and ends with the affirmation of that

mission. It records the transition from taking the Gospel to an exclusively Jewish audience, with Peter preaching to a small

group in the Upper Room, to the Gospel going out among the Gentiles, primarily under the ministry of Apostle Paul. God wants His message of hope and salvation to extend to all people, “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

II. The Lesson

1. vv. 1-3.

Luke named five prophets and teachers in Antioch: Barnabas (Son of encouragement), Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been raised with Herod Antipas) and Paul. Barnabas was mentioned first, and Saul (Paul) was mentioned last. The church was blessed with five men who were filling the vital roles of prophet and teacher. After introducing the leaders of the Antioch Church, we learned that the church was worshiping the Lord and fasting. We do not learn why the church was fasting.

A directive came from the Holy Spirit that said: “Set aside for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). Thus, it was through the Spirit that Barnabas and Saul were separated for the task of evangelizing. Then they were sent on their way by the Holy Spirit. They were sent with fasting and prayer. This whole work required a substantial dependence on God, and fasting and prayer demonstrated that dependence.

Before Barnabas and Saul began their missionary journey, the church leaders placed their hands on them to show that the church supported their work and the men as doing God’s will. The Antioch church leaders, by the laying on of hands, agreed that Barnabas and Saul had the authority to act on behalf of

the Christian community. Both the leadership and the church community together were working under the direction of the Spirit to set apart Barnabas and Saul for evangelistic work.

2. **vv. 4-5.**

The church at Antioch released them from their ministry, but the Holy Spirit sent them out. Luke now began the story of the first missionary journey, described in Acts, Chapters 13 and 14, which lasted about three years in length. Barnabas and Saul left from Seleucia. Their destination was the island of Cyprus. Cyprus was an ideal place to begin the church's outreach program because it was Barnabas' native land or home. He was acquainted with the people. Barnabas and Saul proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues of the city. This tradition invited any learned man to speak to the people of the synagogue on the Sabbath.

On the journey with them was John Mark who was their assistant. He was a valuable companion to Barnabas and Saul because he grew up in Jerusalem and was an eyewitness of many of the events in the life of Jesus Christ. They went from Synagogue to synagogue where they preached the word of God.

3. **vv. 6-12.**

The other city mentioned was Paphos where the island's proconsul, Sergius Paulus, requested a meeting with the two missionaries. Luke described Sergius as "an intelligent man", a man of intellectual curiosity and open-mindedness and discernment who wanted to hear the word of God. However, Sergius had a private magician, a Jew, whose names were "Bar-Jesus" (Son of Jesus) and "Elymas" (magician). If his master became a Christian, Elymas would lose his job as magician. Therefore, he opposed the missionaries, Barnabas and Saul,

and tried to persuade his master not to believe the Christian faith. Paul recognized that Satan was using Elymas to try to keep the proconsul from hearing the Gospel

Paul, using spiritual discernment and operating in the gift of faith, rebuked and pronounced the judgement of God upon Elymas: "...thou shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season" (Acts 13:11). Certainly, those who resist God are blind spiritually, and God gave Elmas a physical blindness that matched his spiritual blindness. Paul was harsh in his confrontation against Elymas because the eternal destiny of the proconsul was at stake.

Sergius saw the courage of Paul who had strong convictions and belief in the Lord. Also, he saw the result of Elymas' sin, physical blindness. When the proconsul saw this, he was amazed at the power of God. When we witness the trouble sin brings to someone, it helps us to seek God earnestly. If one commits a sin, that is his privilege, but it is never right to involve others in one's sinful act.

III. Conclusion

The sending out of Barnabas and Saul was the beginning of a new era in the carrying out of the Great Commission. Two missionaries were sent out by the Holy Spirit through the church at Antioch. We are to promote God's salvation among the nations by going out and serving as workers called by God to spread the Gospel. As Jesus said in Matthew 9:37-38, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field".