

The Acts of the Apostles

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

The Beginning of the Missionary Era

Chapter Thirteen

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Luke mainly leaves aside Peter now and the rest of his writings primarily concern the missionary works of Paul.

Acts 13:1 “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Acts 13:2 And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Acts 13:3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

The first missionary trip resulted after the church leaders were praying and fasting for direction. The Holy Spirit gave them their charge, they obeyed, and we have the first two missionaries sent into the world by Him. But there is a lot more intrigue here! Luke lists some of the early leaders in this church and one of them is very interesting. Manaen was a foster-brother of Herod the tetrarch. A foster-brother was a person of the same age as a person of royalty who was brought up in the household of the royalty. This reminds me somewhat of Moses being brought up in the house of the Pharaoh. In the case of Moses, one of them became a leader of God’s chosen children and the other a deadly enemy. In the case of Manaen, he grew up to be a leader in the Christian church and Herod the tetrarch was the same person who beheaded John the Baptist and was involved in the crucifixion of Jesus! Isn’t this fascinating? God’s work in the world is truly wonderful, true, and fascinating. Why do we want to read anything else? God’s word does require careful reading and good exegesis for it would be easy to just skip over this list of people and miss an important part of the story. Unfortunately we do not know much about the other people named here but just knowing about Manaen is enough for us to offer up a special praise to God!

Also note that Barnabas is mentioned first as the team leader. Saul is mentioned second and with his Hebrew name. Five men are mentioned here as people gathered for this monumental event in history: the first official missionary trip of the Church. Barnabas was a Levite, a Jewish priest. He was from Cyprus and very familiar with Greek culture. Simeon was also called Niger, which means “black” so he was probably a person with black skin and he was a distinguished leader. Lucius of Cyrene was probably one of the men who went to Antioch to establish the church. Lucius is a Roman name so he was probably brought up in a Roman culture. Manaen is a Greek form of a Hebrew name so he was probably a Hellenistic Jew. The last person listed was Saul, who was a Jew who

had persecuted the early Christians and then became a leader of the church. What an integrated church! We see people of different colored skin, rich people, poor people, Jews and Gentiles. It is also interesting at this point to note that Saul had been out of the limelight for some time. He had spent three years in Arabia, about seven years in Asia Minor at Tarsus, and now had spent two years teaching at Antioch. At this point in time Saul had been in the faith for twelve years but had not apparently been used much by God to spread the Gospel. Now he is in middle age and being chosen as a missionary. Perhaps someone reading this has spent many years not in direct service to God and now the call comes. In such a case the person should praise the Lord for the time spent in preparation for this new time of service and proceed with confidence. I am now 67 years old and have spent 3 years in industry, 3 years in graduate school, and 39 years in teaching and administration in universities. Now I am heading into a new phase in my life where I am sure God will use my background, talents, and gifts to serve Him in a new and broader way. God is indeed sovereign!

Acts 13:4 “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Acts 13:5 And when they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.”

As noted above, Barnabas was from Cyprus and that may be the reason that he was chosen as the leader of this team. John was a cousin of Barnabas (Col 4:10) and served not as a missionary preacher but as a person who worked for them to help them obtain their needs during the travels. Seleucia was the port city south of Antioch from which they sailed to the island Cyprus that is about 100 miles long and about 90 miles wide. They landed at Salamis, which had a large Jewish population and probably supported two or three synagogues. Saul always liked to start his presentations to the Jews first. We are told later that he was to be the missionary to the Gentiles but certainly the synagogue always provided an excellent forum for him.

Acts 13:6 “And when they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, Acts 13:7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

They had now traveled from one end of the island to the other end and certainly preaching as they traveled. Paphos is on the other end of the island from Salamis. Luke now tells us of a significant event on the island. A proconsul was a Roman official that had been placed over a province so he was an important man and this meeting would have significant results for the church. God was obviously already working on this man’s heart as he sent for Barnabas and Saul so that he could hear the word of God!

Acts 13:8 But Elymas the magician (for thus his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

Acts 13:9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him,

Acts 13:10 and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?"

Acts 13:11 "And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.

Acts 13:12 Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord."

Don't mess with Saul! Here we have more drama for the reader! God had directed Saul to bring the gospel message to this proconsul and an enemy of God tried to interfere. Saul recognized the interference immediately as from the devil and he proclaimed a curse from God upon this magician. The curse was temporary, perhaps because Saul remembered how his temporary physical blindness helped bring about a mental awakening. Of course only God can transform a heart and we are not told what happened to the magician but the proconsul did believe. The name Bar-Jesus means "son of Jesus". Jesus was a common name at this time but Saul made a play on words when he, in effect said, "you are not the son of Jesus but you are a son of the devil"! Discernment is so important for all Christians and here Saul used it effectively. Here we also see Luke referring to Saul as Paul for the first time. As a Roman citizen a person had three names. Saul was the Hebrew name and Paul was the Roman name. It seems that since Paul was to be the missionary for the gentiles, he would from now on take his Roman name. We are not explicitly told that the belief of the proconsul was a saving belief for it could have just been a belief like that of the demons. However history does seem to tell us that he indeed did become a child of God and was an important person in the establishment of a church there that still stands today.

Acts 13:13 "{Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

Acts 13:14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

Acts 13:15 And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.""

We see now that John left the missionary team. We are not told why he left but some think that since Barnabas was relegated to second in charge that his cousin John left in protest. Luke does tell us later of some remarks of Paul about John Mark's leaving (Acts 13:13; 15:36-41). The team then left the island and went to Perga, which is on the southern coast of what is now known as Turkey. They then went on a treacherous journey into the mountains to this other Antioch, which is at about 3600 feet elevation. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells of being sick at this time and some historians think that he contracted malaria in the lowlands and they traveled to the clear air of the mountains for him to get some rest. Whatever happened Paul and Barnabas went into a synagogue and sat down as was the custom. The order of the meetings were that someone would have a reading from the law, someone would have a reading from the

prophets, and then someone could give an exposition. Jesus was given such an opportunity in the synagogue in Nazareth when the leaders had been reading from Isaiah. Now the leaders asked this new visiting group for a word of exhortation. A word of exhortation is a talk that lifts people up and encourages them. Paul took advantage of the opportunity!

Acts 13:16 “And Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand, he said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:”

What follows is very much along the lines of the sermon given by Stephen and you will remember that Paul was present for that sermon and saw the result! But that history did not deter Paul. The result of this sermon was very different from the result to the sermon given by Stephen. Our hearts will swell when we get to the end of this chapter to see how the Lord was working to spread the truth to the world! Note that Paul addressed his message to two categories of people. He spoke to the Jews and to those who feared God, who would have been the Gentiles who were God-fearers. Past this introduction Paul’s sermon is divisible into four sections. He spoke of the Old Testament *kerygma*, the New Testament *kerygma*, some supportive Biblical texts, and then he gave the Gospel message. [The *kerygma* is a statement of God’s works in His people.] It is probable that Luke gives us a condensed version of Paul’s sermon but we certainly get the point and it is magnificent.

Acts 13:17 "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it.

Acts 13:18 "And for a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness.

Acts 13:19 "And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance-- all of which took about four hundred and fifty years.

Acts 13:20 "And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.

Acts 13:21 "And then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.

Acts 13:22 "And after He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.'

Most Biblical scholars think that this verse is the end of the Old Testament *kerygma*, as it seems to even me. In the Old Testament we see theology of God as it is revealed over a very long time period. We see how God worked patiently with His chosen people even in time when they were supremely recalcitrant. They even turned down God as their king and wanted a king that all people could see like the other nations had!

Acts 13:23 "From the offspring of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,

Acts 13:24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

Acts 13:25 "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

Acts 13:26 "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the word of this salvation is sent out.

Acts 13:27 "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him.

Acts 13:28 "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed.

Acts 13:29 "And when they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.

Acts 13:30 "But God raised Him from the dead;

Acts 13:31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.

Paul now ends his New Testament *kerygma* and gives his audience some supportive Biblical texts.

Acts 13:32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers,
Acts 13:33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee.'

Acts 13:34 "And as for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'

Acts 13:35 "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'Thou wilt not allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.'

Acts 13:36 "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers, and underwent decay;

Acts 13:37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

After giving these texts, Paul now lays down the words of the Gospel message.

Acts 13:38 "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,

Acts 13:39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

Acts 13:40 "Take heed therefore, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you:

Acts 13:41 'Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; For I am accomplishing a work in your days, A work which you will never believe, though someone should describe it to you.'"

His sermon has been magnificently given and they now get up to leave. Paul gave them the gospel message, which is a message that sets us free from bondage to the law. Indeed the truth will set us free.

John 8:32 "and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Acts 13:42 "And as Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

Acts 13:43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God."

Rather than being stoned to death as was Stephen, Paul and Barnabas were begged by the people to tell them more! God was surely doing a mighty work in the hearts of many people here through His messenger Paul.

Acts 13:44 "And the next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of God.

What a result! The whole city came to hear the truth about God's new work in the world.

Acts 13:45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy, and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.

Now we see the predictable result of the hard-hearted Jews. Luke describes them appropriately as being jealous. They loved their power and the fact that the people held them up as god-like so they were very jealous when people came along to point the people to the true God. In order to contradict the words of Paul they had to blaspheme the true God because the words of Paul were the true words of God. We must also know the truth of God so that we can stand up against the evil ramblings of those opposed to God.

Acts 13:46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

Acts 13:47 "For thus the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, That You should bring salvation to the end of the earth.'"

Acts 13:48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

Here again we see that only those who have chosen before the foundation of the world were the ones who truly believed and became children of God. We do not know who these chosen people are so we have to do like Paul and preach the gospel message whenever we have the chance. God will reap the reward and the glory as people are brought into His family partly through the words of His people. We do not have to be

great theologians or great oracles. God chooses to work through the words of people like me and you to reach to His other chosen people.

Acts 13:49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. Acts 13:50 But the Jews aroused the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

It is interesting that the devout, rich, Jewish women were “aroused” against these Christian missionaries. Just as Satan went to Eve first, he here also went to the women first. These women could then manipulate their husbands to do their bidding. So the Jews did finally get these men out of the city but the damage had been done.

Acts 13:51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.

Paul and Barnabas just did what Jesus told His disciples to do when they met such opposition:

Matt 10:14 “And whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake off the dust of your feet.”

Matt 6:11 “And any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake off the dust from the soles of your feet for a testimony against them.”

Luke 9:5 “And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.”

I dislike trendy sayings, but it is wonderful to do what Jesus would do. It is imperative for us to know the word of God so that we also will know how to react in situations in the same way that Jesus would do. We are “little Christs” and we need to always act accordingly.

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

What a mountain-top experience these disciples were given! I can only imagine the bliss experienced by them at this point. From the warnings of Jesus they knew that their life would not be continually like this throughout their life but to taste a bit of heaven now would have provided them with the courage to face the future. Remembering this experience also allowed Paul to later write:

Rom 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

We all need to remember any such experiences God gives us so that we can join Paul in the above statement.

As an aside, think about how long it took for God to establish a church at Pisidian Antioch. It took one week and this church lasted for hundreds of years! We plan and save and pray and then when we think that we are ready we “plant” a church. I am not saying that we should not save, pray, form committees, plan, etc. However I think that when we take more and more time to plan we are actually moving forward on our own strengths rather than on the initiative of God.

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