

Text: Acts 12:25-13:3

Title: Barnabas and Saul, the First Missionary Team

Truth: God called two individuals to a vocational kind of ministry.

Date/Location: Wednesday April 10, 2013 and 3/27/2024 at FBC

Introduction

Remember from 11:27-30 that Barnabas and Saul had been sent to Judea to take money to the Christians who were suffering a famine. A scene change occurred in Acts 12:1-24 where the Bible covers Herod's activities against the church and his sudden demise.

I. Barnabas and Saul Return from Jerusalem, 12:25

- A. Paul and Barnabas finished the benevolence ministry they had been assigned and came back from Jerusalem to the Antioch church.
- B. Their team expanded to three because they brought John Mark with them from Jerusalem. John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10).

II. God Blessed Antioch with Several Prophets and Teachers,

13:1

- A. Barnabas. He was an encourager (Acts 4:36), a Levite, from Cyprus, he gave a generous donation of money from a land sale to the church (4:36-37). He was a "people person" who brought Saul to the other believers in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27); an encourager again in 11:22-23, a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith (11:24). Then he found and brought Saul to the Antioch church for ministry (11:25-26). He traveled quite frequently (11:27-30) and demonstrated his concern for the poor. He shows up multiple times in Acts 13, 14, and 15 as well as 1 Corinthians 9:6, Galatians 2:1, 9, 13; and Col. 4:10.
- B. Simeon, called Niger. This phrase "called X" or "surnamed X" is used of John "called" Mark in Acts 12:12, 12:25, and 15:37; Simon Peter in 10:5, 32; 11:13; and Judas Barsabbas in 15:22. It may be a surname that is descriptive of his dark complexion or his origin

(Africa). Both may be true—that he was a black man from Africa. Whenever I read this portion about Simeon, I consider him to be an example for us that we would strive for ethnic diversity in our churches, and certainly *not* to put any boundaries that would hinder a diverse population from coming. The gospel is enough of a “barrier” that we do not need to add more difficulties! It cannot be proven that this Simeon was the same as Simon of Cyrene (Matthew 27:32).

C. Lucius of Cyrene. See Acts 11:20 for his likely origin in Antioch.

D. Manaen, brought up with Herod the tetrarch, the king who murdered John the Baptist (Luke 3:19-20). Here is a man who was well placed in society, yet had not pursued that and instead became a Bible teacher.

I observed earlier in our study of Luke’s gospel that Joanna was the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward. And now we have Manaen. Two points of influence or connection to the king of the region. Perhaps in recent years he did not pay attention to these individuals, but if he did know them and speak with them, this gave Herod little room to claim an excuse that he did not know about the Lord or His message.

E. Saul. We know much about him from chapter 9 and then chapters 13 and forward, as well as 13 New Testament letters.

F. Luke does not say which of these five men were the prophets and which were the teachers. There is no great importance associated with that information at this point.

G. The prophets may not have been “future telling” prophets but rather proclaimers of the Word of God. We could profitably read this as “preachers and teachers,” because that is how we would apply it today. Obviously some have a teaching gift; some are missionary and outreach minded; some are pastoral types like Barnabas who are able to deal well with people.

It is no problem in the infancy stage of the church for them to have the prophetic gift regarding some future events, as Agabus did (Acts 11:28, 21:10), but that gift obviously died out as the New Testament was completed.

H. This church had a number of teachers and preachers, and some of them we already know were very gifted at this ministry. God chose to use this church as the nucleus from which he would send out a couple of these well-qualified men to start other churches.

III. The Lord's Call for Evangelism and Church Planting, 13:2

Verse 2 introduces us to how the early church implemented the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). It is the beginning of a more organized, church-based approach to world missions in which the church implements the Lord's directive to invite and persuade individuals from all nations to become Christians.

A. The pre-conditions of the call were that they were ministering and fasting. They went about doing what they already knew to do. This was the context in which God's call came, and I believe it comes that way today. God generally directs Christians who are "moving," not those who are sitting still. The ones who are moving, the busy ones, are the ones who are really into it and dedicated to the Lord. Their activity level in Christian endeavor is an indication of their character. God uses people of dedicated character.

He also uses churches like this one in Antioch that have lots of well-trained people in them.

B. The Holy Spirit revealed to them specifically that He, the Lord of the harvest, was assigning Barnabas and Saul to do a new work. That work is detailed in the following verses of chapters 13-28. We must pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out Christian workers (Luke 10:2, Matthew 9:38).

C. The call was not private. The whole church knew it. So it should be with us—not that we hear a voice from heaven, but that we can clearly see God is working in someone's life and with their desire is moving them into ministry. If someone comes into the church claiming to have the call of God for ministry, it should be well known and understood by more than just that person.

D. God's call was a command to the group, not just to the ministering individuals. The group is the church which set them apart for work that they were supposed to do and released them to that work. God worked with the *entire* church.

IV. The Obedient Response to Call of the Lord of the Harvest,

13:3-4

- A. They continued fasting and praying just as they had been, but now with a more pointed purpose. Previously, it may have been the case that the prayer times of the church were a bit vague, unsure of what to ask or even how God might fulfill their desire to plant other churches. Now, they had a definite plan moving forward and had something not only to do, but people to prepare to do it.
- B. Then the church laid hands on Saul and Barnabas. They had a special commissioning service, depicting how they solemnly committed the first missionaries to God, trusting God for their protection and supply, and hoping for a fruitful ministry.
- C. Sent them out. God called and the church released them for ministry. God demanded a separation between the two ministers and the rest of the church (a good kind of separation).

I speculate (wisely, I think) that the commissioning must have included financial means. Today we plan and prepare for the financial and other practical aspects of ministry instead of leaving them up in the air.

Conclusion

Notice that the church gave up some of its spiritually gifted people and their gifts to reproduce other churches in other areas of the Roman empire. This left holes in the ministry, but they still had no lack of prophets and teachers to carry on the local ministry of Antioch.

God called Saul and Barnabas. He may well do the same to someone who is hearing these words!

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