

Text: Acts 13:4-12

Title: The First Missionary Trip

Truth: Barnabas, Saul and John Mark traveled and preached the Word of God.

Date/Location: Wednesday 4/17/2013 and 4/3/2024 at FBC

Introduction

The opening verses of chapter 13 record how the Lord called upon the church to send out Barnabas and Saul for evangelistic and church planting work. We noted that their call was not private, but was rather church-wide.

I. Missionaries Sent Out, 13:4-5

- A. We see two sending agents: the church and the Holy Spirit. In verse 3 Luke writes, “they sent (ἀπολύω) them away.” In verse 4, the text says, “being sent out (ἐκπέμπω) by the Holy Spirit.” The church “released” the missionaries for the service to which the Spirit of God was “sending them out.” Neither action erases the other; both are necessary. As often in God’s work, there is a human element and a divine element.
- B. They traveled “down” to Seleucia, which was west of Antioch and a seaport. Then they sailed to the island of Cyprus, arriving at the city of Salamis.



- C. It is not revealed exactly how they knew where to go first to start their speaking ministry, although we could speculate that:
1. They had some direction from God, either direct or indirect. For example, the Spirit could have given them some guidance as in Acts 16:6-7. Perhaps the church together decided on where the team should go, based on their knowledge of the region, burden for it, connections they already had, or other factors. Perhaps the Lord used Saul's desire to minister to Jews to get him to synagogues, and then to Gentiles in those areas. When 'burden' or 'desire' is not in conflict with God's word, it *can* be something that gives some direction to your path.
 2. There were already some Christians in Cyprus whom they knew (Acts 11:20). This would provide them with people who could guide them to the best places and house them.
 3. The synagogue was a natural place to start since there Paul could find people who were interested in hearing about the Scriptures. He sought to "extend" their knowledge with the further revelation from God.

II. Problem with a Sorcerer, 13:6-11

- A. In their line of work, the Paul and Barnabas were destined to run into some other people in the "religious" department. They encountered a false prophet, a sorcerer named Bar-Jesus. This name means "son of Joshua." He is somewhat like Balaam in Numbers 24:1. This man was also a Jew who had sadly departed from the true God. In the Arabic tongue his name was Elymas, meaning *magician*. He was hanging around political power in the person of the proconsul, a government official on the island of Cyprus in the city of Paphos.
- B. The proconsul Sergius Paulus wanted to hear God's word. He was an intelligent fellow. His intelligence was a gift of God. It was manifested in that he called for Barnabas and Saul to hear what they had to say. He had some intellectual curiosity. I take it that intelligence which God approves includes the idea of being smart

enough to *not* shut out the message from God but to think deeply about it and consider it seriously.

- C. Opposition immediately arose from the devilish Elymas, trying to get the proconsul to turn away from following Christ. Isn't that the way of many unbelievers today—to try to turn people away from God? In his situation, we can speculate that he knew (or the devil animating him knew) that if Sergius Paulus became a believer, the sorcerer would not be able to take advantage of or steer his political power in the direction he desired.
- D. In verse 9, Luke notes that *Saul* was also known as *Paul*. The former is a Hebrew form of his name, and Paul a Greek/Roman version of the name.
- E. Paul responded firmly to the opposition. Note the descriptions of Elymas in v. 10 by Saul, describing just how bad the sorcerer is:
 - 1. Full of all deceit and all fraud.
 - 2. Son of the devil. Given this, the above line makes complete sense.
 - 3. Enemy of all righteousness.
 - 4. Perverting the straight ways of the Lord.
- F. Paul then pronounced a judgment on this man, a physical consequence of blindness. This event is not explainable by naturalistic means. It was a supernatural phenomenon, done by God or perhaps an angel at the request of Paul. God did this sort of thing sometimes in the first century for and with His apostolic representatives specifically for the progress of the gospel. It not only authenticated the gospel message and minister, but physically restrained the evil that was attempting to hinder the gospel. God does not operate that way in our present age, though we easily could wish that he would. Governmental and cultural hindrances to the gospel are sometimes quite formidable, and they do seem to be a real reason that some people are lost forever.
- G. A lesson to learn here: do not oppose the work of God when an apostle is around, because you might go blind! Although somewhat tongue-in-cheek, this is a real warning. If you hinder the work of God or destroy His church, He will have an appropriate judgment in

store for you. It may not be now or soon, but it will come about eventually.

H. When Sergius Paulus saw the miraculous judgment, coupled with the teaching of Jesus and now seeing its authority exercised, he believed the messenger, the message, and the Savior of the message.

III. Belief of the Proconsul, 13:12

A. When Sergius saw the miracle, it proved in his mind the trustworthiness of the messenger and the message, and he believed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

B. Without the power of miracles at our disposal today—we believe the plain evidence that there are no miracle-working apostles today, and very few if any verifiable miracles of any sort in accordance with the general pattern of history—what do we have to “convince” our listeners? We have the power of the gospel itself. We have the power of fulfilled prophecy. We have the power of transformed lives via the gospel. We have the (good) history of the (true) Christian church and its impact on the world.

Conclusion

We call this work missions, from the title Great Commission. It is more direct to say that such work is evangelism and church planting. Whatever you call it, the teaching the word of the Lord to new areas is a necessity for the Christian church.

Such work faces opposition from the devil and his agents. But we can trust God to protect and help us through.

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