

History in the Making
“Understanding the Book of Acts-Part Twenty-Three”

Introduction:

- ✓ The Jerusalem church, since Pentecost, had faithfully carried the Gospel across many cultural thresholds in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria (Acts 1:8).
- ✓ Through the Apostle Paul, the church will embark on fulfilling the Great Commission to the uttermost parts of the earth.
- ✓ What begins in Chapter 13 is the first of three missionary trips of Paul, and is a microcosm of his missionary call.

But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." Acts 9:15-16 NKJV

Four primary themes that emerge in this opening description of Paul's first missionary journey

NOTE:

I. The Wonder of God's Grace

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. Acts 13:1-3 NKJV

A. Prophetic word to the church leaders as they fasted and prayed regarding the role of Paul and Barnabas.

1. Probably an inspired utterance of some kind
2. Especially sensitive during times of prayer and fasting
3. After further fasting and prayer, they were commissioned and sent out

NOTE: The call (both inward-Paul in Acts 9) and now completely confirmed-hands laid on and sent out

IMPORTANT: Underscores both individual responsibility and corporate accountability

B. Interesting diversity of the church leaders in Antioch

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- ✓ Barnabas
- ✓ Saul
- ✓ Simeon (Niger) of dark complexion
- ✓ Lucius of Cyrene (North Africa)
- ✓ Manaen-brought up with Herod the tetrarch (literally in Greek; foster-brother)
 1. Herod the Tetrarch (killed John the Baptist and tried Jesus)
 2. His foster-brother is one of the leader in Antioch

NOTE: What a commentary on the wonder of God's grace

TRUTH: Heritage can be dreadful, but does NOT define us!

II. The Need of God's Church

A. Diversity of leadership

1. Prophets/teachers
2. Socioeconomically/multiculturally diverse
 - a. Barnabas-Levite from Cyprus-wealthy-gave land
 - b. Simeon-black man
 - c. Lucius-Roman from North Africa
 - d. Manaen-foster-brother of Herod
3. Rich diversity as potential list for missionary service

B. Antioch sends its finest-Antioch a model for missionary vision in the local church

1. A church that embodies cultural diversity
2. Spiritually gifted and sensitive leaders
3. Obedient to the leading of the Spirit
4. Willing to intercede for the world
5. Willing to send their best out

NEED OF GOD'S CHURCH

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III. The Priority of God's Work

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant. Acts 13:4-5 NKJV

A. Paul and Barnabas leave Antioch heading for Cyprus

1. Seleucia-a Mediterranean port of Syrian Antioch
2. Land at Salamis-administrative center-130 miles west of the Syrian coast (Island of Cyprus)

B. Begin with preaching the Word of God to Jews in the synagogues

NOTE: Practical expression of Paul's philosophy

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. Romans 1:16 NKJV

C. Took with them-John Mark (v. 5) as their assistant

1. Cousin of Barnabas
2. Will later be source of controversy

NOTE: Close to Peter and knew the story and person of Jesus possibly as an eyewitness-could relay that to Paul and Barnabas

D. "They preached the Word of God"

1. This phrase will be repeated numerous times in the first missionary account
2. This must be the main activity of missions
3. Humanitarian and relief efforts are essential and called missions
4. But the church's primary mission is the communication of the Gospel

IV. The Power of God's Word

A. Challenge from the sorcerer

Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Acts 13:6-8 NKJV

1. Traveled island east to west until they arrived at Paphos-some 90 miles away
2. Had been invited by the proconsul (appointed governor of Roman province) to speak with him
3. He was interested in what they had to say
4. His name was Sergius Paullus
5. The sorcerer Elymas (or Bar-Jesus) was probably a court astrologer and he sought to distract the proconsul from hearing the message of Paul/Barnabas
6. If he believed-his livelihood would be challenged

NOTE: This proconsul interest would certainly impress Theophilus to whom Acts is written

B. Blinding of Elymas

Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 10 and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? 11 And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Acts 13:9-11 NKJV

1. Rebuke by Paul
2. Curse of temporary blindness

“Knew from his own experience, that by the darkening of the eyes, the minds darkness might be restored to light.”

C. The conversion of the proconsul

Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. Acts 13:12 NKJV

“Astonished (not by the miracles) but the teaching of the Lord.”

1. Becomes the first totally pagan Gentile convert
2. Representative of upper echelon of Roman society

POWER OF GOD’S WORD!

Conclusion: This early account of the church's first endeavor to do world missions brings to light some interesting and important truths.

1. We must welcome the diversity that God places within the body and embrace it as an asset to Kingdom advancement.
2. We must be willing and anxious to give our very best and most gifted to the call of world evangelism.
3. We must never abandon our commitment to the priority of God's Word in all of our Kingdom efforts.
4. We should be alert to and expect enemy conflict but never back down or lose confidence in the victory provided us in Christ!