

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Paul's First Missionary Journey, Part I

1. Barnabas and Saul are called and sent ([13:1-3](#))
2. Seleucia, Salamis and Paphos ([13:4-13](#))
3. The Sermon at Pisidian Antioch ([13:14-41](#))
4. The Response to the sermon ([13:42-50](#))

Barnabas and Saul are called and sent ([13:1-3](#))

Simeon who was called Niger: Niger means black, so Simeon was presumably a black African among the congregation at Antioch. Some think this might be the same Simeon who carried Jesus' cross (Luke 23:26).

The "Manaen" mentioned here had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, the Herod who beheaded John the Baptist, and presided over one of Jesus' trials (Luke 23:7-12).

The Holy Spirit said: This call may have come through the ministry of prophets in the church at Antioch, though it could have come simply through an inner calling by the Holy Spirit.

Separate to Me: Sanctify them, set them apart for holy service. God had a specific work He had appointed to Barnabas and Saul to do. Paul knew this well, as he writes later in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." God here is calling Barnabas and Saul to a subset of those good works!

This is a serious matter; we know from Acts 9:15-16, "...he (Saul/Paul) is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." This was not a "feel good" call - it was a serious call to a serious ministry.

And laid hands on them: The laying on of hands was a formal commissioning to this ministry, and so we continue the practice even now. Barnabas and Saul were "ordained" before this, but now they were entering a different sphere of ministry.

They sent them away: The church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul out, being supported and sent by this specific congregation at the direction of the Holy Spirit. As far as we know, this had never happened before in the history of the church. Certainly, people went out as "accidental missionaries" due to persecution, but there was never a concerted and organized effort to carry the Gospel to the world quite like this.

Seleucia, Salamis and Paphos ([13:4-13](#))

Went down to Seleucia: We aren't told of any specific ministry taking place in Seleucia, a city near Antioch. Saul and Barnabas may have gone there merely because it was the port city near Antioch, but it is hard to imagine them not doing any ministry there. Seleucia wasn't far from Antioch, where there was a thriving church, so it isn't difficult to imagine there was already a group of Christians in that city.

We are not told why they went to Cyprus (Salamis is on the east coast) first, but we do know Barnabas grew up on that island (Acts 4:36).

They preached the word of God in the synagogues: This custom of the "open synagogue" would afford Barnabas and Saul many opportunities to preach. The custom of the open synagogue invited any learned man to speak to the congregation on the Sabbath.

They also had John as their assistant: This is John Mark, previously in Acts 12:25. He is traveling with Barnabas and Saul on this trip. This is the same Mark who will later write the Gospel that bears his name. Mark would have been a valuable companion for Barnabas and Saul. He grew up in Jerusalem, and was an eyewitness of many of the events in the life of Jesus and could relate them with special power to Barnabas and Saul, and to others whom they were preaching to.

Paphos: This city was known for its immorality: According to Barclay, "Paphos was infamous for its worship of Venus, the goddess of [sexual] love". We see in Paphos a familiar combination, immorality connected to spiritual darkness. It's interesting that the Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, sought to hear the Word of God. And Paphos being the kind of place it was, we should not be surprised by opposition to that idea by Elymas/Bar-Jesus.

Saul, who also is called Paul: It was common for people in that day to have names that were similar, yet different according to the language or culture they were in. Saul's given name was indeed Saul, a Jewish name after the first king of Israel. But his Roman name was Paul, sounding similar to "Saul." It's entirely possible that his family called him "Saul", but his Greek playmates in Tarsus would call him "Paul".

Filled with the Holy Spirit ... "O full of all deceit and all fraud": Wow! Paul, using spiritual discernment and operating out of faith, rebukes and pronounces the judgment of God upon Elymas (you shall be blinded). As Elymas is struck with blindness, one wonders if Paul remembered his own experience with God and blindness, and wondered if it would lead to repentance as it had with him. We don't read of Elymas repenting, though.

Either way, God is at work, clearly marking out the eternal destiny of Sergius Paulus. He saw the just result of Elymas' sin, physical blindness corresponding to his spiritual blindness.

Being astonished at the teaching of the Lord: As amazing as the miracle of Elymas' sudden blindness was, the good news the proconsul heard from Paul was *even more amazing*. His astonishment is said to be at the teaching of the Lord, merely not the miraculous work before his eyes.

They came to Perga: Paul, Barnabas and their companions leave the island of Cyprus, coming to Perga on the mainland of what is today Turkey. We don't know exactly why John Mark went home to Jerusalem. Was he homesick for his family? Was he afraid of the tough and dangerous travel through the mountains ahead of them? Was he resentful that the team of his cousin Barnabas and Saul (Acts 12:25) had now become Paul and his party? Was he a pessimist because Paul was suffering from poor health (Galatians 4:13)? Whatever the reason, Paul didn't appreciate the fact that John Mark abandoned the missionary journey here!

The Sermon at Pisidian Antioch ([13:14-41](#))

A synagogue service generally went like this: Opening prayers were offered, then there was a reading from the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament). Then, a reading from the Prophets. Then, if there was an educated person present, they were invited to speak on subjects related to the readings.

Men of Israel and you who fear God: Paul addresses both groups who would be at the synagogue on a typical Sabbath: Jews and "near Jews," those Gentiles who admired Jewish religion but did not make a full commitment to Judaism.

In this survey of Israel's history, Paul notes important events - the choosing of the patriarchs, the deliverance from Egypt, the time in the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, the time of the Judges, the creation of a monarchy - but it all culminates in Jesus. This survey demonstrates that God has a plan for history, and we need to sense a connection to that plan. Jesus is the goal of history, and as we are in Jesus, we are in the flow of God's great plan of redemption!

John the Baptist responded to Jesus the right way. He prepared the hearts of others of Jesus, and he saw Jesus as who He is. John knew Jesus was the One greater than all others. He knew Jesus was more than a teacher, He was the very Lamb of God.

They took Him down from the tree: (Literally "the wood", similar to how we talk about prisoners on death row getting "the chair"). Paul wants to communicate the idea that Jesus was cursed so we could be blessed (Galatians 3:13).

Then Paul applies the truth of resurrection, which means that Jesus truly is the unique Son of God (Psalm 2:7), and also proves that He was utterly holy even in His work on the cross (Psalm 16:10).

Through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins: The promise is that, because of who Jesus is and what He has done for us, forgiveness is offered to us freely in Jesus. We may be justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

What's can't we justify ourselves before God? Because to do so wrongly assumes God grades on a curve; it gives us the glory for our own salvation - instead of what Paul later wrote: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

There are some similarities between Paul's sermon here and the sermon of Stephen in Acts 7. Perhaps that sermon from the first martyr of the church was still ringing in the ears of the man who led his execution!

The Response to the sermon ([13:42-50](#))

It's safe to assume that many of these people hearing the message were already believers, because Paul and Barnabas persuaded them to *continue* in the grace of God. This means they had already started to trust in the grace of God.

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God: This scene is easy to picture. The whole city is ready to hear the gospel from Paul on the next Sabbath, and this dramatic response makes the leaders of the synagogue envious. Why? Because they aren't in charge anymore!

Contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul: Paul's preaching is opposed as if he were conducting a debate, his opponents contradicting him, and blaspheming God. We've seen this sort of response before; the Gospel is opposed by the Devil regularly and vigorously.

The blasphemy mentioned here like was abusive and degrading language directed towards *Jesus*, whom Paul preached.

Many Jews could not accept that Gentiles should be equal to them, and so attacking the object of their worship and faith, Jesus, is the natural attack vector.

Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold: They wouldn't let this challenge go unanswered, because they really believed the truth about Jesus.

Since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles: They rebuke those who reject Jesus, letting the Jews know that it was a privilege that this message should come to them first, a privilege they are even now rejecting.

Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed: The Gentiles respond to Paul's invitation with enthusiastic belief, learning with joy that God does not hate Gentiles, but offers them salvation in Jesus.

Paul shows wisdom in not spending all his time trying to persuade hardened hearts. We know that even after he made Gentiles the focus of his evangelistic efforts, he still prayed earnestly for the salvation of Israel (Romans 10:1), but he spent his missionary time ministering to more open hearts.

But the Jews... raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas: Wherever there is revival, the second party to be revived is the Devil. Jewish opposition was strong enough to force Paul and Barnabas to leave the area.

But they shook off the dust from their feet against them: In doing this, Paul and Barnabas are treating the city as if they were a God-rejecting Gentile city.

Jews, when going into or through a Gentile city, upon leaving the city would shake the dust off their feet as a gesture saying, "We don't want to take anything from this Gentile city with us." In this sense, Paul is saying "I don't want to take anything with me from you Jesus-rejecting pseudo-pietists!"

They were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit: Being filled with joy and being filled with the Holy Spirit go together, and they have a joy that contradicts their circumstances. Paul is a pretty great example of his own command to be constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18)!