

Last week the first three verses of this chapter gave us insight into how the early church functioned with elders praying and worshiping together and being led by the Spirit. The message from the Spirit was to send out Saul and Barnabas to the work God had called them to do. The rest of the book of Acts shows us that the work was planting new churches as they evangelized from town to town.

⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. Acts 13:4 They had been given their orders from the Captain of the Hosts (Joshua 5:14). They didn't raise funds or enlist sponsors. They just up and went by faith, trusting that the God who sent them would direct and provide for them. They are soldiers under a commander, and when He gives the orders they will obey (Matthew 28:20).

It is important to see that they were sent by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes people go when they are not sent. The church in Antioch was quite large by that time. Only two were sent by the Holy Spirit, and they also enlisted John Mark, Barnabas cousin (Colossians 4:10), to come along and assist them. God sends those whom He has prepared. We must be careful not to let people send us when the Lord has not called us. There are pastors and missionaries who have responded to the call of man instead of the call of the Holy Spirit. That is one reason half of all ministers leave the ministry within five years and only one in ten will retire as a minister.

Mission work today is difficult, but not as difficult as it was in these beginning years of the church or even a hundred years ago. When people set sail at the turn of the 20th century, they often took a coffin with them, never expecting to return. Many never did return. Disease, persecution, even martyrdom took many lives. We can read in 2 Corinthians 11 of the rigors Paul endured before he was martyred. While they may have had an idea of how difficult their mission would be, they courageously obeyed trusting God for the fruit and their own lives (Hebrews 11:8).

Seleucia was the nearest port city to Antioch, about sixteen miles away. From there they traveled to Barnabas home country, Cypress, arriving in the main port city of Salamis. Cypress was to them what Hawaii is to us. It had a beautiful climate and a large Jewish population. It was an easy 130 mile journey by sea. *⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.* Acts 13:5 This is the pattern that they follow throughout their ministry. They went to the synagogues first. The reason that Saul gives for this pattern is that the message is to the Jews first. They are the chosen people of God to proclaim the truth of God to the world (Acts 13:46-47). That was their mission in the Old Testament and it was still true, however, that message now included the truth that the

Commented [PW1]: Joshua 5:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?"

Commented [PW2]: Matthew 28:20 (ESV)

²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Commented [PW3]: Colossians 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him),

Commented [PW4]: 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 (ESV)

²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.

²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.

²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;

²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Commented [PW5]: Hebrews 11:8 (ESV)

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Commented [PW6]: Acts 13:46-47 (ESV)

⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

Messiah had come to bring us salvation. We'll see that message in Saul's sermon next week. That is proclaiming the word of God (Acts 13:38).

There is a practical reason as well. Jews understood the nature of man and of God from the Scriptures (Jeremiah 17:9). They understood the sinful nature of man and the just demands of God (Ezekiel 18:4). They learned of the nature of God. They knew He is holy, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Psalm 86:15). But they also know He will not leave sin unpunished (Exodus 34:7). When a Jew recognized Jesus as the Messiah and accepted the salvation He offers us, they would naturally be the core of a new church in the area. Some would become the elders of a new church. The Jews who were not just religious, but who were truly devout lovers of God would be the fertile ground for the gospel.

We have the same situation today with the Catholic Church. While the Catholic church has recently declared that salvation is only by grace through faith, most Catholics still rely on good works, confession, and the taking of communion to save them. When they see in Scripture that it is simply by faith in what Jesus has done (Ephesians 2:8-9), many will readily accept that good news. They have been prepared for the gospel by knowing that sin deserves judgment. They have a healthy fear of the Lord. Proclaiming the word of God to them and to others is to tell of what Jesus has done for us in His death and resurrection.

Luke didn't convey to us any results of the trip to this point. They proclaimed the message and apparently didn't see any results at the time. Maybe that island had the same spirit as Hawaii, laid back and unconcerned. That must have been difficult, as they had seen so much response in Antioch. But things were about to change.

⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. Acts 13:6 They had crossed the island from east to west. Now on the far side of the island in Paphos they meet spiritual resistance. Before real fruit is born there is usually a spiritual battle. This battle came from one influential man. Proconsuls often had their own sorcerer in their court. Bar-Jesus means "son of Joshua." He was Jewish and he was a false prophet. Jewish law prescribed that false prophets should be stoned (Acts 18:20). He had convinced the proconsul that he had prophetic powers to be employed and thereby had his protection.

⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. Acts 13:7 Sergius Paulus had gotten word that Barnabas and Saul were bringing something new to the synagogues of the island and wanted to hear from them. He is described as a man of intelligence which can be translated "sensible." Bar-Jesus must have had an evil spirit to have been able to deceive him.

Commented [PW7]: Acts 13:38 (ESV)

³⁸ Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,

Commented [PW8]: Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Commented [PW9]: Ezekiel 18:4 (ESV)

⁴ Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

Commented [PW10]: Psalm 86:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Commented [PW11]: Exodus 34:7 (ESV)

⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Commented [PW12]: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Commented [PW13]: Deuteronomy 18:20 (ESV)

²⁰ But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.'

⁸ But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Acts 13:8 He would have opposed them because he could see that if Sergius Paulus converted he would be out of a job (2 Peter 2:15). But probably more to the point, Elymas Bar-Jesus is the spiritual opposition. The evil spirit inspiring him hates the message Barnabas and Paul have brought and doesn't want to lose his evil influence over the island. We have seen opposition come from established religion, from political power, and now we are seeing it from a sorcerer inspired by the demonic realm. Whether they know it or not, all opposition to the gospel is inspired from evil. John the Beloved wrote, ¹⁹ *We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.* 1 John 5:19 He will not sit back quietly while those he has blinded are being brought to the light (2 Corinthians 4:4). We have no need to fear, for greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world, as we will see in the following verse (1 John 4:4).

⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?" Acts 13:9-10 There is a time for gentleness and understanding, and a time for bold confrontation. May God help us discern which is appropriate by the indwelling presence of the Spirit.

The name of Saul now changes to Paul. We aren't told why, but it is interesting that it is brought up when he is trying to share the message with a man named Paul. Paul means small. Perhaps with the demonstration of such power he wanted to remind himself that it is not that he is great, but rather that God is great. I have a friend whose last name is Little. It goes with John the Baptist saying, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30) Another reason may be that this was Saul's Roman name and now the ministry will increasingly be to Gentiles.

Luke reminds us that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit with the effect that he is presently still full and directed by the Spirit. That is the implication of the Greek verb used here. This is not just a frustrated evangelist blowing off steam. This is the Spirit speaking through Paul, and he lets him have it with both barrels. "You son of the devil!" Paul said, "You aren't son of Jesus, you are son of Lucifer." The devil is a deceiver (Revelation 12:9), and that is what this man was doing, deceiving the proconsul. Jesus said the weeds among the wheat were sons of the evil one (Matthew 13:38). "You enemy of all righteousness, full of deceit and villainy!" What a description of Elymas! "Will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?" That was the use of Scripture clearly identifying for Elymas where his heart and deeds were (Micah 3:9). It was also a question and an invitation. It was John the Baptist's invitation to make a highway in his heart for the Lord through repentance (John 1:23).

Throughout the church's history the advancement of the kingdom has always been met with threats and persecution. It is to be expected. How we need to pray for those on

Commented [PW14]: 2 Peter 2:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing,

Commented [PW15]: 2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)

⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Commented [PW16]: 1 John 4:4 (ESV)

⁴ Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Commented [PW17]: John 3:30 (ESV)

³⁰ He must increase, but I must decrease."

Commented [PW18]: Revelation 12:9 (ESV)

⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Commented [PW19]: Matthew 13:38 (ESV)

³⁸ The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one,

Commented [PW20]: Micah 3:9 (ESV)

⁹ Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight,

the front lines facing this kind of opposition to be full of the Holy Spirit. That is the only way Paul and Barnabas could face this kind of resistance and that which was to come. It is the same for us with neighbors and friends. We need to be in tune with our Commander to know whether to respond with gentleness or fire. Love is always central, for even the fire is delivered with the hope that their heart will see the truth and repent. Notice that Saul says the blindness would be temporary (as it was with him).

¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time. Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. Acts 13:11 I would imagine that Paul was just as shocked as Elymas at the outcome of this confrontation. We've seen Paul declared powerfully in Damascus that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 9:27), but we've never seen him confront his opposition like this, and despite the good fruit that came from it, we'll never see him do it again.

The hand of the Lord is referred to in Scripture to bless (Acts 11:21), to punish (Exodus 9:3), and to convict (Psalm 32:4). The account is strangely similar to Saul's conversion. He was blinded during his rebellion against God, trying to stop the church from advancing. He couldn't see for a time and needed someone to guide him by the hand.

The last chapter showed us Herod Agrippa's fate when he tried to kill the leaders of the church. Now we are seeing Elymas' fate for trying to stop Sergius Paulus from converting. The powerful think they can stop the church by harming us, but in the end they are only advancing the church and harming themselves. China's oppression of Christians has built a powerful church. Islam's persecution of believers is making some powerful, sold out Christian ministers of the gospel. The Ayatollah has done more to advance the church in Iran than any missionary, for in seeing the fruit of Sharia Law, many are turning to Jesus. His truth is marching on!

¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. Acts 13:12 Elymas ended up helping the proconsul to believe. The judgment on him convinced Sergius Paulus that the gospel was true. Astonished at the fact that God could love the world so much that He would send His only Son to die in our place, He repented and was born again. The mission movement started slowly, but under opposition it made its first big missionary gain.

We've seen several times already that there are archeological confirmations of Luke's account of what took place. He got the title and position of proconsul correct for that time period. We'll see even more as we go through the book. Sir William Ramsay reports that inscriptions bearing Sergius Paulus' name have been found on Cyprus confirming that he was a Christian and that his entire family became Christians.¹⁴

¹³ Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, Acts 13:13 What happened here is

Commented [PW21]: Acts 9:27 (ESV)

²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

Commented [PW22]: Acts 11:21 (ESV)

²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

Commented [PW23]: Exodus 9:3 (ESV)

³ behold, the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague upon your livestock that are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks.

Commented [PW24]: Psalm 32:4 (ESV)

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

Commented [PW25]: Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word – Acts: The Church Afire. Quoted from Ray Steadman, Growth of the Body pp. 14-15

somewhat conjecture based on what we know from the details in Acts. Paul did not preach in the synagogues of Pamphylia. His next place to preach was Galatia, and he wrote in Galatians 4:13 that it was because of an illness that he first preached to them. Pamphylia was known as a place to contract malaria. Perhaps he came down with malaria which would account for the difficulties with his eyes (Galatians 4:15).

John Mark left at this point. Paul will later imply that he didn't have the fortitude and courage to endure the hardships that were faced and deserted them. We have seen that John Mark's mother was probably wealthy, so he would not have been accustomed to such hardship. Barnabas and Paul will later go separate ways over whether or not to take John Mark again (Acts 15:37-38). We see redemption in the fact that in Paul's later years he asked for John Mark's help writing, "he is useful to me for the ministry." (2 Timothy 4:11)

Questions

- 1 Who sent out Barnabas and Saul?
- 2 Why did Saul go to the synagogues?
- 3 What helps make a person ready for the gospel?
- 4 Describe Bar-Jesus.
- 5 Why did he resist the gospel?
- 6 In what ways Elymas' judgment similar to Saul's conversion?
- 7 How is "hand of the Lord" used in Scripture?
- 8 What happens when someone opposes the gospel?
- 9 What may have happened to Paul in Pamphylia?
- 10 Why do you think Mark left?

Commented [PW26]: Galatians 4:13 (ESV)

¹³ You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first,

Commented [PW27]: Galatians 4:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

Commented [PW28]: Acts 15:37-38 (ESV)

³⁷ Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark.

³⁸ But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work.

Commented [PW29]: 2 Timothy 4:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.