

Into All the World...

Studies in the Book of

Acts

**Part 2 – The Gospel to the
rest of the World**

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Study 19: Acts chapter 13

Introduction

The scene now moves into the third (geographical) area of ministry – into the then known extent of the world.

The early part of the book of Acts covers some of the work of the Apostle Peter, and the latter part focuses on the work of Paul.

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

Content: *What are the major events?*

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Body of the Study

What was happening in the church at Antioch?

How were Barnabas and Saul separated?

Why was “laying on of hands” applied to Barnabas and Saul?

Where did they go? Why might they have taken this route?

How did they go about their work?

What reception did they get at Paphos?

How does the position of Saul change?

How does Paul deal with Elymas?

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Concise history of the Jews:

What is the reaction to Paul’s first recorded sermon?

How do Paul and Barnabas react?

What was the reaction of the Gentiles?

Homework:

Read the notes as a review of the study.

- *How does the joy shown by the disciples at Pisidian Antioch differ from the things that bring us joy today? What did they have that brought them joy, and what things bring us joy?*
- *What things should we pursue in our lives if we want to know the joy of the Lord?*
- *How did Paul and Barnabas go about being effective in sharing the gospel?*

Read chapter 14 in preparation for next week

Notes for study 19: Acts chapter 13

Introduction

The scene now moves into the third (geographical) area of ministry – into the rest of the then known world. This extended to India, Gaulle (France), Africa, and Britain, although Luke does not cover evangelism in these areas. Luke is not writing (primarily) a detailed history – if he were, it would read more like Josephus – but is providing us with “pictures” of the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church.

The early part of the book of Acts covers some of the work of the Apostle Peter, and the latter part focuses on the work of Paul, although the work of neither is covered in complete detail.

Almost nothing is said of the other apostles apart from Peter and Paul. We do know some things about the apostle John – his exile to Patmos and his death in Ephesus around 100 AD, and there is some evidence from antiquity that the other apostles went out teaching the gospel – Thomas and Bartholomew to India, and both Paul and Peter to Britain.

The “windows” that Luke presents allow us to look at how the apostles went about preaching and teaching. What they did – how the people reacted – how the apostles dealt with difficulties – how they dealt with problems in the church, and perhaps most importantly how they “...went everywhere preaching the word...”.

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

Herod’s death occurred in AD 44, and the latest that Paul and Barnabas could have arrived in Paphos is AD 48. However, this does not leave sufficient time for the missionary journey to be undertaken and fit into other events. Therefore, most likely it probably began around 45 or 46 AD.

Content: *What are the major events?*

The church at Antioch, Barnabas and Saul are called, First Missionary Journey – Cyprus, Elymas rebuked – Perga – Antioch in Pisidia – History of the Jews – to Iconium.

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Saul (Paul), Barnabas, John Mark, Sergius Paulus, Elymas,

Body of the Study

What was happening in the church at Antioch?

“...In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers...” (13:1 NIV) The prophets were “inspired spokespersons for God” – ie they spoke the things of God that they had learned by *inspiration* (whilst we speak (hopefully) the things of God that we have learned by *perspiration!*).

One of the spiritual gifts was the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 12:10), which was given through the laying on of the apostle’s hands. Saul was an apostle, and had laboured in Antioch with Barnabas for a whole year by this time (11:26). It is therefore not surprising that there were *abundant* spiritual gifts in the congregation.

The church also had *teachers* as well as prophets. The gift of teaching is a natural rather than a miraculous gift, although the gifts of teaching and prophecy are related. The central issue being how the people got their *knowledge* of what they were teaching. At that time, the New Testament had not been written. If people wanted to know what God had to say on a particular matter, they had to seek special information from those leaders who were endowed with special knowledge – ie the apostles, or from those who had knowledge imparted by miraculous means – the prophets.

One of those mentioned is “...*Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch)...*” (13:1 NIV). There were several Herod’s who were “Tetrarch’s” – ie a (Roman) ruler over a small part of the Roman Empire – see family tree of Herod, p. 111. This particular Herod was Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great by his Samaritan wife Malthace. It was Antipas’ wife Herodius and his daughter Salome who were responsible for the death of John the Baptist. He was also the one to whom Jesus had been led during his Roman trials prior to His death. Herod Antipas was eventually banished to Lyon in Gaulle (France) in AD 39, (before the time presented here by Luke).

How were Barnabas and Saul separated?

“...*The Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’...*” (13:2 NKJV). **HOW** the Holy Spirit revealed His will, we are not told, although it is not beyond the bounds of reality that it was revealed through one of the prophets. Luke has just described some of the things that are happening at Antioch for no other apparent reason – although it does provide us with a *picture* of what was happening in the church there at the time.

Barnabas and Saul were an intimate part of the work in Antioch, and they were to be taken out of that specific work to do something else. They were *NOT* told to be *removed* from the work, but to be *separated* from it. The work of evangelising to the rest of the world was to be *a part of the work* in Antioch. We will see in later studies how Barnabas and Saul (and later Silas) came back time and again to Antioch, and were sent out on several occasions.

Why was “laying on of hands” applied to Barnabas and Saul?

The laying on of hands was not for the purpose of appointing Saul to be an apostle, since this had happened at his conversion (26:16). Nor was it for the purpose of endowing the spiritual gifts upon them, since they both had these before this event (13:1). Also, since it was not the apostles who were performing the laying on of hands, they could not have passed on the miraculous gifts (8:18).

We are not told who performed the laying on of hands, but it (almost) certainly was not the apostles (unless some of them had come down from Jerusalem for the event – which would seem unlikely, especially since Luke does not mention it). Most likely it was the leaders of the congregation – whoever they were.

The context and circumstances clearly identify the purpose of the event as being the appointment to the work to which they had been called. An almost identical circumstance occurred in chapter 6, where the apostles did the appointing of the seven deacons *by the laying on of their hands*. In both cases the event was preceded by petition to God through prayer (and in this case also fasting).

The church then sent them out. Presumably this was done by the leaders of the congregation on behalf of the whole church, and under the direction of the Holy Spirit. An interesting question is, *how did they know what the work was* for which the Holy Spirit had separated them? It must have been revealed to them by some miraculous means, that their specific work was to “go out” to the rest of the world. Perhaps the prayer and fasting was also focused towards seeking an answer from God on what their work was to be. A similar incident occurs in chapter 16, where a clear direction from God needed to be “worked out” to understand what it meant (16:10).

Where did they go? Why might they have taken this route?

The journey started by heading firstly to Seleucia, which was the seaport for Antioch, about 30 km away (by land), downstream on the Orontes River. From there they set sail for Cyprus. Why Cyprus was chosen may simply be because it was not too far across the water from where they were, however that begs the question as to why they didn’t just take a much simpler land journey. We should note that the Holy Spirit was leading them as they were sent out (13:4). *How* the leading took place is illustrated by 16:6-7.

Cyprus was the home of Barnabas (4:36), and the first place that they went was to the territory that he was familiar with. Some of the brethren from Jerusalem at the time of the dispersion had gone to Cyprus (11:19). Given the location relatively close to Antioch, the importance of Antioch, the length of time that Barnabas and Saul had been at Antioch, and the fact that Cyprus had been Barnabas' home, it is almost certain that Barnabas and Saul were familiar with the spread of the gospel into Cyprus already. Further, the church in Antioch had begun with the help of brethren from Cyprus (11:20).

Luke is giving us “pictures” or “windows” of what is happening in the church and the spread of the gospel. It is not a complete “history”. In 11:19 he tells how the brethren went to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch at the time of the dispersion. He has shown some of the things that have been happening in one of those locations – Antioch. We are left to assume that similar things were happening in other places, although Antioch was endowed with the specific blessing of having the “*apostle to the Gentiles*” (Saul) working with them for quite some time.

Salamis was the largest city on the island, and had a large population. It was a major trading city for the island, which produced fruit, wine, flax and honey¹. The Romans later invaded the city, and 240,000 people were killed. An earthquake later completed the destruction of the city, and it was rebuilt in the 4th century. The city was large enough to have several synagogues (13:5).

How did they go about their work?

Barnabas and Saul began their work by first going to the Jewish synagogues. The primary reason for this was that the gospel was to be taken to the Jews first (13:46; Rom 1:16). They were people who understood Jehovah God, knew that He was the true and living God, and understood the Old Testament. However they did not understand the fulfilment in Christ, and needed to have that explained to them. If anyone was going to be receptive to the gospel, surely it would have been with those who had their sights turned towards God. At the very least, they deserved the first opportunity to hear about the promised Messiah who had now come and fulfilled the prophecies about Him.

John Mark was the nephew of Barnabas (Col 4:10), and the son of Mary of Jerusalem (12:12), in whose house many of the brethren met together. He is described as “...*their assistant*...” (13:5), which probably means that amongst other things he did a lot of the baptising as they went on their journey (since Paul says that he did not baptise many people himself – 1 Cor 1:13).

Luke does not mention whether the work in Salamis was successful, which probably means that it was not great. Nor do we know how long they stayed in the city, but given that they preached in the synagogues (plural) it is likely that they would have preached in a different one every week, and may have been there for several weeks with little result.

They then move on across the island “...*Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos*...” (13:6 NKJV). Paphos is about 150 km from Salamis. Luke again gives us “windows” into the work. He does not tell us anything about any other places they visited, or where they might have preached – but we see through some “windows” our insight into the work as they went – be it unfruitful (as apparently it must have been in Salamis), or “more interesting times” as they are about to encounter on the other side of the island at Paphos.

What reception did they get at Paphos?

Arriving in Paphos, Barnabas and Saul firstly found a Jewish sorcerer. This should be of great surprise, since any kind of sorcery was forbidden to God's people (Dt 18:9-13). His name was Bar-Jesus (son of Joshua), or Elymas (a Greek name which means *strong* or *wise* giving us some information on how he was selling himself). This man claimed to be a prophet of God, and (like Simon in chapter 8) was claiming that his “*magic powers*” were from God.

¹ Coneybeare & Howson; p 114.

Sergius Paulus was the proconsul of the island under the Roman government. The island swung back and forth between government by a governor, and that of a proconsul. A proconsul held both military and judicial power, and had absolute authority over the region during his period of office – for one year – but usually appointed for a second. If there was an army present, then the region would usually be administered under a Governor appointed by the Emperor. If there was no army to keep law and order, the region was governed by a Proconsul who was elected by the senate.

This helps us date the first missionary journey, as Barnabas and Saul must have arrived at the city sometime during that two-year period of the Proconsulship of Sergius Paulus. In the year 52 AD (the twelfth year of Claudius' reign), *L Annius Bassus* was proconsul (from an inscription). Julius Cordus and Cominius Proclus were most likely Bassus' predecessors, which places the time of the first missionary journey after Herod's death in AD 44, and some time between AD 46 and AD 48 (the likely dates for Sergius Paulus Proconsulship).

Bar-Jesus "...was with the proconsul..." (13:7). It was not unusual at all for rulers to consult an "oracle" or soothsayer for advice, and it is most likely that this is why Bar-Jesus was hanging around with Sergius Paulus. Sergius was the most important man on the island, and when he heard of Barnabas and Saul being in the city, no doubt his good sense of inquiry led him to seek information from them as he did from others. The purpose of his summons to Barnabas and Saul was "...to hear the word of God..." (13:7 NKJV).

Elymas reacted to try to stop the Proconsul from hearing what Barnabas and Saul had to say – no doubt trying to preserve his own position as "special adviser" to him, and he was "...seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith..." (13:8 NKJV). So far, the reaction has been mixed– great interest from Sergius Paulus, and rejection by Elymas. Luke tells us nothing about what might have been achieved in their public ministry up to this point.

How does the position of Saul change?

This is the last time that Luke refers to him as Saul, and afterwards calls him Paul. It is possible that he was given a Gentile name as well as a Hebrew name by his parents. Wherever it came from, Paul himself adopted it, signed his letters by that name, and was also called Paul by the other apostles (2 Pet 3:15). It is likely that he was now embracing his role as *apostle to the Gentiles*, and took up his Gentile name accordingly.

Paul's dealing with Elymas was a turning point. We not only have the change of name, but (mostly) from here on we also have a change of status. Rather than "*Barnabas and Saul*", it is now "*Paul and Barnabas*".

As they leave Paphos, the events that have just unfolded have placed Paul in a very strong leadership position. Perhaps it is the first time that his miraculous powers have been so strongly demonstrated (although they have been demonstrated in other ways). Perhaps it was because Sergius Paulus – the highest official in the land – has been converted. Whatever it was, it was a turning point for Paul.

How does Paul deal with Elymas?

Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit – which indicates that the act that he was about to perform was neither by his own power, nor was it done out of character with the will of God. He was able to detect the sin of Elymas, and to effect the judgement of God upon him. Elymas was:

- Full of deceit,
- Fraudulent,
- Son of the devil,
- Enemy of all righteousness,
- Perverter of the righteous ways of the Lord!

This judgement was done in such a way for all to see: All Paul did was to speak, and Elymas was struck blind. He was then in need of someone to lead him about by the hand. This was evidence of the power of God to Sergius Paulus, and also to all who knew Elymas in the city.

The miracle performed on Elymas is noteworthy because it was not done to make a (physically) sick person well, but on the contrary made a well person sick. It can of course be argued, that although he was physically well, Elymas was spiritually sick. If he had a fair mind, he would immediately understand the power of God, and consequently the weight of the things that Paul and Barnabas had to say, and would have obeyed the gospel. The miracle would (at least partially) have contributed to his spiritual healing. Whether this was the case, we are not told.

The miracle had a profound effect on Sergius Paulus, since we are told that “...*he believed...*” (13:12). But note that it was “...*when he saw what was done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord...*” So, when Sergius saw what was done, he listened to the things that Paul (and Barnabas) had to say. Mark (who was there at the time of this incident) tells us in his gospel, that the disciples “...*went everywhere preaching, ... and confirming the word with signs that followed...*” (Mk 16:20). The purpose of the miracles was to confirm (provide assurance to) the things that were taught. Here we see another example of exactly that situation in action.

Where to from here?

It is now “...*Paul and his companions...*” (13:13) as they continue on their journey. They enter in the region of Galatia, and begin in Perga, the capital city in the province of Pamphylia. This city included a temple of Diana.

At this point, John leaves them and returns to Jerusalem. Paul later intimates that he considered that action to be one of forsaking the work – and not worthy of an evangelist. (15:37-39), although he later redeemed himself (Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11).

Apparently they did not remain long in Perga, and Luke tells us nothing of their work there. However Paul writes to the churches in Galatia that it was because of an illness that he first came and preached to gospel to them (Gal 4:13 –15). This tends to give the idea that Paul may have become sick (some think possibly from malaria) in Perga, and moved on quickly into the highlands to seek some relief.

They make their way to Antioch in Pisidia, about 150 km north from Perga. This city was a Roman stronghold with a considerable Jewish population. Luke uses the singular to describe the synagogue, suggesting that there was only one in the city.

Why did they go into the Synagogue?

As with the previous occasions and locations, the synagogue provided a ready audience of people who were (or at least should have been) attuned to God. Luke gives a concise description of the synagogue worship:

- The reading of the Law
- The reading of the Prophets
- A word of exhortation

The visitors were invited (as guests) to offer words of exhortation to the people. An opportunity that Paul would not miss.

Concise history of the Jews:

- Our fathers were strangers in Egypt,
- 40 years in the wilderness (rebellious against God),
- Overpowering 7 Nations to inherit the land 450 years later,
- Appointment of Judges,
- Appointment of Kings – Saul, and then David as a King after God’s own heart,
- Jesus raised as a Saviour & seed of David,
- John first preceded Him, preaching a baptism of repentance,
- John said that he was not even worthy to untie his shoelace,
- The salvation message has been brought to the all of the Jews and God-fearing people.

- But those (Jews) in Jerusalem, and the Jewish leaders have rejected Him, and not listened to the voices of the Prophets – because they did not know Jesus. They read the prophets every Sabbath day, and yet they are not listening to what they are saying about the promised Messiah. Consequently, they have fulfilled what the prophets have said, and condemned the very Messiah to death.
- Jesus fulfilled all of the things that the prophets said about the Messiah, and was then taken down from the cross and buried in a tomb. But the grave could not hold him, because God raised Him from the dead.
- The fact of Jesus resurrection was not one which just happened by hearsay, but He was seen by many witnesses – not just one or two – and not for just a few hours either – but for a period of 40 days.
- The things that we are saying to you are good news! – because this is the fulfilment of what God promised to our fathers many centuries ago – and He has now fulfilled His promises, and we are the ones who have become the recipients of them!
- Even the Psalms prophesied about Jesus – That he was the begotten Son of God, and that He would not see corruption. The latter Psalm speaks about His death – that He would not only not stay dead – but also He would never die again.
- We know that David died, was buried just like the other Patriarchs, and his body decayed. But God raised up Jesus, and His body never decayed like that of David and the other Patriarchs.
- Through Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is preached. But more than this, we have through Jesus “the blessings of David” ie – the blessings that David promised are delivered through Jesus!

This should not have been a new concept to the Jews. They were familiar with the OT sacrifices, the significance of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, and the Day of Atonement when the High Priest would go into the holiest place in the Temple once every year to make a sacrifice for their sins.

- Through Jesus, everyone who believes can be made right with God, and free from the things that we are condemned by under the Law of Moses!

The Jews would be very well aware of the burdensome nature of Moses’ law, and the fact that they were all condemned by it – because they did not keep it perfectly.

- Beware that the things that the Prophets warned about do not become pronounced on you! (Hab 1:5). Paul warns that the condemnation of Habakkuk applies to everyone who rejects Jesus as the Messiah. The choice was up to them what they were going to do about it.

Paul presents Jesus the Messiah, in a way that indicates that He was most likely well known by most of the Jews there – even in the remote parts of the Roman Empire. This was now the year 46 AD – 13 years after Jesus’ death. Remember that the Jews frequently (every year if possible) went to Jerusalem. It would be highly unlikely that any of them could have gone to Jerusalem without being confronted by the facts of Jesus and of His predecessor John the Baptist. Paul confronts them with the fact that Jesus was the one who was really the promised Messiah, (rather than having to tell someone about Jesus that had never heard of Him).

We could well say that the challenge to us today is exactly the same – that people have heard of Jesus, but have not come face-to-face and been confronted with Him as the Messiah.

Notice how Paul recounts the events of Jesus’ death. He was obviously very familiar with the details. But remember that at that time, none of the New Testament had been written, and many of the events with which we are so familiar would most likely have been presented to many of these people for the very first time. Paul received his knowledge of these events not from men, but by direct revelation from God (Gal 1:11-12), and perhaps by personal knowledge from being in Jerusalem shortly after that time (if he was there, he never used it as an argument to support his knowledge of Jesus as being one of “first hand” experience).

However Paul was in Jerusalem not very long after the events, and had been taught by one of the greatest Jewish scholars of the day (Gamaliel) who was there at the time, and was a member of the Sanhedrin before whom Jesus appeared.

What is the reaction to Paul's first recorded sermon?

Luke makes a break between "...the Jews (meaning Paul and Barnabas) went out of the synagogue..." (13:42), the Gentiles who begged to have them talk to them next week, and "...the congregation breaking up..." (13:43). The idea seems to be that those in the synagogue must have been rather agitated by what they heard, and Paul & Barnabas walked out. Further evidence towards this is that Paul does not continue with the message of what they needed to do to obey the gospel. After they had left, the leaders of the synagogue wrapped up the service.

So, on the one hand, they get some negative response. But on the other, "...many of the devout Jews and Proselytes followed (them)... and (were) persuaded to continue in the grace of God..." (13:43 NKJV).

The reaction from the Gentiles could hardly have been better: they begged them to come and preach to them! The Greek language is stronger than the English, and conveys the idea that they kept begging them. The next Sabbath day, almost the whole city came to hear the word of God.

With such a strong multitude gathered to hear Paul and Barnabas, the Jews were angry and envious. A large crowd had been drawn to these people, when the regular leaders of the synagogue were only able to draw a few people along. It is most probable that their *contradictions* were along the lines that Paul was saying that salvation was available to everyone through Jesus, whilst the Jews were teaching that it was only available through the Law of Moses and by becoming a Jew.

How do Paul and Barnabas react?

Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles, although it was their first priority to teach the Jews. (*To the Jew first, but also to the Greek – Rom 1:16*). Eventually they shake off the dust from their feet, and go to the city of Iconium (13:51).

They were speaking by the commandment of the Lord (13:47), and they were not going to back off from preaching the gospel. Paul appeals to a prophecy of Isaiah (Is 49:6) and says that this prophecy of taking the gospel to the world was being fulfilled in them.

What was the reaction of the Gentiles?

The Gentiles "...were glad, and honoured the word of the Lord..." (13:48 NIV), whilst "...the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit..." (13:52 NKJV).

Amongst this, Luke adds that "...as many as were appointed to eternal life believed..." (13:48). Some people take this verse as a prime evidence for a doctrine of absolute predestination – ie that some people are destined to be saved and cannot do anything about it, and others are destined to be lost and cannot do anything about it.

The Greek word "appointed" is *Tasso* and has a meaning of *Addict – Appoint – Determine – Ordain – Set in order*. The verse could therefore well read "*as many as were determined to have eternal life believed*". Such shows the reaction of the people, and their acceptance of the things spoken by Paul and Barnabas, and their belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

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