

Paul's First Missionary Journey Begins

Lesson Scope: Acts 13

References in brackets refer to Acts 13 unless otherwise specified

Lesson Focus

The church at Antioch began as a direct result of the persecution of Christians at Jerusalem and the scattering abroad after Stephen's martyrdom. A great number believed, and the church grew rapidly. Paul and Barnabas taught and exhorted the believers, and they grew in the faith.

The gifts of the brotherhood were evident in the brotherhood. Paul and Barnabas were called and sent by the Holy Ghost to carry the Gospel throughout Asia Minor.

The Book of Acts focuses on Paul's efforts in preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire. The ever-expanding work of the church followed the commission of Acts 1:8: "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Christ has commissioned His followers to witness for Him in all the earth. His Spirit empowers these witnesses and leads sincere seekers to a saving faith.

God's Word spread rapidly through the Roman Empire in the early days of the New Testament church. Willing messengers risked their lives, facing the dangers of travel and persecution so that they could tell others about Jesus.

Note the prominence of the Word in the evangelistic efforts in the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts refers to preaching the Word at least thirty-four times. The Word is still the foundation for evangelism. Its message has the power to convict men and to change lives.

Saving souls is God's work; we are privileged to enter into this work as labourers in the harvest. This lesson should stir in each heart a greater desire to win souls for the kingdom of God.

Lesson Aim: To present principles for proclaiming the Gospel.

Theme Verse: **Romans 10:14.** How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

Lesson Text

Sent by the Holy Ghost

Acts 13:1-4

¹ (KJV)

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. ³ And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away. ⁴ So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

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Acts 13:6-16

⁶ (KJV)

And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name *was* Barjesus: ⁷ Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. ⁹ Then Saul, (who also *is called* Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, ¹⁰ And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, *thou* child of the devil, *thou* enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord *is* upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. ¹³ Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ But when they departed from Perga, they came

to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. ¹⁵ And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, *Ye men and brethren*, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. ¹⁶ Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with *his* hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

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Acts 13:44-49

⁴⁴ (KJV) And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. ⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. ⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

Questions for Study

Sent by the Holy Ghost

1. What conditions must be met to be an effective witness for Christ?
2. How does Worship prepare us for witnessing?
3. Why should our mission efforts be guided by the church?

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4. Why does the preaching of the Word bring results?
5. When and how should we rebuke evil in others (13:9-10)?
6. List opportunities we have to share the Gospel.

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7. What causes opposition to the Gospel message?
8. Why is ongoing practical and doctrinal instruction for new Christians just as important as helping them find salvation?

Analysing the Passage

“As they ministered to the Lord” (13:2) alludes to worship and obedience. They had given themselves to worship and to living out the Gospel. God calls faithful men who are already busy in His service.

“The Holy Ghost said” (13:2) does not necessarily indicate an audible voice. The Holy Ghost usually works through the brotherhood, and this call was likely heard through the prophets and teachers mentioned in verse. The brotherhood then confirmed this call to mission work.

While God had called Paul and Barnabas, the church, as God’s representative, gave them the charge to go forth (13:13).

Saul’s name was changed to Paul (13:9). Saul was his Hebrew name; Paul was his Latin name. It is also from this time on that the Bible refers to Paul and Barnabas rather than Barnabas and Saul, showing that Paul is now the leader.

Principles and Applications

Sent by the Holy Ghost

1. God blesses a faithful church with men who are able and willing to proclaim the message (13:1). A faithful church is made of faithful men who know God’s Word and are living out its teachings. Faithful men are burdened with the needs of souls around them. When the call to service comes, they answer like Isaiah, “Here am I; send me.”

Opportunities to proclaim God’s message come to us every day. Some are called to witness in the “uttermost part of the earth.” Others may be called to witness “in Jerusalem,” or right at home, about their work.

2. A deep spiritual commitment is a prerequisite for carrying the Gospel to others (13:2). Daily worship prepares us to reach others with God’s message. When men see that we have been with Jesus and that our lives express His teachings, they will be more ready to accept the message of salvation. An inconsistent life hinders seeking souls, and may harden them to the message of God’s Word.

Fasting is mentioned in verses 2 and 3 as a key to the success of this mission work. The denying of ourselves, to focus on witnessing to men, will surely bear fruit today too.

3. The Holy Spirit calls and directs believers for the work of proclaiming the Gospel (13.3). Many times, the Holy Spirit prompts us to speak

about God to our neighbours and to those we meet in the workplace. Other times, the Holy Spirit directs through the church to send missionaries to new areas to proclaim the Gospel. While it is noble to aspire to mission work, this call should come through the body of believers, and not be pursued only out of personal ambition. Being a faithful messenger where God has placed us will prepare us for further service.

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4. The Word of God is the message that the world needs to hear (13: 7). Sometimes men explain the Word in their own way, trying to reason through everything the Bible teaches. God calls men to a simple faith in and obedience to His Word. We must present this simple plan of salvation to the world. All men can understand it; all who hear it are confronted with a decision.

5. Proclaiming the Gospel sometimes involves forthrightly rebuking evil (13:9-10). We do not laugh at indecent remarks. We should ask others to turn off a television screen or a blaring radio. We rebuke those who take God's name in vain. We must tell our neighbours what God's Word says about divorce and remarriage.

6. Every believer should seek opportunities to share the Gospel (13:14-15). We are called to be instant in season, out of season. We should begin each day by asking God to direct us to seeking souls, and to give us His Word to speak to their individual needs. If we are seeking opportunities to share the Gospel with others, those opportunities may come in many little, everyday ways. We should start by illustrating the Bible in our daily lives.

Bold in the Holy Ghost

7. The Gospel message and its bearers will face opposition (13:45). When we are spreading the Gospel, we are entering the battle between God and Satan, which is waged in the hearts of men. Men cannot be neutral when confronted with the Gospel message. Jesus foretold the persecution we would face: "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). The devil would be happy if we would water down God's Word, lest we face opposition. We must preach the unadulterated Word of God.

8. Those who earnestly seek the truth are worthy of further instruction (13:46-47). The Great Commission commands us to teach them "to

observe all things.” It is not sufficient for men to know about God, or even to start the Christian life. We must sow seeds of truth in the hearts of men, and we must also nurture those seeds by teaching and example. In a natural garden, we diligently sow seeds, but we also cultivate, weed, and water it. In a similar way, we encourage, instruct, and help those that begin the Christian life.

9. God’s people share the Gospel so others may believe in Jesus Christ and find salvation (13:48-49). Am I ready to sacrifice my time and money to reach out to others, or is another hour of work with its wages more important than the needs of men? Sharing the news of salvation will take time. We cannot be efficient or speedy in this work. Rather we must take time to listen and to share. God will amply reward our efforts.

Important Teachings

1. God blesses a faithful church with men who are able and willing to proclaim the message (13:1).
2. A deep spiritual commitment is a prerequisite for carrying the Gospel to others (13:2).
3. The Holy Spirit calls and directs believers for the work of proclaiming the Gospel (13:3).
4. The Word of God is the message that the world needs to hear (13:7).
5. Proclaiming the Gospel sometimes involves forthrightly rebuking evil (13:9-10.)
6. Every believer should seek opportunities to share the Gospel (13:14-15).
7. The Gospel message and its bearers will face opposition (13:45).
8. Those who earnestly seek the truth are worthy of further instruction (13:46-47).
9. God’s people share the Gospel so others may believe in Jesus Christ and find salvation (13:48-49).

Answers to Questions

1. What conditions must be met to be an effective witness for Christ? We must know God personally and experience His saving power in our lives. We must maintain a close communion with God. We must be full of the Holy Ghost. We need to have a burden for souls, to be faithfully serving in other ways, and to be willing to go where God calls us.

2. How does worship prepare us for witnessing?

Through worship, we gain a sense of God's greatness and our smallness before Him. The joy of close communion with God gives us a desire to help others find God too. We cannot go without a message; God's Word is the message we must feed on and share with others.

3. Why should our mission efforts be guided by the church?

Relating to a sending church provides fellowship, safeguards, direction, and a place to seek advice. On our own we tend to become short-sighted and choose wrongly. The church provides a place for continued instruction of believers.

4. Why does the preaching of the Word bring results?

God's Word is truth; it is quick and powerful. It speaks to every need of mankind; it is never out of date. All men are confronted with a choice when they hear God's Word.

5. When and how should we rebuke evil in others (13:9-10)?

We bring a silent rebuke on evil by being a consistent, godly example in speech and actions. We must keep a sense of the seriousness of sin, rather than becoming accustomed to it. We should rebuke those who take the name of God in vain. We should tell what the Bible says about divorce and remarriage. We rebuke sin firmly, but with concern for the person.

6. List opportunities we have to share the Gospel. This mission begins at home, with our families. Other places are at work, in business dealings, in travels, by Gospel tracts, street meetings, jail services, rest home singings, and suchlike.

7. What causes opposition to the Gospel message?

Satan and his forces are opposed to it. Self, our carnal nature, the deceitfulness of riches, and conviction for sin can all hinder the Gospel message. "Strait is the gate . . . which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

8. Why is ongoing practical and doctrinal instruction for new Christians just as important as helping them find salvation?

Without nourishment, young Christians and each of us would die.

We need the strengthening of God's Word and the encouragement of fellow believers to make it through this life.

Summarizing the Lesson

Go home and tell to those you love,
How Christ has set you free;
The wondrous change which grace has wrought,
Let all your neighbours see.
Go home and tell them how you met,
With one who understood
Who knew your need and saw your sin,
And shed for you His blood.

Chorus:

Go home and tell, go home and tell, / What God hath done for you;
Go home and tell, go home and tell, / That they may want Him too.

Research Guide

Research the significance of Antioch in the early church.