

ANTIOCH BIBLE CLASS

LESSON SUBJECT

THE CHURCH REACHES OUT

SCRIPTURE TEXT: ACTS 13:1-52

MEMORY VERSE. ACTS 13:2. 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.

INTRODUCTION

It has been about twelve years since the Lord gave the great commission to go unto all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. During that time the church has been firmly rooted in the area of Jerusalem and Judea, except for reaching as far as Samaria and Caesarea. While Jerusalem was the base of the church, yet many were scattered by persecutions to other areas, and the apostles primarily remained in Jerusalem, teaching, leading and growing the church. The 8th chapter of Acts tells of the church reaching into the city of Samaria, to a people who were generally despised by the Jewish leaders. The 10th chapter records the opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles.

For a few years now, a base has been building in Antioch with the blessings of the apostles and the mother church upon them (Acts 12:19-30). Barnabas and Saul are preaching in Antioch when a prophecy of a famine was given. As a result of this, an offering was received at Antioch and Paul and Barnabas carried it to Jerusalem.

The 13th chapter finds them back in Antioch, serving the church there, when God calls them for a work far deeper into the Gentile world. Thus the first foreign missionary endeavor begins with Antioch as the launching pad. That is the message of this chapter and lesson.

DAILY SCRIPTURES AND THOUGHTS.

MONDAY. ACTS 13:1-3. THE CALL OF GOD.

SCRIPTURE.

V1. 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.

COMMENTS.

The church at Antioch was some 300 miles north of Jerusalem, near the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea. From this location it afforded a much more practical and opportune base from which to launch a mission field. Antioch was the third largest city of the empire, next to Alexandria and Rome. It was known as the "Queen of the East", and shared special favors from Rome. There was a large and flourishing Jewish colony there which afforded a first endeavor location for the gospel, since the citizens of that city were of a determined Grecian culture.

When the church at Jerusalem first chose deacons, among the original seven was a disciple named Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. It was at Antioch that disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26). This was probably a derisive name at first, but historically became the distinction between those who profess to follow Christ from all others in the world.

While they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, they sent them on their way. The important point to make here is that it was God that called them to this work and then the church joining in the process and support. It was not an initiative of Paul and Barnabas, though they fully cooperated; it was an initiative of God through the church. That is how the first evangelistic mission into the foreign field was organized and sent forth, and that is how it should work.

TUESDAY. ACTS 13:4-12. SENT FORTH BY GOD.

SCRIPTURES.

V4. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. 5. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. 6. 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 subtilty 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.

COMMENTS.

In the second verse, God called Barnabas and Paul to a work for him. Now, in verse four, it is God that sends them forth. They first went from Antioch to the port city of Seleucia, where they took sail to the Greek island of Cyprus. In Acts 4:36, Joses, a man of Cyprus, sold his land and gave the proceeds to the church. Then in Acts 11:20, many who were scattered by persecution made their way to

Cyprus. Beginning at Salamis, on the east coast of the island of Cyprus, they preached in the synagogue of the Jews. They traversed the island to Paphos on the west coast, some 100 miles, presumably preaching in synagogues along the way. There is evidence of considerable Jewish settlements on the island, and therefore most likely many synagogues. Paul most usually went to the synagogues on his journeys, especially early on and this gave him opportunities to preach which might not otherwise have been available to him. While they did not have much success among the rulers of the synagogues, yet the people were often fertile soil for the preaching of the gospel.

It was also at Paphos where Paul preached to and converted Serguis Paulus, deputy or ruler of the country. In the process he had to rebuke and call down blindness on Elymas, the sorcerer, who was opposing the message of the gospel. John Mark had been with Paul and Barnabas up to Paphos, but from there he returned to Jerusalem while Paul and Barnabas sailed to Perga.

WEDNESDAY. ACTS 13:13-37. PAUL PREACHES JESUS FROM THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS.

SCRIPTURE.

V13. 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 of 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, 17. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. 18. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness, 19. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot. 20. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. 21. And afterward they desired a king; and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. 22. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will. 23. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus: 24. When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, whom think ye that I am? I am not he, but, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose. 26. Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. 27. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. 28. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. 29. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulcher. 30. But God raised him from the dead: 31. And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people, 32. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was

made unto the fathers, 33. God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. 34. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. 35. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 36. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption. 37. But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

COMMENTS.

Paul, Barnabas and John leave Paphos, Cyprus and came to Perga for just a short, uneventful stop. John returns to Jerusalem, while Paul and Barnabas continue on to Antioch of Pisidia. This is a totally different Antioch from the one where God sent them forth from. The first thing they did here was to go to the synagogue and take a seat. After the (usual) reading of the law the rulers of the synagogue offered Paul the opportunity to have something to say. This was just the opportunity they were looking for.

Paul got their attention and then, using a broad summary of their own history, preached Jesus to them. The affect of this was to show that their history and traditions, which they believed in so strongly, inevitably led to Christ. Thus in verse 23 Paul declares that through the promises God made to Israel of a savior, that they were now fulfilled in Christ Jesus. He then proceeds to declare the full scope and message of this salvation in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Here, as in all other instances, the message for this salvation is the death burial and resurrection of Christ. It is not a philosophical message like a Buddha or Mohammed would declare; it is a living ,life giving message that has been made possible by a risen savior.

THURSDAY. ACTS 13:38-43. THE POOR HEARD HIM GLADLY.

SCRIPTURE.

V38. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: 39. And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. 40. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; 41. Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish, for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. 42. And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. 43. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

COMMENTS.

The people of this synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia had never before heard a message like this which Paul preached to them. They are told that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of

sins. Moses law could not do that for them. Then he warns them not to reject this message – the only message there was or would ever be for their salvation. After the service had ended, the Gentiles besought them to return the next Sabbath with this message of hope again. In addition, the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul as he left the synagogue. It is a pattern often repeated that the religious establishment would not be persuaded by the message of the gospel, but the lower cast of people did. The poor heard this message with joy.

FRIDAY. ACTS 13:44-52. AND THERE WAS WAR AGAIN.

SCRIPTURE.

V44. 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. 50. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. 51. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. 52. And the disciples were fill with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

COMMENTS.

This is an expression found in I Sam. 19:8, reflecting the idea that Israel was again and again faced with war. In the verses before us, a similar idea is reflected when the gospel again meets with envy, opposition and rejection. On the next Sabbath day, with almost the whole city coming to hear Paul preach, the Jews were filled with envy and opposed Paul's preaching. It was nothing new and it would not end here. But Paul and Barnabas, knowing the truthfulness of their message, told them they would take their message to the Gentiles, and leave the obstinate Jews to their own end.

The Gentiles rejoiced in that they are now the object of a message which is far beyond Pagan superstitions and the condemnation of the law. They have found in this new message a new life and a hope they never before had. They continued to preach and the Jews stirred up the "devout women", and raised persecution against them. It seems that the gospel always meets with opposition, especially from established religion. Paul and Barnabas left some disciples in this city which were filled with joy and the Holy Ghost. Mission successful!

SUMMARY.

The story of the advance of the gospel from Jerusalem to other parts of the world is an amazing one. Without modern modes of travel, communication or distribution and many other helps, but by sheer

determination, faith, commitment along with the call and providence of God, and in spite of organized opposition – the gospel advanced to the regions beyond Jerusalem and Judea.

The first missionary journey into a dark and sinful world began at Antioch with the church at prayer. God answered those prayers with a very distinct call for Paul and Barnabas to be separated unto the work God had planned for them. The call of God is so vital to this and every work proposed under his name. To launch out without it is to be completely out of touch with God. God's call did not prevent hardships and labor, nor did it guarantee great successes. What it did guarantee was his presence and providence and that his message would be offered to hearts that could believe. Wherever it went, it always left examples of the wonderful story of redemption through Christ. With a supportive send off by the church at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas have now left converts to the gospel on the isle of Cyprus, Perga, Pamphylia and at Antioch of Pisidia. And they have just begun.

QUESTIONS

1. What two authorities combined to ordain Paul and Barnabas to their mission field?
2. Discuss the toils, hardships, opposition and persecution involved in their endeavor.
3. What message did they deliver at every opportunity?
4. Where did their opposition most often come from?
5. What success did they have and with whom?