

**Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work**  
**Sunday Morning Bible Study**  
**Lesson Ten – Acts 12:25-14:28**  
**Spreading the Word**

The first missionary journey was at once inspiring and terrifying. A blessing and a trial. When Paul and Barnabas returned from their journey they reported back full of excitement to the church which sent them out. God had done tremendous things: many became Christians, churches were established, elders appointed, their message affirmed by miracles and the word of God spread. They also reported of opposition from the religious leaders and being kicked out of cities and stoned, at times close to the point of death. Through it all, however, they knew they would not be stopped because the Holy Spirit sent them and went with them.

**OPEN**

- What do you think would be most difficult about being a missionary?

**STUDY**

- *Read Acts 12:25-13:4.* The previous study ended with the thrilling words “but the word of God continued to increase and spread.” Now Luke has reached a decisive turning point in his narrative. In keeping with the risen Lord’s prophecy (1:8), witness has been borne to him “in Jerusalem” and in “all Judea and Samaria.” Now the horizon broadens to “the ends of the earth.” Up to this point all the action in evangelism has been limited to the Palestinian and Syrian mainland. Nobody has yet caught the vision of taking the good news to the nations overseas (although Cyprus has been mentioned in 11:19). Now at last, however, that momentous step is to be taken.

1. Describe the scene in these verses.

**Barnabas and Saul are sent off by the church at Antioch to travel on a missionary journey, proclaiming the Gospel and teaching new believers. In each town they would preach in the synagogues and often be persecuted. The sorcerer gets blinded by the Lord. Paul preaches to large crowds and proclaims Christ in the Scriptures.**

It is unlikely that the Holy Spirit revealed his will only to the small group of five leaders, for that would entail three of them being instructed about the other two. It is more likely that the church members as a whole are in mind, since both they and the leaders are mentioned together in verse 1. Moreover, when Paul and Barnabas returned, “they gathered the church together.” They reported to the church because they had been commissioned by the church.

2. How does the way Paul and Barnabas are sent compare and contrast with how we send off our missionaries today?

**I think it is similar to how the SBC works. A church identifies a person or a couple that evidences the inward and outward call to missions. They then recommend that person to the IMB who will walk them through an interview and examination process. Once the person is approved, they are sent. So, the process starts with the local church and is supported by the IMB organization.**

3. How does the church of the twenty-first century need to change in order to follow the example of the early church in missions?

**We need more of the spiritual unity that we see in Acts. We need churches that are united in prayer so that they can hear and respond quickly to God’s call on peoples’ lives.**

**Summary:** Would it not be true to say that the Spirit sent them out, by instructing the church to do so, and that the church sent them out, having been directed by the Spirit to do so? This balance will be a healthy corrective to opposite extremes. The first is the tendency to individualism, by which a Christian claims direct personal guidance by the Spirit without any reference to the church. The second is the tendency to institutionalism, by which all decision-making is done by the church without any reference to the Spirit. Although we have no liberty to deny the validity of personal choice, it is safe and healthy only in relation to the Spirit and the church. Still today it is the responsibility of every local church (especially of its leaders) to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, in order to discover who he may be gifting and calling.

4. *Read Acts 13:4-12.* Contrast the proconsul with Elymas the sorcerer.

**The proconsul was an intelligent man that wanted to listen to what Paul and Barnabas had to say. The sorcerer opposed them because he was a “son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy...” (13:10).**

5. Luke tells us that Paul was freshly filled with the Holy Spirit, to show that his boldness, outspokenness and power in condemning Elymas were all from God. Why do you think Paul was so severe in his reprimand of Elymas (vv. 9-11)?

**It was severe because Elymas was not only opposing the Gospel himself, but also “seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith” (13:8). Opposing the Gospel is one thing, but trying to keep other people from believing it is another thing.**

Luke chooses this moment to inform us that Saul was also called Paul. It was common for Jews to take a Greek or Roman second name, and it was appropriate for Luke to mention Saul’s now as he moves into increasingly non-Jewish contexts. He does not call Paul “Saul” again.

6. *Read Acts 13:13-52.* How do you see God’s grace emphasized in Paul’s history of Israel (vv. 16-25)?

**God preserved the Israelites in Egypt and led them out of slavery. He put up with their rebellion in the wilderness. He gave them Canaan. He sent Christ, the Savior.**

7. Paul jumps from David to the promised Savior, Jesus. What truth about Jesus does he proclaim?

**Jesus is the offspring of David, which is very important, and he was promised.**

8. What are the consequences of his sermon (vv. 42-52)?

**Some of the people wanted to hear more of what Paul and Barnabas had to say. The next week most of the city came to listen. However, the Jews were jealous and began to contradict the Gospel message. Then, after Paul preached some more, the Gentiles believed and rejoiced, but the Jews incited violence and drove Paul and Barnabas out of the town.**

9. What do we learn from Paul and Barnabas about interacting with those who are hostile to the gospel?

**Violence should not stop the proclamation of the Gospel, but there is a time when Christians will have to leave an area because of the violence.**

**Summary:** Luther wrote in his Preface to the Acts of the Apostles, “It should be noted that by this book St. Luke teaches the whole of Christendom . . . that the true and chief article of Christian doctrine is this: We must all be justified alone by faith in Jesus Christ, without any contribution from the law or help from our works. This doctrine is chief of the book and the author’s principle reason for writing” ([Muhlenberg Press, 1960], p. 363). On the other hand, over against the offer of forgiveness, Paul issues a solemn warning to those who reject it.

10. *Read Acts 14:1-28.* How do Paul and Barnabas react to being perceived as gods (vv. 14-18)?

**They are offended and tell the people to stop. They can’t believe that they are being worshiped as gods when they are just normal humans. They call the people to worship the living God instead of vain idols.**

11. This first missionary journey illustrates the extraordinary versatility of the apostle in adapting himself to different situations; he appeared to be equally at ease with individuals and crowds, Jews and Gentiles, the religious and the irreligious, the educated and the uneducated, the friendly and the hostile. Contrast the way the people responded to Paul’s message.

**Some people wanted to hear more. Some people listened, heard, and believed. Others, like the Jews, did not want to listen and became jealous when people started believing the Gospel. They incited violence against the apostles and the Gospel message.**

12. In summary, what different approaches do you see Paul take as he relates to different groups and individuals through this whole passage?

**When he talks to the Jews, Paul uses the Old Testament scriptures to show how Christ is the fulfillment of prophecy and is the Messiah. When he talks to Gentiles, he uses language that they can understand. When he interacts with the idolaters at Lystra, he calls them out for worship idols when they should be worshiping the living God.**

13. Retrace Paul and Barnabas’s steps through his first missionary journey, and look for the ways they made sure that the churches they left behind had a solid foundation on which to grow (13:43, 49; 14:21-23).

**They always stayed with them for a certain time to teach the Word of the Lord. They also encouraged people to continue in the faith.**

**Summary:** The most notable feature of this first missionary journey was the missionaries' sense of divine direction. It was the Holy Spirit of God himself who told the church of Antioch to set Barnabas and Saul apart, who sent them out, who led them from place to place, and who gave power to their preaching, so that converts were made and churches planted. The sending church had committed them to the grace of God for their work (14:26), and on their return they reported "all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (14:27). True, he had done the work "with them" (literally), in cooperation or partnership with them, but he had done it, and they gave him the credit. The grace had come from him; the glory must go to him.

**APPLY**

- As you observe that the Holy Spirit permeates everything that Paul and Barnabas are and do, how would you like to see this more true of your life?

How would you like to see your church grow in touching the world with the gospel?

**PRAY**

- We are called to be missionaries, whether at home or abroad. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you all that hinders you from fully responding to that call and to keep you faithful to it.

All material taken from:  
John Stott, *Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work*. Downers Grove, IL: IV Press, USA, 1998.