

Acts 12:25–14:28 - Paul's First Missionary Journey

The map at the end of this document is helpful in tracing Paul's steps.

12:25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

13:1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

After Barnabas and Paul (accompanied by John Mark) had finished their journey to Jerusalem for famine relief for the churches in Judea (Acts 11:29-30), they went back to Antioch (12:25).

In 13:1 the leadership at the church in Antioch is mentioned. It consisted of five men who were prophets and teachers. Antioch was a cosmopolitan city and these five men also pictured the ethnic and cultural diversity of Antioch. Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus. Saul was educated in Jerusalem but was born in Tarsus (in the eastern part of modern day Turkey). Simeon was called Niger (which means black or dark skinned), and he was probably a black North African. Lucius was from Cyrene (North Africa); Manaen belonged to the elite Roman society that occupied Israel, and was a childhood friend of Herod the tetrarch.

13:2 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

13:3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

It isn't clear whether the subject of the sentence is the leaders or the entire church, but they were gathered to worship the Lord. "To minister" means to serve; the gathering of God's people together to worship was a service to God (Marshall, 229).

They were also fasting. In the OT fasting was referred to as "afflicting the soul" (Lev. 16:29-31; Ps. 35:13; Isa 58:3-5; Zech. 8:19, etc.). David said that he humbled his soul with fasting (Psa. 69:10). The overall purpose of fasting is to express submission to God and to renounce self (Ps. 35:13; Ezr. 8:21). It is the sacrifice of personal will which gives fasting its value. People fasted when they were seeking guidance from God (Ezr. 8:21-23; II Chr. 20:3; Matt. 4:1-4) or during special times of prayer (II Sam.12:16-23; Matt. 17:21; Acts. 13:2-3).

At that time, the Holy Spirit told them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work of the ministry. How the Spirit spoke to them is not told; perhaps He spoke through one of the prophets. All that is said is that they should be set apart ("for Me") and that God had a special task for them to do.

They fasted and prayed some more and laid their hands on the missionary team and sent them off. In verse 4 it says they were sent on their way by the Holy Spirit. The church and the Holy Spirit were both

involved in the sending process. "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 the 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 whom he may be gifting and calling" (Stott, 218). The church was willing to give up key people for the sake of God's work elsewhere and they did so joyfully. The laying on of hands was a picture of the church identifying with them and their work and to entrust them with God's grace. It is saying, "The brothers and sisters of our church are with you!"

It is almost impossible to overstate the historical importance of this moment in Antioch in the history of the world. Before this word from the Holy Spirit there seems to have been no organized mission of the church beyond the eastern seacoast of the Mediterranean. Before this, Paul had made no missionary journeys westward to Asian Minor, Greece, or Rome, or Spain. Before this Paul had not written any of his letters which were all the result of his missionary travels beginning here.

This moment of prayer and fasting resulted in a mission's movement that would make Christianity the dominant religion of the Roman Empire within two and a half centuries and would yield 1.3 billion adherents of the Christian religion today with a Christian witness in virtually every country of the world. And 13 out of the 29 books of the New Testament were the result of the ministry that was launched in this moment of prayer and fasting (Piper).

13:4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

13:5 When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.

13:6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus,

13:7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

13:8 But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

13:9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him,

13:10 and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?"

13:11 "Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.

13:12 Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.

Although Luke gives details about this missionary journey's itinerary, he is selective in what he focuses on.

They began their journey by going to the seaport of Seleucia, about 16 miles from Antioch. They then took a boat another 60 miles to Cyprus which was a large island about 140 miles long and 60 miles wide. This was where Barnabas had his roots. When they arrived at Salamis (a commercial city on the east coast of Cyprus) they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues there. The synagogue was a logical place to begin, but it also reflected the need for the gospel to be offered to the Jew first (see notes under 13:42–52). The word that they preached is no doubt the same word Paul proclaimed in Acts 13:32ff.; that is, it was the word about Christ - His salvation, glory, and return. Paul and Barnabas had confidence in the power of the gospel to transform lives and bring reconciliation.

They then traveled west, across the whole island, until they came to Paphos on the coast. Paphos was the capital of the island of Cyprus, and therefore, the residence of the Roman governor.

There they had the opportunity to speak to the Roman proconsul (governor) at his request, but were opposed by Elymas (which means “magician”), a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet, who was fearful that he would lose his position. Paul, being filled with the Spirit, addresses him not as Bar-Jesus (that is, in Hebrew, son of Joshua; literally, son of “Yahweh saves”) but as son of the devil, and pronounced the judgment of God upon him so that he was blinded for a time. The fact that the blindness was not permanent was a promise of grace; the blindness could become the means to bring this man to his senses. "God's judgment of him was fitting. For those 'who put darkness for light and light for darkness' forfeit the life they originally had" (Stott, 220).

When the proconsul saw what had happened, he realized the missionaries represented One who had superior power to the magician, but he believed because he was amazed at the teaching of the Lord (12). Temporary blindness was a display of the Holy Spirit's power over the evil one, but the message of the gospel was utterly amazing.

"In the course of the story two significant incidental features occur. First, Paul occupies the leading role, a fact which is recognized by the way in which 'Barnabas and Saul' in verse 7 is replaced by 'Paul and his company' in the first verse of the next section (verse 13). Secondly, having called him Saul up to this point, for the first time Luke refers to him as 'Saul, who is also called Paul' (verse 9) and thereafter consistently calls him Paul" (Marshall, 234). Saul was the name used in a Jewish environment. The change in name to “Paul” corresponds to his entry into a mainly Gentile environment (Marshall, 234).

13:13 Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem.

13:14 But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

13:15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it."

From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed north to Perga. There John Mark left the band to return to Jerusalem. Later, in 15:38, Paul considers his departure “desertion” while Barnabas was willing to make allowances. The reason for his departure is not given; it could have been anything from disagreeing with Paul and Barnabas’ methodology, to simply not wanting to hike around the country anymore.

By this time Paul had contracted some form of a debilitating illness, so when he arrived in the cities of southern Galatia he was in some way disfigured (Gal. 4:13-15).

From Perga they went to Pisidian Antioch, about 100 miles north of the mountains (which is approximately in the center of modern day Turkey). This was one of several cities that the Syrian king, Seleucus Nikator (301-280 B.C.), founded and named after his father Antiochus (cf. 11:19 note). It was a Roman colony and was the governing and military center of the southern half of the vast province of Galatia (Ramsay, 25). On the Sabbath they went to a synagogue. Luke 4:16-21 describes the features of a synagogue service. It was customary at synagogue services to allow visiting teachers to speak, so Paul was asked if they had anything that they wanted to say. Perhaps Paul's clothing identified him as a Rabbi or he had had some contact with the leader of the synagogue prior to the service. Paul addresses those in the synagogue as Jews, and gives a distinctly Jewish message.

13:16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:

13:17 "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it.

13:18 "For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness.

13:19 "When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance-- all of which took about four hundred and fifty years.

13:20 "After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.

13:21 "Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.

13:22 "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.'

13:23 "From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus,

13:24 after John had proclaimed before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

13:25 "And while John was completing his course, he kept saying, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

13:16–25 is the sermon's introduction: the Old Testament preparation

Paul stood up and emphasized his message with gestures.

One point of Paul's message is that everything in the history of Israel was leading up to the coming of Jesus and the great salvation he would accomplish. Another point is that the story behind Jesus is God's story. This text is utterly saturated with God. Sixteen times Paul presses home the truth that God is the central Actor in history.

"In this brief recapitulation of the history of Israel from the patriarchs to the monarchy, Paul's emphasis is on God's initiative of grace. For He is the subject of nearly all the verbs" (Stott). Paul says, God chose the fathers, He made the people prosper and with mighty power He led them out of Egypt. In the desert He endured their conduct and in Canaan He overthrew the nations and gave His people the land. After that, God gave them judges, then Saul as their first king, and King David, a man after God's own heart. After David, Paul jumps straight to the promised Savior, a descendent of David (2 Sam. 7:12–16; cf. 22:51; Psa. 89:29, 36f.; 132:11f., 17).

13:26 "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent.

13:27 "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him.

13:28 "And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed.

13:29 "When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb.

13:30 "But God raised Him from the dead;

13:31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.

13:32 "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers,

13:33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.'

13:34 "As for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY and SURE blessings OF DAVID.'

13:35 "Therefore He also says in another Psalm, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.'

13:36 "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay;

13:37 but He whom God raised did not undergo decay.

13:26–37 is the sermon's focus: the death and resurrection of Jesus

"Paul tells the story of Jesus, as he has told the story of Israel. In doing so, he concentrates on the two great saving events, his death and his resurrection, and demonstrates that both were fulfillments of what God had foretold in Scripture. He concedes that the people and the rulers of Jerusalem did not recognize Jesus. Nevertheless, he adds, in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets which they knew very well, since they are read every Sabbath in the synagogue. Although they could find no adequate ground for condemning him, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And again in

doing so, though without realizing it, they were carrying out all that was written about him, including the transfer of his body from the tree (the place of the divine curse) to that tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and made it possible for him to be seen by those who had accompanied him from Galilee to Jerusalem, namely the apostles. They are now his witnesses" (Stott, 224).

Through the resurrection, God has fulfilled his promises for Israel. Three of these promises are mentioned: Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33), Isaiah 55:3 (Acts 13:34b) and in Psalm 16:10 (Acts 13:36). All three texts may have been regarded as messianic in pre-Christian Judaism.

The most confusing issue is how Psalm 2:7 ('YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU') is tied to the resurrection at all. The explanation is complex:

In the ancient near east, the son's behavior was thought to be a reflection of his father. For example, in Matthew 5:9 it says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." God is the supreme peacemaker. Insofar as we make peace, we are acting like God and shall be called "sons of God"; like father, like son. In a negative sense, John 8:44 says of the leaders who wanted to kill Jesus, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies." This is not saying that they were literal children of the devil as if Satan had a relationship with a woman and a child was born, nor is Jesus saying they weren't Jews. Rather, Jesus is speaking on a merely functional level – you act like your parent.

In a similar way, when the time came for a king to take the throne, that human being was called a son of the god because he was to act like the god; like father, like son. The king represented the local deity. He mediated the god's authority.

But God uses this idea in a much more profound sense.

In Israel, when someone came to the throne, God said to the king, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." The king was thus to act like God and on behalf of God. He was God's representative to execute justice, to reveal God's goodness, and to pursue covenant faithfulness. He was to be God's voice of authority among the people. When God said to King David, "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You" it legitimized his kingship.

This Psalm makes perfect sense of a Davidic king coming to power. At the same time, there is a pattern in Scripture that insists that what happens to David is a forecasting of what will take place with David's greater Son (Messiah). In other words, there is an enthronement that outstrips David's enthronement – there is the Son who will perfectly reflect God and rule as a perfect mediator.

When Jesus rose victoriously from death and was exalted to the right hand of God, He became our High Priest (Heb. 5:5) and God's mediatorial king. At this "enthronement" Jesus, like David, was declared to be God's Son. This was a functional declaration; He became God's Son in the sense associated with His enthronement. As king, all of God's mediatorial authority and sovereignty was now exercised through

Him. He upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3). He must reign to the very end (Lk. 1:32-33). As Guthrie says, “. . . the early church understood Psalm 2:7 to refer to Jesus' induction into his royal position as king of the universe at the resurrection and exaltation. In these events God vindicated Jesus as Messiah and established His eternal kingdom. God becoming the Son's Father, then, refers to God's open expression of the relationship upon Christ's enthronement – an interpretation that fits the Old Testament context well" (Guthrie, *Commentary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 928).

In sum, Jesus' resurrection declared Him to be “the Son” in the sense used in the enthronement psalms, for it was then that He was installed as king. The appointment of Jesus as King is thus tied to resurrection; because He is at the right hand of the majesty on High, He has authority over all other beings. To paraphrase Paul, “God has fulfilled this promise to the children of Israel in that He has enthroned the messianic King by raising Him from the dead and exalting Him to His right hand.”

13: 38 "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,

13:39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

13:40 "Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you:

13:41 'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.'"

13:38–41 is the sermon's conclusion: the choice between life and death

Paul has brought the Old Testament Scriptures and history together. On this basis he makes his appeal.

The Law of Moses could not justify anyone since we all break the law and the law condemns law-breakers. However, through faith in Jesus, God has provided justification. We need to remember that Paul is addressing Galatians. Only a few months or so later he will be writing his letter to the Galatians. In that book he will repeat the essence of the gospel which he preached here.

In addition to offering the grace of God in Christ, Paul gives a warning to those who reject it. He quotes Habakkuk 1:5 which predicted God's use of the Babylonians as instruments to judge Israel.

The sermon here is similar to what appears in 1Corinthians 15:3–4. It includes the same four events: Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and the testimony of those who had seen these things. The structure is also almost identical to Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost.

13:42 As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people kept begging that these things might be spoken to them the next Sabbath.

13:43 Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.

13:44 The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord.

13:45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.

13:46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

13:47 "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'"

13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

13:49 And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.

13:50 But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

13:51 But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium.

13:52 And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

13:42–52 is the sermon's consequences: a mixed reaction

After Paul's message, many people begged them to stay so they could hear more. At least some of them believed and received God's grace in the message of salvation that Paul had proclaimed; if they had not received it Paul and Barnabas could not have urged them to *continue* in it (43b). The exhortation to continue is necessary for at least two reasons: (1) persecution would be inevitable; if they were not rooted firmly in Christ they would wither at the first sign of opposition that came their way. But also (2) they were urged to continue because endurance in the faith is the ultimate test of reality. Jesus said, "he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Mk. 13:13). But Jesus also said, "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of *all that He has given Me I lose nothing*, but raise it up on the last day" (Jn. 6:39). Christ preserves the saved (He loses none) so that they persevere to the end.

The next Sabbath came and almost the whole city was gathered to hear the word of the Lord (44). When the Jews saw the crowd they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul and were blaspheming. This illustrates the two different responses to the gospel. The first response was by the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus; he was amazed at the teaching of the Lord (13:7, 12). The gentiles also began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord when they heard it (13:48). But the Jews had a different response; they immediately instigated persecution to have Paul and Barnabas with their message of grace driven away. Jesus, however, was not just a Savior for Israel; salvation was to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth. The apostles see themselves as fulfilling Isaiah 49:6 – they were to be a light to the nations (Acts 13:47; Isa. 49:6) and become an extension of the work of Jesus. The singular "you" in this OT quotation (I have placed you as a light for the gentiles, that you may bring

salvation to the end of the earth) is probably best explained as a reference to “one in many” (Bock, 464), not as a reference to Christ.

The Jews’ rejection caused Paul to turn to the Gentiles, although this turning is not absolute, for everywhere Paul goes he begins by preaching to the Jews (14:1; 18:4-6, 19; 19:8-9; 28:28; explained in Ro. 9-11).

A couple of observations should be made. First, Paul and Barnabas thought that it was necessary to proclaim the word to the Jews first (Ro. 1:16). The same priority continued in Paul's missionary expeditions as recorded in the Book of Acts (13:14, 46; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1, 10; 18:4, 19; 19:8; 28:17). Secondly, those who responded to the word and believed are described as having been appointed to eternal life. This is another way of saying they were predestined to be saved. At the same time, those who reject the gospel are accountable for their actions, since they do it deliberately.

In verse 50, the missionaries were violently cast out of the city by the rich and prominent. As a result, they shook the dust off of their feet as a public protest against those who rejected the gospel (13:51). This imagery came from the custom of the Jews; when coming back from gentile land, they would shake the dust off before re-entering Israel. It was “a symbolic token that the very soil of the country was defiling” (Furieux quoted by Robertson, RWP). The Jews’ rejection of the gospel resulted in the apostles’ rejection of them. “This significant action, like that of the ‘shaking of the raiment’ (Acts 18:6), implied that those against whom it was done were henceforth left to go their own way. Cp. Nehemiah 5:13, Matthew 10:14” (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges). It was tantamount to regarding these Jews as pagan (Marshall, 245).

In spite of this, the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit, and as Paul is about to write in the book of Galatians, a fruit of the Spirit is Joy.

They next went to Iconium, a distance of about sixty miles south-east (a five days' journey [Renan]) where they would once again enter a synagogue and proclaim Christ.

