

THE FIRST JOURNEY BEGUN

Acts 13:1-13
Key Verse: 13:2

“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”

World mission was in the heart of God. He sent his Son to be the savior of the world. Now, it was imperative that the world be told about it. God’s own people must be the ones to go and tell the world. From the time he had called them he wanted them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Through hundreds of years God had trained the people of Israel to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. Their isolation from the people of the world was both desirable and necessary to God, for in this way they maintained their uniqueness as God’s people. They were people who received and believed the promises of God. This is the stuff God’s history is made of.

Now, a new age had come. Jesus the Son came and lived and died for the sins of the world. He was raised to life by the very power of the Creator. The believers saw him and rejoiced. He told them to love one another and to go and preach the good news to all people everywhere. Jewish exclusiveness had to be broken. God used Peter, the spiritual leader of the church to do this through his visit to the home of Cornelius. God chose Paul, a highly educated Jew and a man of great knowledge of the Scriptures, to be his chosen instrument to bring the gospel to the Gentile world.

God prepared the Antioch Church to be a missionary sending church. They studied the Bible with Paul and Barnabas. They gave sacrificially to the poor saints in Jerusalem. Now the time had come to send out missionaries.

First, the church and the Holy Spirit send out Barnabas and Saul (1-3).

When the Christians in Antioch were worshiping the Lord, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” God himself orchestrated this mission journey and set it in motion. The church obeyed the leading of the Spirit. They showed their participation in this mission when they fasted and prayed and laid their hands on the men God had chosen. God asked them to send out their best Bible teachers, the men who had been teaching them and building up the church. They didn’t send out the weakest people or people with problems who needed to leave. They sent out two men whom they couldn’t get along without. This was God’s doing.

Second, Cyprus (4-12)

Saul and Barnabas set sail for Cyprus. They took an intern shepherd to help them, John Mark, a cousin of Barnabas. Cyprus was the native home of Barnabas, but this

connection is not mentioned by Luke. They arrived in Salamis and went to the Jewish synagogue, where they proclaimed the word of God. This was to be the pattern of their ministry: "First to the Jew, then to the Gentile." They traveled about a hundred miles through the Island to Paphos, the seat of Roman rule in Cyprus. There they met two men. One was a Jewish sorcerer, who was also a prophet. He had worked his way into the trust of the Proconsul and was quite influential in the country of Cyprus. The other was Sergius Paulus, the proconsul himself. He was an intelligent man and a truth seeker. He went for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. Elymas the sorcerer did his best to keep the proconsul from accepting Jesus and becoming a Christian. When Saul realized what was happening, he looked straight at Elymas and cursed him in very strong language. He became blind. The proconsul was so amazed that he believed in Jesus. There are indeed times when God makes the wrath of men to praise him. God used the enemy of God and planted faith in the heart of one man in Cyprus.

This event had other effects. From this time, Saul was known as Paul. Paul means "little." It comes from a Roman or Greek background, while Saul is a Jewish name, the name of the first king of Israel. Also, from this time, Paul became the leader of the team. His name is mentioned first, i.e., "Paul and his companions" (13) John Mark was very shocked at the aggressiveness of Paul and he was dismayed when Paul took over the practical leadership. So he went home to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continued their journey and crossed over to the mainland.

When the church moved forward into world mission, Satan attacked. It became clear that this is a spiritual battle. Paul forcefully did battle with Satan and won the victory. His battle was not against flesh and blood, but with the spiritual forces of evil and the powers of this dark world. Later, he asked one church to pray for him, that words might be given him so that he might fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel. World missions is a spiritual battle.