

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

Lesson 6f: Acts 13:1 – 15:35 – Paul's First Missionary Journey

Introduction

We now begin to see the blossoming of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. It is interesting to note that although Paul possessed much zeal and knowledge when he was saved, the Lord still took time to prepare him, and everyone else, for the ministry that He would give Paul. The Lord has His own timing for our lives that isn't always in line with our expectations. We must allow Him to complete His work in us and trust that at the right time, He will reveal His plan and engage us in the work He has for our lives.

Acts 13:1-3 – The Ordination of Saul & Barnabas

What were these prophets and teachers doing in Antioch?

They were ministering to the Lord by ministering to the people in Antioch, both evangelizing the lost and maturing the saints.

Does it appear that the Holy Spirit communicated His message to the other prophets and teachers, Saul and Barnabas, or to both groups of them? What does this teach us about ordination?

- 1.) God will make His will known to both the authorizing church and the candidate(s) He desires to be ordained. We just don't ordain someone because:
 - a. They want to be ordained
 - b. They have been around long enough
- 2.) God is the one that prepares, qualifies, and calls His workers. We simply recognize what the Lord has already done when we ordain them.

What is ordination?

Ordination is the setting apart of a person divinely called to the work of either a pastor or deacon. It is the act of the church conducted through the ordained brethren designated and authorized by the church to act on their behalf.

What is the process of ordination we see in this passage?

They fasted (to draw themselves closer to God) and prayed (for their ministry) and laid their hands on them (signifying their recognition of God's calling this individual to that work and their reception of authority to conduct their work.)

Acts 13:4-12 – Ministry at Cyprus

Cyprus is the third largest island on the Mediterranean, after Sicily and Sardinia (see map on page 2). It is about 60 miles off the Syrian coast and would have been visible from Seleucia on a clear day. In New Testament times its two major cities were Salamis, the chief port and commercial center, and Paphos, the capital. Cyprus was Barnabas' home town and it had a major Jewish settlement, large enough to support several synagogues in Salamis.

What do we learn about Bar-Jesus?

He was a Jewish false prophet, also a magician. His name means, "Son of salvation". He proclaimed to speak for God, but in reality, he dabbled in the occult. He was probably similar to Simeon from Samaria or Joseph Smith of the Mormons.

What do we learn about Sergius Paulus?

He was the Roman governor of that area. He was intelligent and was persuaded to faith in Christ after hearing their teaching and seeing the miracle of Bar-Jesus' curse.

What do we learn about Satan's ploys from this and why was Bar-Jesus' blindness temporary?

He seeks to gain influence and power through a country's leadership. His servant, Bar-Jesus had attached himself to the pro-counsel and had a position of influence. God removed this stronghold of Satan enabling a church to be established. His blindness is symbolic of God's mercy towards unbelievers.

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Acts 13:13-52 – Ministry at Pisidian Antioch

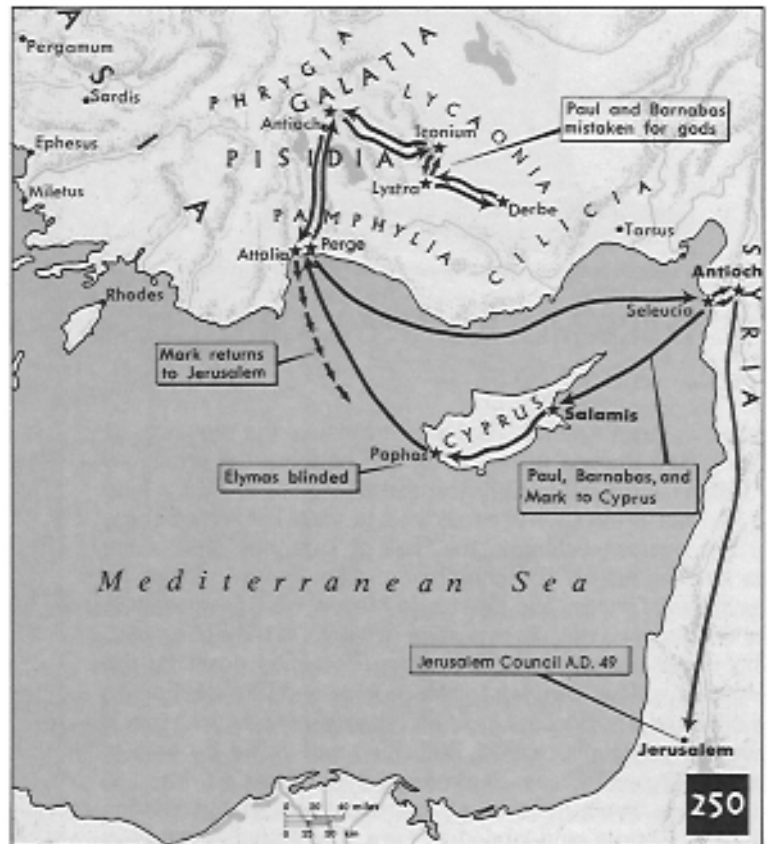
After being deserted by John Mark, they set sail from Cyprus to Perga. Rather than preaching in Perga, which they did on the way back, they made the difficult 100 mile journey across the Taurus mountains to the city of Pisidian Antioch, in the region of Galatia (the book of Galatians was written to the churches established in this area). It is hypothesized by some that Paul was ill, possibly with malaria, and needed to leave the coastal lowlands for the cooler mountain regions (see Galatians 4:13). The journey would have been very long and dangerous, both from the pass through the mountains and from the many bands of robbers that inhabited them. They would have also had to forge the turbulent flood-prone Cestrus and Eurymedon rivers. Paul may have been thinking about this journey when he wrote 2 Corinthians 11:26, "I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers..." (NASB)

We are beginning to see a pattern emerge in Paul's missionary journey. What is the first thing he seems to do upon coming into a city? Why is this? See also Romans 1:16.

They present the gospel to the Jews in the synagogue first. The Jews had a spiritual advantage to the Gentiles through their background in God's Word. They made great building blocks for the early church. Also, the Lord seemed to give them the first opportunity to hear and head the gospel.

Acts 13:16-41 is the longest recorded sermon of the Apostle Paul. It is addressed to Men of Israel (Jews) and you who fear God (Gentile proselytes). It can be broken down into the following sections:

- Jesus: the Culmination of History (vs 16-23)
- Jesus: the Fulfillment of Prophecy (vs 24-37)
- Jesus: the Source of Salvation (vs 38-41)



What was the initial response to the sermon that Paul preached?

Initially they were very interested and open to what Paul and Barnabas were preaching. In fact, they treated them as men of God because they asked them to continue in the grace of God.

After the initial reception came the rejection by the Jews and their manipulation of the local government to have Paul and Barnabas cast out. What motivated this change in behavior? Do we see this elsewhere in the Bible? (think about Old Testament prophets)

Their response was jealousy over the large crowds they drew and that the Gentiles were getting an opportunity to partake in God's blessings. This is very similar to Jonah's response to God granting repentance to the City of Ninevah.

What is the contrast between the believers and unbelievers as Paul and Barnabas leave?

The unbelievers are filled with hatred, bitterness, and jealousy. The believers are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

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Acts 14:1-7 – *Ministry at Iconium*

Iconium was a melting pot of native Phrygians, Greeks, Jews, and Roman colonists.

We are beginning to see another pattern emerging in Paul's ministry. What is the effect of the gospel upon a community when it is properly presented? (See also Matthew 10:34-36)

It divides people. It draws a line in communities between those who believe and put their faith in Christ and those who reject Him.

What was the method the local Jews used to create resistance against the Christians?

They "stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren". Evil affected means, "embittered". They slowly poisoned their minds by slandering and falsely accusing them. This is just what happened with Christ!

Acts 14:8-20 – *Ministry at Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe*

The cities around Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe were quiet towns, well off the main routes used for travel by most people at that time. They were located in the Roman province of Galatia. It was later that Paul penned a letter to the, "Churches of Galatia". Lystra was the home of Lois, Eunice, and Timothy (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5). They may have been saved during Paul visit.

How did Paul perceive that this man had enough faith to be healed? (See Mark 1:40 for an example from Jesus' ministry)

Paul didn't look into this man's heart, but perceived his level of faith by the things that he was probably saying. There must have been some response from this man that enabled Paul to discern where his heart was at in response to the message of the gospel.

Regarding Paul and Barnabas being named Jupiter (Zeus) and Mercury (Hermes), "There was a tradition in Lystra (recorded by the Roman poet Ovid, who died in A.D. 17) that the gods Zeus and Hermes once came to earth incognito (disguised). When they arrived at Lystra and asked for food and lodging, everyone refused them. Finally, an old peasant named Philemon and his wife, Baucis, took them in. Their inhospitable neighbors were drowned in a flood sent by the vengeful gods. Philemon and Baucis, however, saw their humble cottage turned into a magnificent temple, where they served as priest and priestess. After their deaths, they were turned into two stately trees."¹

What do Paul being called Mercury (Hermes) and Barnabas being called Jupiter (Zeus) tell us?

Paul was their chief speaker while Barnabas seemed to be a leader among them.

What do Paul and Barnabas' response to their worshippers teach us about their character?

They refused the worship because no one but God should be worshipped. This shows that they were not out to gain a following, but to serve the Lord.

Why were the Lycaonians were willing to stone Paul?

The Jews persuaded the crowd, but there was willingness because those who had not yet believed were probably in a state of rejecting the gospel. This gave them excuse.

Was their visit to Lystra successful? What does verse 20 imply?

There were disciples gathered around them, implying that some got saved and baptized.

Acts 14:21-28 – *Establishing churches in Derbe, Lystram Iconium, & Antioch*

What was Paul and Barnabas' purpose in going back through the cities from which they had just came? Why wouldn't they have encountered the same problems?

Their purpose was to establish churches and ordain elders among the disciples so that they could continue on in the Lord's work. They probably didn't minister in public.

¹ The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Acts 13-28, John MacArthur, Jr., 1996, p. 50

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Acts 15:1-21 – *Debate in Jerusalem*

When Paul stated in Acts 20:29 that, “after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock”, it came from experience. In this chapter we see the first appearance of these wolves who seek to distort the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What caused the great division in the church at Antioch?

Men came down from Judea and started telling them that they all had to be circumcised after the Jewish tradition in order to be saved.

Concisely state the big issue.

How does man get saved, by grace or by works?

How did they decide to resolve this problem?

They sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles and the Elders there. This was the first church counsel.

Let's outline the argument made by Peter and James:

- Past **revelation** proves salvation is by grace (15:7)
- The gift of the **spirit** proves salvation is by grace (15:8-9a)
- **Cleansing** from sin proves salvation is by grace (15:9b)
- The **inability** of the law to save proves salvation is by grace (15:10-11)
- The fact of **miracles** proves that salvation is by grace (15:12)
- **Prophetic promise** proves that salvation is by grace (15:13-18)

Who is James and what do we know about him?

This is the Lord's half-brother who had been converted after Jesus' crucifixion and became a prominent elder there in the church at Jerusalem.

Why did they encourage them to abstain from things contaminated by idols, from fornication, and from what is strangled and from blood? (see verse 21)

They didn't want to impose Jewish laws on the Gentiles, but neither did they want the Gentiles to offend the Jews. Respecting these things would enhance their ministry.

Does this passage imply that one church should have power over another?

We don't see the church in Jerusalem having binding power over Antioch but we do see that the Jerusalem church was highly respected because the Apostles were there and some of their elders even knew Christ in the flesh. They would be the most familiar with His teachings and were an invaluable resource to the early churches.

Acts 15:22-35 – *A Letter to the Church at Antioch*

Why did the church in Jerusalem send Judas and Silas back to Antioch?

These brethren would provide verification that Paul and Barnabas didn't make these things up but that it was the consent of the whole body of apostles and elders.

Assignment:

Read Acts 15:36 – 18:22 in preparation for the next lesson