



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for 26 October 2008
Released on Wednesday, October 22, 2008**

"Set Apart to Work"

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 28:16-20

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:1-52

LESSON TEXT: Acts 13:1-12

1 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.

4 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.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Summarize the events that led up to Barnabas and Saul's mission trip and what happened while they were on Cyprus.
2. Compare and contrast the experiences of the church at Antioch and of Barnabas and Saul

with modern churches and individuals involved in short-term missions.
3. Describe one way he or she will support the local church's mission program.

INTRODUCTION

Have you been called? Is that a question you are reluctant to answer?

The church is called to the task of evangelism (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 5:42). As understood historically, missions suggest something more than general evangelism. Missions are intentional and strategic cross-cultural evangelism. This requires specialized training, enormous commitment, and generous funding.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he declared that they were "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:2).

While God calls all His children to salvation and service, some have been called in special ways. In this week's lesson we see how the Spirit called Saul and Barnabas to serve as missionaries from among those already gifted and called. We learn of a little church, far, far away and long, long ago that pioneered the idea of strategic cross-cultural evangelism. The resultant missionary activity had an impact that is still felt today.

HOW TO SAY IT

Antioch	AN-tee-ock
Cyrene	Sigh-ree-nee
Elymas	EL-ih-mass
Lucius	Lew-shus
Manaen	Man-uh-en
Niger	Nye-jer
Paphos	Pay-fus
Selucia	Sih-lew-shuh
Sergius Paulus	Ser-jih-us Paul-us

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: A.D. 47-48

Place: Syrian Antioch

Antioch of Syria was one of the great cities of the ancient world. Seleucus, one of the generals of Alexander the Great, founded this city in 300 B.C. The city was named in honor of Antiochus, the father of Seleucus. It became the capital city for the Seleucid dynasty. The city sat on the banks of the Orontes River, about 15 miles from the Mediterranean coast.

The city seems to have had a Jewish community from the beginning, and this grew to such a large number that the Jews of Antioch were allowed to have a large measure of self-government. In Paul's day, Antioch had become the administrative capital of the eastern Roman Empire. It was a very cosmopolitan city, having a mixture of Greek, Roman, Arabian, and Jewish cultural influences. Estimates put the population of Antioch in this period at half a million people, making it the third city of the empire, behind Rome and Alexandria.

It is not surprising that the new faith in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah had spread to the large Jewish community in Antioch (see Acts 11:19), which numbered between 25,000 and 65,000 at the time. Unlike the Jerusalem church, the Antioch congregation seems to

have been an early adopter of the right of non-Jews to be full members of the church (Acts 11:20). These believers were also the first to be called *Christians* (Acts 11:26), meaning "of the Christ party." This name quickly gained popularity and has been a primary designation for the followers of Christ ever since.

When the leaders of the Jerusalem church heard about the church in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to investigate (Acts 11:22). However, rather than impose the authority of the Jerusalem church upon the church in Antioch, Barnabas joined their leadership team. Realizing Antioch's need for a first-rate teacher, Barnabas remembered his old friend Saul (Paul), who was in his hometown of Tarsus. So Barnabas went to Tarsus, some 100 miles away, and brought Saul back to Antioch (Acts 11:25, 26) where they labored together and taught many people.

The scope of this ministry was shown when the Antioch church sent support "by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" to Jerusalem for famine relief (Acts 11:28-30). This successful trip by the team of Barnabas and Saul sets the scene for today's lesson about a far more significant journey.

SET APART BY THE SPIRIT (Acts 13:1-3)

1. Who were some of the prophets and teachers in the Antioch church (Acts 13:1)?

As Acts 13 opens, we are introduced to five "prophets and teachers" who were serving the church in Antioch. A prophet speaks for God as a result of the influence of the Holy Spirit. A teacher expounds scriptural doctrine. We do not need to understand these roles as mutually exclusive, for doubtlessly there were "teaching prophets" in the early church.

Barnabas is listed first. He was introduced earlier in Acts (4:36). His real name was "Joses" or Joseph. The apostles nicknamed him "Barnabas," which means "son of consolation." He was of the tribe of Levi and from Cyprus.

"Simeon" was a common name. To distinguish him from others with this name, he was called "Niger," which means "black." He may have been from Africa.

Lucius was from the North African city of Cyrene. Since people from Cyrene were present at Pentecost, perhaps he was among the first converts (Acts 2:10). Some of the original evangelists who came to Antioch were from Cyrene (11:19-20), so Lucius was possibly among them.

Manaen is distinguished by the fact that he had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch. This was Herod Antipas, who was king during the ministry of Christ. The wording in the original language could mean that they were foster brothers or simply grew up together.

The fifth prophet in the church Saul, better known to us as Paul, a designation that will continue hereafter (Acts 3:9). From this point onward in Acts, Paul is the dominant figure. This was Luke's way of informing his readers how Paul became involved in missionary work.

2. How were some selected for another work (v. 2)?

While pray and fasting may have involved the whole church, the grammar seems to suggest that it was confined to the aforementioned prophets. The word "ministered" is the Greek *leitourgeo*, which was used of the work of priests and Levites in the temple.

At any rate, it was while they were worshiping and fasting that the Holy Spirit spoke and told the others that Barnabas and Saul should be set apart for a special task. The Holy Spirit designated the two most eminent and gifted leaders among the entire group.

3. What was done before these men were sent off to the new work (v. 3)?

After more fasting and praying, hands were laid on the two men of God, and the church at Antioch sent them off. The laying on of hands was done to identify them as chosen by God and confirmed by the church. Such a practice was common when launching new ministries or setting apart leaders (cf. Acts 6:6; 14:23; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6). This is the biblical basis for ordaining, appointing, or commissioning church leaders today.

The ceremony of commissioning Barnabas and Saul is presented with little detail, but we assume that it takes place in the presence of the full congregation. This is logical because those sent out as missionaries are still accountable to their mother church.

SENT OUT BY THE SPIRIT (Acts 13:4-8)

4. What was the name of the island where the missionaries first went? Why did they go there (vs. 4, 5)?

After leaving Antioch, Barnabas and Paul made their way to Seleucia, which served as a seaport for Antioch. From there they sailed to the island of Cyprus.

Divine approval for this endeavor is shown by Luke's comment that they are *sent forth by the Holy Ghost*. Barnabas, Saul, and the others have a high sense of discernment regarding the will of God, so they act on it. Why do they go to *Cyprus*? This island is the original home of Barnabas (Acts 4:36), so at least two factors come into play. First, Barnabas surely has a burden for his own people to hear the message of salvation. Second, this is known territory for Barnabas, making the target location seem less intimidating.

Concerned about reaching as many as possible, the mission team made their way to Salamis, the largest city on the island and the former capital. That there were several synagogues indicates a sizable Jewish population.

5. In what ways have you been guilty of resisting the promptings of the Holy Spirit? How have you overcome this tendency?

Some think that following the lead of the Holy Spirit is risky business. To follow the Spirit's lead will take us out of our comfort zones. We may fear the questions and criticism of others as we act on the promptings of the Spirit.

At times we fail to respond to the Holy Spirit's leading because we are overly cautious about the origin of the prompting. "Is this really from the Holy Spirit, or is it simply my own desires at work?" we ask—and rightly so! Sometimes those who are in leadership positions want to move forward, since they believe the Holy Spirit is leading them. But there may be someone in the church who has a strong influence in opposition to what the leaders want to do. Fear of offending this person causes some churches to fail to move out by faith.

Yet fear of offending the Holy Spirit should be the greater fear. The problem of resisting the Holy Spirit is noted in Acts 7:51.

6. Why was the Jewish synagogue an appropriate place to begin the mission work (v. 5)?

As would be customary on future journeys, the missionaries preached to Jews first. There was both a theological and a practical reason for doing this. From the standpoint of God's plan, the gospel was to be presented to Jews first (Matt. 10:6; Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16). Practically speaking, however, Jews already believed in one God, accepted the Hebrew Scriptures as inspired, and were awaiting the Messiah. In presenting the gospel to Gentiles, though,

none of the above was true.

The synagogues were also strategic targets. They gave the missionaries ready audiences for their preaching. All they had to do was arrive in a new city, find a synagogue, show up on the Sabbath and try to show their fellow Jews that Jesus is the Messiah on the basis of Scripture (Acts 17:1, 2).

7. What was John's function? What else do we know about him?

Luke informed us that the missionary team was actually three in number. John (Acts 13:5) was in fact John Mark (12:12, 25), later the writer of the Gospel of Mark. Evidently very young at the time, John Mark served as their helper (his role was often used of servants who performed menial tasks.) John Mark decided to leave the work before they had proceeded very far. This later caused a rift between Paul and Barnabas, who was related to John Mark (Acts 15:36-41; Colossians 4:10).

8. What resistance did Saul and Barnabas encounter (vs. 6-8)?

Arriving in Paphos, the missionary team encountered a Jewish sorcerer, a false prophet, by the name of Bar-jesus. This sorcerer was likely an adviser to the proconsul of the island, Sergius Paulus. A proconsul was similar to a Roman governor. Apparently a man interested in spiritual things, Sergius Paulus wanted to hear the message of God.

Sergius Paulus is known to us from nonbiblical sources as a member of a leading family of the city of Rome. His name appears on an ancient inscription found in Turkey that confirms his title of proconsul. We can assume that he had ties with the Jewish synagogue (thus his relationship with Bar-jesus) and is therefore interested to learn more about the message of the missionaries.

Bar-jesus was also known as "Elymas" (Acts 13:8). Elymas may be the Aramaic version of "magician." This is similar to Simon the magician in Acts 8:10, who goes by the title "the great power." Here, the sorcerer quickly realizes the threat posed by the missionaries. So he seeks to protect Sergius Paulus from them in order to maintain his own position of influence. He "withstood" the messengers of God and sought to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

STRENGTHENED BY THE SPIRIT (Acts 13:9-12)

9. What are some possible reasons Saul's name was changed to Paul? How did Paul respond to Elymas (vs. 9, 10)?

Luke (the author of Acts) presents a scene of high drama. *Paul* does not back down or cower from the threatening sorcerer. Paul engages him with direct eye contact, demanding his full attention.

Paul is ready to do his first mighty deed of power, and Luke chooses the moment to make a change. Without comment, the Jewish name *Saul* becomes the Greco-Roman *Paul*. This is also a point of change in the leadership of the team. From this point forward, it is no longer "Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 13:7), but rather "Paul and his company" (Acts 13:13). While Barnabas is still important, the mantle of leadership is passed!

Paul passes judgment on Bar-jesus quickly with three condemnations and revealed his true nature in the presence of the deputy. First, Bar-jesus is the source of *subtilty* and *mischief*, meaning he continually distorts the truth. While he seems powerful and authoritative, he is lying and leading his followers astray. Second, Bar-jesus is a *child of the devil*, indicating that his source of supernatural power is not God, but Satan. Third, Bar-

jesus is an *enemy* and perverter of God's righteous standards.

Bar-jesus could no longer deceive Sergius Paulus concerning spiritual things. "Satan is in a special manner busy with great men and men of power, to keep them from being religious; because he knows that their example, whether good or bad, will have an influence upon many" (Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Hendrickson).

10. What was the outcome of Paul's response to Elymas (vs. 11, 12)?

The false prophet was stricken blind in the presence of the proconsul. It was not a permanent blindness, but it served the purpose of ending his interference with the preaching of the gospel at that time.

Paul does not claim any power for himself in this situation, but attributes this punishment to *the hand of the Lord*. This is the second time we encounter God's striking someone blind in the book of Acts. The first one was Paul himself (chapter 9)! But this case is presented in very different terms.

Paul had been blinded by a brilliant light (Acts 9:3), symbolically overcome by the glory of the risen Christ. By contrast, the sorcerer is blinded by a cloud of *darkness*. A further contrast is seen in the sorcerer's groping for someone to help him and the apparent lack of response. On the Damascus road, Paul's friends had quickly helped him and led him into the city (Acts 9:8).

Whether Bar-jesus ever came to know the Lord, we are not told. But the deputy, Sergius Paulus, did become a believer in Christ, for he was "astonished at the doctrine of the Lord" (Acts 13:12). Since miracles confirmed the preached word (Mark 16:20), this miracle accomplished its purpose by helping bring the deputy to faith.

CONCLUSION

In Paul's day, a missionary trip was much less involved than it is today. While the details of mission work may have drastically changed in the last 2000 years, basic strategy has not. Missionaries are those who are called to find people who do not have the gospel, make effective contact with them, and preach the good news so that they too may become disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We do missions for two basic and interconnected reasons. First, we do them because being Christlike means that that we have compassion upon the multitudes of unsaved (Matthew 14:14). Second, we do them because the Lord Jesus has commanded that the gospel be taken to all people – that we go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19).

When we gain this perspective, we will begin to experience what used to be called a "passion for the lost." From this perspective, the support of Christian missions and those called to this special work should be high on our list of priorities.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We can be sure of the Lord's direction if we are faithfully serving Him (Acts 13:1-2).
2. The church should confirm and support those whom God chooses to serve in missions (vs. 3-4).
3. If we are consistent witnesses, God will bring us those who are willing to listen (vs. 5-7).
4. We should expect opposition to the gospel and not be deterred from preaching it (v. 8).
5. We should humbly, compassionately warn those who reject Christ's gospel (vs. 9-11).
6. The gospel has the greatest impact when it is demonstrated as well as heard (v. 12).

PRAYER

Mighty God, who reigns over all the earth, may we never be guilty of hoarding the gospel, of keeping it just for our community and ourselves. May we share it freely by our support of ministries dedicated to taking the good news to the ends of the earth. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Either be a missionary or support one.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

Next week's lesson is "Using Your Gifts" and focuses on things that unite Christians and the various spiritual gifts that are allowed to operate in that unity. Read 1 Corinthians 12:3-21 and Ephesians 4:1-16.

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