

Bible Study September 1, 2021

ACTS 13 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

Barnabas and Saul Sent Off

1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Who were these men? They were of different races and economic standing: Greek, African, Roman, and Jewish. Lucius was from Libya in North Africa; Simeon was a man of African descent; Paul was both Roman and Jewish; Barnabas was Greek and Jewish; Manaen was brought up with King Herod. The common thread among these five men was their deep faith in Jesus Christ. As in the early church, if believers today do their part to reach out to all who are lost, churches will resemble the heavenly congregation, consisting of all races, income levels, education levels, and language backgrounds. The men mentioned here represent the social, geographic, and racial diversity in the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit moved through them all to appoint Barnabas and Paul to their next mission. When we exclude people or treat them differently because they are not like us, we are not representing the teachings of Jesus. The more we understand the gospel and embrace God's vision for the body of Christ, the more we will begin to appreciate and understand these differences but not allow them to divide us.

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." 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

When the Holy Spirit prompted them, the church "appointed," or dedicated, Barnabas and Saul to the work God had for them.

This was the beginning of Saul's (Paul's; see 13:9) first missionary journey. The church was involved in sending Paul and Barnabas, but it was God's plan. Why did Paul and Barnabas go where they did? (1) The Holy Spirit led them. (2) They followed the communication routes of the Roman Empire, which made travel easier. (3) They visited key population and cultural centers to reach as many people as possible. (4) They went to cities with synagogues, speaking first to the Jews in hopes that they would see Jesus as the Messiah and help spread the Good News to everyone.

Barnabas and Saul on Cyprus

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

Located in the Mediterranean Sea, the island of Cyprus, with a large Jewish population, was Barnabas's home. Their first stop was in familiar territory.

⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

Sergius Paulus was a proconsul, a high Roman official; here he functioned as the governor of the island. Such leaders often kept private sorcerers. Bar-Jesus realized that if Sergius Paulus believed in Jesus, he would soon be out of a job.

⁸ But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Here Luke refers to Saul as Paul for the first time. It is possible that this change from a Jewish to a Greek name could signal a shift in Paul’s calling to focus primarily on reaching the Gentiles. This focus becomes more and more pronounced as the book of Acts progresses.

The Holy Spirit led Paul to confront Bar-Jesus with his sin. There is a time to be nice and a time to confront. Ask God to show you the difference and to give you the courage to do what is right.

Paul and Barnabas at Antioch in Pisidia

¹³ Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem,

Paul’s later letters reveal, however, that he grew to respect Mark (Colossians 4:10) and that he found Mark to be helpful in his work (2 Timothy 4:11).

¹⁴ but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.” ¹⁶ So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.

What happened in a synagogue service? First, the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which Jews would repeat several times daily) would be recited. Then certain prayers would be spoken and there would be a reading from the Law (the books of Genesis through Deuteronomy), a reading from the Prophets intending to illustrate it, and a sermon. The synagogue leaders decided who would lead the service and give the sermon. A different person would be chosen to lead each week. Since it was customary for the synagogue leaders to invite visiting rabbis to speak, Paul and Barnabas usually had an open door when they first went to a synagogue.

Antioch of Pisidia was a different city from Antioch of Syria, where there was already a flourishing church (11:26). This Antioch, in the region of Pisidia, was a hub of good roads and trade and had a large Jewish population.

When they went to a new city to witness about Jesus, Paul and Barnabas would go first to the synagogue. The Jews who were there believed in God and diligently studied the Scriptures. Tragically, however, many could not accept Jesus as the promised Messiah because they had the wrong idea of what the Messiah should be. He was not, as they desired, a military king who would overthrow Rome's control but a servant-king who would defeat sin in people's hearts. (Only later, when Jesus returns, will he judge the nations of the world.) Paul and Barnabas did not separate themselves from the synagogues but tried to show clearly that the very Scriptures the Jews studied pointed to Jesus.

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 uplifted arm he led them out of it. 18 And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. 19 And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. 20 All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 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. 22 And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' 23 Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. 24 Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.'

Paul's message to the Jews in the synagogue in Antioch began with an emphasis on God's covenant with Israel. This was a point of agreement, because all Jews were proud to be God's chosen people. Then Paul explained how the Good News fulfilled the covenant from the time of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph to the resurrection of Jesus. Some Jews found this message hard to accept. Paul also explained very simply how Scripture had been fulfilled and how Gentiles are part of God's plan.

26 "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. 27 For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. 28 And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. 29 And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead, 31 and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. 32 And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, 33 this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

"'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'

Paul often began where his listeners were and then introduced them to Jesus. Because Paul was speaking to devout Jews, he began by reminding them about God's covenant with Israel and the great ancestors of the faith, like Abraham and David. Later, when speaking to the Greek philosophers in Athens (17:22-32), he began by talking about what he had observed in their city. In both cases,

however, he centered the sermon around Jesus and emphasized the crux of the Christian faith—the Resurrection. When you share the Good News, begin with what most interests your audience. Then tell them about Jesus. He meets people at their point of need and shows them how much they need him.

³⁴ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

“‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

³⁵ Therefore he says also in another psalm,

“‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’

³⁶ For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, ³⁷ but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. ³⁸ Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, ³⁹ and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

Forgiveness of sins and freedom from guilt are available through faith in Jesus to all people—including you. Have you received this forgiveness?

⁴⁰ Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

⁴¹ “‘Look, you scoffers,

be astounded and perish;

for I am doing a work in your days,

a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.’”

⁴² As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. ⁴³ And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.

The Jewish leaders undoubtedly brought theological arguments against Paul and Barnabas, but Luke tells us that the real reason for their hostility was that they were jealous. When we see others succeeding where we haven't or receiving the affirmation we crave, it is hard to rejoice with them. Jealousy is a natural reaction. But how tragic when our jealous feelings cause us to try to stop God's work. If you find yourself feeling jealous, seek forgiveness. If a work is God's work, rejoice in it—no matter who is doing it.

⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.

Why was it necessary for the Good News to go first to the Jews? God planned that through the Jewish people all the world would be blessed to know about God (Genesis 12:3). Paul, a Jew himself, loved his people (Romans 9:1-5) and wanted to give them every opportunity to join him in proclaiming God's salvation. Unfortunately, many Jews did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, and they did not understand that God was offering salvation to anyone—Jew or Gentile—who comes to him through faith in Christ.

47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

***“I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”***

God planned for Israel to be this light (Isaiah 49:6). Through Israel came Jesus, the light of the nations (Luke 2:32). This light would spread out and enlighten the Gentiles.

48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

Instead of accepting the truth, the Jewish leaders stirred up opposition and ran Paul and Barnabas out of town. When confronted by a disturbing truth, people often turn away and refuse to listen. When God's Spirit points out needed changes in our lives, we must listen to him. Otherwise we may be pushing the truth so far away that it no longer affects us.

51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Often Jews would shake the dust off their feet when leaving a Gentile town on the way back to their own land. This symbolized cleansing themselves from the contamination of those who did not worship God. For Paul and Barnabas to do this to Jews demonstrated that Jews who rejected the Good News were not part of the true Israel and were no better than pagans. Jesus had told his disciples to shake from their feet the dust of any town that would not accept or listen to them (Mark 6:11). The disciples were not to blame if the message was rejected as long as they had faithfully presented it. When we share Christ carefully and sensitively, God does not hold us responsible for our listeners' decisions. Be careful not to misapply this action. "Shaking the dust off your feet" is not the way to respond to insults, disagreements, or people who simply annoy you. This was a specific judgment on a group of people who heard the Good News and understood it but rejected it.