

~ACTS~

Lesson 38- The First Missionary Journey: Cyprus

Acts 13:1-12

We are continuing our study in the book of Acts, and today we begin the second half of our study as Luke shifts his focus primarily to the Apostle Paul and his mission to the Gentiles. This is the 38th lesson, as we have spent over nine months in the book of Acts, and I think it might be helpful to take a quick review of the book again as we enter into this next section. The entirety of the book spans the first 30 years of Church history. From **32-62AD**, and it has one common theme throughout...that Jesus is the Risen Christ who has brought Salvation to the world, and the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent, is working through faithful people bearing witness that Jesus is the Christ. And all those who believe are brought into the body of Christ as Jesus builds His Church.

The book of Acts is outlined at the very beginning of the book as Jesus lays out the marching orders for His disciples in **Acts 1:8**... from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, then to the ends of the earth. And this outline is divided into two parts: First part- chapters 1-12, dealing primarily with Peter and Jerusalem; and Second part- chapters 13-28, focusing on Paul and the mission to the Gentiles.

First Part of the book of Acts- chapters 1-12, (32-44AD)**Chapters 1-7, (32-33AD)**

- The first seven chapters were focused on the Gospel being preached to the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea
- Stephen is martyred at the end of chapter 7 and begins the persecution against the Church

Chapter 8, (33-36AD)

- Persecution spreads the Gospel up to Samaria
 - Persecution continues for three years and continues to spread to Caesarea, Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch- **but to the Jews only**

Chapter 9, (36-41AD)

- Saul of Tarsus is converted on the road to Damascus
- Peter goes throughout the regions of Israel edifying the body of Christ- **but to the Jews only**

Chapters 10-11, (41-44AD)

- In chapters 10 and 11 the barrier between Jew and Gentile is brought down with Cornelius
- The first Christian church consisting of Jews and Gentiles is established in Antioch

Chapter 12, (44AD)

- Paul and Barnabas are sent down to Jerusalem to help minister to the church
- Begins transitioning away from Peter and Jerusalem, and re-direct our attention to the ministry of the Apostle Paul from Antioch.

Second Part of the book of Acts- chapters 13-28, (45-62AD)

From this point on in the book of Acts, “the Second Half,” from chapters 13-28, Luke will focus on the life and missions of the Great Apostle Paul and the events that brought the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Chapters 13-14, (45-49AD)

- Paul’s first missionary journey

Chapter 15, (50AD)

- Jerusalem Council meeting discussing the acceptance of uncircumcised Gentiles into the body of Christ

Chapters 16-18, (51-54AD)

- Paul’s second missionary journey
 - Begins writing books of the NT... **1-2 Thessalonians; Galatians**

Chapters 19-20, (54-58AD)

- Paul's third missionary journey
 - Writes **1-2 Corinthians; Romans**

Chapters 21-28, (58-62AD)- Imprisonment

- 2 years in Caesarea
 - Appeal to Caesar
- 2 years in Rome under house arrest
 - Writes his prison epistles... **Hebrews; Ephesians; Colossians; Philemon; Philippians**

Notice that Luke takes the last eight chapters of this book, chapters 21-28, to deal with the arrest and imprisonment of the Apostle Paul. The reason for this amount detail in these last four years is focused on the historical premise of this book. Luke is writing this second volume as trial documents to the Roman officer Theophilus in anticipation for Paul's appeal to Caesar. But in addition to the historical premise of the book, there is a Spiritual premise. The Holy Spirit gave us this amazing book of Acts as a witness to the Risen Christ. That Jesus is alive, and He is working through faithful men and women by the power of the Holy Spirit to bear witness that Salvation has come to all who believe in Him, Jew and Gentile alike, in One Body, by One Spirit in Christ Jesus.

This ends the book of Acts in 62ad, but after his release he goes on his 4th journey and ordains Timothy and Titus as bishops over Ephesus and Crete respectively, and then writes them both letters: **1 Timothy** and **Titus**. Then Paul gets arrested again, this time unto martyrdom, but before he dies he writes his final letter to his son in the faith Timothy, which we know as **2 Timothy**.

Today we will begin chapter 13 looking at the first leg of Paul's first missionary Journey to the Gentiles as he travels through the island of Cyprus. Let's start with verse 1...

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

Remember chapter 12 ended with Barnabas and Saul returning from Jerusalem back to the church at Antioch after fulfilling their ministry by bringing famine relief and exhortation and comfort to the church in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas had been shepherding the flock in Antioch for the past year and Luke says among them in Antioch were prophets and teachers. He doesn't distinguish who was a prophet and who was a teacher. We know Paul and Barnabas were teachers because Luke says that for a whole year they taught a great many people in Antioch, Acts 11:26; 15:35. The main purpose of the office of a teacher and a prophet in the New Covenant is to edify the body of Christ. We see this in the five-fold ministry in **Ephesians 4:11-12**. And Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 14:3 that the office of a prophet "*speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.*" So in this case, Paul and Barnabas could be considered prophets as well because they were constantly exhorting and encouraging the saints through the Word of God. Barnabas' name even means "Son of Encouragement," Acts 4:36. So these five men were elders in Antioch serving the body of Christ.

We obviously know a lot about Barnabas and Saul, but there is not a lot said about these other three men: Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen. Nothing for certain is known of **Simeon**. This was a very common name that's why Luke distinguishes him as the one **who is called Niger**. Most likely, **Lucius of Cyrene** is one the "men from Cyrene" who first spread the seeds of the Gospel to Grecians in Antioch, Acts 11:20. Paul also refers to a Lucius in his letter to the Romans in Rom 16:21. Luke says **Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch**. A tetrarch is one who is a ruler of a minor region in the Roman Empire. This would not have been Agrippa I from Acts 12. Luke is probably referring to Herod Antipas. He was the tetrarch of Galilee, Luke 23:6-7. This word "brought up" means "to be nourished with," as in a childhood

companion. This is a perfect example of two people being brought up the same way but because of their decisions, their course of life had completely different results. Herod Antipas spent his life fighting God and Manaen wisely chose to join with God. It is interesting that Saul is listed last in this list. Usually in the Bible people are listed in order of importance. We will notice that even in the next few verses Saul is listed behind Barnabas, but that changes after verse 9 when Luke begins referring to Saul as Paul. This just shows that even the great Apostle Paul started off as a humble servant in the church. No big name or celebrity. Just a faithful man of God whom God highly exalted. But even late in life Paul still referred to himself as *less than the least of all the saints*, Eph 3:8.

2) As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

These five were elders in the church of Antioch and Luke says, **As they ministered to the Lord and fasted.** They were seeking God’s direction and humbling themselves to His guidance. Paul knew he was called to the Gentiles, but he is patiently waiting for the Lord’s leading, and then... **the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”**

Notice it’s not the elders making the decisions, it’s God. And at the perfect time, God speaks and says, “*Ἀφορίσατε δὴ*” This is an emphatic urgent declaration. Separate now indeed to Me Barnabas and Saul unto the work I have called them toward, *προσκέκλημαι*. This word *προσκαλέω* means “to call toward,” and it is in the perfect tense, meaning it is completed in the past with lasting results. God called Paul to the work to be the Apostle to the Gentiles even before the foundation of the world, and He has called every one of us into His work as His ambassadors, **Ephesians 2:10**. These good works are the fruit of walking in Him. We don’t do good works to be saved, we do good works because we are saved. We do these good works because He is our Master and we love Him and want to please Him. But notice that the timing is completely up to God. He is the One doing the calling and the sending. They don’t immediately send Paul and Barnabas, they begin praying and fasting.

3) Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

This is God’s plan. The elders hear God speak, they immediately fast and pray, then lay hands on them and set them loose. The translation, **“they sent them away”** isn’t great, because it is God who is doing the sending. This word in verse 3 is *ἀπολύω*, “to loose away.” It is a releasing to the will of God. The church doesn’t send people, only God does the sending. Look at verse 4...

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

They were **sent out by the Holy Spirit**. This word “sent” here in verse 4 is *ἐκπέμπω*, “to send out.” This is a different word than verse 3. The Holy Spirit is the One who sends. He did the speaking, the calling, and now the sending. The church fasted and prayed to be in line with the will of God. The Spirit leads them to Barnabas’ hometown of Cyprus. They traveled from Antioch along the Orontes River to the town of Seleucia. Then found a boat that would take them the short distance to the island of Cyprus.

5) And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant.

They take the short trip on the Mediterranean from Seleucia to Salamis. Probably only a 4-hour boat ride in good weather. Salamis was established around 1100bc, and was a major seaport in Cyprus. Luke says when they arrived, **they preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews**. There were many Hellenistic Jews living in Salamis in the first century. Enough so that they had multiple synagogues. And they went to the Jewish synagogues first, to the Jew first and then the Greek. Remember, that was God’s plan. These Hellenistic synagogues from the Diaspora of Babylon became the starting point of the Gospel

in these pagan cities. This was God's intention to reach the Gentile nations. And that is what we see happen here in Cyprus. They begin preaching the Word of God in the synagogues in Salamis, then word spreads and the Roman proconsul requests to hear the Gospel.

Notice who Paul and Barnabas have with them as their assistant... John Mark. He was there with his mother Mary when Peter escaped from prison in Jerusalem. He is the cousin of Barnabas, Col 4:10, and traveled back with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, Acts 12:25.

6-7) ⁶ Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the Word of God.

Paul and Barnabas travel the length of the island, from Salamis to Paphos, about 100 miles because the proconsul of Rome sought to hear the Word of God. Luke says **they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus**. This word found is εὐρίσκω, to find after searching. They were looking for this man Barjesus, because the proconsul Sergius Paulus had called for them and this sorcerer was with him. Sergius was a Roman proconsul, a pagan Gentile who had sought the council of this pseudo-prophet, a sorcerer. But he was an intelligent man searching for the Truth and when he heard the happenings in Salamis about the Word of God being preached, the Holy Spirit began moving on his heart, and he called for Paul and Barnabas to come to him. But the enemy is doing everything it can to prevent this meeting...

8) But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

The enemy had this Roman proconsul in his trap, and the Truth is about to set him free, so this false prophet is trying to keep Sergius bound in deceit. Notice the tactic of the enemy, **seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith**. This is the faith that comes from the hearing the Word of God. Remember Sergius sought Paul and Barnabas to hear the Word of God from which saving faith will arise out from. So this sorcerer tries to turn the proconsul away. This word is διαστρέφω. To thoroughly twist or turn away from. Notice Paul's response in verses 9-10 as he calls him on this deception...

9-10) ⁹ Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?"

This word "perverting" is the same word as in verse 8, διαστρέφω, "to turn, to pervert, twist around." The Way of the Lord is straight. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, John 14:6, and the enemy is doing everything it can to keep this proconsul away from the Truth because it is the Truth that sets us free and keeps us on the straight path, John 8:31-32; Proverb 2:6-15; 3:1-6; 2 Tim 2:15; Mk 1:3.

This is the first time in Scripture that Luke refers to Saul as Paul, and from this point on, he is always referred to as "Paul," except for when Paul recounts the Road to Damascus. It is likely that Paul always had two names even from birth, Saul as his Hebrew name, and Paul as his Roman-Greek name. And now at the point when Paul takes the lead, Luke begins referring to him as Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. There is a notable change in Paul's status from this point forward. After Acts 13:9, very rarely, with the exception of a few times with Barnabas, Acts 14:14, 15:12, 25, is Paul listed second in a company of men. From this point on, it is Paul and Barnabas, Acts 13:43, 46, 50; 15:2, 22, 35, or Paul and company, Acts 13:13; 19:29; 21:8, or later we will see Paul and Silas, Acts 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10.

Luke says, **Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him**. Paul is full of the dunamis power of the Spirit and I believe he is looking intently waiting on the direction of the Lord, **Acts 14:9**. Paul gets a word

from the Lord, much like Peter received about Ananias, Acts 5:3-4, and also Simon Magus the sorcerer, Acts 8:20-23. Being full of the Spirit Paul says, **“O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?”** Paul confronts him of his deception and calls him a son of the devil, **John 8:44**. After Paul’s conviction, God works through him divine judgement...

11) “And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

Notice this is the hand of the Lord enacting Judgement, not Paul. Most miracles of the New Testament are those of mercy and restoration, but here we see a miracle enacting Judgement. But just as with other miracles, these are not on-demand, but rather miracles led by the Holy Spirit working in and out through His faithful vessel. But this Judgement on Elymus is not permanent like that with Ananias and Sapphira or Herod Agrippa. He is only **blind, not seeing the sun for a time**. This is still leaving an opportunity for repentance, much like Peter and Simon Magus, Acts 8:22.

Now notice the results of this miracle...

12) Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

This Roman proconsul, who was previously under the influence of a demon possessed sorcerer, is set free by the Word of Truth! The sorcerer was using his trickery and deception on Sergius, keeping him ensnared, but the Word of God prevailed. He had ears to hear the Truth and he believed the Word of God. Notice the purpose of this miracle. It was used as a sign to point Sergius to the Truth. The miracle isn’t what saved him. There is no salvation in a miracle. The miracle was only a sign to open his eyes and point him to the Truth. One commentator said, “The blinding of this false prophet opened the eyes of Sergius Paulus.” Conybeare, Life and Epistles of Saint Paul, 1858, John 9:39. The Roman proconsul sees the power of God, but notice what Luke says he is astonished by... **being astonished at the teaching of the Lord**. He doesn’t say he was astonished at the miracle, but rather astonished at the Truth of the Word of God.

This Roman proconsul is the only convert recorded on this first leg of the journey in Cyprus, although I am sure that more believed, it is interesting to note that out of all the conversions on this island, this is the only Salvation that Luke records. This is now the second record in the book of Acts of a Roman official hearing and receiving Salvation: Cornelius and now Sergius Paulus. I don’t think this a coincidence given the underlying reason why Luke is writing this letter. Remember he is writing this letter as trial documents, addressed to Theophilus, a Roman official, making his appeal to Caesar about Christianity. That Christianity is Life; that Salvation is through Jesus Christ and all who will believe in Him, whether Jew, or Greek or even Roman... all who believe in Jesus Christ will receive remission of sins and Life Everlasting, John 20:31.

That ends Paul and Barnabas’ trip through Cyprus. A first steppingstone in Paul’s travels as he is now Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. Next week we’ll see them travel north to Galatia and continue to preach the Gospel up there.