

Session #12: Acts Chapter 13

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We now move into our third section of the Book of Acts and some scholars suggest should be called the Acts of Paul. We leave behind us (for the most part) the Church in Jerusalem and the work of St. Peter. In this last section, we now focus on the missionary work of St. Paul along with his companions St. Barnabas and later St. Luke.



Barnabas and Saul Commissioned 13:1-3

Our chapter begins with the Lord calling Barnabas and Paul into their role as evangelists. We see in these three short verses that ministry is less about what people want to do with their lives and everything to do with God's desire. We will also see in this chapter that the center of missionary work, which was once Jerusalem, moves to the city of Antioch. Jerusalem remains the center of the 1st century church but the freedoms in Antioch allow for greater autonomy in Antioch

13:1 prophets and teachers

Just like any church community needs its ministers to help in the day to day function so too did the early Christian community. One way to view this is the prophets job was to speak and lead the community through inspiration and prayer as well as being aware of future challenges. The teachers job was to lead the community to a deeper understanding of their faith through the study of the stories and teachings of Jesus as well as the interpretation of the Old Testament.

Barnabas, ... and Saul

There were those who functioned as prophets and teachers but these five men were outstanding leaders in this community. All five men were Greek speaking Jews. Barnabas, as we know originally came to Antioch from Jerusalem (Acts 11:22). Symeon and Lucius, who some scholar advocate came from Africa. (There is nothing in scripture to support that.) Manaen, who again some scholars claim came from Herod's in Galilee and may have been related in some way to Herod. (Again, there is nothing in scripture to support this) And of course, we know that Saul (Paul) came from Tarsus.

One Side Note: One of the commentaries (The New Daily Study Bible by William Barclay) suggested that it could be possible that the *Lucius from Cyrene* is actually the Simon from Cyrene who carried the cross of Jesus (Luke 23:26)

13:2 worshipping the Lord

This is one of those moments that, to understand the fullness of the writing it is wise to read Greek. The Greek word used by St. Luke for *worship* was *leitourgeo*. This word is used in association with the liturgical work of priests (such as priests of the Temple) in their public acts of worship on behalf of the faithful – the public liturgical prayer. Scholars look at this word used and are able to discern that what St. Luke meant was that these five men were

leading the public prayers of the Antioch community, most likely the first attempts at Eucharistic liturgy or in other words the early version of the Mass.

the work to which I have called them

We read in the Old Testament book of

Habakkuk: *O Lord, I have heard the report of thee, and thy work, O Lord, do I fear.* (3:2) Scholars believe that St. Luke is quoting this passage. The idea from Habakkuk is that the work we do is the work of God and all too often those who don't believe don't see.

13:3 *fasting and prayer*

As we have seen throughout our study fasting and

prayer was something that the Jewish community would engage in as a way of seeking and opening oneself up to the will of the Lord. These practices continue to this day. As Catholics we are called to engage in both during Lent as well as other times of the year. One scholar suggests: *the purpose of this prayer and fasting is to purify hearts and lips, so that the Lord will be at their side and ensure that none of their words "fall to the ground" (1 Samuel 3:19)* The Navarre Bible: Acts of the Apostles

laid their hands

Even to this day we "lay hands" on someone we are

seeking to commission into a role or responsibility. At Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders the ordained lay their hands on the child, student or young man as a part of the calling down of the Spirit of God into their lives.

The First Missionary Trip 13:4-12

This trip (which will be discussed from 13:4-14:28) was believed to have happen in 46-49 AD. There will be a second missionary trip (15:36-18:22) and a third (18:23-21:15). We will see similarities in this trip with those of St. Philip as he preached to the Samaritans. St. Philip had to deal with the magician/sorcerer Simon Magus (8:9) showing the power of Christ over the ever present power of evil in the world.

13:4 *sailed to Cyprus*

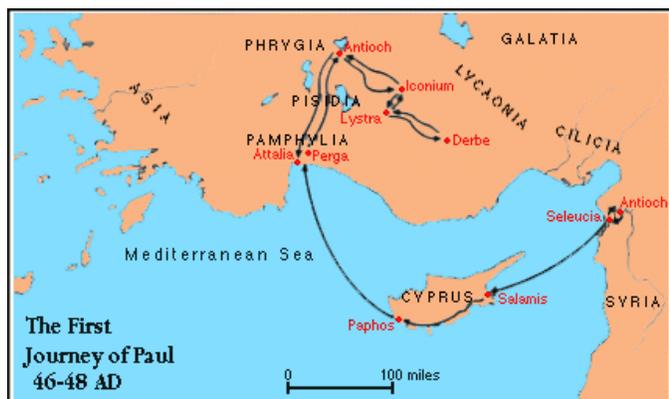
A beautiful island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. In the 1st

century this island was a province of Rome and you may remember the home of Barnabas (4:36). We read that in Paul and Barnabas' teaching and preaching the whole island from Salamis on the east end of the island to the west end, Paphos were exposed to the truth of Jesus Christ. Cyprus was famous for its copper mines and its shipping.

13:5 *they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues*

There is a

consistency to Paul's missionary work. In approaching a new community the first place Paul will go to preach and teach is the synagogues. (13:14; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19...) There were reasons for this. On the practical side synagogues (much like community centers) was one



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obvious place that people would gather. Both Jews and Gentiles would congregate for prayer, worship and fellowship. There is also a theological reason. Paul still struggles with the belief that the Jews should be first to inherit the blessings of this messianic age. (Acts 13:46; Romans 1:16)

They had John This is NOT the Apostle John, Catholic scholarship agrees this is the young man John Mark. We have spoken of him earlier (12:12). It was his mother who opened her home to be one of the first Christian Churches in Jerusalem and who is a cousin of Barnabas. It is also this young man who will later accompany St. Peter on his missionary trip and would later write the Gospel of Mark.

13:6 A magician named Bar-Jesus Throughout time there have been those who take advantage of others by posing as men (and women) of faith. Bar-Jesus is clearly identified as a false prophet. By the way the “Bar” in Bar-Jesus means the son of” and a more accurate translation from Aramiac would be “son of Yeshosua”. Yeshosua could be translated either to Jesus or Joshua.

13:7 Sergius Paulus A proconsul was a Roman appointed governor of a region, in this case the island of Cyprus. He was in charge of the army, of distributing justice and of administration. Sergius Paulus is the first Gentile ruler in Acts to become a believer.



13:8 Elymas Do you remember the comic with someone facing a decision? On one shoulder stood the angel, in this case Paul, leading towards righteousness. And on the other shoulder was the devil, in this case Elymas, trying to talk him/her out of the doing the right thing. Elymas was not the devil but certainly was not concerned for anyone but himself. He saw his power diminishing as the proconsul turned to Christ. Elymas is the second magician or sorcerer to be chastised by the Apostles.

13:9 Saul, also known as Paul Basically from this point forward we will read only of the name Paul. As stated before Paul is the Greek variation on the Jewish name Saul. They are one in the same persons. Most scholars believe that Saul/Paul, upon his conversion experience chose to call himself Paul as a sign of his becoming a new man in Christ.

13:10 twisting the straight paths of the Lord? St. Paul scoffs at Elymas and his ways stating that the evil the sorcery he does in in opposition to God’s plan. This statement of *twisting the straight paths of God* is a paraphrase of Isaiah 40:3-5

13:11 you shall be blind...lead him by the hand Interesting that St. Paul should be calling down blindness on this man. Could it be he hoped that Elymas, in his own blindness, would come to Christ as St. Paul himself did after the experience on the road to Damascus (9:8).

Paul and Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia 13:13-43

13:13-15

13:13 Paul and his company

Note that when this trip began it was Barnabas and Paul (Saul) (13:3). Now we can see that Paul has taken the lead command of this delegation.

came to Perga

This Roman community is about 12 miles inland from the coast.

John left them

We have no reason as to why John Mark left the missionary trip.

William Barclay in his commentary offers some possibilities: *Perhaps he resented Barnabas being deposed from the leadership; perhaps he was afraid of the proposed journey up into the plateau where Antioch in Pisidia stood, for it was one of the hardest and most dangerous roads in the world; perhaps, because he came from Jerusalem, he had his doubts about this preaching to the Gentiles; perhaps at this stage he was one of those many who are better at beginning things than finishing them; perhaps – as John Chrysostom said in the fourth century – the youth wanted his mother.* Truthfully, we will never know. We do know that in this choice to leave John Mark has created a bad taste in St. Paul's mouth for when the option comes up later for John Mark to join them again on the second missionary trip, St. Paul will refuse to accept him (15:38) and Barnabas and Paul part ways because of it. Not to worry, St. Mark will redeem himself in St. Paul's eyes many years later. In writing to the Colossians from prison, St. Paul will them to receive Mark (Colossians 4:10), and then later to Timothy how useful Mark is in ministry (2 Timothy 4:11)

13:14 Antioch of Pisidia

This is not to be confused with Antioch of Syria where the mission trip began. Antioch of Pisidia was found in southern province of Galatia and was home to a large Jewish community. St. Paul will later write one of his famous letters to those believer is the Galatia region (The Letter to the Galatians)

13:15 After the reading of the law and the prophets

In the same way our Mass begins with the readings from the Bible, so too was the worship of the Jews. The "law and prophets" is to be understood as readings from the Torah which form the core of the Synagogue service every Sabbath.



The typical service would be the readings from the Torah (The Torah is the five first Books of the Old Testament – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Numbers). After the reading different individuals would give their explanations or teachings on the reading which would be followed by prayers. It was not uncommon to invite guests to offer their insights.

13:16-43

What we have here is St. Paul's first sermon and most likely an excellent example of his preaching throughout his life. In his effort to bring his listeners to faith Paul gives a summery of salvation history – from Exodus to Jesus, stressing that Jesus is

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the fulfillment of the covenantal promise of God. If we compare it to the sermon of St. Peter in chapter 2 we see many similarities

13:16 *So Paul stood up* As we discussed in our first weeks of this study St. Luke choose certain historical moments in his narrative to show a parallel between Jesus to Peter and later Paul. Here is one of those moments. It should remind us of Jesus coming in from the desert, going to the synagogue and offering his first teaching. (Luke 4:16)

And you who fear God These would be the Gentiles who have come to the synagogue to pray because of their belief in the one true God. So, St. Paul is speaking to a mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles.

13:18 *put up with* Depending on your bible edition, you might have the word sustain. The two variations give quite a different read. One communicates the idea of impatience while the other offers a more loving expression.

13:20 *At the end of about four hundred and fifty years* There are two options as to what this period could refer to. First, it could refer to the time the Israelites were in Egypt before the Exodus along with their travels through the wilderness and conquest of the Promised Land. It could also refer to the years from the conquest of the Promised Land to the prophet Samuel. Either way Paul is recounting major moments in salvation history.

13:28 *with nothing deserving death* As we know, Jesus died on the Cross as an innocent man which in and of itself gives testimony to the love God has for us. Why would Jesus do such a thing? To take on what would be our just punishment for the sins of our lives.

13:31 *He appeared* We know from the gospels of Luke and John that Jesus, once risen from the dead but before His ascension, appeared to His Apostles and disciples in both Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20) and Jerusalem (John 20:19-29, Luke 24:36-49). These appearances give testimony that Jesus truly did rise from the dead. While some point to the empty tomb as proof of life, there are always those who would say: "They stole his body or there was a conspiracy..." The fact that the Jesus, once dead now walks on the earth cannot be disputed with so many witnesses.

13:33 *second psalm* The psalm that follows in verses 33-34 is the second psalm in the book of psalms. It is an enthronement prayer that was most likely recited on the day the Kings of the Israelites were anointed into their office and understood as the adopted sons of God. St. Paul is using this psalm to show that today, with the death and resurrection of the one true Son of God, this Psalm speaks of the day Jesus rose from the dead.

13:34-35 St. Paul continues to build his case by reciting first Psalm 2:7 (verse 33b) Isaiah 55:3 (verse 34) and Psalm 16:10 (verse 35) *Isaiah gives hope to Israel in exile that God will restore the kingdom and blessing of David through an everlasting covenant. Psalm 16 is David's own prophecy*



that Yahweh will preserve the anointed Messiah from the corruption of death. Ignatius Catholic Bible Study

St. Paul is using these texts and applying them directly to Jesus who because of His resurrection is the only descendant of King David to whom they could apply.

13:39 every believer is justified St. Paul will talk about “justification in faith” in his letters to the Romans (3:26) Our understanding of justification is the idea of what makes us right with the Lord. To be in right relationship with God two things must be in play: Seeking forgiveness for our sins—Repentance, and working to live a life worthy of God. Repentance without just works or works without belief – neither are sufficient in the eyes of St. Paul.

13:41 Behold, you scoffers St. Paul offers one more quote to challenge those who might think that what he has said is ridiculous. This time the quote is from Habakkuk 1:5. The prophet prayed to God because the words he offered from the Lord were not taken seriously. God responds with a proclamation of His judgement for those who would not listen.

13:43 followed Paul and Barnabas Notice that Paul’s name is first. Scholars mark this verse as when Paul takes the leadership in this mission trip that was first entrusted to Barnabas.

Address to the Gentiles 13:44-52

13:45 filled with jealousy Isn’t it sad the because of our own sinfulness the truth is hidden. These Jews could not hear the truth because of their own jealousy.

13:46 spoken first to you As exemplified in Jesus, the Apostles and Disciples prioritized their preaching and teaching the truth of salvation by going first to the Jews before seeking out the Gentile. We saw that at the beginning of this chapter when Paul & Barnabas go first to the synagogues (13:5). (See also Acts 3:26) Paul will continue throughout his mission and ministry to go to the Jews first where ever his mission work takes him. (Iconium--Acts 14:1, Thessalonica--Acts 17:1, Berea—Acts 17:10, Athens 17:17, Corinth--Acts 18:4 and Ephesus--Acts 18:19)

condemn yourselves From childhood I was raised with the image of God (and I am sure many of you as well) of God the Father sitting on the throne judging us as good and worthy of heaven or bad and therefore sent to hell. The truth of the matter is we condemn ourselves by the life we live and the choices we make. In that final moment, together with God our lives will pass before our eyes and we will know ourselves if we are worth of eternal life at the feet of God or belong to those eternally damned. *Now is the present time. Now is the present hour* (Romans 13:11).

we turn to the Gentiles Paul is not abandoning the mission to the Jews. The Christian Church and it’s leaders then until the end of time will teach and preach to



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whomever will be open to listen. In this moment Paul is simply walking away from the hardened hearts of the synagogue Jews.

13:47 *I have set you to be a light*

Paul backs

up his argument by quoting Isaiah 49:6. Paul takes a small liberty by using the word Gentiles where in the original statement it says nations. But, this quote, while initially directed to the “Suffering Servant”, speaks to the call of proclaiming the truth of salvation first to the Jews and then to all nations. While the “Suffering Servant” is to be seen primarily as the Messiah, Jesus; we also understand that the “Suffering Servant” to be a

command directed towards all believers.

13:50 *expel them from their territory*

Paul and Barnabas share in the experience of both

Peter and John (Acts 5:17) as well as Jesus Christ himself. People are so upset at what is happening they force these men from their community.

13:51 *shake the dust from our feet*

This is a harsh sign of judgement because it means

that one is completely disassociated with the people there. Those who refuse to welcome the message, the Word of God cut themselves off from God’s blessings. It had been a long-standing custom for Jews, when returning to the Promised Land from Gentile territory, before crossing the border, to shake the dust of the pagan lands off their feet. It was a symbolic act to remind them of the pagan ways were unclean and that they, as God’s chosen, were called to be pure which can only be found in God. Sts. Paul and Barnabas are doing this because Christ first told the 12 Apostles to so; “And as for those who do not welcome you, when you leave that town shake the dust from your feet in testimony against them. (Luke 9:5); and the Seventy-two Disciples (Luke 10:10-11)

Reflection Questions:

1. Has anyone ever stood in the way of your coming to faith or has anyone ever discouraged you from growing in your faith? What did that feel like? Was the situation ever resolved
2. Have you ever gotten in your own way, have you offered resistance to what you know is God’s plan for your life? How has God shown His patience for you?
3. Disasters and setbacks are painful but with time can be shown to be blessings in disguise. Has there ever been an disaster or setback that you lived through that in the end brought greater love, light, hope, joy into your life?

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Fasting: 1969, 1434, 1438, 2043, 1387

Jesus, Son of God: 445, 2606

Justification: 1987-1995

To Judge the Living and the Dead: 678-679

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