

Lesson 5: Paul's First Missionary Journey

Introduction: We turn now to study what is commonly referred to as the first of Paul's missionary journeys. Such a description may, however, belie the fact that Paul had been making missionary journeys since his conversion some fourteen years earlier. Beginning in Acts 13 however, Paul embarks on a career which specifically focuses on broadening the reach of the kingdom of Christ throughout the Gentile world.

I. THE NURTURING CHURCH AT ANTIOCH - Acts 13:1-3

- A. There was unity in diversity among church leaders
 - 1. The leadership was ethnically diverse
 - 2. The leadership was socially diverse
 - 3. The leadership was unified in purpose and practice
- B. The leaders were submissive to the direction of the Holy Spirit
- C. The leaders commended the work of the missionaries

II. MINISTRY IN CYPRESS – Acts 13:4-12

- A. This was Barnabas' home area – Acts 4:36
- B. They preached in the synagogue at Salamis – Acts 13:5
- C. They passed through the island with the Gospel – v. 6
- D. They had a power encounter at Paphos – vv. 6-11
 - 1. Opposed by an apostate Jew
 - 2. The conversion of Sergius Paulus – v. 12-13
 - a) Represents a turning point in Gentile evangelism
 - b) May have provoked the departure of John Mark

III. MINISTRY IN PAMPHILIA

- A. Synagogue preaching in Psidian Antioch
 - 1. Addressed to Jews and God-fearers – v. 16
 - 2. Content of the message – vv. 17-41
 - a) Divine blessing on Israel from Abraham to David – vv. 17-22

- b) Divine blessing on Israel through Jesus, David’s son – vv. 23-37
 - (1) Proven to be the Messiah through resurrection – vv. 23-31
 - (2) Proven to be the Messiah through prophecy – vv. 32-37
 - c) Proclamation of salvation and warning against unbelief – vv. 38-41
 - (1) Jesus provides forgiveness and justification – vv. 38-39
 - (2) Ignoring the invitation brings divine rejection – vv. 40-41
 - 3. Results from the preaching – vv. 42-52
 - a) Enthusiasm among the Gentiles – vv. 42-44; 48-49
 - b) Jealousy among the Jews – v. 45
 - c) Pronouncement by Paul – v. 46-47
 - d) Persecution and departure – vv. 48-52
- B. Mixed results at Iconium – Acts 14:1-7
 - 1. Many believed the preaching backed by miraculous signs – vv. 1, 3
 - 2. Unbelieving Jews stirred up opposition to their message – vv. 2, 4
 - 3. Organized persecution caused them to flee to Lycaonia – vv. 5-7
 - a) Paul was willing to suffer for his faith
 - b) Paul was willing to flee for his faith
- C. Difficulties at Lystra – Acts 14:8-20
 - 1. A lame man is healed – vv. 8-10
 - 2. Both the apostles and the local people respond in culturally appropriate ways¹ – vv. 11-14
 - 3. The apostles preach an incomplete sermon to the pagan animists – vv. 15-18
 - a) God is the Creator
 - b) He is knowable through Creation
 - 4. The reception turns stony – vv. 19-20

¹ The New Bible Commentary states regarding this episode, “There is an ancient story about these same two gods visiting a town in the area. They were not recognized and received only a cool reception. In anger they destroyed the town that had been so inhospitable. With such a folk-tale circulating in this region, it is hardly any wonder that the crowd reacted in the way that they did, bringing forth a bull and wreathes and wanting to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas after a simple healing.”

- a) Trouble is stirred up by Jews from the cities previously visited
 - b) Paul is stoned and cast off as dead
 - c) Paul revives and departs for Derbe
- D. The gospel is received at Derbe – v. 21
- 1. The missionaries preached
 - 2. The missionaries made disciples
- E. The path toward home is retraced – vv. 21-25
- 1. They strengthened the souls of the converts/disciples
 - 2. They encouraged them to persevere in the faith
 - 3. They warned them of persecution in this life
 - 4. They ordained elders and committed them to the Lord²

IV. **MINISTRY IN ANTIOCH**

- A. The home church is informed of God's gracious works – vv. 26-28
- B. The intended work had been fulfilled
- C. There is a spirit of camaraderie
- D. The emphasis is on God
- E. They remained a long time in Antioch

Conclusion: The first missionary journey ends on a note of joy and fulfillment. Paul and Barnabas had accomplished what they set out to do. Through tribulation and disappointment mixed with victory and exhibitions of God's power, these missionaries established a pattern for all subsequent missionary endeavors. They showed their willingness to adapt their communication to fit the audience coupled with their absolute fidelity to the message committed to them by the Lord.

² These early missionaries demonstrate a biblical paradigm for missions work: 1) Make disciples, 2) Strengthen their faith, 3) Appoint leadership, 4) Commit them to the Lord. The missionaries recognized that these local believers had the same Word of God, the same Holy Spirit and were part of the same Body of Christ and were thus able to depart with confidence that Christ would indeed build His church!