

Paul's First Missionary Journey (Acts 13-14)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Acts

I. Review from Prior Lesson

- a. In the previous lesson, we discussed the start of the church in Antioch, in the northern part of ancient Syria, a Roman imperial province. This city would become an important missionary center for spreading the gospel to the east and west.
- b. In **Acts 11**, it says that Barnabas went to Tarsus to seek Saul, who came with him and taught people for a year in Antioch.
- c. After we discussed the miraculous escape of Peter from prison in Jerusalem, we now return to Antioch and to Paul's ministry.

II. First Stop: Island of Cyprus

- a. Read **Acts 13:1-3**.
 - i. During a time of fasting, the Holy Spirit speaks to the church leaders (prophets and teachers), telling them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a special missionary trip.
 - ii. The leaders, having fasted and prayed, laid hands on the men and sent them out.
 1. This is reminiscent of **Acts 6:6**, where the apostles *pray and then lay hands on* seven men selected for the special task of meeting the needs of the widows in Jerusalem.
 - iii. In **Hebrews 6**, it speaks of six elementary teachings of the faith. One of the six is the "laying on of hands". Since there are many situations in which Christians lay hands on others, many have questions about what type of laying on of hands is referred to there. Here in **Acts 13** we find another instance of laying on hands, in this case prior to sending men on an important mission.
 1. "Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of *laying on of hands*, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment." (**Hebrews 6:1-2**, NKJV)

b. Read **Acts 13:4-12**.

- i. First stop on the journey: sail to the *island of Cyprus*, in the eastern Mediterranean Sea off the coasts of Syria and Turkey.
 1. Recall that Barnabas was from Cyprus.
 2. “And Joses [*Joseph in many versions*], who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite *of the country of Cyprus....*” (**Acts 4:36**, NKJV)
- ii. Salamis and Paphos are cities on the island of Cyprus.
- iii. Paul follows a pattern we will see repeated many times in Acts, starting here in Salamis, in Cyprus.
 1. First, he goes to the local synagogue and preaches to the Jews.
 2. (Later, we will see on many of his trips that he will go to the Gentiles next, after being rejected by most of the Jews.)
- iv. Paul then goes to Paphos. He tries to preach to Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, but is opposed by a Jewish false prophet and sorcerer, Elymas.
 1. I have no idea what the name “Elymas” means, nor even in what language that word has a special meaning.
- v. Here Paul rebukes Elymas with very strong and colorful language.
 1. Legendary rebukes from the New Testament include:
 - a. Paul: “...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?” (**Acts 13:10**, NKJV; from the text we are now studying)
 - b. Paul, speaking about Jewish Christians who were teaching circumcision: “But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. *I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!*” (**Galatians 5:11-12**, ESV)
 - c. Jesus, rebuking the Jews who opposed Him: “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because

there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” (**John 8:44**, NKJV)

d. Jesus, rebuking the Pharisees and scribes in **Matthew 23**:

i. “Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” (**Matthew 23:24**, NKJV)

ii. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (**Matthew 23:27–28**, NKJV)

iii. “Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?” (**Matthew 23:33**, NKJV)

2. Yes, there is a place for strong, memorable and even graphic rebukes for those who are in serious and deliberate sin. We should use these sparingly, only when needed, and not out of unrighteous anger: strong medicine for those who risk spiritual death otherwise.

a. “Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold Is a wise rebuker to an obedient ear.” (**Proverbs 25:12**, NKJV)

b. “Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it...” (**Psalms 141:5**, NKJV)

c. “and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, *for reproof*, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (**2 Timothy 3:15–17**, NKJV)

i. One of the reasons we need to know the Scriptures well is so that we can deliver

appropriate rebukes in various situations, to help our brothers and sisters.

3. Like in medicine, best to encourage a healthy lifestyle and focus on nurturing and loving, and comforting those who have fallen into sin and repented. However, those who deliberately sin and are unrepentant are another story.
4. Some perspective on rebuking others, from Paul to Timothy:
 - a. “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.” **(1 Timothy 5:1-2, NKJV)**
 - b. “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.” **(1 Timothy 5:19-20, NKJV)**
 - i. Unfortunately, there are very few churches that take this admonition to heart. Much more typical are churches who protect or cover up the sins of their leaders.
 - ii. This admonition is given for the health of the church. The intent of this rebuke is to wake up the elder involved in the sin, the other elders, and the entire church to the seriousness of sin, and to make it clear to all that there is no partiality in dealing with sin in the church.
5. **Takeaways and Recommendations:** Rebukes can be spiritually lifesaving. However, they should be used sparingly. Don’t go around rebuking everyone, especially Christians who are older. At the same time, if elders are found to be in sin, and there is clear evidence from multiple witnesses, they are to be rebuked (as an example for all to learn from).
- vi. This passage is the first place where Saul is called by the name of Paul.
 1. “Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him” **(Acts 13:9, NKJV)**
 2. There is no mention of the Lord giving him a new name. Some people think this was his “Roman name”. Some think he might have adopted the name from Sergius Paulus, the proconsul

who was converted and believes in Jesus at the end of this story. However, it doesn't say!

- vii. Note that miracles of God were not just to heal people, but sometimes were used to punish the wicked, as well. Like the 10 Plagues of Exodus, they can put the fear of God in those who see these kinds of miracles. Examples we have seen thus far include:
 1. Elymas (blinded, here in **Acts 13**)
 2. Herod (struck dead by angel, **Acts 12**)
 3. Ananias and Sapphira (struck dead, **Acts 5**)

III. On to Pamphylia (Southern Coast of Turkey) and Pisidia (Inland)

a. Read **Acts 13:13-14**.

- i. If you have a study Bible or other Biblical resource that shows the path of each of Paul's three missionary journeys from **Acts**, that will be very helpful to visualize what is going on and provide a clearer perspective.
- ii. Overview of Paul's first missionary journey
 1. First, sails from Antioch to the island of Cyprus and preaches there.
 2. Then sails north to Pamphylia (a region in modern southern central Turkey), landing near modern Antalya, Turkey. He first goes to Perga and then does a circuit that will end up back there.
 3. After Perga, he goes inland and north to Antioch of Pisidia. We have his sermon to that church, in **Acts 13**.
 4. After Pisidian Antioch, he goes eastward inland to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.
 5. They then retrace their steps and return through the places they have gone, ending up back in Perga.
 6. They depart from Attalia (like Perga, very close to modern Antalya) and sail back to Antioch in Syria.
- iii. 'John' (I presume referring to John Mark) does not continue with Paul and Barnabas beyond Perga. He returns to Jerusalem, while Paul and Barnabas continue together for the rest of the trip.

- iv. Alison and I have visited the ruins of ancient Perga, which I found to be well preserved and fascinating. Perga was a well-developed ancient city. If you are ever in that part of the world and have an interest in the ancient world, I encourage you to go there!

IV. Paul's Sermon in Pisidian Antioch

- a. It is valuable for us to examine how the apostles spread the gospel in the beginning. This can help us to appreciate:
 - i. What is the gospel (the good news) that was preached originally?
 - ii. How did they persuade unbelievers and skeptics to come to faith in Jesus?
 - iii. What were the things they considered to be foundational?
 - iv. How did they use the Old Testament prophecies, and which ones did they use?
 - v. Did Peter and Paul preach a different message from each other?
 - vi. Was the gospel always preached the same way, or were there common patterns?
 - vii. For us today, how should we present the gospel to unbelievers?
- b. This sermon in **Acts 13**, along with the one Peter gave in **Acts 2** (and to a lesser extent what Peter preached in **Acts 3**), are perhaps the best examples of a *detailed account* of the gospel being preached to a somewhat receptive audience.
 - i. In **Acts 7**, we saw Stephen preaching another extended message. However, that was addressed to a hostile Sanhedrin, convicting them of having just rejected and killed the Messiah.
- c. Read **Acts 13:14-43**.
 - i. This is addressed to "men of Israel and you who fear God". (**Acts 13:16**)
 - ii. So, the message is given to Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles who attended the synagogue, all of whom should be familiar with the Law of Moses and the Prophets.
- d. My own breakdown of Paul's sermon, divided into its major sections:
 - i. From Egypt to King David. (**Acts 13:17-22**)
 - 1. Egypt, Wilderness, Judges, Saul and David

- ii. “The promise” given to David (**Acts 13:22-23**)
 - 1. This refers to the promise given through the prophet Nathan in **2 Samuel 7** (designated **2 Kingdoms 7** in the LXX); also in the parallel account found in **1 Chronicles 17**.
 - a. That promise was confirmed in **Psalms 89** and **Psalms 132** (designated **Psalms 88** and **131** in the LXX).
 - b. This promise included the following elements:
 - i. One of David’s descendants, who would be “raised up” after David had died.
 - ii. He would reign over an eternal kingdom.
 - iii. This promised descendant of David would build the temple of God. That temple would never be destroyed, would last forever.
 - iv. He would be known as God’s Son.
 - 2. This was the same promise that Peter referred to in **Acts 2:30**.
 - 3. This also was the same promise that the angel Gabriel was referring to in the announcement to Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God, in **Luke 1:26-38**.
- iii. John the Baptist (**Acts 13:24-25**)
 - 1. The forerunner, who announced to all Israel that One greater was coming.
- iv. Jesus, who fulfilled the prophecies through His condemnation in Jerusalem, suffering, death, and bodily resurrection from the dead. (**Acts 13:26-41**)
 - 1. Suffered and killed under Pilate “fulfilled all that was written concerning Him” (**Acts 13:27-28**)
 - 2. Raised from the dead. (**Acts 13:30**)
 - a. Seen by eyewitnesses. (**Acts 13:31**)
 - b. In fulfillment of the prophecies (**Psalms 2, Psalms 15/16**).
 - i. This statement could not have applied to David himself.

- ii. Note that Peter made a similar point in his address on the day of Pentecost, in **Acts 2**.
- iii. Paul gives two reasons why this promise regarding not remaining in Hades and His body not seeing decay, from **Psalm 16** (designated **Psalm 15** in the LXX), *could not* have applied to David himself.
 - 1. First, because David's body had decayed and "saw corruption" (**Acts 13:36**). (Peter had made the same point in **Acts 2:29**, that David's body was still in its tomb.)
 - a. Second, Paul says we should look to the Christ, the one descended from David, to fulfill the prophecy of **Psalm 16**. Paul Read **Acts 13:34-37**.
 - b. There was a promise in **Isaiah 55:3**, "the holy and faithful things of David" falling to someone else.
 - i. Paul quotes from the LXX here. Compare the text in **Acts 13** from a Greek interlinear New Testament vs. the LXX for **Isaiah 55**.
 - c. This also reminds me of the discussion at the end of **Psalm 89** (designated **Psalm 88** in the LXX) regarding the promise made to David being fulfilled in the Anointed One, the Christ.
- e. Major takeaways from this sermon by Paul include:
 - i. This is the most detailed presentation of the gospel message to unbelievers that we have from Paul.
 - 1. If someone wanted to know what was the gospel Paul preached, this might be the first place to look!
 - ii. What he preaches here also is completely consistent with the summary he gives in **1 Corinthians 15**, where Paul is addressing a predominantly Gentile church.

1. “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.” (**1 Corinthians 15:1-6**, NKJV)
2. Regarding the Corinthians being a predominantly Gentile church: “You know that *you were Gentiles*, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.” (**1 Corinthians 12:2**, NKJV)
 - a. Paul had been preaching the same message to a predominantly Gentile church in Corinth that he had preached to the Jewish synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, near the beginning of his missionary endeavors.
 - b. Paul did not change the gospel message when he preached to Gentiles!
- iii. This sermon also has a lot of similarities to what Peter preached in **Acts 2**, on the day of Pentecost. Similarities include:
 1. A kingdom-oriented message, citing the promise given to David.
 2. The prophecy of **Psalm 16** is quoted regarding the resurrection of Jesus, with an explanation of why this promise could not have applied to David himself (but instead must apply to the promised *descendant of David*).
 3. There was reliable confirmation of the resurrection of Jesus by eyewitnesses.
- iv. Paul can refer to “the promise” to his audience and does not even need to quote it. He assumes they know exactly what he is referring to (the promise made to David in **2 Samuel 7**).
 1. This was the same promise that the angel Gabriel alluded to in announcing that she would give birth to One who would be called the Son of God, in **Luke 1:26-38**. She also understood “the promise”.

- v. Paul does not tell the Jews in Pisidian Antioch, “*You* killed Jesus.” He says, in essence, “*They* (referring to the Jews in Jerusalem)” rejected and killed the Messiah. See **Acts 13:27-29**.
 - 1. In the past, I have heard Christian preachers attempt to use Peter’s statement, “...God has made this Jesus, *whom you crucified....*” (**Acts 2:36**) in attempting to make the case that all people are guilty of murdering Jesus.
 - 2. However, based on what Peter says here in **Acts 13:27-29**, as well as what he said to the household of Cornelius in **Acts 10:39**, it seems clear to me that Peter was NOT preaching that all people are responsible for the murder of Jesus.
 - a. Peter lays the blame for that upon the Jews in Jerusalem who were involved in rejecting Him and demanding that He be crucified.
- vi. The outline of Paul’s message in Pisidian Antioch, as I see it:
 - 1. The kingdom of God, as promised in the prophecies.
 - a. Jesus fulfilled “the promise” given to David that one of his descendants would be “raised up” to reign over the eternal kingdom.
 - 2. The suffering, rejection and death of Jesus in fulfillment of the prophecies.
 - 3. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
 - a. Seen by many eyewitnesses.
 - b. In fulfillment of the prophecies.
- f. Also, we can add to the growing collection of prophecies about Jesus used by the apostles and other disciples in **Acts**, another powerful one, directly quoted here:
 - i. **Psalm 2**, which tells us:
 - 1. The Anointed One, the Christ, is God’s Son.
 - 2. He will be opposed by the rulers of this world, who will conspire against Him.
 - 3. He will (eventually) rule with a rod of iron.

- g. For ideas we might consider for an 'evangelistic study series', perhaps we should start by considering the main points and Scriptures used by Paul in this sermon.
 - i. This approach might be worthy of attention, especially by those who want to *look to Paul* to find the gospel message.
 - ii. My advice: Start by reading **Acts 13** to know what Paul preached and how he presented the gospel to unbelievers (rather than starting with **Romans**, which was addressed to people who were already Christians).

V. Rejected by the Jews, Paul Turns to the Gentiles

- a. Read **Acts 13:42-52**.
 - i. Many Jews and proselytes (God-fearing Gentiles) follow Paul and Barnabas after they preach in the synagogue.
 - ii. Many of the Jews get upset at the immediate Gentile interest in the gospel. The Jews then begin persecuting Paul and Barnabas.
 - iii. Paul then turns to the Gentiles and quotes from **Isaiah 49**, which encourages the Gentiles (as this prophecy foretells the Gentiles receiving salvation.)
 - 1. **Isaiah** has a lot to say about the nations, the Gentiles, turning to God in the end.

VI. On to Other Cities in Asia Minor, then Return Trip

- a. Read **Acts 14:1-7**.
 - i. In Iconium: Paul's preaching causes great division, with opposition from many of the Jews.
 - ii. The Gentiles and Jews made a "violent attempt... to abuse and stone them...."
 - iii. Paul and Barnabas flee to the cities of Lystra and Derbe.
- b. Read **Acts 14:7-20**.
 - i. A crippled man is miraculously healed in Lystra.
 - ii. The pagan Gentiles in that city incorrectly conclude that Paul and Barnabas are "gods" and attempt to offer sacrifices to them.
 - iii. Paul preaches "we are only men" and calls the people of that city to believe in *the one God who made all things*.

iv. Enemies from Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia follow them to Lystra and turn the crowds against them.

1. While Paul had previously hunted down and persecuted Christians, now *he is the one being hunted down!*

v. Paul is stoned by the people and left for dead.

1. He arises, returns to the city, then departs the next day.

c. Read **Acts 14:21-28**.

i. Paul returns to the cities he had previously visited on the way back, to strengthen the disciples.

ii. Paul certainly is not preaching any form of the so-called “prosperity gospel”!

1. Paul is stoned for the gospel message!

2. “...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must *through many tribulations* enter the kingdom of God.’” (**Acts 14:22**, NKJV)

3. This is the challenge: persevering through trials.

iii. They appoint elders in every church among the cities where the gospel had recently been planted.

1. “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” (**Acts 14:23**, NKJV)

2. **Question:** But aren’t these churches all full of new converts? Doesn’t Paul say in **1 Timothy** that the candidates for elder must not be recent converts?

a. “...not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.” (**1 Timothy 3:6**, NKJV)

b. Perhaps they were appointing mature Jewish believers who had been part of God’s kingdom for years before, but who had just recently converted to the the Christian faith.

3. The Greek word rendered “appoint” here, translated “ordain” in some older translations, comes from root words that suggest ‘*extending hands upon* (someone)’.

4. With praying and fasting, commending them to the Lord.
 - a. Read **Titus 1:5-9**.
 - b. Paul told Titus to appoint elders in Crete in order to “set in order the things that are lacking”.
 - c. **Questions:** If Paul was commenting on *our church*, would he say that something was lacking? Would he say that something needs to be “set in order”?
 - i. What are the implications for those of us who are in church fellowships that currently lack any designated elders/bishops/overseers?
 - ii. Perhaps we need to take a careful look at what the Scriptures say regarding how a church is supposed to be ordered and led.