

Paul Takes up the Torch - First Missionary Journey to Cyprus and Central Turkey

This chapter marks a turning point in the Book of Acts. The story now focuses on Paul and his work of spreading the Gospel among the Gentiles, whereas before it had been on Peter and his work among the Jews.

V 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.

“Certain prophets and teachers.” Some of these were likely the brave pioneers who were the first to witness to the Greeks back in Acts 11:19-21. *“Simeon. . . called Niger.”* “Niger” means “black”, so he might have been an African, or else very dark-skinned. *“Lucius of Cyrene.”* From Libya. *“Manaen. . . brought up with Herod the tetrarch.”* Apparently he was raised in the household of Herod the Great (who met the Wise Men) and was a foster-brother of Herod Antipas (who ruled during the time of Jesus’ ministry). Manaen’s presence showed that the Early Church had made some major inroads amongst the upper classes. And of course, Barnabas and Saul are mentioned.

V 2-3 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.”

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

“The Holy Spirit said. . . having fasted and prayed.” The disciples in Antioch were good examples of letting the “Holy Spirit” influence them and of being desperate to find God’s will.

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

“Being sent out by the Holy Spirit.” Again the Holy Spirit is mentioned as the driving force behind the new mission; it was a work of God’s doing, not man’s. No more was God’s Spirit locked up in the tabernacle of the Israelites but was now available to any who wished to avail themselves of that Power.

“Seleucia.” The port city for Antioch 16 miles downstream on the Orontes River. ***“Sailed to Cyprus.”*** Cyprus was a good place to start since it was Barnabas’ home territory and was only a two-day journey from Antioch. Their journey began in A.D. 46 or 47 and lasted for one and a half years.

Method of Expansion

“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as. . . Antioch.” (Ac.11:19)

The only time that total scattering abroad happened to the Church was when the hammer of persecution came down and scattered them. But it wasn’t long before they bunched up again and got together and co-operated up at Antioch and started the greatest missionary venture of their generation.

They had learned their lesson at Jerusalem; they had holed up too long and had not gotten the job done. However, here at Antioch you find them sending out teams hither, thither and yon, but they didn’t send out a team prematurely.

They secured their basic beachhead first before they did any further major witnessing. It says that Barnabas and Saul (or Paul) came to Antioch and ***“that a whole year they assembled themselves with the Church, and taught much people,”*** (Ac.11:26) Paul spent a long time in Damascus (Ac.9:1-25) and in Jerusalem (Ac.9:26-30) and Antioch (Ac.11:26), the other home bases, before he was ready for the field and they were ready to do without him!

Then when the time was right, ***“The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” “to bear My name (Jesus) before the Gentiles.”*** (Ac.13:2; 9:15)

However, on such a major missionary venture as this Paul and Barnabas didn’t go alone. The Scripture says, ***“they had also John to their minister”***, and farther on in the account it speaks of ***“Paul and his company”*** (Ac.13:5,13) to show there were several people besides those named - a major evangelizing force. . .

(from lecture by [David Berg](#) - August, 1974)

V 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.

“Salamis”, on the east coast of Cyprus, was its chief port and commercial center.

“They preached. . . in the synagogues.” Being Jews, the synagogues were an open door for Barnabas and Saul. Also, if they were to preach first to the Gentiles, then likely the Jews would not have wanted to listen to them at all.

V 6-7 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, 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.

“Paphos.” On the western coast, was the capital of Cyprus and seat of the Roman government and also a major center for the worship of Venus.

“A certain sorcerer.” The Greek word used here, *magon*, means “wise man”. Because of his inclination towards the Dark side, this particular “wise man” had become *“a false prophet”*. (For more information on this, see notes on Acts 8:9.)

“Bar-Jesus” means “son of Jesus (or Joshua)” (no connection to Jesus the Messiah). The name “Jesus” wasn’t an uncommon name amongst the Jews then. It was a shortened version of “Jehovah saves” and was certainly an appropriate personal name for the Messiah, the name which the angel Gabriel commanded Mary to give her child, the Son of God. (Luke 1:31) The name “Christ” was actually a title and was the Greek form for the Hebrew word “Messiah”.

“The proconsul, Sergius Paulus.” The Roman provincial governor of Cyprus, and curious (*“an intelligent man”*). The fact that he *“called for Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God”* seems to indicate he was worthy and receptive.

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

“Elymas.” The sorcerer’s Greek name; it means “magician”. As often happens in witnessing situations, he played the role of adversary trying to *“turn the proconsul away from the faith”*. Most likely, the sorcerer, for purely selfish reasons, saw the apostles as rivals whom he feared would threaten his own position of influence in the court of the Roman governor.

V 9-10 Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him

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?

“Saul, who also is called Paul.” From here on Saul is called by his Roman name Paul. It was a small way of “becoming one” in the western Roman world where most of his ministry would take place.

“Filled with the Holy Spirit.” Filled with the righteous indignation of the Holy Spirit, as David before Goliath, Paul *“looked intently at him”* and socked it to this false prophet Elymas who had dared to defy the messengers of God.

“Perverting the straight ways of the Lord.” Being a Jew, Elymas would have known something about the *“ways of the Lord”*. Paul’s reprimand is reminiscent of Peter’s rebuke to Simon the sorcerer who in Acts 8 wanted to buy the Holy Ghost.

V 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.

“You shall be blind. . . for a time.” It is a rare thing to invoke a curse on someone in the name of the Lord, but once in awhile that’s the medicine that’s needed, and it worked. In fact blindness was the medicine that Paul himself had to take a few years before on the Damascus road when he, just like this sorcerer in Cyprus, fought violently against the earliest disciples.

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

This miracle, witnessed by Sergius Paulus, made him a believer who was *“astonished at the teaching of the Lord”*.

. . .When Paul landed on the Island of Cyprus, he would have been there yet if he’d just associated himself with the fishermen. . . but he was on his way to see the governor! He won him to the Lord, and as a result, Cyprus became the world’s first Christian nation because he won the one with the power and authority to permit it and finance his preaching to help the poor!

When Paul went to the common people only, he got knocked out and the officials ran him out of town when they heard about the stir he was making and they didn’t know what he was up to. But when he went to the powerful first, they got the point and got Jesus, and they had the power and

wealth to permit him and finance him. They needed the knowledge of why and what he was preaching, and that it was something everybody needed, including them!

(from lecture by [David Berg](#) - March, 1973)

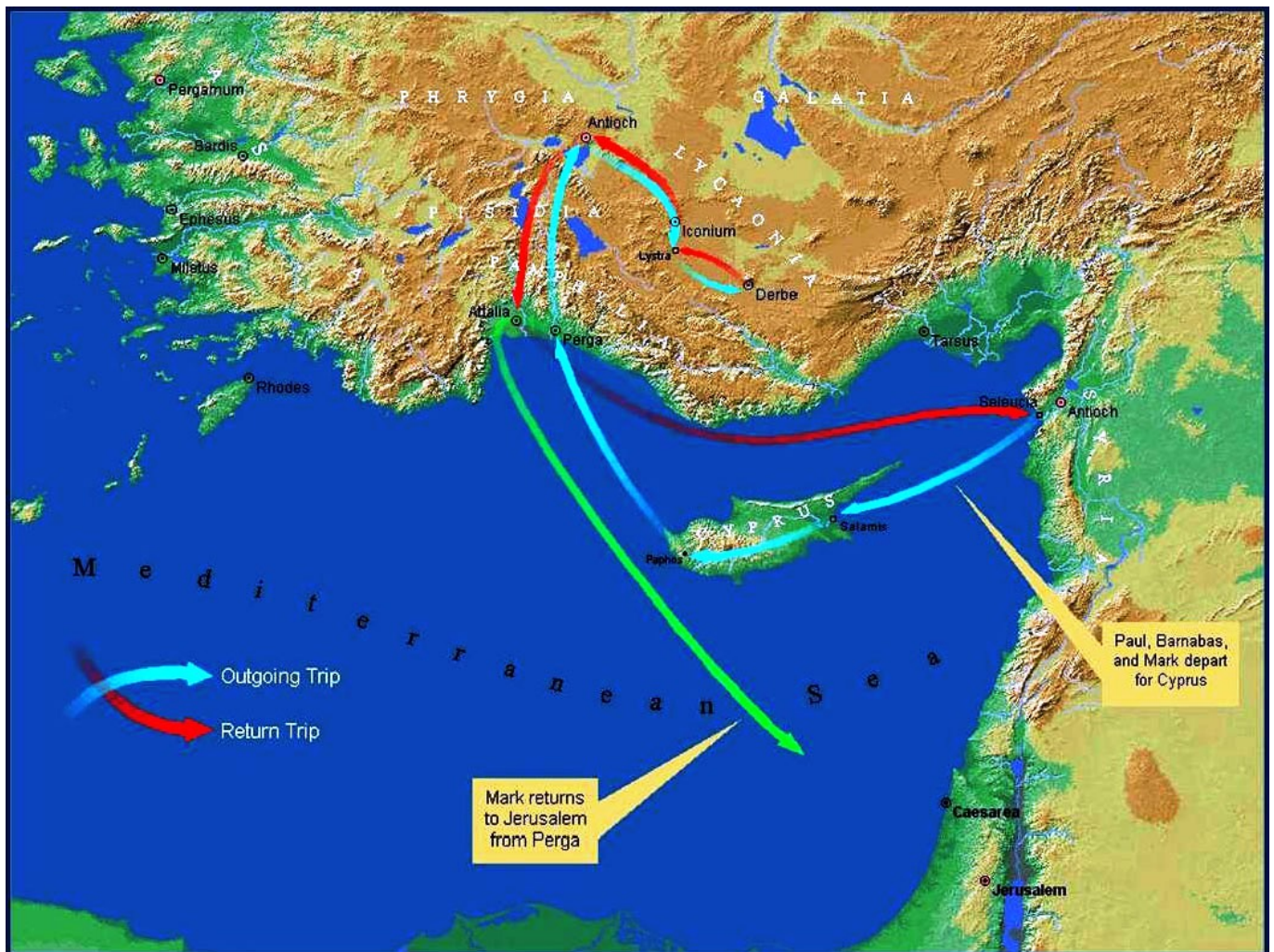
V 13 Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

“Perga.” A major coastal city in the Roman province of Pamphylia in Asia Minor, 200 miles north of Cyprus.

“John, departing from them.” It seems John Mark left the team prematurely and returned to Jerusalem. However, he was reinstated into Paul’s good graces later on. (Colossians 4:10, 2Timothy 4:11)

V 14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.

“Antioch in Pisidia.” Not to be confused with their home base city of Antioch in Syria. This one was located in the mountains of Asia Minor (Turkey). To get there was a long and arduous journey, especially since travel by land in those days had to be done on foot, or on the back of a donkey or camel. However, because the Romans had built a system of paved roads throughout the empire, travel had become easier and more predictable than it had ever been before.



Map of First Missionary Journey

V 15 And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”

“If ye have any word. . . say on.” Another one of God’s golden opportunities to witness. Paul, recognizing his cue, didn’t hesitate at this crucial moment and took full advantage of the opportunity to deliver God’s message.

V 16 Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:

“And you who fear God.” Paul makes sure to address the Gentile believers

who were there also.

V 17-22 “The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it.

“Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness.

“And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment.

“After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. “And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.

“And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, *‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’*

In order to fully explain the transformation of his religion and doctrine, Paul starts with a background history of Israel before launching into his main message. This approach was similar to that of the martyr Stephen and was used probably to try to win the confidence of his audience as well as prepare them for the radical message he had come there to give.

“Seven nations.” Deuteronomy 7:1 lists these *“seven nations greater and mightier than you”* whom the children of Israel conquered as they took possession of their Promised Land.

“I have found David. . . a man after My own heart.” Paul quotes from 1Samuel 13:14, Psalm 89:20.

V 23-25 “From this man’s seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior - Jesus -

“after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.

“And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not He. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.’

“From this man’s seed.” There were many promises that the Messiah would arise from David’s *“seed”*, from his descendants. (2Sam 7:12-16, Isaiah 11:10, Jeremiah

23:5) Here was the “springboard” Paul could use to jump out of past Old Testament history into the events of their present day, events which had so recently brought the wonderful fulfillment of those promises of old.

“John. . . preached before His coming.” Paul continues the background history, jumping from King David’s time to the time just prior to Jesus’ ministry when John the Baptist was preaching the *“baptism of repentance”*.

V 26 “Men and brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent.

“And those among you who fear God.” Again Paul makes it a point to include the Gentiles along with the Jews.

V 27-29 “For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him.

“And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death.

“Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.

“Those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers.” Whether or not the foreign Jews and Gentiles compared themselves much with the dwellers in Jerusalem we don’t know, but chances are that Paul’s foreign audience might have felt a trace of smug satisfaction to hear that the Jerusalem-dwellers, the people who were supposed to be so expert in religious matters, hadn’t scored so well lately, having made the colossal blunder of killing the Messiah.

And why did they commit such a crime? *“Because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets”*. They didn’t have a spiritual connection with God, or true dedication, and this blinded them to the fact that their Messiah had arrived.

Paul also mentions twice the point that they had *“fulfilled”* what *“was written concerning Him”*. It was needful to stress that the Old Testament had predicted what would happen: we know, for example, that the crucifixion was predicted (in Psalm 22) at a time when this form of execution was not used, or His burial in a tomb (Isaiah 53:9) even though victims of crucifixions were tossed into mass graves. And there are several other such predictions about Jesus’ life and ministry.

The Word is what builds faith, and the people needed to know that something so contrary to natural expectation as the shameful manner of their Messiah's death had been predicted in the Old Testament.

V 30 "But God raised Him from the dead:

Now comes the climax of Paul's message, the Resurrection, the most remarkable comeback from seeming defeat that had ever happened in all of history.

V 31 "He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people.

"He was seen for many days." See Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20-21, Acts 1:9, 1Corinthians 15:6-8.

V 32-33 "And we declare to you glad tidings - that promise which was made to the fathers.

"God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm:

'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'

"We declare to you glad tidings." When Peter gave his stirring messages to the crowds in Jerusalem, it seemed at first like "sad tidings" because his words exposed the people as accomplices to the murder of their Messiah. But really, it was "*glad tidings*" as Paul says here: The Resurrection brought hope for all of humanity to know that the gloom and hopelessness surrounding death was abolished now through faith in the One who had conquered death and brought forgiveness of sin. The sting of the Curse that had fallen on mankind had been removed. (1Corinthians 15:55)

"You are My Son. . ." Quoted from Psalm 2:7

V 34-35 "And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus:

'I will give you the sure mercies of David.'

"Therefore He also says in another Psalm:

'You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.'

More quotes from Isaiah 55:3, Psalm 16:10. Again, it was important for the Jews who had knowledge of the Scriptures to know that their Old Testament supported these revolutionary truths that Paul was trying to get across - about the Messiah, His Resurrection, and the new Age of Grace.

"I will give you the sure mercies of David." The passage quoted here was from Isaiah 55, a prophecy that described how the blessings of God are freely available to anyone. The first part of that verse said, *"Incline your ear, and come to Me: hear, and your soul shall live."* No preconditions, or keeping the Law of Moses, or any other kind of works were required. Through this prophetic message the Lord was trying, even way back then, to lead His people into a more intimate relationship with Him and away from the more formal relationship, which was all that was required in the Law of Moses.

Then the verse goes on to say, *"And I will make an everlasting covenant with you - the sure mercies of David."* Paul, and most Jews at the time, understood that the *"sure mercies"* were the blessings and promises given to King David and would be fulfilled in the Messiah, who was to descend from David, which Paul had already announced in verse 23: *"From this man's [David's] seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior - Jesus."* And thus Paul uses this passage from Isaiah as an introduction to the rest of his message about the coming of the Messiah, His Resurrection, and His power to forgive sin. This understanding was perfectly acceptable at that time in history.

However, although the passage in Isaiah 55:3 about the *"everlasting covenant"* with its *"sure mercies of David"* saw much of its fulfillment at Jesus' first coming, there is reason to believe that there is more yet to come. Those prophetic words in Isaiah 55 seem to have a wider application that goes even beyond the grace and divine favor that was launched into the world in the early years after Jesus' first coming. Verse 13 of that chapter states, *"Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree."* This suggests a major change will take place in our earth's environment.

Christ's Second Coming will usher in a new period of divine favor. We know from certain passages that this coming era, known as the Millennium, will feature righteous, just government; peaceful living conditions and no war; and even removal of some aspects of the Curse, such as the enmity in the animal kingdom. (Isaiah 9:6-7, Revelation 20:4, Micah 4:3, Isaiah 11:6-9) And in the domain of

human relations, most likely, we can expect to see implemented a much higher standard of tolerance, loving interaction, and fair-mindedness.

Another interesting point to ponder: Just as David of old and the prophets foretold certain aspects of the future covenant, so it could be that certain aspects of what is coming in the future are also being foreseen by today's prophets and men of God.

**V 36-37 "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption;
"but He whom God raised up saw no corruption."**

Similar to what Peter had done when addressing the crowds in Jerusalem, Paul also clarifies that David's prophecy about the "*Holy One*" not seeing corruption was not about David, who "*saw corruption*", but about Jesus, who "*saw no corruption*". He had to explain exactly how these Old Testament Scriptures were meant to be applied - not to the old king David, but to the Messiah. The passage in Psalm 16:10 clearly states, "*Nor will You allow Your Holy One (the Messiah) to see corruption,*" and this was fulfilled in the death of Jesus, not that of David.

It is quite natural for societies to revere their ancestors, and often this can transform into a form of ancestor-worship, which in this case seems to have led to some misunderstanding of the old Scriptures about David and his descendant the Messiah. So possibly, to counteract any such confused thinking, Paul makes it clear that they are to worship Jesus the Messiah, not the highly revered king David of old, whom some, apparently, mistook to be the "*Holy One*" spoken of in this 1,000 year old prophecy.

The "David" of the past was only a prophet whose job was to lay in advance the foundation for Christ's first coming. (And, it might be added, the modern day "*house of David*" is preparing the way for Christ's second coming.

In the New Testament the "*house of David*" was first manifested amongst those Jews who accepted Christ. But as the Early Church soon found out, the line of inheritance of the "*house of David*" extended much further - to those who were Jews "*inwardly*" for whom "*circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit*", which included vast numbers of Gentile peoples. (Romans 2:29).

Thus, the "*house of David*" did not end with the dismantling of the Israeli nation

in 70 A.D. by the Romans. But the *“house of David”* has manifested itself throughout history in the many groups of true Christian believers who have sprung up out of various nations and races and were used by the Lord to attract other truth-seekers and peace-makers into His Kingdom.

The finale of this great movement of the *“house of David”* will come soon in the Time of the End. As in the days of the Early Church, the final Church will experience a time of great harvest, and can look forward to a glorious future that will usher in the dynamic presence of the Almighty, in greater intimacy and in greater power.

V 38-39 “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;

“and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

“Forgiveness of sins.” The Jews were accustomed to making sacrifices to atone for sins; this was one of the features of Judaism that set it apart from other religions of that time - this consciousness of wrongdoing and the need to give account to and seek forgiveness for it from God. Of course, much of this *“atonement”* ritual was not a heartfelt thing, but had become just a mechanical exercise of going through the motions.

There were a multitude of rules in the Old Testament outlining the different infractions and required atonements. So for the Jews it was quite an adjustment in their thinking and habits to now be *“justified from”*, or *“freed from”* all those old rules. Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself paid the penalty for sin once and for all, so there was no longer any need for all the atonement sacrifices.

Although it should have been a tremendous relief to be released from the burden of the Law, nevertheless, this *“good news”* didn’t sit too well with many of the Jews. Mainly it was the result of pride. No more could they feel righteous or superior just because of their dutiful keeping of the Law.

In a way it was easier to do it the old way than to keep the new law of love that Jesus brought in as the new yardstick for human behavior: it required a lot more giving of oneself than did the old Law - loving one’s neighbor as oneself, loving one’s enemy, and so on (as outlined in Matthew 22:37-40 and the *“Sermon on the Mount”* in Matthew 5-7).

V 40-41 “Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:

“Behold, you despisers, Marvel and perish! For I work a work in your days, A work which you will by no means believe, Though one were to declare it to you.”

“Beware therefore.” Paul ends with a warning to his listeners that they be receptive and not as those who would *“by no means believe, though one were to declare it to you”* (a quote from Habakkuk 1:5).

V 42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.

Evidently, the Gentiles were genuinely hungering for the truth, more so than were the Jews, many of whom were too insulated in their own righteousness of keeping the Law of Moses to want to hear these strange new truths that threatened to shatter their old belief system.

One could imagine that the Gentiles, who had made the big step of converting to Judaism and experienced so much change in their belief systems already, were more likely to be genuine truth-seekers and more apt to be flexible and open towards new ideas; they would have picked up more readily on the significance of what the apostles were saying.

Whereas for many of the Jews, their religion was inherited and more a matter of tradition than a sincere appreciation of truth. For the Gentiles it was easier to recognize Judaism as the old way that needed to be forsaken, and to adopt the new way of grace as the next logical and forward step in their walk with God.

V 43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

“Devout proselytes.” These were Gentile converts to Judaism whose commitment had gone as far as to undergo circumcision.

“Continue in the grace of God.” With all their previous instruction in the Law of Moses, it would have been easy for the *“Jews and devout proselytes”* to slip back into some form of Mosaic legalism.

“Paul and Baranabas.” From here on it is no more *“Barnabas and Saul”*, but *“Paul and Barnabas”*. The new phrasing seems to indicate a role reversal. This may have been humbling for Barnabas, but it often happens that the elder (Barnabas in this case) has to step aside and allow the junior (Paul in this case) to shine forth and claim his anointing.

V 44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.

“Almost the whole city.” News could spread fast by word-of-mouth in those days, even without cellphones and internet communication.

V 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.

Since their followers preferred now to listen to Paul and Barnabas, the Jews became *“filled with envy”* as they saw their influence dwindling before the congregation. Envy was the root cause of much of the persecution in the Book of Acts; sometimes misguided idealism was a factor as well (as was the case with Paul).

V 46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.

“Paul and Barnabas grew bold.” They did not allow themselves to be intimidated by the Jews’ *“contradicting and blaspheming”*. The result of their courageous stand of faith was that *“when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad. . . And the Word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region”*. (verse 48-49)

Paul and Barnabas set the record straight to the unbelieving Jews: *“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first.”* But since the Jews would not receive it, they said, *“We turn to the Gentiles.”*

God never planned for salvation to be an exclusive possession of the Jews, and through the process of time, the knowledge of God’s ways and truth had become somewhat “bottled up” within the confines of Judaism. It was time now to break out of the old mold and share that knowledge with the whole world.

“Judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life.” Paul and Barnabas were letting them know that the repercussions in the Afterlife for those who rejected the “word of God” would be serious, and they would only have themselves to blame because of their own poor decisions.

Inclusion of the Gentiles:

And don’t forget that word “whosoever” in verse 26: *“Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.”* Thank God, apparently a number of the Jews did receive the message, according to verse 43: *“Many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.”*

But this new doctrine caused such an uproar that everybody turned out next Sabbath to hear it. Obviously the Jewish church hadn’t had that big a crowd in a long time, so *“they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming”* (Acts 13:45).

So the apostles *“waxed bold, and said, it was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth”* (Acts 13:46-47).

This made the Gentiles very happy, and *“they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region”* (Acts 13:48-49), which shows they made very good witnesses.

But also notice the chronological sequence of the Gospel in verse 46—that it was to be preached first to the Jews, or the Jewish church of that day, the supposed worshippers of the true God, to give them first chance to hear it, but also the choice to reject it, which, evidently, a good many of them promptly did, stirring up a lot of trouble for the apostles, verse 50, so that they had to leave town. Result: They split, and took off for other parts, when the heat got a little too heavy. But they weren’t sad about it; in fact, they were actually glad: *“filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost”* (Acts 13:52). End of story—or, perhaps we should say the beginning of a new era of history, and a new phase in a revelation of the truth of God—the so-called

“time of the Gentiles,” or, as some call it, the church age—today.

This did not mean that God was entirely through with the Jewish people. It simply meant that what He’d been trying to show them all along, and what they themselves proved continually, was that they were absolutely no better than anyone else, without God, and they could only be saved by His grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). They had to come to God the same way as everybody else, just like the Gentiles, the despised people of their day.

Salvation had always been open to these Greeks and other Gentiles, and you will find indications of this in the Old Testament. You can also see this by verse 43 of Acts 13. Many of them were present in the synagogue on that day that Paul and Barnabas split the church. These Gentile believers among the Jews were called “proselytes,” which is proof that the kingdom was always open to those who believed, regardless of nationality or racial background. These things had absolutely nothing to do with their salvation, and there had been no change at all in God’s plan to save “*whosoever among you feareth God*” (Acts 13:26). Hallelujah.

Nothing had changed in the eyes or the mind of God. He had only further opened the eyes of believers to the truth that “*God is no respecter of persons*” (Acts 10:34), “*and the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent*” (Acts 17:30).

(from essay by [David Berg](#), written 1971)

V 47 “For so the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

“*A light to the Gentiles.*” Quotes Isaiah 49:6 which very clearly outlines God’s plan to spread His love and truth beyond the borders of Israel and into all the world.

V 48-49 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.

“*They were glad.*” To learn that this great God of the Jews was so intent on reaching out to them and including them in His circle caused no small rejoicing among the new Gentile believers.

“*As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*” If Paul and Barnabas

had not obeyed the command to be a *“light to the Gentiles”*, or as Jesus re-stated it in Mark 16:15, to *“preach the gospel to every creature”*, then the people who were *“appointed”* or destined to be saved would not have been saved at that time. Their salvation would have been delayed, and this would have been a loss both to them and to God’s work in the Earth.

“The word of the Lord. . . spread throughout all the region.” Evidently, the Gentiles were good witnesses. In contrast to other national gods, this God of the Jews did not have to rely on the force of arms or conquest of nations to claim new worshipers. The irresistible power of God’s love, the Holy Spirit, and the truth of the Gospel manifested in these new Gentile followers did the job well enough.

V 50-51 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium.

“The Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women, and the chief men.” In the Roman empire the Jews wielded some degree of influence, which several years earlier had been used against Pilate. (John 19:12-13) In Cyprus Paul and Barnabas were able to nullify the influence of the powerful Jewish sorcerer there, Bar-Jesus, but in this city of Antioch they did not have the same kind of opportunity. Who these *“devout and prominent women”* were is not very clear.

But if they were *“devout”*, then chances are they were converts to Judaism and under the influence of the Jewish priests. They were *“prominent women”*, meaning they circulated in the elite circles of the city. The Roman author, Strabo, wrote that the women in this part of Asia exerted a powerful influence in society.

“Shook off the dust of their feet.” It was a Jewish custom, based on antagonism towards the *“unclean”* Gentiles, not to bring even Gentile dust into Israel. By this action Paul and Barnabas were saying the Jews (and their dust) were no better than the heathen they so despised. This was also Jesus’ counsel in the Gospels to do as a sign against those who rejected the Gospel. (Matthew 10:14-15)

Paul and Barnabas did return later to this city of Pisidian Antioch, once all the turmoil had died down. (Acts 14:21)

V 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

“Filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” It was time for a victory celebration, knowing they had fulfilled their mission.

Where Is the True “Kingdom of God”?

“And when He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, the kingdom of God cometh not by observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:20-21).

Those of you looking for the kingdom of God on earth will only find it within your own hearts and fellowship of the saints, the children of God. Any looking for any more literal promised land, or kingdom of heaven on earth, will have to await the Millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ.

I didn’t find it in Israel, I assure you! If anything, it was a poor substitute, a counterfeit, and a delusion. It’s no refuge for Christians, that’s for sure, and we had better thank God for what He has given us—a more wonderful and glorious kingdom of the children of God than would be at all possible in earthly Israel.

In fact, Israel reminds us more of America than any other country we visited, with all its busy materialism, its riches, power, and armaments, its noisy traffic and air pollution, and its increasingly materialistically minded younger generation. The dream of nearly every Israeli we met was not an idealistic and spiritual Israel, but another little America on wheels, and they’re getting there fast, sad to say.

We have now left behind us the shattered materialistic dream of a literal Promised Land and are moving on into the heavenly reality of the kingdom of God in the hearts of men.

We have been liberated from the narrow confines of earthly human limitations into the glorious freedoms of the realm of the reality of His Spirit. Our vision has expanded beyond national boundaries of human origin to that of His worldwide universal church; from tiny isolated revolts to widespread worldwide warfare in the Spirit; from insignificant earthly goals to the interplanetary heavenly kingdom. From an earthly Sinai which cannot be touched to the new and heavenly Jerusalem built of living stones one by one; from the superstitious darkness of traditionalism into the glorious light of His love. We are the children of God. We have heaven in our hearts, the promised land of His kingdom within! Let’s spread its glories abroad in the hearts of all children of men.

This truth is so tremendous, it's almost beyond comprehension! We are stunned with the stupendous magnitude of the Spirit, so far beyond finite minds of men. We are shooting for the stars, and beyond. Why piddle around with puddles when there are oceans to swim in, and all space to revel in! At last we're free, thank God.

It's a terrific transition, like being born, to be suddenly catapulted from the comfortable cradle of a dogmatic doctrine into the full stature of the spiritual man, but it's worth it all. For we enter a new world of freedom from the shackles of the flesh, into the vast and boundless universe of the Spirit. We are free—free to do His will, free to follow Him whithersoever He leads, to abandon the boundaries of man for the boundless abundance of God. Hallelujah, we're free!

Suddenly I feel liberated, as if from an old burden, an ancient bondage, a binding tradition, into the fullness of the stature of God. I have come out into the sunlight with a sudden recognition of what it means to be a son of God in all its fullness, instead of a mere child of fleshly Abraham, with only an earthly home.

There's no stopping us now with some earthly destination. Heaven is my home. *"Earth is My footstool"* (Isaiah 66:1), a mere stepping stone to all the glories of God. *"If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, but My kingdom is not of this world"* (John 18:36). This world is not my home; I'm just passing through.

***"Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city. . . a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Hebrews 11:12-16,10).**

For *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath*

foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Hebrews 11:8-10).

Even though he got to the earthly Promised Land, he never found the place he was looking for, because it wasn't there. Israel's not where it's at. Israel couldn't even begin to hold it. If you want to read a description of the real thing, you'll have to turn to the grand finale of the Bible, Revelation chapters 21 and 22, the thunderous climax of the symphony of God, a place of such resplendent beauty that it lifts you into the heavenlies, beyond the imagination of man.

“But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). Hallelujah. Praise His name.

How could we have been so carnal as to have longed for an earthly home? How could we have been so fleshly as to have desired an earthly rest from our labors? How could we have been so limited in our spiritual horizons as to have hoped for some earthly fulfillment?

How could we have been so blind as not to have known that there was no exception to His admonition: *“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2).*

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven” (2 Corinthians 5:1-2).

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). Amen.

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.” (Romans 8:19) Hallelujah.

(From essay by [David Berg](#), written 1971, Copyright © February 1971 by The Family International)

[\(Continue to ACTS, chapter 14\)](#)