

Acts 13

The journeys of Paul begin with this chapter. Barnabas and Saul had returned to Antioch after carrying benevolence to the Judaeian brethren and they, with three others, are "ministering to the Lord." As they fast and pray, the Holy Spirit commands "Separate unto me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). So, after fasting and praying, they laid hands on them, sending them away. Early disciples and even Paul himself frequently fasted (2 Cor. 11:27). Fasting is an individual matter, but modern men have not grown out of the need for it. Serious and sober reflection upon God, our blessings and our responsibilities to Him are always in order. When the brethren laid hands on Barnabas and Saul it was not to impart the Holy Spirit to them but to solemnly show they were doing what the Holy Spirit had commanded: "Separate unto me..."

The company of brethren, including Mark, departed from the seaport of Seleucia. Mark, to whom the second account of Christ's life is credited, was mentioned in the 12th chapter for it was in his mother's home that brethren had gathered, praying for Peter (Acts 12:12). He was the cousin of Barnabas and Peter spoke of him as his son (Col. 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:13). The destination of these brethren was Cyprus. Whether the Holy Spirit directed this island as their first evangelistic endeavor is not stated. Since He will later forbid them to travel to certain regions and bide them go to other places, it is possible He direct them to Cyprus (Acts 16:7, 10). But since men from Cyprus had first preached to Gentiles in Antioch and Barnabas who himself was from there, it may simply have just been a logical starting point (Acts 11:19, 20; 4:36).

Two cities, Salamis and Paphos, were places where the Word was preached. What result (if any) they had at Salamis is not mentioned. Only one convert is mentioned, a proconsul named Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7). He had called Barnabas and Saul to him that he might hear the Word. But he had in his employment a certain man named Bar-Jesus, a Jew, a sorcerer and a false prophet. This man withstood Barnabas and Saul. It was here Paul wrought his first miracles by smiting Elymas (Bar-Jesus) with blindness for a season (Acts 13:11). Thus, he who sought to keep the proconsul in spiritual darkness was smitten with physical darkness! The proconsul believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord (Acts 13:12). From this point forward, Saul will now be identified as Paul, the Greek form of his name. This was likely done because his work was primarily among the Gentiles. And, the narrative will no longer

read "Barnabas and Saul," but "Paul and Barnabas," implying that Paul has assumed the prominent position in this journey they are making.

Paul and his company sailed from Cyprus and came to Perga in Pamphylia. Here Mark left them, returning to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). No explanation is given for his action nor does the historian reflect on the attitude of the companions he left behind. But, this incident will cause problems between Paul and Barnabas sometimes later (Acts 15:36-40).

The company came to Antioch of Pisidia and they entered into the synagogue and taught the people. Paul was the speaker and his sermon is recorded in verses 19-31. In this sermon Paul began with Israel in Egypt, telling how God with a high arm led them forth from there. He mentions the 40 years of wanderings, the destruction of the seven nations in Canaan and Israel's settling in the land. For about 450 years they were governed by judges, but then God gave them a king, Saul, whom he later removed to place David in his stead. Paul said David was a man after God's own heart and to David God gave certain promises, which promises had now been fulfilled in raising up Jesus.

Paul said that because the people knew not the voice of the prophets, they fulfilled them by rejecting and crucifying Jesus. But, God raised him up. Paul used three passages to prove Christ's resurrection was predicted in Old Testament scripture. Psalms 16:10 was quoted also by Peter at Pentecost when he made the same point. The second scripture was "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David" (Isa. 40:3). The third passage was Psalms 2:7, "Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee." This passage is quoted three times in the New Testament; here in Acts 13:33 and then again in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5. Does the quoted passage refer to Jesus' resurrection or to His advent to this earth? Because to "raise up" does not necessary refer to "resurrection," but may also mean to "elevate" or "bring to the fore," some are disposed to apply the passage to Jesus' advent to the earth. Two things are certain. The context of the passage is discussing Christ's resurrection and Paul said that Christ was "declared to be the Son of God...by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

Having given proof of the resurrection of Christ, Paul then said that the good tidings of the promise made to the fathers ("in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" Gen. 22:18) was "that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins and by him everyone that believeth is justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38f). It was this point Paul made that had

already been, and would continue to be, a critical issue with Jewish hearers. For many, to teach that they could not be justified by the law of Moses was blasphemy. From Paul's teaching they drew some conclusions and charged him with teaching "all the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children neither to walk after the customs" (Acts 21:21). Such an inference was an erroneous one but, nonetheless, was put to great advantage in closing the minds of Jews to accept Paul's gospel teaching.

Whether Paul noticed some dissension with his lessons or simply that he warned them to be careful that they not reject the teaching because it was new, he said, "Beware therefore lest that come upon you which is spoken in the prophets..." (Acts 13:40f).

This message brought many hearers who were urged to continue in what they had learned. The large crowds it drew wrought jealous and caused some Jews to blaspheme and contradict the things Paul taught. To the dissenters Paul said: "It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Plots were laid by hardened Jews and persecution followed. Paul and Barnabas were cast out of their borders. The two men shook off the dust of their feet and went on to other places. The disciples who remained behind were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

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