

The Book of Acts

Paul's First Missionary Journey

Lesson #7 for August 18, 2018

Scriptures: Acts 13-14; 2 Corinthians 4:7-10; Romans 3:19; 9-11.

1. This lesson is about the intentional breaking down of the walls of separation between Jews and Gentiles in the Christian church as it grew. As we have already seen, that was a very hard lesson for the Jewish Christians to comprehend and accept.
2. Read Acts 11:19-26 and Galatians 2:11-13. Even in this clearly Gentile city sometimes called the "Queen of the East," the third-largest city in the Roman Empire of those days, the Jewish Christians had been spreading the gospel only to other Jews. Then came those missionaries from Libya (Cyrene) and Cyprus; when they reached Antioch, they began spreading the gospel openly to non-Jews. And we do not even know the names of those first Christian missionaries to the Gentiles!
3. The excitement that developed in the church at Antioch as a result of the conversion of non-Jews led the church in Jerusalem to send Barnabas to see what was happening. Barnabas, himself a Hellenistic Jew from Cyprus, soon recognized that God was at work in the church at Antioch. He needed more help. Then, he remembered that Paul was not far away in the city of Tarsus. This evangelistic duo of Barnabas and Paul caused a great surge in the membership of the church at Antioch.
4. What do you think would have happened if those Hellenistic Jews had not gone to Antioch and preached to the Gentiles? If there had not been an explosive growth in the church among Gentile believers in Antioch, might Barnabas have remained in Jerusalem? Would Barnabas have even called Paul to help? Would we ever have heard of Paul?
5. But, the Devil never gives up easily. Satan will always do his best to interrupt or prevent progress by any means he can devise. The growth of the church at Antioch was so great that even Peter himself went there and was caught up with the great evangelistic Spirit. Peter ate freely with the Gentiles until some of his fellow Jewish believers arrived from Jerusalem; then, Peter began to draw back, refusing to eat with those same Gentiles. Even Barnabas was swept up in that conservative Jewish action. It was finally necessary for Paul to rebuke Peter publicly for that cowardly action. (See Galatians 2:11-14.)
6. Based on what we know of the history of the early Christian church, it seems clear that Antioch became the new headquarters for the Christian church. It was at Antioch that followers of Jesus were first called *Christians*. (See Acts 11:26.)
7. In Acts 13 and 14, we next learn about the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas. We are told that there were prophets and/or teachers in the church in Antioch. Were Paul and Barnabas called prophets? Can you name any other people referred to as prophets in the New Testament? On the basis of what set of criteria were they judged to be prophets?
8. Read Acts 13:1-12. We do not know exactly what the impetus was that led the church at Antioch to send Paul and Barnabas on that first missionary journey. Remember that there were some people from Cyprus and Cyrene who had gone to Antioch and started preaching the gospel openly to Gentiles. Maybe, they were the ones who encouraged Paul and Barnabas to go back to Cyprus to spread the gospel there. In any case, the church leaders at Antioch laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas, anointed them, and sent them out to spread the gospel in new territories.

9. They sailed to Salamis on the island of Cyprus. No doubt, they visited synagogues and preached the gospel to various groups on the way. Barnabas himself, of course, was from Cyprus; it is possible they visited his home town. Paul and Barnabas took with them John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (Acts 15:39; Colossians 4:10) We do not know exactly what success Paul and Barnabas had in visiting those first few synagogues in Cyprus. But, there was enough excitement that when they arrived in Paphos, the local Roman governor of the island, Sergius Paulus, welcomed these two visitors and asked them to explain their mission.
10. But, even there, the Devil tried to interrupt the mission. A Jewish sorcerer named Elymas (in Greek) or Bar-Jesus tried to oppose their work.

Acts 13:9-11: ⁹Then Saul—also known as Paul—was filled with the Holy Spirit; he looked straight at the magician ¹⁰and said, “You son of the Devil! You are the enemy of everything that is good. You are full of all kinds of evil tricks, and you always keep trying to turn the Lord’s truths into lies! ¹¹The Lord’s hand will come down on you now; you will be blind and will not see the light of day for a time.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Acts 13:9–11). New York: American Bible Society.

11. Following this display of God’s power over His enemies and after having listened carefully to the teachings of Paul and Barnabas, the governor of the island believed.
12. Did Paul and Barnabas set off from Antioch with the specific purpose of taking the gospel to the Gentiles? Or, were they, first of all, focused on reaching Jews? Paul had been chosen by God to preach the gospel to Gentiles. What work did the Holy Spirit call them to do? (See Acts 13:2.) How much influence do you think that first message had on Paul’s later ministry? (See Acts 9:15.) Did Ananias tell Paul that he had been chosen to carry the gospel to the Gentiles? Since Paul was still a dedicated Pharisee, how do you think he would have initially responded to that task?
13. From Paphos the team sailed to Perga in Pamphylia where two significant changes took place. The young John Mark, faced with new difficulties and beginning to realize how challenging the mission would be, left the team and went back home.

It was here that Mark, overwhelmed with fear and discouragement, wavered for a time in his purpose to give himself wholeheartedly to the Lord’s work. Unused to hardships, he was disheartened by the perils and privations of the way. He had labored with success under favorable [170] circumstances; but now, amidst the opposition and perils that so often beset the pioneer worker, he failed to endure hardness as a good soldier of the cross. He had yet to learn to face danger and persecution and adversity with a brave heart. **As the apostles advanced, and still greater difficulties were apprehended, Mark was intimidated and, losing all courage, refused to go farther and returned to Jerusalem.**—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles** 169.2-170.0. [Bold type is added.]

14. How many of us would be willing to set out on a journey like that, not knowing what would happen and recognizing that we could potentially have our lives threatened? Paul recognized that it would not be easy. In fact, he had been told by Ananias back when he was baptized in Damascus that it would not be easy.
15. **Acts 9:15-16: The Lord said.... “And I myself will show him all that he must suffer for my sake.”**—*Good News Bible.** [Bold type is added.]

16. Read Acts 13:16-41 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. These are brief summaries of what was probably Paul's usual approach in new locations. As we have seen many times, Paul's sermons, like those of Stephen and Peter, were divided into three parts. There was an initial section, discussing events and prophecies in the Old Testament. That was followed by proof that Jesus was the fulfillment of those promises concerning a Descendant of David. (Acts 13:24-37) He concluded with a warning against rejecting the wonderful salvation offered through Jesus. (Acts 13:38-41)
17. The Jewish Christians had come to believe that salvation came through keeping the law according to their Jewish custom. Paul made it very clear that keeping the law was important; but, it never could bring salvation. We can only be saved by Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:1-4: ¹My brothers and sisters, how I wish with all my heart that my own people might be saved! How I pray to God for them! ²I can assure you that they are deeply devoted to God; but their devotion is not based on true knowledge. ³They have not known the way in which God puts people right with himself, and instead, they have tried to set up their own way; and so they did not submit themselves to God's way of putting people right. ⁴For Christ has brought the Law to an end, so that everyone who believes is put right with God.—*Good News Bible*.*

Galatians 2:16: Yet we know that **a person is put right with God only through faith in Jesus Christ, never by doing what the Law requires.** We, too, have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be put right with God through our faith in Christ, and not by doing what the Law requires. For no one is put right with God by doing what the Law requires.—*Good News Bible*.* [Bold type is added.]

18. What should be our understanding of the relationship between keeping the commandments of God—for which Seventh-day Adventists have become famous—and the process of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? Salvation comes only through Jesus Christ Himself. (Acts 15:10; Romans 8:3) We can be transformed into children of the heavenly King only by following the example of Jesus. When that is our goal, the Holy Spirit steps in, forgiving our past sins and helping us to live a new life. (Romans 3:19,28; Galatians 2:16; 3:10-11)
19. Read Acts 13:42-49. When Paul and Barnabas began their work at the city of Antioch in Pisidia (not the Antioch in Syria), they were at first welcomed by the Jewish community. But, when the Jewish congregation of the synagogue saw the incredible response among the Gentiles, their natural prejudices arose; there was a big change in their attitude.
20. In order to better understand what happened, we need to recognize that a number of Gentiles in the Mediterranean world were attracted by the religion of the Jews. The Jews believed in a single God, they had a healthy lifestyle, and they maintained a meaningful worship service on Sabbath. A large number of Gentiles were attracted and joined various synagogues in many places. But, for various reasons, they were reluctant to accept the Jewish practice of circumcision. Many considered it a barbaric and disgusting practice. Those people who regularly attended the synagogues and accepted most of the Jewish religion, but did not become fully-Jewish converts by becoming circumcised, became known as *God-fearers*. It was probably that group of people that went forth from that Sabbath sermon to tell their fellow citizens of Antioch about Paul's message. A great excitement was stirred up, and nearly everyone in the town went to hear Paul speak the next Sabbath.
21. It is interesting to notice that those meetings are mentioned in the Scripture as occurring only on Sabbath. Surely, Paul and Barnabas were not quiet during the rest of the week. Were they

conducting Bible studies in various homes? What did they do that led to such an incredible response on the following Sabbath? This enormous response was welcomed by the Gentiles; but, it led to great jealousy among the Jews. Those Jews again stirred up some of the leading people of the city and started a persecution which forced Paul and Barnabas to leave that area. From there they traveled to Iconium. Today, there is only one Christian church in that city.

22. Read Acts 14:1-7. Opposition did not arise as quickly in Iconium as it had in Antioch. The apostles spent some time there. Once again, while many both of Jews and Gentiles were attracted by the message, others were vehemently opposed. When Paul and Barnabas got the message that their enemies were planning to stone them, they quickly left the city of Iconium and went to Lystra and Derbe.
23. Try to imagine Paul's approach to the Jewish congregations in the synagogues in those cities. Did he mention that he was a Pharisee and had been a member of the Sanhedrin? How do you think the Jewish members of the synagogues might have responded? Do we have any evidence that those communities of Jews had any previous knowledge about Christianity?
24. Review Romans 9-11. In these chapters, Paul made it very clear that he had a great burden for the Jews, his fellow countrymen.

“Paul’s argument in Romans 9-11 offers a further explanation of the mission strategy he pursues in the narrative of Acts and confronts every generation of Christians with the theological importance of bearing witness to unbelieving Jews.”—David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 401.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, August 15.]

25. Read Acts 14:8-20. We do not know what kind of miracles were performed in Perga, Antioch, or Iconium. (Acts 15:12) But, in Lystra an important miracle did take place.
26. In these verses we see that those impressible crowds could swing from thinking Paul and Barnabas were gods because of their ability to heal the paralyzed man to thinking that they were so evil that they needed to be stoned just a short time later. Paul himself was actually stoned and dragged out of the city and left for dead. We do not know exactly what injuries Paul sustained; but, when the believers went out and gathered around him, he got up and went back into the town.
27. Where did those people of Lystra get the idea that Paul and Barnabas might be gods?

Latin poet Ovid (43 B.C.-A.D. 17/18) had earlier recorded a legend of these same two gods disguised as humans visiting a town in the same area (“the hills of Phrygia”) and seeking a place to rest. According to the legend, a humble, elderly couple treated them kindly and with hospitality; the rest of the people were indifferent. Because of their kindness and hospitality toward the incognito visitors, the couple had their house transformed into a temple and themselves into priests, while the rest of the town was completely destroyed (*Metamorphoses* 611-724).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, August 16.
28. We do not know how much time Paul and Barnabas were allowed to continue preaching in Lystra. Nor do we know what kind of response they got from the people of Lystra. What we do know is that some of Paul's opponents from Antioch and Iconium were so moved by their

opposition to Paul that they stirred up rebellion in Lystra against Paul's preaching.

29. How many of us would be willing to continue our missionary efforts after being stoned? Paul and Barnabas moved on to Derbe where they won many disciples. (Acts 14:21-26) Then, they went back through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the churches, appointing elders, and establishing new Christian congregations. Finally, they returned to the coast and preached in Perga and Attala; and then, they sailed back to Antioch in Syria.
30. Having reviewed these experiences of Paul and Barnabas, what do you think they said to the church when they arrived back in Antioch of Syria? Did Paul still show signs of having been stoned? Did Paul pretend that his injuries were only minor?
31. What would you have done if you had been Paul at that time? Would you have continued to preach first of all to the Jewish synagogues? Or, would you have gone straight to the Gentiles? Might Paul have avoided the conflicts we read about if he had done so?

During the life of Christ on earth he had sought to lead the Jews out of their exclusiveness. The conversion of the centurion and of the Syrophenician woman, were instances of his direct work outside of the acknowledged people of Israel. The time had now come for active and continued work among the Gentiles, of whom whole communities received the gospel gladly, and **glorified God for the light of an intelligent faith.** The unbelief and malice of the Jews did not turn aside the purpose of God; for **a new Israel was grafted into the old olive-tree.** The synagogues were closed against the apostles; but private houses were thrown open for their use, and public buildings of the Gentiles were also used in which to preach the word of God.—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul** 51.5.

In all their missionary endeavors Paul and Barnabas sought to follow Christ's example of willing sacrifice and faithful, earnest labor for souls. Wide-awake, zealous, untiring, they did not consult inclination or personal ease, but with prayerful anxiety and unceasing activity they sowed the seed of truth. And with the sowing of the seed, the apostles were careful to give to all who took their stand for the gospel, practical instruction that was of untold value. This spirit of earnestness and godly fear made upon the minds of the new disciples a lasting impression regarding the importance of the gospel message.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 186.2. [Bold type is added.]

32. In our story so far, we must recognize that John Mark had been a disappointment. But, Barnabas was willing to overlook his former mistakes and invite him to join them when they went on their next journey. Paul was adamantly opposed to that idea. (See Acts 15:37.) However, three important things need to be remembered about John Mark's subsequent ministry: 1) He apparently was closely associated with Peter for some time; 2) At the end of his life, Paul recognized his usefulness and said: "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11, *NKJV*); and 3) While in Rome where Paul and Peter were in prison, John Mark, working with Peter, wrote that first Gospel which we call Mark.
33. After reading of these experiences of Paul and Barnabas, what should we do? Do we need to travel across oceans and learn new languages and new cultures in order to spread the gospel? Not at all! What can we learn from these experiences that would help us to be more effective witnesses even to those around us? Are there any prejudices which we have that are hindering the spread of the gospel? Are there any beliefs that we have held—even for a long time—that are not correct? Could God pour on us the Holy Spirit in latter rain power if we

are not correctly representing Him? What do we need to do to prepare ourselves for the latter rain? How can we get more of the Holy Spirit's help?

34. Does your church have a specific plan or mission—either to the local area or to some other location where work needs to be done? Have you personally spent time in thinking about ways that you could better spread the gospel?
35. Why is it so easy for Adventists to congregate in small comfortable Adventist ghettos and fail to reach out to their neighbors and friends? Are there attitudes and beliefs that prevent Seventh-day Adventists today from doing the work that should be done in spreading the gospel? Do we have any prejudices that might be in some ways similar to the Jewish prejudices that Paul and Barnabas faced?
36. Have you made it a practice to ask for guidance from the Holy Spirit in your mission to those around you? What would happen if everyone in your church did that? Could a group of Seventh-day Adventists formulate a plan to spread the gospel? Even in your local community? It is so easy for us to think that the work of spreading the gospel is the pastor's work. What would happen in our churches if we started thinking that spreading the gospel was *our* work? If your church has a plan to reach out to other areas to try to spread the gospel, do you have contact points in those other areas to help you organize?
37. We must never think that the work of spreading the gospel is primarily our work; it is the work of the Holy Spirit. But, we can gain a blessing by joining with the Holy Spirit.

The plan to leave Ur did not originate in Abraham's mind. Moses did not issue on his own the call for freedom. Joshua did not choose to split the Jordan River. Isaiah did not pick his career as a prophet. Daniel did not invent the prophetic telescope. Esther did not choose to deliver the Jews. Peter didn't leave the fishing net on his own. Neither did Saul become Christianity's first great missionary on his own. In each case, the Holy Spirit made the call.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 94.

38. In the church in Antioch in Syria, we are told there were prophets, teachers, and possibly some high government officials. (See Acts 13:1-3; compare Acts 15:32.) Are there any prophets or teachers in your congregation? Or, your Sabbath school class? Have you ever felt a tug at your heart? Or, a whisper in your ear? Or, perhaps even a direct command to conduct missionary outreach? What did you do?
39. We must never think that the Devil will roll over and play dead if we try to spread the gospel. There will be opposition no matter what efforts we undertake. Should we allow that to stop us?
40. It is interesting to notice that in discussing the work in Cyprus, Dr. Luke said: "Saul, who is also called Paul..." (Acts 13:9, *NKJV**) From then on in the rest of the book of Acts, the name Saul disappeared except in Acts 26 as Paul was relating his experience on the road to Damascus. Up to that time, Barnabas was the one mentioned first when Paul and Barnabas are mentioned together. But, after that point, it was *Paul and Barnabas*; and Barnabas was humble enough to accept the secondary designation.
41. Obviously, the church at Antioch was a pioneering church. Does your church consider itself to be a pioneering church? Could it be?

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