

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 13:1—14:28

Opening Thought

1) What images come to mind when you hear the word “missionary” or “missions”? Why?

2) Have you ever been on a short-term mission trip? If so, where? What happened? What were the highlights?

Where would you like to go on a short-term mission trip? Why?

Background of the Passage

Beginning in chapter 13, Luke’s history of the church focuses almost exclusively on outreach to the Gentiles and the consequent growth of the church “to the ends of the earth” (1:8). Here we find the Spirit’s selection of Paul and Barnabas to become special missionaries, and we see a shift as Paul replaces Peter as the central figure in the book.

Paul’s entourage (Barnabas and John Mark, at the very least) sets sail, stopping on Cyprus, where the messengers of Jesus confront a false prophet named Bar-Jesus. Then the mission moves north to Perga. For an unknown reason, John Mark abruptly leaves the venture and returns to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continue inland to Antioch of Pisidia.

The initial reaction to Paul’s preaching is favorable. But among the audience is a number of jealous Jewish leaders (verse 45). Despite efforts by these men to discredit both Paul and his message, the assembled Gentiles eagerly embrace the gospel. This further incites the Jewish leaders, who are eventually able to stir up a mob that

runs Paul and Barnabas out of town. These events serve as a kind of microcosm of the entire ministry of Paul: stiff opposition from most Jews and joyous acceptance of the gospel message by many Gentiles (verse 52).

Journeying through the region of Galatia, the missionaries visit Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, and God confirms their message in each place with miraculous signs and numerous conversions. Even so, the Jewish mobs turn murderous and Paul is stoned. But God is not finished with the apostle from Tarsus. Paul's joyful perseverance in the face of extreme persecution is testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life.

Following a successful evangelistic campaign in Derbe, the missionaries backtrack through all the cities visited on their missionary enterprise. The goal is to strengthen and encourage the believers, appoint elders in the churches, and pray with and for them. At last Paul and Barnabas return to their home church in Antioch of Syria and report on "all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (verse 27).

These chapters not only demonstrate God's grace and faithfulness but also set the stage for a coming controversy over the presence of newly converted Gentiles in a previously all-Jewish church.

Bible Passage

Read 13:1—14:28, noting the key words and definitions to the right of the passage.

Acts 13:1—14:28

- 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.*
- ² *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."*
- ³ *Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.*
- ⁴ *So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.*
- 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.*
- ⁶ *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,*
- ⁷ *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.*
- ⁸ *But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.*
- ⁹ *Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him*
- ¹⁰ *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?"*
- 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.*
- ¹² *Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*
- 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.*
- 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.*
- 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."*
- ¹⁶ *Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:*
- ¹⁷ *"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.*

18 *“Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness.*
19 *“And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment.*
20 *“After that He gave them judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.*
21 *“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.*
22 *“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.’*
23 *“From this man’s seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus—*
24 *“after John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.*
25 *“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.’*
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.*
27 *“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.*
28 *“And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death.*
29 *“Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.*
30 *“But God raised Him from the dead.*
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.*
32 *“And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers.*
33 *“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.’*
34 *“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.’*
35 *“Therefore He also says in another Psalm: ‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’*
36 *“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption;*
37 *“but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.*
38 *“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;*
39 *“and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.*
40 *“Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:*
41 *“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.”*
42 *So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.*
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.*
44 *On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.*
45 *But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.*
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.*
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.’”*
48 *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.*

49 *And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.*
50 *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.*
51 *But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium.*
52 *And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*

14:1 *Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.*
2 *But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.*
3 *Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.*
4 *But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.*
5 *And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them,*
6 *they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.*
7 *And they were preaching the gospel there.*
8 *And in Lystra a certain man without strength in his feet was sitting, a cripple from his mother's womb, who had never walked.*
9 *This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.*
10 *Now when the people saw what Paul had done, they raised their voices, saying in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"*
11 *And Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.*
12 *Then the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of their city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes.*
13 *But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out*
14 *and saying, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them,*
15 *"who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.*
16 *"Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."*
17 *And with these sayings they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them.*
18 *Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.*
19 *However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.*
20 *And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch,*
21 *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."*
22 *So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*
23 *And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.*
24 *Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.*
25 *From there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed.*
26 *Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.*
27 *So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.*

prophets (13:1)—preachers of God’s word who instructed local congregations and occasionally received new revelation from God (though this function ended with the cessation of the temporary sign gifts)

Simeon ... called Niger(v. 1)—”Niger” means “black.” Simeon may have been African; there is no direct evidence to show this was the Simon who carried the cross of Christ.

ministered (v. 2)—the Greek word that in Scripture describes priestly service, implying that ministry is a form of worship

fasted (v. 2)—associated with fervent prayer and either the loss of appetite or the intentional decision to concentrate solely on spiritual issues

Cyprus (v. 4)—probably chosen because it was Barnabas’s home and also the home to a large Jewish population

Paphos (v. 6)—the capital of Cyprus

sorcerer (v. 6)—a magician who dabbled in the occult; the name Elymas is a transliteration of the Arabic word for magician

Perga in Pamphylia (v. 13)—in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey)

John, departing from them(v. 13)—Whatever Mark’s reasons, they were not accepted by Paul (15:38). This incident led to a rift between Paul and Barnabas (15:36–40) that was obviously resolved much later (see 2 Timothy 4:11).

Antioch in Pisidia (v. 14)—not to be confused with Syrian Antioch, location of the first Gentile church

a man after My own heart(v. 22)—David was obviously a sinner; this description implies his hunger for God and his humble willingness to acknowledge sin, repent, and seek forgiveness.

according to the promise(v. 23)—Old Testament prophecy points to the Messiah as a descendant of David.

rulers (v. 27)—the supposed experts in the Old Testament, including the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and priests

tree ... tomb (v. 29)—The Old Testament predicted Christ’s crucifixion (Psalm 22; Numbers 34) and his burial (Isaiah 53:9).

God raised (v. 30)—the ultimate proof that Jesus is the Messiah

witnesses (v. 31)—more than five hundred (see 1 Corinthians 15:5–8)

you could not be justified by the law of Moses (v. 39)— Attempting to keep the law of Moses never freed anyone from his or her sins.

devout proselytes (v. 43)—full converts to Judaism who had been circumcised

continue in the grace of God (v. 43)—those who are truly saved persevere in the grace of God.

to you first (v. 46)—God offered the plan of salvation to the Jews first (see Luke 24:47 and Romans 1:16).

we turn to the Gentiles (v. 46) —because of the Jewish rejection of the gospel, however, the Gentiles have always been part of God’s plan

appointed to eternal life(v. 48)—one of Scripture’s clearest statements on the sovereignty of God; He chooses us—not the other way around

shook off the dust (v. 51)—a symbolic act demonstrating condemnation; devout Jews would attempt to avoid

even bringing Gentile dust into Israel; Paul and Barnabas were equating these “devout” Jews with pagan Gentiles

granting signs and wonders (14:3)—Such demonstrations of divine power confirmed the message of Paul and Barnabas.

apostles (v. 4)—Barnabas was not truly an apostle; the word can be translated “messenger” and that is the likely meaning here.

“The gods have come ...”(v. 11)—A pagan folklore tradition said that the gods Zeus and Hermes had once visited Lystra incognito; the locals thought this might be another instance of “divine” visitation.

tore their clothes (v. 14)—a Jewish expression of horror and revulsion at blasphemy

did not leave Himself without witness (v. 17)—Paul cited God’s providence and His creative power, not Scripture, in addressing this Gentile audience.

they stoned Paul ... supposing him to be dead (v. 19)— Paul did not die and resurrect; the mob erroneously assumed Paul to be dead.

From there (v. 26)—Thus ended Paul’s first missionary journey.

Understanding the Text

2) This passage indicates that the original missionary enterprise was preceded (if not precipitated) by a time of fasting and prayer. What happened as a result?

3) What is the purpose of fasting? What are the benefits? Is it a discipline in which modern-day Christians should engage? Why or why not?

(verses to consider: Nehemiah 1:4; Psalm 35:13; Daniel 9:3; Matthew 6:16–17; 17:21; Luke 2:27)

4) What happened when Paul and Barnabas encountered Bar-Jesus?

5) At Pisidian Antioch, Paul preached a message that is recorded in 13:16–41. What did Paul say in his closing words about the issue of justification? How did this square with the typical Jewish understanding of salvation?

(verses to consider: Romans 3:28; 1 Corinthians 1:30; Galatians 2:16; 3:11; Philippians 3:9; Colossians 2:13–14)

Cross Reference

Read Psalm 2, a messianic psalm that depicts the world’s hatred for the Son of God (and by implication, those who would follow Him).

Exploring the Meaning

6) What about the apostle’s message so infuriated the Jews? What was the result of their fierce anger?

7) In what ways do you see people today getting angry because of the gospel? What lies behind these reactions and phenomena?

8) 13:48 makes clear that in salvation, God chooses the person; the person does not choose God.

“The matter of human will and divine election is so inscrutable, so incomprehensible to our minds, as to demand that we believe both without being able to comprehend how they fit together in God’s mind.” —*John MacArthur*

What questions about the doctrine of election trouble you most?

9) How do you resolve them?

10) Why did Paul and Barnabas make the effort to revisit the cities in which they had previously ministered? What implications are here for modern-day Christians and churches? What ingredients make for quality evangelistic “follow-up”?

Summing Up ...

“Conflict will often occur when the true gospel is preached today. The gospel does not gather everyone together, nor is it a generally tolerable opinion that nonbelievers can take or leave. Instead it splits people, dividing the penitent from the hardhearted, the saved from the unsaved, the righteous from the reprobate, those who love its truth from those who reject it.” —*John MacArthur*

Reflecting on the Text

11) What character qualities do you most appreciate in Paul and Barnabas? To what degree are those same traits evident in your life? How could you be more like that?

12) The ministry pictured in chapters 13 and 14 is all-encompassing. Paul and Barnabas did not simply preach sermons—they poured out their lives so that others might know Christ and grow in Him. What lessons are here for you? How involved in personal ministry are you? What is stopping you from coming alongside other people and helping them grow spiritually?

13) Paul and Barnabas never seemed surprised and they certainly never retreated when they encountered opposition. What was the secret to their boldness and perseverance?

14) Why do you think North American Christians seem so taken aback by persecution and hostility by unbelievers? What specific steps can you take this week to be bolder for Christ?

Recording Your Thoughts

For further study, see the following passages:

Numbers 34

1 Samuel 13:14

Habakkuk 1:5

Matthew 10:5–6

John 8:31

Acts 1:22

Acts 11:30

Romans 1:18–20

Romans 3:20, 22

2 Corinthians 8:23

Galatians 3:16

Ephesians 1:4

Ephesians 2:20

Colossians 3:12

Colossians 4:10

2 Thessalonians 2:13

1 John 2:19