



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

New Testament Survey

Lesson 20 – Paul’s First Mission Journey and the First Church Convention

The great missionary Paul and his first mission journey

The young Pharisee Saul consented to the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr of the New Testament church. Soon Saul himself became an active persecutor of Christians everywhere. But after Saul saw the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, he became a Christian and a preacher of the Gospel. Saul’s conversion is so important that the book of Acts has three accounts of it (see Acts 9, 26, and 28). Saul’s Roman name was Paul, and Paul is the name we know best.

Paul was chosen by God to be His first and greatest missionary to the heathen world. God guided Paul’s life so that he was especially suited for this task. He was a Roman citizen, brought up in the Greek city of Tarsus and so he was fluent in the Greek language, and he was a Jew by race and religion, taught by Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Paul knew how to become all things to all men, so that he might be able to gain them for the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Paul did not become a missionary to the Gentiles immediately after his conversion. He first preached to Jews in Damascus and Jerusalem (and he also spent some time in Arabia). Then he lived in Tarsus, his hometown, until he was called by Barnabas and the congregation in Antioch of Syria to be one of their pastors. After they had worked there for some time, the Antioch congregation sent Paul and Barnabas to bring the Gospel of Christ to other places where the people knew nothing about Christ and the hope of salvation through Him.

On this first mission journey Paul and Barnabas first went to the island of Cyprus, where Barnabas had grown up. After the Lord granted them some success there, they crossed over to the Roman province of Galatia in Asia Minor. Today this is part of the country of Turkey.

When Barnabas and Paul came to a town, their first course of action was to go to the Jewish synagogue. In the several centuries before Jesus was born the Jewish people had scattered in all directions, and wherever there were at least ten Jewish men in a town, they established a synagogue (a meeting place) where the Old Testament was read and studied. These synagogues also attracted non-Jewish people who would regularly attend the Saturday services where the Old Testament was read and explained. Since Barnabas and Paul were themselves Jews, they wanted to share the good news of Jesus first of all with their fellow-Jews. But what usually happened is that most of the Jews would reject their message, while the Gentile synagogue worshipers would be eager to hear more about Jesus and the good news of their salvation, and these Gentiles would spread the good news to other

Gentiles. The success of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles led many of the Jews to become hostile to Paul and Barnabas and the Jews would stir up persecution against them.

The Gospel (Good News) that Paul and Barnabas proclaimed and taught can be summed up in these words recorded in Acts 13:38-39: **“Through this Man (Jesus) 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.”** God blessed their preaching of this Gospel, and the result was several Christian congregations that consisted of some Jews but even more Gentiles.

Read the listed passages as you study each of the events below. If you have any questions, ask them.

The congregation in Antioch of Syria sends Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-3).

The Holy Spirit said: **“Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them”** (v. 2). John Mark accompanied them as their assistant.

Paul and Barnabas bring the Gospel to Cyprus (13:4-12).

Antioch in Syria: their home base.

Seleucia: the seaport of Antioch.

Salamis in Cyprus: they preach the Word of God in the synagogue.

Paphos, the home of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus.

The sorcerer, Elymas (Bar-Jesus) opposes their Gospel presentation to Sergius Paulus.

Paul said to Elymas: **“You son of the devil ... you shall be blind”** (vv. 10-11).

“The proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done” to Elymas (v. 12).

Paul preaches Sermon 5 at the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (13:13-52).

Perga in Pamphylia – At this point John Mark leaves the group and returns to Jerusalem.

Antioch in Pisidia – Paul and Barnabas attend a synagogue service and are asked to speak.

Paul’s sermon had four main parts:

1. The history of the Jewish people (vv. 16-22).
2. The history of Jesus and how God in Him fulfilled the promises (vv. 23-37).
3. The significance of all of this for the audience: the forgiveness of sins (vv. 38-39).
4. A strong warning not to neglect this good news (vv. 40-41).

The Gentiles ask Paul and Barnabas to return the next Sabbath.

“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” (v. 44).

The Jews **“were filled with envy ... they opposed the things spoken by Paul”** (v. 45).

Paul and Barnabas: **“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”** (v. 46).

The Gentiles happily receive the Gospel, but the Jews drive Paul and Barnabas out of the city.

“As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (v. 48). Faith is a matter of God’s grace.

Paul and Barnabas bring the Gospel to other towns in Galatia and then return home (14:1-28)

Iconium – They enter the synagogue; some Jews and Greeks believe; others try to stone them.

“The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles” (v. 2).

“Part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles” (v. 4).

Lystra – There is no synagogue; the people speak the Lycaonian language.

Paul heals a crippled man, and the people worship Barnabas as Zeus, Paul as Hermes.

Paul: **“We ... preach to you that should turn from these useless things to the living God ... He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good ... , filling our hearts with food and gladness” (vv. 15, 17).**

Jews from Antioch and Iconium persuade the Lystrans to stone Paul.

Derbe – Paul gets up and they go to Derbe, where **“they made many disciples” (v. 21).**

Lystra, Iconium, Antioch in Pisidia, Perga, Attalia – the return trip.

Paul and Barnabas: **“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (v. 22).**

They **“appointed elders in every church” (v. 23).**

Antioch in Syria – **“They reported ... that God ... had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (v. 27).**

The first church convention

The first mission journey resulted in the founding of several Christian congregations where the Gentiles outnumbered the Jews. The problem was that some Jews thought these Gentiles should have to become Jews first before they could be Christians. That is, they thought they should have to be circumcised and follow other Jewish customs to be saved. We call these people “Judaizers”; most of them came from Jerusalem.

A major controversy developed in Antioch of Syria between these Judaizers on the one hand, and Paul and Barnabas on the other hand. Paul and Barnabas believed that if the Gentiles believed in Jesus as their Savior, they were Christians and they did not have to become Jews to be saved. They decided to bring this matter up at a meeting of Christians in Jerusalem (probably 49 AD). The Judaizers were present at this first convention, as well as Paul, Barnabas, Peter and other apostles, James (the brother of Jesus and head elder in Jerusalem), and other believers in Jerusalem and perhaps believers from other places.

Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James all spoke out for freedom from Jewish laws. Peter declared: **“We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they”** and not through the keeping of Jewish laws (Acts 15:11). They then agreed to ask the Gentile Christians to refrain from certain practices that were especially distasteful

to Jews out of love for their fellow believers. This eased the tensions between the Gentile and Jewish Christians in the early church.

Read the listed passages as you study each of the events below. If you have any questions, ask them.

The first church convention (Acts 15:1-35)

Antioch in Syria – The Judaizers say: **“Unless you are circumcised ... , you cannot be saved”** (v. 1).

Paul and Barnabas disagree with them.

The Antioch congregation send Paul and Barnabas and others to Jerusalem to discuss this matter with the apostles and other Christians.

Phoenicia, Samaria – The report of mission work among the Gentiles causes **“great joy”** (v. 3).

Jerusalem

Paul and Barnabas report that God had brought many Gentiles to faith in Jesus.

The Judaizers: **“It is necessary to circumcise them”** and obey other Jewish laws (v. 5).

After a long discussion:

Peter: **“God chose ... that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe”** (v. 7).

Peter: **“God acknowledged them (Gentiles) by giving them the Holy Spirit”** (v. 8).

Peter: **“Why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples?”** (v. 10).

Paul and Barnabas declare how many miracles God worked among the Gentiles.

James agrees with Peter and Paul and quotes the Old Testament as proof.

James: **“We should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning”** (v. 19).

James suggests that out of love for the scattered Jews the Gentiles should:

“abstain from things polluted by idols”

“abstain ... from sexual immorality”

“abstain ... from things strangled”

“abstain ... from blood.” (v. 20).

The proposal of James is adopted and a letter is written with this resolution.

The letter is brought to Antioch in Syria and other places by Paul and Barnabas, together with two delegates from Jerusalem: Judas Barsabas and Silas.

Antioch in Syria – **“When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement”** (v. 31).

Questions

1. If you have access to a map that shows the places listed in this lesson, please examine it, and note of where Paul and Barnabas took the Gospel.

2. How were Paul and Barnabas called for mission work among the Gentiles?
3. Why was it natural for them to travel to Cyprus first?
4. How did God confirm their preaching of the Gospel in Cyprus?
5. Which place in a city did Paul and Barnabas usually visit first?
6. Which different kinds of people attended a synagogue service?
7. What was the main point of Paul's sermon in Antioch in Pisidia?
8. Why did many of the Jews in Antioch in Pisidia oppose their teaching?
9. Why did the people in Lystra at first try to worship the missionaries?
10. Name some of the difficulties the two missionaries encountered.
11. What doctrinal problem led to the convention in Jerusalem?
12. How was this doctrinal question resolved?
13. Why did the letter from Jerusalem make the Christians in Antioch of Syria happy?