

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Acts Chapter 13

Verse 1- Now that the church at Antioch had grown, there were several prophets and teachers there to lead the people in addition to Barnabas and Saul. Three are named here, Simeon called Niger (most likely a black man from Africa, some believe this was the same man who carried the cross for Jesus), Lucius of Cyrene (from a Greek city in North Africa, may also have been black), and Manaen (who grew up with Herod Agrippa (the uncle of the Herod who had tried to kill Peter). It is likely that these men are mentioned in order to let us know how diverse the church of Antioch was. There were more people groups than just Jews and Gentiles. These men were all from different backgrounds. Lucius and Simeon were not likely wealthy, but Manaen must have been of some wealth or position to grow up with Herod. This is probably why Herod is referred to as, “the tetrarch” which means “the ruler of a small territory.” It’s interesting that though both Herod and Manaen grew up together in families of position, they went in opposite directions in life. One grew up to be a killer and persecutor, while the other grew up to be a Christian and leader in the church. This proves that God uses all kinds of people from all walks of life. (1 Peter 4:10-11, ESV p1119), (1 Corinthians 1:26-29, ESV p1054) So, these five men were leading the church at Antioch. Today, they might have been called the “ministerial board.”

Verse 2- So, they were going about their normal duties, ministering and fasting. Then, at this particular time, notice that they were not ministering to the people as we might normally think. The King James Version says, they were ministering “to the Lord.” The Greek word for ministering in this passage is, “leitourgeo (li-toorg-eh’-o)”, which means to “perform a work or to do a service at one’s own expense.” This phrase was used particularly to refer to those who served Christ by instructing others in the way of salvation. While it is often translated as “worshiping” or “honoring,” it actually means more literally, “while they were working for the Lord and serving Him and fasting...” Fasting in the bible generally has a purpose. Usually, it is done to show humility before God (Job 23:10-12, ESV p 477) or to ask for guidance or breakthrough (Ezra 8:21-23, ESV p 435); or to show repentance (Daniel 9:3-5, ESV p 832). It can also be done to set aside distractions and to bring complete focus on God and prayer (Daniel 6:18, ESV p 828). Anyway, while these men were working to serve the Lord, praying and fasting (probably for guidance and a sense of direction), the Holy Spirit spoke to them. The Holy Spirit told them that it was time for Barnabas and Saul to separate from them in order to fulfill the work that God had called them to. You may remember that Barnabas was a Levite, so he was a member of the family of priests, brought up in the church, called to be an encourager (Acts 4:36, ESV p1010-1011), and was the first advocate for Saul (Acts 9:26-28, ESV p 1016). He pretty much served as Saul’s mentor. You

may recall that God told Ananias that Saul was specifically chosen to be his vessel to proclaim His name to the Gentiles, to kings and to the people of Israel ([Acts 9:13-16, ESV p 1016](#)). So, the Holy Spirit was guiding them to know that the time had come. ([Luke 12:12, ESV p 965](#)), ([John 14:26, ESV p999](#))

Verse 3- Once more they fasted and prayed, perhaps to be sure that this was God's will. Then, they anointed the two men. The phrase to "lay hands on" means to symbolically transfer authority, blessing, and power. It often refers to commissioning or ordaining someone to do specific work for the Lord, such as when Stephen and the six other men were ordained to oversee the distribution of food so that the Apostles could continue prayer and the ministry of the word ([Acts 6:6, ESV p1012](#)). Now the church at Antioch had commissioned Paul and Barnabas to go be missionaries for the Lord. While others before them had gone out to tell others about Jesus, most of the others had other jobs or vocations that took them to other places, but Paul and Barnabas do not appear to have had any other jobs.

Verse 4- This verse tells us their travel plans. It gives us an idea of how far they went and how they had to go. From Antioch they traveled by land to the seaport of Seleucia (15 to 16 miles)¹, then by sea to Salamis on the east end of the island of Cyprus (100-130 miles)².



Verse 5- While in Salamis, they stopped to preach to the Jews in the synagogues. John Mark joined them there to help.

Verse 6- Then, they traveled by land across the island to the west end and landed in Paphos (90-100 miles)³. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus.

Verse 7- Bar-Jesus' boss, the proconsul (similar to the governor), Sergius Paulus sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.

1-about 6.4 days on foot

2- about 8 – 9 days on non-motorized boat or ship

3- about 40 days on foot

Verse 8- But Bar-Jesus (also known as Elymas) tried to advise him against Saul and Barnabas because he didn't like or believe what they were teaching.

Verse 9- Then, Saul (also called Paul) "filled with the Holy Spirit" "set his eyes on him." To be filled with the Holy Spirit is the voluntary ongoing process of yielding control of one's life to God's spirit to control their thoughts, actions and character. The Greek word in this passage for the phrase "set eyes on" is "atenizo" (at-en-id'-zo) which means to gaze intently. In modern language, Paul, through the power of the Holy Spirit, stared him down. At that precise moment, the Holy Spirit revealed to Paul exactly who this man was and what his motives were. (1 Corinthians 2:10-13, ESV p1054), (John 16:13, ESV p1000)

Verse 10- Paul boldly confronted Elymas about his deceit. He let Elymas know that he was fully exposed. (Proverbs 26:24-26, ESV p 610), (Ephesians 5:11, ESV p1081)

Verse 11- Paul told Elymas exactly who would punish his deceit and what that punishment would be. The good news for Elymas and all deceivers is that the punishment did not have to be permanent. Paul told him it would be for a set time. God still showed mercy and grace. (Proverbs 19:9, ESV p 603), (Proverbs 28:13, ESV p 612), (Isaiah 55:7, ESV p 686)

Verse 12- Elymas witnessed God at work and believed. God's plan was accomplished. (Isaiah 46:9-11, ESV p 677), (John 15:4-5, and 8, ESV p 999)

Verse 13-14- Once God's plan was accomplished at Paphos, Paul, Barnabas and John sailed on to Perga across the water about 175 to 200 miles (1 to 3-day's journey). At that time John Mark left them and returned home to Jerusalem. We are not told why. We do know through history, however, that the journey they were about to take was through rough mountainous areas and noted for being unsafe because of bandits. (2 Timothy 2:3, ESV p 1097) Still, Paul and Barnabas continued their journey on foot to Antioch in Pisidia (another 100-110 miles/5-7 days), where they went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and just sat down to listen. There is no indication that they were planning to speak at that time.

Verse 15- The service went through a traditional order of reading from the Books of the Law (first 5 books of Old Testament- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) and from the Books of the Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel and the 12 minor prophets). Then, the leaders of the synagogue recognized them and invited them to speak to the congregation so they could encourage them. It is clear here that they are deeply rooted in tradition and history. It is also clear that they were aware of Paul's reputation for knowing the law and possibly also Barnabas' reputation for encouragement. (Acts 22:3, ESV p 1032), (Galatians 1:14, ESV p 1074) (Acts 4:36-37, ESV p 1010-1011)

Paul's message: Verse 16-41

1. (verse 16) Paul starts by addressing both groups of people present in the synagogue- the Jews who are following their old laws and the Gentiles who are adopting the Jewish teachings. "Men of Israel and you who fear God..."
2. (verse 17) He points the Israelites to all that God has done for them in history- their rescue from Egypt, (verse 18) their stay in the wilderness (while they complained), (verse 19) their inheritance of the land of Canaan from seven nations. He reminds them of the previous leaders that God had sent them- (verse 20) the judges, then, (verse 21) King Saul, then (verse 22) King David from whose lineage came (verse 23) Jesus, then, (verse 24-25) John the Baptist, who told them that he was not the One, but another was coming.
3. (verse 26-27) Then he tells them that their ancestors failed to understand the word of the law and prophets (much like they have).
4. (verse 28-37) Next, he reveals to them that God fulfilled his promise to his people through Jesus Christ's death, burial and resurrection.
5. (verse 38-39) Then he proclaims that this salvation is not just for the Jews, but "everyone who believes is freed," which the law of Moses could not do. (verse 40-41) Finally, he warns those that do not believe that they will perish.

It is interesting to note that Paul, though he is trying to encourage them, as he was asked, does not withhold the truth of the consequences of disbelief. (John 3:18-21 ESV p 984) (Hebrews 3:18-19, ESV p 1104), (Matthew 10:33 ESV p 904)

Verse 42-44- This records the response of the congregation to Paul's message.

1. "After the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts followed Paul and Barnabas."
2. "Paul and Barnabas...urged them to continue in the grace of God."

To continue in the grace of God means to grow in the knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18, ESV p 1122), to recognize that through God's power we are strengthened in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9, ESV p 1073) and to realize we can go directly to God through prayer for mercy and help in time of need (Hebrews 4:16, ESV p 1104)

3. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came to hear them.

Verse 45- This records the response of the Jews, those who were holding on tightly to tradition and the old covenant with God. Notice the recurring theme of the opposition- jealousy, contradiction and abuse. (1 Timothy 6:3-5, ESV p 1096)

*Purple lettering indicates this word, or passage was added to the initial distribution

Verse 46- 47- Paul and Barnabas responded with boldness citing the commands of Jesus to his disciples. He explained, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first.”
(Matthew 10:5-6, ESV p 904)

Verse 48-50- The Gentiles gladly received the word of God, and it spread throughout the region.

Verse 51-52- Though the Jewish leaders continued to reject the word and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas even telling them to get out of their region, Paul and Barnabas not only continued their journey, but they were joyful and filled with the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 10:14-15, ESV p 904)