
Ministry of the Holy Spirit
Acts 13:1-5
Lesson 22 – To the Ends of the Earth

Acts 13:1-5 (NIV) ¹ In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴ The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

Discussion Questions

1. Verse 2 says they were "worshiping the Lord and fasting." Why do you think the Holy Spirit spoke during a season of worship rather than during a strategy meeting?

- What does this teach us about hearing God's voice?

2. Barnabas and Saul were already serving faithfully before they were sent out.

- What does this teach us about the relationship between faithfulness and greater responsibility?
- Why is it dangerous to wait for a "big assignment" before serving?

3. Verse 4 says they were "sent on their way by the Holy Spirit."

- What's the difference between being sent by people and being sent by God?
- How can we discern whether an opportunity is God's calling or simply a good idea?

4. Barnabas and Saul's first recorded action after arriving in Cyprus was proclaiming the Word of God.

- Why should preaching and teaching Scripture always remain central to the church's mission?
- What happens when churches replace God's Word with entertainment or personal opinion?

5. John Mark accompanied them as a helper.

- What does this teach us about the importance of support roles in ministry?
- How can someone faithfully serve even if they are not the primary leader?

6. Personal Reflection

- As you read this passage, where do you see yourself?
 - Worshiping and seeking God?
 - Waiting for clearer direction?
 - Being called to step out in faith?
 - Supporting someone else's calling?

- Being sent into a new assignment?

Challenge: What is one step of obedience the Holy Spirit may be asking you to take this week?

Closing Reflection

Acts 13 reminds us that **God's greatest movements often begin quietly—in a room filled with worship, prayer, fasting, and surrendered hearts. Before there was a missionary journey, there was a worship service. Before there was public ministry, there was private devotion. Before the church changed the world, it first listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit.**

Final Question: *If the Holy Spirit spoke to our church today the way He spoke to Antioch, would our church be ready to hear Him—and more importantly, would we be willing to obey?*

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

A. The First Missionaries, Barnabas and Paul: The Most Challenging Call Ever Given, 13:1-3

(13:1-3) Introduction: this passage begins the most daring and challenging step ever taken by any organization in the history of the world. The Christian church launched forth, making a deliberate effort to carry the gospel to the whole world. It commissioned its first two missionaries for the deliberate purpose of going to meet the world's desperate need for Christ.

1. (13:1) Church: the first missionaries were members of a great church, a church that reached out to all. The greatness of the Antioch church is seen in two facts.

1. The Antioch church was God's choice to become the mission and evangelistic center of the world. God was now ready to send His Word to the whole world. The first three phases of the *great commission* had been launched. The disciples of Christ had borne and left a witness in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria. Now it was time for a witness to go into all the world, reaching out even to the uttermost part (Acts 1:8).

But note a significant fact, a fact that stands as a warning to every church: God had to choose some church other than the Jerusalem church to launch the world-wide mission. The Jerusalem church was too narrow and traditional to do the job (see note, Salvation vs. Ritual—Acts 15:1-3 for discussion). Too many of its members (Jews) were too prejudiced and held too many feelings against the rest of the world (Gentiles). They refused to freely and wholeheartedly commit themselves to world missions and evangelism. They refused to repent of their *exclusiveness and their traditional, formal approach to God*. God had to bypass the Jerusalem church and raise up another church to become the center of His mission upon earth.

Note what this means, for it is a warning to every believer. Some leaders other than the Jewish leaders had to be chosen to launch God's purposes on earth. The Jewish leaders had proven too slow in launching out in the full liberty and freedom of God's Spirit. They, too, had waited too long to repent of their sins. God was ready to move out into the world and the leaders in Jerusalem were not ready. God had no choice but to raise up other leaders who would commit their lives fully to the gospel and to carry the gospel to the whole world in an uninhibited and free spirit.

2. The Antioch church was diverse, a church that reached out to everyone. This is clearly seen in the men mentioned.

- a. Barnabas: he was a wealthy Cyprian, a man born and reared on the island of Cyprus. (See note—Acts 4:36-37 for discussion.)
- b. Simeon or Niger: the name "Niger" means black, referring to the complexion of his skin. He was probably from Africa. The name is also a Roman name which shows that he moved about in Roman society. Some commentators suggest he was the Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross for Jesus (cp. Mark 15:21).
- c. Lucius of Cyrene: he was probably one of the poor persecuted believers who had fled to Antioch for safety. If so, he was one of the founders of this great church. When he arrived in Antioch, he and the others began to share Christ immediately (cp. Acts 11:19-20).
- d. Manaen: he was of the higher class of society, being a foster brother to Herod Antipas. This is the Herod who had tried Jesus and murdered John the Baptist.
- e. Saul of Tarsus: he was one of the religionists of society. He is mentioned last as though he was considered least important among the leaders. However, Saul's deep love for the Lord and his driving commitment to the Lord's cause would soon lead God to use Saul beyond imagination.

The point is this: these men, with their diversity of backgrounds and social standings, show just how much the church at Antioch reached out to everyone throughout the community. It reached out to all classes of people, all needs, all nationalities and races. No one was excluded; everyone was invited to Christ and welcomed into the fellowship and ministry of the church. The church at Antioch was a ministering church, a great outreach church, just the kind of church God needed to launch and support the first missionaries to the world.

"Go ye [the church] therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage" (Matthew 22:9).

"Go ye [the church] therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

2. (13:1) Gift, Spiritual: the first missionaries were gifted with the very special gifts of the Holy Spirit.

1. They were gifted as prophets
2. They were gifted as teachers

3. (13:2) Ministers— Missions: the first missionaries were called while ministering and fasting. This is critical to see.

1. The chosen men were faithful in their ministry *right where they were*. They were not waiting to serve when they reached the fields of the world; they were serving right then and there, right where they were. They did not

overlook nor turn away from needs around them, in their own community. They were the Lord's, His followers, and as such they were commanded to minister even as He had ministered—right where they were (John 20:21; Matthew 20:28).

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24).

"For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men" (Romans 14:18).

It was because of their faithfulness where they were that God *knew* He could trust these men to do greater things for Him.

Thought 1. God calls those who are faithful where they are.

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2).

"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:20).

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).

2. The men chosen were men of prayer and fasting. Apparently they had come together to discuss the matter of world evangelism and were fasting and praying over the matter. The point is clear: God can use only those who sense the desperate needs of the world, sense the needs so deeply that they will set food and everything else aside in order to seek God's face.

Thought 1. How desperately God needs men and women who will fill the gap as these men did. What a tragedy! Generation after generation has rolled in upon the other and the world is still unreached. Where are those...

⇒ who will be faithful in ministering right where they are?

⇒ who will be so concerned they will set food and everything else aside for prayer?

"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

"Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:24).

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Ephes. 6:18).

"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes. 5:17).

4. (13:2) Call— Holy Spirit: the first missionaries received a specific call. The call came from the Holy Spirit: they were to be set apart for "the work" chosen by God. Note several facts that are critical for every believer and minister of the gospel.

1. It is the Holy Spirit that calls the believer to serve God. Paul and Barnabas were not called...
 - by the church.
 - by the other leaders.
 - by their own determination.

The words of Christ were as true for Paul and Barnabas as they were for the first apostles and for us today:

"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16).

Now note: the Holy Spirit was not calling Paul and Barnabas to a life of witness. Every believer is called to be a witness for God. The Holy Spirit was calling the men to a specific task, to a lifetime commitment to ministry. The two men were never again to be lay believers, but were to give their lives to serving God as full time world-wide evangelists or missionaries.

2. The call of the Holy Spirit comes at a specific time. There is a definite time when the Holy Spirit speaks to the believer's heart and mind, and the voice and will of God are unmistakable.
3. The call of the Holy Spirit is for the believer to be His, to be possessed by God's Spirit. The called believer is *separated to belong* to the Holy Spirit: to allow the Spirit to live and move and have His being within the believer's body; to be possessed, infilled, and guided by the Spirit; to be controlled completely by the Spirit; to be completely surrendered to the Spirit's will and use.
4. The call of the Holy Spirit involves "work"—the work He has chosen for the believer to do. The believer is...

⇒ "separated...to work," to do the work of the ministry.

⇒ "[to do] the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephes. 4:12).

5. (13:3) Prayer— Fasting: the first missionaries bathed their mission in prayer and fasting. They did not launch out immediately. The *new call* was too momentous. The face of God had to be sought...

- for a deep sense of His presence and power.
- for the direction of His will.
- for the praise of His name.

(See notes, pt.2—Acts 13:2; and Fasting—Matthew 6:16-18 for more discussion.)

6. (13:3) Commission— Church: the first missionaries were commissioned by the church. Note two points.

1. This was apparently an official meeting of the church called for the specific purpose of commissioning Saul and Barnabas.

2. The church was not calling and setting these two men apart. It was the Holy Spirit who had called and set these two men apart to the ministry. The church was...

- acknowledging the Holy Spirit's call by the laying on of hands. (See Deeper Study #2—Acts 6:6.)
- committing its support and prayers to the two God-sent men.
- obeying the Holy Spirit's leadership and allowing the men to be *separated* from the Antioch church.

However, note that the church was called upon to *acknowledge and commission* these men to the work of God (Acts 13:2).

"Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6).

DEEPER STUDY #2

(13:1) **Teaching - Teachers:** teaching is a high calling, one of the greatest of callings. Teaching is ranked second only to the spiritual gifts of apostle and prophet (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28; Ephes. 4:11). Every apostle and prophet and pastor has the gift of teaching, but every teacher is not an apostle or prophet or pastor. The gift of teaching bears one of the largest responsibilities given by God; therefore, the teacher will be required to give a strict account to God for his faithfulness in using his gift (see note, Teachers—James 3:1).

The spiritual gift of teaching is the gift of understanding and communicating the Word of God, of edifying believers in the truths of God's Word. It involves understanding, interpreting, arranging, and communicating the Word of God. The gift of teaching is given to the believer who commits his life to the Word of God, to sharing its glorious truths with God's people.

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

ACTS: DIVISION VI

THE FIRST GREAT MISSION OF PAUL TO THE GENTILES: TO CYPRUS AND GALATIA,

B. Cyprus, the Island: The Beginning of Missions and Evangelism, 13:4-13

(13:4-13) Introduction: this is the first picture of missionary action in the world. As such it paints a graphic picture of just what missions and evangelism involve.

1. (13:4) Missions— Holy Spirit: there was the leading of the Holy Spirit. Picture the scene: Seleucia was the seaport of Antioch. It lay fifteen miles to the west of Antioch. Barnabas and Saul with all their luggage were being escorted to the port by some of their Christian friends from Antioch. Imagine the conversation and excitement as they shared their plans and dreams of what lay ahead. But note: this is not what Scripture stresses. What Scripture stresses is simply stated, but it is critical.

The servants of God were "sent forth by the Holy Spirit." They were not striking out on their own. They were not going because of a *feeling*, an inner idea that told them they should go. They were not going because the church was sending them forth. They were not going because they had chosen missions as a profession. The source of their call and mission was the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit of God that had called them and was sending them forth (cp. Acts 13:1-3).

The leadership of the Spirit is critical to the servant of God. If he is led by the Spirit, he is filled with the greatest encouragement; but if he is not led by the Spirit, he is often filled with the greatest discouragement. Paul and Barnabas were led by the Spirit; therefore, they were able to march forth triumphantly. They knew five encouraging things.

⇒ They were *sons of God*.

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

⇒ The Holy Spirit would be *abiding* with them.

"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16-17).

⇒ The Holy Spirit would be *guiding them*.

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come" (John 16:13).

⇒ The Holy Spirit would be giving them the words to say.

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

⇒ The Holy Spirit would be *giving success*, convicting the hearers.

"And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11).

Note that the Holy Spirit leads Barnabas and Saul to the island of Cyprus, the home of Barnabas (see Deeper Study #1, Cyprus—Acts 13:4). Salamis was the largest city on the island. (See Deeper Study #2, Salamis—Acts 13:5 for discussion.)

2. (13:5-6) Missions, Work of— Discipleship: there was the work of missions. The primary work of missions is clearly seen in these two verses.

1. The Lord's servants preached the Word (see note, Preaching—Acts 14:21 for discussion. See outline—Acts 13:14-41 and notes—Acts 13:14-41 for the message Paul preached.)

2. The Lord's servants made disciples. They took John Mark with them. The word "minister" (*hupēretēs*^{PWS: 2599}) means attendant, assistant, helper. Mark was ministering under Barnabas and Paul, being disciplined by them—helping, serving, ministering right with them, learning all he could. Apparently he was somewhat younger. Note the word "also": this could be saying Mark was doing some preaching as well as helping in other areas.

Making disciples of young men was one of the major ministries of Paul. He was usually seen with at least several disciples accompanying him. Even on this mission, he seemed to have several whom he was discipling, although they were not named (cp. "his company," Acts 13:13).

Just how Paul went about making disciples of others can be seen in the words of the great commission: "Go ye...and teach [make disciples of] all nations...." (Matthew 28:19). The word "teach" (*metheteusate*) means to *make disciples*. Thus the verse accurately reads, "Go ye therefore and 'make disciples' of all nations...." The point to note is this: our Lord is not only telling us *to go and evangelize*; He is telling us *how* to go and *how* to evangelize. He is not only giving His ultimate *objective* and overriding purpose; He is giving *the method* to use in evangelizing the world.

Think about the word "*metheteusate*" (make disciples). What does our Lord mean by *make disciples*? Is He not telling us to do exactly as He did?

What *did* He do? Christ "came to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He sought the lost, those who were willing to commit their lives to Him. And when He found such a person, He saved that person. When Christ found a person who was willing to *commit* his life, Christ attached Himself to that person. Christ began to mold and make that person into His image. The word *attach* is the key word. It is probably the word that best describes discipleship. Christ made disciples of men by *attaching* Himself to them; and through this *personal attachment*, they were able to observe His life and conversation; and in seeing and hearing, they began to absorb and assimilate His very character and behavior. They began to follow Him and to serve Him more and more closely.

In simple terms this is what Paul did. This is the way he made disciples. This was his mission and his method, his obsession. There is another way to describe what Paul did. Paul envisioned something beyond himself, and beyond his day and time. He envisioned an *extension* of himself, an *extension* of his very being, and an *extension* of his mission and method. The way he chose to extend himself was discipling; he *attached himself* to committed persons, and through *attachment*, the persons absorbed and assimilated the Lord's very character and mission. Then they in turn *attached* themselves to others and disciplined them. They, too, expected their disciples to make disciples of others who were willing to commit their lives to Christ. It was by this method that the glorious message of Christ marched down through the centuries until it reached us. And it is by this method that the message of Christ is to march down to the generation that is to follow us (2 Tim. 2:2).

There is no question what our Lord's commission is: we are to go; but more than that, we are to make disciples, to attach ourselves to those persons who will follow our Lord until they in turn can make disciples (2 Tim. 2:2).

"Go ye therefore, and teach [make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting [equipping] of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephes. 4:11-12).

"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

3. The Lord's servants reached out to new areas. Note the two men went through Cyprus, to the city of Paphos. The idea is that they evangelized and preached the Word from town to town, village to village as they moved about the island. They reached out to every area, carrying the glorious gospel to those who were even in the *back areas* of the island.

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

"For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:15).

4. The Lord's servants confronted a false prophet. If there were no false prophets, there would be no false teaching. False teaching exists because of false prophets. Therefore the servants of Christ will not only be confronting false teaching, they will be confronting the false prophet himself. This is important to note, for it is usually much more difficult to confront a person than just an idea. A person can stand toe to toe with a person, threatening and persecuting him. The false prophet and teacher is usually in rebellion and opposition against God; therefore some form of evil attack is almost sure to happen.

The point is this: the Lord's true servant will run across false prophets and teachers. Therefore, he must be walking in the Spirit, relying upon His leadership and care and His presence and power in order to stand against false teachers and their teaching.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

"Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).

"For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:18).

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim. 4:1-2).

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1).

"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son" (1 John 2:22).

"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 John 7).