

Introduction

1. We have two commands or declarations of Jesus that converge here
  - a. We find the first in Acts 1:8 when Jesus called upon the Apostles to be His witnesses in **“Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth”**
  - b. We find the second in Acts 9 where we have the calling and conversion of Saul and Jesus declares that Saul would be His **“chosen instrument...to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel”** (15)
2. For the first third of Acts, the focus was on ministry to the Jews and the establishment and building up of the Church in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria
3. However, in chapters 10 & 11, we begin to see a transition from there to the gentiles and the rest of the world:
  - a. The first major event in this transition was the conversion of Cornelius along with his family, relatives and friends—all gentiles
  - b. The second major event was the establishment of the gentile church at Antioch
4. Our passage today marks the end of the transition and the beginning of a new focus for Luke and the book of Acts—the growth of the Church among the gentiles and the **“remotest part of the earth”**

A. The church at Antioch responds to the leading of the Holy Spirit (13:1-3)

1. A couple weeks ago we learned about the establishment of the church at Antioch:
  - a. Most of the Jews who were forced out of Jerusalem during Saul’s persecution took the Gospel with them to wherever they ended up, but they preached only to other Jews
  - b. However, a few men from Cyprus and Cyrene decided to take the Gospel specifically to Gentiles in Antioch:
    - 1) Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman empire with a population of almost half a million people
    - 2) It was a major seaport trading hub with people from all different culture and religion and served as the capital of the Roman province of Syria and Phoenicia
    - 3) It ultimately became the home base for Paul and Barnabas for their missionary journeys and ultimately earned the nickname as the **“cradle of Christianity”**
    - 4) As we mentioned in our study of Acts 11, the church at Antioch becomes as important, if not maybe even more important, than the church at Jerusalem because it facilitated the spread of Christianity beyond Jerusalem into the rest of the world
2. We learn a number of important things about the church at Antioch which made them such an important part of God’s redemptive plan and the spread of the Gospel (13:1-3):
  - a. The first thing we learn is that the Holy Spirit gifted them with prophets and teachers (READ 13:1):
    - 1) Aside from Saul and Barnabas, we almost nothing else about these men other than they were prophets and teachers

- 2) A prophet was one who under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit could speak on behalf of God:
    - a) This could include revealing new Biblical or spiritual truth like the Apostle Paul
    - b) It could include delivering encouraging messages from God to the church like Judas and Silas did in Acts 15:32
    - c) It could even include revealing future events like Agabus in Acts 11:28 and 21:11
  - 3) A teacher was someone who the Holy Spirit gifted with the ability to expound upon what God had already revealed, either through His Word the Old Testament or new revelation and truth delivered by the prophets
  - 4) According to Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, God specifically appoints prophets and teachers within local churches for the purpose of building up the Body of Christ and we see that here at Antioch
- b. A second thing we learn about the church at Antioch, is that they were attentive to the leading Holy Spirit (READ 13:2):
- 1) To be attentive means to pay close attention to something and here we see that the Antioch church was sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading—they heard Him when He spoke
  - 2) It appears the reason they were in-tune with what the Holy Spirit was saying to them was the fact that they were "**ministering to the Lord and fasting**":
    - a) This phrase "**ministering to the Lord**" is simply another way of saying that they were serving the Lord—it's used in the OT to refer to Samuel's, Aaron's and the priests' service to the Lord, and it's used in the NT to describe how the angels served Jesus when He was in the wilderness and how believers serve one another
    - b) Fasting was a religious ritual used when seeking divine favor or guidance and it was generally combined with prayer—that's what Luke is describing here (he combines fasting with prayer in v. 3)
    - c) In other words, the Antioch church was dedicated to serving the Lord and actively seeking His guidance and direction when the Holy Spirit spoke to them
- c. The third thing we learn about the church at Antioch, is that they were obedient to the Holy Spirit's command (READ 13:3):
- 1) Saul and Barnabas were probably the two greatest earthly assets the Antioch church had
  - 2) When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he was apparently quickly overwhelmed with the responsibilities of shepherding the new church so he went to Tarsus to recruit Paul and brought him back to Antioch to help teach
  - 3) They spent the next year teaching "**considerable numbers**" of new believers (Acts 11:26)
  - 4) By the time we get to our passage today we see there are now multiple prophets and teachers, most of whom were no doubt trained and disciplined by Paul and Barnabas
  - 5) Imagine how difficult it must have been for the Antioch church to now send these two away on their first missionary journey?
  - 6) Yet, at the Holy Spirit's command, they didn't hesitate—they prayed, fasted, commissioned them (e.g. laid their hands on them) and sent Paul and Barnabas away to carry out the ministry the Holy Spirit had assigned to them

3. Before we move on I want to briefly take another look at v. 2 and highlight three more things: **“the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”**
  - a. The first thing to notice is the imperative: the Holy Spirit gave them specific instructions and commanded them to set Barnabas and Saul apart
  - b. Second, notice the repetition of the personal pronouns: “set apart for **ME**...for the work to which **I** have called them”
  - c. Finally, notice that the Holy Spirit had a specific mission to which he called Paul and Barnabas: **“for the work** to which I have **called them**”
4. Takeaway: everything in these few verses screams that the Holy Spirit is in charge!
  - a. We, the Church, operate under the authority, the direction, the provision, and the commands of the Lord through the Holy Spirit
  - b. It’s not my church, or Dustin’s church, or any pastor’s church; it not even your church or the congregation’s church
  - c. It’s Jesus’ church and He guides and directs it through the Holy Spirit
  - d. This means that like the Antioch church, we need to be committed to actively seeking the Spirit’s leading, listening to Him, and being committed to obey Him

**B. Saul and Barnabas obey the Holy Spirit and set out on their first missionary journey (13:4-12)**

1. Luke reminds us that it was the Holy Spirit who had ultimately commissioned Saul and Barnabas and we see that they obeyed (4a): **“So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit...”**
2. They begin their mission in Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea about 60 miles away from Antioch (READ 4-5):
  - a. They start in the city of Salamis—probably because it was a port city and likely where they arrived on the island; it was also one of the largest cities on Cyprus so it was a strategic place to start (at one point it was the Roman capital until they moved the capital to Paphos)
  - b. The island was mostly Gentiles, but Luke tells us that they first began preaching the Gospel in the synagogues, which would have been a mostly Jewish audience along with some God-fearing Greeks:
    - 1) Based on the rest of the book of Acts, this became Paul’s pattern wherever he went-he would begin with the Jews at the synagogues
    - 2) In fact, when he arrived in Rome for his trial at the end of Acts, the first thing he did was call together the leading Jews of the city and preach the Gospel to them
  - c. It’s pretty clear in this passage and the rest of Acts that the Holy Spirit was sending Saul and Barnabas out into “the remotest parts of the earth” to preach the gospel to gentiles; so, why did they start in the synagogues?
    - 1) In Romans 1:16 Paul wrote that the Gospel is **“the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also the Greek.”**
    - 2) He wrote something similar in Romans 2:9-10: **“There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”**
    - 3) Now, look at Acts 13:44-47 (READ)

- 4) God’s redemptive plan has always been to bring about forgiveness and salvation through Israel so it makes sense that He would offer it to them first—we see this in the Gospel where Jesus was first sent to the house of Israel, and Paul followed this same pattern of preaching the Gospel to Jews first, then gentiles
3. As they make their way across the island, they encounter opposition from a Jewish mystic (READ 6-7):
    - a. Paphos was the capital city and was located on the west side of the island
    - b. Luke says nothing about their success or lack of success in preaching the gospel across the island, but when they get to Paphos they face opposition from a man named Bar-Jesus:
      - 1) He was a magician which is best understood here as a mystic or sorcerer
      - 2) He was Jewish
      - 3) He was a false prophet meaning he misrepresented God
      - 4) And he served the proconsul (e.g. governor) of Cyprus
    - c. When the governor summons Saul and Barnabas so he can hear the Word from them, Bar-Jesus (Elymas) tries to convince him to reject the Gospel (READ 8)
  4. In response, Paul, having become empowered by the Holy Spirit, strikes the man with temporary blindness (READ 9-11):
    - a. Did you notice all the irony here?
    - b. Paul is full of the Holy Spirit, but the false prophet is “full of all deceit and fraud”
    - c. His name was Bar-Jesus, which means son of Joshua, but Paul calls him “huie diabolou” which means son of the devil
    - d. Paul accuses him of making crooked the straight ways of the Lord (after all, that’s what a false prophet does)
    - e. And, to cap it off, he suffered the same fate that Paul did when he opposed Jesus—he was struck blind and needed to be led around by the hand by others!
  5. Luke records the response of the governor in v. 12 (READ):
    - a. Luke states that the governor “**believed**” when he saw what happened to Bar-Jesus
    - b. When Luke said the same thing of Simon the magician back in Acts 8:13 I suggested that it wasn’t a genuine conversion or saving faith, mostly because the context suggested that Simon was more interested in getting the ability to bestow the Holy Spirit on others than he was in salvation
    - c. However, here it seems Luke is referring to genuine belief because he gives the reason for the governor’s belief—he was amazed at the teaching of the Lord (e.g. he believed WHEN he saw what happened to Bar-Jesus but he believed BECAUSE he was amazed by the Word)
  6. Takeaway:
    - a. One of the takeaways that immediately comes to mind for me is the power of the Gospel:
      - 1) Paul wrote in Romans 1:15-16 that he wasn’t ashamed of the Gospel because it’s the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes
      - 2) David wrote in Psalm 19 that the Word of God has the power to restore the soul, make wise the simple, rejoice the heart, enlighten the eyes, and convict mankind of his sin
      - 3) The author of Hebrews wrote, “**For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of**

**both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”**  
(Hebrews 4:12)

- 4) We see all of this here when all the false arguments of the governor’s own trusted spiritual advisor is no match for the simple Gospel message presented to him by two strangers
- b. Another takeaway is how precisely this passage matches what Jesus said to Paul at his conversion:
- 1) Jesus told him he would be his chosen instrument to bear his name before gentiles, and kings, and the sons of Israel
  - 2) Here, we have Paul and Barnabas commissioned by the Holy Spirit, sent into gentile land, preaching in the synagogues with its mix of Jews and gentile proselytes, and essentially bearing Jesus’ name before a king (e.g. a governing official)
  - 3) This is a great reminder that Jesus has a plan and purpose for building His Church and it will all work out according to that plan and purpose