

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 14
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
CHAPTER 13**

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 13 begins a fresh section of the Book of Acts. We have seen that from chapters 1 to 7, the focus is on the church in Jerusalem and work among the Jews. Chapter 8 to 12 can be described as a transition period in which the Gospel was being introduced from Jews to Gentiles. This chapter onwards to chapter 28 highlights the ministry of the Apostle Paul unto the Lord Jesus Christ in reaching out to Gentiles, from Antioch¹ in Syria to Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire. Altogether, Paul embarked on three missionary trips. Chapter 13 records the beginning of the first missionary witnessing to the Gentile world. Luke's record of Paul's first missionary journey to Asia Minor provides valuable lessons and principles for Christians and churches today in mission work. The church in Antioch, Syria became a strong base from which Paul launched his missionary outreach to the surrounding regions. The choosing of Paul and Barnabas by the Holy Spirit for mission work also provides valuable practical insight for church leaders today. Paul's method of preaching and teaching the people in

¹Antioch was known as the "queen of the East"

the cities he visited is instructive. There is a pattern in his way of going about the work, which Christian leaders can adopt. His encounters with friends and foes are both enlightening and helpful.

In chapter 13, Saul's name was changed to Paul (v.9). "Saul" is Paul's Jewish name. After this, Luke did not use his Jewish name anymore. Luke used his Roman or Latin name of "Paulus or Paul". This is a long chapter and its study is best divided into smaller sections under the following headings: 1) The Call of Paul and Barnabas (vv.1-3); 2) Paul's First Missionary Trip (vv.4-13); 3) Paul's Preaching in Antioch-Pisidia (vv.14-41); 4) The Mixed Response to Paul's preaching (vv. 42-48); Paul and Barnabas' Departure to Iconium (vv.49-52).

COMMENTARY

Call of Paul & Barnabas

In Acts 11, we learn that the first Gentile church was formed in the city of Antioch. The Lord blessed the missionary work and the church flourished tremendously. Barnabas was sent there to investigate the growth of the church. The believers were the first to be called Christians in Antioch. We also learn that Barnabas could not cope with the work, and he sought Saul (later called Paul) to complement and enhance the work there.

After the fall of Jerusalem, Antioch became an important Christian centre for the province of Syria. By then it was perceived by some to be at par with Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria in Egypt. Its greatest contribution was the part it played in the expansion of Christianity. The Church in Antioch supported Paul's three

missionary journeys. Every city that Paul went to, he preached and taught the Word, and churches were formed in those cities. Each time Paul would return to Antioch and report his work to the church. The church prayed and supported him. The church could boast of God-fearing and Spirit-filled leaders. Five of them are mentioned. We know Barnabas well when the church began in Jerusalem. He was a Levite from Cyprus, and a God-loving Christian who loved to encourage others and who gave to the Lord for the advancement of His kingdom (Acts 4:36, 37). There was Simeon who was nicknamed “Niger” because he was dark-skinned and probably came from North Africa. Lucius is next and not much is said of him except that he came from Cyrene in Libya in North Africa. Manaen who is mentioned as being brought up by Herod belonged to the elite society in Roman-occupied Palestine, and now a Christian. Last but not least was Saul, who at first was a fierce persecutor of the Christian faith, and later became its faithful preacher. These men served as preachers of the Word and teachers who gave instructions to believers in Antioch. Moreover, they were men filled with the Holy Spirit and lived in obedience to His guidance and direction. They spent time fasting and praying too. It is significant that Luke wrote that “they ministered to the Lord” (13:2); they served no men but the Lord Jesus Christ.

In one of their prayer meetings, the Holy Spirit spoke probably through one of them to separate Barnabas and Saul for a special work. The church formerly set apart money for the Lord’s work (Acts 11:29, 30). Now they set apart men for the work of Christ. This is an example for modern churches to

follow. There is a spiritual progression of maturity and commitment; first the giving or provision of material means and then choosing of men who are willing to give their all to the service of the Lord. They prayed with fasting; and convinced of the choice of Barnabas and Saul, they laid their hands on them. This public laying of hands, which today is termed “ordination”, serves as a visible indication that the calling and service of these two men, were accepted by the church. It is imperative that the leaders and members of the church support them spiritually and materially. As these men were chosen by the Lord, so they were being sent forth by the Holy Spirit—the church is the visible instrument. This is a very important factor in ascertaining the calling of a person who desires to serve the Lord full-time. A person must first be diligent and active in serving the Lord, and then be convicted of the Lord’s calling and confirmed by Spirit-filled leaders of the church, and finally he does the work under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s First Missionary Trip

Saul and Barnabas were sent forth by the Holy Spirit on their first missionary trip. For the mission to be successful, they must be sent by the will of God and with the power of the Holy Spirit. They proceeded to Seleucia, the sea-port of Antioch. From there they sailed across the sea to Cyprus, the hometown of Barnabas. So Barnabas, once again proved useful. He was familiar with the country and could easily guide Paul. Cyprus is a large island. At that time, it boasted of a great number of Jews. Some of its people had been believers, having been witnessed to by visiting missionaries and their own converts (11:19, 20). They landed at

Salamis in Cyprus – the port that is nearest to Seleucia. There was more than one synagogue in Salamis. Paul began preaching the Word by going to the synagogues first. This had been his strategy, which Christians today can follow. The Jews and others who embraced Judaism would be familiar with the Scriptures. Paul surely would expound the Scriptures to show its fulfilment in Jesus Christ. A third person, who was with them, was John Mark, a relative of Barnabas. He attended to the needs of Paul and Barnabas and helped in their preaching.

Departing Salamis they travelled south-west across the island to Paphos. Paphos was the Roman capital of Cyprus. It was noted for its worship of Venus, which in Roman mythology was a goddess of love and lusts. Athanasius, a third century Christian theologian, called Paphos one of the wicked places in the old Roman world. Paul and Barnabas found a false prophet there, by the name of Bar-Jesus (meaning: “son of a saviour”), who was also known as Elymas. He was a sorcerer, a self-claimed prophet who practised black magic and spiritism. He associated himself with Sergius Paulus, the governor who was a learned and intelligent man. Sergius Paulus summoned Paul and Barnabas desiring to hear from them about the Word of God. But Elymas personally tried to stop their meeting by persuading the governor not to believe the Christian missionaries. Paul, who was filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at Elymas’ eyes and gave him a sharp rebuke. Paul accused him of being crafty, deceitful and mischievous, and called him “a child of the devil”, and an “enemy of all righteousness”. Paul continued and charged him not to

oppose the right ways of God (v.9). In righteous indignation, Paul invoked the name of Christ in judgement against Elymas, who was immediately stricken with blindness and had to be led around by someone. The impact on Sergius Paulus was instant. He was not only amazed at what happened to Elymas, he was also astounded by the doctrine of the Lord. He became a believer!

Paul’s Preaching in Antioch Pisidia

From Paphos, Paul and his team sailed across the sea north to Perga in Pamphylia, a province on the mainland of Asia Minor. In Perga, an incident took place. John decided to part company with them and to return to Jerusalem. Luke did not give any reason. But perhaps his return was due to a shaken faith or a weakened one.² Paul and his team passed through Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. It is important to distinguish the Antioch-Pisidia here with Antioch-Syria. Antioch-Pisidia was a flourishing region which characterized both Greek and Roman civilisations. The synagogues were attended not only by Jews but God-fearing Gentiles (v.42).

As his custom was, he went into the synagogue in that city on the Sabbath day and participated in the religious service. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers

² Acts 15:37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. 38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. 39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

² Timothy 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

extended an invitation to the visitors to speak a word of exhortation to the worshippers (v. 15). From this record, we learn something about the form of worship in the early days. Firstly, we learn that the Jews divided the Holy Scriptures (Old Testament) into three sections: (1) the Law which comprises the Pentateuch or the five books of Moses; (2) the Prophets which includes the books of Joshua, Judges, 1st and 2nd Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve Minor Prophets; and (3) the Writings or Hagiographa which contains the rest of the other books. We learn that the worship service consisted of prayers by the rulers of the synagogue; reading of the Scriptures – portions of the Law, or Prophets or the Writings; and a word of exhortation and encouragement. We also learn that it was their custom to invite distinguished visitors to share a word of encouragement with the people. In response to the invitation by the rulers of the synagogue, Paul stood up indicating his intention to speak.

A study of Paul's message to the worshippers in the synagogue shows that Paul's purpose was to declare to his fellow Jews and God-fearing hearers that salvation, forgiveness of sins, and justification could be had only in the Lord Jesus Christ and not by the Law of Moses. Paul was careful in his opening statement. He was aware of the fact that his hearers were a mixed group. He therefore called to attention both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles to his message. His message can be logically divided into three sections. In the first section, he broadly traced the pertinent stages of the history of Jews from the time when God delivered them from bondage in Egypt to His covenantal promise that He would raise from the

house of David a Saviour who is Jesus (v.23). At this juncture, Paul once again drew the attention of his hearers, both Jews and those who feared God that God's message of salvation was for them. In this way, he introduced the second point of his message.

Paul proceeded to mention the testimony of John the Baptist who was respected by the Jews as a great prophet. John declared that he was not the prophet whom they were seeking but rather, the One who came after him. He was the One above him, whose shoes he was not worthy to unloose. Paul focussed on the rejection, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. He pointed out that the rulers and others who lived in Jerusalem did not know Jesus nor did they understand the Scriptures, which they heard read every Sabbath. Their rejection of Jesus and their demand from Pilate that Jesus be put to death were in fulfilment of what the Scriptures wrote of Him. Paul made it crystal clear that Jesus was their promised Messiah or Christ. Hence, God raised Him from the dead. His bodily resurrection was witnessed by many and they in turn witnessed to the people. God had fulfilled all these so that his hearers who were the children of those who were in Jerusalem might know that Jesus is alive again as it is written in the books of Psalms (2:7; 16:10). Paul aptly proved from Scriptures and from eyewitnesses that Jesus was their living Christ. His argument therefore removed any doubts that the Jews and the Gentiles might have about Jesus and His resurrection.

And now for the third time, Paul specially called upon his hearers – “men and brethren”—that through “this man” a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, is preached the forgiveness of sins, and

that by Him those who believed in Him are justified from all things. This justification they could not obtain by the Law of Moses (vv.38-39). Paul did not fully explain the doctrine of justification. But the Jews and the Greeks understood the term “to justify” means “*not to make* someone righteous” but “*to declare* someone righteous.” The moment someone puts his or her faith and trust in Jesus Christ, God declares that person to be righteous, acquitted from all charges. God does the declaration and the justification, not men. The act of justification is not a long drawn process but it is an instantaneous act, which is never repeated. The verdict once pronounced remains eternally settled. Paul warned against despising God’s offer of salvation in Jesus Christ and so fulfilling the prophecy of Habakkuk 1:5³, which speaks of the danger of not recognising what God had done and that they would not believe even if someone were to tell them.

Mixed Response to Paul’s Preaching

The Jews in the synagogue left without saying anything. When they had left, the Gentiles requested that Paul preached more of what he had said to them the next Sabbath. Many of the Jews and Gentiles who embraced the Jewish religion followed Paul and Barnabas, and in response the latter persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

The next Sabbath came and almost the entire city gathered to hear the Word of God! The people were truly hungry for the Word. But the Jews were

jealous when they saw the multitudes. They began to oppose, contradict and blaspheme what Paul had spoken to them. Paul and Barnabas were not afraid of them. They boldly said to these dissenting Jews that it was God’s design that His Word should be given to the Jews first. But since they rejected it and counted themselves to be unworthy of everlasting life, they turned to the Gentiles. The Lord Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry had foreseen this happening. The Lord Jesus Christ had called His disciples to be “a light to the Gentiles” bringing the good news of salvation to the ends of the world (v.47). The Gentiles when they heard these words were delighted and they glorified God for His Word. Luke’s statement that “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” may be difficult for some to understand. The word “ordained” means “to assign a place” or “to appoint”. If we take its plain sense, it simply means that those whom God appointed to eternal life believed. This is the sovereign right of God.⁴ But immediately the following verse implies that the Word of the Lord needs to be proclaimed in all the places, and man must hear the Word in order that they can exercise their faith. No one should be perturbed or be at variant with this revelation of the truth. God’s election of man to salvation and man’s responsibility to believe to be saved are like two sides of a coin. The teaching in the Word of God is clearly there and we must humbly accept it and not to try to reconcile it. We must admit that some

³Habakkuk 1:5, "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you."

⁴ Compare: Ephesians 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

of the teachings of God cannot be fully comprehended by man.

Paul & Barnabas's Departure to Iconium

Whereas the Gentiles gladly received the Word of the Lord, the Jews stirred up “the devout and honourable women” and the chief men in the city to oppose, persecute and expel Paul and Barnabas from the city. Paul and Barnabas had done their work in faithfully preaching the Word to both Jews and Gentiles and many of them believed and glorified God. It was customary for Paul and Barnabas to shake off “the dust of their feet” as a gesture of their disapproval against them. They then left Antioch-Pisidia and proceeded to Iconium. They were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

PRACTICAL VALUE

One of the valuable lessons which we can learn from this chapter is how we ought to do the work of God, be it overseas missions, evangelistic outreach, or the various church ministries. Prior to any decision, there is the need to seek the leading of the Holy Spirit through prayer and even fasting, if necessary. The decision rests on the leaders who are already active in the work of the church, and after that the whole church is participant in one way or another (vv.1-3).

The next thing we learn is that the main purpose of mission trips is to preach and teach the Word of God. Paul preached and taught in every city he went. He was not involved in any humanitarian activities, commendable as these are, but his over-riding singular focus was the preaching of the Word. This is understandable because

Christians are the only ones who possess the Word of life, of sins forgiven and justification in Christ. Nothing in fact is more important and necessary to the people except this. If Christians are distracted from their mission work of reaching out to the people with the gospel of salvation, then the people are deprived of the means of hearing the Word and exercising faith in Christ.

Another thing is that at any new place that we go to, we should seek out believers living there. Paul always went first to the synagogues to preach the Word to them. This would facilitate the forming of a church, the training of the local believers, and eventually to let them carry on with the work. They could initially be supported by the founding church, which sent the missionaries.

We learn from Paul the essentials of the gospel message. The message of salvation in Jesus Christ is particularly directed at any God-fearing man. The essentials of the gospel message are emphasised. Man needs to be saved from the bondage of sin, and that Jesus Christ is his only Saviour. Paul explained to the people about the rejection, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The message of the forgiveness of sins, and justification in Jesus Christ only and not by the works of the Law is being impressed upon the hearers. The problem of sin and the means of justification need to be uncompromisingly taught.

Finally, in doing the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, there will always be opposition by people who are either envious, or opposing the gospel message, or wicked. We can learn from Paul and Barnabas the courage to rebuke and to warn the people. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Acts 13:1-13; Romans 10:13-17.

Tuesday: Acts 13:14-29; Luke 2:10-18.

Wednesday: Acts 13:30-41; 1 Timothy 2:1-6.

Thursday: Acts 13:42-48; Hebrews 4:7; John 1:12.

Friday: Acts 13:49-52; 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

Discussion Questions

1. What were the features in the church at Antioch that could be exemplified as a model for present-day churches?

2. How do you rate your Church in comparison to the model that you have studied in Acts 13? What can you do to improve it?

3. Why does the gospel of Jesus Christ bring division whenever it is preached?

4. What can we learn from Paul and Barnabas about meeting those like Elymas and the jealous Jews who are hostile to the Gospel?

5. Construct a logical presentation of the gospel of salvation to an unbeliever by using Paul's message as a guideline in the following outline: the Person of Jesus Christ; the need for the forgiveness of sin and salvation; the provision of Christ; and the requirement of faith.
