

Armagh Baptist Church
Sunday 3rd January 2010 - 11:00am

Acts 12:25-13:13 – ‘The First Missionary Send-off to Cyprus’

Introduction

When I was inducted to this church as pastor, 8 months ago, I said that there were certain things that I wanted us to set as priorities and keep our focus on: One of those was a strong emphasis on **Discipleship** in every area of church life. We were able to talk about that at the end of the old year when we looked at Acts 11:26 *‘The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.’*

Another one was a desire to keep **Mission** top of our agenda as a church. Well we have an opportunity to do that in the first service of this New Year as we look at Acts 13:1-13 this morning: *‘The First Missionary Send-off.’*

In Acts ch.12 we saw a Church engaged in earnest prayer in Jerusalem. Well, Acts ch.13 opens with another Church engaged in prayer in Antioch.

The Jerusalem Church had been concerned for Peter’s welfare, because he had been arrested and put in prison by the tyrant, King Herod, and was awaiting execution on death row.

But God heard and answered the church’s prayer by bringing Peter out of prison, right to the door of their prayer meeting! At first they couldn’t believe it was him - that he had been released in answer to their prayers - but in the end they were convinced and let him in. Peter had since gone into hiding, but very shortly afterwards, God struck down King Herod, and the tyrant was no more. Then we read Dr Luke’s summary statement on the advance of the Gospel:

‘But the Word of God continued to increase and spread.’ (v.24)

That brings us to the last verse of ch.12, where we are told that when Barnabas and Saul *‘had finished their mission’* they returned from Jerusalem (to Antioch), taking with them John, also called Mark. What mission was that? Well in case you’ve forgotten, turn back to Acts ch.11:27-30.

Remember back at the end of Acts ch.11, Agabus had come up from Jerusalem to Antioch, and had prophesied that a terrible famine was going to spread across the whole of the Roman World. It happened during the reign of Claudius Caesar, but the effects began to be felt straight away in places like Tyre and Sidon (Acts 12:20), and eventually Judea, where the Jerusalem Church was, would be hardest hit. So the Gentile-background-believers in the Antioch Church saw it as their duty to gather together some food aid and send it down to the Jerusalem Church under the care of Barnabas and Saul, who in turn gave it to the elders of the church in Jerusalem to distribute (11:29-30).

Now I think it is important to notice in Acts 12:25 that this trip is referred to as a ‘mission’. *‘When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission they*

returned from Jerusalem’ obviously back to Antioch. The word is *diakonean* (service, ministry or mission) It is translated ‘mission’ in the NIV and NASB. It is important at this early stage in the history of the church to notice that a trip that involved bringing food aid from a donor church in Antioch back to a recipient church in Jerusalem was seen as *‘mission’*. A trip that involved physical food aid going to those in need in a famine situation, was seen just as much as mission, as going to preach the Gospel was.

This wasn’t some deviation from true Gospel mission work as some might see it - that crept into mission in the 20th Century – No! It is all seen as mission! I think it is important to remember that throughout the New Testament there would continue to be this need in the Jerusalem churches for physical and material food aid. Again and again Paul would see it as part of ‘his mission’ to raise money and support for his brothers and sisters back in Judea, just as much as he saw it as important to press on with the Gospel into new virgin territory towards Rome and ultimately to Spain itself. It didn’t seem to conflict.

So the 20th Century argument in Mission circles about what is or is not classed as ‘mission’ should be settled here and now in Acts ch.12:25 – a verse before we have what is often referred to as the First Missionary Send-Off in Acts 13. God the Holy Spirit used the same word for Barnabas and Saul’s trip to Jerusalem with food aid for brothers and sisters in Christ as he does for their next trip in Acts 13 when they are sent out to preach the Gospel to the island of Cyprus from their home church in Antioch. So, just as we saw last Sunday morning that the Word of God and Prayer go hand in hand in mission, so we see already this morning that mission often involves physical *and* spiritual food going out together. It’s not a case of either/or, it should be a case of both/and.

So technically Barnabas and Saul have already completed their first missionary journey by the end of Acts ch.12. They went south to Jerusalem from Antioch carrying food aid for the churches there, and now they have just returned the 300 miles north again to Antioch, bringing with them a young man called John Mark. This was the son of Mary Mark, the lady whose house the prayer meeting was held in for Peter’s release from prison (cf 12:12 & 12:25). Colossians 4:10 also tells us that this John Mark was the cousin of Barnabas! So the early church was just like many churches here in Northern Ireland – they had lots of family connections!

But as we come into Acts ch.13 we discover that the leadership in the Antioch Church certainly wasn’t restricted to close family members. It was so diverse!

1. The Leadership in Antioch (Acts 13:1)

We are told straightaway that the Leadership in the Antioch Church was made up of prophets and teachers. Five names are mentioned:

Barnabas – The Son of Encouragement – who came from Cyprus.
Simeon – called Niger (black) – who probably came from Africa.
Lucius – of Cyrene – who also came from North Africa (Libya).
Manaen – (who was the foster brother of Herod the Tetrarch!) Jewish.
Saul – of Tarsus – from Cilicia in modern day Turkey. He was a Roman citizen but he was also Jewish by birth and by up-bringing.

It seems to me, that this church in Antioch certainly had a good leadership in place. Not just people from a staunch Jewish background, as in Jerusalem or Judea, but people from all around the Mediterranean basin. Two of them were from Africa - Simeon and Lucius – so they were probably dark skinned. Two of them were in the forefront of the grass-roots movement to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles (cf. 11:20 – probably Barnabas from Cyprus and Lucius from Cyrene). Manaen, since he had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch was probably from the Jewish aristocracy, but now heavily influenced by Roman culture. And of course Saul of Tarsus: a Jew to the back-teeth, but one who had been brought up in the Roman colony of Tarsus in Cilicia, and who was proud of his Roman citizenship too. So this team of leaders in the Antioch Church were already very cross-cultural in their make-up. They were ready to think outside the box as far as world mission was concerned. They were ready to bring the Gospel from this new centre in Antioch to the rest of the Roman World at that time.

But in the meantime as well as giving themselves to preaching and teaching in the church in Antioch in a team ministry, they also were in the habit of devoting themselves to worshipping the Lord and fasting. They were giving of their time, as a leadership (or eldership) to seek God's face together in prayer: *'What would you have us to do?'* I'm sure was the question that was often on their lips as they sought God's Will together.

It was during one of those periods of prayer and fasting that the Holy Spirit spoke to them, clearly leading them to...

***'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul
for the work to which I have called them.'***

So leader No.1 and leader No.5, I want to send you both out on mission! It really does seem as if Barnabas was the key leader in Antioch at this time. It was him who was sent down from the church in Jerusalem to check out these new converts, and it was him who encouraged them to stay true to the Lord. It seems with his name being mentioned first here, that he has the key leadership role. It was Barnabas who also went to Tarsus in search of Saul to bring him back to help in the teaching ministry in the Antioch Church. So Saul is very much a junior leader at this stage, but all that would soon change. God had now called the church to set these two men apart for His service elsewhere. They continued to fast and pray and then they placed their hands on them and sent them off, in obedience to the Holy Spirit's promptings.

(Saul had already been **called** to the work of Gentile mission in Acts 9:15-16. Now he has been **ordained** or **set apart** for this work, by his home church). It is important, if the Lord calls an individual to serve in mission, that their home church can identify with and endorse that call, and then send them out with the full-backing of their home church. This is the pattern laid down in Acts 13. (There is no place for lone ranger/maverick missionaries in New Testament!)

2. The Leadership of Barnabas (vs.4-7)

Where did they go? It's interesting, but the Holy Spirit doesn't clearly tell them **where** to go at all. He has simply asked the Antioch Church to set them apart ***'for the work to which I have called them'***. That work was the mission to the Gentiles. That had been Saul's calling since his conversion in Acts ch.9

This is where I reckon Barnabas had some hand in it. Because they immediately head down to the local sea-port of Seleucia, and from there they sail straight for Cyprus, arriving into the port of Salamis on the island, which just happens to be where Barnabas had originally come from! He was taking the Gospel to his own people back on the island of Cyprus. Saul had already been doing this in his home town of Tarsus in Cilicia. Now it was the turn of Cyprus, as far as Barnabas was concerned. Is there a principle here that we should preach the Gospel in our home towns first, where people know us best before we go to the other side of the world? We should be active at home, and active in our home churches, before we try to do God's Work in another culture overseas! A local church like this one here in Armagh should be the training ground for missionaries or ministers before we send them elsewhere!

N.B. Although the Holy Spirit hadn't told the church to send Mark out with them, yet his cousin or uncle Barnabas has brought him along on the trip (v.5) Was this some kind of on-the-job training? If so, it didn't seem to work! (v.13)

After Cyprus, they will take a ship north to Perga in Pamphylia, on the coast of Turkey. From there they will travel inland to visit another town called Antioch (this time in Pisidia). Then they will turn East to visit the towns of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Then they will retrace their steps back to Perga, and from there they will take a ship back along the coast to Seleucia and arrive back at their home church of Antioch once again, completing their missionary journey.

How long did they go for?

Well from Acts 13:1 to Acts 14:28 is a maximum of 2 years! That's all. And in Acts 14:26 we are told that ***'they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.'*** In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit had asked the leadership in the church in Antioch to set apart Barnabas and Saul ***'for the work to which [he] had called them.'*** And by Acts 14:26, ***just 2 years later*** we are told that work was now complete.

So where do we get this idea from that whenever we send out missionaries from this or any other church, that they have been sent out for life!? That is rarely the case. Such an idea owes more to the biographies of William Carey or Hudson Taylor who spent 40 years in India and China and rarely ever came home. With relatively cheap flights everywhere now, it is rare that missionaries will go and spend a lifetime in any country. Here in Acts 13-14, the first missionary trip lasted less than 2 years. But the Holy Spirit said their work was done as far as that trip was concerned.

Almost exactly a year ago, this Church here in Armagh sent out Andrew & Carolyn Roycroft as missionaries to Peru with Baptist Missions. They are now home after one year. They obeyed God's call upon their lives at the time, and they went. They pushed the doors; they tried the experience of living cross-culturally and of bringing a baby up in a very different environment to here in Northern Ireland. They have had a difficult year, there is no doubt about that, and for various reasons the doors they tried in Peru, have now closed to them. Only eternity will tell what they accomplished there in terms of work done, but the fact is they are now home, and it is our duty as their sending church to now gather around them, to listen to their story as they tell it in various ways here in the church in the coming months, and then to let them gather their thoughts, and re-group, so that in the not too distant future, we will have the privilege as a church of sending them out again into the Lord's work. It may not be back overseas again; it may be back into pastoral work here at home. That is not for us to say, that is for the Lord of the Harvest to decide. But there is no doubt about it, just as the Holy Spirit called and equipped Barnabas & Saul, He has also clearly gifted, called and equipped Andrew & Carolyn for His work, and in the months to come we believe He will open up new avenues of service for them again. We'll all look forward to that day...

But coming back to Acts ch.13, we have seen where Barnabas and Saul went, and how long they went for, but...

Who did they go to?

Well, having arrived on the island of Cyprus, and into the port of Salamis, their desire was to proclaim the Word of God (v.5). Their desire in Cyprus is exactly the same as it had been in Antioch (12:24) to see *'the Word of God continue to increase and spread.'* But here in Cyprus, as indeed on all of Paul's missionary journeys they worked to certain principles - they had a strategy:

- To the Jew First (v.5).

We're told *'they proclaimed the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues.'* They very definitely worked on the basis that the Gospel was for the Jew first, *and then* for the Greek or the Gentile. They were already fulfilling the principle that would later be written down in Romans 1:16:

'I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.' Everywhere that Paul would go on his future missionary travels, he always stuck to this principle. He would always search out the Jewish population in any given city first. It was only after he had discharged his responsibility to them, that he would then go on to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles next. This is a principle that we should still uphold today. I believe that over the years this church here in Armagh has had an interest in Christian Witness to Israel. Well in our new missions policy which we will bring to the members at the AGM, we want to continue that interest in the months and years to come, in order to play a small part in seeing this principle fulfilled, that the Gospel should go to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile second. *'To the Jew first':*

- To the Whole Island (v.6)

Barnabas and Saul didn't content themselves with staying in Salamis. Their mission was to the whole island. So in a short space of time they travelled throughout the island preaching the Gospel as they went, until they came to another major port city on the other side of the island – Paphos. Now this didn't mean that they preached the Gospel to every citizen of the island on this world-wind tour. No, they preached the Good News about Jesus in the Jewish synagogues wherever they found them on the island, but particularly...

- To the main centres of population (Salamis & Paphos)

They spent most of their time in the two main centres of population on the island – Salamis, the commercial centre on the Eastern end of the island, and Paphos, the political capital on the Western side of the island. Again, throughout the rest of the Acts, we will see this strategy unfolding. It wasn't Barnabas and Saul's duty to preach to every last individual on the island, but it was their responsibility to preach in all the main centres of population, to see a few people converted to Christ, form them into small fledgling churches, and then leave those churches to reach the countryside around them in the years that would follow. The missionary's job, wherever they go, is to establish a Gospel witness, to plant churches, and then to leave those churches, made up of local people and led by local people, to do the work of evangelism into the rest of their areas in the years that follow. And that should still be the case today. **A missionary's job is to work themselves out of a job.** To hand the task over to local people and then to leave, allowing the church to go on to reach into their culture and community in a far more effective way, than cross-cultural missionaries will ever do it. There comes a time when a mission needs to have the courage to up sticks and leave a country altogether, if the local national church is not to be forever dependent upon resources from overseas. I personally believe that day has come as far as Baptist Missions work in Peru is concerned. BM needs to have the courage to hand the work over and leave

Where did they go? Cyprus. How long did they go for? 2 years. Who did they go to? To the Jew first, then the Greek, in the main centres of population. So...

Who did they meet in Paphos?

Well, it's very interesting, just as on the mainland, Barnabas & Saul discover very quickly that even though their strategy is to go to the Jew first, they actually find a Jew who opposes the Gospel being preached, and a Gentile accepting the Gospel that they preach. This again will be repeated throughout their travels, but they still stuck to their strategy – *'To the Jew first...!'*

The Jew they met was called:

- **Bar-Jesus** (He was a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet) (v.6)

He was also known as:

- **Elymas the sorcerer** (v.8 – This is the same man).

He was an attendant of the highest Roman official on the island. A man called:

- **Sergius Paulus** (v.7 & v.12)

This man, we're told in v.7 was an intelligent man, who actually sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the Word of God.

So he's interested in hearing the Gospel. He wants to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, so he can decide for himself whether to trust in Christ or not.

But Elymas, the Jewish Sorcerer, who should have known better because he was a Jew, actually opposed Barnabas & Saul – he came out against them – and he tried to turn his boss, the Proconsul, from the faith.

He didn't want him to believe in Jesus for himself!

So here we have an example of a Jew opposing the Gospel, because he is actually possessed by the devil – involved in all kinds of magic and sorcery. And at the same time, a Gentile Roman Ruler, who shows a great interest in the Gospel, and wants to believe in Jesus for himself. The opposite of what they might have expected, but in a sense part of the bigger picture, as the Jews now more and more turn against the Gospel, and the Gentiles more and more across the Roman World begin to accept and believe the Gospel!

It's at this point in v.9 that Barnabas fades into the background, and Saul comes to the fore in terms of leadership. Here from v.9 onwards we have...

3. The New Leadership of Paul (vs.9-13)

Paul comes to the fore (v.9) – Here we have a change in the partnership. Maybe Barnabas, the gentle encourager, wasn't suited to this confrontational style of evangelism. So Saul takes over, and at this point Dr Luke gives us his new name for the first time. The name he will be known as throughout the rest of the New Testament. Saul of Tarsus, has become Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. He begins his new role by confronting a Jewish sorcerer!

Filled with the Holy Spirit, and looking straight at Elymas, Paul confronts him by saying in v.10:

'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.'

Immediately, just the same as what happened to Saul of Tarsus on the Road to Damascus, happened to Elymas the Sorcerer in Paphos:

'Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.' (v.11)

But on this occasion, it wasn't the Jew who had been struck blind who believed, it was the Gentile, Sergius Paulus, who saw what was going on!

'When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.' (v.12)

But notice it wasn't just the miracle that made him believe, it was the teaching he had already received from Paul & Barnabas that brought him to faith. He believed their message about the Lord Jesus Christ, his death & resurrection. And so, with the top man on the island of Cyprus, now a believer, Paul & Barnabas, could now go on their way – their work was finished on Cyprus. The believers there, including the Roman Governor of the island, could now carry on Gospel witness on the island, and influence many for Christ! So...

Where to next? (v.13) –

Well, yet again, we see the change in leadership coming through: We're told that, *'From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia.* It's no longer *'Barnabas and Saul'*, it's now *'Paul and his companions.'* Barnabas doesn't even get a mention! The one who used to be the key leader in the Antioch church was now playing second fiddle to Paul, who was now the leading light on this mission to the Gentile Roman world.

I wonder how Barnabas coped with that? Playing second fiddle to this young up-start Paul, who he'd only recently seen converted and integrated into the church. It was Barnabas who had made him so welcome. Now he has been eclipsed by him! We could imagine all sorts, but there is no record here of any fall out between Paul & Barnabas. The fall out comes once they get home from their missionary trip, more than two years later in Acts ch.15:36-41.

There as they are about to set sail on another missionary journey, they have a sharp disagreement and they part company - all over whether to bring John Mark with them or not. Why? Because of Acts 13:13 – because John Mark deserted them at this point on their first missionary journey. He leaves them when they land in Perga, and he heads back home to Jerusalem.

No reason is given for him leaving - but it just goes to show two things:

1. Mission is never easy, it's always a battle!
2. Missionaries are just as human as we are!

