

The Missionary Tour of Paul and Barnabas

*“Separate me
Barnabas and
Saul [Paul] for the
work whereunto I
have called them.
And when they had
fasted and prayed,
and laid their
hands on them,
they sent them
away.”
—Acts 13:2,3*

THE APOSTLE PAUL'S

first major effort in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ was at Antioch in Syria. After preaching briefly at Damascus and Jerusalem, and escaping from those who sought to kill him, he went to his home city of Tarsus, perhaps to await an indication of the Lord's will as to

how, where, and when he should engage more actively in the ministry. (Acts 9:19-30) He did not have to wait long, for Barnabas sought him out and persuaded the apostle to accompany him to Antioch, there to share with him and others in the work of proclaiming the Gospel.—Acts 11:25-30

The work in Antioch prospered. The church grew, not only in numbers, but among the local brethren

several developed into competent servants so that it became apparent that the services of Barnabas and Saul were no longer so vitally needed. In addition, there were now Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen as servants to the church at Antioch. The Holy Spirit indicated to the brethren, as stated in our opening text, that Barnabas and Saul should now begin a special work to which God had called them. With fasting and prayer, they were sent on their way. "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus."—Acts 13:1-4

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY TOUR

Saul, whose name now had been changed to Paul, took the place of Judas Iscariot among the twelve apostles by divine appointment. He was now embarked on his first missionary tour, being accompanied by Barnabas and also joined by John Mark. (Acts 13:5,9) It is interesting to note that while these two served together in Antioch they are referred to as Barnabas and Saul, but soon after they began their travels, the order was changed to "Paul and Barnabas."—vss. 43,46

The first recorded missionary activity of their journey was in Salamis, where "they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews." (vs. 5) While Paul was made a special apostle to the Gentiles, he did not hesitate to witness to the Jews whenever and wherever he found an opportunity.

Salamis was on the island of Cyprus, "When they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of

the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man.” The deputy called for Barnabas and Paul to come and speak to him, as he “desired to hear the Word of God.”—vss. 6,7

The sorcerer, however, withstood Barnabas and Paul, “seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.” Then Paul, “filled with the Holy Spirit, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.”—vss. 8-11

Here was Paul’s first exercise of divine authority and power in the ministry as an apostle. The fact that the sorcerer, by Paul’s act, was made blind, was very impressive, and from that time on we find him the leader of the group and in most instances the spokesman. Indeed, in God’s providence this great apostle had now been elevated to his ordained position in the ministry of the Gospel and the brethren. Even the deputy of the country, whom the sorcerer tried to prevent hearing Paul’s message, was impressed, and “believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.”—vs. 12

PAUL AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA

From Paphos on the island of Cyprus, Paul and his companions sailed north to Perga, in Pamphylia, which was one of the coast regions in the south of Asia Minor. No information is given us concerning

their visit to Perga, except that here John Mark left the party and returned to Jerusalem.—Acts 13:13

“From Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia.” The Antioch from which Paul and Barnabas had started on their journey was in Syria. Reaching Antioch in Pisidia they “went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.” Here again, we find Paul seeking out the devout Jews to witness to them. In the synagogue Paul’s opportunity soon came. After reading a portion of the law and the prophets, the rulers, seeing these strangers in their midst, sent word to them saying, “Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”—vss. 14,15

Paul did not need to be urged. He “stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.” Then Paul, in his usual forthright, though diplomatic manner, presented the Gospel of Christ to the Jews assembled in the synagogue. He first traced Israel’s traditional religious background, which he affirmed as being true, and which was highly treasured by every devout Israelite.—vss. 16-23

Wisely and skillfully, Paul then referred to John the Baptist, who apparently occupied an honored position in the minds and hearts of most Jews. He explained to them that John had announced the presence of Jesus, their Messiah, placing him in a very high position by saying that he was not worthy even to unloose his shoes. The audience knew that it was their own people in and around Jerusalem who had insisted that Jesus be put to death. Paul explained to them that although the Jews of Judea did not know it, actually the prophecies in

which they professed to believe had foretold that this is exactly what they would do.—vss. 24-29

“But God raised him from the dead.” (vs. 30) This was the keynote of Paul’s message. No matter how they might try to explain the crucifixion of Jesus, or insist, perhaps, that their compatriots in Jerusalem had acted wisely in putting him to death, their arguments would have no weight at all in face of the fact that God had raised him from the dead. Had Jesus been a sinner, a blasphemer, a traitor to Israel, and an enemy of the nation, God would not have raised him from the dead.

Paul proceeded to show that the resurrection of Jesus, as well as his death as man’s Redeemer, had been foretold by God through his holy prophets. He said, “We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.”—vss. 32,33; Ps. 2:7

Then, as recorded in Acts 13:34, Paul quoted another prophecy from the Old Testament which he indicates implied the necessity for Jesus to be raised from the dead. It was the words of Isaiah 55:3, in which God assured the prophet that he would give him “the sure mercies of David.” This prophecy is related to the covenant which God had previously made with David.

Nathan had explained to David God’s covenant, saying, “When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house

for my name [the immediate fulfillment of this was through David's son, Solomon], and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. ... My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever."
—II Sam. 7:12-16

David sensed, in part at least, the importance of this promise and in response said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come." (vss. 18,19) David could not, of course, know the full extent of that "great while" which he sensed was implied by God's wonderful promise to him. However, when, as the Apostle Paul indicates, we find that the resurrection of Jesus was related to its fulfillment, it begins to take on a meaning that is truly wonderful.

Paul spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and he was also well acquainted with the prophetic testimony concerning the kingdom of David, so in his association of these prophecies with the resurrection of Jesus, we have a clear example of properly interpreting the Word of God. Isaiah wrote concerning Jesus, the Messiah, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace

there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:6,7

The apostle would also know of the angel's declaration to Mary when announcing to her that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. “Fear not, Mary,” the angel said, “for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”—Luke 1:30-33

By reading the history of the successive kings in the royal line of David, from his death to the overthrow of Zedekiah, one is impressed with the manner in which, through the overruling providences of God, the Davidic line of kings was not permitted to be destroyed. Jesus, through his birth, belonged to that family and was the true heir to David's throne. (Matt. 1:1-17) He had no sons, however, and he himself was killed by his enemies. From the human standpoint, this would mean the end of this royal line of kings.

God intervened, not to save the rightful king from death, but to raise him from the dead. Thus, as Paul indicates, the mighty power of God was utilized to make certain the “sure mercies of David”—that is, to fulfill the promise made to David, which was based upon mercy. In view of the circumstances,

it was in this manner that Paul saw in the Davidic covenant a forecast of Jesus' resurrection.

Paul, proceeding with his sermon, quoted yet another prophecy of Jesus' resurrection: "Thou wilt not ... suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Ps. 16:10) Paul reasoned that this could not refer to David himself because he did see corruption. Indeed, David was still dead. He "fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption."—Acts 13:35-37

After establishing the fact that Jesus, in fulfillment of prophecy, had been raised from the dead, Paul then made the practical application of this Truth to the lives of those who could believe it. He continued: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Paul closed his sermon with a note of warning that they should not in a spirit of unbelief lightly dismiss what he had said.—vss. 38-41

Verse 42, from the *Revised Version*, states that "as they went out, they besought that these words might be spoken to them the next sabbath." The next verse explains that "many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God."—*King James Version*

"And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God." (vs. 44) Here was a spontaneous response to Paul's preaching. There had been no previous publicity

by cooperating congregations, no high pressure advertising, and no importing of an audience from distant cities. One brief sermon had been preached by the Apostle Paul, and the news concerning it had been circulated, with the result that the following Sabbath nearly the entire city gathered together to hear Paul.

We are not to assume that all these people were genuinely interested in the Gospel of Christ. Much of the excitement was, no doubt, based on curiosity. After all, Paul had said some startling things. He had declared that a certain one, even Jesus of Nazareth, had been raised from the dead. Certainly the urge to hear more about something as sensational as this would be irresistible. Millions, even today, gather once each year to commemorate, at least in practice, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy.” They began to oppose Paul and Barnabas, “contradicting and blaspheming.” However, this did not discourage these ardent missionaries. “Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”—vss. 45,46

Paul understood the principles of the divine arrangement. He knew that the opportunities of the Gospel of Christ were to be offered to “the Jew first,” and that then the Gentiles were also to have an opportunity. (Rom. 2:9,10) The apostle then quoted a prophecy to show that God had made provision for the Gentiles in his great plan of redemption through Jesus.—Acts 13:47; Isa. 49:6

“When the Gentiles heard this,” the record states, “they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” (Acts 13:48) The expression “as many as were ordained to eternal life” does not mean that these were predetermined to be saved and go to heaven when they died, and that the remainder of this great multitude who gathered to hear Paul had been foreordained by God to be tortured in hell-fire forever, as many theologians have shamelessly taught.

The Greek word here translated “ordained” literally means “to arrange in an orderly manner.” We read in Acts 15:14 that “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.” It was not God’s plan to convert all the Gentiles during the present Gospel Age, but merely to select from them a small company who, through devotion and self-sacrifice, would prove worthy to reign with Christ in his kingdom. (Rom. 8:16,17; II Tim. 2:11,12; Rev. 20:6) This work of selection has been done by God in an “orderly manner.”

Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) Whether it was Paul’s preaching, or the humble efforts of a devoted Christian in witnessing to his next door neighbor, it has been only as God “draws” that there has ever been a genuine response to the Gospel message. Thus it has been accomplished in an “orderly manner,” for our Heavenly Father is a God of order. (I Cor. 14:33) His drawing has been based on heart qualities and other considerations which he knows will, if the individual proves faithful, blend with his plans for the later blessing of all mankind.

In the Lord's providence, Paul and Barnabas found it necessary to move on from Antioch. They had no choice, for "the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against" them, "and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium."—Acts 13:50,51

In Iconium, the general pattern of events for Paul and Barnabas continued as they had experienced in other places. First there was the witness in the synagogue. Then the unbelieving Jews began to oppose, stirring up the spirit of riot among the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas continued their efforts in the city as long as they could. However, they left when they learned that there was a plot to inflict physical violence upon them.—Acts 14:1-6

From Iconium they fled to Lystra and Derbe, other cities in that region. Here Paul had the opportunity of healing a man who was "impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked. ... And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voice, saying in the speech [language] of Lycaonia, The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker."—vss. 8-12

Thinking that they were gods, the people prepared to offer sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, but when the missionaries learned of this plan, they cried out to the people, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all

things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”—Acts 14:14-17

These to whom Paul thus witnessed were Gentiles, so his approach was quite different from that which he used in a Jewish synagogue. He called their attention to the goodness of God as manifested in the loving provisions he had made for all nations. If they had not heard of this true God before, the one who had created the heaven and the earth, it was because he had permitted them to go along in their own way without interference. Nevertheless, even though they did not know him, and had never given him thanks for his daily blessing, he loved them. It was necessary that they understand and appreciate this basic truth before Paul could lead them further into the mysteries of the Gospel.

The record does not state whether any of these accepted Paul’s message or were impressed by it. Seemingly, before it had time to take root in their hearts, unbelieving Jews of Antioch and Iconium, who had followed Paul and Barnabas from those cities, appeared on the scene, and stirred up the people to stone Paul. He was rendered unconscious and given up as dead. However, he revived, and the next day he and Barnabas continued their journey to Derbe.—vss. 19,20

THE RETURN JOURNEY

After they had preached the Gospel in Derbe, and “had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium and Antioch, Confirming [Greek:

strengthening] the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue [persevere] in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:21,22) These “disciples” whom Paul and Barnabas thus confirmed in the faith were those who had believed during their first visit to these cities.

Without doubt all these new disciples had suffered persecution, so it was explained to them that this was part of the cost of discipleship, that only by suffering with Christ could they hope to reign with him in his kingdom. Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that any continued in the way of the Gospel except those who had genuine faith. There was no present reward except the peace and joy of knowing that the great plan of God through the Messiah was progressing to a glorious consummation.

Paul instructed them in the importance of working together in an orderly manner, and of choosing those competent among them to serve as leaders and teachers. Thus we see that Paul was not only an evangelist, but a pastor also, a genuine caretaker of the flock, instructing the disciples in all their needs.—vs. 23

After visiting a few more places, the details of which are not given, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch in Syria, from which they had started on this first missionary tour. Arriving there they gathered the brethren together who had sent them out, and to whom a report was therefore proper, and “they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” (vs. 27) How we rejoice at the manner in which God used these faithful missionaries to initiate the spread of the Gospel to new regions of the world! ■