

Barnabas and Saul Sent Forth

*“Separate
forthwith unto me,
Barnabas and
Saul, unto the
work whereunto I
have called them.
Then, fasting and
praying, . . . they
sent them away.”*

*—Acts 13:2,3,
Rotherham
Emphasized Bible*

IT WAS NOT LONG AFTER

their return from Jerusalem to Antioch that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, gave indication to the brethren that Barnabas and Saul should begin spreading the Gospel message to other regions. Eager to cooperate, the ecclesia gladly sent them to engage in the work of sowing the seeds of truth in outlying countries. John Mark went with them, and they sailed for the island of Cyprus, arriving first at the port of Salamis. Cyprus was a logical place to begin their work because it was the original home of Barnabas. They began their preaching in the synagogue of the Jews. This became the practice of Barnabas and Saul in every place they visited, even though their mission was also for the Gentiles.—Acts 4:36; 13:4,5; Gal. 2:7

When the Lord called Saul, he said, “He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles,

and kings,” but he also added, “and the children of Israel.” (Acts 9:15) Therefore, before Saul went to the Gentiles, he first visited the synagogues to attempt to convince his fellow Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. Later, he wrote: “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all.”—Rom. 9:1-5

ISRAEL’S UNBELIEF TEMPORARY

Paul knew that the prophecies foretold the unbelief of his people and that God would not find a sufficient number for the body of Christ from among the Jews. Nevertheless, he had a strong desire for their salvation. This caused him to write: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” (Rom. 10:1) Again, he writes: “I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.”—chap. 11:13,14

Israel’s unbelief as a nation, Paul realized, would not be turned away until after their exalted Messiah’s return at his Second Advent. Thus, he could say, “I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise

in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”—vss. 25,26

WORK IN CYPRUS

We do not have a record of any success Saul and Barnabas had among the Jews on Cyprus, but we know of at least one Gentile who believed. It happened as a result of an open attempt by the Adversary to stop their work. This was done through a Jewish sorcerer named Barjesus, who tried to dissuade the local deputy from hearing Barnabas and Saul. We here note that it was at this juncture in Saul’s life that the record states his name was changed to Paul. Appropriately, Paul, endued with Apostolic authority from God, confronted the evil sorcerer, “set his eyes on him,” and called him a “child of the devil.” He further declared that the Lord would cause him to be temporarily blind, “and immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness.”—Acts 13:6-11

Serguis Paulus, the Gentile deputy of Cyprus, was so impressed with Paul’s power and his message, that he became a believer. (vs. 12) No one else is mentioned by name in this account of Paul and Barnabas’ stay in Cyprus. Later, one of those who became an assistant to Paul was Titus. He is not mentioned in the Book of Acts, yet we know from Paul’s letters that Titus accompanied him when he later went to Jerusalem, so the Jewish brethren could see a good example of the Gentiles who were now

in the body of Christ. (Gal. 2:1,2) Toward the close of Paul's ministry, Titus was sent to the island of Crete to help the brethren, and remained there for many years as an elder in the congregation. The home and birthplace of Titus is not known, but one of the speculations is that he may have come from one of the Mediterranean islands—Cyprus or Crete.

AT ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA

When Paul and Barnabas had completed their labor in Cyprus, they sailed for the mainland of Asia Minor to a city in Pisidia called Antioch. There John Mark left them to go back to Jerusalem, and Paul and Barnabas continued with their missionary work. At Antioch, they went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, where they were invited by its rulers to speak. (Acts 13:13-15) Paul did not require prodding, but immediately stood up and delivered a marvelous discourse which is recorded in verses 16-41. His presentation was so impressive that many of the Jews and proselytes invited him to return on the next Sabbath and speak again.—vss. 42,43

On the following Sabbath, nearly the entire city assembled to hear, both Jews and Gentiles. (Acts 13:44) This caused some of the Jews to be envious, and they began to oppose and blaspheme Paul's words. Realizing that things were getting out of hand, Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue with these words: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." (vs. 46) Then they quoted this prophecy from the Old Testament, applying it to the situation confronting

them: "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth."—Isa. 49:6

Verse 8 of this same prophecy reads: "Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages." These words establish that now, during the Gospel Age, is the "acceptable time" for the work of finding a people for God's name. When this particular "day of salvation" ends, God subsequently will bring the whole world into covenant relationship with himself under the New Covenant. Those whom God is seeking during the present age serve the interest of that New Covenant by preparing themselves for the future work of its glorious administration.

The Gentiles who listened to Paul now realized that no longer was his message confined to the synagogue. Instead, "as many as had become disposed for life age-abiding," believed, and "the word of the Lord went on to be carried through the whole country." (Acts 13:48,49, *Rotherham*) These expressions confirm the selected nature of the present Gospel Age call, which at that time had begun to take root. The Gentiles who believed Paul's words rejoiced in them. This ministry in Antioch continued for a while, possibly several weeks. Eventually, however, opposing Jews convinced the authorities to expel Paul and Barnabas from the area, but not until many new disciples were established in a knowledge

of the Truth, and had received evidences of the Holy Spirit among them.—vss. 50-52

TO ICONIUM, LYSTRA AND DERBE

Paul and Barnabas traveled east to Iconium, and, as was their custom, visited the synagogue first. Similar events transpired as before, and a goodly number of both Jews and Gentiles believed. However, opposition again came from unbelieving Jews, who also enlisted the support of certain Gentiles, until the entire city was divided—some siding with the apostles and others with their antagonists. In the end, the Jews prevailed, causing severe persecution. As a result of a plot to stone them, Paul and Barnabas were forced to leave, but not before a lengthy period was devoted to preaching the Word and helping the disciples to become established in the faith.—chap. 14:1-5

The two travelers then fled to the province of Lycaonia, where they preached in the cities of Lystra and Derbe. While they were in Lystra, a strange incident occurred. A man who had been lame from birth, and had never walked, was healed by Paul because of his faith. The people who witnessed this miracle were so awed by it that they began believing that Barnabas was Jupiter and Paul was Mercury—gods who came to them as men. As the excitement grew, the local “priest of Jupiter” arranged to offer a sacrifice to them as if they were gods. Paul and Barnabas had a difficult time trying to stop the proceedings, and to convince the people that they were just ordinary men. They rent their mantles and spoke to the crowd, explaining to them about the true God who made heaven and earth, and

finally restrained the crowds from offering their sacrifice.—Acts 14:6-18

Their popularity in Lystra was short-lived, however. The Jews of Antioch and Iconium joined forces and followed them to Lystra. Convincing the people that Paul and Barnabas were imposters, they found Paul and began stoning him. There are no details given of the incident. However, we can imagine as the stones began to hit Paul, the vision of Stephen may have flashed through his mind before he entered a state of unconsciousness and was dragged outside the city's walls and left for dead. It was a mournful group of disciples that gathered around their beloved teacher, supposing him gone. Miraculously, though, Paul regained consciousness, and arising, returned with the disciples to one of their homes. There he partially regained his strength, while the disciples talked over a plan for quickly getting him to a safer location. The next day, Barnabas and perhaps some others, took him to the neighboring town of Derbe. (vss. 19,20) Although the account does not provide any details, it was possibly there that Paul spent time recovering from his injuries. This may have been in the home of Timothy's family, who resided in Derbe, and of whom Paul speaks so highly in later writings.—Acts 16:1,2; 20:4

APPRECIATION FOR TIMOTHY'S FAMILY

Many years later, one of the letters Paul wrote as he neared the end of his life of service to the Lord was the Second Epistle to Timothy. Paul opens with a beautiful salutation and expresses his appreciation for Timothy and his example of faithfulness.

Because he was like a son to him, the apostle was inspired to write: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.”—II Tim. 1:1-5

It is in this letter that we learn of Paul’s great respect for Timothy’s mother and grandmother, who were both consecrated sisters in Christ, and of his love for faithful Timothy. In this epistle, he also calls to mind the very painful experiences which had first brought him to their home: “Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (II Tim. 3:10-12) At the time of the apostle’s first visit, Timothy was possibly in his teens, and no doubt keenly aware of these experiences of Paul, perhaps even assisting in the care given to his wounds in their home.

ADVERSARY THWARTED

We see how the adversary continually tried, but failed, to suppress the work of finding God’s people.

If Paul had been killed in Lystra, the witness efforts in Asia Minor may have suffered a major setback. Barnabas was spared this stoning experience. Possibly, since he was an older man, recovery would have been much harder for him, while Paul's relative youth and vigor helped him to recuperate quickly. Thus, even in these details, we see God's overruling hand.

When Paul was first called, the Lord told him through Ananias, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:16) Certainly, he was learning that those who "live godly in Christ Jesus" must suffer persecution, and that not alone was he to suffer, but all the brethren would experience suffering as well, that they might learn this same lesson. Those who had tried to kill Paul must have followed up by also persecuting the brethren in these same cities. Later, as he returned to see these Christians, one of the key lessons taught by the apostle was that all the consecrated "must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."—Acts 14:22

RETRACING STEPS

Paul may have originally had in mind to visit his home town of Tarsus, which lay not far to the east from Derbe. However, he did not do so on this journey. The stoning incident had weakened him physically. More importantly to Paul, though, the success in finding so many interested brethren required that more attention be given to their needs. Thus, after staying awhile and finding many disciples in Derbe, he and Barnabas started back, retracing their steps to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the

truth to the brethren, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and encouraging them to endure what persecutions would come upon them.—Acts 14:21,22

One of their objectives in revisiting these classes was to make sure they would be organized properly along the lines of the instructions for qualifications of elders and deacons, which Paul later set down in I Timothy 3:1-13. It might appear from the wording of the account in Acts 14:23 that Paul and Barnabas did the selecting of the elders, performing a ceremony of ordination. However, the Greek word translated “ordained” in this verse means “to vote by stretching out the hand.” (*Thayer’s Greek Definitions*) This procedure is the same as used today by ecclesias of the Lord, in voting for elders and deacons, being no different than what Paul and Barnabas established.

After seeing to the selection of elders and deacons, Paul and Barnabas prayed with the brethren in each ecclesia, and commended them to the Lord as they departed their midst. On their return, they “preached the word” in Perga and Attalia, which were southern coastal towns of Asia Minor, sailing finally to the east and returning to Antioch, their home class. (Acts 14:23-26) Paul and Barnabas’ return must have been met with much rejoicing by the brethren. They had been gone for a long period of time, and there was much to discuss. The account states, “When they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” (vs. 27) There could be no doubt in the minds of the Jewish brethren now. The “door of faith” was now open to all believers! ■