

Commissioned by the Community

Key Verse: “*When they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*”
—Acts 13:3

Selected Scripture:
Acts 13

OUR LESSON TODAY BEGINS

at the early Christian church in Antioch, located about three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. Among the members of the church there were Barnabas and Saul of Tarsus. Saul, having received much instruction from the Lord since his earlier conversion was now ready to begin his ministry. God, through the Holy Spirit, said, “Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.” (Acts 13:2) The Key Verse indicates that the brethren of Antioch prayerfully and soberly sent Saul and Barnabas away to begin their missionary journey, a journey which would take them to many different places under varying circumstances, all for the purpose of proclaiming the message of the Gospel of Christ.

As they began their journey, Saul and Barnabas had the custom, much as Jesus had during his earthly ministry, of first going to the synagogues of the Jews. At one of their early stops, the isle of Paphos, they came upon a sorcerer and false prophet, a Jew named Bar-jesus, also called Elymas. He was associated with an official deputy of the country, a Gentile named Sergius Paulus, who desired to hear the Word of God. This false prophet tried

to turn the deputy away from hearing the message. “Then Saul, (who also is called 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.”—vss. 9-11

How appropriate that the record states here, the first official act of his ministry, Saul was now called Paul (verse 9). The name Paul signifies ‘little.’ Truly, now that he had become little in his own sight, a humble servant of God, he could be used for great things in the Lord’s work. We immediately see the results of his first missionary act, as it is recorded, “Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” (vs. 12) Thus began Paul to fulfill his commission to be the “apostle of the Gentiles.”—Rom. 11:13

Shortly after departing from Paphos, Paul (no longer called Saul) and Barnabas came to the region of Pisidia, going once again to the synagogue, where they found the religious rulers reading the “law and the prophets” to the people. (Acts 13:14,15) These rulers then gave Paul and Barnabas the opportunity to speak. It is here we have the first public discourse given by Paul, recorded in verses 16-41. He recounted the entire history of Israel, going back to their bondage in Egypt, their miraculous deliverance, and eventual entrance into the land of promise. He reminded them of how God had destroyed their enemies, had given them judges, and later kings, David being king at the zenith of their history. Paul then spoke of Jesus, of the natural seed of David, as the one who had come to bring salvation to the Jews, but that they had rejected him, and had him killed. Nevertheless, he was raised from the dead by the mighty power of God. Most of the Jews despised Paul’s message, but many Gentiles gladly received it, and became followers of the Gospel.—vss. 45-48 ■