

## THE FIRST MISSIONARY TRIP WAS PERILOUS BUT PROSPEROUS

**PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.**

The thirteenth chapter of Acts marks a dramatic change in the focus of the book. The spotlight shifts from Peter and the Jerusalem apostles to the apostle Paul. The mission field broadens beyond Palestine to include the world. Each of the three missionary thrusts outlined in Acts 1:8 (Jerusalem, Judea/Samaria, and the world) had its own unique beginning. Jerusalem was evangelized through a miracle (Pentecost), Judea and Samaria through persecution (Acts 8:1-4), and the world through a church missionary program (Acts 13:1-4).

It is in Acts 13 that we find the local church purposefully and willfully involved in world missions. These two chapters of Acts, which contain what is known as the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, provide the Biblical pattern for local church-centered missions today. Paul's journey through Cyprus (13:4-13), Antioch of Pisidia (13:14-52), Iconium (14:1-5), and Derbe and Lystra (**14:6-20**) was characterized by victory, preaching, opposition, and severe persecution. In spite of every sort of opposition and persecution (even resulting in death or near death at Lystra), Paul always kept up a constant ministry of preaching. The mission's pattern established by the apostle Paul should be studied carefully.

### I. Missions: The Call - 13:1-4

**13:1-2** - Paul and Barnabas were actively serving in the church at Antioch when the church leaders were notified by the Spirit to release Barnabas and Saul (Paul) for another work that He had called them to do. The Spirit had already called Barnabas and Saul for this work before He told the church leaders, so now His call was confirmed by the Spirit's word to these church leaders. Paul had already been called to work among Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel in Damascus shortly after he had met Jesus in a vision and was converted (Acts 9:4-6; 15-16). As soon as he was converted he began to preach the gospel (Acts 9:20-22, 28-29). Barnabas was called into the ministry through his church in Jerusalem, when it sent him to Antioch to serve in that church (Acts 11:19-24). It is noteworthy that the Spirit did not call these men to do missionary work until they proved themselves to be effective workers.

**13:3-4** -- Paul and Barnabas were "released" for missionary work by the local church at Antioch and "sent" by the Holy Spirit. There are two Greek words for "sent" in these verses. The word for the church's "sending" (v. 3) has the idea of "separate" or "release." The word for the Holy Spirit's "sending" (v. 4) is the normal idea. Thus, these men were "released" by the church to be "sent" by the Spirit.

### II. Missions: Preaching, Persecution, and Perseverance - 13:4 - 14:20

#### A. Cyprus - 13:4-13

**13:4-5** - "Cyprus" - Cyprus was near Antioch, it had a substantial Jewish population, and it was Barnabas' home. For these reasons it was natural for the missionaries to go there first.

**13:6-8** - Elymas the Sorcerer was directly involved in attempting to hinder the gospel ministry.

**13:9-12** - The miracle of blinding Elymas astonished the deputy, Sergius Paulus. He realized the doctrine of the Lord had greater power than that of Elymas and it caused his conversion.

**13:13** - As they sailed from Cyprus and arrived in Pamphylia (Southern coast of present day Turkey), John Mark deserted the missionary team. Reasons for his departure can only be postulated: 1) perhaps the terrain was too difficult — **100** miles over mountains to Antioch of Pisidia; 2) perhaps persecution was getting too severe; 3) perhaps he was homesick; 4) perhaps

the salvation of Gentiles was too much for his strict Jewish heritage. In any case his desertion became a source of contention between Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:36-41.

### **B. Antioch of Pisidia — 13:14-52**

Note the mission's pattern that developed here:

**13:14-41** – Paul and Barnabas began by preaching in the synagogue. The theme of Paul's message was "Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ." He was condemned by the Jewish leaders without a cause and demanded that Pilate have him crucified. He was buried, but God raised him from the dead. Jesus' resurrection was prophesied by David in the second Psalm. God said, "You are my Son, this day have I begotten you." Paul preached that Jesus was begotten when He was raised from the dead (13:33-34). Faith in Jesus' resurrection provided for the forgiveness of sins and justification from all things that the Law of Moses could not do (13:38-39).

**13:42-44** - Many Jews and proselytes believed and the whole city turned out to hear more of Paul's preaching.

**13:45-48** - The Jews were envious when the Gentiles came to hear the gospel, too, so they caused trouble. Then Paul and Barnabas turned from the Jews to the Gentiles in that city and many believed.

**13:49** - New converts spread the gospel to the surrounding regions.

**13:50-52** - The preachers were driven out by persecution, but they left a thriving nucleus of believers behind.

### **C. Iconium - 14:1-6**

**14:1-2**-- Iconium was 80 miles southeast of Antioch of Pisidia. Paul and Barnabas followed a familiar pattern by beginning their ministry in the synagogue. Typically, many believed, but the unbelieving Jews stirred up tremendous persecution.

**14:3-4** - Note the fruits of a lengthy, uncompromising gospel ministry -- the entire city was divided.

**14:5-6** - When stoning was imminent, Paul and Barnabas fled to Lystra and Derbe.

### **D. Lystra and Derbe - 14:7-20**

**14:7** - Note the apostles did not begin their ministry at the synagogue as in the other cities. They simply preached wherever they could.

**14:8-19** - At Lystra a good example is given of the effect that miracles have on a crowd when it is not accompanied by belief in the doctrine of the true God. The people saw the miracle, but they deified Paul and Barnabas rather than Jesus Christ. This fickle crowd soon turned against the apostle when prompted by unbelieving Jews who came up from Antioch and Iconium.

**14:19** - Paul was stoned and left for dead. Paul may very well have died. A stoning was tremendous punishment and nigh impossible to live through. Perhaps Paul was unsure whether he had died or not (see 2 Cor 12:2-4). Paul may have borne permanent injuries from that time forward as a result of this stoning (2 Cor 12:7).

**14:20** - Note the tremendous courage and endurance of Paul. That very day he returned to the city of Lystra, and on the next, he went on to Derbe to preach!

### **III. Missions: Church Planting - 14:21-25**

Paul and Barnabas were not content with mere soul-winning. They understood the ministry went much further than that - cf. Mt 28:19, 20; Col 1:28, 29. Paul and Barnabas returned to these hotbeds of persecution with a twofold ministry:

**14:21-22** – They strengthened and encouraged the converts in their faith.

**14:23** – They ordained elders (pastors) in every church. They planted indigenous (self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating) local churches.

#### **IV. Missions: An Accounting of the Work - 14:26-28**

**14:26-28** – Paul and Barnabas were not "free-lance" missionaries. They returned and gave an account to the local church that had sent them forth. Paul reported all that God had done. The two words, "all" and "God," would keep all missionary reports in proper perspective. Note carefully that the missionaries had completed ("fulfilled") their work in the regions to which the Holy Spirit had sent them on this first missionary trip. How can it be said that they finished their work? Had everyone been evangelized? No! How then can this be said of them? In this way: the task of a missionary is to evangelize the lost and to organize the saved into local churches. When that is done, the missionary's work is "fulfilled." This is what Paul and Barnabas had done - vv. 21-23. Then it is the task of the churches to evangelize the lost in their areas and to train up the believers that they win to Jesus Christ.