

Lesson 10 – Paul’s First Missionary Journey

Text: Acts 13-15

Main Characters: God, Paul (Saul), Barnabas, John Mark, Peter, James, Silas, the Jews

Key Passages:

- Acts 14:19 – Paul was stoned by the Jews for preaching, but survived.
- Acts 14:23 – Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the churches they visited.

Main Storyline:

At the church in Antioch (in Syria), there were five teachers and prophets: Barnabas, Simeon (Niger), Lucius, Manaen, and Saul (also called Paul). While they were fasting and praying, the Holy Spirit instructed them to send Paul and Barnabas away to preach elsewhere. They obeyed, sending Paul and Barnabas away.

Paul and Barnabas took a young man, John Mark, with them on their journey as their assistant. From Antioch, they went to Seleucia, where they sailed to the city of Salamis on the island of Cyprus. After preaching there, they crossed the island to the city of Paphos, where they encountered a false prophet named Bar-Jesus (Elymas) and the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. While Paul and Barnabas tried to teach the proconsul, Elymas was trying to discourage and dissuade him. Paul rebuked Elymas, and God struck him so that he became blind. Then the proconsul believed because of what he had been taught and what he had seen.

The men left Paphos and sailed to Perga. John Mark, for unspecified reasons, did not continue, but rather, he returned to Jerusalem. From Perga, the men proceeded to Antioch (in Pisidia, different than their starting location). In Antioch, Paul preached in the synagogue to teach the Jews about Jesus and the need to repent and believe for forgiveness of sins. When the ruling Jews saw the multitudes of people flocking to Paul and Barnabas, they became very envious and started to blaspheme and oppose the things that Paul was teaching. Eventually, the Jews caused such a stir that Paul and Barnabas were expelled from the region.

Paul and Barnabas proceeded to Iconium and preached in the synagogue there. Many Jews and Gentiles believed in what they had to say. Despite their initial success, the unbelieving Jews influenced the new disciples and caused them to turn again against Paul and Barnabas. The turmoil became so great that many people, both Jews and Gentiles, tried to abuse and stone Paul and Barnabas. Fortunately, Paul and Barnabas found out about their plan and were able to flee to the cities of Lystra and Derbe to preach safely.

In Lystra, they encountered a lame man who had been crippled since he had been born. Paul, seeing the man’s faith, healed him, and he was able to walk. When the people saw what Paul had done, they began to praise him and Barnabas as gods (Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes) and offer sacrifices. Paul and Barnabas rebuked them and instructed them to stop and worship the true God instead. Despite Paul’s best efforts, he barely prevented the people from offering sacrifices to them.

Eventually, the confrontational Jews from Antioch and Iconium found Paul and persuaded the people to drag Paul out of the city and stone him. Fortunately, Paul was not killed by the Jews at this time, so the next day, they went to Derbe. After making many disciples there, they returned to the other cities and encouraged them to persevere through the difficulties and persecution that they would surely be facing. Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church to lead each of them before returning to Antioch.

At some point, certain men came to Antioch and were teaching that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. The Pharisees also were teaching the same. The disciples decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles and elders there. The apostles and elders wrote a letter to the brethren in Antioch explaining that circumcision was no longer necessary. After a while, Paul and Barnabas were going to return to the churches they had previously visited, but disagreed about taking John Mark. Paul decided to take a man named Silas with him and journey separately from Barnabas and John Mark.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) God’s plan for the church is for elders to watch over and lead every church as an independent body.
- 2.) Preaching and teaching will often lead to persecution; we need to persevere through those difficulties.