

Paul's Missionary Journeys

Paul's Three Known Missionary Journeys plus a boat ride:

First AD 46-48	Acts 13 & 14
Second AD 49-52	Acts 15:40-18:22
Third AD 53-57	Acts 18:23-21:19
Paul's trip to Rome AD 59-60	Acts 21:17-28:31

To get us started, we're going to watch a video that will give us the geographic setting and some of the key events of the first of Paul's journeys. Hopefully, this overview will help you get a perspective on the extent of this first trip.

Watch Video

As the video mentioned, this trip is recorded in chapters 13 and 14 of Acts, however it may have taken longer than two years, perhaps as many as three. Let's take a look at how this trip is conceived and the people who are involved.

Acts 13:1-3

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

So, one of the first and perhaps most important things we notice in this passage is that the Holy Spirit is credited with providing the direction for this work. As these followers of Jesus gathered, they spent their time involved in worshiping the Lord and fasting, which is always accompanied with prayer. The Christian Church was poised to take the Gospel out to all the world, but not based on the determination or planning of the people. Throughout this study we will see the leading of the Holy Spirit and the obedience of the Christian men and women who carry the message of Christ to new places.

Question: Given that this journey begins the way it does and specifically by the direction of the Holy Spirit, what sort of outcomes would you expect?

Before we move into the actual trip, it's worth noting who some of these people are and where they're from. Remember that Saul becomes known as Paul. According to William Barclay's "The Daily Study Bible; The Acts of the Apostles", the prophets mentioned here were wandering preachers and not attached to any one church, but had given their whole lives to listening for the word of the Lord and then taking that word to their fellow men. The teachers were the men of the local churches whose duty it was to instruct those who became followers of Jesus in the faith. The list of prophets here reflects the universal appeal of the Gospel. "Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus; Lucius came from Cyrene in North Africa; Simeon was also a Jew but his other name Niger is given and that is a Roman name and shows

that he must have moved in Roman circles; Manaen was a man with aristocratic and courtly connections; and Paul himself was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia and a trained Rabbi. There in that little band there is exemplified the unifying influence of Christianity." They clearly had discovered the "togetherness" and "fellowship" only Christ can create.

A footnote in some Bibles say that *Niger* is a Latin word meaning *black*, or *dark*. Barclay also notes, "One extremely interesting speculation has been made. Simeon who was also called Niger not improbably came from Africa, for Niger is an African name. It has been suggested that this very Simeon is the same man as Simeon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross (Luke 23:26). It would be a thing most wonderful if the man whose first contact with Jesus was carrying the Cross - a task which he must have bitterly resented - was one of the men mainly and directly responsible for sending out the story of the Cross to all the world."

So, Paul and Barnabas are sent out by this group of men who represent a variety of backgrounds and cultures to places that neither had ever been before, but with a message that had already been received by such diverse people.

Question: In what ways might these men have been encouraged or inspired by being sent by these people?

Paul and Barnabas leave Antioch and travel 15 miles down the river Orontes to the port of Antioch which was Seleucia. From there they sail to the island of Cyprus landing at Salamis on the east coast of that island in the eastern Mediterranean. Again, from Barclay, "We may see the hand of Barnabas there. He was a native of Cyprus (Acts 4:36), and it would be typical of the gracious heart of Barnabas that he desired to share the treasures of Jesus first of all with his own people."

Question: What advantages and disadvantages might there be for Barnabas to return to where he was from as he and Paul would share the Gospel there?

Acts 13:4-12

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. ⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus. ⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. ⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? ¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

Verse 5 mentions that John was also there to assist them. This is the man also known as John Mark, or simply as Mark, one of the disciples of Jesus. We'll learn more about him in a bit. We also see that Paul's name shifts from Saul. According to Barclay, "In those days nearly all Jews had two names. One was a Jewish name, by which they were known in their own circle; the other was a Greek name, by which they were known in the wider world. ... Sometimes the Greek name translated the Hebrew name. So Cephas is the Hebrew and Peter the Greek for rock; so Thomas is the Hebrew and Didymus the Greek for twin. ... So Paul was Saul, his Hebrew name, at home and Paul in the wider world. It may well be that from this time he so fully accepted his mission as the apostle to the Gentiles that he determined to use only his Gentile name."

To give a perspective on its size, the island of Cyprus is about 3572 square miles as compared to the island of Hawaii, which is 10,931 square miles, just over three times larger. "Cyprus was a Roman province. It was famous for its copper mines and its shipbuilding industry. It was sometimes called Makaria which means Happy Isle, because it was held that its climate was so perfect and its resources and products so varied that a man might find everything necessary for a happy life within its bounds."

After sharing the message of Christ on the east side of Cyprus Paul and Barnabas, as well as John we can assume because he is still with them a bit later, arrive in Paphos where the governor and capital of the island is located. "Paphos was famous or infamous for the worship of Venus, the goddess of love, and was a byword for lustful immorality. The governor of Cyprus was Sergius Paulus. These were intensely superstitious times. Superstition is always the sign of a decadent civilization. Most great men, even an intelligent man like Sergius Paulus, kept private wizards, who were soothsayers and fortune tellers and who dealt in magic and spells. Bar-Jesus, or Elymas – an Arabic word which means *the skillful one* – was the private wizard of Sergius Paulus. He saw that if the governor was won for Christianity his day was done."

Look again at Acts 13: 9-12

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Question: What do you think of the approach Paul took with Elymus?

Question: How did God use this encounter?

Question: Have you ever confronted a situation or person that was evil and if so, what did you say or do? Did you see God use what happened in a positive way?

This traveling band of believers will leave Cyprus and sail to a totally new region for any of them. Even though verse 13 ends with a coma, we're going to unpack a couple things from it. Prior to this verse Barnabas has been named before Saul/Paul, but here that shifts. "It was Barnabas who had set out as

the leader of this expedition. But now it is Paul and Barnabas. In the very nature of things it is Paul who has assumed the leadership of the expedition. And the lovely thing about Barnabas is that there is from him no word of complaint. He is a man prepared to take the second place, so be it God's work was done."

Acts 13:13

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem,

The second part of this verse is very simple but is a significant event. Later in Acts 15, we will see where Barnabas wants Mark to be a part of Paul's second missionary journey, but because of this event, Paul refuses and he and Barnabas part company over the matter. There is nothing noted about why Mark decides to leave to return to Jerusalem at this point, but regardless we might benefit from a refresher on who this man Mark was.

"Mark was very young. His mother's house seems to have been the centre of the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) and Mark must always have been very close to the centre of the faith. Paul and Barnabas took him with them as their helper, for he was the kinsman of Barnabas; and now he turned and went home. We will never know why. Perhaps he resented the deposition of Barnabas from leadership; perhaps he was afraid of the proposed journey up into the plateau where Antioch in Pisidia stood for it was one of the hardest and most dangerous roads in the world; perhaps, because he came from Jerusalem, he had doubts about this preaching to the Gentiles; perhaps at this stage he was one of these lads who was better at beginning things than finishing them; perhaps – as Chrysostom said long ago – the lad wanted his mother. However it was he went."

Question: What do you think of these possible reasons for Mark's leaving? Have you ever had someone leave you hanging and how hard was that on your relationship with them?

Barclay points out that Barnabas and Paul split company later over whether Mark should join them on their second journey. He also gives more information on Mark following the debate over him in Acts 15:38. "Then Mark vanishes from history. Tradition and legend say he went to Alexandria and Egypt and founded the Church there. But when he re-emerges almost 20 years later he is the man who has redeemed himself. When Paul wrote to the Colossians when he was in prison in Rome he tells them to receive Mark if he comes to them. So Mark is with Paul again. And at the very end when he wrote to Timothy just before his death he says, 'Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is a useful man when it comes to doing a bit of service' (2 Timothy 4:11). The man who once a deserter has become the man who was useful to Paul. ... By the grace of God the man who was the deserter became the writer of a gospel and the man whom, at the end, Paul wanted with him."

Question: Being redeemed and reconciled are powerful experiences. What emotions come to mind for you as you think of what Mark may have felt as Paul requested his presence at the end of his life?

Question: Is there anyone you know who might need to know that you still love them after they failed you or others?