

THE CHURCH AND MISSIONS

WEEK 3: WHAT WAS THE APOSTLE PAUL'S MISSION STRATEGY?

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The goal of this six-week class is to zero in on the mission of the church from a Biblical perspective.
- Our schedule will look like this:
 - Week 1: What is our mandate?
 - Week 2: What is the church's role in missions or the centrality of the church?
 - **Week 3: What was the Apostle's Paul's strategy for missions?**
 - Week 4: Kyle Baker sharing his personal call to missions.
 - Week 5: How has the church historically accomplished missions?
 - Week 6: How should church members be involved in missionary work?

INTRODUCTION¹

- The church's mission program has been fraught with difficulties from the very beginning. The book of Acts teaches us that the church was extremely slow and even unwilling to engage in missions, even though it had the very recent command of Christ and his words still echoed in its ears.
- The obstacles of that day were diverse in nature:
 - There was obviously the fear of the unknown, the apprehension of dangers which necessarily accompany all mission work.
 - In addition, however, there was during this time the factor of spiritual blindness. Many people did not see sharply enough that the wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile had been torn down by the completed work of Christ (Ephesians 2:14), and they were therefore, still extremely hesitant to preach the gospel among the Gentiles.
 - And finally there was the inclination to keep the status quo, to remain undisturbed, a tendency which always plagues the church.
 - The church loves to be occupied with itself and its own problems. It loves peace and calm, and it is deadly afraid of anything that can shake it up a bit and bring unrest. The congregation of Jerusalem was also a congregation which was in love with peace and quiet, and which preferred to remain alone.

¹ Bavinck JH, *Introduction to the Science of Missions*. (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company) 1960, p. 277.

- “The deepest motive of the book of Acts, therefore, is not the deeds of the apostles, but the mighty works of the risen Jesus Christ. For in spite of the church's reluctance and opposition, Christ takes the church with him on his triumphal march through the world. And this main thought of Acts is at the same time the theological perspective under which we must regard the further development of the history of missions. Acts provides the key to the mystery of the history of missions and makes it possible for us to view it as God intended. It is the history of God's mighty acts.”²

THE CHURCH IS PUSHED OUT OF JERUSALEM

- God wanted the church to leave Jerusalem (not the whole church) and take the gospel message to the surrounding areas. The church was, for whatever reason, hesitant to do so.
- “While Christianity in its very earliest years may, in fact, have functioned like an appendage of Judaism, by the year 70 it was moving out on its own. That move to independence from Judaism was greatly accelerated by Roman destruction of the Jewish temple and the cessation of the sacrifices that had played such a large role in Jewish worship.”³
 - “The great turning point represented by the destruction of Jerusalem was to move Christianity outward, to transform it from a religion shaped in nearly every particular by its early Jewish environment into a religion advancing toward universal significance in the broader reaches of the Mediterranean world, and then beyond. To Christians, to Jews, and soon to many others, it was increasingly clear that Rome’s disruption of Judaism had pushed the Christian church out on its own.”⁴
- There are two main reasons why this is important. Firstly, God did not intend the first church to simply worry about its own growth and comfort. He wanted them to go out and share the gospel with their friends, neighbors and even those outside their own communities.
- Secondly, this shows the universal call of the gospel. There was no limit on where these people could go once they had left Jerusalem. There was persecution and they were fleeing for their lives. Had their minds been on certain people groups or other metrics, they may not have simply went and shared the gospel.
- This is such a stark contrast between the nation of Israel and the church. As we discussed prior, Israel was to be a standalone nation whose God was ruling and reigning over them. They were not directly commanded to go to the nations and tell them about God.
- They were to be separate from the world in both location and practice. They were not to let the world come into their country but seek to be set apart for the service of God.

² Bavineck JH, *Introduction to the Science of Missions*. (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company) 1960, p. 278.

³ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, Third Edition. (GR MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 15.

⁴ Ibid. p. 17

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY IN ACTS 13:1–14:28

- Before getting to Paul's actual journeys to take the gospel to the unreached people, it is important to know who Paul was before he went out.
- Before being saved, he was a persecutor of the church (Acts 7, 8 and 9). He was saved on his way to Damascus when he was going to persecute more Christians (Acts 9:1–2).
- The Lord Jesus came to Paul in a flash of light and he was converted (Acts 9:3–19).
- Several days after being saved, we read that Paul "immediately began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'" (Acts 9:19–20)
- Paul was radically transformed from someone who hated and persecuted the church to someone who was now their largest supporter and proclaimer.
- **Galatians 1:11–2:10**...Paul said that when Christ called him, he did not go to Jerusalem to receive instruction from the apostles. Rather, he retired into Arabia for a time and not until three years later did he go to Jerusalem. Even then, the only apostle he met was Peter, and the only other leader he met was James, the presiding elder of the Jerusalem church. It has often been remarked that Paul clearly implied that he spent three years being taught by Jesus Himself (1:12), either directly or (perhaps more likely) through the study of the Word. Thus, like the other apostles, Paul studied with Christ for three years before beginning his ministry (compare Acts 1:21).⁵
- Fourteen years after his conversion, he had occasion to go to Jerusalem and there he met privately with the leaders, including the apostles Peter and John (2:1–10). He reports to the Galatians that they compared notes and found that there was absolutely no difference between what he had been teaching for eleven years in Antioch and what the apostles had been teaching in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. There never had been a problem, nor was there one currently, between Paul's message and the teaching of the Jerusalem church.⁶
- Whether Paul spent 14 or 17 years in training and preaching, the point is simple...he did not get saved and then go out as a church sanctioned missionary.
- I believe there are two reasons for that...firstly, he needed to be built up in the faith. He needed to have the same instruction that the other apostles had. Secondly, the church was not ready to take on this endeavor. They need to be more established in their structure so that they could support missionaries.
- This means the church will be ready to properly send out missionaries but also there will be proper missionaries that are ready to be sent out.
- The church should not send out missionaries just to do it but the church should make sure they are still in a position to properly fulfill the mission of the church from Ephesians 4.

⁵ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-preparation-of-paul>

⁶ Ibid.

The Beginning of the Mission of the Church

- With that said, we will start with the mission to the “end of the earth” in **Acts 13**. While we know the Gentiles had already been reached (Peter to Cornelius and Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch), this is the first time in the Bible that the Christian church sees the need for a witness which was beyond them. Also, this is the first time we see the commissioning of “missionaries” to carry out the task of evangelism.
- **Acts 13:2** “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”
 - The church at Antioch was ministering in such a way that they were expecting the Lord to work something through them. They were fasting and ministering, perhaps this was a time when normal ministry was suspended and they were seeking the Lord on what to do next.
- A very important point that we should not overlook...Paul was already teaching at the church in Antioch.
 - **Acts 11:25-26** “And he [Barnabas] left for Tarsus to look for Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”
 - Paul had a prominent role in the church and the church was growing under his teaching. As we have said before, Paul was not the worst guy in the church that they could not wait to get rid of...he was someone who was making an impact in the early church.
 - Paul was qualified to do the work that he was going to be sent out to do. The church witnessed what Paul’s gifts were and then the Holy Spirit told them to send out Paul.
 - This also is an important point; the church acted in accordance with God. While the early Jerusalem Christians were scattered with no real agenda on where to go. What we see here is the systematic approach to sending out missionaries.
- The church not only sensed the Holy Spirit’s leading but also saw that Paul was qualified. We know the church was behind their sending because we read in **13:3** “Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.”
 - The church fasted and prayed about sending these specific men out to do the work. The church then laid hands on them signaling that they were supportive of the decision. The church then sent them away to do the work.
 - This also, once again, shows the centrality of the church regarding missions.
- I like **13:4** “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit...” We just read in **verse 3** it was the church that sent them and now Luke tells us that they were sent out by the Holy Spirit. This shows the cooperating grace that takes place between the Holy Spirit, the church and the one(s) being sent out.
- **What does that look like today in the church?**
 - We now have the inspired Word of God in the complete revelation.

- Remember, when this was happening in Acts, they only had access to the Old Testament and perhaps a gospel. Acts is a transitional book where we read about the gospel going out to all people and they are transitioning to what the church is.
- Therefore, having the full cannon today, we now have spiritual marks on a man who desires to be a missionary. We can align their lives with what the Bible says. If we believe that missionaries should be elder/pastor qualified, we can read through **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1**.
- Now, depending on the task or service that someone desires to do as a missionary the gift of teaching may or may not be applicable, but the moral and character traits must be spot on.
- Where did they go? We read in **13:4–5** “...they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant.”
- **Why did they pick the places where they went?** Paul and Barnabas set out on their mission, departing from Seleucia, the main port for Antioch, lying about sixteen miles downstream and five miles from where the Orontes flowed into the Mediterranean. Their destination was Cyprus, some sixty miles distant. Barnabas was himself a Cypriot by birth (4:36), the Hellenists had already begun some witness on the island (11:19), and other natives of Cyprus belonged to the Antioch church (11:20).⁷
- They went where they did because they knew the places and the people. We should not think that it is less spiritual or Godly to go to a place where we may have some existing contacts.
 - This may be the exact reason that God wants us to go somewhere because we know that there are people there who desire to hear the gospel preached.
- We also learn something else; John Mark was there with them as their helper. It is most likely that he was there to assist them in their work as missionaries.
 - I think this simply attests to the fact that missionaries need support around them. No one person has all the gifts to accomplish the task.
 - We do not know what John Mark’s servant tasks were, but we know that he is described as their assistant. He was there to make sure these men could accomplish their God ordained mission.
 - This is the same Mark who wrote the gospel, he was Barnabas’s cousin (Col. 4:10) and he deserted Paul while on this first missionary journey (Acts 13:13).
 - The number one reason missionaries come off the field is interpersonal conflict.
- We also see a pattern which would form for Paul. Where there was a local synagogue in a city (meaning there was a large Jewish community), he would go there and preach/teach to them.

⁷ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 291.

- We find out in **13:46** “Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.’”
- Jesus came for the Jew first (Rom. 1:16; 2:10) and Paul also brought them the gospel first. But after their continual rejection, he moved onto directly reaching out to the Gentiles.
- Worthy of taking note, the mission one is sent out for may see some change as things progress. There may be a specific people group that you desire to reach only to find out they really do not care what you have to say. But perhaps God brought you there to actually reach someone else.
- They knew the Scriptures which spoke to salvation coming to the Gentiles (Acts 13:47) and they also saw the immediate fruit of preaching to the Gentiles.
- **Acts 13:48** “Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”
 - This is what happens when we take the real gospel out to the people. Some people are going to not really care. Some people are going to be thankful and respond with joy. Others, like in verse 50, are going to be stirred up in anger against us and bring persecution.
 - Notice **verse 49** though, “And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region.” This is what happens when men and women get saved. This was not an organized effort to systematically share the gospel.
- This was the effect of people getting saved and then telling other people about getting saved. This was the work of Paul and Barnabas being multiplied by the Holy Spirit.
- After journeying through many other cities, they ended up in Derbe, where they would end their trip.
- **Acts 14:21** “And when they had preached the gospel to that city [Derbe, see v. 20] and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch...”
- Notice the importance that Luke places on *making disciples*. This was to show the fulfillment of Jesus’ command in **Matthew 28**. They were not just going around sharing the gospel with people, but they were making disciples out of them.
- Furthermore, in **verse 22**, as the men are returning, they are “strengthening the souls of disciples.” They were exhorting them to continue in the faith (persevere) by telling them they had to face much persecution in order to enter the kingdom of God.
- Most importantly, Paul and Barnabas did not leave these new converts to wander aimlessly. We read in **verse 23** “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord.”
- Here is where you get to see what the purpose of missions really is to our mission. We are to take the gospel to people, see them get saved and plant churches.

- Those churches are then to do the same thing over and over again.
- This is why when we send out missionaries who are planting churches, they must be elder qualified. If they are not, they are not going to be able to really recognize nor train others to do the work.
- Paul and Barnabas made it back to Antioch, their sending church. Notice a few things:
 - They completed the work they were sent out to do.
 - The whole church was gathered together and Paul and Barnabas reported to them all that God had done through them. Most importantly, God had *opened the door of faith to the Gentiles*.
 - Paul and Barnabas did not go right back out, but they rather stayed there with the disciples at the church. They most likely began ministering there and this is when Paul wrote Galatians.
 - The local church was involved in the whole missionary work process from start to finish.

PAUL'S FIRST MISSION ACTS 13:4 - 14:28 AD 46-48

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IMPORTANT PARTS OF PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

- They were sent out by the church. (Acts 13:2–3)
- They went to where they knew the people and the customs. (Acts 13:4–5)
- They relied on the preaching of the Word of God and not their own devices.
 - **Acts 13:5b** “...they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.”
 - **Acts 13:17–41** Paul recounted the history of the Jews and what they did to Christ. In verse 38–39 “Therefore, let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.”
 - Paul is preaching the gospel from the Old Testament to the Jews who were there.
 - **Acts 14:21** “After they had preached the gospel to that city...”
 - **Acts 14:25** “Now when they had preached the word in Perga...”
- They were aware enough to leave the Jews exclusively and preach to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:46)
- They had boldness, not in their own efforts or abilities but in the Lord
 - **Acts 13:46** “Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”
 - **Acts 14:3** “Therefore they spent a long time there speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands.”
- Persecution came because the people did not like the message. (Acts 13:50, 14:2, 5, 19–20)
- They made disciples. (Acts 14:21)
- They encouraged the ones whom they preached the message to before. (Acts 14:22)
- They planted churches and appointed elders.
 - **Acts 14:23** “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”
- They returned to their home church to give a report of what they had been up to.
 - **Acts 14:26–28** “From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a long time with the disciples.”