

The Acts and Torah of the Apostles Study Guide

Chapter 13

13:1-12

The scene shifts from Jerusalem back to Antioch. The Antioch assembly was better-equipped than Jerusalem to carry out the task of taking the Good News of Yeshua to the Gentiles. Antioch was the base of Saul, and Barnabas had come to be with him there to teach the believers for over a year.

- v. 1 – They were joined by a number of other gifted prophets and teachers who had a diversity of cultural backgrounds.
- v. 2 – The Holy Spirit set apart Barnabas and Saul to lead this endeavor. This is an indication of the importance of God’s calling when it comes to missions. It is a holy (set-apart) undertaking, in which God’s calling must be evident. Therefore, not everyone is a missionary. But that does not negate the responsibility of all believers to be witnesses. It just affirms that God does set apart some believers for special purposes.
- v. 3 – The example here is that there needs to be a formal way of indicating that missionaries have been set apart and sent forth with the blessing of a local assembly.
- v. 4 – This is known as the first missionary journey. Their first stop was the island of Cyprus (accompanied by John Mark). But the first thing these “missionaries to the Gentiles” did was to witness to the Jews of Cyprus. In fact, everywhere that Saul went, he always stopped first at the local synagogue and proclaimed Yeshua. This shows that he never lost his passion for the salvation of his fellow Jewish people. And he set the example of including outreach to the Jewish people in church missions programs today. His example is not an either/or approach, but both/and.
- v. 9 – This is the first time the name Paul is used regarding Saul. This practice is different from the way that Simon became known as Peter. In Matthew 16:18, Yeshua declared that Simon would be known as Peter. Prior to that he was always identified as Simon Peter or “Simon who is known as Peter” (written after the fact by the Gospel writers for clarification). It is interesting to note that Matthew never refers to Peter as Simon again after that. So in his case, it was clearly a name change by the Lord. But no such occurrence is recorded here. It is all about Saul utilizing his Latin or Roman name *Paulus* (Gr., *Paulos*), which indicated his rights as a citizen of Rome. That would enable him to go to various Gentile communities and to find acceptance. It was a strategic move that was consistent with the way that he varied his message from one context to another (see 1 Cor 9:20-23).

But it is also important to note that even though he is identified with the name Paul in the rest of the New Testament, as he took the Good News to the Gentiles, he never stopped being the Jewish man Saul whose heart’s desire was the salvation of his fellow Jewish people (Rom 10:1).

- v. 6-8 – At the far end of the island of Cyprus, they run into a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus (“Son of Salvation”), also known as Elymas (his Greek name). Meanwhile, Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul or governor of Cyprus, wanted to hear the message of Paul and Barnabas. But Elymas tried to prevent this from happening because he knew that if the proconsul believed the message, his role, which may have had an official capacity, would come to an end.

- v. 9-11 – Paul exercised the divine authority given to him as an Apostle by causing Elymas to be blinded (remember, according to 1:22, Apostles had to be a witness of the resurrection of Yeshua, and Paul was qualified in that way because Yeshua had appeared to him on the road to Damascus).
- v. 12 – The proconsul believed because of what he witnessed and the message that had been taught to him. It demonstrates the importance when witnessing to people, that not only do they need to know the truth, but to see the reality of that truth, especially in terms of making a difference in the circumstances of their lives.

13:13-41

- v. 13 – From Cyprus they sailed to the southern shore of central modern-day Turkey. But John Mark turned around and went back to Jerusalem, which indicates that his commitment to the journey had wavered, and that would later create a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas.
- vv. 14-15 – They headed inland and observed Shabbat in the customary manner at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. The *Torah* portion was read, followed by the *haftarah* (reading from the Prophets). Then Paul was given an opportunity to teach on what they had just read.
- vv. 16-22 – Paul began with a historical review from the Exodus to David.
- v. 23 – Then he connected David to Yeshua as the offspring of promise and the Savior.
- vv. 24-25 – He described Yeshua’s relationship to John the Baptist, who was regarded favorably by most Jewish people.
- v. 27 – His referral to the people not recognizing Yeshua or the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath demonstrates how easy it is to have the truth right in front of you and not realizing it or believing it as truth.
- vv. 28-29 – Paul described the death of Yeshua in a non-judgmental tone, and did not assign condemnation on the Jewish people as a whole for Yeshua’s rejection by the leaders of Judaism. If God had intended a cursing on the Jewish people as some critics have promoted historically, this would be an appropriate place to mention it in Paul’s summary of the big picture.
- vv. 30-32 – But he did not do that and turned the focus to how God fulfilled His plan through Yeshua as a “promise made to the fathers” (v. 32). He then used a series of verses in the Tanakh (Old Testament) to show how Yeshua fulfilled God’s plan.
- v. 33 – Paul quotes from Psalm 2:7 – showing that the Messianic prophecies had to be fulfilled through a rightful descendant of David who is also the Son of God.
- v. 34 – He refers to Isaiah 55:3, which brings out the everlasting nature of the one who would come through David.
- v. 35 – He then quotes Psalm 16:10 in order to show God’s plan required both the death of the Messiah and His resurrection.
- vv. 36-39 – He reminded them that David could not have been writing about himself, for he experienced bodily decay like everyone else. Only Yeshua avoided decay through His resurrection. In light of these things, Paul gets to the heart of the matter, stating that the people had two options: believing in Yeshua or continuing to observe Torah alone. But complete forgiveness of sin is only possible through Yeshua. In contrast, the Law of

Moses cannot bring about complete justification and people can never be freed from sin through its observance.

- v. 40-41 – Paul cites Habbakuk 1:5, which was a warning to the people of Judah prior to their captivity in Babylon. That warning from the prophet also applied to the Jewish people in Paul’s day because just as the Babylonian captivity was a judgment from God, but they had prophets warning them in advance, the present generation would likewise face judgment if they did not heed the message that they had been given.

13:42-52

- v. 42-43 – Some Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism believed their message and continued to spend time with Paul and Barnabas. They also encouraged them to return to the synagogue the next Sabbath, which they did.
- v. 44-45 – But would must have gotten out because a massive crowd showed up, meaning Gentiles, in addition to the Jews who would normally have been there on Shabbat. But the mere fact that a message of hope was being extended to Gentiles infuriated the Jewish leaders who were still under the false assumption that Gentiles were unclean in God’s eyes and thus not deserving of His grace. So they blasphemed (spoke evil) against Paul and Barnabas and clearly that represented the majority opinion of the community.
- v. 46-47 – The conclusion of Paul & Barnabas established three key points:
- They had to speak the message first to the Jewish community because it was consistent with God’s faithfulness in communicating His message to the people of promise and the audience of the prophets.
 - The repudiation of their message was evidence of the people judging themselves as being unworthy of eternal life. They had no excuse because the facts had been presented to them. That is a sad, but accurate reality when we witness to others. If they reject our message, they have at least been given an opportunity to believe it and they only have themselves to blame. The key, from our perspective, is to be careful to be clear and loving communicators of the Good News so that the rejection is of the message, not the messenger.
 - Because Israel was called to be a light to the nations (Isa 49:6), but they were failing in that calling, Paul and Barnabas would accept that role. As a result, the Gentiles of the community reacted with much excitement. No doubt they had been told that they were unworthy of the blessings of the God of Israel and treated as second-class citizens. So hearing a different message would be greatly welcomed.
- v. 48 – The phrase “as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” is evidence of the election of God regarding to those who are saved.
- v. 49-52 – Notice the reaction of those who rejected the Gospel message. It shows that people who consider themselves to be devout can still practice hatred, even persecution, likely justifying it as a way of defending your religion.