

Thoughts on Acts Thirteen

Acts 13 is another dividing point in Luke's narrative of the early church. The Holy Spirit described this critical location and how people migrated to and were converted at Antioch of Syria. Except for the meeting discussed in Chapter 15, the church at Antioch is the primary place discussed as sending the Gospel out to the Gentile world. Paul is one of twelve active apostles, and his work is representative of all twelve. Luke only recounts the travels he witnessed or learned directly from eyewitnesses that traveled with Paul. Luke may also have had access to some of Paul's actual letters. There are traditional stories about how the other apostles went to various parts of the world, but none have the first or second-hand narrative that Luke provides in Acts. Luke also includes many historical points that are verifiably accurate from outside sources.

Chapters 13 and 14 contain a list of cities in the order Paul and Barnabas visited them. Some wish to ask Luke, "Why do I need to know that?" But Luke seems driven by the Holy Spirit to include as many specific details as possible on the exact geography of the journeys in Acts. These chapters tell us about Paul and Barnabas traveling on their missionary journey to Cyprus and Galatia. There are some that believe they started in Cyprus because Barnabas was from there. Then, after meeting Sergius Paulus in Cyprus, and since this Roman's name is prominently displayed in Antioch of Pisidia, many believe he convinced Paul to carry the Word to his relatives. Read more about this famous Roman in Family Talk Blog "Sergius Paulus," November 1, 2020."

Without ignoring the scholarly abilities of the men involved, Paul and Barnabas are only two of many given the task of preaching to all peoples. If we look at the places visited by and the areas denied to Paul throughout Acts, we can see the Holy Spirit guiding the work. To select Pisidian Antioch as the central point of their journey into Galatia, The Holy Spirit allowed Paul and Barnabas to plant the Gospel in a center for communication in the heart of Asia Minor. The East-West roads ran to the West through Apamea, Colossae, Laodicea, Magnesia, Ephesus, and the Greek world of the Aegean Sea. To the East, roads gave access to Lystra, Derbe, and by the Cilician Gates through the Taurus Mountains to Issus and Antioch of Syria. From what is written in Paul's letters, the Gospel may have spread to Colossae by faithful men along this roadway.

After leaving Cyprus, Paul began preaching in Antioch, a city of Galatia, in the district of Galatia called Phrygia. While preaching Jesus Christ, Paul leads the lesson to the main point. After being pronounced dead by the Roman authorities, *"God raised Him from the dead"* (Acts 13:30). He summarized this in his letter to the Romans. *"He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification"* (Romans 4:25). The fact of the resurrection is so important, these words were written to the church in Corinth. "For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. (1 Corinthians 15:16-17).

Each of Paul's sermons, following the pattern of Peter's and Stephen's, shows the faith the ancients had in eternal life after physical death. Although the ancients looked for a home not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (Hebrews 11:8-10; 2 Corinthians 5:1). By faith, they looked forward to it, but "The Way" was not known until Christ came (John 14:6). The obedient faith that it would someday be a reality, kept them moving onward. Now the full measure of the promise is revealed in Paul's words. *"And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has*

fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You' (Acts 13:32-33).

Many Jews and Gentiles wanted to hear more. *"The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. 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. When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.* The Jews instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, driving them away. *But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium"* (Acts 13:44-52). There were two primary parts to the persecution and false teaching encountered by early Christians. One was the Sadusee's denial of the spirit and life after death. The other was the Jews, jealous of Paul's doctrine and teaching Gentiles to conform to parts of Moses' Law.