

CHAPTER 4

FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Barnabas and Saul chosen

In the list of prophets and teachers in Acts 13:1, Barnabas is listed first and Saul is listed last. This order is maintained, using the name Saul, during the first part of the missionary journey, until Saul confronts the sorcerer Elymas in Cyprus (Acts 13:8-11). From that time on, the name and order are “Paul and Barnabas” (with the exceptions of Acts 14:12-14 and 15:12).

Note that it was during a time of worship and fasting that God made his choice known.

The laying on of hands by the elders in Antioch was not an ordination to the apostleship, but to Paul’s new special ministry as a missionary.

John Mark accompanied them on this journey as a helper, probably as an authorized catechist (ὑπηρέτης *huperetes*, Acts 13:5).

Island of Cyprus

Barnabas and Saul left the seaport of Seleucia and sailed to Salamis in Cyprus. Cyprus was Barnabas’ original home (Acts 4:36). In Salamis they preached in the synagogues; the large Jewish population in the island could support more than one in that city. The reaction is not stated (Acts 13:5).

Traveling overland they came to the capital city of Paphos. Cyprus was a senatorial province, governed by a proconsul (ἀνθύπατος *anthupatos*), Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7). Just as Peter earlier had confronted the sorcerer Simon (Acts 8:9-24), so now Saul faced the sorcerer Elymas. “Elymas” means “wise, learned”; his name was Bar-Jesus, from Bar-Joshua. When Saul speaks for the first time in the narrative among a Gentile audience, Luke notes his Roman name of Paul, and thereafter places him as the head of the mission. Sergius Paulus was converted, impressed by God’s power over Elymas.

There have been efforts to identify the name of Sergius Paulus in inscriptions in Cyprus. Since only his *nomen* and *cognomen* are provided by Luke (not the *praenomen*), certain identification is impossible. The name Sergius Paulus, as far as it goes, was commonly found among Romans. Three inscriptions have been put forth as bearing his name. Two

of these are not considered to be convincing. The third is quite fragmentary, but may refer to him. It is dated from the first century, and may be restored as follows:

[Klaud]iou Kaisaros Sebastou kai [epi K]jointou Serg[iou Paulou anthupatou],
“[in the time] of [Claud]ius Caesar Augustus, and [in the time of the proconsul
C]jointus Serg[ius Paulus]”

(For a discussion of these inscriptions, see Bastiaan Van Elderen, “Some Archaeological Observations on Paul’s First Missionary Journey,” *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. by W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin, pp. 151-56)

On to Perga, John Mark’s defection

Having finished their tour of Cyprus, the missionaries sailed north to the coast of Pamphylia and went about ten miles inland to the city of Perga. At that point they were ready to cross the Taurus range to the cities of the interior.

William M. Ramsay speculated that Paul had caught malaria (his “thorn in the flesh,” the illness he suffered in Galatia, Gal 4:13), and decided to go to the cooler high country of Pisidian Antioch (*St Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, pp. 92-97). However, it seems more likely that this trip had already been planned, and Paul crossed the mountains for a missionary, rather than a personal, purpose. It seems that Paul’s illness among the Galatians had some relation to his eyes (Gal 4:15).

From Perga John Mark defected from the mission and returned—not even to Antioch, but to his mother’s home in Jerusalem. The reason is not stated, although the impression in Acts is that the reason was not justifiable. In Acts 15:38 the negative term ἀφίσταμαι *aphistamai*, “desert,” is used; it is related to the noun ἀποστασία *apostasia*, “departure, desertion, rebellion, apostasy.”

Several possibilities for Mark’s motivation have been suggested:

- Physical or emotional weariness
- Fear of coming dangers in travel or from enemies (perhaps Paul refers to this journey in 2 Cor 11:26)
- Missing his home and family
- Resentment at Paul’s new preeminence over his cousin Barnabas (note wording of Acts 13:13)
- A possible change of plans for the mission itinerary (William Ramsay)

We note the fine Christian character of Barnabas, who continued on with Paul, even though Mark had left and Paul had taken Barnabas' place as the leader of the mission.

Pisidian Antioch

In Acts 13:14 the KJV, following some Greek manuscripts, reads "Antioch in Pisidia," but the better Greek manuscripts read "Antioch near Pisidia," or "Pisidian Antioch." The city was called by this designation also outside the NT. This latter reading is correct, as Antioch in Paul's time was not actually in the region of Pisidia, but near it. The city lay in the territory of Phrygian Galatia, a part of the large province of Galatia referred to now as South Galatia. Antioch was a Roman colony, as were other cities where Paul ministered (Lystra, Philippi, Corinth).

In Acts 13:14-41 Luke records Paul's sermon in the synagogue of Antioch. The synagogue service was followed (vv. 14-15). It normally consisted of the Shema, prayer, the reading of the law and perhaps the prophets, and a sermon. As a visiting Jewish scholar, Paul was invited to speak. His sermon reveals the classic presentation of the gospel to the Jews. It follows the outline of Jesus' life that Peter used in Acts 10. There is emphasis on OT fulfillment, on the death and resurrection of Jesus, and on the need for repentance and justification.

Paul's sermon in Antioch, as recorded by Luke, carries forward some of the purposes of Acts. It shows that the Roman authorities were not disposed against Jesus (v. 28), thereby encouraging Roman approval for Christianity. It also shows how Paul's gospel was no different from that of the early church and the other apostles.

Note the list of Paul's speeches in Acts in Goodwin, p. 41:

- 1) The synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, 13:16-41
- 2) Lystra, 14:14-18
- 3) The Areopagus in Athens, 17:22-31
- 4) To the Ephesian elders in Miletus, 20:17-35
- 5) To Jerusalem Jews from castle stairs, 21:40 - 22:21
- 6) Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, 22:30 - 23:9
- 7) Reply to Tertullus before Felix in Caesarea, 24:10-21
- 8) Before Felix and Drusilla in Caesarea, 24:25
- 9) Before Festus, 25:10-11

- 10) Before Herod Agrippa II, 26:1-29
- 11) On the ship during voyage to Rome, 27:21-26
- 12) With Rome Jews when in house arrest, 28:17-20
- 13) Second meeting with Rome Jews, 28:25-28

When the Jewish leaders were moved to envy by the hearty reception the Gentiles gave to Paul's message, they opposed the gospel, and Paul no longer cooperated with them, but condemned their unbelief. This rejection of the gospel by the Jews and turning to the Gentiles is another theme which runs through the book of Acts.

The shaking of the dust from the feet (v. 51) "signified the breaking off of all intercourse, and was regarded as tantamount to calling a man a heathen" (F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p. 276; Bruce notes other NT examples: Matt 10:14 = Mark 6:11 = Luke 9:5; Luke 10:11; cf. Acts 18:6; 22:22-23; notice also the article on "Gestures" in the new *ISBE*).

The Jewish opposition became so strong that Paul and Barnabas left the city, but a strong new church was left behind.

Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and the return trip

From Antioch Paul and Barnabas traveled to Iconium, the easternmost city in Phrygian Galatia. The location of the border between Phrygia and Lycaonia in Paul's time is not clear; it appears that Iconium was in the borders of Phrygia, but its history was closely tied with the cities in Lycaonia, and historical writers often associated it with that region; for details, see Ramsay, *St. Paul*, pp. 110-12.

Following his usual practice Paul went first to the synagogue, with many Jews and Gentiles receiving the message. But, as in Antioch, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the city against Paul and Barnabas (Barnabas being called here in Acts an apostle [Acts 14:4, as in 14:14], in a general sense of one sent out who had seen the resurrected Jesus, perhaps one of the 120).

Because of the threatened violence, they moved on to Lystra.. Lystra and Derbe were in the Lycaonian region of South Galatia (Lycaonia itself was partly within and partly outside the province of Galatia).

The earliest physical description of Paul to come down to us from the early church is contained in a pseudepigraphical work, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* (ca. A.D. 190). The account tells how Onesiphorus waited by the road from Iconium to Lystra in order to find Paul, having received a description of him from Titus:

“And he went along the royal road which leads to Lystra, and stood there waiting for him, and looked at (all) who came, according to Titus’ description. And he saw Paul coming, a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel.” (Edgar Hennecke, *NT Apocrypha*, 2:353-54)

For more on this description, see A. J. Malherbe, “The Physical Description of Paul,” *Harvard Theological Review* 79:1-3 (1986) 170-72; same description used for heroes; see in *NT Abstracts* 31:2 (1987) 172.

In Lystra Paul healed a crippled man, and the citizens assumed the missionaries were gods in human form:

Barnabas – Zeus (Roman Jupiter, dignity of appearance?)

Paul – Hermes (Roman Mercury, chief speaker)

Paul and Barnabas stopped the false worship and turned them to the true God. The speech in Acts 14:14-18 is similar in content to Paul’s speech to the Greeks in Athens in Acts 17, and the theology he explains in Rom 1.

The disgruntled Jews of Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra, and stirred up the people so they stoned Paul in the city and took him out as dead (perhaps Paul thought of Stephen at that time). However, he recovered and went to Derbe. Paul remembered this stoning in 2 Cor 11:25. Perhaps Timothy and his mother and grandmother became Christians at this time (cf. Acts 16:1; 2 Tim 1:5; 3:10-11).

In Derbe they had an apparently successful mission (Acts 14:21). Gaius may have been converted at this time (Acts 20:4).

Paul and Barnabas retraced their route back to the coast. In each of the four churches they had established they ordained elders (Acts 14:23). This early church government, with a plurality of elders in each church, was the same as that used in the Jewish synagogues.

From Perga they went a short distance to Attalia, and from there sailed home, coming to Antioch in Syria. Acts 14:28 says “they stayed there a long time with the disciples”; according to our chronology, from the fall of A.D. 48 to the summer of A.D. 49.