

43. Christ Led the Church to Expand its Vision

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to carry out the ministry that the Lord has for them. The Lord has prepared each of us for a unique ministry. We also saw that the Lord judged Herod for his pride. As a part of their ministry, Saul and Barnabas took Mark with them back to the city of Antioch. This gave them the opportunity to show him how to minister to different cultures. Today, we will see how the Lord expanded that ministry to other places beyond the city of Antioch.

Barnabas and Saul had been the leaders that had helped the church at Antioch in its early development. However, that leadership team expanded as additional men became a part of that leadership team. Acts 13:1 says, “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.” Here, we see that the leadership team in the city of Antioch now included five men. One of the things that we notice is that none of these men were from the city of Antioch. We mentioned in an earlier topic that Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. It is not uncommon in large cities to have church leadership teams from many different backgrounds and cultures.

We see that these men are called prophets and teachers. We saw in a previous topic that Agabus was a prophet. He had come from Jerusalem to the city of Antioch and told the Christians in Antioch that there would soon be a famine. As a result, the church at Antioch collected a gift to help the Christians in Jerusalem and sent it to the leaders of the church by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. In the case of Agabus, he predicted an event that would happen in the near future. He predicted another event in Acts 21:10-11 where we read, “And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.’”” Until the New Testament was complete, there was a need for individuals who could predict events that would happen in the near future as Agabus did in these passages.

In Acts 15:32, we see that prophets had other ministries as well. That verse says, “Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.” 1 Corinthians 14:29 says, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.” Then, 1 Corinthians 14:32-33 adds, “And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” Ephesians 3:5-6 says, “Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” Taking all of these passages, we see that prophets encouraged, strengthened, and had their spirits in subjection so that they brought peace and not confusion. Prophets together with the apostles also revealed how the Jews and Gentiles are one in the church. In fact, the apostles and prophets together provided the foundation for the church as Ephesians 2:20 says, “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*.”

We see that the leadership team in Antioch was very diverse. We saw in Acts 4:36 that Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus. The word translated “Niger” means *black* so it is possible that Simeon was from Africa. Lucius was from the city of Cyrene in North Africa. Manaen had been brought up with Herod, the tetrarch. Herod the tetrarch was the Herod mentioned in the Gospels so Manean had grown up in the home of Herod the Great who tried to kill Christ as a baby. Saul had grown up in the city of Tarsus. As you can see this leadership team had great variety in their backgrounds.

Acts 13:2-3 goes on to say, “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.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.” The word translated “ministered” is different than the normal word translated “ministered”. This word is only used three times in the New Testament. Hebrews 10:11 says, “And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.” In this verse, the word talks about the Old Testament priests. Romans 15:26-27 says, “For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.” We see that this verse talks about the fact that the gift of the Macedonians for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem is called an act of worship. Here, in Acts 13, the context shows they were praying. The leadership team was worshiping the Lord in prayer and fasting.

It was while they were praying and fasting that the Holy Spirit said, “Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” The word translated “separate” means *to set apart or to appoint*. Here, we see that the Holy Spirit told the leadership team to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which God had called them. We will see throughout the rest of the book of Acts that this work involved taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The leadership team at Antioch did three things before they sent Barnabas and Saul out for the work that the Lord had for them. They fasted. This meant that they did not eat so that they could devote this time to prayer. They prayed. This time in concentrated prayer was very important as Barnabas and Saul would face many new situations as they traveled to various cities of the Gentiles and would need great wisdom from the Lord as they faced many different situations. They laid their hands on them. 1 Timothy 4:14 says, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.” The laying on of hands was a way that the leaders of the church showed their support and identification with a person that was called to a special ministry by the Lord. Once the leadership team had done these three things they sent Barnabas and Saul out to the work God had called them to do.

Acts 13:4-5 says, “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, 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.” A key thing to notice is the fact that Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:18 says, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” The law drives people, because the law shows people

when they are guilty of sin. Galatians 5:1 says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” In contrast, the Holy Spirit leads people. Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Here, we see that the Holy Spirit sets us free to serve one another in love.

Barnabas and Saul then left Antioch and went first to Seleucia. Seleucia was about sixteen miles from the city of Antioch and served as the harbor for the city of Antioch, because it was close to the mouth of the Orontes River. There they went on board a ship and sailed to the island of Cyprus. Acts 4:36 says, “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus.” Here, we see that the very first place where Barnabas and Saul went when the Holy Spirit called them to a special work was right back to the island where Barnabas had lived. In many large cities, the first place where people go when the Holy Spirit sends them out is back to the area where they grew up so that they can share the Gospel with relatives and friends. That is the first place the Lord led Barnabas and Saul.

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. It was only about a two-day boat trip from Antioch. The island also had a large Jewish population. As a result, as Barnabas and Saul visited the various cities, the first place that they went was to the Jewish synagogues. This was important for two reasons. First, Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” Barnabas and Saul always gave the Jews the first opportunity to respond to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ. Second, there were also many Gentile proselytes in every city who attended the Jewish synagogues to learn more about the Old Testament. Acts 13:43 says, “Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.” In every city, the greatest initial response to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ came from these Gentile proselytes.

Barnabas and Saul also took along John as their helper. As we mentioned in an earlier topic, John was the nephew of Barnabas. Barnabas and Saul realized the importance of showing both physical and spiritual children how to serve the Lord. John was like a spiritual son to Barnabas and Barnabas wanted to show him how to become effective in ministry to other cultures. Nearly forty individuals are listed who traveled with Paul at various times in his ministry. Paul realized that the best way to train younger Christians for ministry was by example. May the Lord richly bless you as you also take younger Christians with you and show them how to minister.