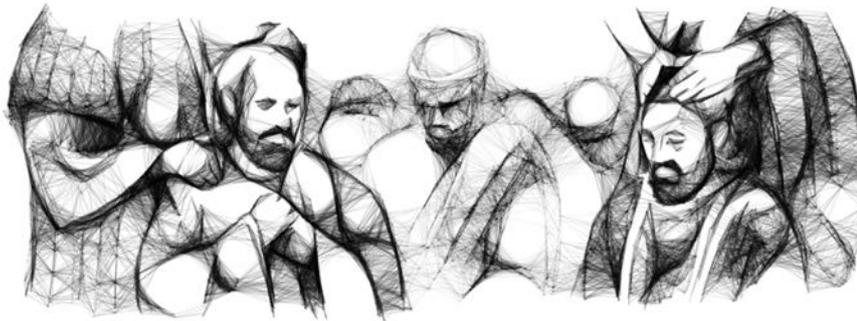


Paul's First Trip to Share the Good News



SABBATH—AUGUST 11

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 13; 2 Corinthians 4:7–10; Romans 10:1–4; Romans 3:19; Acts 14:1–26; Romans 9–11.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Brothers, understand what we are telling you. You can have forgiveness of your sins through [because of] this Jesus. The Law of Moses could not free you from your sins. But you can be made right with God if you believe in Jesus’ ” (Acts 13:38, 39, ERV).



The first Gentile, or non-Jewish, church started in Antioch.

GOD PLANNED for His followers to share the Good News with both Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles are non-Jews. It took a while for the first Jewish Christians to accept this plan.

The first Gentile church started in Antioch. Many Gentiles joined the Antioch church. Many Jewish Christians belonged to the Antioch church too (Galatians 2:11–13). The church grew very fast. How did that happen? Church members were very excited to share the Good News. Also, Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch. The work they did caused the church to grow fast too. Antioch became the first important Christian center outside Judea. In many ways, the Antioch church became more important than the Jerusalem church.

Antioch became the birthplace for Christian mission. Mission is the special work we do to help God's church to grow. Paul left from Antioch to go on all three of his mission trips to share the Good News. Paul and the other leaders in Antioch helped Christianity to become the church that Jesus wanted it to be: a worldwide religion that would spread the Good News to everyone on the earth (Revelation 14:6).

PAUL'S TRIP TO CYPRUS (Acts 13:1–12)

In Acts 13, Luke introduces us to Paul's first trip to share the Good News (Acts 13, 14). From Acts 13 until the end of the book, Luke writes about Paul and his work with the Gentiles. As we learned, Gentiles are all non-Jews.

Paul's first trip to share the Good News is the first time the church makes a careful plan to reach people with the truth about Jesus. Luke is careful to make it clear that this plan started with God, not with believers. God can work only when we are willing to put ourselves in a place where He can use us.

Read Acts 13:1–12. What important truths does Luke make clear to us in these verses about the work that Barnabas and Paul did in Cyprus?

Some church members in Antioch prayed and fasted. Fasted means that they did not eat any food for a short time for spiritual reasons. Then the church leaders laid hands on Barnabas and Paul and asked God to bless their work for Him in a special way (Acts 14:26).

Barnabas came from the island of Cyprus. Cyprus is found in the northeast part of the Mediterranean Sea. Cyprus was not far from Antioch. So, Cyprus was a good place for Paul and Barnabas to start their trip to share the Good News. Yes, people on Cyprus knew about the Good News. But there was more work for Paul and Barnabas to do there.

In Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas took Barnabas's cousin John Mark (Acts 15:39; Colossians 4:10) with them. They went to Salamis and preached in synagogues. Synagogues are Jewish "churches" or places of worship. Anywhere Paul went, he preached in synagogues first before he preached to Gentiles. Remember, Jesus was Israel's Promised One. So, it made sense to share the Good News with the Jews first.

After Salamis, Paul and his friends went west and came to Paphos. Paphos was the capital of Cyprus. A Jewish magician named Elymas did not accept the Good News. But Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor, did (Acts 13:12).

In this story in Acts 13, a Jew does not accept the truth. But a Gentile accepts it. How can this experience help us understand that it is sometimes harder to reach Christians with "present truth"? Present truth is the truth we need most for our time.



Sergius Paulus was the Roman governor at Cyprus. He accepted the Good News about Jesus.

PAUL'S TRIP TO ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA: PART 1
(Acts 13:38)

Paul and his friends leave Cyprus and sail to Perga. Perga is on the south coast of land that belongs to Turkey today. Then Paul and his friends go to a city named Antioch in the country of Pisidia. But before that trip, Luke tells us about two important changes that happen. First, Paul becomes the group's leader. Up to now, Luke always says Barnabas's name first in the story. Second, Luke stops using Paul's Jewish name, "Saul" (Acts 13:9). Here, Luke starts using the name "Paul." Why? Maybe because Paul is now mostly with people who follow Greek and Roman ways.

Acts 13:13 tells us that John Mark goes back to Jerusalem. Acts does not tell us the reason why John Mark leaves Paul. Ellen G. White says that John Mark feels afraid and hopeless about all the hard times they will meet in the future. "Mark became afraid. He lost all courage. He refused to go forward. So, he went back to Jerusalem."—*The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]*, page 170, adapted. God never promises us that the work He gives us will be easy. Paul knows from the beginning that he will suffer a lot for serving Jesus (Acts 9:16). But Paul learns to trust fully in God's power. That trust in God is how Paul stays strong (2 Corinthians 4:7–10).



John Mark goes back to Jerusalem. He feels afraid and hopeless about all the hard times that may happen in the future.

Read Acts 13:38. As this verse shows us, what truth is at the center of Paul's message to the Jews in Antioch?

In Acts 13:16–41, we find Paul's first sermon in the New Testament. Of course, this sermon is not the first one that Paul ever preached. For sure, these verses do not tell us everything Paul says in his sermon.

The sermon has three parts. The sermon starts with two truths. The first truth is that God chose Israel as His people and chose David to be king (Acts 13:17–23). The first part of Paul's sermon shows the Jews that their beliefs are the same as Paul's. Next, Paul's sermon shows the Jews that Jesus is the Savior who makes all God's promises come true. Jesus is a future son of David. Only Jesus can save Israel (Acts 13:24–37). Then, the last part of Paul's sermon is a warning. It warns the Jews not to turn away from God's plan to save them (Acts 13:38–41). Acts 13:38, 39 is about the truth that Jesus makes us right with God. The law cannot save us. Only Jesus forgives us and makes us clean (Romans 10:1–4; Galatians 2:16).

PAUL'S TRIP TO ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA: PART 2 (Acts 13:42–49)

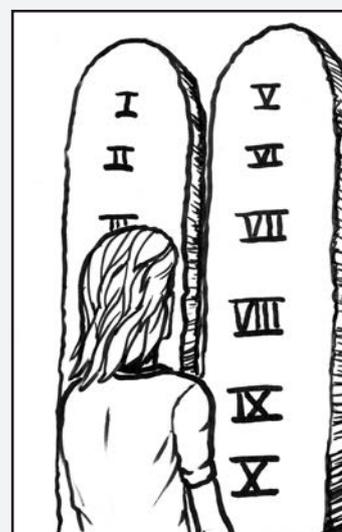
Acts 13:38, 39 tells us that the law cannot make us right with God. Our being made right with God is an important Bible teaching. We must obey the law. But the law cannot make us right with God. Why? Because the law cannot make people obey (Acts 15:10; Romans 8:3). But what if the law did give us the power to obey now and in the future? Great! But that power cannot take away past sins (Romans 3:19; Galatians 3:10, 11). That is why we cannot become right with God by obeying the law. We cannot earn God's favor. We can get this gift only when we have faith in Jesus' death for us (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16). We are not worthy of this gift. Yes, obeying the law is important to the Christian life. But obeying the law does not save us.

Read Acts 13:42–49. As these verses show us, how do the Jews like Paul's message?

Paul ends his message by saying some things that are no doubt hard for the Jews to accept. Most of the Jews accept Paul's message anyway. But the next Sabbath, something changes. Some Jews do not accept Paul's message. Possibly, they are the leaders of the synagogue. A synagogue is a Jewish "church" or place of worship. Why are the leaders mean to Paul? Luke says they are jealous.

But why? In Bible times, there are non-Jews who like many Jewish beliefs. What beliefs do the non-Jews like? A belief in one God, the Jewish way of living, and also the Sabbath. Many non-Jews, at that time, accept the Jewish faith, but they do not fully become Jews. They do not like the idea of needing to be circumcised. To be circumcised means the extra skin on the end of the male sex parts is cut off. So, many non-Jews worship God in the synagogues but do not become Jews. This group of non-Jewish worshipers is named the "God-fearers." The God-fearers in the Antioch synagogue (Acts 13:16, 43) may help spread the news about Paul's message. At this time, many people join the church in large numbers. Of course, the non-Jews are excited that they can be saved without having to be circumcised first.

This story may help explain why the Jewish leaders are jealous of Paul. These leaders do not accept the Good News. But that helps Paul and Barnabas give their full attention to the non-Jews. The non-Jews thank God for inviting them to accept His plan to save sinners.



We must obey the law. The law is very important to the Christian life. But our obeying the law does not save us.

PAUL'S TRIP TO ICONIUM (Acts 14:1–7)

The Jewish leaders in Antioch asked the local rulers of that city to bring together a large group of people. The local rulers made this large group angry at Paul and Barnabas. Then the rulers and the large group chased Paul and Barnabas out of town (Acts 13:50). But Paul and Barnabas were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52). Then the two men went to the city of Iconium.

As Acts 14:1–7 shows us, what happens because of the work that Paul and Barnabas do in Iconium?

In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas continue their habit of preaching to the Jews first before they preach to the non-Jews. Paul's sermon in Antioch (Acts 13:16–41) shows us his reason for going to the Jews first before going to the non-Jews. What reason is that? Paul's reason is about God's choice. God chose Israel to be His people (Romans 3:2; Romans 9:4, 5). God also made His people a promise. He promised to send them a Savior, born from David's family line. Sadly, many Jews turn away from the Good News. But Paul hopes that many Jews will accept Jesus in the future.

In Romans 9–11, Paul says that “only some of the people of Israel are really God's people” (Romans 9:6, ERV). Also, the reason that some Jews believe in Jesus at all is because of God's mercy. God has not turned away from His people. Even today, “a few of the Jews are being chosen because of God's loving-favor” (Romans 11:5, NLV). Paul continues to preach the Good News to the non-Jews. But Paul believes that more Jews will come to Jesus in the future.

“Paul's words in Romans 9–11 explain more fully his plan to reach the Jews and the non-Jews alike with the Good News. Paul gives Christians a good reason for sharing the Good News with Jews who do not believe in Jesus.”—David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles [leaders and teachers]* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), page 401, adapted.

At first, both Jews and non-Jews accept Paul's Good News about Jesus. But then the Jews who do not believe in Jesus poison the minds of the people against Paul and Barnabas. A large crowd plans to kill Paul and Barnabas with stones. But Paul and Barnabas leave town first.

How can you be a good witness to your Jewish friends?



A large crowd plans to kill Paul and Barnabas with stones. But Paul and Barnabas leave town first.

PAUL'S TRIP TO LYSTRA AND DERBE (Acts 14:5–19)

Paul and Barnabas visit Lystra next (Acts 14:6, 7). Luke tells us only one story that happens in Lystra. It is the story about how Paul heals a crippled man.

Read Acts 14:5–19. How do the people in Lystra behave when they see Paul heal the crippled man? How does their behavior show us that their beliefs are silly?

The crowd in Lystra is very excited about the miracle that Paul does. The crowd thinks that Paul and Barnabas are gods. They believe Barnabas is Zeus. Zeus was the king of all the Greek gods. The crowd believes Paul is the Greek god named Hermes. Hermes was the god who ruled over business, communication, inventions, travel, and stealing. Hermes was also Zeus's messenger and helper. The people in Lystra bring gifts of flowers and bulls to the city gates. The leaders want to burn these gifts in an act of worship to Paul and Barnabas.

There is a story about Zeus and Hermes from that time. It helps explain why the people want to worship Paul and Barnabas. The Roman poet Ovid wrote about this story. Ovid says Zeus and Hermes act as humans. Then they visit a town near Lystra. Ovid says that an older couple is kind to the two gods. But other people are not nice to the gods. The gods reward the old man and old woman. The gods change their house into a temple and turn the old man and woman into holy leaders. Next, the gods put the new holy leaders in charge of the temple. Then the gods destroy the other people in the town (*Metamorphoses*, 611–724).

The people in Lystra know this story very well. No wonder they think Paul and Barnabas are two gods when Paul heals the crippled man! Paul and Barnabas stop the people in Lystra from worshiping them. But some bad men come from Antioch and Iconium and make the people in Lystra angry with Paul and Barnabas. The people throw stones at Paul until they think he is dead.

As Acts 14:20–26 shows us, where do Paul and Barnabas finish their journey? What do they do on their way back?

Paul says: “‘We must suffer many things on our way into God’s kingdom’ ” (Acts 14:22, ERV). What does Paul mean? How can you learn to grow from your suffering?



Paul heals a crippled man in Lystra.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “When Jesus lived on earth, He did everything to show the Jews they were wrong to stop other people from knowing the truth. Jesus worked to save non-Jewish people. Jesus worked to save the Roman army leader. Jesus also worked to save the woman from the country of Phoenicia. Now it was time for Jesus’ followers to bring the non-Jews to Jesus. Whole villages of non-Jews accepted the Good News gladly. They praised God for their new faith. Most of the Jews did not believe in the Good News. They tried to hurt those who believed. But their doubt and hate did not stop God’s plan to save the non-Jews. God’s plan was to join the new Israel to the old Israel. The Jewish places of worship closed their doors to the apostles. The apostles were the men Jesus chose to lead His church after He went to heaven. People opened their homes to the apostles and let them teach there. The apostles also used public buildings owned by non-Jews. The apostles preached God’s truth there too.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, page 51, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:



“Jesus worked to save the Roman army leader.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, page 51, adapted.

- ① Think more about John Mark’s story. He ran away from Paul and Barnabas when things got hard. Later, Paul and Barnabas argued over John Mark. Barnabas wanted to work with John Mark again. Paul did not want to (read Acts 15:37). But many years later Paul wrote to Timothy: “Get Mark and bring him with you. He helps me in my work for the Lord” (2 Timothy 4:11, NIV). We see Paul changed his mind. What does this story tell us about giving people second chances when they fail to do the work God gives them to do?
- ② Read again what Paul and Barnabas said to the people in Lystra who thought Paul and Barnabas were gods (Acts 14:14–18). What should we do when we feel the desire to accept praise for things that God does?
- ③ Read Acts 14:21–23. What do Paul and Barnabas do to help the faith of new believers grow stronger? How can we do the same?
- ④ The religious leaders who attacked Paul let man-made beliefs get in the way of true faith. How can we escape this trap ourselves?