

Scripture Reading:

Acts 12: “20 Now Herod had been very angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon; but they came to him with one accord, and having made Blastus the king's personal aide their friend, they asked for peace, because their country was supplied with food by the king's country. 21 So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. 22 And the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died. 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark.”

Acts 13:1 “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. 2 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." 3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, & from there they sailed to Cyprus.”

"Witnesses to All the World"

Today, we resume our study of the Book of Acts and as we begin Chapter 13 we come to the great missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul... It is considered the second part of the Book of Acts by almost all the outlines and commentators you can consult. While a major shift is taking place, we must also remember the purpose for which Luke has written both his Gospel and the Book of Acts [*Two books that comprise over 20% of the New Testament*] Luke began his first book, the Gospel of Luke, with these words:

Luke 1:1 “Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”

- To the modern mind, what Luke has said here would seem to indicate that the Gospel and Acts are much more like science or history than theology or religion:
- It should remind us that as Christians we do not have to put our mind on the shelf to be faithful:

In fact it is our faith that affirms the reality of both science and history!

Luke tells his friend that certain things have been fulfilled, that there were witnesses, and so that Theophilus could have a right understanding Luke was going to present an orderly account of what had happened.

- Luke continues this train of thought as he introduces the second part of his orderly account, what we know as the Book of Acts:

Acts 1:1 “The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

- Luke once again makes sure that his friend understands how all of what he is sharing is grounded in real history!

Now some may think as I have moved through the Book of Acts that I speak about the Kingdom WAY too much!

- I would point out that this is exactly what Jesus spent time teaching His disciples about during the forty days He had with them on earth after His resurrection.

This is the great theme of the Book of Acts: Luke gave all that Jesus began to do and teach in his Gospel and in the Book of Acts we see how the resulting victory will be completed:

- We must also remember that it is the commands that Jesus gave to His disciples that are being followed as the Spirit begins to fill the earth with the Kingdom of God's Son.

Acts 1:4 "And being assembled together with them, [Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me; 5 for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

They would shortly see Jesus ascending into heaven, taking His seat at the right hand of God the Father, which had been promised and foreshadowed in the Old Testament: *Thinking especially the most-quoted Psalm 110*. Not many days after, the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost just as Jesus had promised and the Church begins to carry out its mission of filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus! We have seen things progress exactly as Jesus said they should:

- According to commands Luke tells us about right here at the beginning of Acts:

Acts 1:6 " 6 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 And [Jesus] said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." 9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. "

- The disciples were to be witnesses for Jesus in Jerusalem, all of Judea and Samaria and then finally they are to witness to the entire world!
- This is exactly what we have seen up until this point in the Book of Acts.

From this point forward, Luke is going to focus on the work of the Apostle Paul and he will end his orderly account with a picture that continues down to our day...

Acts 28:30 "Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him."

If you do not understand that the Book of Acts teaches us how the Spirit uses the Church to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus, then this ending is going to be very anti-climactic or leave you looking for part three...

- Something many liberal scholars have suggested I might add.

No, we have all that God intended us to have here in the Bible and we should be a little excited as we reach the portion that speaks specifically about the Gospel going to the Gentiles...

- The Gospel coming to us!

Saul of Tarsus will soon be called Paul and he is known as the Apostle to the Gentiles...

Going to the Gentiles was the specific calling Paul received from Jesus.

God told Ananias about Paul's mission as he was sent to baptize him:

Acts 9:15 “¹ the Lord said to Ananias, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

- We will certainly see the fulfillment of this calling in the life of Paul as we move on in the chapters ahead.

We also know from the testimonies given by Apostle Paul himself that Ananias told Paul about this calling:

Acts 22:14 “Then [Ananias] said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. 15 For you will be His witness to ALL men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'”

- Paul’s testimonies also reveal that Jesus Himself gave Paul more details about his calling not long after his conversion:

“17 Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.' So I said, 'Lord... [you see, even the great Apostle Paul had to learn the lesson that God is in control and knows what He is doing, because here we see him explaining to God that there might be a better way]

“So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. 20 And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

- God does not argue, but simply repeats what Paul had already been told by Ananias:

21 “Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'”

We learn from Paul’s later testimony before King Agrippa, that Jesus had begun to teach Paul his mission even on the road to Damascus:

Acts 26: “And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. 17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’”

The promise revealed long ago by the Prophet Isaiah; the truth revealed to Simeon which we sing in his prayer each week; and now the great calling of the Apostle Paul... The promises to Abraham are for ALL the nations! So Paul continues his testimony:

19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.”

We have seen Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, weave together the ministries of Peter & James and Barnabas & Paul up until this point of his orderly account:

- The Gospel was preached to Cornelius & other Gentiles at Caesarea
- The first gentile church was established at Antioch and now Luke turns his attention almost exclusively to the Gentile world.

Barnabas had been sent by the church in Jerusalem to help establish the church at Antioch. At some point, he went to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him back to assist with the work & they ministered in Antioch for several years. They were then sent to Jerusalem with relief aid for the famine. And now, as we read from the end of chapter 12 this morning, Paul and Barnabas have returned to the Church in Antioch. John Mark returns with them and he will join them on the first journey:

Mark will become a source of great conflict between Paul and Barnabas reminding us again that the Spirit uses broken people to accomplish His work!

In chapter 13, Luke first tells us a little about the leadership there in Antioch:

Acts 13:1 “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.”

There has been much written about who these men were and whether they were prophets or teachers or both. Since Luke chose to give us only a few details I think we should keep the speculating to a minimum and take what appears to be likely as likely while not being emphatic: I think Luke’s reference to prophets & teachers means that we are to see these men as leaders in the church:

Not the only leaders but representative of all leaders there in Antioch and perhaps some we would know. Obviously we know about Paul and Barnabas, the bookends of the list. Next we have Simeon who was called Niger and Lucius of Cyrene:

- We should remember that it was men of Cyrene who first came to boldly preach the Gospel to the Gentiles here in Antioch.
- I think it safe to assume that Lucius was one of these men.

We are told that Simeon’s Latin name was Niger, which means black & many take this to mean he came from Africa. However, Matthew tells us that the Simon who carried the Cross of Jesus was a Syrenian who had sons Alexander and Rufus who may be those referenced later in the New Testament.

We are also told that those of Cyrene were present at Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out so it might make sense to see both of these men as being from Cyrene. Finally we have Manaen who was somehow connected to King Herod Antipas who killed John the Baptist and held the mock trial of Jesus.

- It is possible that he was actually a foster brother to the King who was raised with him in a prominent family in Rome.
- The bottom line here is that the leadership there at Antioch consisted of Jews, proselytes and Gentiles: Those who had positions of importance in both the Jewish and Roman worlds.

It is also significant that great missionary journey to the Gentiles was going forth from this church rather than the Church at Jerusalem. I do not believe this is done to show that the Church in Jerusalem is being left behind... Far from it, we will see the first great Church Council held there in chapter 15.

I do not believe this is done to show a divided Church: Quite the contrary, just as our list of leaders shows how the Gospel has united many different backgrounds, so now we see the Church as one united body carrying out the command of Jesus to be His witnesses to ALL the world.

This is confirmed by what we read in verse two: “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.”

We see here two great truths that unite them to the Church in Jerusalem and throughout all of history:

‘Ministered to the Lord’ is what we would commonly understand as worship.

After the victory of Jesus on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom: Up until that point, the only proper place for people to worship, to minister to the Lord was at the Temple in Jerusalem, and then only through the priests.

Now things have changed and people can properly worship God wherever the Saints gather to do so:

- **This reminds us of the importance of worship as we studied together before the Advent season.**

And going hand in hand with the Saints lifting up right worship we have the Holy Spirit leading them:

- **Just as He did in Jerusalem!**

What we clearly see here at the beginning of chapter thirteen are the two great lessons we are always learning from the Book of Acts:

- **The Kingdom of Jesus is going to fill the earth!**
- **The Spirit of God is the one who directs and empowers the Church as they carry out this great mission!**

Luke does not tell us how the Spirit spoke, but rather than speculate about what we are not told, we need to focus on the importance of the fact that He did speak:

This confirms the personhood of the Spirit: He is not some sort of godly power or force: He is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity equal with the Father and the Son!

This also confirms His authority and control over the work of the Church: He tells them to set apart Paul and Barnabas for “ME” & to do so for the work the “I” have called them to do.

- **The Saints there at Antioch respond in obedience, as we always should when given God’s commands...**

3 “Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.”

Notice again that Luke stresses that it was the Holy Spirit who sent them out!

- **Thus we see the beginning of a great journey that we will study in the coming weeks.**

It will be a journey that will be followed by other journeys as the Gospel is taken to the Gentiles and God’s Kingdom begins to fill the earth. These journeys will not be without many great trials and even conflicts among the Saints... There will be many lessons for us to learn along the way: These will be truly exciting journeys! And we must remember that Luke will not give us all of the details of the journeys as is evident by some of what Paul reveals in his letters:

In making his defense to the Church at Corinth in his second letter, Paul gives us many details about his journeys:

11:24 “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”

What Luke is telling us with his orderly account is the story of how the Spirit will glorify the Son by filling the earth with His Kingdom:

The Apostle Paul understood this mission and that is what he rejoices in as he encourages young Timothy in what is likely the last letter we have from Paul: I am sure it was a great encouragement to Timothy and should be to all of us as we continue to carry out the Great Commission today:

II Timothy 1:6 “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, 10 but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, 11 to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.”

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 55:

“1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. 2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. 3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—

6 Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.”