

Acts 13:1-12

“A Deliberate Decision”

It's the 8th Vs of the 1st Ch of the book of Acts; Jesus said, “...*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.*”¹ We've been watching the witness of the disciples unfold in that exact order throughout our studies in this book. They began in Jerusalem, made their way to Judea & Samaria; & we've even seen the gospel beginning to edge its way out into the uttermost parts of the earth as we observed an incredible spiritual awakening in Antioch, some 300 miles north of Jerusalem.

The church in Antioch is the 1st vibrant/thriving church on the planet that was planted *in* & brought forth *out of* a completely pagan community. No one was requesting the gospel, none of the apostles or church leaders were instrumental in planting the work, believers were simply sharing Jesus w/people as they made their way into different regions & something truly amazing sprung up in Antioch. The gospel took root, up came the shoot & out came tremendous fruit in that area!

People were responding to the gospel in droves. So Barnabas was sent up to encourage them, & that's exactly what he did. Ultimately, things were growing so radically he decided head out to Tarsus & find Saul to come back & help him w/the work! There they were, for a year just pouring into the people, discipling them, rooting them, grounding/growing them in the word of God, the love & grace of God & the truth of J.C.

So; the gospel has made its way out onto/into the fringes, it's on the cusp of going to the ends of the earth. But here in Ch 13, a deliberate decision is made & obeyed to take the gospel into uncharted territory. & It wasn't the church in *Jerusalem* that made this decision, it was this Gentile church in *Antioch* who saw the need & banded together to send men on the 1st official mission's trip!

Vs 1

I love the diversity (culturally & ethnically) that's seen represented in the leadership of the body there in Antioch. We can only imagine it to be quantified in the body. We might call it the “universal appeal” of the gospel. You've got Barnabas who was a Jew from Cyprus. Simeon (or Simon) (who was called Niger).

This fella is kind of interesting because “Niger” means “black”, so we kind of presume he was a black man named Simon.

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Ac 1:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

What makes that interesting is that when you read Matt's gospel Ch 27 you discover that as the Lord was carrying His cross to Golgotha (to Calvary) that He (being exhausted from blood loss & dehydration) collapsed under the weight of it. So the Romans leading Him found a man from Cyrene (northern Africa) named "Simon" & compelled him to carry it for him.

If you notice, Lucius (here in Vs 1) is also from Cyrene. It could be that this is that same Simon, & that having been compelled to carry the cross, he went back to Cyrene w/the message of J.C. & Him crucified, Lucius was saved & together they carried the message of the cross everywhere they went, winding up right here in Antioch as key leaders in the church. Of course it's impossible to know that for sure, but it's interesting speculation nonetheless.

Notice also there was a man named, "Manaen" of whom we read he, "had been brought up w/Herod the tetrarch". Herod the tetrarch was Herod Antipas. That evil individual who had J.B. beheaded & presided over one of the trials of Jesus on the morning of His crucifixion. Now; from the way this reads, we don't know if it means that he was a foster brother to Herod, or at the very least he was a close childhood friend of his & grew up in the same aristocratic circles as kings!

But can you imagine this? This guy was close friends (at least throughout his formative years) w/Herod & yet as to where Herod utterly rejected J.C., mocked Him & made a spectacle of Him when He was before him. Manaen came to see Jesus for who He was, believed *upon* Him, surrendered his life *to* Him & served as a leader in the dynamic congregation at Antioch! It's fascinating to realize that 2 men from the same circle can wind up on totally opposite ends of the spiritual spectrum as it pertains to Jesus.

Maybe you've experienced something similar in your life. You grew up w/someone, you went one way (receiving Jesus) & they went completely the other way (rejecting Jesus). Or *maybe you're* the one who's rejected Jesus! All that can change today! Believe on the Lord J.C. & you too will be saved! (Saved from the penalty of sin, receiving eternal life in Christ).

Then there's Saul, a Jew born in Tarsus but educated & trained as a Rabbi in Jerusalem. Here's my point. Different people, different backgrounds, different rungs of the social ladder, all finding a common bond (unity) in Christ.

There's no emphasis upon ethnicity, just one body. Ethnic tension, gender identity, those things go away in Christ (He's our identity, our all in all).

To the Galatians Paul put it like this, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*² & We see that modeled beautifully right here in Antioch.

Vs 2

Family I want you to notice something here. They received a word *from* the Lord as they (they phrase is) "ministered *to* the Lord". Have you ever stopped to think about this phrase, or what it means to "minister to the Lord"? This is something that was happening here in Antioch.

Yes; Barnabas, Simeon, Saul... they were all certainly ministering to the *congregation*, but here we read that the congregation as a whole was *ministering to the Lord*... Have you ever paused to think about what that means as it pertains to your place in the body as the church? Perhaps up to this point you've thought that when you come to church, you arrive (more or less) as a *spectator* & ministry kind of pours forth from up on the platform out to you... There you are, standing (or seated) w/the congregation & you're being ministered to by the folks in front of you up on the platform.

Now; there's no doubt that the people who stand up here before you, have it in their heart, they *want* to minister to you, to *serve* you, to *bless/build up* & edify you. I would never seek to deny nor diminish that aspect. That certainly *does* happen (at least that's our prayer). But what I'm seeking to communicate here is that I want you to understand that anytime you show up here to meet w/the body, you're part *of* the body & you're supposed to be doing some ministry as well!

& Do you know who *you're* supposed to be ministering to? It's kind of a 2-fold answer, isn't it? Because given a moment, I think we would all realize/recognize that we're called to minister to one another. The NT is replete w/Vs that speak to the fact that we're to love one another, bless, encourage & serve one another. You are more than welcome (in fact) to come alongside & pray for each other, minister a word of encouragement or comfort to one another.- However, I think too often we *don't* stop to recognize/realize that we're also called (in fact *created*) to do as the believers did in Antioch. When we come together we're to minister... to the Lord.

As a matter of fact, I'd suggest to you that ministry to the Lord comes 1st! It's out of the overflow of our ministry to the Lord that we're effectively equipped to minister to one another!

² [The New King James Version](#). (1982). [\(Ga 3:28\)](#). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

What can I give that I haven't received? If I'm not spending time w/the Lord, than what do I really have to offer you that's going to benefit you in any eternal way?

How then do we minister to the Lord? In Romans Ch 12 Paul put it like this, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."*³ That word "service" is the word "worship". Worship & service go together, they're 2 sides of the same coin. If you try to serve the Lord apart from worship, you'll drift into legalism. If you worship w/out serving you'll have a form of godliness, but no power, no fruitfulness for the glory of God.

To put it plainly, we minister to the Lord when we do those things that please Him, that honor Him. When you lift your voice & sing you're bringing a sacrifice of praise. That's ministering to the Lord. When you serve one another, you're ministering to the Lord, when you're praying, seeking *after* Him, learning *of* Him (even as we are now) we're honoring Him, ministering to Him. They were also fasting. Denying their flesh, that they might honor Him, desiring to walk *in* & hear *from* the Spirit.

& We don't know what they were seeking God in regard to, what they were praying about... But I'm going to go out on a limb here (based upon how the Spirit leads them) & presume that they were seeking God about how to get the message of the gospel to a hurt & dying world around them! "God, the message of J.C. & Him crucified isn't for us to keep to ourselves, but to get to as many people as we possibly can! God what would You have us do? How can we best serve You?" Jesus had said, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;"*⁴ For God so loved "The world" He gave His only begotten Son, that *"whoever"* believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. God's not willing that *"any"* should perish, but that *"all"* should come to repentance.

& Aren't you glad that the love of God isn't passive just sitting there waiting on people to wake up & come to Him, or arrive at His door? The love of God is *active*, God (in His love) is seeking after & saving that which was lost (namely you & me). You & I are the direct beneficiaries of the seeking, searching, saving love of God! The Christians in Antioch were grateful that someone brought the message to them, now they want to take it to others!

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 12:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 28:19-20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

So they're praying, they're worshiping, they're fasting, seeking God... & the Holy Spirit says (no doubt by means of one of the prophets), "Now separate to Me Barnabas & Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Check this out, God chose to give this great responsibility to those who were *already faithfully seeking & serving Him*. Jesus said, "*For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.*"⁵ God rewards faithfulness. Opportunities come to those who serve!

It's interesting how many "backseat drivers" are around for the work of the kingdom. They want to express a burden & have *you* do the work. It doesn't work that way. The typical way God works is by using the one who has the burden! If you're burdened to see change, then get involved, don't try to direct others, just get to it!

You might underline the words, "Separate to Me." Before they could do this work *for* God, they had to separate themselves *to* God. If I'm going to draw near *to* God, it necessarily means I'm going to have to move *away from* other things, yes? It's hard to say "yes" to the call of God upon your life until you say "no" to things that would keep you from that call.

Because believe me when I tell you that just as much as God had a work He'd called *them* to do, He has a work He's calling *you* to do as well. Eph 2:10, "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*"⁶

Now; the calling of God upon Saul had already been stated back in Acts Ch 9. But as for when it would be set in motion, it wasn't said. Here, it's said, "Now", "Now's the time to be separated to the gospel, to bear My name before Gentiles, kings & the children of Israel." No more delay, it's time to get to it.

Vs 3

Now the gospel moves out officially on its way to the ends of the earth... The church leaders laid hands *on* them, prayed *over* them & sent them away. They were standing w/them, supporting them, commending them over to the call of God upon their lives. & To the best of our knowledge, this had never happened before in the history of the church.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mk 4:25). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Eph 2:10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Oh, there were “flee for your lives” mission’s trips that took place as people fled persecution & were sharing along the way. We might say that they were *scattered*, but now we see them *sent*! This was a deliberate decision to take the gospel to the ends of the earth! There was no demographic analysis, no marketing survey... they went forth w/the calling of God & the power of the Holy Spirit.

Vs 4

Allow me to split this hair. They were sent “away” by the church; but sent “out” by the Holy Spirit. Man can send you away, but the Holy Spirit sends you out. The ordination of man just doesn’t matter apart from the ordination of God. (Map)

They went down to the port city of Seleucia, got on a boat & sailed to Cyprus. Why Cyprus? Well, I can’t say w/certainty, but most likely because it’s where Barnabas was from (Acts 4:36). & This is so often how God moves, the supernatural through the practical. Sovereignty & freewill. Perhaps Barnabas was like, “Where do you want to go?” Saul was all, “I don’t know, where do you wanna go?” Barnabas said, “Well, Cyprus could sure use the gospel. I have family & friends over there, there are synagogues, around & the pagan culture is just festering in that place.” So, Saul said, “Sounds good! Cyprus it is!”

Vs 5

Why preach in the synagogues? Their custom was to take the message to the Jew 1st. Jesus came through the Jews, they took the message of the Messiah 1st to the Jews. But also in synagogues would be Gentile proselytes, people seeking to be right w/God, it would just make sense. There was also a custom in the synagogues that day where if you had a distinguished guest (Barnabas was a Levite, Saul was a highly educated Rabbi & they had the robes that would display that) the one conducting services would say something to the extent of, “We’re honored to have distinguished guests in our midst today, do you have anything you’d like to share w/us?” You give a guy like Saul/Paul, that kind of platform & it’s a wrap! 😊 He had plenty he’d like to share w/them & that’s exactly what they did.

Those people were anticipating the Messiah & Paul would share w/them that He’d come, Jesus was His name, He was crucified, resurrected in fulfilment of all that the prophets had written & that they could be saved by grace through faith in Him.

We also read here that they had John (Jn Mark) as their assistant. (He probably carried the parchments, helped w/new believers, baptized people, whatever they needed).

He was actually about 12-14 yrs old when Jesus on earth was ministering to people & he was around all of that. So he could share (this was prior to him writing the gospel of Mark) certain things about Jesus from that eye witness perspective.

Now; we don't know if they had any success in Salamis, but in a strange way I'm kind of comforted by the fact that it doesn't draw attention to it. There's no record of a fruitful endeavor on their 1st stop... They were like us, they didn't always hit a home run. Sometimes they sowed, other times they watered, sometimes they were able to reap...

Listen, don't be discouraged if you share the gospel & someone doesn't immediately fall on their face in repentance, you've sown the seed, it's God who gives the increase...

Vs 6-7

Hey; an open door on the west coast of the island. This was a city known for its immorality. & The stage is being set whereby we can tell they're going to be facing the combination of immorality and spiritual darkness that was common across the pagan world of the Roman Empire. This was an area famous for its worship of Venus, the goddess of sexual love.

But 2 people come into focus for us, "Bar-Jesus" (which means son of Jesus). (BTW Jesus was not a unique name at this time, in fact it was quite common, that's why Jesus was often distinguished as Jesus "of Nazareth"). This guy was a sorcerer, someone entrenched in occultic activity & he was an advisor to Sergius Paulus, a Roman proconsul who'd been appointed to oversee the area. He was a big deal, an important man... Hearing that Barnabas & Saul were around & preaching, he wanted to hear them, so he calls for them.

Vs 8-12

I'll bet he was! Ladies & Gentlemen, this is what we call a confrontation! Paul wasn't concerned about being politically correct, he was concerned for the eternal well-being of this man's soul!

Listen, we've talked about *opportunities & open doors*, but generally these things come w/*opposition*. You can just expect it. The Spirit was leading, but that doesn't guarantee smooth sailing. You have an enemy. Here opposition presents itself through this man named Elymas (they refused to call him Jesus) who was w/standing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Why? Because if the proconsul is saved, Elymas is out of a job!

So we can kind of see it can't we? Perhaps Barnabas is sharing the message of Jesus...

& This sorcerer is there, “C’mon Sergius; you don’t actually believe this foolishness do you!? A Man, crucified, raised from the dead! Salvation by believing that! These fools have lost their minds! I can’t believe you’re even giving them the time of day!”

The whole time Saul (who is called Paul [it’s like he emerges]) is locked on him. (Paul would be his Roman name, Saul his Hebrew name). Finally (being filled w/the Holy Spirit) he just sets it straight.

He’s all, “You full of all deceit & all fraud! You son of the devil! (Remember, his name is Bar-Jesus, son of Jesus. Paul is like, you’re no son of Jesus, you’re a son of the devil!) You enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord! And now the hand of the Lord is upon you & you’re going to be blind for a time.” (As he was spiritually, he would be physically). & Boom, he goes blind, he hits the panic button & starts asking people to help him & to lead him...

This is the 1st recorded miracle of Paul’s & it was in opposition to satanic forces, demonstrating that the power of God is greater than any other “god” or demonic power that they’d held up & worshiped. But this was critical because what weighed in the balance wasn’t only the soul of Sergius but more than likely the open door to all of Cyprus.

(Somewhere in my mind later on Paul & Barn was like, “Did you see that! The dude totally went blind! ☺) Let me ask you a question, when you’re up against opposition, do you see adversity or opportunity? It’s been said, A pessimist is one who “sees a difficulty in every opportunity”; an optimist is one who “sees an opportunity in every difficulty”.

But listen, Paul wasn’t about to let this guy stand in the way of another man’s salvation! If you want to commit spiritual suicide, that’s tragic, but it’s your choice. But it’s another thing altogether to try & drag others down w/you. Some of the most severe words in the bible are reserved for those who stand between men; & the truth. Between man & God.

But check this out & we’re done. What was it that astonished the proconsul? Being who he was, & the men he had around him, I have little to now doubt that he’d seen incantations, supernatural encounters before (not to compare the 2). My point is that though the *miracle* may’ve impressed him, it was the *message* (the teaching of the Lord) that “astonished” him. When he heard of the love of God *for* Him, that Jesus was sent to pay the penalty of sin on behalf *of* Him, that he could find forgiveness & reconciliation to God through faith *in* Him... It blew him away.

He believed & was saved. The same opportunity is before you today. God loves you, He wants to give new life *to* you through faith in J.C. who has given Himself *for* you. Turn from your sin; trust in Jesus today...