

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 18:10:2011

Reading: Acts 13:1-16, 42-52

THE CHURCH ABLAZE

23. THE BEGINNING OF WORLD MISSION

For many people, Willie Nelson's song, "*On the Road Again*," is more than just a fun car-trip sing along. It's a way of life. Moving from city to city, job to job, school to school these days has become commonplace. Just consider your own neighbourhood. How many people have you seen move in or out lately? And what about you? How many times have you moved during the past few years? Although few of us enjoy moving, when a higher standard of living, or a chance for a cosier neighbourhood comes knocking on the door, off we go, on the road again. For the Christian, though, there is another reason for moving. **God**. When He says its time to go, although we may not understand why, we set out, like Abraham, to a land we do not know. Now the book of Acts is a log of that kind of travelling. People are on the move, setting off in one direction or another in response to God's call.

Do you recall Gods plan? "*Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judaea, and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*" (1:8) Now Jerusalem was as far as His witnesses went, until the stones of persecution hit the calm

waters and sent the believers rippling onward into the second phase of God's plan, Judea and Samaria. Once having put down some roots there, though, could it be that they had forgotten the last part of the Lord's instructions, "*and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*" You see, (Acts Ch 13) begins the third main division in the book. The church was Established in Jerusalem, (Ch's 1-7) Scattered to Judea and Samaria (Ch's 8-12), and now, through the rest of the book of Acts, it will Extend to the remotest parts of the earth. Now (Ch 13) of this book is a pivotal chapter. Here the emphasis in Acts moves,

1. From Jerusalem to Antioch. Until now, Jerusalem had been the centre of ministry, but from this point on, Antioch in Syria, would become the new centre. (11:19)

2. From Peter to Saul of Tarsus, or the apostle Paul. If we were dividing the book biographically, (Ch's 1-12) have to do with Peter and (Ch's 13-28) have to do with Paul. Paul is now the new leader.

3. From ministry to the Jews to ministry to the Gentiles.

4. From Palestine to the Mediterranean world.

5. From home missions to foreign missions.

6. From Saul to Paul, and to Paul and Barnabas.

Now if you and I had visited the city of Antioch in Syria about the year AD 45, we would have seen a beautiful metropolis. Antioch was called “ *Antioch the beautiful, Queen of the East.*” About half a million people, lived in Antioch. It was a cosmopolitan city, a great centre of trade and business. The imperial mint was there and also the centre for government. On the outskirts of the city, stood the temple of Daphne, a deplorable centre of prostitution and pagan worship. Chariot racing and sports lured gamblers into the city, where the atmosphere exuded a high-rolling style. But under the glaring lights of the big city the Lord was kindling the warm flame of Christian faith and morality, as the most important people in Antioch were meeting together, worshipping God, and praying. My ... this was the beginning of the world-wide missionary outreach of the Church.

The Commencement of World Mission. I don’t think anybody has to be convinced that it’s the task of the local church to reach the world with the gospel. We must witness not only in our own Jerusalem, and to neighbouring areas, but we also need to reach out to the uttermost parts of the world. It’s a sad thing when a local church becomes ingrown, when the gospel becomes a commodity to protect instead of a treasure to share. It was Dr. Oswald J. Smith who said “ *that the light that shines the farthest is going to shine the brightest at home.*” Let’s look at (Ch 13) and see how the Holy Spirit moves His people into new territory, one we are still exploring today.

(1) THE CALL TO MISSIONARY WORK

G. Campbell Morgan says of the (13:1-4) “ *This paragraph is a brief one, but of great importance. It may be spoken of as the watershed of this book. We now enter upon a study of that wonderful movement, of which Paul was the central figure.*” Now (Ch 13) to (Ch 21) focus on Paul’s three missionary journeys.

1. The First Missionary Journey is found in

(13:4-14:28)

2. The Second Missionary Journey is found in

(15:36-18:22)

3. The Third Missionary Journey is found in

(18:23-21:17)

Now it’s important to notice that the mission movement begins with the local church. Missionary societies do a great work and most of them will tell you that they are here to support and facilitate the local church. But it’s from the local church that believers are raised up and sent out. Incidentally, are you in fellowship in a local church ? Have you submitted yourself to the authority of a local church ? So many Christians want all the privileges but bear no responsibility. Now I want you to see that this missionary movement is intimately linked with the local church. Indeed we may say that the,

Missionary is Trained in the Local Church: (11:25-26 13:1)

Missionary is Known by the Local Church: I mean every one in Antioch knew Saul and Barnabas. (13:1)

Missionary is Called through the Local Church: It was

while they were ministering in the local church that the Holy Spirit set them apart. (13:2)

Missionary is Accountable to the Local Church: For after this first missionary journey they returned to Antioch and “ rehearsed all that God had done with them,” (14:27) Now I wonder have we lost sight of those 4 simple principles ? Are those who we are commending to the Lord’s work, trained by us, known to us, called through us, and accountable to us ? Now let’s have a look at this Antioch church, the first beachhead of Christianity in a pagan world. Notice here that,

(a) SPIRITUAL MEN WERE RECOGNISED:

It’s easy to skip over a verse like (13:1) thinking that it’s just another list of difficult to pronounce names. But we’d miss a significant insight if we did, for these leaders reflect a great diversity of backgrounds. Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus. Simeon also had the name, Niger which according to Harrison, was a “ *Latin term meaning, black-skinned.*” Locus was from Cymene, which was west of Egypt on the coast of Africa. His name was Greek, so he was possibly a Gentile. Manaen was a member of high society, having grown up with Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Perea. And there’s Saul with his impressive education and rabbinical training. A Cyprian Jew, a black man, a Gentile, an aristocrat, and a rabbi, my this was a cosmopolitan leadership team.

With such backgrounds they were better able to minister to the many ethnic groups in Antioch.

Consequently the church had become a model of diversity within unity, a microcosm of God’s upcoming world-wide, multicultural ministry. Now these men were serving as

“ *prophets and teachers,*” in this local church. The prophets helped lay the foundation for the church as they proclaimed the Word of God. (Eph 2:20 1 Cor 14:29-32) They were more “ *forth-tellers,*” than “ *foretellers,*” though at times the prophets did announce things to come. (11:27-30) The prophets function as receivers of divine revelation ended with the cessation of the temporary sign gifts. Even their office, like that of the apostles was replaced by pastor teachers and evangelists. (Eph 4:11-12) The teachers helped to ground the converts in the doctrines of the faith.

(2 Tim 2:2) Now have a look at these five men. There was,

(1) Barnabas: He reminds us of the Sweetness of Christ:

He was a man with a kind and loving disposition. Like his Saviour, he went about doing well. My every local church needs a Barnabas, a man addicted to good works, an encourager in the fellowship. Are you such a person ?

(2) Simeon: He reminds us of the Sufferings of Christ:

One wonders if this was the “ *Simon a Pyrenean,*” who was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mk 15:21) the man who carried the cross for Jesus. If he was the

same man, then he must never have tired of telling of that unforgettable day in his life. Every church needs a Simon Niger, a man who has been to Calvary, a man whose vision is filled with the vision of Christ and He crucified.

(3) Locus: He reminds us of the Sovereignty of Christ:

For the Lord Jesus is always in control. He rules all circumstances. He is never ruled by them, they are all ruled by Him. My look at these men. Simon Niger, and Locus of Cymene, and Saul of Tarsus. Saved in different places, at different times, brought by different routes to Antioch, and there linked together in the common cause of Christ. It's a picture of the Sovereignty of the Lord Jesus.

(4) Manage: He reminds us of the Salvation of Christ:

The Greek word translated “*brought up*,” can mean “*foster brother*.” Manage and Herod Antipas may not have only been playmates as boys, but members of the same family. Manage became a believer, Herod became a beast, Manage became a minister, Herod became a murderer. Look at what Manaen was saved from, and look at what he was saved for. To become a choice saint, a leader in Antioch, a prime mover in the evangelisation of the world. Such is the salvation of Christ.

(5) Saul: He reminds us of the Service of Christ:

He was a man with all the gifts, apostle, evangelist,

pastor, teacher, and missionary. And every one of his talents was at the service of Christ. My are all your gifts are at the service of the Saviour ? You see, as we look at the leadership of the church at Antioch, we are impressed. (a)

(b) SPIRITUAL MINISTRY WAS EXERCISED:

Unlike many in the church today who are busy with shallow activities and programmes, the leaders at Antioch understood their spiritual mandate clearly. They patterned themselves after the apostles, who, according to (6:4) devoted themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. My those are ever the priorities for the man of God. The word “*ministered*,” here means more than *public service*, it describes *priestly service*. In the Septuagint it described the priests who ministered in the Tabernacle. (Exod 28:41)

Serving in a leadership role in the church must be viewed as an act of worship to God. Such service consists of offering prayer, oversight of the flock, studying, and preaching and teaching the Word. (Heb 13:15-16) Isn't it interesting to notice that “*they ministered to the Lord*.” (13:2)

Not to the congregation but to the Lord for God is the audience for all spiritual ministry. (Acts 20:19-20) You see, if our primary objective is to minister to the people, we'll be tempted to compromise to achieve that end. But if we make the Lord the object of that ministry it avoids the need for compromise. Do you recall what Paul says of the Macedonian believers ? “

But first they gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." (2 Cor 8:5) My do you see the order ? The Lord first, and only then to other believers. Can I ask, whatever you're doing do you, " do it heartily, as to the Lord and not unto men." (Col 3:23) Do you see what happened while they were ministering to the Lord ?

(c) SPIRITUAL MISSION WAS REALISED:

For did you notice (13:2) "*As they ministered to the Lord and fasted the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*" By the way, that word " separate me," is used three times in relations to the apostle Paul. It is used in (Gal. 1:15) where Paul says the Lord separated me from my mother's womb. Then in (Rom Ch 1) he says I have been separated unto the gospel of Christ. Now the Spirit of God says about him, "*separate me Barnabas and Saul.*" The word, separate, is actually a Greek word that means to "*take someone and put them on a new horizon.*" It means to expand horizons. It is just like if you were on a boat and you look out on the sea. You can, see a pretty good way as you look out the boat. But out on that boat there is a crow's nest way up there. If you climb up to that crow's nest and look out to the sea, you are looking from the vantage point of a new horizon. You are seeing things you didn't see before
So, when the Spirit of God says to the church, "*separate me, Barnabas and Saul for the work*

whereunto I have called them," He is saying I want these people to have a brand new horizon.

I want them to see things they have never seen before. I want them to have visions they have never had before. To see potential and opportunity they have never had before. That's what the average church and average Christian needs, a new horizon. There are just too many church's today who are flying paper planes when they ought to be flying jets. They are playing mud puddles when they ought to be diving in deep oceans. They are scratching around with the chickens when they ought to be soaring with the eagles. New horizons. May God help us as a church to be always reaching out to new horizons for Jesus Christ. Now did you notice how these men were called ?

(1) This Divine Call was CLEAR:

It was initiated by the Holy Spirit. It would seem that the Holy Spirit had already been speaking privately to Barnabas and Saul about a lost world, and they had already been lifting up their eyes to look on fields white to harvest. For this call came to those who were **Diligent:** "*Barnabas and Saul,*" (13:2) Here were men who had proved themselves in the local church at Antioch by steady application to the work of God in that church and city. They had seen souls saved there, their ministry had been a benediction to the saints, they had pastored the church, shepherded the flock, visited the sick and needy. My are these not the kind of

men that God calls to further service ? God is not likely to take idle Christians down from the shelf, dust them off and entrust them with important work. God doesn't usually ask people who are doing nothing to do something. He calls people who are doing something to do something more, more important, more urgent, more sacrificial.

Notice, also this call came to those who were **Devoted:** Fasting indicates that a person is willing to set aside the normal demands of life in order to concentrate for a time on what God wants. (Neh 1:4 Ps 35:13 Lk 5:33) My Barnabas and Saul were two of that church's best men. What would happen to this church if God called our best men to go to the mission field ? My are we willing to give our best young people ? Are we willing to give our best young couples ? Barnabas and Saul were loved, trusted, respected. They were the two best men the Antioch church had. But God said, "*Seperate me Barnabas and Saul*," (1)

(2) This Divine Call was CONFIRMED:

Look at (13:3) You see, *this call was initiated by the Holy Spirit but now it was authenticated by the church.* "*Separate me Barnabas and Saul.*" In other words, the church was to do the separating. The Lord calls but the church confirms. My if God calls you there should be some authenticating ministry on the part of the church. There should be some recognition on the part of the church that you have been called of God to preach or be a missionary. If you feel there is a call of God on your heart and your church is sceptical about it

you had better check out your call. For there is an authenticating work that the local church does. Now the laying on of hands neither granted Saul and Barnabas the Holy Spirit, nor ordained them to the ministry. Both had already received the Spirit (9:17 11:24) and had been serving in the ministry for several years. No, this simply signified identification, confirmation, and unity in their forthcoming mission. (Num 8:10 27:18-23) That phrase, "*they sent them away,*" could be translated, "*they let them go,*" "*they released them.*" You see the church did not choose Saul and Barnabas, nor did Saul and Barnabas volunteer, rather God called them to missionary service. All that the church could do was cut the cord and let them go.

(3) This Divine Call was CARRIED OUT:

Look if you will at (13:4) Saul and Barnabas and John Mark didn't leave Antioch under the auspices of a missionary society or as part of a missions programme. They were people who were sent out by the local church to reach unsaved people with the gospel. My is this not the heart of missions ? Obedient people, being sent forth as labourers into the harvest. (Matt 9:37-38) You see, missions is not about programs, it's about people. We need to remember that its people that God calls to the mission field. Programs and organizations can be of assistance but only if a God called person is willing to go. Are you willing to let Him send you where He wills ? Is the Lord pointing you toward something new ? A new ministry, a new location, a new mission

field ? Will you let Him take the helm in your life ? (1)

(2) THE COMPLICATIONS OF MISSIONARY WORK

When you became a Christian, did you think, all the hard times would be over ? Did you think that the Christian life would be a kind of spiritual Disneyland, where worries are checked at the gate and the world is clean and pure and happy ? The truth is life often gets rougher after we trust Christ. My no matter what your level of involvement in Christian activity or ministry, you will be subject to difficulties and trials. Families will fail you. Friends will sometimes forsake you. Heartache will be a regular part of your life. In fact dedication to the Saviour often brings us face to face with more problems than if we lived for ourselves. Many believers have the misconception that if you are in God's will, there will always be smooth sailing. *But often when there is progress there will be problems.* Now here is Barnabas and Saul, along with John Mark, a cousin to Barnabas (Col 4:10) setting out on their first missionary journey. And it's not long before they encounter problems.

The course of their first mission was quite simple. They set sail from Seleucia, the port city near Antioch, for Salamis, the port city of the island of Cyprus. It was an easy 130 mile voyage. The ancient world regarded Cyprus very much like we regard Hawaii or the Bahamas. It was called Markaria or “ **Happy Isle,**” because its climate was so perfect and its resources so abundant. For some it was a place in the sun or a,

“ **Fantasy Island.**” But it was also a needy place, the cross-roads of the Mediterranean, and a natural place to go to first because Barnabas was a Cypriot himself. Cyprus had two main cities, Salamis, the commercial centre on the eastern side, and Paphos the political centre on the western side. Upon arrival, their method was simple, travel the island from east to west, from Salamis to Paphos, a distance of about 90 miles, preaching the gospel first in the Jewish synagogues but also to the Gentiles. Now they had not gone far before complications and problems arose. For example we see them here,

(a) *DEALING WITH DECEPTION:*

It's unusual to find a Jewish false prophet and sorcerer, for the Jews traditionally shunned such demonic activities. The name Elymas means, “ *the skillful one,*” and *the root of Bar-Jesus means " son of salvation."* This was a man of immense power, having a controlling influence over the ruler of Cyprus. You see, if Sergius Paulus converted to Christianity it would spell the end of his own fame and power. Thus Elymas stood against the missionaries, aggressively opposing them at every turn, trying his best to make his darkness overcome the light of Christ. But Saul didn't back down. He faced this problem head on, and inflicted blindness on the false prophet as a judgement from God. This miracle was also proof to Sergius Paulus that Paul and Barnabas were servants of the true God and preached the true message of salvation. (Heb 2:4) The Roman official believed and was saved. Now (13:9) is the first place you'll find the familiar name **Paul** in the New Testament and as we shall see in a moment Paul is coming more to the foreground. (a)

(b) DEALING WITH DEFECTION:

Look if you will at (13:13) Having first visited Barnabas's home island of Cyprus, the missionary team next visited Paul's home region, Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. Leaving Cyprus, they sailed nearly 200 miles across the Mediterranean Sea and landed at Attalia, the port of Perga. At this point, John Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem. My as Paul and Barnabas packed their bags for hardship, Mark packed his for home. We do not know what was said, what excuses he gave. Maybe he made his mother his excuse, "*I'm worried about mother. Things aren't going too well back in Jerusalem. There's a famine there. I think my mother needs me.*" Maybe he confided in Barnabas, "*As long as you were in charge Uncle, things were different, but Saul has no sense, no caution.*" You see Paul had begun to take over the leadership. Look at the contrast between (11:25 13:2 13:13) Did Mark resent Paul taking over ? Also, Pamphylia was a treacherous region. The coastal area around Perga was rife with disease, including malaria. It is possibly here that Paul suffered an ailment he later referred to in his epistle to the Galatians. He said, "*Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.*" (Gal 4:13) What bodily illness forced Paul inland, further into Galatia ? My if he had contracted malaria in Perga, that would have been ample motivation to escape the lowlands to recover in the cooler mountain regions. Now all of this undoubtedly added up to unbearable stress for John Mark.

Change, homesickness, disease, danger, no response in Salamis, demonic activity in Paphos and Mark went to pieces. He had inwardly romanticised the ministry they were undertaking, but reality had smashed his dreams. Do you know anyone like John Mark ? I do. People who said the call of God was on their life but they did not stick it. My the story of missions and the Lord's work is littered with stories of such people, people who say, "*I'll go,*" or "*I'll help,*" or "*Count on me,*" and who back down after just a while. My have you drawn back from a commitment you have made ? Does fear, shame, guilt, crush your spirit ? Maybe you are battling failure right now. If so there is hope. You can face your fears in Gods strength, just like John Mark did, and like him, you can make your own comeback.

(c) DEALING WITH DECISIONS:

(1) Decisions had to be made as to their Movements:
(13:14) The road from Perga to Pisidia, some one hundred miles away, was difficult and dangerous. It wound its way through the rugged Taurus mountains, clinging to cliffs that ascended to dizzying heights. These mountains were notorious for the robber bands who infested them. Indeed Paul may have had this journey in mind when he wrote, "*In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers.*" (2 Cor 11:26) Now Antioch in Pisidia was located in Asia Minor and is not to be confused with Antioch in Syria, from which the missionaries set out on their journey. This was a Roman colony and no doubt this influenced Paul to head in that direction. My Paul was a master

strategist. Indeed as you follow his journeys in the Acts, you will notice that he selected strategic cities, planted churches in them, and went on from the churches to evangelise the surrounding areas.

You will, also notice that where it was possible, he started his ministry in the local synagogue, where he found Jews and Gentiles ready to hear the Word of God. (Rom 9:1-5) (1)

(2) Decisions had to be made as to their Message:

(13:16-44) Do you recall that Luke gives a full-length summary of Peter's first sermon as the great apostle to the Jews ? Well, now he gives us a full-length summary of Paul's first sermon as the leader of the Gentile world evangelism. The expression "*men and brethren,*" occurs three times (13:15, 26, 38) and marks the division of the sermon. This message revolved around *Israel's mission, Israel's mistake, and Israel's moment.* Paul presented Christ as, The Culmination of History:

(13:17-22) The Fulfilment of Prophecy: (13:23-37) and the Justifier of Sinners: (13:38-41) Yes, (2) My ... does there not need to be a return to Biblical preaching in these days ? For there is a dearth of sound preaching creating "*a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord.*" (Amos 8:11) From today's pulpit come the uncertain sounds of psychology, social commentary, storytelling, and political rhetoric, but my ... biblical preaching is vital to a spiritually strong church.

No wonder Paul says, "*Preach the word,*" (2 Tim 4:1)(Rom 10:14 Titus 2:1) In (13:5) "*they preached the Word of God,*" in (5:26) and following they preached the Christ of God. Is this not what missionary work is all about ? There is nothing better to preach, than the Word and ignoring the Word invalidates service. 1: 2:

(3) THE CONSEQUENCES FROM MISSIONARY WORK

What happens when the gospel is preached ? Conflict. My ... the gospel splits people, it divides the saved from the unsaved, the righteous from the reprobate, those who love its truth, from those who reject it. (Matt 10:34-36) Most of the opposition to the gospel in the early years came from the Jewish people. In Jerusalem, the persecution came from the Jewish leaders (Acts Ch's 4, 5, 7) In Samaria, the opposition came from Simon the magician, who likely was either fully of partly Jewish. Paul faced bitter persecution from the Jews in Damascus (9:20-23) In (Ch 12) Herod attempting to please the Jewish leaders, murdered James and imprisoned Peter. On the first stop of their current journey Paul and Barnabas encountered the Jewish false prophet Bar-Jesus (13:6-8) and so it goes on. (14:2 14:19 17:5, 13 18:6) Here in Pisidian Antioch we notice the differing responses to the sermon. Notice for example,

(a) THE INITIAL REACTION:

(13:42-44) The initial response to Paul's message by

the synagogue congregation was favourable. They were Pleased: (13:42) they were Persistent: (13:43) they were Professing: (13:43) and they were Present: (13:44) but that attitude was soon to change. For notice,

(b) THE SUBSEQUENT RESPONSE:

(13:45-49) For after the initial positive reaction to Paul's message, the subsequent response split along racial lines. The response of the Jewish people was negative, but the response of the Gentile people was positive. Can you see what is happening ? Can you see how the plan of God is unfolding ? The Lord had revealed to Peter that the gospel should go to the +Gentiles, and He had called Paul to be the primary vehicle for delivering the gospel to that group. *Doesn't it make sense that God at the same time would be preparing Gentiles to receive the message ?* And that's exactly what happened at Antioch. It was the Gentiles who pressed forward and said, " *We want to hear more.*" So these missionaries instead of trying to convert those who weren't interested, they turned their attention and action to those who were. Do you see,

(c) THE DIVERSE RESULTS:

(13:48) gives us the Divine side of evangelism but (13:49) gives us the Human side of evangelism, for if we do preach the Word, then noone can believe and be saved. (2 Thes 2:13-14) What a contrast there was in Pisidian Antioch, from the Jews Opposition, to the Gentiles Salvation. Well, there you have it. **The Start**

of World Mission. Some years ago there was a great missionary rally in the Royal Albert Hall, in London. A minister who was there, turned to the Duke of Wellington, the Iron Duke whose armies had defeated Napoleon, and asked, " *My lord, do you believe in missions ?*" " *What are your marching orders ?*" asked the Duke. " *Of course, the Bible says to go into all the world,*" answered the minister. " *Then you have nothing to say about it. As a soldier you are to obey orders.*" My are you obeying the Saviours orders to go ?