

## **Out On the Mission Field, Part I: To Cyprus**

**Text:** Acts 13:1-5

### **Introduction:**

Barnabas and Saul have returned from Jerusalem to Antioch, having fulfilled their mission, of bringing famine relief to Jerusalem. And last time, we saw that the teachers and prophets (leaders) in the church at Antioch, were quite the mixed bag, representative of the church at large; a people from various cultures and nations.

This morning, we move on to consider how Saul and Barnabas are set apart, so as to be sent out onto the mission field, beginning with the Island of Cyprus, Barnabas's native land.

### **I. Saul and Barnabas are Sent Out**

"As they [the prophets and teachers] 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'" (vs. 2).

As these prophets and teachers were conducting their ministry to the Lord (instructing and edifying the church at Antioch), apparently, they had fasted, with the intention of seeking out the Lord, concerning further direction. It seems as if they were asking, "Lord, where do we go from here? What is Your will, concerning our ongoing labors here at Antioch?" We are not really given any further details, concerning the nature and purpose of the fast, but the "Holy Spirit given" solution, would seem to confirm my assumption. Needless to say, we could easily find warrant here, for fasting in the New Covenant church, and particularly (in this context), among those who are in leadership, especially concerning, seeking divine guidance for the direction of the church.

And in their case, the Holy Spirit responds, presumably through the prophetic utterance of at least one of the prophets, who were present among them. And what does the Holy Spirit say? He tells them to separate (to set apart) Barnabas and Saul for a specific work, unto which He has called them. Barnabas and Saul were called out of the work at Antioch, to extend the kingdom of God further, into unreached territories, ultimately and especially "to the ends of the earth" (to the furthest Gentile regions).

"Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away" (vs. 3). In obedience to the Spirit's call, they then send Barnabas and Saul out. And this "missions

commendation" is itself accompanied by fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands. They commend Barnabas and Saul to the safe keeping of God, as they are separated spatially, in keeping with the mission, unto which they were appointed.

Note the following three things:

1) The Holy Spirit equips and calls those who are truly to be set apart for ministry. While we no longer hear the Spirit's voice by way of prophetic utterance, the Spirit is still the One who calls and sets apart unto the ministry. There are, at least, three general parts to this calling: The inward desire ("This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop/overseer, he desires a good work" -1 Tim. 3:1); the meeting of the Biblical qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9); and an outward confirmation of the calling, given by the church (which, in cooperation with the elders, assesses the giftedness, and whether or not the qualifications have been met--- there are no longer Apostles). [Acts 6:2-7- an established church]

2) The Holy Spirit and the church; the Holy Spirit, by the church, ordains and sends/sets a man into an appointed ministry (vs. 3-4; Rom. 10:14-15). A man does not anoint/ordain himself unto the Gospel ministry. Rather, his gifts being recognized by the church, leads to the setting apart unto the Gospel ministry. [Be here, get involved, minister to people, and God will set His mark in due time; if the desire is known, express it; note: people do not find out their own giftedness, because they are hardly with the brethren...begins with being with the brethren, often, serving...etc]

3) It is very proper to fast and pray, throughout the process of considering and setting apart a man unto the Gospel ministry (Acts 14:23). The worst thing that can happen is for a man, who is not truly called; a man who is not empowered by God the Holy Spirit, to take the office of a minister of the Gospel/Elder/Deacon...etc. A lot can happen with one man, for good or bad.

## **II. Off to Cyprus**

"So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus" (vs. 4).

Again, we find that emphasis being placed on the fact that Barnabas and Saul were sent out, ultimately, *by the Holy Spirit*. They could have assurance that this entire mission, no matter what they encounter; no matter what they feel or experience, will be successful, because they have been sent not by man, but by God, Himself. The best place for anyone to be, is exactly

where God wants him. Once he is certain that he is there, no matter what, he cannot fail! And so, they head down to the port city of Seleucia, where they will set sail for Cyprus, that rather large island, to the west, in the Mediterranean Sea.

"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" (vs. 5).

Arriving on the east coast of Cyprus, they begin their ministry in the city of Salamis. As in most places throughout the Roman Empire, there were synagogues in Salamis, which allowed the dispersed Jews, opportunity to conduct Judaistic worship. And so, naturally, in accordance with Barnabas's cultural background (being a native of Cyprus), and of course, the Jewish upbringing of both Saul and Barnabas, and the priority given to the Jews first, they use the Jewish synagogues as an inroad for the spread of the Gospel. They begin advancing the Kingdom of God in Cyprus then, by preaching the Gospel in these synagogues.

Note the wisdom, in looking for providential inroads, when seeking to evangelize a people. I wonder, "Have we thought of (searched out) sufficient means, to reach this local community?" The "synagogue" was one key entryway for the Jewish Christians. [Discuss this. Merrick Fair, Marching in Memorial Day parade, Door to Door, Merrick Chamber of Commerce...etc; Can we pray and spend time searching out means of reaching this hardened community?]

Note as well that, John Mark was their assistant. John assisted them, at least at the outset. There are many roles to be filled in the mission field. Some preach, some lead, some assist, some help with physical tasks (building, medical assistance...etc), some help with legal issues, some help with financial support (business in a foreign culture), some write or edit or print...etc. There are many needs when serving in a foreign culture (as there are at home). Have we considered these other roles? Mark (at least) starts off as an assistant. He will later pen the Gospel of Mark (with Peter's influence and help). Luke, who will later join Paul on the mission field, is a physician and a gifted historian, who will also pen the Gospel of Luke and Acts. [Joshua to Moses, Elisha to Elijah ---servants, who later became great leaders]

Amen!!!

