

To the End of the Earth
Read Acts 13.1-52

INTRODUCTION / CONNECTIONS / CONTEXT

1/ The title of this lesson, *“To the End of the Earth,”* could also be applied to the rest of the Book of Acts – and even beyond to this very day. But I have chosen the title for this particular lesson because here in **Acts 13** is where the church’s missionary trajectory and thrust **‘to the end of the earth’** began. As we have already noted many times before as we have made our way thus far through Acts, Luke is completing his methodical development of the fulfillment of Jesus’ ‘Great Commission’ that He gave to His apostles and churches in **ch 1.8**. [See an intentional announcement of the fulfillment of this Gospel ‘scope and sequence’ here in **ch 13.47 – quoting from Isaiah 49.6!**]

2/ From here on, the focus of the Acts narrative is shifting away from the Jerusalem epicenter where it all began [though we will return to Jerusalem in **ch 15** – more on that when we get there]. Now the focus of missionary activity emanates from the church in Antioch of Syria – approximately 300 miles north from Jerusalem. The content of this lesson will sketch out in summary how that first missionary movement began, and we’ll cover the first steps of that campaign here in **ch 13** ... to be continued in **ch 14**...

3/ NOTE: we see in the church in Antioch five prominent marks of a healthy, Spirit-filled church ministry: [1] effective evangelism [2] dynamic discipleship [3] mercy ministry [4] multi-cultural outreach and acceptance [5] Spirit-directed, church-sent/supported missionaries.

I / vv 1-3 | Holy-Spirit-called, church-sent missionaries

v 1 / Scriptural missions is from churches – both then and still now. We have already seen how the Gospel first came to Antioch in **ch 11.19-26**. Where the Gospel goes, disciples are made, and churches are established. Jesus has designed and decreed that evangelism will be accompanied and followed up by disciple-making and church-planting [see **Matthew 28.18-20**] – and that those churches of disciples will keep on repeating that reproductive cycle. So it was from the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch; and we shall see it being repeated again here in Antioch and beyond **‘to the end of the earth.’** But as the church in Antioch was established, grew, and developed, ‘prophets’ [preachers of the Word] and teachers emerged as their spiritual pastors and leaders: **Barnabas** [whom we have met numerous times before]; **Simeon who was called Niger** [a Latin word for *black/dark*, most probably from the African continent to the south]; **Lucius of Cyrene** [another immigrant from African Cyrene]; **Manaen, a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch** [a convert from a prominent political ruler]; and **Saul** [who will be re-named ‘Paul’ in **v 9**]. You will see Barnabas and Saul laboring together in their church activities in **ch 11.22-26**.

v 2 / As they were going about their regular worship and fasting [no doubt seeking God’s will for the ‘end of the earth’ burden that was burning in their hearts], “the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” This was the conviction and call of the Holy Spirit. Paul has testified before that it was Jesus who called him to his ministry [see **chs 9.15; 22.10; 26.14-18**]. *So, who called them: Jesus or the Holy Spirit? The answer is: ‘Yes!’* Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit work in unity and harmony of purpose, will, and activity as Jesus promised they would: **John 16.7-15**.

v 3 / After more fasting and praying, the elders of the church laid their hands on them to signify their confirmation, approval, and partnership of their mission – and the church sent them away.

II / vv 4-12 | Barnabas and Saul on Cyprus

1/ vv 4-5 / Their first stop was on the island of Cyprus – just a few miles offshore to the west from Antioch. But first we must take note how Luke repeats **“being sent out by the Holy Spirit.”** No church ministry – and certainly no missionary ministry – is ever effective unless it is the Holy Spirit who is directing and quickening it. The church does its work only under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the

direction and power of the Holy Spirit! Seleucia was the seaport city they sailed from to Cyprus. Barnabas is in familiar territory because he is a native of Cyprus [ch 4.36]. When we first meet him, he had migrated to Jerusalem from there. Salamis was the coastal seaport entry point to the island. Barnabas and Saul followed the pattern Jesus had prescribed: they went to the Jews first and proclaimed the Word of God in their synagogues. This will be a pattern they will repeat everywhere they go. **And they had John to assist them.** This is the John Mark we met in ch 12.12, and he had also returned to Antioch from Jerusalem with Barnabas and Saul [ch 12.25]. BTW, he was also closely related to Barnabas [Colossians 4.10]; and also the later human author of **The Gospel of Mark** under the influence of the apostle Peter [another story].

2/ vv 6-12 / From Salamis, Barnabas, Saul, and Mark traversed the 90-mile width of the island and came to the western coastal city of Paphos. We will need to summarize the narrative of this section by noting these three responses to the Word of God that we witness and preach. [These ‘points’ credited to Pastor Tony Merida via Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Acts]:

- **vv 6-7 / Some people will be open to God’s Word.** We are introduced to two prominent influential people in Paphos. The first of these is a Jewish false prophet by the name of Bar-Jesus [son of Jesus/Savior]. Jesus was a common name among the Jews, just as it still is today among Latin peoples. He was a ‘magician,’ but not like Houdini, Criss Angel, David Copperfield or other illusionists. He practiced the arts of the demonic occult world. He had hired himself to the local Roman proconsul or governor of that region, Sergius Paulus and made his livelihood by being his ‘spiritual’ counselor and advisor. But ‘the word on the street’ got around to Sergius Paulus. He is described as **a man of intelligence**, and he was also open and interested to hear more of the Word of God that Barnabas and Saul were preaching. So he called Barnabas and Saul to come to him for a personal audience. Sergius Paulus is a Gentile, a Roman, a pagan from a culture that worshiped multiple gods, and a high-ranking political figure. We never know whose heart God may open with interest in our message!
- **vv 8-11 / Some people will oppose God’s Word.** Bar-Jesus had another name also – Elymas [sorcerer]. When he saw Sergius Paulus’s interest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he **opposed** or ‘took a stand against’ the Gospel. Not just objected – he vehemently argued in Sergius Paulus’ presence and tried to turn him against the Gospel – away from believing it. Elymas was obviously motivated by two demonic spirits: pride and materialism. If Sergius Paulus believes the Gospel, then Elymas loses his standing, influence, and livelihood. Barnabas and Saul and their Gospel of Jesus must be defeated by any and all means! This is the spiritual warfare we all will face as we seek to proclaim the Gospel. In v 9, two important transitions take place: [1] up to this point, Barnabas has been mentioned first in their missionary partnership; now Saul will step up to do the primary speaking; [2] Saul will be called Paul from this point on. ‘Paul’ is the Roman, Gentile equivalent of the Jewish name ‘Saul.’ Paul minces no words: **“You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?”** There is so much irony in Paul’s statement. I want to quote Tony Merida again: *“Paul is ‘filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Bar-Jesus is filled with ‘deceit and trickery.’ Paul is a child of God. Bar-Jesus, far from representing his name, is a ‘son of the devil’ (cf. John 8.44). Paul is telling everyone about the Righteous One who makes sinners righteous. Bar-Jesus is an ‘enemy of all that is right.’ Paul is announcing the way of salvation (cf. Luke 3.4). Bar-Jesus is ‘perverting’ the way of salvation. Instead of advocating real conversion, Bar-Jesus advocates spiritual perversion. As a consequence, the Lord judges Bar-Jesus. He strikes him blind, perhaps representing his spiritual blindness (John 3.19-20; 9.39). This move was particularly fitting since the man was a proponent of darkness (Isaiah 5.20). His judgment was a foretaste of what will happen to all who fail to bow the knee to Jesus: they will be thrown into utter darkness (Matthew 8.12; 25.30).”* You may think Paul to be a tad harsh? People’s eternal destiny is at stake when we are witnessing the Gospel of Jesus Christ!
- **v 12 / Some people will embrace God’s Word.** God, the Holy Spirit, was at work in Sergius Paulus’s heart. God had chosen Sergius Paulus and appointed him to eternal life [see v 48]. When he saw the sovereign power of God acting in supremacy of power over the demonic, occultic power that Bar-

Jesus/Elymas boasted in, he believed both the miraculous sign he saw and the accompanying Gospel message of the One who obviously enacted the power – Jesus Christ. **“Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.”**

3/ And so, here on the first stop of the first ‘to the end of the earth’ missionary campaign, the saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ invaded and conquered this little island that previously had been a guarding outpost fortress for the kingdom of Satan and darkness. Onward!

III / vv 13-47 | Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch

1/ vv 13-14a / Having traversed the island of Cyprus from east [Salamis] to west [Paphos], and after the notable encounter with Sergius Paulus in Paphos, they set sail again across the northern Mediterranean Sea – northwest to Perga in Pamphylia. Pamphylia was the name of the province [region]. Most likely they landed in the seaport city of Attalia and walked the twelve miles inland to Perga. *It was at this point that Luke reports: “And John [Mark] left them and returned to Jerusalem.” We can only speculate why, but this event will create a rift later on in the relationship between Paul and Mark and even Paul and Barnabas [see ch 15.36-41].* Paul and Barnabas then **“went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia.”** Luke doesn’t report how logistically difficult that journey was, but John Polhill writes: *“Antioch lay some 100 miles to the north across the Taurus mountain range. The route was barren, often flooded by swollen mountain streams, and notorious for its bandits, which even the Romans had difficulty bringing under control. Antioch itself was in the highlands, some 3,600 feet above sea level.”* NOTE: our ministry and missionary endeavors will inevitably encounter both relational conflicts and physical difficulties and dangers. We must be prepared to anticipate them and persevere through them under the direction and grace that the Holy Spirit promises to supply.

2/ vv 14b-15 / When they arrived in Pisidian Antioch, again they sought out first where the Jewish worshipers were gathering in their synagogues on the Sabbath day [see v 5]. The Jewish synagogue services had set orders of worship they followed; and after their customary readings from the Scriptures, **“the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them saying, ‘Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it...’”**

3/ vv 16-47 / At this point, Paul delivered this stirring Gospel message, which we can only briefly summarize here with some comments under the main subject movements which Paul addressed. Again, I am copying these subject headings from Pastor Tony Merida [cited above]:

- **Introduction: Preparation for the Coming of Christ (vv 16-25).** Paul covers centuries of Old Testament history in these statements – but in every instance, he interprets all the OT Scriptures and events as being preparatory and pointing to the coming of Christ; this is correct OT reading and interpretation. **The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm He led them out of it.** We need to note all throughout this sermon that Paul is highlighting the sovereignty of God in the Providential choosing and blessing of His people as He created, established, protected, redeemed, and saved His people for the express purpose of making a people/nation to bring Christ into the world. **And for about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness.** Paul introduces into his sermon narrative how the people of Israel chronically, repeatedly, and stubbornly resisted and rebelled against God’s Lordship and Holy Kingship over them, beginning immediately after the Exodus and during those forty years of wilderness wanderings. **And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, He gave them their land as an inheritance. All this took about 450 years.** So with that statement, Paul has summed up their history from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the Exodus – but God faithfully fulfilled all His covenant promises to Israel. As we have seen in our previous studies from Genesis, *all of these prophetic promises were made to Christ to lead us to the New Covenant and Christ’s Gospel!* **And after that He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.** Paul now progresses to the subject of kings because he will demonstrate that Jesus Christ is the appointed and

anointed Royal King of God's Kingdom. **And when He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, of whom He testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my own heart, who will do all my will.'** THIS is the core, pith, anchor, lynchpin, key to ALL the OT promises and Jewish people's expectations concerning their King. He would be the promised descendent of David [2 Samuel 7; et. al.]. To which Paul exclaims: **"Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as He promised."** AND, contrary to king David, whose body corrupted – and they knew precisely where his buried remains still were [see ch 2.29], **"but He whom God raised up did not see corruption"**! So, Jesus Christ is the promised King of God's Kingdom that He has been preparing from the creation of the world! **Then John the Baptist announced him as such during the course of his 'forerunner' ministry.**

- **Proclamation: The Death and Resurrection of Christ (vv 26-37).** Once again, Paul rehearses how their fellow Jews in Jerusalem **"did not recognize Him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath [as they had just done], fulfilled them by condemning Him ... But God raised Him from the dead, and for many days He appeared to those who had come up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now His witnesses to the people."** Paul then continues the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ to these Pisidian Antioch Jews hundreds of miles from Jerusalem, citing again **Psalm 2.7, Isaiah 55.3, and Psalm 16.10.**
- **Application: The Promise of Forgiveness and Justification for All Who Trust in Christ (vv 38-41).** Jesus Christ Himself is God's Gospel message and the only Name by which we must be saved. God saves all those who believe in Christ and justifies them from their sins through faith in His Gospel. But then Paul issues a stern warning by quoting **Habakkuk 1.5: "Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: 'Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.'"** Those in Habakkuk's day did not heed Yahweh's warnings about the impending Babylonian invasion and were destroyed and carried off into captivity. IF these Gospel-day Jews do not heed the proclamation of the Messiah who has come, they will be destroyed in like manner.

4/ vv 42-47 / **"The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the Word of the Lord."** The unbelieving Jews were filled with jealousy and began verbally abusing and **'blaspheming'** Paul's words and message – thereby blaspheming God and Christ Himself in their violent contradictions they offered against Paul's message. Paul and Barnabas then announced: **"It was necessary that the Word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth [Isaiah 49.6].'"**

IV / vv 48-52 | Shaking the dust from their feet

1/ vv 48-49 / **"And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the Word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the Word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region."**

2/ vv 50-51 / **"But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of the district. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium."** This practice of shaking the dust of the place from their feet was in keeping with Jesus' command to His apostles: **Matthew 10.14; Mark 6.11; Luke 9.5.** This signifies that they were leaving the dust there that would fall under the judgment of God for rejecting His message of salvation He had promised, provided, and sent to them in Jesus Christ, His Son, their only Savior.

3/ v 52 / **"And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."** Everywhere the Gospel comes, and everywhere the Holy Spirit leads, directs, and works – there is JOY!

"...through this Man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you!"