

Purposeful Missions Begins—Acts 13:1-5—10/11/26
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Open your Bibles to Acts 13 as we enter the next phase of Gospel growth in this narrative of the foundation of the church.

Follow along with me as I read Acts 13:1-13. [READ]

Today we embark on the spread of Christianity to the ends of the earth.

We have studied the church's birth in Jerusalem & its spread around Judea & into neighboring Samaria.

We've studied how the new revelation of Jesus as the Christ was proven by signs & wonders & miracles as God opened the New Covenant blessings & called Israel to repent & turn to their Christ.

We've marveled at the church as one new body of Jews & Gentiles proven & affirmed by Peter & the Apostles.

But how would the Gospel go far away to the rest of the world?

Philip had been sent to a nearby traveling Ethiopian eunuch who was already seeking God in studying the prophet Isaiah.

And Peter had been sent to nearby Caesarea to a Gentile whom God had prepared to receive the Gospel along with his household.

And other believers had shared Christ as they scattered under persecution—but none of that was exactly planned as outreach.

Yet what we find as we begin Acts 13 today is what a church does when believers begin to be **purposeful** about spreading the Gospel.

We see what a strategy or philosophy of missions looks like.

We see how it was generated & what its priorities & practices were.

We as church leaders spent a year studying Scripture & writing & editing & teaching & refining our philosophy of missions.

We wanted our pursuits **established in Scripture**, not in preferences or traditions handed down or opportunities presented that we react to.

Since the church is always in need of Reformation, we need to be evaluating the roots of "*the way we've always done it.*"

Just because "*that's the way we've always done it*" in whatever part of life or ministry, that does **not** necessarily mean it's authoritative.

It **may** have authoritative grounding we need to rediscover or it **may** have a mixture of right & wrong ideas we need to discern.

And in missions, what we found was that it **may not be** ideas that are unbiblical that cause **drift** as much as ideas that are just **unnecessary**.

Often in missions, the innumerable **possible extras** have grown to replace the biblically **commanded essentials**.

And loads of energy and money and people have been poured into efforts that are **not** the chief focus of missions in the Scripture.

Those **side** structures have often replaced the **main** commitment of Jesus who said that He would build **His church**.

So we anchored our philosophy of missions in pursuit of **that priority**.

With our **limited** resources, we wanted to **channel our efforts** most carefully into **what the NT emphasizes as essential**.

We wanted to step back from the flood of programs & expenditures **labeled** as missions & **define missions** with biblical parameters.

And the basic path we found is what we see this morning as we consider answers to 2 basic missions questions in Acts 13:1-5.

Acts 13:1-5 sets the path for **whom to send & what to do** as the **first purposeful sending of missionaries** began from the church at Antioch.

I am borrowing from Pastor Rick Zaman of Grace Bible Church of Richmond, a likeminded church that partners with us with missionaries & conference for youth & young adults.

He explained this section in a recent sermon using those 2 questions—
(1) Who do we send on mission? & (2) What do we do on mission?

I cannot improve on those basic questions that lead to the takeaway answers for application to missions in our times—again, **we'll answer who do we send & what do we do.**

So our outline today will find **answers to those 2 questions** in Acts 13:1-5 **to renew & bolster** our commitment to **purposeful missions**.

As we get to that first question, let's remember where we were.

We have seen the focus on Peter & the Apostles **subtly transition** to **James**, the Lord's brother, as a key leader in the Jerusalem church.

This was perhaps AD 47, sometime after the death of Herod Agrippa I in 44 AD that we studied at the end of Acts 12.

No NT Scripture had yet been written, except possibly James's letter, which was written sometime before the Jerusalem council in 49 AD.

James wrote to the 12 tribes dispersed abroad because the church was mainly made up of Jewish believers at that time.

But the Gentile church in Caesarea in Cornelius's house had begun and as believers spread to Antioch, they evangelized Jews & Gentiles.

Then that Antioch church became a missions minded church.

Look at Acts 11:19-30 to recall the beginning of that church. [READ]

Christians from various areas scattered because of persecution & evangelized in Antioch & many turned to Jesus.

When the mother church in Jerusalem heard, they sent Barnabas to pastor those believers & even more were brought to the Lord.

Barnabas knew he needed help & went to get Saul from Tarsus to help in the work of teaching & discipling these Christians.

Then their concern for fellow believers in Judea moved them to send a gift to those churches by Saul & Barnabas as their messengers.

And at the end of Acts 12, verse 25, we find how that mission was fulfilled & Barnabas & Saul returned to Antioch.

So Acts 13 begins back at the church in Antioch with Barnabas & Saul as two of at least five leaders there as we read in verse 1. [READ]

Whereas prior references in Acts referred to the church in Jerusalem, Luke clarified this as the church being in Antioch.

The pattern of establishing elders in every local church as pastors & overseers was not yet commanded & codified.

So in the transition time with no NT Scripture, this local church had **prophets** & teachers **rather than** pastors & teachers.

Prophets were the **foundation of the church** alongside the Apostles, as **Ephesians 2:20** describes, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone.

So prophets were part of that **initial structure** that was built upon as the NT was written while the church formed & spread.

As we saw with Agabus in Acts 11:27-28, such prophets sometimes gave predictions from the Holy Spirit of specific needs or directions.

Agabus prophesied the great world famine that occurred during the reign of Claudius that prompted the gift from Antioch.

And we'll see in verse 2 how God's Spirit gave specific direction for the church at Antioch in planning their first missionary trip.

But first note this spiritual gift of prophet was **necessary** when the NT **playbook** for the church had not yet been written.

So as we've studied before in Acts & saw again last week in Sunday School and on Sunday evening, this **prophetic gift was revelatory**.

That means such prophets gave direct revelation from God that was authoritative & had to be infallible & proven as fulfilled.

The OT idea of a prophet was someone who spoke from God.

And if his words did **not** come true, he was judged to be a **false prophet** was to be stoned according to **Deuteronomy 13 & 18**.

True prophets came at various points in OT history & were given for a time in the church with the Apostles when God was revealing the NT.

Some say a sense of prophesying still operates in preaching God's revealed written Word today & that's possible.

But the office & gift of prophet was likely more specific to revelation.

We'll see how the Spirit spoke through prophets in verse 2 & consider how the Spirit leads in His church today in a minute.

But first note that in the church at Antioch were also teachers, those who explained truth & instructed people from the OT Scriptures.

The sermons in Acts modeled some of that teaching.

Acts 11:23-24 said Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit and faith & was fruitful in encouragement, exhortation & evangelism.

So he likely had the **spiritual gift of teaching**, as did Saul.

And in this list of leaders in verse 1, Barnabas was named first, likely as the first one sent from Jerusalem to Antioch when the church began.

Then Saul was listed last, possibly because the others were there already when Barnabas had gone to Tarsus to get Saul.

The diverse backgrounds of these leaders is striking—with Barnabas a Jewish Levite born on the island of Cyprus as we learned in Acts 4:36.

His name was Joseph, but was called Barnabas by the Apostles, which translated means **Son of Encouragement**.

Next in the list was Simeon who was called Niger, which is a Latin word for black and may indicate his dark skin or African descent.

We know the next man, Lucius, was definitely from Africa because Cyrene was a city in North Africa.

But there's **no link** of him to the author Luke or others with that name.

Then what's said about the fourth man Manaen is interesting.

The term could mean '**foster-brother**' or close companion, one **raised** with Herod Antipas who was called the tetrarch.

Recall that Herod Antipas the tetrarch was the **uncle** of Herod Agrippa I that was eaten by worms at the end of Acts 12.

Antipas had ruled before Agrippa as the Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded & was ruling Galilee at the time of Jesus' death.

Yet God had saved this man he grew up with & united that man with others from various backgrounds to serve with Saul.

And we know Saul from his conversion in Acts 9 & the rest of the NT with his Gentile name, Paul, the Apostle who wrote many NT letters.

So now let's move on to read verse 2. [READ]

This word for ministering is used of official public service & also of priestly religious service, which is what's indicated here.

It's not clear whether the whole church was ministering or only the men listed in verse 1.

It's the church gathered even if only the leaders' ministry is noted.

But all ministry is to the Lord when it's viewed & done rightly.

As you kids know 2nd Timothy 2:15 says from your AWANA verse—we present ourselves as workman to be approved by God, right?

We give ourselves to the Lord first & then to others, as 2nd Corinthians 8:5 says.

We serve the Lord by serving people in ways His Word commands.

We follow God's prescribed means for church life as the path in season & out of season, as Paul later wrote to Timothy.

When we serve & seek to please the Lord, it gives clarity & stability.

In some seasons of need or decision, that may include fasting, abstaining from food for a time, not eating for a day or longer.

It may also be fasting from other things as a means of discipline in seeking the Lord for some area of growth & direction.

We're not told if the church was fasting to pray about being witnesses to the end of the earth like Jesus had said in Acts 1:8.

But we know the Holy Spirit answered with clear revelation that must have come through one of the prophets in the church.

The message had specific instructions & divine purpose.

The purpose was for the Spirit Himself, for the work to which He had already called Barnabas & Saul to in the past with lasting impact.

Jesus had already made His calling for Saul clear when He appeared to Him twelve years earlier as recorded in **Acts 9**.

In Acts 9:15, Jesus had said Saul was “*a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel.*”

The Spirit had plans for Barnabas also & the time had come to send both him & Saul to bear Jesus' name before the Gentiles.

This specific, divine revelation from the Spirit was not what we might say or hear or think of today as a subjective leading of some kind.

This was not what the Spirit prompted or impressed upon their hearts or made them sense in some personal individual way.

This was a clearly revealed, **infallible** message from God the Spirit.

I realize that when I clarify that, you might ask or wonder how the Spirit leads or calls a person into missions today.

Since we have the completed NT, we can point to commands for all of us to somehow be involved making disciples of all nations.

And we can check our desires with the Scriptures & ask God's Spirit to evaluate our burdens & motives & to direct our steps.

We must earnestly pray & fast & submit ourselves to Scripture & God's work through the church & its affirmed leaders in His design.

That's all part of how we as a church move forward with training & testing & affirming & sending out missionaries.

So if you have a desire for missions, you should be serving now loving people & being equipped & proven & share your desires with leaders.

Do not assume that going on a trip will prepare you better than doing evangelism & church ministry as part of your life now.

Why would you be sent to do something you are not doing already?

The Spirit said to send two men who were already qualified & proven as gifted leaders & teachers in the church.

That's the answer to the question of who to send on mission—as we might phrase it today—the Spirit said to send two elder-qualified men.

The Spirit said to draw a line to sanctify them for the work.

What was the work?—it was the work they had been doing, the work of the church, the work of evangelism & encouraging & teaching.

That's what Acts 11 said Barnabas & Saul did at Antioch & we also know that Saul had also preached Christ in Acts 9.

Both of their ministries had brought many people to the Lord.

And what happens when people are brought to the Lord?

They are baptized & added to the church & taught to obey all that Jesus commanded as they serve in the local body & reach others.

Therefore, those sent out must be qualified & gifted to be church leaders, to be elders & pastors & overseers.

That is the essential need for evangelism & church planting—men who live faithfully & lead others to Christ & disciple & teach.

That's who the Spirit said to send & that pattern is repeated in Acts & in the design of the church explained in the NT letters.

Again, this was the fruit of a church worship service like God might use today—not some special conference or emotional pressure context.

Luke did not record a strategy session or demographic analysis or any other possibly useful tool or event.

The Spirit spoke & the church obeyed as we read in verse 3. [READ]

The Antioch church had sent Barnabas & Saul to Jerusalem before with the gift for the churches of Judea.

And here they were going to send them on the first missionary journey that was purposefully initiated & pursued.

They again sought God with fasting & prayer & they laid hands on them to affirm them & commission them.

They identified with them as part of their body they were sending, as connected & set apart to God for specific work.

Then they sent them away—literally released, set them free.

They did so, meaning the whole church did so, all the believers joined in the efforts of prayer & supplying to free up & sending.

Missionary ministry is the work of the church together, as guided by the leaders & affirmed by the body.

Then those missionaries sent out came back to report to the church.

We find that report in Acts 14:26-27 when Barnabas & Saul returned to Antioch a year & a half later.

With that accountability, there's no reason to send anyone who is not already serving & sharing Christ & proven in character & giftedness.

As you hear this, you may ask about those not gifted to teach or be church leaders, whether men or women—what about them?

You may recall from our philosophy of missions document that we address that question with answers in the realm of support ministries.

In every local church are a variety of gifts for serving & for speaking, for women discipling women & men discipling men.

There are gifts for evangelism & mercy & deacon-type serving that free up men for the ministry of prayer & the Word as Acts 6:4 says.

So we ask if people with such gifts be part of missionary team?

Look at the end of verse 5 in Acts 13—**and they also had John as their helper**, referring to John Mark whom we met in chapter 12.

His role was that of **helper or assistant or servant under others**.

He went on the missionary journey **in that role & for that purpose**.

So the answer is **yes**—that mission teams **can include** those who **function in support roles**.

And that could **include men & women** in those support roles.

Of course, that would include **missionary wives**, but could **also** include **single women or men** who do not teach publicly.

That rounds out the answer to the first question in our outline today.

Who do we send on mission?

1st, we send elder-qualified men who are set apart by the Holy Spirit.

We identify those not by a new word from God, but by God's written Word about the qualifications for church leaders.

We know 1st Timothy 3 & Titus 1 & other verses require the character & giftedness for the work of making disciples & pastoring a church.

And then we know from Acts 13:5 & other passages that **other helpers** may possibly **also** be sent alongside the leading men.

That's the **same design** commanded in the NT for **every local church**.

Missionary work is simply **reproducing** the structure & practice of a **faithful church** in a different location.

That begins with **qualified leaders & truly converted members**.

And how does conversion of people happen to build a church?

It's through **preaching of the Gospel**, proclaiming the Word of God.

Read Acts 13:4-5 to see that's what they did. [READ]

Here is the **answer to question #2** today—**what do we do on mission?**

Question #1 was "Who do we send on mission?" & now **question #2 is "What do we do on mission?"**.

The **answer to question #2** is simple—**we proclaim the Word of God**.

That's what Barnabas & Saul did at their first destination.

They started in the synagogues of the Jews because that's where the Scriptures were opened regularly already & they could teach there.

That's where people were gathering & so the general pattern for NT evangelism in each city was to start in synagogues.

Since Jews had the **OT Scriptures** & a **hope for their Messiah**, it made sense to **start** by preaching Jesus as that proven Messiah to **Jews first**.

That kind of preaching is **what to do on mission** as stated by Jesus in **Acts 1:8**—be His **witnesses**, **testify to Him**.

That's what to do as Jesus said in **Matthew 28:19-20**: **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing & **teaching** them to obey all He commanded.

Proclaiming God's Word is vital for Christ to build His church.

We know that is central in the gathered church, but we must not forget or minimize that same essential priority in evangelism & missions.

That is the main thing—we preach Christ, as 1st Corinthians 1-2 exalt as vital even though it may be foolishness to the world.

And therefore listen—all the other things that get called missions, that fall under a missions heading or category—can only be considered biblical missions if they prioritize proclaiming God's Word.

Mercy ministries like providing food or water or medical help or career help can be useful & can model the love of Christ.

But they must be a context for speaking God's Word, for sharing Christ in the proclamation & explanation of the Gospel.

And that Gospel is the Good News that you should be ready to share in brief summary at any opportunity.

You should be able to expand on its truths from the span of Scripture & for application to every soul.

You know how I say it often—Jesus is God the Son who became a Man & lived perfectly, died sacrificially & rose in victory to provide all that is needed for sinners to be saved.

Jesus is the Messiah, the Promised Christ of OT expectation, & He is the only Savior who can forgive our sins & give us eternal life.

His life can become our righteousness to get us to God & His death can be the full payment for our sins against God & His resurrection can be the secure assurance of being with God.

We are all sinners who cannot get to God on our own & cannot atone or make up for our sins, & who deserve eternal punishment.

But Jesus has come to rescue us, to save us from our sins.

He says to repent, to turn from your sins, & to trust Him, to surrender in faith to rely on all He is & has done & to follow Him.

If you respond to that call to repent & trust Him, He freely gives all that you need now & forever to be right with God.

Knowing Jesus as Lord & Savior welcomes us into new life spiritually that begins now & will last forever in His presence in heaven.

That is a summary of the Word of God that must be preached.

That is a quick reminder of the essential Gospel that must be shared.

The Word of God must not take a back seat to sneak in if possible or to share eventually down the road.

The Word of God must be explained for the souls of men to be saved.

And it's not loving to help people in the short term & leave them lost apart from Christ forever in the long term.

That's not faithful care & it's not obedient to Christ's call on our lives.

So get that—various things may be possible, but one thing is essential & that is the proclamation of the Word of God.

Other decisions about where to start preaching may be answered with practical realities like knowing the Scriptures are read in synagogues.

Even when Barnabas & Saul had a direct word from God's Spirit, we're not told they were sent to a specific destination.

The Spirit did not leave a link to Google or Apple Maps for directions.

They likely went down to Seleucia because that was 16 miles down the river as the closest port city to Antioch.

They likely sailed to Cyprus because it was close—60 miles offshore within sight on a clear day—& also because Barnabas was from there.

The **island of Cyprus** was likely familiar to Barnabas & he likely had contacts or family there to welcome or help them.

Barnabas also likely had sailed in & out of the east-facing port of Salamis that had a good harbor & was closest to Antioch & Seleucia.

All those factors **may make their choice** to go to Cyprus sound **oversimplified & not all that spiritually exciting**.

But we **don't need to overcomplicate or sensationalize** such practical steps in planning to go preach the Gospel somewhere.

God works through our experiences & relationships & circumstances & desires & that's all part of His **wise providence** in guiding us & providing for us.

I think we underestimate the amazing ways God moves in His sovereign control over all things to direct our steps.

And some of the **details** of this first purposeful missionary journey were part of God's providence like He leads today.

So we need to consider such details prayerfully & plan wisely, but we also need to keep the **main ministry as the main goal**.

And that is that we **must proclaim the Word of God**.

That's **what we do on mission**—that's the **essential work** of missions.

As I began studying this passage, I was reminded of **our church's philosophy of missions** statement.

And I was grateful to **freshly compare it** to these Scriptures & to see the **consistency of the NT design** we found & explained before.

So in all that is labeled missions in our times, be sure to evaluate it by biblical standards like we've seen in Acts 13:1-5.

And we could look at other passages that teach the same emphases.

But as we consider the **beginning** of purposeful missions from the church at Antioch, let's also be reminded of **God's commands for us to be involved** in evangelism & missions.

We may be the ones who **go** or those who **support & send & pray**.

But we **must be involved in the work**.

We must be **sharing the Gospel** as we have opportunity & we should be praying for opportunities & for faithfulness & fruitfulness as we do.

We should ponder the **prize our Savior is** to be preached & the **peril of eternal torment** for all who do not trust Him.

And we should **pray for God to save many** through our ministries personally & as a church & through our missionaries.

What a **joy** to think of sacrificial giving that will be revealed one day with **eternal investment returns!**

We want to **define & direct** missions biblically & we also want to **embrace & invest** in evangelism & missions **zealously & wisely**.

If we can help you pursue those desires, let us know.

And if we can lead you to our Savior today, let us know that also.

Let's pray that God will awaken & deepen our passion for Christ building His church here & around the world.

Pray with me as we close.