

PAUL'S LIFE AND TEACHINGS

Lesson 10

Paul's First Missionary Journey

Do you travel much? Maybe you travel for work or maybe for pleasure. Do you enjoy travel? Is your travel usually by car or plane? Perhaps you travel by boat or train.

Should your travels take you out of town on a weekend, do you find a place to worship while gone? Is safety an issue when you travel? Have you ever gone to a foreign country where you are required to get vaccinations before you go? Do you ever feel like you're living out of a suitcase? Do you miss your home and hometown? Do you ever miss certain food or find the food where you are visiting strange?

I live a life of travel. My job is one that keeps me traipsing all over the country and often around the globe. This week I've spent Monday and Tuesday in St. Louis, coming home to my family Tuesday night. Wednesday and Thursday I was in Los Angeles, making it home in time for a great family evening Thursday night. I then boarded a plane Friday morning for a day trip to Lubbock, Texas. It is not unusual in my job for me to be on one coast one day and the far coast the next.

I remember as a young lawyer, I thought travel to be glamorous. How fun it must be, I thought, to be a frequent flyer, finding the exotic spots around the U.S. and globe. Now don't get me wrong, I do enjoy travel, but it has certainly lost its glamour! I think it may have been the overnight trip to Manchester England. Not overnight in the sense that the flight is overnight, "overnight" in the sense that I flew to Manchester, England from Houston, Texas (connecting in Newark!) for a dinner. I arrived after spending 14 plus hours traveling so I could eat dinner with a witness, only to grab a few hours sleep and get right back on an airplane for the even longer return to Houston.

Travel is hard on the body, mind and spirit. It is physically trying because you are away from the comforts and conveniences of home; sleep is more difficult to come by; food is different and not just around the corner in the kitchen. The travel itself exacts a physical wear and tear on the body. That is true whether one is flying, riding, or walking!

Travel also takes an emotional toll on people. When you remove someone from their home environment, they lose a certain amount of security and comfort. Travelers always must exercise greater caution for unknown areas and the

potential dangers. There is a stress involved in not having your own home for retreat and refuge. Friends and family, and the support system they provide are gone. Telephone calls help, but they are no substitute for real presence.

Travel poses an interesting spiritual dynamic. Some of the most regular attendees of church find it much more difficult to worship and fellowship while on the road. Notwithstanding that, there is a certain spiritual opportunity in travel. Anytime stress, danger, and turmoil are before us, we have a greater incentive to rely upon God for strength and sustenance.

But enough about us and our traveling! What does this have to do with Paul? Hopefully it helps set the stage for us to think about the sacrifices and human experiences that must have unfolded before Paul as he took to the road to deliver the gospel message that had turned his own life around. We began today looking at Paul's missionary journeys.

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

We find the story of Paul's first missionary journey beginning in Acts 13. We might borrow a timeline with some modification from F. F. Bruce to place the journey into time perspective:

Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost	April-May 30
Conversion of Saul of Tarsus	c. 33
Paul's first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem	c. 35
Paul in Cilicia and Syria	35-46
Famine in Judea; Paul and Barnabas sent with relief	46
First Missionary Journey	47-48 ¹

Luke begins this part of his history with Paul and Barnabas in Antioch as part of the team of prophets and teachers. Luke adds in passing that another of the teachers is Manean, who had been "a member of the court of Herod the

¹ F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Eerdmans 1977) at 475. See also Bruce's *The Acts of the Apostles, The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans 1951) at 55. McRay dates it slightly differently arguing that Paul's conversion came in 34 making his first visit to Jerusalem in late 37. McRay places Paul in Cilicia and Syria in 37-43 adding placing Paul in Antioch from 43-47. McRay does agree with Bruce, however, on the first missionary journey explaining it started in late 47 and lasted to mid 48. John McRay, *Paul, His Life and Teaching*, (Baker Academic 2003) at 73-75.

Tetrarch.”² The Greek for “a member of the court” is *suntrophos* (σύντροφος). This title “was given to boys of the same ages as princes, who were brought up with them at court.”³ As a *suntrophos*, Manaen would “have been brought up with” Herod, hence some translators even use the term “foster brother” for *suntrophos*.⁴ Other literature of the period used the word for “an intimate friend.”⁵

Luke does not want the informed to miss the point; Herod Antipas and Manean are brought up together as playmates at the royal court. Herod Antipas goes on to behead John the Baptist and participate in the killing of Jesus, while Manaen becomes a Christian leader in the Antiochan church whose name is set out for the ages in Acts. What a difference choices in life can make!

The Call

So in this growing church, the Holy Spirit stakes claim on a mission for Paul and Barnabas, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). We see here that the Holy Spirit is the true missionary here. Barnabas and Saul are called to be the tools of the Spirit; but it is the Spirit who has the mission. It is the Spirit who has made the call. It is the Spirit that is giving direction.

The church hears and understands the Spirit’s call and following a special fast and prayer, lay hands on Barnabas and Saul and “sent them off” (Acts 13:3).

As Paul leaves on this trip, there is no question in his mind why he is going. Early in Paul’s Christian walk God had told him that God would “send” him “far away” to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21). No doubt Paul had worked toward that end in Antioch, Cilicia, and Syria. But now God was sending Paul to other altogether new places.

The Trip

Barnabas, Paul (still called by his Hebrew name Saul⁶) and John Mark⁷ leave Antioch and head by boat on the Mediterranean Sea to the island of Cyprus. The following map gives us orientation to this journey.

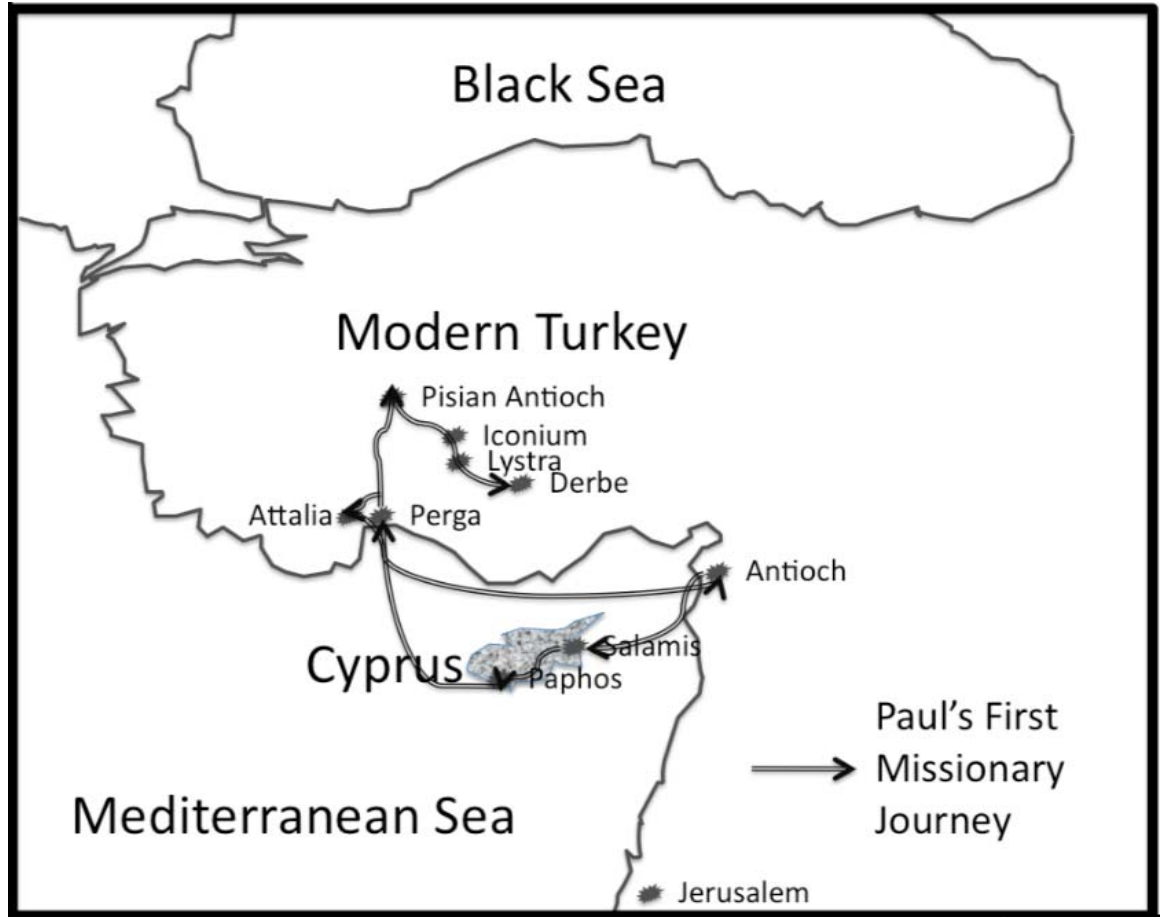
² There are many Herods in the New Testament. Josephus gives us enough history to put together a family tree of the Herods. See the Biblical Literacy lesson 27 downloadable at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

³ Bruce, *Greek Commentary on Acts* at 253.

⁴ Vincent, Marvin, *Vincent’s Word Studies of the New Testament* (Hendrickson 1888) Vol. 1 at 514.

⁵ Danker, Frederick, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* 3d ed. (U. Chi. Press 2000) at 976.

⁶ On Paul’s Hebrew and Latin names see Lesson 1 in the Paul series downloadable at www.Biblical-Literacy.com.



We are not told why Barnabas and Saul chose Cyprus as their first destination. We do know that Barnabas was from Cyprus, so he would have likely been returning to share the gospel with some of his own relatives, friends and

⁷ They took John Mark with them "to assist them" (13:5). The English Standard Version may lose some of the import of Mark's role by translating him simply as assisting. The word Luke uses is *hupereten* (ὑπηρέτην), which means "attendant" or "minister." Luke used the same word in Luke 1:2 speaking of the things that were delivered by "those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word." Mark could likely be included as one of the eyewitnesses who were a servant of the word. A number of scholars believe that Mark was taken along to provide eyewitness accounts of a portion of the life of Christ. Some scholars believe that Mark, who wrote his gospel based largely on Peter's information, was likely the "youth" referred to in Mark 14:51-52. These two verses are merely a passing entry in the narrative that the author (Mark) likely put in for personal reasons.

acquaintances. Since John Mark was a cousin of Barnabas's it is also reasonable to assume that he had relatives of some degree on the island as well.

On Cyprus, the three sailed into the port of Salamis and wasted no time presenting the Word of God in the synagogues. Going through the island, they arrived at the far port of Paphos. Here Luke details a specific encounter.

In Paphos, Paul and Barnabas are summoned by the Roman Proconsul Sergius Paulus. The Proconsul kept near him a false Jewish prophet named Elymas Bar-Jesus ("Bar Jesus" meant "Son of Joshua") who was constantly opposing the teachings of the missionaries, trying to turn away the Proconsul from any faith. We have then a pivotal place in Luke's Acts narrative: "But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him [Elymas] and said, '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? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time' (Acts 13:9-11). Immediately, we are told, mist and darkness fell on Elymas and the Proconsul "believed" being "astonished at the teaching of the Lord" (Acts 13:12).

This passage is pivotal for several reasons. First, this is the first place where Luke gives us Paul by his Roman name "Paul" rather than his Jewish name Saul." From here on, Luke uses "Paul" and does not return to "Saul" except for three places where Paul is telling the story of his own conversion, quoting the usage of "Saul" by Jesus and Ananias (Acts 22:7, 13; 26:14). We are not told why Paul began using his Roman name, although there are many reasons that seem reasonable if not obvious. First, Paul's common Roman name ("Paulus") was the very same as that of the Proconsul. It would have been a logical point of connection that Paul would not likely overlook. Second, the Roman Proconsul was not Jewish. We know that Paul was sensitive to this as he interacted with people. Paul would later write,

"To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law" (1 Cor. 9:19-21).

Second, up to this point, the Acts has always spoken of "Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:26, 30; 12:25; 13:2, 7) giving Barnabas the leadership role of first listing. That changes with Paul taking charge before the Proconsul. As Paul calls God into play with Elymas, Paul becomes the leader henceforth. Now Luke will write of "Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 13:42, 43, 46, 50; 14:1, 3, 23, etc.).⁸

⁸ There are two more places where Luke reverts back to "Barnabas and Paul." The first is Acts 14:12, 14

Finally, in this verse we see for the first time Paul as God's hand in a miracle that attests to the power of God in conjunction with the delivery of God's message. Before this time, we read of God working miracles through Peter and the apostles, but Paul is God's tool through his teaching and words. Now Paul is used by God in a profound miraculous way, as will become very common in his ministry. God always gives Paul what is needed for the moment, whether common in the eyes of man or miraculous. God shows that as the mission is His, so is the ability to complete the mission!

After their experiences in Paphos, the missionaries, now "Paul and his companions" in Luke's writing, sailed to the mainland putting in at Perga (now modern south-central Turkey). In Perga, Paul and Barnabas decide to head inland up into the mountain regions going first to Pisidian Antioch.⁹ John Mark, however, does not continue on. John Mark turns back and returns to Jerusalem.

Luke stays silent on why John Mark left the mission field at this time. Scholars, always trying to find any morsel of information, have offered a number of reasons. Sir William Ramsay in *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* sets one that is often cited. Ramsay, as we have noted in previous lessons, was a first rate scholar, historian, and archaeologist who wrote in the late 1800's a definitive book on Paul, Acts, and the archaeology of the region.

Ramsay believes the key to understanding Mark's departure lies in the change of plans that Paul put into place. Ramsay points out that the narrative style of Luke lets careful readers realize that Paul and crew had planned on staying and teaching in the lowland town of Perga, but instead journey deep inland up to the mountainous region of Pisidian Antioch. Ramsay then says that Luke ties this change of plans into Mark's departure. Ramsay notes that while Luke does not give the reason for the change of plans, Paul himself does in his letter to the Galatians.

We should note here that the Galatians are the very churches that Paul and Barnabas will start up in the mountainous lands of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Ramsay points to Paul's passage to the Galatians about why Paul came to preach to them. "You know it was because of a bodily ailment

where the pagans think that Barnabas is Zeus and Paul Hermes. Yet even here, we are told that Paul was Hermes because he was the chief speaker. In Greek mythology, while Zeus was the lead God, he was always assumed to be too high and mighty to even have much interaction with humanity. Therefore, Zeus had others do his speaking for him, principally Hermes. We see that Barnabas was taking the quiet role at this point while Paul was the outspoken leader. The second place where Luke returns to "Barnabas and Paul" is Acts 15 where the two are back in Jerusalem. Before the church "Barnabas and Paul" recount the stories of the missionary trip. No doubt out of longstanding respect and history with the Jerusalem church, Barnabas again takes lead position.

⁹ Pisidian Antioch is a different city than the Antioch where Paul and crew began this journey.

that I preached the gospel to you at first” Paul wrote in Galatians 4:13. This was an illness that was apparent to people and was of some duration, for Paul adds, “and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God.”

Ramsay believes that “Paul had a serious illness in Pamphylia, and on that account he left Perga and went to Antioch.”¹⁰ Ramsay believes the illness was something that was prevalent at sea level with a perceived advantage for treatment coming from higher altitudes. Ramsay thinks the illness likely some kind of malaria.

Of course as we began this lesson speaking of the difficulties of travel, it seems normal to expect that if Paul were sick, *Paul* would be the one to call off the mission and return home. But not Paul. Paul was there because God put him there. This was the most important thing in Paul’s life. If Paul could not do this, Paul had no reason to stay on earth. As Paul would later write the Philippians,

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith” (Phil. 1:21-25).

While we do not know for certain the reasons, we do know that John Mark did not continue the journey, but instead returned home. We also know that John Mark’s departure left “a deep and painful impression on Paul and remained rankling in his mind for years.”¹¹ Luke notes as Paul and Barnabas prepared for their second missionary journey that Barnabas again wanted to take John Mark, but “Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work” (Acts 15:38).

Next week, we will continue on Paul’s journey and see a first century synagogue service, complete with a sermon by a visiting preacher!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. Mission work is God’s work. The Holy Spirit told the church at Antioch to set out Barnabas and Saul “for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). We see from Luke two perspectives. The earthly perspective has Barnabas and Saul “sent off” by the church (Acts 13:3) but from an eternal

¹⁰ Ramsay, Sir William, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Baker 1949) at 93.

¹¹ Ramsay at 90.

- perspective, Luke immediately clarifies that they were “being sent out by the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 13:4).
2. Yet God uses us to perform his mission. Paul reminds the Romans, “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” (Rom. 10:14-15).
 3. Add to your prayers those among us who have gone out into the mission field. This week pray for the Cross family. Charles and Amy Cross are CFBC members who serve in France with Greater Europe Mission. Charles is the Field Director in France, working with over 30 missionaries engaged in ministry through the country. Pray not only for Charles and Amy, but also for their children Clair, Emma, Sophie and Thomas. Pray especially for God’s gospel to penetrate the French people. France has the lowest church attendance of any European country and maintains the highest Muslim population.