

PAUL'S LIFE AND TEACHINGS

Lesson 11

Paul's First Missionary Journey – Part Two

Have you ever watched the British television show *Doctor Who*? The show centers on a “time lord” who in his space/time vehicle (shaped on the outside like a British Police Box of the 60’s) is able to navigate time and space for interesting adventures far in the future or at all points in the past. Instead, maybe you remember Sherman and Mister Peabody and the “WABAC machine” (pronounced “way-back”) that enabled wonderful adventures in the past on the animated cartoon of Bullwinkle and Rocky? Or, how about the classic show of the 1960’s, *The Time Tunnel*?

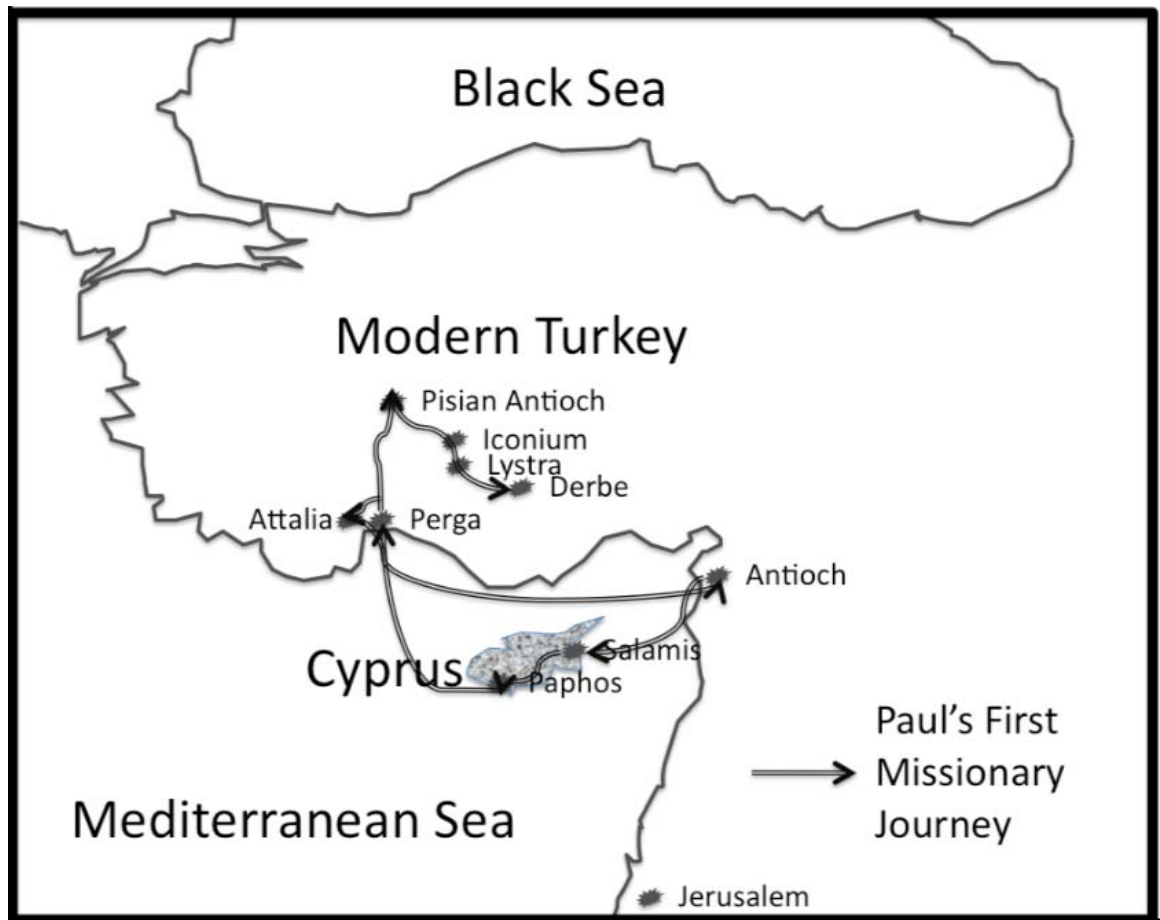
If we were to climb into one of these time machines and transport ourselves back to Paul’s first missionary journey, what would we see and hear? (At this point, we’d rather be in *Doctor Who* than *The Time Tunnel*, for *Doctor Who*’s time machine also allows its occupants to understand the languages of the period, whereas in *The Time Tunnel*, we would be stuck understanding virtually nothing!)

Last week, we considered the call of Paul and Barnabas to the missionary field. We also examined the first leg of their journey through the island of Cyprus to the mainland of modern Turkey. This week, we pick up there, transporting our minds back to late 47 A.D. to observe Paul’s first missionary sermon recorded in mainland Asia Minor.

PAUL’S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Let us remember where we are on this trip. As we considered last week, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark left Antioch and ventured to the island of Cyprus, Barnabas’s childhood home. God successfully used the trio to bring the gospel to the ruling Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus in Paphos on Cyprus. Following that success, the three left for mainland Turkey putting in at the port of Perga. It was there that John Mark left to return to Jerusalem while Paul and Barnabas pressed on to Pisidian Antioch.

Last week, we discussed why the two would have gone straightway to Pisidian Antioch as opposed to first preaching in the lowlands town of Perga. We considered Ramsey’s theory based on Paul’s letter to the Galatians that Paul had an illness that might get better if he left the low-lying coastal area for the mountains of Galatia. Pisidian Antioch was a difficult journey up through the Taurus Mountains onto a plain that was about 3,600 feet above sea level. It was here that Paul and Barnabas stopped and we begin our lesson this week.



Archaeologists have uncovered some key information at Pisidian Antioch. One of the most important discoveries sheds some additional light on Paul's and Barnabas's selection of this area for missionary work. The Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus who came to faith on the island of Cyprus was actually from this area. His family was a prominent family in the Pisidian Antioch region, and archaeologists have uncovered inscriptions of the family name in the region.

For this reason, a number of scholars have traced the logical point that Sergius Paulus would have not only likely sought Paul and Barnabas to go share his new, found faith with his family, but would also have given letters of introduction and recommendation as well.¹

¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Eerdmans 1998) at 403 and cites therein. See also Gill and Gempf, *The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting* (WIPF and Stock 2000) at 386-387.



One can find this stone on display at the Yalvac Archaeological Museum in Yalvac, Turkey. The stone is seen as confirmation of the large land holdings the family of Sergius Paulus would have had in the area.

Who were the people of this area? We know a number of things about them both from the Bible as well as from other historical sources.

First, Paul will write to them as “Galatians.” That is the title that most assigned to these people at the time (and for several hundred years before). The Galatians were originally marauding soldiers of Celts that came to the area from “Gaul” (parts of modern France, Germany, Western Switzerland, and Northern Italy). These Gauls were active in the region fighting around 278 B.C. and staying afterwards. As the Gauls became more and more Hellenized (mixing with Greeks in both race and custom), they became known as “Gallogrecians.” It is the Gaul, or “Gallo” part of their name and heritage that is the source of the word for their territory, “Galatia.”²

Not all the people in Galatia were Gallogrecians. There were also a good number of Jews. Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote (just a few decades after Paul’s first missionary journey) of the Jewish settlement in the Galatian area. When Antiochus III “the Great” (242 – 187) was in power, there were rebellions in the Galatian region of Phrygia and Lydia. Antiochus decided to move 2,000 Jewish families into the region “because of their piety towards God, and because I know that...they are faithful, and with eagerness do what they are desired to do.”³ Antiochus not only

² Gill and Gempf, at 381.

³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 12, Ch. 4, v. 149-150 (Whitson translation, Kregel Publications 1999).

relocated these Jews, but also gave them land, possessions, and ten years of “tax free” status! The Jews were also allowed to use their own laws.⁴

Of course, these Jews with these special privileges quickly became established as a wealthy segment of the population. It is not surprising that over the next 200 years they were able to build synagogues for worship.⁵ It is to one of these synagogues that Paul and Barnabas first went.

We read the story of Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13:13-52. Paul and Barnabas arrive and Luke immediately tells us “on the Sabbath day, they went into the synagogue and sat down.”

THE SYNAGOGUE

If we were in our time machine and got to attend that service, what would we have seen? We have ancient Jewish sources that detail for us the procedure behind such a Sabbath synagogue service in Greek areas outside of Palestine. In some ways, these synagogue services differed little from 21st century church services, and in other ways, they were quite different.

We would find the synagogue likely around a river or some type of water, typically on the outside of town. This provided easy access to the water needed for purification by the priests or others as deemed necessary under the law.⁶

As we walked into the synagogue we would first find a very special seating arrangement. We catch glimpses of this in the New Testament as we read Jesus talking of hypocritical scribes and Pharisees who sought “the best seats in the synagogues” (Mt 23:6; Mk 12:38-39; Lk 11:43, 20:46). Schurer writes, “The congregation sat in an appointed order, the

⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities* at Book 12, Ch. 4, v. 150-153.

⁵ In fact, the letter where Antiochus orders the Jewish relocation even provides that the state was also to pay for the Jewish religious “functionaries.” These Jews were being relocating to provide for a military stability in the region. See, Safrai and Stern, *The Jewish People in the First Century*, (Fortress Press 1974) Vol 1 at 469ff.

⁶ Emil Schurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ* (Hendrickson Publishers 1998 reprint of 1890 publication), Div. II, Vol II at 69.

most distinguished members in the front seats, the younger behind; men and women probably apart.”⁷

Once we took our seats, we would have time to look around. We would see a closet (*tyboh* תִּיבָה) that held scrolls of the law and the other “books” of the Old Testament. Each scroll would be wrapped in linen and have its own case.⁸ At the front would be a raised platform (*bema* בִּמְהַ) which would hold a “pulpit” or “reading desk.” This *bema* would be for reading the scriptures as well as for preaching.⁹ We would also likely pick out the “ruler of the synagogue.” Luke uses the term *archisunagogoi* (ἀρχισυναγωγοί). His responsibility was to make sure the needs of the service were taken care of and were supervised. He was not the one who actually read the scriptures, prayed, or preached. The members themselves typically did those tasks, but he would choose those fit to perform those functions and secure their help before each service. Schurer calls him the “conductor of their assembly.”¹⁰

There was someone we might call a “minister” in the synagogue.¹¹ This man was responsible for bringing out the scriptures and replacing them after their use (Luke 4:20). This was also the man who had to execute any required scourging and would provide the instruction for children to learn to read.¹²

A final thing we might notice were containers for the alms or tithes. There was a box that was for money. This is where the hypocrites Jesus spoke of would sound a trumpet (an expression for exaggerated displays of “showiness” in giving) as they made their donation (Mt 6:1-2). There was also a plate or dish that was for the giving of natural products. This would include the “mint and rue and every herb” that Jesus spoke of some tithing, even though they neglected the important matters of mercy, justice, faithfulness and the love of God (Mt 23:23; Lk 11:42).

⁷ *Ibid.* at 75.

⁸ *Ibid.* at 74.

⁹ *Ibid.* at 75.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* at 65.

¹¹ In the Greek, Luke uses the word *huperetes* (ὑπηρέτης) and the ESV translates this man as “attendant” in Luke 4:20.

¹² *Ibid.* at 67.

The main purpose behind the synagogue services was not so much corporate praise and worship, but “instruction in the law.”¹³ We read constantly in the New Testament about Jesus “teaching in their synagogues” (Mt 4:23; 9:35; 13:54; Mk 1:21; 6:2; Lk 4:15; 13:10; Jn 18:20). We would see this as the service itself began to unfold.

The service would have a reciting of the *Shema*. The *Shema* is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41. In the main, it contained the core confession, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Dt. 6:4). In fact, the word “*shema*” is the first Hebrew word in Deuteronomy 6:4 translated “Hear.” There would be prayers recited with the *Shema*, although the *Shema* was considered a confession of faith more than a prayer.¹⁴ Certain formula prayers were offered rather than extemporaneous prayers. The whole congregation did not say the prayer, but rather the one assigned to pray. This prayer leader would typically stand in front of the chest of scrolls while pronouncing the prayers. The congregation would answer the prayers with “amen.” Schurer writes that the prayers were typically offered while standing and facing Jerusalem. This is consistent with what we read in the New Testament.¹⁵

Following prayers, the scripture readings would occur. Two parts of the Old Testament were read, one section from the Law (*Torah*)¹⁶ and a portion from the prophets. The Law section was rather large so that the entire Law would get covered every three years. The prophet section was simply a paragraph and was typically chosen by the reader. The reader of the scripture would stand while reading.¹⁷ We also see this in the New

¹³ Schurer, Div. II, Vol II at 54. The Jewish Philosopher and historian Philo (born around 20 B.C.) wrote of the synagogue services as focused on teaching the law. In his *Hypothetica* (7:12ff), Philo wrote of the Sabbath assemblies as “sitting together in a respectful and orderly manner [to] hear the laws read so that none should be ignorant of them.” Philo, (Loeb 2001) Vol IX at 433.

¹⁴ Schurer at 77-78.

¹⁵ Mt 6:5, “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues.” Standing in prayer was not only in the synagogue. Jesus also spoke of others standing while praying. See, Mk 11:25, “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone...” Lk 18:11, “The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus...”

¹⁶ These were scrolls of what we consider the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

¹⁷ Schurer at 79-81.

Testament (Lk 4:16 speaks of Jesus going to synagogue on the Sabbath stating “he stood up to read” choosing to read from Isaiah 61:1-2, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor...”).

After the reading, an “edifying lecture or sermon”¹⁸ was given in explanation of the scripture read. The role of teaching, like that of the readings and the praying were open to qualified members of each congregation. The ruler of each synagogue typically gave the assignments.¹⁹

The service was closed with a benediction or blessing which was announced upon the congregation with hands raised to shoulder height. The congregation responded with “Amen!” and the service was finished.²⁰

PAUL AT SYNAGOGUE

We now return to the story of Paul and Barnabas at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch found in Acts 13.

In verse 14, we read that Paul and Barnabas “came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.” Which seats they took, we do not know.

We are then told “after the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, ‘Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.’” (Acts 15:15) While Luke does not tell us what the readings were, many scholars note that the words Paul uses in his sermon echo the words from passages that are conjectured to be the texts. A number think that the Law reading was likely Deuteronomy 1 (where Moses recounts the Israelites refusal to enter the Holy Land) or Deuteronomy 4:25-46 (where Moses recounts God’s faithfulness and power as the only true God).

Paul accepts the offer and stands to speak. Paul addresses both the Jews in attendance and the Greeks who were there. “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen” (Acts 13:16). Paul then begins discussing God’s

¹⁸ *Ibid.* at 82

¹⁹ *Ibid.* at 65, 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.* at 82.

faithfulness in making the Jews great while in Egypt and then redeeming them from that captivity. God “put up with”²¹ the Jews for 40 years in the wilderness before giving them their inheritance. Paul then recounts God’s provisions of judges, prophets, and kings. Paul adds that with King David, God promised a Savior through David’s offspring. Paul explains that Jesus was this promised Savior. John the Baptist came before Jesus proclaiming a baptism of repentance while noting that one was coming “the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie” (Acts 13:25).

Paul then explains that the rulers in Jerusalem failed to understand the Prophets and the Law and condemned Jesus the Savior. The irony, as Paul explained, was that by attempting to dispel any role Jesus could have among the people as their Messiah, the rulers actually fulfilled the prophecies and brought about Jesus’ necessary death. Paul explained that although Jesus was executed and buried, God raised him from the dead. There were many witnesses to the resurrected Lord, and Paul and Barnabas came to Pisidian Antioch to bring the good news. Paul then cites several Psalms as texts to support the resurrection events.

Paul explains that even the great King David’s body was destroyed after death, yet the body of Christ never faced “corruption.” In Jesus, Paul explained, was a forgiveness of sins for people. This, Paul said, was the work Habakkuk spoke of when he prophesied, “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” (Acts 13:41; Hab. 1:5).

After the synagogue meeting, many came to Paul and Barnabas asking them to stay around and return to speak more on this subject the following Sabbath. Paul and Barnabas do, but for that story, you must return for our next class!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. God prepares the mission field. Consider the way God had ensured the Jewish presence in Pisidian Antioch several hundred years before Paul, giving them both time and money to prepare the place for Paul to preach the gospel. God prepares the fields for harvest. Then, God sends us, the laborers, into the field for harvest. “I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor,” Jesus said in John 4:37. In like manner, Jesus calls us to “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2).

²¹ Acts 13:18.

2. The gospel story and the history of the church are based on real events that happened in the everyday lives of real people. God does that. He moves in our lives to give us what we need. I do not want to detract from the gift that is above all others, namely eternal life through the sacrifice of Christ. But I want us to see that God is also working in our lives here, today. He gives us eternal life, but he gives so much more. It is God who gives us “daily bread” (Mt 6:11). He has numbered the hairs on our head (Mt 10:30). “Every good and perfect gift is from above” (Jn 10:10). May we believe and see the hand of God in our world and in our lives.

3. Pray for our missionaries Danny and Vanessa Beams who serve in Bolivia. Danny works on drilling water wells for clean drinking water. Vanessa ministers in an orphanage and a crisis pregnancy center. They have three children for whom we should also pray: Luciana, Nathaniel, and Isaiah.