

THE FIRST MISSIONARY REPORT

Acts 13:4-12

Acts 13:1-12

It is a common expectation of missionaries that once they are "on the field" (to use some missionary nomenclature) they will begin sending back reports to their supporters. And this is as things should be. After all, just as in every other area of life, people want to know what they are getting for their money.

One would hope that every missionary that goes out is a stalwart Christian, a great defender of the faith, a hard-working evangelist motivated by little other than seeing people come to know Christ and be changed by him. But not every missionary is so good. *Sloth, Lust* and *Vice* can all raise their ugly heads on the mission field just as they can back home. And sometimes, due to the very independent and isolated nature of their work, the mission field can become Satan's playground.

And so, here we see right from the beginning – with this, the very first recorded sending out of a missionary by the church – we see how the missionaries were sent out not alone, but as a team. And why a team? So that there might be

- 1) Support, both physical, spiritual and emotional, and that there might be
- 2) Accountability.

For from the beginning of mankind, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone." In that first case, God made the man a helpmate...a wife. But be it a wife, or a co-worker, every mission organization in the world knows that it is best to never send out a missionary all alone.

Here and there, in the history of the church, we can run across one of these "loner" type missionaries that **did a great work for God**. But that is the **exception** more than it is the rule. And so we always consider it better to send out a couple, than a single. But be it a couple or a single, they need to be part of a group...a team...for support and accountability.

So, they go out, they reach the field, and they start sending back reports. In ancient times – such as what we read of here in Acts 13 – an actual written

report may have been a long time in sending or receiving. Today, with email, messaging, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter one can, if one really wants to know, have almost an instantaneous report. Almost instantly we can see where the missionary is now living, who is around him or her, or even what they had for supper. This is good as it helps those back home know how to pray.

Many of you have been on short-term mission trips. I also have gone on many such trips. To me the greatest value in these trips is when they are **to a place where we already have a missionary**. Then I can **see with my own eyes** what is going on. The emails and photos, and Facebook posts may have given me **SOME** sense of what the work in Alaska (for example) is like. But to actually be there, to meet the people, to sleep in the village or sit with the village chief...well, that fills in a lot of the blanks.

So if **you** would like to visit the Hoeyes in Alaska, Mary Raver in Japan, or maybe the Rosemans, the Grahams, or see the work of the Independent Church in India first hand, **let's get you over there!** It could change your life!

So here in Acts 13 we have the very first Christian missionary report...

Now it says that Barnabas and Saul made their way to the island of Cyprus. This would be west of Israel and south of Asia Minor or what is today called Turkey. Cyprus is a large island of some 3,100 square miles. What the population may have been back when Barnabas and Saul set foot on the island I do not know, but today **over a million people** live there **and over 75% of those people call themselves Christians**.

But that certainly wasn't the case back here in Acts chapter 13. Now way back in Acts chapter 4, where we first learn of Barnabas...(let's turn to it)...

Acts 4:34-37

So we here learn of Barnabas' generous character. But almost incidental to the description of what happened is the comment that **Barnabas was from Cyprus**.

So when we read here that following the church's sending Barnabas and Saul out of their missionary endeavor, it should not surprise us to learn that their first stop was Cyprus.

Barnabas, at least at this point, was the leader of this group that included Saul and John Mark. And one can imagine him carrying a bit of weight. He had served as Saul's discipler and mentor. And so when the question came up, "So, where should we go?" Barnabas apparently said, "Let's head to my home turf." And so they did.

Missionaries, like everyone, have their favorites. On the field, one may be routing for the Eagles and another routing for the Steelers. We all have our favorites. And the same goes for fields of ministry. When I was in Romania and then the Ukraine, I found myself thinking, "I could see coming **here** as a missionary." But when I was in Uganda, I never had that feeling...not even for a second.

They Hoeys are heading to Alaska. That makes sense as Steve, for about as long as I have known him, has been talking about Alaska. There is a tremendous beauty in Alaska...a masculine sort of beauty. Good for you Steve, and good for you, Renee, to finally give in to your husband's desire!

Mary Raver is in Japan. I've never been to Japan.

And how well I recall a student from Lancaster Bible College who while at LBC took a short term trip to Papua New Guinea, to live among some of the most remote people on earth...people who only a few years earlier had finally given up cannibalism. He loved it. His name was Tom Covington. Some of you may know him. The point being: we all have different interests.

So Barnabas says, "Let's go to my homeland...let's go to Cyprus." And so they did.

Now the text makes it clear that **they started by going to the synagogue.**

If you have a Bible, please note with me a few passages...

13:13-14

14:1

17:1-2

17:10

18:1 and 4

By now I am sure you see the pattern...what was described back in Acts 17:2 as Paul's "custom"...always going first to the synagogue.

Barnabas and Saul were both Jews. As noted two weeks ago they were very cosmopolitan, having been around the Roman world pretty much their entire lives. And Saul, as we also noted two Sundays ago, was a Roman citizen. But they were **first and foremost Jews**.

And being Jews they started with those who were already well over half-way to embracing Christ: people who believed in one God, who believed that one God revealed himself in holy scripture, and who believed that that One God was one day going to send a redeemer for Israel and maybe for all mankind. The bottom line is that these people had the Old Testament scriptures, and it is in what we call the Old Testament that one can learn of Jesus.

So, just as Jesus in Luke 24 revealed himself from the law, the prophets and the writings, Saul and Barnabas began to do the same in the synagogue, among those who thought like them.

And this is good advice to any modern missionary: **start with those who are the closest in thinking to you.**

I have always thought that missionaries to **Muslims** actually have **a lot to start off with**, as the Koran is so steeped in the Old Testament scriptures, and even to some extent in the gospels as well. Muslims and Christians may be at great odds regarding the person of Jesus Christ and his finished work on the cross, but you and I are a whole lot closer to the most orthodox and even radical of Muslims than we are to any secular humanist or atheist.

Muslims pray; we pray

Muslims believe in one God; we believe in one God

Muslims believe in divine revelation; we believe in
divine revelation

Muslims believe in the judgment of God; so do we.

So you start with those that you are already the closest to...and then branch out from there.

But following their stop at the synagogues, this section of Acts 13 goes on to deal with two who were **not so close** to Barnabas and Saul:

1. A secular Gentile politician named Sergius Paulus, and
2. A heretic fellow Jew, who was also a magician and a false prophet

A few years ago I read the book The River Congo by Peter Forbath. It was a VERY GOOD read, dealing with efforts made back in the late 19th century to discover the headwaters of the Congo River in central Africa. The book gives a good narrative of the development of slavery that began centuries earlier with the Portuguese. It later covers the missionary efforts of the Christian missionary Dr. David Livingston, and still later the exploration work of Henry Morton Stanley, the famed journalist who having been sent out by the New York Herald in 1871 in an effort to find Dr. Livingston uttered his famed line, "Dr. Livingston I presume," upon finding Livingston in eastern Africa.

Anyway, a good read. But one of the things that came out of the book is how **missionary efforts in Africa were GREATLY HURT by the earlier SLAVE WORK of white Europeans** centuries earlier. Those earlier Europeans were truly "white devils," and because of their nefarious labors they made it difficult for some truly good white Christian men and women to gain a hearing.

Well, here in Acts 13 you have a potential witness to this "proconsul" political leader on the island of Cyprus **being injured** because this politician has as his right hand man a Jew of a very different sort than Barnabas or Saul.

And isn't that just how Satan works?

Ruth and I recently have come in contact with a man who was raised in a Christian home, came to Christ at an early age, got involved in a local church, married a Christian girl, was busy

establishing a Christian home and business when...of all things...as far as we can get the story, the pastor of the church ran off with his wife. The net effect of it all is that this fellow has been so hurt by it all (he is now divorced) that he hasn't set foot in a church in YEARS.

Was his problem Christ? No

Was his problem the gospel? No

So what has been his problem? A leader of a church who was and is a no-good, low-down, slimeball, who called himself a pastor.

That's how Satan works: corrupt what is good by sending in the counterfeit. That's his way.

And so while, at his invitation, Barnabas and Saul were explaining the glories of our Savior, this counterfeit Jew (who ironically even has the name Jesus as part of his name: Bar Jesus, Son of Jesus!) was messing things up.

They take it for awhile but finally Saul says...

verses 9-11

Oh man, it makes sense that it would be Saul (and not Barnabas) who would speak this way to this fellow. Please turn with me, quickly, back to Acts chapter 9, where we read of Saul's conversion...

Acts 9:3-8

Later, in Acts chapter 22:11, while Paul is recounting the story of his conversion to the Jewish people, he says that the result of his blindness was that he was "led by the hand."

So Saul, later called Paul, who was blinded so that he had to be "**led by the hand**" here tears into Bar-Jesus and says, "And you are going to have the same thing happen to you that happened to me!"

And sure enough, exactly that is what took place.

Seeing that – seeing that kind of boldness and power – convinced Sergius Paulus that there was truly something to the gospel message of Barnabas and Saul. And with that he was converted.

That makes for a pretty good first missionary report I would say. Given that some missionaries spend YEARS before seeing even a single convert, that makes for a pretty good report. Praise God.

Now one last point before we move on/close...

It's just 2 chapters back...back to Acts 11, right near the end...

Acts 11:27-30

A global famine was coming...bad times...difficult times. And what was the church doing as these hard times begin hitting? They were sending out missionaries! Do you see this?

And here we are today: global pandemic...bad times...difficult times. And what are we doing? Sending out missionaries.

Because the truth is there are ALWAYS hard times (here or there)...There are ALWAYS reasons to hunker down, to take shelter, to seek our safety. But praise God, the church in Antioch saw beyond the hard times to see the lost condition of humanity. And while in the 1st century, I'm sure there was a great need for BREAD. What was needed even more was the BREAD OF LIFE that is found in JESUS CHRIST!

And today, while people all over the world are desperately seeking SAFETY from a virus, what is needed even more is the ETERNAL SAFETY that is found in JESUS CHRIST!

So the Hoeyes go out!

They have put up their house for sale;

They have packed up their goods;

And this week they head out!

And we get to SEND THEM AWAY!