

Acts 12: 24

24 But the Word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.
25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking along with them John, who was also called Mark.

The following ad once appeared in a London newspaper in 1909:
"Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful."

The ad was signed by Sir Ernest Shackleton who was an Antarctic explorer. Amazingly, the ad drew thousands of respondents, eager to sacrifice everything for the prospect of meaningful adventure.

How many of you would have signed up?

Today we come to the 13th chapter of Acts where Paul begins the first of his three adventures commonly called the missionary journeys. These journeys are amazing and were certainly filled with adventure but adventure was not why these men signed up to go.

Just a few amazing facts:

- 1st Journey – 1,235 miles; 2nd Journey – 2,703 miles; 3rd Journey – 2,515 miles. Total – 6,453 miles. That is further than Washington, DC to LA to Miami, FL and back to Washington.
- Companions included: Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Timothy (2nd & 3rd), Luke (2nd & 3rd), Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus, and Trophimus.
- All 3 Journeys were commissioned from the Antioch Church

When you consider that these journeys occurred 2000 years ago and the difficulty of travel at that time, it must have taken considerable courage and great faith to have signed up to go with Paul.

Why do you think they were willing to risk their lives to travel with Paul on these journeys?

Verse 1 of chapter 13 gives us a clue.

1 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Until chapter 13, the central character in the Book of Acts was Peter. However, now Luke turns all the attention to Paul. The switch in the order from the beginning to the end is significant because what Luke is telling us is that Paul is taking on the leadership responsibility of the church going forward.

Verse 1 says that in the church at Antioch there were both prophets and teachers. What is the difference between a prophet and a teacher?

Peter Wagner defines prophets and teachers this way:

The gift of prophecy is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to receive and communicate an immediate message of God to His people through a divinely anointed utterance.

The gift of teaching is the special ability that God gives to certain members of the Body of Christ to communicate information relevant to the health and ministry of the Body and its members in such a way that others will learn.

The Greek word for prophet can simply mean an inspired speaker while the word for teacher means an instructor or professor.

Luke says that the church in Antioch had five good teachers and prophets. God was blessing this church in a big way.

Verse 2 says that the church was worshipping and fasting.

Fasting means to abstain from food for the purpose of seeking God's will in a particular area.

Why would people in this vibrant church be fasting?

Luke doesn't tell us the specific reason they were fasting, he just says they were fasting. We can assume that they were asking for God's will for the church and His direction.

What we do know is that while the church was worshipping and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke to them. He gave them guidance into what God's will or calling was for Saul and Barnabas.

Look at verse 3.

3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

God's will was for Saul and Barnabas to be missionaries. God's will was for them to travel the world preaching the gospel to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

This was something that was evident to the whole church and not just to Saul and Barnabas. And so the church fasted and prayed some more and then they had a laying on of hands ceremony to set them apart for the purpose to which God had called them.

There are several questions here that we can ask. First, what does the world believe about missionary work?

Why does the world believe that it isn't right for Christians to go into other cultures and tell the people of that culture that their way of worship is wrong?

What is the difference between Christians wanting to spread the gospel and the US wanting to spread democracy?

Another question is how can we know God's will for our lives?

Does God have one perfect plan for each person's life?

I believe that God indeed has a purpose for each of our lives. We are commanded by Jesus to go into all the world and preach the gospel. It is God's will for you to go into the world and share Christ with the lost. The Bible says we are become conformed to the image of God's Son. It is God's will that we become Christ like.

I also believe He has a special calling for each of us.

When I was 12 years old, a Sunday School teacher came to my house one Sunday afternoon. After dinner, my family went into the family room and the man opened his Bible and shared the gospel with us. That day, my father, my mother, my sister, my brother and I all accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Savior.

Our lives changed dramatically. Soon after, my mother informed me that she had heard God's calling for me to become a pastor.

So whenever anyone asked me what I was going to be when I grew up she would quickly answered, "Oh, John is going to study for the ministry."

The only problem is that I never heard the calling. When I was in college, I read a book by Garry Friesen called, Decision Making and the Will of God. Friesen was a Dallas Theological Seminary graduate and what he wrote was shocking to the Evangelical Church. In the book, Friesen says that God does not have one perfect plan for each person's life. Instead, God has one set of morale values and principles and anything you choose to do within that scope is within God's will for your life.

What do you think?

In the case of the apostle Paul, God clearly had a plan for his life. Verse 2 says, "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

What has God called you to do? Dr. Henry Blackaby wrote that if you a plumber, then God has called you to be a missionary plumber. And if you are a doctor, then called has called you to be a missionary doctor. Whatever your profession, God has called each of us to be missionaries while we do the job we have.

Turn to your neighbor and them your profession using the phase, “I am a missionary _____.”

When God calls you to a ministry, He also equips you for the assignment. And when you discover the calling that God has for your life, you will find peace and fulfillment in your life that you have never felt before.

Barnabas and Saul were among the prophets and teachers in the local church in Antioch. Then God moved them to the mission field. God may use you in a certain way for a number of years and then move you to a different area for a few more years. God is sovereign and does what He sees is best.

So the first Missionary Journey begins. Look at verse 4.

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.

Notice that Paul and Barnabas began their missionary work by preaching in the synagogues to the Jews. Why did they start with the Jews when Paul’s calling was to preach to the Gentiles?

During that time, the Jewish scribes kept records of current events. Many people dismiss Paul’s missionary journeys as an impossibility because of the difficulties associated with travel at that time. For the past 1000 years or so, famous scholars have written that it would have been impossible for Paul to have traveled more than 6,000 miles given all of the problems and that Luke must have inaccurately recorded the events we are reading here in the Book of Acts.

As recently as 1902 Weisaker (who was considered to be one of the finest historian scholars of his time) believed that the historical value of Acts 'shrinks until it reaches a vanishing point.' Another historical scholar named Tubingen wrote "These books (that is the Books of the Bible written by Luke) are without value..."

Norval Geldenhuys is the worlds recognized scholar on Luke and his writings. Here is what he has written, "Toward the end of last century, and during the first part of the present century, the researches of men like Ramsey, Harnak, and Hawkins, brought to light masses of surprising facts that confirm the historical accuracy of the statements by Luke, which were formerly condemned as fictitious."

"In consequence, a complete changeover has been brought about in (secular) historian's opinions regarding the historical trustworthiness of Luke. After doing research work for many years in the regions described by Luke, Ramsey stated unambiguously that 'Luke's writing is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness.'"

"Whenever modern scholarship has been able to check up on the accuracy of Luke, the judgment has been unanimous, he is one of the finest and ablest historians in the ancient world."

What archeologists have found when they uncover the ancient cities mentioned in Acts, is consistent with what Luke wrote. The records from the Jewish scribes have never contradicted the record we are studying in the book of Acts.

We will continue our study of Paul's Missionary Journey next week. It is exciting and I hope you will join us.