



Never Been to Spain

The Journals & Journeys of Paul

"To Iconium... and Beyond!"

Paul's first missionary journey was *not* his first missionary journey.

Paul and Barnabas are singled-out by the Holy Spirit to take the Gospel to certain Gentile regions. We call their two-year trip Paul's first missionary journey. But, as we've seen, Paul had been busy for at least ten years taking the Gospel to Damascus, Arabia, Jerusalem, Syria and Cilicia.

He'd been a year in Antioch, with Barnabas, teaching. At a meeting God spoke to the church, probably through a word of prophecy, to send out Paul and Barnabas.

The journey began from Seleucia, the seaport of Antioch (Acts 13:1-4). There were two cities named Antioch - Antioch of Syria, their starting point, and one in Turkey that they visited on this trip. Paul, Barnabas, and John-Mark sailed across to Cyprus, some 80 miles to the south-west.

After landing at Salamis and proclaiming the Word of God in the synagogues (Acts 13:5) they traveled along the entire southern coast of the island of Cyprus until they reached Paphos (Acts 13:6).

There Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul, was converted after Paul rebuked the evil sorcerer Elymas (Acts 13:6-12). It was quite a confrontation.

Act 13:9 Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him

Act 13:10 and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?"

Act 13:11 And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

Act 13:12 Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

From Paphos they then sailed north up to the Asian mainland in what is today Turkey. They traveled the short distance up the river Cestrus to Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13).

Young John-Mark went home. Luke called it a departing. Later in the Book of Acts Paul considered it a desertion. When Barnabas wanted to take John-Mark along with them on a subsequent mission's trip, Paul said "No way!" and the two split company and went in opposite directions.

Paul certainly cared about John-Mark; but he had a 'big-picture' mentality that put priority on the mission.

Barnabas certainly cared about the bigger mission; but he had a sensitivity to individuals that superseded the mission.

Who was right?

Neither! There are all kinds of leaders with their various styles. The exhortation here is, Don't be a John-Mark! There is no doubt that he flaked-out on his commitment.

Paul and Barnabas continued inland for about 100 miles up to Pisidian Antioch. Many were converted by Paul when he made his first recorded address there (Acts 13:16-51). Not long afterward however, they encountered persecution from certain people who refused to hear the Gospel. After being expelled from the region, "they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium" (Acts 13:51).

After traveling southeast to Iconium they again made many converts among Jews and Gentiles (Acts 14:1) but they were again persecuted. This time they would have been killed (Acts 14:5) if they hadn't discovered the plot and fled quickly from the city (Acts 14:6).

From there they continued southward to Lystra where they again made converts (Acts 14:8). Unfortunately the people of the city, who were accustomed to idolatry, went too far in their esteem for Paul and Barnabas, who they proclaimed as "gods." (Acts 14:11-18). Paul and Barnabas quickly tried to explain that they were merely men sent to teach but it didn't go over very well with a number of the people.

Some of the persecutors from Antioch and Iconium had followed them and incited the crowd. Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. "But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe." (Acts 14:20).

After preaching the good news in Derbe they then returned back along their entire route, through Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, "appointing elders for them in each church" (Acts 14:23). They then continued southward through the regions of Pisidia and Pamphylia until they arrived at the seaport of Attalia (Acts 14:24-25). From there they boarded a ship and sailed back home to Antioch where they had began two years before.

"On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." (Acts 14:27).

It was an amazing, eventful, fruitful two years of ministry. I want to focus our attention on how it all started.

Act 13:1 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Act 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Act 13:3 Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.

Church is prominent in these verses and, indeed, throughout all the trip.

- They were sent out by the church at Antioch.
- They established churches in every city, appointing leaders in them.
- Returning to Antioch they gathered together with the church.

Christians need to be attached to a local church. Churches have leadership; they have laity. At their gatherings the Holy Spirit prompts believers to exercise their gifts so that all the church can be built-up. They are centers of learning and of loving.

The leaders in Antioch were "prophets and teachers." We learn in our reading of the New Testament, especially in the Book of Ephesians, that the apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church which is Jesus Christ. Apostles and prophets gave way to pastor-teachers and evangelists.

Prophets, no; prophecy, yes. There is no office in the church of 'prophet,' but there remains for the church the gift of prophecy.

Five guys met together during a time of fasting for prayer. It was described as "minister[ing] to The Lord." I'm not sure if that means it was a regular service of the church or a special event or a board meeting. I do know that there was opportunity for one of them to prophesy and through him God the Holy Spirit revealed a plan that was on His heart.

Did something like this happen at every meeting? Probably not. But they did have a place for it to happen. God was invited to speak to them.

Sooner or later you need to decide if you are a cessationist or not. By 'cessationist' I mean a person who believes certain of the Holy Spirit's gifts are no longer available to Christians and thus should no longer be active in the church today. The gifts which are said to have ceased are prophecy, tongues and the interpretation of tongues, miracles, healings, the word of knowledge, and the word of wisdom.

To be fair, some whom I would consider cessationists say there is a gift of prophecy but they mean by that it is a person speaking forth the written word of God. Likewise the word of knowledge or the word of wisdom is human knowledge and wisdom helped by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In their view the Holy Spirit lives in you only to use your own natural abilities and intellect to understand the Bible and then methodically apply its principles. You become sort of a super-human.

Shouldn't God's strength be on display in our weakness? Is ministry accomplished by my strategy or by God's strengthening?

You might not think you are a cessationist but you might be a practicing one. You say you believe in all these gifts, that they are available and active, but if you always fall back on human intellect, human wisdom, human planning, what makes you any different from a cessationist?

I'm partially influenced tonight by a letter Pastor Chuck Smith sent out to all the Calvary pastors this week. In it he wrote,

The success of Calvary Chapel can only be contributed to the fact that it was begun in the Spirit. When J. Edwin Orr, an expert in the study of the history of revivals in the church, heard about Calvary Chapel, he came down to study this revival and concluded, "It was the Spirit of God, working through the Word of God, transforming the lives of the people of God."

Pastor Chuck went on to say, "Back then, we were seeking to be led and controlled by the Spirit of God; today, it seems to me that we are now seeking to be led by gifted men to share their ideas of church growth."

God was able, through the church and its gifted members meeting together, to direct the movements of Paul and Barnabas. If a gifted, brilliant man like Paul needed to be led by the Spirit, don't I need to be even more?

Here's another perspective. On this two year trip Paul and Barnabas were confronted by the occult. They had to suffer through a desertion. They were persecuted - stoned even and left for dead.

I don't know about you but I'd want to be sure God sent me. I wouldn't want to wonder as the stones were pelting my body if this was my idea, my plan, that I had formed in my own heart then prayed about for a few minutes. I wouldn't want to doubt that I was in the wrong place at the wrong time when staring down a person dabbling with the occult.

We must continue in the Spirit - to be led by the Spirit.

If we are to be led by the Spirit, both individually and corporately, we need to be a vital part of a local church and have times of ministering to The Lord - times of worship in which He is invited to speak through each of us to all of us.

Every meeting won't be like that; every meeting shouldn't be like that.

But this meeting is and we want to hear from Him, to receive His leading.