

TWO MISSIONARIES SENT TO THE GENTILES

BIBLE TEXT : Acts 11:27-30; 12:24, 25; 13:1-12.

LESSON 324 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous" (I Peter 3:8).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Acts 11:27-30

²⁷ And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

²⁸ And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.

²⁹ Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

³⁰ Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 12:24-25

²⁴ But the word of God grew and multiplied.

²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled *their* ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

Acts 13:1-12

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

² As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

³ And when they had fasted and

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

A Great City

The city of Antioch was a great and wealthy city, but also very wicked. Most of the people there worshiped idols instead of worshiping God. Still, in this city God saw people who would be saved if they knew the Gospel, so he sent Paul and Barnabas to preach to them. In 42 A.D. a church was established there, and the followers of Jesus were first known as Christians in the city of Antioch.

The church of Antioch prospered spiritually, and many Gentiles came to worship the true God, and to believe that Jesus was the Son of God. They not only were saved, but were also sanctified and received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. From this centre the Apostles worked to send the Gospel into the Roman world.

A Dearth Prophesied

Prophets from Jerusalem came to visit the Antioch church, and among them was one who foretold that a famine would come upon the world. This ability to see what was going to happen was God-given, and the Christians believed the report and began to prepare for the hard times ahead. But the Christians in Jerusalem did not have anything to save. They had suffered great persecution because of their faith in Jesus, and all their living had been taken away from many of them. The Gentile Christians in Antioch were in a better position, and immediately showed their love for their less fortunate friends by sending relief to them.

The gifts from the Antioch church must have helped to bring about a closer feeling of fellowship between the Gentile congregation and the Jewish congregation. Barnabas and Paul were chosen to carry the gifts back to Jerusalem.

Forsaking Wealth and Power

Among the leaders of the Antioch church, with Paul and Barnabas, was the foster brother of Herod, the ruler who had been so very cruel to the Christians. Manaen was willing, like Moses, to forsake the court with all its wealth and power, choosing rather to suffer the affliction and persecution, which Christians at that time had to suffer, than to "enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." God had blessed Manaen, and made him strong in the work of the Lord. No doubt the presence, in the church, of this man who had once had influence in the world gave others courage to come to the church.

The Holy Ghost's Words

As these leaders fasted and prayed that the work of God might go forward to many more people, the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." (The Apostle Paul had up to this time still been called Saul.) It was time now to do what they had already been called to do. At the time of Saul's conversion, Ananias had been sent to

prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away.

⁴ So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.

⁵ And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to *their* minister.

⁶ And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name *was* Barjesus:

⁷ Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

⁹ Then Saul, (who also *is called* Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,

¹⁰ And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, *thou* child of the devil, *thou* enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?

¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord *is* upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.

¹² Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

him by God to tell him that he was a chosen vessel to preach to the Gentiles about Jesus. It seems that Barnabas had also been told ahead of time that he was to be sent to the Gentiles.

The call to a successful ministry or missionary work must come from Heaven. At this time the Holy Ghost proved Himself equal with God in speaking with authority to these men to do the work of the Lord. He also shows His personality when the text states that He spoke.

The work that Paul and Barnabas had been doing at Antioch was among Gentiles, but now their field was widening. There were many more Gentiles in the country round about who needed to know about Jesus. Paul and Barnabas had stayed with the work they were going until they were told to move ahead. God had blessed their ministry, and many souls had been saved. But now the Holy Ghost gave the instructions to go.

The elders of the Antioch church gathered in prayer with Paul and Barnabas, and laid their hands on them in ordination for the work they had to do. The church supported the work of these missionaries with their prayers and authority, but the call first had come from Heaven. Jesus said: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16).

Sailing to Cyprus

The call of the Holy Spirit was sending them across the sea. With Paul and Barnabas went a young minister named John Mark. These three missionaries went a long way from home, clear to the island of Cyprus.

Although this was a missionary journey to preach to the Gentiles, the first meetings were always held in a Jewish synagogue. The Jews still felt that they were a little more favoured of God, so they were given the first opportunity to accept the teachings about Jesus. If they received it, they were soon enjoying Christian fellowship with the saved Gentiles; but if they refused it, they had no reason to complain. They had been given every opportunity.

Meeting with a Fortune-teller

In the journeyings of the missionaries on Cyprus, they met a sorcerer, or fortune-teller. The people were very superstitious on that island, and they would listen to him when he told his stories. Even the Roman ruler of the island paid attention to his supernatural work, which he did by the power of Satan. But when the ruler, whose name was Sergius Paulus, heard about Paul and Barnabas, he became very much interested. His heart was honest. He had listened to the sorcerer only because he did not know any better. When he learned that the missionaries had the Word of God and were preaching the truth, he wanted to hear them.

Elymas, the sorcerer, however, did not want to lose his influential friend. He knew that there was no agreement between his teachings, which were of the devil, and those of Paul and Barnabas. If Sergius Paulus should become a Christian, their friendship would end. The sorcerer began to fight the preaching of the truth.

Whenever the Word of God is preached in the Spirit, Satan tries to hinder the listeners. If a person wants to become a Christian, there is usually someone around who will say, "You will never have any more fun if you become a Christian," or Satan will whisper, "You know you do not want to make those restitution."

"You will never be able to live a Christian life, even if you start."
"The Christian life is a hard life."

These are only lies of the devil. No one is as happy as the Christian. Jesus told His followers, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). Isaiah the Prophet also said: "Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (Isaiah 12:3).

A Holy Gospel

The ministry of Elymas can be compared to that of false religions, which practise many fanatical rites. Some people can work themselves into frenzy by the rhythm of their music or the clapping of their hands, and claim that it is the Spirit of God. Some people perform what they call a holy dance, and go into an ecstasy or trance. There is much feeling and emotion that is not the Spirit of God.

The Gospel that Paul and Barnabas preached was one of holy living. Their meetings were carried on in an orderly manner. The Apostle Paul tells us: "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (I Corinthians 14:33).

Paul was not afraid to tell Elymas that he was a child of the devil. The Holy Ghost was on Paul, and the words he spoke came to pass. He pronounced judgment upon Elymas -- that he should be blind for a period of time -- and it happened right away. Judgment may not always strike that soon, but if a sinner does not repent, his judgment is sure to come eventually.

When Sergius Paulus saw how God worked through Paul, and heard the doctrine, which Paul preached, he believed on Jesus. The doctrine was new to him. Perhaps he had never even heard of Jesus before. But he recognised the truth when Paul, anointed by the Holy Ghost, preached.

Here was another man who was great in the world, humbling himself so that he could become the chosen of God. The Apostle Paul once said: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (I Corinthians 1:26). A woman of noble birth, who became a Christian, once said, "I thank God for the letter 'm.' I'm glad that he said, 'not many' instead of 'not any.'"

The preaching of Paul and Barnabas prospered, even though Satan tried to hinder; and many Gentile converts were won for the Kingdom of Heaven.

QUESTIONS

1. What year was the church at Antioch established?
2. Who were the first ministers?
3. What man of influence was saved there?
4. What great work was carried on from the Antioch church?
5. Who was the young man who went with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey?
6. Where did they go?
7. Whom did the missionaries meet on the island?
8. What important person was converted here?
9. What were Paul's instructions for conducting a religious service?