

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Acts 12:25-13:5 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the passage. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

ACTS 12:25-13:5 ESV

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark. 1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. 4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. 5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

STRUCTURE

- I. Barnabas and Saul faithfully complete their relief mission (12:25)
- II. Barnabas and Saul are faithfully sent by the diverse church in Antioch to reach diverse peoples (13:1-3)
 - a. Antioch's team of diverse gifts and cultures (13:1)
 - b. Antioch's piety and the Spirit's command (13:2)
 - c. Antioch's piety and obedience to the Spirit (13:3)
- III. Barnabas and Saul faithfully embark on their evangelistic mission (13:4-5)
 - a. The Holy Spirit sends them (13:4a)
 - b. They travel to Salamis and preach first to the Jews (13:4b-5).

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

From here forward, Luke shifts the focus from Peter and the Twelve to Saul/Paul and his teams. Symbolic of this shift, Luke begins identifying Saul (his Hebrew name) as Paul (his Greek name) in 13:9—and he never stops. Despite popular teaching, Paul's name did not change after conversion. He went by both. But we know him in history as Paul because his Gentile name corresponds to his role as the Apostle to the Gentiles (9:15; 22:21; 26:17-18; Gal. 2:9).

Luke has tracked the Spirit's movement toward Gentiles throughout Acts (1:8; 6:5; 8:26-40; 10:1-11:30), but this story marks the first Gentile church-planting church. Previously, Jerusalem had served as the hub for all surrounding missions; now, Antioch has assumed the same role, focusing especially on Gentiles.

Nevertheless, ties to Jews and Jerusalem remain. Luke mentions Jerusalem in 12:25 as the locale from which Saul and Barnabas return after their relief mission. When the Spirit sends Barnabas and Saul, they focus first on the Jews (13:5). Despite the increasing Gentile "flavor" of church life, it maintains Jewish roots and Jewish ties. The reason is not cultural but theological. God fulfills His covenant to Abraham by blessing the Jews, who in turn bless the world (Gen. 12:1-3; Acts 3:25-26; 13:46). Gentiles who forget their Jewish roots have grown arrogant (Rom. 11:18, 20, 25). Antioch maintains these links, yet without adopting Jewish culture and customs, which Christ freed us from (Acts 10:9-16; 11:5-10; 15:1-35; cf. Rom. 14:1-6; Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:16-17). As believers, we should feel grateful for Israel, knowing that we received the gospel through her. However, we need not adopt the customs of Judaism.

This section not only introduces a new section and a new half of the book focused on Gentile mission; it also links with what came before. The relief mission of Saul and Barnabas, completed in 12:25, began at 11:30 before Luke dropped the story off. In between the beginning and end of their journey, Luke sandwiches the story of Herod's persecution (12:1-24). It seems that Luke wants us to contrast the way King Jesus cares for His citizens in famine (11:27-30; 12:25) with the way Herod does (12:20). Herod angrily neglects his people; Jesus provides for them

through prophetic warnings and generous gifts (11:27-30). Put differently, Jesus provides through His Spirit-filled church—a “Spirit” that Herod and his citizens sorely lacked.

Another link between Acts 11:30 and 12:25ff is the theme of faithfulness. Luke has emphasized this theme before, for instance with the lowly table-servers transforming into powerful preachers and miracle workers (Acts 6-8; more comments below). Now, Jesus observes the faithfulness of Barnabas and Saul to travel and care for the weak, and He gives them a promotion. For completing their financial mission, He now sends them on an evangelistic one. It will turn the world upside-down. O, the power of faithfulness in the little things! We have much to learn from this. Before we promote leaders and send missionaries, we should observe their faithfulness first.

Not only Saul and Barnabas, but the whole church in Antioch had been faithful. They faithfully sent funds to Jerusalem (11:30); they faithfully raised up leaders, no longer depending on outsiders (13:1); they faithfully worshiped, prayed, and fasted (13:2-3); they faithfully heard the Holy Spirit and obeyed Him in a hard sacrifice (13:3-4). Faithful churches care for the weak, seek God, listen to God, obey God, and send their best workers out into the harvest.

This Gentile harvest consists of diverse cultures, and Luke emphasizes diversity in this section. Two Africans (probably black men), one culturally Greek Jew, one culturally Jewish Jew, and a member of the aristocracy comprise the team in Antioch. By emphasizing diversity, Luke shows that healthy churches reach their community and raise up leaders from the harvest. Antioch formerly relied on traveling Jewish prophets and teachers (11:26-30); now they have prophets and teachers of their own (13:1). They came from the harvest. Healthy churches save the lost—and turn them into leaders.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

—The previous narrative about Herod ended in 12:25. Therefore, this begins a new section.

—This verse tees up the missionary expedition of Barnabas and Saul, which 13:1ff elaborates on. But that's not all the verse accomplishes. It also interlocks with 11:30, where we last observed Saul and Barnabas. See how 12:25 relates to 11:30: “And they did so [sent financial relief], sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.” This verse explains the beginning of their mission; 12:25 highlights its faithful completion.

—Why does Luke interlock these stories of financial relief via the hand of Saul and Barnabas, with Herod's tyranny in the middle?

- One reason is that it contrasts the way Jesus cares for His church with Herod's neglect of his citizens. Because “Herod was angry with the people of Tyre and Sidon” (12:20), they had to ask the violent dictator for “peace”—lest they go hungry (12:21). In other words, Herod punished people who got on his bad side by depriving them of basic sustenance. These were not enemies; they were his own citizens. Herod was cruel to his own people.
- How differently Jesus treats citizens of His kingdom! First, He communicates by the Spirit that a famine will soon overtake the land (11:28). Then He dispatches faithful disciples to send financial relief from the generous church in Antioch (11:29-30). Jesus cares for His citizens, but Herod forces them to beg and flatter him just to eat (12:20-22).
- Notably, Jesus cares *for* His church *through* the church. He empowers a prophet to predict the famine, and then He moves through the generous response of the church in Antioch. Finally, He dispatches Saul and Barnabas to send the offering. Jesus cares for His citizens, but He does so through other Kingdom citizens.
- Two kingdoms coexist: the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. As citizens of God's kingdom, we simultaneously dwell in the kingdom of this world. Herod reigned over Tyre, Sidon—where people sought the king's help—but he also reigned over Judea, where Saul and Barnabas brought relief. The churches did not rely on Herod for survival—they couldn't—Herod wanted them dead. Placing their hope in King Jesus instead, the Spirit worked through them to provide for one another.
- In the same way, we must learn to submit to and honor our government leaders, but without placing our hope in them. When they issue decrees that contradict the King of Kings, we submit to the

authority of the Higher Jurisdiction. When they refuse to create an environment where citizens flourish, we look for Jesus to provide that care through His church. This includes church members caring for us as well as us caring for them. Herod reigns by neglecting his citizens; Jesus reigns by empowering His people to love one another. Healthy churches prevent over-reliance on government.

—"Barnabas and Saul": in last week's Study Guide, I discussed how Barnabas is mentioned first because he is the leader of the duo, but this shifts as Jesus promotes Saul. Barnabas humbly steps aside like Jonathan did for David and like John the Baptist did for Jesus. Humble leaders don't have to be the smartest person in the room. They are not threatened by more gifted people. Instead, they identify God's call on others, promote them, and step aside.

—"from Jerusalem": Antioch is beginning to stand on its own two legs as the central mission base for the church. Nevertheless, Luke still mentions "Jerusalem." The mission to Gentiles runs through Jerusalem. The Jewish roots of our gospel arise again later in the passage, at which point I will address them.

—"when they had completed their service":

- Faithfulness is a theme in Acts. Stephen and Philip were faithful table servers, so God made them miracle-workers and preachers. Saul and Barnabas faithfully went "on mission" to deliver funds, so God entrusts them to deliver something far more precious: His gospel to the ends of the earth. When we are faithful in the little things, God entrusts us with greater things.
- The theme of faithfulness will arise again later, but from a negative angle, when "John, whose other name was Mark" flakes out and Paul doesn't want to bring him on the next trip for that reason. We'll reserve that discussion for Acts 15.

1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

—"in the church at Antioch":

- The church that was borne of unnamed evangelists (11:20-21) now has expanded its leadership team.
- Wise churches disciple new leaders. Saul and Barnabas came from the outside, but the other leaders are new to the church plant. The multiethnic leadership team implies that it arose from the harvest.

—"prophets and teachers":

- What a beautiful combination of Word and Spirit! O, how the church would benefit from more blending of prophets and teachers.
- Prophets interpret spontaneous revelation; teachers interpret written revelation.
- If we have prophets but no teachers, we drift into heresy and foolish speculation. If we have teachers but no prophets, we drift into dry orthodoxy, void of power.
- Originally, Antioch had to import prophets to minister (11:27), but now they have established their own. The same was true of teachers (11:26).

—"Barnabas... Saul":

- We have already studied these characters significantly. But why is Barnabas listed first and Saul last? Barnabas was still the most prominent leader at this point. When Peter took the most prominent role among the apostles, Luke listed his name first too (1:13). Among the seven deacons, Stephen and Philip—the most prominent—come first (6:5).
- When Luke lists someone last, it does not connote prominence, but it does convey emphasis of some kind. In the list of disciples in the Upper Room, Luke follows it with mention of "the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." This emphasizes the role of women and Jesus' family in the early church.
- In the list of Acts 6, "Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch" is listed last. His status as "proselyte" suggests he was a Gentile. Luke is foreshadowing the expansion of the gospel to the ends of the earth.
- In the same way, Saul's mention at the end emphasizes his role in the Gentile mission. Barnabas begins in the prominent position, but Saul will be remembered throughout history as "the apostle to the Gentiles."

—"Simeon who was called Niger":

- Most scholars believe that Simeon was "Simon of Cyrene," who carried the cross of Christ (Luke 23:26). The one who carried Christ's cross apparently became a believer because his sons, Alexander and Rufus, became known to the church (Mark 15:21; maybe also Rom. 16:13).
- "Niger" means "black" or "dark" in Latin. This is not to be confused with the racial slur, which should never appear on the lips of anybody. Far from insulting someone, Luke is elevating the beauty of diversity in the church of Antioch.

—"Lucius of Cyrene":

- Throughout church history, "Lucius" has commonly been identified as Luke, the author of Acts. Modern scholars diverge from this view because of how Luke carefully keeps himself anonymous throughout the narrative. In my mind, even if Luke wanted to remain anonymous, mentioning his own name in a list of others does not blow his cover.
- I believe Luke was a Gentile. In Colossians 4:10 and 14, his name is included amongst a list of Gentiles, all of whom are set in contrast with Jewish believers, whom Paul calls "the circumcision" in 4:11.
- Being from Cyrene, North Africa, Lucius would have likely been a black man.
- If church history is correct, and I lean in that direction, then about 25% of our New Testament was probably written by a black man.

—"Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch":

- "lifelong friend" is rendered "brought up with" (NKJV, NIV, NASB), "close friend of" (CSB), and "foster brother" (RSV).
- It is the singular word, *syntrophos*. According to Vine's expository dictionary, "It has... been found in Hellenistic usage as a court term, signifying an intimate friend of a king."
- Manaen grew up with close ties to Herod the Tetrarch—so close that he would have been considered like a brother. To find him among the leadership in Antioch surprises us, especially on the heels of a different Herod (the nephew of Herod the Tetrarch—Herod Agrippa) murdering James and imprisoning Peter (Acts 12). Manaen must have sacrificed considerably to associate himself with this persecuted people.
- More importantly, King Jesus reveals His sovereignty over Herod's court. Not only does He strike down Herod Agrippa (12:23); He recruits Herod the tetrarch's confidante to join His team.
- Schnabel: "Manaen evidently belonged to a noble Jewish family with connections to Herod's court.... Since 'brought up' (*syntrophos*) was used as a title, Manaen, before his conversion, may have held an influential position at the court of Herod Antipas." (Herod Antipas was the same as Herod the Tetrarch.)

—Putting it all together, Barnabas and Saul were diaspora Jews, the former being from the isle of Cyprus and the latter from Tarsus. Barnabas was Hellenistic (culturally Greek), and Saul was both racially and culturally Jewish. Simeon and Lucius were probably black men from North Africa. Manaen grew up with a silver spoon, in and around Judea, where Herod reigned.

—Two issues stick out. First, they ministered as a team. Second, their team was diverse.

- On ministering as a team: this is the New Testament pattern, which goes back to Jesus, who appointed His disciples as apostles—*sent ones*—to go out before Him and prepare cities to receive Him (Matt. 10; Luke 9-10). The only person who didn't need a team was Jesus, yet He chose to work with one. In the Old Testament, we find more solo heroes: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Samuel, the judges, Elijah, David, etc. This is probably because God worked so significantly through family units. Heads of tribes led heads of smaller units, which led households to honor Yahweh. Under the New Covenant, "make disciples" replaces "be fruitful and multiply" as the primary commission. Instead of merely raising up our household to love the Lord, we work in teams to reach the harvest.
- On the diversity of the team: we find no indication that the church in Antioch was trying to meet a diversity quota. These are not token leaders. They are highly qualified and gifted men who rise naturally to leadership from the diverse culture of Antioch. The leadership of the church reflects the population they reached. The more we reach our city, the more we will look like it.

- Antioch made the highest levels of leadership accessible to all people. It was not a good ole boys club. Diversity requires strategic intentionality to remove blind spots, which keep “outsiders” on the outside, instead welcoming them in on equal footing.
- In the flow of the narrative, diversity highlights the beauty of the gospel. In Acts 10, Luke clarified that the gospel was not just a Jewish gospel, and in Acts 11, we learned that we don’t just have Jewish churches. The gospel is multi-color; therefore, so is the church.

—Schreiner: “Luke emphasizes this point [Antioch’s diversity] with details not usually provided: surnames, where they are from, or who they are friends with.”

2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

—“they”:

- Was it the church in Antioch or the leaders of verse 1 who worshiped the Lord with fasting? I have always taken it to be the leaders of verse 1 because they are in the immediate context. We can’t know with certainty.
- The important factor here is not which people “they” involved but rather that the word is plural. “they” agreed on what the Holy Spirit said. People should seek consensus about “the word of the Lord” for big moves like missions. If you sense God is calling you to missions, that’s great, but has anyone else confirmed that word for you? Did you decide this in a vacuum? The early church heard the Holy Spirit together.
- Hearing God is a team sport. Especially when it comes to major life decisions.

—If you want to hear from God, worship God and fast! This runs along the same lines as what Luke has repeatedly taught about prayer and prophecy. Worship, fasting, and prayer belong to the same family of spiritual disciplines. They open our spirits to hear God more. They reflect the heart of someone who draws near to God—the very kind of people God loves speaking to.

—I am reminded of Elisha requesting a harpist before prophesying: *“And Elisha said, “As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would neither look at you nor see you. But now bring me a musician.” And when the musician played, the hand of the LORD came upon him”* (2 Kings 3:14-15).

—Practically, it is much easier for me to hear God in an environment of worship than when I am out in the world.

—What about the role of fasting? Read Isaiah 58. When our fast is not a spiritual show (vv. 2-4) but rather accompanied by humility (v. 5) and holiness (vv. 6-7), God grants revelation, healing, and protection (v. 8), answered prayer and intimacy with God (58:9-10), guidance and joy (58:11), and effectiveness (v. 12).

—Some of my greatest encounters with God and revelations from Him have come during seasons of fasting. I try to fast one day a week, and I go on a few longer fasts each year. I spend the rest of the year building up caloric reserves in my belly 😊 Gotta plan ahead!

—We are not told how “the Holy Spirit said” this. Was it through a vision? Was it audible? It doesn’t matter because Luke doesn’t mention it. He merely wants us to know that the Holy Spirit initiated the missionary enterprise. Just as God spoke and created the world, the Holy Spirit spoke and reached the world—through missionaries. God initiates His work with His Word.

—Schnabel: “The fact that Luke relates the words of the Holy Spirit in direct speech, placed between his comment on the worship of the church (v. 2a-b) and the sending off of Barnabas and Saul by the church (v. 3), underscores Luke’s emphasis that the initiative for the missionary work comes from God’s Spirit.”

—Missionaries should seek a real sense of calling before going out. I have known people to engage in mission work because it seems like a fun adventure to trot around the globe and see diverse cultures, all while doing a little work for the Lord. That’s not missions. That’s vacation.

—“Set apart... work”:

- This language is priestly. The Greek word for “worship” is used in Levitical contexts in the Greek Old Testament. “Set apart” reminds us of the sacred space and objects in the temple. Saul and Barnabas are a holy offering to the Lord. When we send people out for mission work, we do so as an offering, an act of worship.
- Saul and Barnabas had spent “a whole year” teaching the church in Antioch (11:26). They comprised Antioch’s very best! And yet the church sent them out. What a risky move! To send out your very best people for the global cause of Christ! No wonder Luke characterizes it as worship. Like David

once said, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24). For Antioch to send Saul and Barnabas away cost them much. Two of the best teachers in the history of the church belonged to the same local assembly. Antioch gave them away.

- How easy it would have been to keep them! Imagine the questions arising in their board room. "If we lose Barnabas and Saul, the tithes will stop flowing. They built this place from the ground up. When they speak, the crowds come out. Can someone please convince them to stay?" But that's not how it went for Antioch. Antioch heard the Holy Spirit and obeyed Him. They sent; Saul and Barnabas went. Simple as that.
- The word "work" is not well-defined here. The Spirit doesn't clarify the precise work—were they to head north, south, east, or west? This resembles Abram's call to "go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). Abram's calling to leave home was prototypical for every believer. All of us are called to part with the familiar and launch into unknown territory with God. Friendship with God is an adventure.

—"to which I have called them":

- The word "called" can reference our salvation. All of us were "called" by Jesus unto salvation. But too often we stop there.
- The word "called" also refers to our mission. Jesus doesn't save us to sit around and do nothing. He saves us to set us apart for a work to which He has called us. See Eph. 2:10.

3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

—The wording suggests that verse 3 refers to a separate fast from verse 2. If verses 2 and 3 referred to the same fast, the wording would have been redundant.

—Stott: "in neither reference to fasting does it occur alone. It is linked with worship in verse 2 and with prayer in verse 3. For seldom if ever is fasting an end in itself. It is a negative action (abstention from food and other distractions) for the sake of a positive one (worshiping and praying)."

—The church in Antioch worshiped the Lord and fasted as part of the regular pattern of life and ministry. Then they fasted and prayed again, not just as a regular rhythm but for a special occasion: the commissioning of Saul and Barnabas.

—Christians should fast regularly. Jesus expected His disciples to fast after He departed (Matt. 9:15); the church in Antioch fasted (13:1-3); Paul subjected himself to "fastings often" (2 Cor. 11:27 NKJV / ESV footnote). The Bible does not tell us how often to fast, but we should follow Antioch's model (assuming we have no special health concerns): develop a fasting rhythm, and fast for special occasions too.

—The Didache, which is the earliest Christian document besides the New Testament (and written around the time of the New Testament), advises Christians to "fast on the fourth day and the Preparation"—that is, Wednesday and Friday. This was common in the first century.

—John Wesley: *"Some have exalted fasting beyond all Scripture and reason; and others have utterly disregarded it"*

—Types of fast in Scripture:

- *Normal fast*: Eating no food, drinking only water.
- *Partial fast*: Eating only certain types of foods, like fruits and vegetables (Daniel 10:3).
- *Absolute fast*: Eating no food, drinking no water (Deut. 9:9, 1 Kings 19:8, Esther 4:16, Acts 9:9). Don't try this without advice from a mentor, a doctor, and a very clear leading from God! In most cases, it is not advisable. You could die.
- *Public fast*: Any of the above fasts, done with a group of people instead of individually (Esther 4:16, Joel 2:15, 2 Chron. 20:1-4, Ezra 8:21-23). Historical example: On February 23, 1803, the King of England called for "A Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer" to seek protection from Napoleon's invading warships. The nation fasted, and the battle never materialized.
- *Note*: When you fast, spend more time seeking Jesus. Try to devote normal mealtimes to Bible study, prayer, and worship.

—A few tips about fasting:

- Jesus warns us against advertising our fast to people. Don't walk into a room and say, "I'm starving because of this fast!" We don't fast to be seen by people but by God (Matt. 6:16-18).

- Don't fast for crazy amounts of time. This is called self-abasement because it is needless torture (Col. 2:23).
- If you are pregnant, don't fast. If you have an eating disorder, don't fast. If you are a growing teenager, do a partial fast that includes needed nutrients. If you have health concerns, consult a doctor before any type of fast.
- Drink lots of water, or your fast will be miserable.
- Don't fast on days like Thanksgiving, birthdays, or other special days, unless you are in desperate straits and feel you must.
- Don't fast on days where you will have to do strenuous athletic activity. Or if you do, do something like a partial fast (see above).
- If you break a fast prematurely, don't beat yourself up. Just get back up and keep going!

—"laid their hands on them":

- People laid hands on others for healing (Acts 9:12, 17; 28:8), impartation (8:18; 19:6), and to appoint them for leadership roles, either inside the church (6:6) or as missionaries sent from it (13:3).
- Sending missionaries out was a big deal. The church prayed, fasted, and officially commissioned them to go.
- I have known many people who planted churches and became missionaries without any sending church. It rarely goes well.
- I'm not saying God could never send someone without a sending church, but Acts gives us a different model. Generally, if not always, missionaries should be sent out by churches that agree with the calling on the person's life and officially send them out.
- One might respond that the unnamed, unofficially sent missionaries of 8:1 and 11:19 led to conversions, which in turn initiated church plants in Samaria and Antioch. However, these people were forcibly scattered by persecution. They preached the Word of God wherever they went, as we all should. None of these individuals planted an actual church, either. Samaria needed Philip, John, and Peter. Antioch needed Saul and Barnabas. It's true that we should evangelize wherever we go, but ideal church planting involves a sending church. There could be exceptions, but not many.
- If you believe God is calling you to foreign missions, praise God! I pray we can send more of you. Now, here are a few questions to ask: does anyone else in my local church see this calling on my life? Are church leaders able to bless me and send me out? If the answer is no, that doesn't mean you're not called. As the Lead Pastor, I would just invite you in so we can get to know you more. Saul and Barnabas were well known to the church in Antioch. Antioch knew who they were sending. Convergence wants to know you too! Mission flows out of friendship.
- The warning of 1 Timothy 5:22, which focuses on elders, also applies practically in sending missionaries: "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure." This verse means that if we too hastily "bless" new leaders (or missionaries), we "take part in the sins of others." God is never in a hurry. His school of leadership takes time. When we take shortcuts, we promote immaturity, and immature leaders hurt people.

—Schnabel: "The congregation responds to the prophetic directive of the Spirit with four actions. They call for another period of fasting. They pray, surely for wisdom, guidance, courage, and protection for Barnabas and Saul as they embark on a new missionary initiative. They lay hands on them, probably as they pray for Barnabas and Saul, invoking God's presence, blessing, and empowerment (see on 6:6). Then they send them on their way, acting in obedience to the directive of the Spirit."

4 So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

—We previously read that the church sent them out. Here, we read that the Spirit sent them out. Which is it? Did the church send them or did the Spirit send them? Both!

—On the one hand, Luke wants to show us the important role the church plays in sending missionaries. First, we create a culture of leadership development, like Antioch, which began with no leaders but eventually had sufficient "prophets and teachers" (13:1) in place that the founding leaders could respond to the call of missions without destroying the church they left behind. Second, we create a culture of seeking God through worship, prayer, and fasting, so that our actions are blessed by God and flow from God. Third, we officially appoint and commission people, which safeguards "lone ranger" missionaries who lack the

maturity and faithfulness to fulfill their mission. In all these ways, the local church plays a role in sending missionaries.

—On the other hand, Luke wants to show us the primary role played by the Spirit in sending missionaries. The church's role is not to embark on mission and invite God to bless it; the church's role is to join the mission that God's already blessing. God, the Holy Spirit, launched the mission through speech, and He sanctioned the mission through the church.

—Stott: "Would It not be true to say both that the Spirit sent them out, by instructing the church to do so, and that the church sent them out, having been directed by the Spirit to do so? This balance will be a healthy corrective to opposite extremes. The first is the tendency to individualism, by which a Christian claims direct personal guidance by the Spirit without any reference to the church. The second is the tendency to institutionalism, by which all decision-making is done by the church without any reference to the Spirit."

—We don't know whether Saul and Barnabas felt a special leading to enter Seleucia and Cyprus. Luke glosses this detail to emphasize the Spirit's sending.

—Schnabel summarizes this introduction and the missionary endeavors that follow: "The missionary work of Paul and Barnabas is authenticated by the Holy Spirit, supported by the church in Antioch, characterized by geographical movement, and focused on proclaiming the Word of God."

5 When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

—From "Antioch" to "Seleucia" to "Cyprus" to "Salamis": Antioch was located 16 miles inland, but Seleucia was a port city. The gospel would travel across an ocean for the first time on record. From Seleucia, they sailed 62 miles to the island of Cyprus—home of Barnabas—where they came to the city of Salamis, on the eastern shore.

—Luke will soon tell the long story about what happens next on Cyprus, in the city of Paphos on the western shore. However, all we learn about his ministry in Salamis is that they proclaimed the gospel in Jewish synagogues with John's (or Mark's or John Mark's) help.

—Proclaiming the gospel first to Jews is a pattern throughout Acts: see 13:14; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1-2, 10, 17; 18:4-6, 19; 19:8.

—Why did they proclaim the word of God first to the Jews? This was not just because Saul and Barnabas happened to relate well to Jewish culture. The missionary strategy was rooted in theological realities, which Saul/Paul articulates in his letter to the Romans:

- Rom. 1:16: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, **to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**"*
- Rom. 2:9-10: *"There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, **the Jew first and also the Greek**, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, **the Jew first and also the Greek.**"*
- The good news of the gospel is that it is *"for **everyone** who believes"* (Rom. 1:16). Jews do not get in by merit of their ethnicity, and Gentiles are not excluded for that reason. Faith is the deciding factor, not ethnicity.
- Nevertheless, Jews took priority in their missionary strategy. Acts give us some hints as to why:
 - Paul says to the Jews of Antioch Pisidia, *"**It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you.** Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles"* (Acts 13:46).
 - Peter articulated the same thing to his Jewish audience: *"**You are sons of the prophets and of the covenant** that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' **God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness"** (3:25-26).*
 - When Jesus says to extend the gospel to "Jerusalem... Judea... Samaria... and the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), His focus is not merely geographical ("reach all places!") or ethnic ("reach all peoples"), but theological ("start with the Jews!").
 - This fulfilled the word of the Lord to Isaiah: *"For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem"* (Isa. 2:3).

—So-returning to the original question-why did Jews take priority in the church's missionary strategy? Why was it "necessary" for them to bring the gospel first to the Jews?

- According to Peter, God was blessing first-century Jews by turning them back to the Messiah, who shared their same lineage. They preached first to the Jews because the promises were first made to them. They deserved first dibs at receiving the gospel because God gave them first dibs in election, starting with Abraham. God had made a covenant to bless them and through them to bless nations. There is a sequence to this promise made to Abraham. First the Jews, then through them, the Gentiles.
- Schreiner: "To spread the message first to the Jews fulfills Isa. 49:6. The Lord regathers Israel before being a light to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16)."

Had the early church not prioritized evangelizing Jews first, God would have failed His promise of first blessing the Jews, and through them, blessing the world.