

OUT OF THE BAG: ACTS 13



T. M. MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Susie Moore, Editing and Finishing
The Fellowship of Ailbe
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Introduction to Acts 13

The Cat's out of the bag, and all heaven is breaking loose on earth. Acts 13 leads us into the next stage of the ongoing work of Christ.

How selfless and visionary was the church in Antioch! Not only could they see the possibilities for sending out missionaries, they ordained two of their best men for the job. Saul (Paul) and Barnabas didn't waste any time getting to the work. Everywhere they went, the results were the same: The Cat of Christ shredded the devil's domain and set up His Kingdom in believers and churches all over south Asia Minor.

This is a thrilling story, and what began so long ago has been going on for 2,000 years! As gloomy and foreboding as things can appear in our day, the King is still marching on, and His Kingdom is still advancing. Like Paul and Barnabas, we need to have the vision and faith to follow Christ wherever He leads us, taking our place in His ongoing work with courage and joy.

We're happy to offer a series of brief videos to introduce each portion of this study. You can view each one by [*clicking here*](#).

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

1 Set Apart, Sent

Read and meditate on Acts 13.1-3.

The Holy Spirit is on a roll, and He's just getting started. Having brought the Good News to Samaritans and Gentiles, the Spirit has opened all the doors to the Kingdom. Now He needs capable folks to serve as worthy heralds of and escorts into the Kingdom of God. So, since the work is to be expanded among Gentiles, where else to look but in the fastest-growing Gentile church in the Roman world, Antioch?

For reflection

1. We note that it had pleased the Spirit to bring several teachers to serve the growing congregations in Antioch. We can see the wisdom in this, since the Spirit intends to send two of those teachers for a work elsewhere. Meditate on Titus 1.5-16. What qualifications should churches require of those who teach?
2. How did the Spirit speak to the church in Antioch concerning Saul and Barnabas? We don't know. It's possible the church may have been seeking the Lord about His plan for them. Leaders may have been praying and fasting, seeking the Lord's will, when the Spirit made His intentions known. Perhaps there was an audible voice. More likely, one or more of the leaders were "impressed" by the Spirit and shared their thoughts with the rest. How do the leaders of your church seek to determine the Lord's leading? Ask a few.
3. Neither Barnabas nor Saul were "locals," and since Barnabas had been so helpful in getting the church organized in Antioch, and Saul was a Roman citizen, the leaders may have considered that they were the best choices for the Spirit's mission. What qualifications should churches today be looking for in those they support for the work of missions?
4. The decision having been made, and all agreed, the congregation entered into more prayer and fasting, laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, and sent them off. To where? We don't know how complete their plans were at this stage, but we can imagine they probably followed existing trade routes and routines, since they would have required passage from Antioch to Cyprus and elsewhere. The Spirit would lead them, of this they had no doubt. Would you describe the church in Antioch as "missions-minded"? Why or why not? What does a church look like today that has this mindset?
5. In Jerusalem, the Spirit used persecution to jump-start the mission of the Church. In Antioch, He spoke to the congregation during worship. If our worship is focused on God, waiting on Him, listening for His voice, and seeking His will, He might be pleased to launch our church into some new and exciting Kingdom adventure. But if all we're looking for in worship is something for ourselves, we're not likely to hear the Spirit prompting us to greater challenges. What are some of the differences between worship focused on people and their needs and worship focused on God and His will?

Summary

A new stage in the ongoing work of Christ begins, as the church in Antioch sends off a missionary team to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom among Jews and Gentiles in far-off places. This was a risky enterprise. Communications would be difficult. Opposition was guaranteed. Resources would have to be secured along the way. Would you describe your church as a "risk-taking" church for the Kingdom? Why or why not?

Closing Prayer

Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles!
Laud Him, all you peoples!
For His merciful kindness is great toward us,

And the truth of the LORD *endures* forever.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 117

2 Open Doors

Read and meditate on Acts 12.4-7.

The Jews had been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire prior to the birth of Christ – a Roman attempt to dissipate and defang their rebellious tendencies. We can see how God was at work in this, laying a foundation for the coming of the Gospel.

For reflection

1. Paul preached in synagogues everywhere he went, and, while he was frequently opposed by the rulers of those synagogues, a good many of the first Christians were enlisted there. To Barnabas and Saul it “made sense” to begin their work in the synagogues, since, as we shall see, they intended to use the Old Testament to make the case for Christ. How would you make a case for Christ from the Old Testament?
2. As in the Old Testament (Joseph, Daniel), certain Jews, scattered about in the Roman world, managed to insinuate themselves into high places among the civil and other authorities in that world. The dispersal of the Jews is one of the many ways God prepared the Roman world for the coming of the Gospel. Can you think of some others?
3. The synagogue would have provided a bridge into the Gentile world, as we see here in Acts 13. We can imagine Bar-Jesus talking about Barnabas and Saul to his client, Sergius Paulus. Bar-Jesus is a “false prophet.” In his case, he probably preached and taught in a way that catered to the self-interest of local rulers, in this case, Sergius Paulus – not unlike the Sadducees in Jesus’ day. Is there a danger of pastors and teachers doing this sort of thing today? Explain.
4. Bar-Jesus might have suggested some advantage to be gained by the magistrate in becoming familiar with this new teaching. Sergius’ interest was piqued, and being a thoughtful man, he summoned the evangelists to meet with him. Luke tells us specifically that he wanted to hear the word of God. Would he ever! What does this vignette suggest about the importance of making contacts for the Gospel?
5. As we think about extending the Kingdom throughout our own communities, we need to think of the most likely places to begin our outreach, and how to phrase our message in a way that will make sense and appeal to the interests and concerns of the people we’re trying to reach. We’ll see that this is Paul’s method wherever he goes. What opportunities for extending the Kingdom of God are available for your church in your community?

Summary

Saul and Barnabas must have been careful in teaching from the Old Testament – presenting Christ in terms their audience would be familiar with, and, therefore, might more readily understand and receive. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 9.19-23. What does this suggest about your church’s witness in your community? About your own witness in your Personal Mission Field?

Closing Prayer

Great *is* the LORD, and greatly to be praised;
And His greatness *is* unsearchable.
One generation shall praise Your works to another,
And shall declare Your mighty acts.
I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty,
And on Your wondrous works.
Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts,

And I will declare Your greatness.
They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness,
And shall sing of Your righteousness.

Psalm 145.3-7

3 The Teaching of the Lord

Read and meditate on Acts 13.8-12.

It was the *teaching* that won the proconsul. The blinding of the false prophet was impressive, but it was the teaching that won the lost man's soul.

For reflection

1. Saul, who was also called Paul (his Roman name), understood how very serious the Gospel is. He was not pleased – to say the least – that this false prophet was trying to downplay Paul's message or otherwise distract or divert the proconsul from believing. What can we learn about the Gospel, and about sharing the Good News, from Paul's evident passion in this situation?
2. This is what the devil does, as Paul notes. He keeps people from hearing the Gospel. He convinces them that it's not all that important and most likely not true, so why give it a second thought? Eternal destinies are at stake, and the devil delights, through deceit and villainy, in barring people from entering the Kingdom of God. What are some teachings, worldviews, or philosophies that are keeping people from hearing the Gospel in our day? How prepared to address these are you?
3. Hence the ferocity – and that's the right word – with which Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, confronts and confounds Bar-Jesus. We don't know about the lasting impression this might have left on that false prophet. But Sergius was persuaded, and Paul sensed he had believed the Good News. Why does Luke add the last phrase of verse 12 to this story? What does that suggest about your church's witness in your community?
4. The progress of the Kingdom is always at the expense of the kingdom of darkness and the Lie. We can expect the principals of that realm to oppose the Gospel, but we must not cooperate with them or otherwise – by our silence, for example – aid and abet their purposes. How should you and your church prepare to confront the Lie as it is expressed in your community?
5. Jesus promised that people would hate us and oppose us, but that should not keep us from spreading the Good News through every open door of opportunity. Let the "teaching" do its work. Share the Gospel – the whole Gospel – clearly and repeatedly, and the power of that Gospel will not return to God without accomplishing His intended purposes. Why do you think so many Christians maintain a careful silence about the Gospel before the very people who need to hear it?

Summary

When the Lord opens doors for witness, we must be prepared to go through them boldly, and to proclaim Jesus and His Kingdom clearly, and with conviction. What would an "open door" of opportunity look like in your Personal Mission Field?

Closing Prayer

O my God, make [Your enemies] like the whirling dust,
Like the chaff before the wind!
As the fire burns the woods,
And as the flame sets the mountains on fire,
So pursue them with Your tempest,
And frighten them with Your storm.
Fill their faces with shame,
That they may seek Your name, O LORD.
Let them be confounded and dismayed forever;

Yes, let them be put to shame and perish,
That they may know that You, whose name alone *is* the LORD,
Are the Most High over all the earth.

Psalm 83.13-18

4 “Let it be known!”

Read and meditate on Acts 13.13-41.

This is a lengthy section and, in the interest of space, I intend to survey it rather quickly. Paul and Barnabas – we note that the apostle’s name is now featured first (v. 13) – depart Cyprus and land on the mainland of what is today Turkey. John bails, for reasons unknown to us, but unacceptable to Paul (cf. Acts 15.37, 38). In Antioch of Pisidia we find our team again in the synagogue, politely waiting to be invited to speak (vv. 14, 15).

For reflection

1. Paul is ready. He begins by commending their fear of God (v. 16). Building on what they already believe (vv. 17-22), he works toward a brief explanation concerning Jesus (vv. 23-25). Then, more back-and-fill: Paul returns to their story line. How important is it that we understand the “story line” of the people with whom we want to share the Gospel? How can we discover that story line, or, that worldview?
2. Paul connects Jesus to Abraham and the prophets, saying that the Jews in Jerusalem had missed the point of the Old Testament because they “did not know Him” (Hint: Don’t *you* miss it!). Jesus is the point of the Old Testament (Jn. 6.63). Is there a sense in which Jesus is the “point” of every person’s worldview? That He is the hope all people are seeking? Explain.
3. Next come the historical facts of the Gospel – John the Baptist, Jesus’ death and resurrection, His post-resurrection appearances. Then the Good News: What you’ve been waiting for and hoping for and longing for – restoration with God – has arrived! And it’s available through Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, seated with God on high, and calling all men everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel for the forgiveness of sins (vv. 26-38). Is Jesus the hope of secular unbelievers? Of political radicals? Of evolutionary materialists? Is it important that we show such people that Jesus is the hope for *all* human beings? Explain.
4. Then Paul issues a warning, straight out of the prophets: Listen up! Though you may not be able to believe what I’m saying, believe it anyway (vv. 40, 41). Luke has given us something like a synopsis of Paul’s message, but it’s enough. Begin where people are. Look for ways to commend and connect. Lay out the facts of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Declare His rule from on high. Issue the call for repentance and faith as the way through Jesus to the promise of forgiveness and everlasting life. Warn of the seriousness of failing to believe. This is teaching that has power to astonish and convert. How does this compare with the Gospel as you share it?
5. Paul was an expert at fitting the Good News of Jesus into the “worldview” of his audience. We’ll see this over and over in the book of Acts. This is not compromising the Gospel; it’s just good communicating strategy. How well do you understand the worldviews of the people to whom God is sending you with the Good News of Jesus? How could your church help you in this matter?

Summary

Paul was a master communicator. We always proclaim the Good News to people, and all people inhabit a story or worldview that makes sense to them for the moment. Our task is to show that Jesus is the culmination of all their hopes, the only One Who can make sense out of their lives and bring them lasting peace and joy. But we need to do this from within the Scriptures, speaking God’s Word to people who probably have little or no regard for it. What challenges does this suggest about sharing the Good News with the people in your Personal Mission Field?

Closing Prayer

Let Your salvation, O God, set me up on high.
I will praise the name of God with a song,
And will magnify Him with thanksgiving.
This also shall please the LORD better than an ox *or* bull,
Which has horns and hooves.
The humble shall see *this and* be glad;
And you who seek God, your hearts shall live.
For the LORD hears the poor,
And does not despise His prisoners.
Let heaven and earth praise Him,
The seas and everything that moves in them.

Psalm 69.29-34

5 Bingo

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27

Read and meditate on Acts 13.42, 43.

Again, we see the power of the Gospel to astonish and convert. It was like POW! and the light came on for many of these people as Paul worked his way through Scripture after Scripture, using them all to point to Jesus and the fulfilled promises of Abraham.

For reflection

1. Many Jews believed. Many “devout converts” as well. These would have been Gentiles like Cornelius who had come to agree with the Jewish religion. These “devout converts” may have become full-fledged Jews, even to undergoing circumcision. Certain Jewish believers would try to force this on Titus in a little while (cf. Gal. 2.3), but Paul would have nothing to do with that. When it comes to the Gospel, it’s *Jesus*, not Jesus-plus-whatever. Do you think unsaved people today understand this? Do you think Christians do?

2. The Spirit was reaping a harvest among Jews and Gentiles as Paul and his team proclaimed the Good News of Jesus. How they must have been encouraged by these responses! They urged these new believers “to continue in the grace of God” and not to look to the Law for their salvation any longer (vv. 38, 39). What is repentance? What is necessary for repentance to occur? What does this require of us in proclaiming the Gospel?

3. Paul and Barnabas must have taught these people how to read their Scriptures with “new glasses,” looking for grace and Jesus in those old familiar texts, so that new light and understanding would continue to reach them from the Word. The Word they already had was sufficient to establish them in Jesus. They just needed to read that Word from the vantage point of Jesus and grace, rather than Moses and the Law. Is this the way you read the Scriptures? Explain.

4. What God had “promised to the fathers” (v. 32) was to be Israel’s God and to take them for His people. The Good News is that, through and because of Jesus, we can *know the Lord* (Jn. 17.3) – know Him, love Him, share in Him, enjoy Him, serve Him gladly, proclaim Him boldly! If this is not the Good News as you have received it, then what have you believed? Are you more eager to know the Lord’s *benefits* than to know *Him*?

5. The Good News is positive, but it also contains a warning to those who hesitate or decline (vv. 40, 41). How would you state that warning to someone?

Summary

The power of the Gospel accompanies the preaching of Jesus. When Jesus is set forth against the backdrop of any unbelieving worldview, and as the hope of the world and fulfillment of all our aspirations, people will believe. Why do you suppose we see so few new people coming to faith in Jesus in our day?

Closing Prayer

Kings of the earth and all peoples;
Princes and all judges of the earth;
Both young men and maidens;
Old men and children.
Let them praise the name of the LORD,

For His name alone is exalted;
His glory *is* above the earth and heaven.
And He has exalted the horn of His people,
The praise of all His saints—
Of the children of Israel,
A people near to Him.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 148.11-14

6 So Long!

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27

Read and meditate on Acts 13.44-48.

Nothing can stop the spread of the Good News. Not, as we've seen, buffoonish kings, not scheming false prophets, not intelligent magistrates. Not jealous religious leaders, either. Nothing. Try to stamp it out here, it spreads like a splashed oil fire to there and there and there.

For reflection

1. Self-interest is the natural enemy of the Gospel. You can't be your own lord when Jesus is Lord of all. Truth is the Gospel's friend and faithful voice. But self-interest can be so strong, and so blinding (as we've seen), that it not only holds the truth at arm's length, but attacks it by every available means. What warning does this suggest for you as you continue your work as a witness for Christ?
2. Apparently many of those who had come to believe in Antioch of Pisidia, and were continuing in the grace of God, talked with their neighbors, because the next week the whole town showed up for preaching. Now the religious leaders had a problem. Previously they'd looked at Paul as a nice "shot in the arm" for their little congregation. Now he was stealing all the sheep and mixing them in with the goats. How vile! How unacceptable! How do we stop this? Aren't you glad such attitudes don't exist between and among churches in our day? Or do they?
3. Oppose. Contradict. Defame. The opponents to God's truth haven't changed much, and we don't have to sweat them today any more than Paul did in his day. The Spirit, Who is in charge of this ongoing work of Christ, will show us where to go next in seeking and advancing the Kingdom of God. And He will continue the expansion of Christ's Kingdom until the knowledge of the glory of the Lord covers the earth – in the praises and lives of those who believe – as the waters cover the seas. Why do you think so many churches today are discouraged from doing the work of evangelism?
4. Paul says "So long!" to the Jews who opposed the Gospel, but, of course, he's not giving up on them. Not now, not ever (Rom. 9.1-5). But the focus of his ministry will change as he aims more consistently at reaching Gentiles with the Good News. Some people may tell us they don't want to hear anything more about Jesus, but does this mean we have to stop being witnesses to them? Explain.
5. Is there a time for "wiping the dust off your feet" with someone you've been witnessing to for a while? What, following Paul's example with the Jews, would that look like in your case?

Summary

As the Gospel advances, those who oppose it make themselves known. No surprises there. Jesus promised as much, and we've seen it from the beginning of our study of the ongoing work of Christ. But we must not allow opposition to discourage us from our witness. Rather, we simply need to follow the Spirit in whatever next steps of witness-bearing He has for us. How can believers help one another to overcome fear and discouragement in being witnesses for Jesus?

Closing Prayer

O LORD, how great are Your works!
Your thoughts are very deep.
A senseless man does not know,

Nor does a fool understand this.
When the wicked spring up like grass,
And when all the workers of iniquity flourish,
It is that they may be destroyed forever.
But You, LORD, *are* on high forevermore.
For behold, Your enemies, O LORD,
For behold, Your enemies shall perish;
All the workers of iniquity shall be scattered.
But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox;
I have been anointed with fresh oil.
My eye also has seen *my desire* on my enemies;
My ears hear *my desire* on the wicked
Who rise up against me.
The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree,
He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
Those who are planted in the house of the LORD
Shall flourish in the courts of our God.
They shall still bear fruit in old age;
They shall be fresh and flourishing,
To declare that the LORD is upright;
He is my rock, and *there is* no unrighteousness in Him.

Psalm 92.5-15

7 Increase: Word, Persecution, Joy

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27

Read and meditate on Acts 13.49-52.

We note that Paul and Barnabas move on, following the leading of the Spirit, but the Spirit stays behind to fill the believers with joy. The work of the Kingdom is the Spirit's work. He leads. He empowers for witness. He convicts and converts. He sanctifies the faithful. He builds the Church. And He does all this all at once and in every place!

For reflection

1. The Word is spreading rapidly because the people who "got it" really did. How can we tell when someone has truly come to believe the Good News?
2. These people were excited, freed from the burden of their sins, secure in the hope of eternal life, and flourishing in the grace of the Lord. People who know such experiences can't help but talk about them to others, and this is how the Word of the Lord spreads, as we've seen (Acts 8). Suggest some ways Christians today might encourage one another to talk more freely and openly about the Lord.
3. But as the Word increases, so do opposition and persecution. Big deal! That didn't stop Paul and Barnabas, and it shouldn't stop us, either. The joy of salvation is a *real* and *permanent* joy, not one dictated by agreeable circumstances. We should expect opposition and persecution, and know how to deal with these by resting in the strength and promises of the Lord, Who has overcome the world (Jn. 16.33), and by continuing in the ongoing work of Christ. How can you renew yourself daily for taking your place in the ongoing work of Christ?
4. The Jews enlisted the devout women – Greeks – because they could see where this was tending. They weren't content just to get Paul out of their congregation or town. They wanted to shut him down permanently. If only they'd known: Jealous religious leaders had tried that with Jesus, and it didn't work then, either. In this chapter Luke establishes a kind of mini-template. The Spirit calls and empowers, the Gospel goes forward, people believe, persecution arises, the Word and joy of the Lord increase. Is this the pattern we observe in our churches today?
5. Talk with a pastor or church leader. Does this pattern reflect what you see in your church? In what ways? Does anything seem to be missing? What should your role be in helping your church line up with this template?

Summary

The ongoing work of Christ continues because it is the *Spirit's* work, and not merely ours. We see how the Spirit uses faithful people, armed with the Gospel, to lead others to the Lord and His Kingdom. Where we do not see this happening, is it because the Spirit is no longer working? Explain.

Closing Prayer

Return, O LORD!

How long?

And have compassion on Your servants.

Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy,

That we may rejoice and be glad all our days!

Out of the Bag: Acts 13

Make us glad according to the days *in which* You have afflicted us,
The years *in which* we have seen evil.
Let Your work appear to Your servants,
And Your glory to their children.
And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us;
Yes, establish the work of our hands.

Psalm 90.13-17

Out of the Bag: Acts 13

For reflection or discussion

1. What worldviews are competing with the Gospel for people's attention these days? Why is it important we understand something about these worldviews?
2. What is the Good News about Jesus that we as witness are sent to proclaim?
3. Why is it normal to expect opposition to the Gospel when we proclaim it? Should this cause us to be silent about the Gospel? Why or why not?
4. Do you think the Christians you know are as passionate about the Gospel as Paul was? Are you?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 13?

Glory to Glory

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word to the way we *live for His glory* in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

What have you encountered *of* God's glory in our reading and meditations in Acts 13? How has He shown Himself to you more clearly? How can this help you live more consistently *for* His glory in the daily details of your life?

What have you learned about yourself from Acts 13 to help you in knowing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.