

Acts 13:1-12: Did You Change After You Met Christ...or Are You the Same?

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA April 2, 2017

I. Introduction

Did your life change at all after you met Christ? Did your views on sex, marriage, politics, friendship, giving the pill to teens, lying on a job application, getting drunk every weekend, parenting, gossiping, over-eating, "me-time," going out with the boys/girls, etc., etc., did these views change or are you still the same person and are you still doing things the same way before you met Christ?

II. Acts 13:1-12: Did Your Life Change After You Met Christ...or Are You Still the Same Person?

13:1-3, the church of Antioch became the hub of Gentile Christianity and evangelism as the church in Jerusalem was the hub of Jewish Christianity. Antioch was the third most prominent city in the Roman Empire. It was densely populated, urban, multiethnic (there were Romans, Greeks, Jews, Africans, Persians, Indians, and Chinese). It was thoroughly pagan socially, morally, and spiritually. And this is where God decided to plant the second most important church.

The church began when Hellenist Jews went down to Antioch and brought the people the Gospel. Many of them believed and the news reached Jerusalem, so they dispatch Barnabas to investigate. When he gets there, he's overjoyed at all the Gentiles who've come to the Lord and he brings even more into the Kingdom. He then gets Saul to join him and they both decide to make Antioch their home. The people of Antioch were so transformed from their pagan ways that they see the Jews, who're about to suffer from a great famine, as their brothers and sisters whom they must help. So they send Barnabas and Saul with some money for them.

Who were the leaders of this church? We're told that they were prophets and teachers, but what are their backgrounds? Barnabas was from the island of Cyprus, which means that he was a Hellenist Jew, i.e., he grew up surrounded by Gentile ways and culture. Simeon, who was called Niger, was a black African Jew: Simeon was his Jewish name but "Niger" was his Latin name; it means "black." Lucius of Cyrene was from North Africa, but North Africans were more like Arabs. Lucius may've been one of the founders of the Antioch church (Acts 11:20). Manaen is Greek for the Jewish name Menachem. Since he grew up in the royal court with Herod Antipas (who later executed John the Baptist), he was part of the upper class. And finally, we have Saul who was a Pharisee who was so zealous for the Law of God that it drove him to persecute Christians.

How did the people of this church and its leaders (at least one of them: Saul, 9:1-2) go from pagan idolatry or religious fanaticism to becoming loving individuals who care about the welfare of their fellow man even if it means their life? Saul heard the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ who filled him with His Holy Spirit and removed not only his physical blindness but his spiritual blindness (9:1-30). From that point on Saul had a desire to save people, Jew or Gentile. The people of Antioch were personally discipled by Barnabas and Saul for a whole year (11:22-30). And they likewise left their former ways behind as they heard the Lord's voice through His Holy Spirit: it led them to save those in need, like their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. And now this church is about to hear the voice of the Lord again and it will lead them on a mission that will save millions across the world.

It was the regular practice of the leaders of Antioch to fast and pray in order to hear the voice of the Lord. They're seeking to know what God wants them to do next. As they're seeking His voice, the Holy Spirit speaks to the prophets among them, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." The Holy Spirit wants the church of Antioch to consecrate, to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a particular work that He has for them: He wants the church of Antioch to send them out as missionaries. This will be Paul's first missionary journey. Having heard the Lord's voice and direction, they fast and pray further and then lay hands on them, signifying not only *their* appointment of Barnabas and Saul, but the Holy Spirit's. Having done all this, they send them on their way.

13:4-5, we must take note that even though Barnabas and Saul are missionaries for the Antioch church, it was actually the Holy Spirit who appointed them and sent them on this mission. Seleucia was the port city that served Antioch; it was 16 miles west of Antioch. The island of Cyprus was 130 miles southwest of Antioch, less than a days' sail from Seleucia. The island was approximately 150 miles long and 15-20 miles wide; it was an important trade center and Barnabas' hometown. So they sail from Seleucia to Salamis, Cyprus' largest city and its chief commercial center. Since Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles, it seems odd that he would first reach out to the Jewish population on the island. However, this was always Paul's practice according to the principle that he laid down in Romans 1:16. That is, the Gospel was to go to the Jew first because they were God's people. But there was also a practical reason: the synagogues had Gentile proselytes who already believed in God instead of the pagan gods, which made them more receptive to the Gospel. Thus, Barnabas and Saul preach in the synagogues. And John Mark was their assistant.

13:6-12, they make their way through the rest of the island down to its capital Paphos which was about 90 miles southwest of Salamis. Paphos was a cultic center for the worship of Aphrodite and the home of the island's proconsul/governor, Sergius Paulus. By now, Sergius has heard of Barnabas and Saul's preaching, so he calls for them in order to hear the Word of God for himself. But Elymas the sorcerer (Elymas may be the Greek form of an Arabic word that means "sorcerer/magician") who took the name Bar-Jesus, which means "Son of Jesus," contradicted everything Saul and Barnabas said. He was a Jewish false prophet who sought glory for himself which is why he took the name Son of Jesus, i.e., to associate himself with the famous miracle-worker Jesus Christ. He wanted to curry favor with the governor. Thus, if he can refute these men of God, he can secure his position with the governor as a true prophet of God.

But this is no power struggle between two political foes. This is the Word of God and Elymas is preventing the governor from hearing it. Therefore, God the Holy Spirit directs Saul—who will now be known as Paul¹—to do the following: he says to Elymas "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?" and he struck him blind! And immediately Elymas went blind. When Sergius, the governor, saw this, he was astonished "at the teaching of the Lord" Jesus Christ and believed! Sergius has just heard from Jesus Himself and from now on Sergius, the Roman ruler of Cyprus, will rule differently. Instead of turning to false prophets who claim to speak for the gods, he's going to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ for political counsel. Instead of ruling Cyprus by Roman standards, he'll be guided by the Holy Spirit.....did your life change this dramatically when you believed?

¹ The name Paul means "small" or "humble" which is in direct contrast to "Bar-Jesus" who's seeking to exalt himself. It's not that Paul changed his name; he had two names, a Hebrew name, Saul, and a Gentile name, Paul—being a Roman citizen he had a Latin name. Luke will refer to him as Saul only in reference to his past: 22:7, 13; 26:14. Why use Paul instead of Saul? He was the apostle to the Gentiles and from now on, his work will be mainly among Gentiles and he wants to identify with them, which is in keeping with Paul's practice of becoming "all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Do you know that Jesus came to shake up the your world? Jesus said that He came to give you an abundant life, to open your eyes, to set you free from every form of bondage (Luke 4:18; John 10:10). Before Jesus found them, the people of Antioch lived in a thoroughly pagan society. Tim Nichols and Joe Anderson in their textbook *He Shall Crush His Head (Part 2)* describe the world they lived in like this,

“We mentioned above that the gospel turned the Roman world upside down. To understand what the good news of Jesus Christ would mean in that context, we need to understand the Roman culture a little bit better. In America, we like to think about politics, religion and our social relationships as separate areas of life. In Rome, politics and religion were two facets of the same thing; religious life and political life were one and the same. For Greeks who believed in the gods, life was not completely random; the gods actually controlled life in many ways, but it was still chaotic. Everything happened at the whim of whatever god happened to be in control. There really was no hope for the future. Likewise, politics offered no hope for the same reason.

Furthermore, life was really hard; disease was rampant, and except for the very rich, life in the city was lived in incredibly tight quarters with unsanitary conditions. Life was lived meal to meal, and work was hard.”²

But then some Hellenist Jews and Barnabas and Paul introduced the people of Antioch to the Lord and their lives were transformed. Why?

“The Gospel offered something worth living for and an ultimate hope—one day the wrongs of others, society, the government and any personal enemies would be made right by Jesus Christ. Not only that, the gospel also offered a way of being together as community—an ethic of neighbor-love that was virtually non-existent in that society. The gospel offered hope, not just in the resurrection, but that life could be better right now by building a certain kind of community where life was shared in a meaningful way. In short, the gospel offered the possibility of the kingdom in the here and now.”³

And isn't this exactly what happened at Antioch? There were various races and classes that made up that city, yet the church of Antioch housed them all in loving harmony; they looked out for each other and those in need because Christ took away every racial, social, cultural, economic, religious, and political barrier. He made them one in Him (Colossians 3:11). And isn't this exactly what happened with the apostle Paul? He used to kill Christians; he used to be a terrorist, now he's an evangelist, dedicating his life to saving people. Nobody who's ever met the Lord Jesus Christ and walked with Him has ever been the same. He'll change the way you see EVERYTHING.

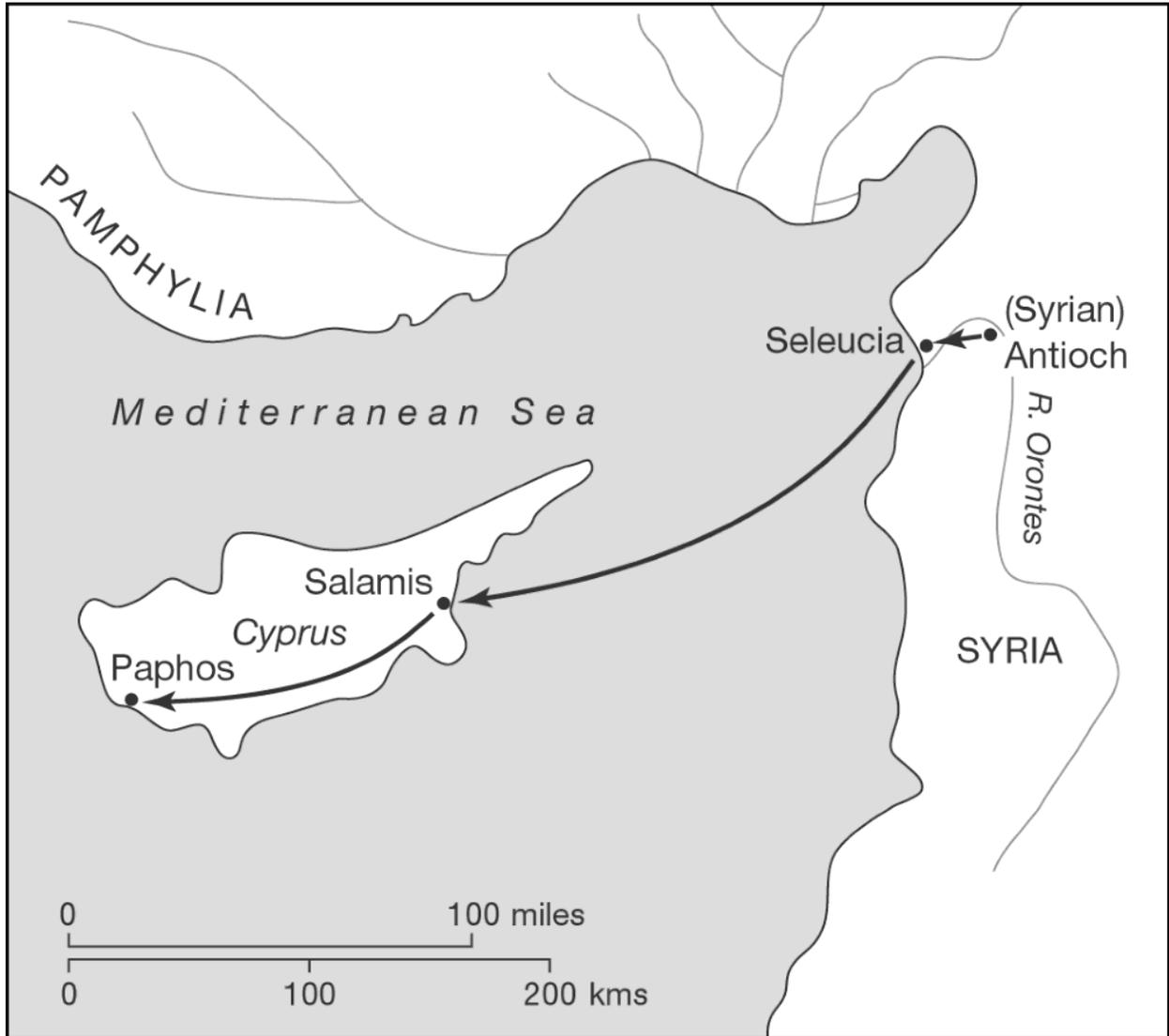
How has your life changed....a preacher's journey, from wanna-be gigolo to pastor.

III. Conclusion

Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him 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?" 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. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

² Joe Anderson and Tim Nichols, *He Shall Crush His Head (Part 2), Christ and His Body*, Headwaters Christian Resources, 2014, p. 360-61.

³ *Ibid.* Anderson and Nichols, (*He Shall Crush His Head*, p. 361)



⁴ Wright, T. (2008). *Acts for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 13-28* (pp. 1–2). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.