The Early Church of Jesus Christ

A Bible teaching commentary on the Acts of the Apostles in easy-to-read English

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The church elders pray for Saul and Barnabas

Acts Unit 7 of 12

Chapter 13:1-52

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PAUL BRINGS GOOD NEWS TO THE WORLD.

Unit 7: Introduction and Chapter 13:1 to 52.

This is our second part of the Manna Bible teaching commentary written by Fred Morris on the Acts of the Apostles.

'Acts' is the name of the book in the New Testament part of the Bible written by Luke. He was a close friend of the Apostle Paul. Luke wrote it towards the end of the first century after the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. It was written for the followers of "The Way" who believed the Good News and trusted in Jesus and who later became known as Christians.

The book of Acts tells what happened to the Jewish believers and other believers and how their witness changed the world as promised by Jesus Himself (Acts 1:8).

In our first Bible commentary on Acts, we read that Jesus returned to Heaven to be with His Father who is our Creator and God Almighty. Jesus promised His Holy Spirit to be with His followers. This happened in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Through the power of the Spirit, God enabled the 120 followers of Jesus to grow in number daily to many thousands of believers.

The Holy Spirit encouraged the disciples or apostles of Jesus to preach boldly the Good News about Him. The Spirit also enabled them to heal people in the name of Jesus.

The word 'apostle' means messenger. The word 'believer' here means 'someone who trusts God and is a follower of Jesus Christ and believes that He is the Son of God'.

Through the preaching of the Good News and the work of the Holy Spirit, many thousands of people believed and were saved from the judgement of God. They were baptised and began a new life of faith in God. They received His righteousness and His promise of everlasting life with Jesus.

A JEW CALLED SAUL.

At first it was mostly Jews who heard the Good News. Many believed in Jesus as the Son of God. They believed that He was their Jewish Messiah, the Christ. He was promised by God many years before and written about in their Old Testament scrolls.

The new believers met with the first followers of Jesus and mixed with the Jews in the Temple courtyard in Jerusalem and in the Jewish synagogues around the world.

Some of the Jewish leaders disagreed with the teaching of the apostles. A Jewish leader called Saul was given permission to put many followers of Christ into prison. Some were killed. But one day God stopped him doing this. Jesus spoke to Saul personally on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3 to 6). He, too, became a follower of Jesus. Jesus forgave him and he was given the power of the Holy Spirit (9:17 to 19) to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ. Saul was later called Paul, his Roman name.

In this second commentary on Acts, we tell you about the life and missionary journeys of Paul. Paul later moved from the church in Jerusalem to the church in Antioch-in-Syria. He travelled around the world preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is the Son of God who came to live on Earth to reunite us with His Father. Paul taught people that God allowed Jesus to be punished for our sins so that we could be forgiven. He knew that if we believe in Jesus and follow Him, we will live with Him for evermore when we die (1 Thessalonians 4:13 to 18).

Like us, Saul (Paul) could not understand these things at first. But he re-read the Old Testament scrolls and believed that it was the purpose of God to save the world by offering salvation to all through Jesus the Christ. If we read our Bibles every day, the Holy Spirit will help us to understand these things.

Saul knew the Old Testament very well. They tell about the Messiah that God was going to send to the Jews. After his

conversion, Saul believed that Jesus was God's Messiah or Christ. He also believed that Jesus came to save people who were not Jews (called Gentiles) as well as the Jews. He devoted his life to spreading this message or Good News of Jesus Christ.

Saul heard and understood all the teachings of Jesus through some of the disciples who had lived with Jesus. He shared the Good News with Jews and later with those who were not Jews, throughout the Roman Empire. This was the plan and purpose of God (Acts 9:15). Saul also wrote many letters to the churches he later planted in Cyprus, Turkey, Greece, Italy and elsewhere.

Acts Chapter 13.

Saul's First Journey Preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ were first called Christians in the church at Antioch (11:26). The church in Antioch grew strong. Antioch was in Syria, 500 km north of Jerusalem. Among the leaders were Barnabas and Saul (13:1 to 2). Also, young John Mark worshipped there who later wrote the Gospel of Mark (13:5). Some were teachers, some were preachers and some had the gift of prophecy. Teaching, preaching and prophesying are all gifts of the Holy Spirit given to those whom God chooses.

One day, as they were worshipping, praying and fasting (13:2) the Holy Spirit spoke to the believers: "Set apart Saul and Barnabas for Me. I appoint them for the special work I want them to do."

The church leaders fasted again. They prayed and laid their hands on the heads of Barnabas and Saul. They sent them off to do special work for the Lord (13:3). The Holy Spirit was in charge. He called and led His servants. He went before them to make the hearts of people ready to hear the Good News.

Paul's first missionary journey from his church in Antioch to Cyprus and Pamphylia (Turkey in Europe)

Notice these things about the calling of Saul and Barnabas:

- Saul and Barnabas were trusted leaders in the church by this time (13:1).
- Time was given to allow the Holy Spirit to speak through the people (13:2).
- The prophets and teachers fasted and prayed for guidance about Saul and Barnabas. They laid hands on them to dedicate them to do good works of God (13:3).
- Saul and Barnabas were sent out guided by the Holy Spirit (13:3,4).

Notice also that the Holy Spirit called Saul and Barnabas but it was the local church that sent them out. The church members confirmed their support for Saul and Barnabas and also for their church leaders. They were all in agreement. They all met together

united, to witness the laying on of hands. In this way, Saul and Barnabas were sent out by God through the local church. Later, the church welcomed them back and called a special meeting to listen to their reports (14:27).

Their church was open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They were happy to send some of their members to serve God overseas. They prayed for them and were encouraged by the ministry God gave them to do. They also gave thanks to God when they later heard of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these missionaries through their preaching and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The Ministry of Saul and Barnabas in Cyprus.

Saul and Barnabas took young John Mark with them to help (13:5). They went down to a sea port and sailed to the island of Cyprus. Barnabas was born in Cyprus.

They went first to the Jewish synagogues on the island to preach about their Messiah, Jesus Christ (13:5).

The Roman governor of Cyprus listened to their preaching. He wanted to hear the truth from God, but a Jewish magician called Elymas tried to stop him from hearing about Jesus Christ. This was their first problem in ministry but they knew that their church in Antioch was praying for them.

It was here that Saul used his Roman name Paul (13:9).

Sometimes we must speak out against Satan and take authority in the name of Jesus over people who are possessed by demon powers. Only the Holy Spirit can guide us for what to do, as He guided Paul. Paul was first filled by Holy Spirit power soon after his conversion to Christ when he was anointed in Damascus (9:17). 'Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil... The hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind." ' (13:9 to 11).

Elymas was blind for a time. When the Roman governor saw what happened to Elymas he believed. 'He was amazed at what Paul was teaching about the Lord Jesus' (13:12).

When we teach and obey the truth of God, people will see the difference it makes in our lives.

Paul Preaches To Both Jews And Gentiles.

From Cyprus, Paul and his friends went to Roman Asia Province. There John Mark left them, but we are not sure why (2 Timothy 4:11). Paul was not pleased with Mark. Mark was a young believer. He did not have a strong vision to serve the Lord at that time (Acts 15:38). Later, Paul learned to trust and work with young believers, including Mark.

When Paul and Barnabas visited other towns, they always visited the Jewish synagogues. That is where Jews met to hear their leaders read the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures. At Antioch-in-Pisidia, the Jews asked Paul to speak. He preached a great message (13:16 to 41).

This is how Paul preached to the crowd using many words from the Old Testament:

- He reminded them that God had blessed their people in Egypt, put up with them for 40 years in the wilderness and led them into His Promised Land of Canaan (13:17 to 20).
- He explained that, through the family line of King David, God brought His Saviour Jesus to Israel as their promised Messiah (13:23,32).
- He said that the people put Jesus to death on a cross but God raised Him from death to eternal life (13:28 to 30).
- Then he preached the Good News of God's Messiah that everyone who repents and believes in Jesus is forgiven and made right with God as promised long ago. He said that faith in Jesus offers more than faith in the Law of Moses. Jesus

offers eternal life through His victory over death and sin (13:32,38 to 39).

- He finished with a warning not to make fun of this truth (13:40 to 41).

Many Gentiles believed and were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (13:48). New congregations were formed. But some of the Jews caused a lot of trouble for Paul and Barnabas. They rejected the truth of God and the hope of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus (13:46). This is a major part of God's Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. They sent the apostles away (13:50).

The preaching of Paul was so popular with the Gentiles that it made some Jews envious (13:42 to 46). They refused to believe in Jesus. They chose to trust in the Law of Moses but not believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, their Messiah. Paul's clear understanding of the purposes of God in the Old Testament was rejected by the devout Jews in Antioch-in-Pisidia. He longed for them to receive Jesus as their Messiah.

Then they chose leaders (elders) who had strong faith in God (14:23). They prayed and fasted for these people and left them in God's care. It is essential that churches have elders to help lead, teach and care for the members. Paul knew that it was not enough to have preachers in charge of the church groups.

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