



Ascribed to Valentin de Boulogne
of the 17th. Century

The Life of Paul

Part 2 of 5

Paul's First Missionary Journey

Acts chapters 13 & 14

46 - 49 AD

We will use the common designation of this era of Paul's life and refer to it as Paul's First Missionary Journey. The background material for the main portion of this segment of Paul's story is to be found in chapters 13 and 14 of the Book of Acts.

In about 46 AD the Christian church in Antioch decided to send Barnabas and Paul on a missionary expedition on their behalf (Acts 13:1-3). Barnabas and Paul also took with them on their travels a young man named John Mark. John Mark was a friend of the Apostle Peter who had come back to Antioch from Jerusalem with Paul and Barnabas. We more commonly know him as Mark who, later in his life, was the author of one of the four Gospels.

Barnabas and Paul first sailed to Salamis on the island of Cyprus where they began preaching the "Good News". Following what became Paul's usual pattern, their visit to a new place began in the Jewish synagogue. Ultimately they traveled on to the city of Paphos at the other end of the island where they met a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus who worked for Sergius Paulus, the governor of Cyprus. The governor became a Christian believer (Acts 13:6-12).

Paul and Barnabas, and some others who were travelling with them, then left Paphos and sailed back to the mainland and landed at Perga in the region of Pamphylia.

(Note: In Acts 13:13 we are told that when Barnabas and Paul left Paphos that John Mark chose not to go on with them but instead decided to return to Jerusalem. This seems like a minor detail but later this became the source of conflict between Barnabas and Paul.)

There is no indication in Acts that Paul and Barnabas spent any amount of time in Perga but instead they moved inland in Asia Minor to the city of Antioch in the province of Pisidia. (Note: This Antioch is not to be confused with the city of Antioch in Syria where they began their journey.) In Antioch in Pisidia they again began their preaching in the Jewish meeting place. When invited to do so, Paul delivered an important address to the people there. An actual summary of what he said to them is recorded in Acts 13:16-41. As would be expected, it was a message designed to persuade Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Many Jews were interested in hearing more and we are told that there were also many gentiles there who already worshipped God. Acts says that "on the next Sabbath almost everyone in town came to hear the message about the Lord." (Acts 13:44 CEV). Although many accepted their message, influential Jews in Antioch rebuked and insulted Paul and Barnabas and stirred up opposition against them. Paul and Barnabas were forced to leave the region and moved on to the city of Iconium.

Their experience in Iconium was much the same as it was in Antioch. They started preaching in the Jewish meeting place and those who opposed them began to stir up the populace. They stayed in Iconium for some time and they did make some converts but the opposition strengthened and some of their opponents began to plot to stone them to death. When Barnabas and Paul learned of this plot they moved on to preach in the cities of Lystra and Derbe and the regions around them.

In Lystra Paul healed a crippled man and everyone was greatly impressed. In fact, they decided that Barnabas and Paul must be gods. Some began to call Barnabas by the name "Zeus" and Paul "Hermes", two of their traditional gods. There was a temple to Zeus in Lystra and the priests in that temple were persuaded to prepare to make a sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. Of course, Paul and Barnabas were horrified by this response though some of the people still regarded them as gods. Before long some of their old opponents from Antioch and Iconium arrived and turned the people of Lystra against them. They even hit them with stones. Though Paul and Barnabas were spared they were forced to move on to the city of Derbe where they again made some converts.

Paul and Barnabas then decided to retrace their steps. They revisited Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Psidia. In each place Paul and Barnabas encouraged the believers and selected leaders to care for the churches that had been established. They then returned to Perga. They preached in Perga before going down to the coast and sailing back to Antioch in Syria.

Their report to the church in Antioch, which had sent them on the journey, emphasized the positive response that they had received among the gentiles to whom they preached. This concluded Paul's first Missionary Journey.

However, the record in Acts makes it clear that the issue raised earlier about what obligations of the Jewish law ought to be imposed on gentile converts to Christianity was not yet resolved to everyone's satisfaction. As Barnabas and Paul had just returned from a mission project that had resulted in many gentile converts they, along with others, were designated to go to Jerusalem to discuss the problem with the apostles and the church leaders. This meeting in Jerusalem took place in 49/50 AD. The details of that consultation in Jerusalem and the conclusions that were reached are recorded in Acts, chapter 15. Two men from the church in Jerusalem, Silas and Judas Barsabbas, were delegated to return to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to present the written report that was issued by the meeting in Jerusalem. The general conclusions of the meeting in Jerusalem were that the work done by Paul and Barnabas was to be commended and that there should be no lessening of their commitment to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to gentiles.

After a time Barnabas and Paul began to talk about returning to Asia Minor to visit the churches they had established there. However, at this point a conflict arose between them. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along with them again but Paul was adamantly opposed to doing so. Paul felt that John Mark had abandoned them on their first trip and was not to be relied upon. So sharp was this dispute between Paul and Barnabas that they finally decided to work separately in the future. Barnabas took John Mark and went to minister in Cyprus and Paul took Silas and returned to Asia Minor. Paul's Second Missionary Journey, this time with Silas, will be the subject of the next part of this series.

This map will be helpful in tracing the places visited during Paul's first missionary journey.

