

To the ends of the Earth

Jesus had commanded his followers to be his witnesses starting in Jerusalem and then moving out to Judea and Samaria ultimately to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The first 12 chapters of Acts focus primarily on the church and its activities in Jerusalem (as well as in Judea and Samaria). Beginning in chapter 13, however, the focus in moves from the monocultural church in Jerusalem to the diverse church in Antioch. Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman empire – it was a “New York” of its day. After the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Antioch would become the world center of Christianity. It is from this church that the gospel truly begins to go to the ends of the earth.

Opening Discussion: What is the most diverse city in which you’ve ever lived?

Read Acts 13:1-12

1. What does Luke tell us about the make-up of the leadership of the church in Antioch?
2. How would you describe the commissioning of Barnabas and Saul/Paul? Who sets them apart for the work? Who sends them on their way? How does the Spirit’s initiative interact with the people’s listening and obeying?
3. According to verses 4 – 5, where did Barnabas and Paul go (check on a Bible map). What did they do when they got there? Why do you think they started in the synagogues?
4. As Barnabas and Paul come to Paphos, the seat of the Roman government on the island, they encounter two men (vv. 6 – 8). How does Paul respond to Bar-Jesus’ (Elymas’s) opposition? Why do you think Paul responds with such harsh sounding words?
5. Do you know anyone like Elymas – someone who openly opposes the gospel, or who tries to interfere with your sharing the gospel? How can you pray for them? How can you, led by the Holy Spirit, speak the truth to them in a way they will understand?

6. The proconsul, Sergius Paulus, responds with interest and openness to the Gospel (v. 7). Do you know anyone like him – someone who is open to the gospel and seeking to learn more? How can you help them?

7. As you consider this whole passage, how would you describe the activity/leading of the Holy Spirit?

8. Sending Barnabas and Paul off to minister elsewhere was a significant loss to the leadership at the church in Antioch. Why do you think the church was willing to send some of their best out as missionaries? What does this reveal about the church in Antioch?

9. As we consider the example of the Antioch church, what might be some possible implications for us as a church? For you individually?