

Sharing the Gospel and Planting Churches

Acts 13:4-15:37

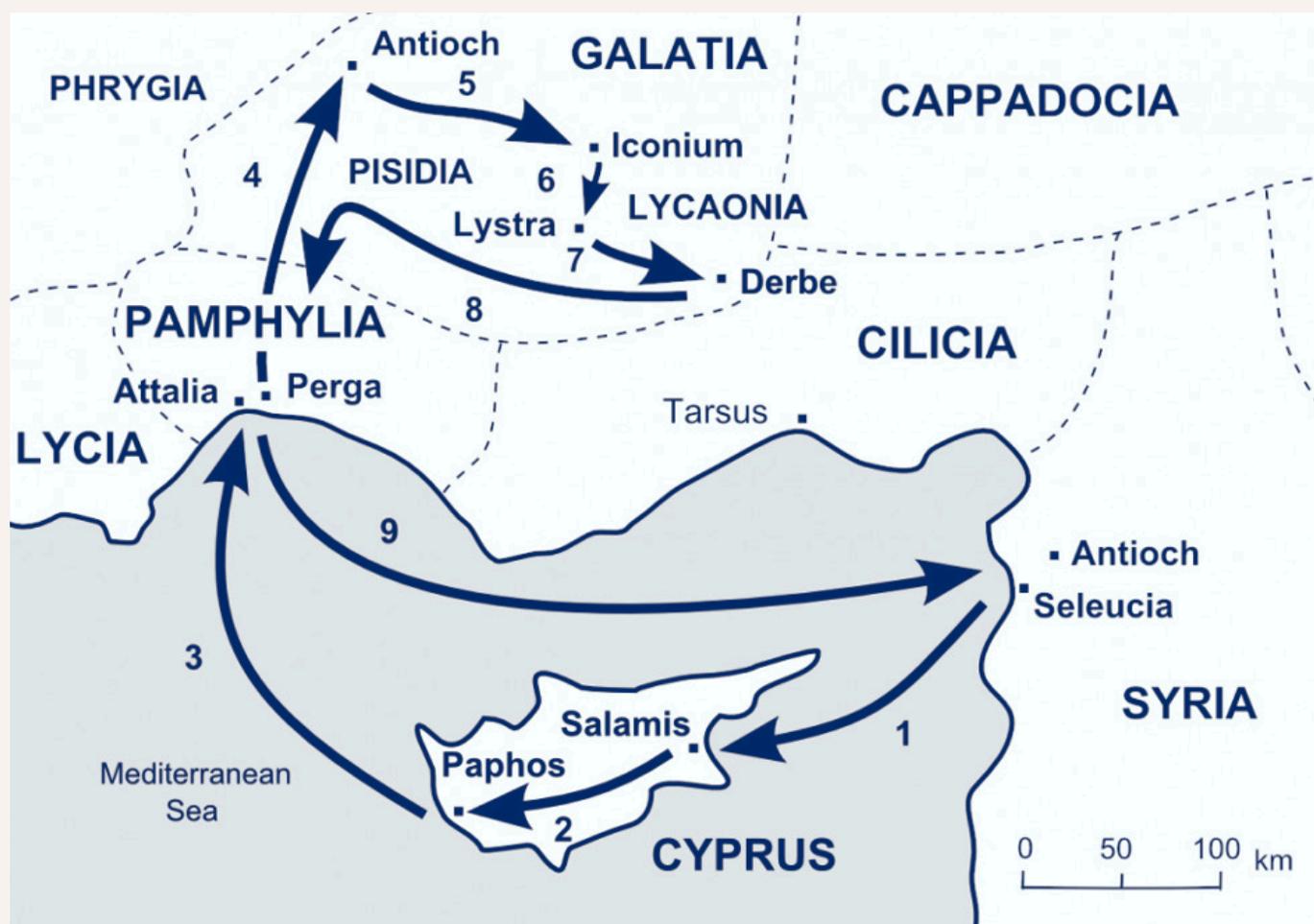
Week 2 - July 21



Questions

1. What does it mean to be sent by the Holy Spirit?
2. In what ways is church planting spiritual warfare?
3. Why are churches often planted in the face of persecution?
4. Who prepares good soil for church planting?

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY





Commentary

For the next three weeks we are going to follow Paul's three missionary journeys in Acts 13-20. As we do, we are going to see that the biblical pattern in missions is church planting.

That was true in Paul's day and is true today. Jesus commanded us in Matthew 20:19-20 to make disciples of all nations. Disciples are not made in isolation. They are made in the context of a church body. Without churches there are no disciples being made. That is why Paul planted churches everywhere he went.

Understanding that missions is church planting is to see Kingdom Advancement through multiplication. Planting churches that plant churches.

Acts 13-20 is the exciting story of a church planting movement.

Paul's first missionary journey is recorded in Acts 13:4 -15:35

The Holy Spirit and Church Planting

Back in verse 2 the Holy Spirit spoke to the elders at the church in Antioch to set Barnabas and Paul to the work He had called them to. Now in verse 4 as they embark on the first missionary journey, they are "sent out by the Holy Spirit." This phrase conveys some of the essentials in Kingdom Expansion:

1. It is God the Holy Spirit who takes the initiative in missions in both calling and sending. Our God is a missionary God. Missions is the heart of God.
2. Paul and Barnabas went out in the power of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:8 Jesus sets the stage for everything else that happens in the book of Acts, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Missions and church planting are not the work of men, or the plans of men. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit through Spirit filled people.
3. As Galatians 5 says, they went out walking in the Spirit, being led by the Spirit, and keeping in step with the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who draws the map of missions and church planting. Our part is to follow Him. The end results of being "sent out by the Holy Spirit" was the planting of new churches everywhere Paul went as people believed.



Commentary

Church Planting on Cyprus, Acts 13:4-12

Paul and Barnabas' first stop was on the island of Cyprus. They went from one end of the island to the other preaching the word of the gospel in the synagogues to the Jews. Paul planted churches among those who believed. When they came to the far end of Cyprus to the capitol of Paphos, the governor Sergius Paulus asked to hear Paul and Barnabas. Paul entered into spiritual warfare and satanic opposition. The Jewish magician Elymas, a devil inspired false pagan religious leaders tried to keep the governor from believing. All false religions are from Satan and are demonic and can only be defeated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, confronts Elymas and blinds him. The governor was astonished at the teaching of the Lord and believed. A church was planted among the Gentiles.

Church Planting in Antioch in Pisidia, Act 13:13-52

Paul and Barnabas left Cyprus to travel to the province of Galatia (Paul would later write to these churches in the book of Galatians. All his letters are written in a missions and church planting context). In route they went through Perga and Pamphylia where John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. No information is given of Paul and these two cities. But, his practice was to share the gospel wherever he was and plant churches for the new believers.

Paul's first stop in Galatia was in Antioch in Pisidia. He went first to the synagogue and preached the death and resurrection of Jesus from the Old Testament. Many Jews and God fearers among the Gentiles believed. The people begged Paul to continue with the gospel the next Sabbath. A great crowd, "the whole city," turned out to hear Paul. A great number of Gentiles believed. House churches were planted, and the gospel spread to the region around Antioch in Pisidia with more churches planted.

The message of the gospel causes tumult and opposition. Unbelieving Jews stirred up some influential people to persecute Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of the region. When the light of the gospel comes, some love darkness because their deeds are evil. They hate the light and oppose it.

Church Planting in Iconium, Acts 14:1-7

Paul went first to the synagogue to preach the word of grace in Jesus. Many Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up opposition to Paul and Barnabas. Paul stayed a long time in the city preaching and teaching the gospel. Churches were planted. Signs and wonders were performed demonstrating and validating the life changing message of Jesus.



Commentary

Iconium became divided between those who sided with the opposing Jews and some siding with Paul and Barnabas. The gospel is always a dividing line. Those who believe are congregated into disciples who follow Jesus as Lord. But Satan will always stir up opposition to the work of God.

The opposition became so great that they went to those with political power to stone Paul. Hearing this, Paul moves on in his missionary journey.

Church Planting in Lystra, Acts 14:8-20a

Arriving at Lystra Paul preached publicly. There was a man crippled from birth in the crowd. Seeing this man believed, Paul healed the man and commanded him to stand and walk. The crowds mistook Paul and Barnabas for Greek gods. Paul responded that God had left a witness of himself in creation. Psalm 19:1, "The heaven declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." He pointed the crowd to the goodness of God. Paul preached Jesus and churches were planted.

The Jew that opposed Paul at Antioch in Pisidia and Iconium, traveled to Lystra and incited the crowds against Paul. The crowds stoned him and drug him outside the city, thinking that he was dead. When the new disciples gathered around him, Paul got up in great boldness walked back into Lystra. Church planting is the missionary mandate. However, it is not an easy task. It will be met with opposition. Sharing the gospel and planting churches requires a Holy Spirit empowered boldness.

Church Planting a Derbe, Acts 14:21b-22a

Little is said about Paul in Derbe. However, what is said teaches an important lesson in missions is church planting. Paul found much good soil in Derbe and made many disciples with many house churches planted.

We are to share the gospel with everyone. But as we sow the gospel some will fall of hard ground, some on rocky ground, some among thorns, and some on good soil. It is God who prepares the good soil.



Commentary

Revisiting the Churches, Acts 14:22b-22

Leaving Derbe, Paul made a return visit to the churches in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia. He did not leave the new church alone to survive in isolation. He encouraged them in the faith and to remain faithful in the face of opposition and persecution. He appointed elders to lead the churches.

It is important that we stay in close contact with our Acts 1:8 partners encouraging them and praying for them.

Paul Returns to the Church in Antioch, Acts 24-28

Paul and Barnabas returned to their sending church in Antioch. They reported all that God had done during their missionary journey, how God had opened the door to the Gentiles, and of all the churches planted. Spending many days with their home church, the church was strengthened, and the church leaders rejoiced because they had heard and obeyed the Holy Spirit in sending Paul and Barnabas.

During our Missions is Church Planting Conference, our Acts 1:8 partners will report all that God is doing through them and in the important role we play in their missions ministries.

The Jerusalem Council, Acts 15:1-35

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the Jerusalem Council to the message of the gospel, to the meaning of missions, and to church planting. While Paul and Barnabas were still in Antioch, teachers from Judea came down and taught that one could not be saved without circumcision. Paul and Barnabas got into a heated debate with them.

The elder of the church at Antioch decided to send a delegation, headed by Paul and Barnabas, to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to settle the question. What was at stake was the meaning of salvation and what it means to make disciples to the uttermost parts of the world. As Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem, along the way they shared what God has done in saving the Gentiles. Everywhere people rejoiced at the news. When we hear from our Acts 1:8 partners, it should bring great joy to us.

When they arrived at the Jerusalem Council, Paul and Barnabas shared what God had done in opening the door to reach the Gentiles and planting churches. Then some believers who came from a Pharisee background argued that to be saved the Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law. The lines of the issue were drawn. Would Christianity be a Jewish sect or would it be a global faith?



Commentary

Peter rose to give the testimony of how God opened the door of the Gentiles to him in the conversion of the household of Cornelius. God makes no distinction between people and confirmed that by giving Gentiles the indwelling Holy Spirit. He warned of the danger of fighting against the heart of God. He ended by affirming that people are saved by grace alone (by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone).

Paul and Barnabas shared the signs and wonders that had been worked among the Gentiles. God has confirmed His work through these miracles.

James, the brother of Jesus, gives the Jerusalem Council's decision. He quotes from Amos 9:11-12, saying all the Old Testament prophet agreed with these words, that God pointed to the time when "all the Gentiles who are called by my name," come to the Lord. Therefore, the Gentiles should not have the yoke of Judaism placed on them. They are to be instructed in holiness by keeping themselves from idolatry and sexual immorality. And in the "Law of Love" they were not to offend Jewish believers in their eating habits. Paul states the same principle in 1 Corinthians 8:13, "Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

The Jerusalem Council sent a letter to the Gentile believers confirming salvation by grace. The gospel is for everyone everywhere. Thus they affirmed that missions is church planting.

Prayer Time

End by having several people pray for:

1. Our Acts 1:8 partners R and M and their training and making disciples of former Muslims. Pray for a church planting movement.
2. Our Acts 1:8 partner Abu John and his work of making disciples in a divided city.
3. Our church to deepen our relationships with our Acts 1:8 partners.
4. Our vision of "Making Multiplying Disciples from Wynne to the World" to be expanded.