

BEYOND OUR WALLS

How Churches Can Change the World

Acts 13:1-13

I. THE DIVERSE **CONGREGATION** (Acts 13:1)

- Look at this remarkable cross-section of the ancient world represented in one local church:
 - Barnabas** - A generous-hearted Levite from Cyprus in the Mediterranean.
 - Saul** - A Hellenistic Jew from Tarsus in Asia Minor (modern Turkey).
 - Simeon called Niger** - The nickname "Niger" literally means "black," indicating this man was from Sub-Saharan Africa, the region where modern Niger sits today.
 - Lucius of Cyrene** - From Cyrene in modern-day Libya, North Africa.
 - Manaen** - From Herod's household, representing Jewish aristocracy from Palestine.

(One from the Middle East, one from Asia Minor, one from the Mediterranean, and two from Africa.)

II. THE DEVOTED **COMMUNION** (Acts 13:2a)

- Not for the Lord, not to people, but TO the Lord Himself. This Greek word describes the highest priestly service in the tabernacle - the ministry of the High Priest in the Holy of Holies. "The word translated 'ministered' here is used in the Septuagint of the work of the Levites. In other words, it suggests the spiritual nature of their service."¹ What does it mean to minister TO God? The heart of it is worship, praise, and communion with God.
- The Greek word "fast" means literally "not eating" - they separated themselves from the everyday cares of life: from jobs, family concerns, and daily burdens to seek the Lord's face and hear His voice.
- Notice the order:** worship came first, then ministry flowed from it. They ministered TO Him before they ministered FOR Him.

III. THE DIVINE **COMMISSIONING** (Acts 13:2b-4)

- "Sent" in verse 3 means "released". Look how the church responded to God's call on its best leaders. They laid hands on them in blessing and commissioning, and "sent them away." They released them gladly. This is the missionary model: local churches identifying, commissioning, and supporting those whom God calls to cross-cultural ministry.

¹ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 13:2a.

IV. THE DRAMATIC CONFRONTATION (Acts 13:6-12)

- From this point forward, Luke uses Paul's Roman name rather than his Hebrew name Saul. Paul didn't take this name from Sergius Paulus - that's a common misconception. Like many Jews of his day, he had both a Hebrew name (Shaul/Saul) and a Roman name (Paulus/Paul, meaning 'little'). As his ministry shifts from primarily Jewish to primarily Gentile audiences, he wisely uses his Roman name. It's simply good missionary strategy.
- Sergius Paulus (political leader of Cyprus) was won to Christ! One strategic conversion can transform an entire region. This teaches us to pray earnestly for leaders - in government, business, education, entertainment.

V. THE DISAPPOINTING CRISIS (Acts 13:13)

- **Why did John Mark leave?** The Scripture doesn't say, but several factors may have contributed:
 - **Comfort zone broken** - They were leaving familiar Jewish territory for dangerous Gentile regions.
 - **Physical hardship** - Perga was a malarial lowland; the journey ahead was mountainous and risky.
 - **Homesickness** - As J. Vernon McGee colorfully said, "John Mark had a yellow streak up and down his spine, and he went home to mama".²
 - **Lack of commitment** - He had never fully died to self and embraced the cross. Mark had grown up in wealth (his mother owned the house where the early church met). He hadn't learned the discipline of hard work or sacrifice. When missionary life got difficult, he bailed out.
- Acts 15:36-39 reveals that five years later, Paul still refused to take John Mark on another journey.
- But this isn't the end of Mark's story. Years later, Paul wrote from prison: "Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11).



APPLICATIONS:

1. **Embrace diversity in the church family.** Don't just welcome people like yourself. Actively reach across racial, economic, and cultural lines. A diverse church can be a strong church for world evangelism.
2. **Learn to minister TO the Lord, not just FOR Him.** Develop an intimate worship relationship in which you commune with God and hear His voice.
3. **Be willing to release the best people for the "Kingdom" mission.** Don't hoard talented members. When God calls them to missions, send them gladly with your blessing and support.
4. **When you get serious about evangelism, expect pushback from Satan.** Don't be intimidated. In the Holy Spirit's power, speak truth boldly and watch God work.
5. **Show grace to those who fail and quit.** Not everyone will stay faithful. Some will abandon the mission when it gets difficult. Keep the door open for restoration. God loves to turn failures into champions.
6. **Pray specifically for the salvation of influential people.** One strategic conversion can have massive ripple effects throughout a community, state, or country.

² J. Vernon McGee "Acts 13:13-20", https://www.blueletterbible.org/audio_video/popPlayer.cfm?id=7916&rel=mcgee_j_vernon/english/act.