



Stuff They Didn't Teach Me In Sunday School



Episode 153 - The Ball Gets Rolling

(Acts 13-14, 15:36-41)

Missions Headquarters: Antioch

We might expect the first huge missionary push to the Gentiles to come from Jerusalem, especially after Peter had shared the Gospel with the Gentile Cornelius (see Episode 151). But instead it came from a Roman city to the north called Antioch. Why Antioch? Back in Episode 148 we talked about a dispute in Jerusalem between traditional Jewish believers and Hellenist believers. The traditional Jews rejected the Greek influence in the Roman Empire, while the Hellenists were Jews who had embraced the Greek language and culture after the rule of Alexander the Great. The dispute revolved around unequal food distribution between the Jewish and Hellenist widows. Stephen and six others were appointed to oversee this food distribution. Following Stephen's martyrdom a Jewish persecution broke out and many Christians scattered from Jerusalem. Some of them came to Antioch, and in addition to sharing the good news with traditional Jews, they started speaking to the Hellenists. It was this congregation from which the Spirit sent the first missionaries.

- Why would reaching out to Jews who accepted Greek manners and customs be a first step in eventually reaching out to Gentiles?
- What important contribution is made by traditional, conservative members who want to guard and protect our historic faith?
- What important contribution do outward-looking members offer the church?
- Why must we keep a balance of both?

Getting the Ball Rolling

After His Baptism, the first stage of Jesus' ministry was set in motion by the Holy Spirit. After He was baptized the Holy Spirit led Him into the desert, where He was tempted by the devil. Through His perfect obedience Jesus earned our Father's favor, and by His innocent suffering and death He turned God's wrath away from us and onto Himself. In His resurrection we have the promise of our own resurrection and eternal life.

As zealous as Paul was to defend the faith he had once persecuted, it wasn't his idea to go on a missionary journey. And as encouraging and supporting as Barnabas was, it's important for us to remember it wasn't his idea to go back to his home island of Cyprus and start preaching. The Holy Spirit Himself stepped in and chose the first missionaries and sent them on their way.

- When the Holy Spirit commissioned Barnabas and Paul, why did He speak to the whole group of prophets and teachers in Antioch and not just to the two? (See Acts 13:1-3.)
- Why is it important for the church to stand behind every missionary and mission team?
- (If you are interested in forming a volunteer mission team in your church, please visit www.lhm.org/teams/default.asp.)

The Dream Team Splits

Barnabas and Paul worked very well together. Paul was brilliant, well-versed in Scripture, and powerful at debating, but he was intense. Barnabas was a warm, friendly guy, who was great at pulling people together, as his name "Son of Encouragement" implies. That all changed after Barnabas' cousin Mark (the writer of the Gospel of Mark) left in the middle of the first journey. It prompted a sharp dispute when Paul wanted to go on a second journey and Barnabas wanted to bring Mark along.

- Why would Barnabas' warm, encouraging personality lead him to go to bat in Mark's defense?
- Why do you think Paul might have taken such a strong stance against Mark coming along?
- When have you seen good friends go their separate ways over a dispute?
- Obviously, God brought good out of this disagreement by creating two missionary teams. What good have you seen God bring out of disputes in your family or church?