

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY AND THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

Acts 13:1-15:35

Key verse 13:47

“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.””

Dear Heavenly Father! Thank You for entrusting us with the study of the Book of Acts at this GLE-Forum. Please teach us how we can be used as the light of the Gentiles, like Paul and Barnabas. Give each of us a personal word. I pray all in Jesus' name. Amen!

We thank the Lord for his Word from the Book of Acts. We may learn that the Holy Spirit brings salvation in Jesus through the witnesses of Jesus to the ends of the earth. Thanks be to God for lecture three (chapters 8-12), through which we have learned that God, in his grace and sovereignty, prepared world mission. The gospel spread from Jerusalem to all Judea and Samaria through the obedience of the Bible teachers. Those who had been driven out of Jerusalem preached the word wherever they went in obedience to Jesus' calling. Through Philip's obedience, there was a great work among the people of Samaria and in the life of an Ethiopian eunuch. Through the obedience of the disciple Ananias, the persecutor Saul was converted and baptized, whom God had chosen as his instrument for the mission to the Gentiles. Through Peter's obedience, Cornelius came to faith, and it was revealed that God does not show favoritism, but that he is pleased with anyone from any nation who fears him and does what is right. Through the obedience of the Bible teachers in Antioch in Syria, many Greeks also heard the word of the Lord, and a dynamic, intercultural, mission-centered church was formed.

Today's passage describes the beginning of world mission in Antioch and God's work on the first missionary journey. We learn about the missionary spirit of the apostles, their belief in the resurrection and their belief in the gospel. May the Lord grant us grace to put on the missionary spirit of the apostles and to be the light of the Gentiles and salvation at the campus in Germany, Europe, Muslim countries and to the ends of the earth.

Part 1: The beginning of world mission in Antioch (13:1–14:28)

World mission began in the church in Antioch. The church in Antioch had been founded by scattered Christians. There, Jewish Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene had preached to the Greeks for the first time and many had come to faith. Verse 1 says that there were prophets and teachers in the church. This church was chosen by God to take the next step according to Acts 1:8, namely the step toward world mission. Let us read verse 2: “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”” The Holy Spirit called on them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the mission among the Gentiles. Verse 3 says that they fasted again, prayed, laid their hands on them, and sent them off. They were prepared by the work of the Holy Spirit to give their best for the mission.

Here we learn about the missionary spirit of the church in Antioch. Instead of hesitating and calculating, they served the Lord, fasted, prayed, blessed the apostles, sent them out on their first missionary journey, and continued to support them with prayer. They remind us of the church in Herrnhut, which was founded almost 300 years ago when Nikolaus Graf von Zinzendorf took in numerous religious refugees at his estate. Shortly after its founding, they sent missionaries to the Caribbean to work among the slaves there. They did not concern themselves with their denominational differences, but, like the church in Antioch, had a clear identity as a world mission center.

On Saul's first missionary journey, Barnabas and Saul, together with John Mark, came to Cyprus and preached the gospel in the synagogues of the Jews in Salamis. Then they traveled across the island to Paphos. There resided the governor Sergius Paulus. He desired to hear the word of the Lord. But a sorcerer named Elymas resisted the apostles and sought to turn the governor away from the faith. The resistance was a confirmation that the apostles were doing the work of the Lord. The Holy Spirit gave Paul authority. Let us read verses 9 and 10: "Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?'" God struck the sorcerer with blindness, and the governor came to faith.

Then they followed the Spirit's guidance via Perga in Pamphylia, where John Mark left them, to Antioch in Pisidia, a journey of about 200 kilometers and an altitude difference of about 1,000 meters. In the synagogue of the city, Paul preached about Jesus. He began with the word of Scripture that had just been read and testified how God had led the people of Israel throughout history to fulfill His promise. From the beginning, God's promise was to send the Savior who would save them from their sins and give them eternal life. They read Deuteronomy and Isaiah and found that God promises the Savior who saves from sins and gives eternal life. This promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Paul proved this with Scripture: Jesus came as the descendant of David, suffered and died, and was buried. However, he did not see decay but rose from the dead according to Scripture. Then Paul invited them to believe and receive forgiveness of sins and be made righteous. Let us read verses 38 and 39: ""Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses." Paul invited them and exhorted them not to despise or miss out on this great salvation.

Through Paul's preaching, God worked powerfully. Many heard about Jesus for the first time. They knew the promises, but now they began to understand their true meaning. They asked the apostles to speak about it again on the next Sabbath. Many Jews and Jewish converts followed the apostles and accepted God's grace. On the next Sabbath, almost the entire city gathered. Let us read the key verse 13:47: "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ""I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."" The Jews became jealous and contradicted and blasphemed. But the Holy Spirit was with Paul, who clearly pointed out to them that if they rejected the testimony of Jesus, they would reject eternal life. Paul and Barnabas also received insight that what was happening was according to God's will, namely that He would now turn to the Gentiles through them and bring them the gospel of salvation.

Once again, God's great work was accompanied by further resistance. We read about God's work in chapter 13, verses 48 and 49: "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord, and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord spread throughout the region." The Jews incited the prominent women and men against the apostles, instigated persecution and drove Paul and Barnabas out of their territory. However, the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

God's work continued, always accompanied by opposition, in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In Iconium, the apostles were able to preach in the synagogue in such a way that a large crowd of Jews and Greeks became believers. Despite the Jews' agitation, the apostles remained there for a long time and taught freely and openly, trusting in the Lord. The Lord testified to the word of his grace and performed signs and wonders through their hands. When a storm arose among the Gentiles and Jews and their leaders, and they wanted to mistreat and stone the apostles, they moved on to Lystra and Derbe and preach the gospel there.

In Lystra, a paralyzed man was healed, whereupon the crowd first wanted to sacrifice to the apostles but then stoned Paul under the influence of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium. However, Paul got up and went back into the city. The next day they moved on to Derbe, preached the gospel to the city and made many disciples. From Derbe they went back to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia, strengthening the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to remain faithful, saying, "We must enter the kingdom of God through many tribulations." They appointed elders in each church, prayed, fasted and commended them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe. On their return journey, they preached the word in Perga and sailed from Attalia back to Antioch in Syria, from where they had been sent out to do the work they had now accomplished.

Praise be to the Lord for his mighty work on Paul's first missionary journey. How were the apostles able to work so victoriously and fruitfully?

First: their missionary spirit. When Paul and Barnabas said, "For this is what the Lord has commanded us," they testified that their lives were mission. Mission was not a part of their lives, but their lives. They followed Jesus, whose life was mission. Jesus came into the world and became human according to God's will with a mission: as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. He healed the sick, preached the kingdom of God and taught the disciples. Then he died on the cross. His life on this earth was his mission. Paul preached the gospel of Jesus in the synagogues. When the Jews resisted, he turned to the Gentiles to preach to them, because God had commanded him to be a light to the Gentiles and salvation to the ends of the earth. Our lives are determined by the mission to which the Lord has called us. We are witnesses of Jesus to the ends of the earth. We are the royal priesthood, declare the praises of God who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. A servant of God testified when he experienced misunderstanding and resistance because of his love for Jesus and Jesus' sheep: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Phil 1:21) "To live is Christ" meant: His mission is my life, and so he fought even more determinedly for the mobilization of the next generation as spiritual leaders and for the establishment of mission bases for Muslim mission.

Second: Their belief in the resurrection. Paul's belief in the resurrection is evident in the fact that he had no fear and did not spare his own life. He believed that, just as Jesus had risen

from the dead, he too would live, even if people killed his body. This belief in the resurrection meant that Paul did not think of himself, but of the sheep. After being stoned in Lystra, he got up and went back into the city and the next day he continued to Derbe. From Derbe, Paul's hometown Tarsus was not far away but Paul went all the way back through the cities where he had been stoned and reviled. Why? To strengthen the souls of the disciples, to encourage and comfort them and to appoint elders among them. His belief in the resurrection made him a loving shepherd to the sheep, just as the risen Jesus had helped Simon Peter to leave all self-centeredness behind and be a shepherd for the sheep. Paul and his co-workers were willing to give everything for the sheep as the overcomers of whom Revelation 12:11 says that they did not love their own lives even unto death.

At the end of the journey, the apostles gave glory to God. Let us read verse 14:27: "On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." They did not talk about how much they had suffered and how difficult everything was. They talked about how much God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They praised God and encouraged many to serve in the mission to the Gentiles.

Boniface was an English monk. His heart burned for the Frisians and Germanic people, who had their own gods and did not yet know the almighty Creator God. To show the locals that there is only one God, he cut down the Donar Oak, which was considered the home of the gods. Until his martyrdom, he preached in Germania and lived as a light for the Gentiles, so that the gospel also spread among the Germanic people.

Thanks and praise be to the Lord, who is also working powerfully in our time among the modern Gentiles at universities in Germany and Europe. He wants to perform signs and wonders, convert souls and open doors. To do this, He needs people with a missionary spirit and resurrection faith. God has already blessed the missionary spirit and resurrection faith of the missionaries and shepherds of UBF in the past and has worked powerfully in the hearts and lives of young people, making them believers and strengthening them in the grace of God. When we think of ourselves, He also blessed our lives of mission beyond our imagination and opened the doors of faith so that young people came to faith, were saved to eternal life and praised the Lord.

Let us continue the mission work of Campus Mission under the guidance of the Holy Spirit by forming 10,000 one-to-one Bible study teams and experiencing God's powerful work. Because we do not consider our own lives worth mentioning because of His grace and calling, but offer them for the salvation of the sheep, God will open the doors of faith for young people at the Bonn-Rhein-Sieg College, the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Law, the EMA, HHG, CoJoBo, in Muslim countries and even in North Korea, China, and Cambodia. "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."" It is my prayer that this year God will raise up 12 disciples of Jesus through each house church and through the young shepherds and that He will open up another 12 universities through the sheep.

I thank God that through Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection, He saved me from my sins of disobedience, greed, desire, laziness, and selfishness. God also called me to be a general of faith and entrusted me with Joshua 1:7-9 as my life key verse. My parents remained

steadfast in their faith and in proclaiming the gospel when they were mocked by the secretary at the law school. God blessed my parents' faith and their one-to-one Bible study teams abundantly and is leading Carla, Meltem, Yasemin, and Oleg to the Word of God. The prayer circle of my parents, Lydia, and me seems small, but God blesses our prayers and gives the students, starting with Carla, Yasemin, Meltem, and Oleg, an open ear for the Word of God and blesses my parents' spiritual fellowship with their sheep. God called Samuel, Peter Josef, Sarah Schweitzer, Sarah Grace and me as shepherds to live as a light to the Gentiles. God allowed me to lead my friend Rahman to the prayer meeting at the Juridicum so that we could pray for him and testify to him our belief that Jesus has died on the cross to forgive our sins. At the fellowship, God showed me that he has an open ear for His Word and is ready to hear it. God lets me pray for him that he will accept the gospel and encourages me to serve him as a light to the Gentiles with the gospel through one-to-one Bible study.

Thanks be to God, who has made us the light of the Gentiles for the unbelieving students on campus in Germany, Europe, in Muslim countries and to the ends of the earth.

2. The Apostles' Meeting in Jerusalem (15:1-35)

Paul and Barnabas stayed with the disciples in Antioch for a considerable time (14:28). Then a new concern arose. Let us read 15:1: "Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."" Verse 24 says that these men had not been sent by the church in Jerusalem. They came on their own initiative. Verse 2 says that the apostles had a considerable dispute with them. Why did the apostles react so harsh? This false teaching by some Jews was an attack on the gospel of God's grace, which alone brings salvation. One can talk about all kinds of things, about whether circumcision is meaningful or not, about what foods to eat and how to celebrate holidays, but everything must be done on the only true foundation, the fact that we are justified once and for all through the unique sacrifice of Jesus Christ and are saved by faith in Jesus alone. The gospel of Jesus' grace is inviolable. In the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas recognized this attack and stood up to protect the Gentile Christians. The Lord arranged for the discussion on this issue to be moved to Jerusalem. This gave many more people the opportunity to hear about God's gracious work among the Gentiles.

Already on their way there through Phoenicia and Samaria, the apostles told of the conversion of the Gentiles, bringing great joy to all the brothers (15:3). In Jerusalem, too, they proclaimed how much God had done through them. Let us read verse 15:5: "Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."" Here we see a great contrast between these Pharisees who had become believers but still adhered to circumcision and the law, and the former master Pharisee Paul, for whom Jesus had become everything and everything else had become rubbish. Paul considered everything he had been proud of as a Jew garbage compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord (Phil. 3:8).

These Pharisees had not yet recognized that the law was perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ and that faith in Jesus frees a person to give his life for the glory of God and to bear much fruit, as Paul did. Unlike the apostles and the Gentile Christians, they did not lead a giving life and feed the sheep, but instead burdened the new believers. Ultimately, they were concerned with their own righteousness. Because they had a certain amount of influence, the assembly argued for

a long time. But God had already prepared his witnesses and defenders. Peter was the first to stand up and speak. Now it became clear why God had led him to Cornelius in Caesarea. Peter had learned that God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. He rebuked those gathered and testified to the gospel of salvation. Let us read verses 15:10-11: "Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." Then the whole crowd fell silent. Once again, Paul and Barnabas recounted the great signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. Then James also stood up. He proved with a quotation from the book of Amos that the mission to the Gentiles is also revealed in Scripture as the will of God. His conclusion was: "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood." This was recorded as a decision by the assembly and sent to the Gentile Christians by Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas. When the Gentiles read the letter, they were glad about the encouragement. They were glad that no further burden was imposed on them. They were glad that their freedom in Christ was recognized and that they could serve God's will, namely his mission to be salvation to the ends of the earth, without hindrance. Verse 35 says: "But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, where they and many others taught and preached the word of the Lord."

Here we learn that God carries out world mission in both external and internal trials through those who are committed to God's flock with a missionary spirit and faith in the resurrection and the gospel. God has made us the light of the Gentiles so that we may be salvation to the ends of the earth. Let us live as the light of the Gentiles with the Holy Spirit by forming 10,000 one-to-one Bible study teams and thus bearing fruit for spiritual revival among young people in Germany, Europe, Muslim countries and to the ends of the earth.

Dear Heavenly Father! Thank You for teaching us through this lesson to live as the light of the Gentiles, who are salvation to the ends of the earth. Please use us with the power of the Holy Spirit as Bible teachers in Bonn, Germany, Europe, Turkey and to the ends of the earth. Continue to bless this GLE-Forum abundantly. I pray all in Jesus' name. Amen!