

Empowered

The Amazing Church of Jesus Christ

Week 6

The First Missionary Journey

Acts 13:1 – 14:28

Teacher Notes

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*Bible versions used throughout the Empowered teacher notes are
NASB, ESV, NLT, and CEB.*

✧ Introduction to Week Six

ILLUSTRATION: A young man decided to run the New York Marathon that was to take place in the month of November. Training was critical! On the day of the race the wind picked up causing a chill factor that created harsher conditions in the already extreme cold temperature. He was not deterred by the weather, however, because he had trained and felt confident that he was prepared to run the twenty-six-mile course. About halfway through, his body started to ‘complain’ with stomach cramps. With great difficulty, he persevered to finish the race after five long hours. The reward? A t-shirt plus bragging rights plus a very sore body. Was such a reward worth it? Yes, to this young man.

The personal cost to successfully run in this race? Training, discipline, preparation, perseverance, and the willingness to suffer.

- Paul persevered for a lifetime, suffering hardships and near death, that produced an abundance of spiritual fruit.
- **NOTE:** Remember on this journey there was no modern means of transportation; no four-wheelers, buses, trains, planes, or automobiles. They were on foot, moving along steep and difficult terrain. The physical demands were rigorous. Paul walked with fearless courage.
- Up to this point in our study, Jerusalem has been the center of ministry with Peter being the key apostle.
- From this point on, Antioch in Syria (the third largest city in the Roman Empire and well known for its pagan idolatry) would be the new center and Paul would be the new leader.
- Paul and Barnabas persevered in running the race that God set them upon—to go and carry the gospel onto the mission field.
 - ~ Their submission to this call will bring the suffering of hardships and near death. The reward? An abundance of spiritual fruit.
- As we study Chapters 13 and 14, the strategy toward world evangelism begins; the key to its success is faithful perseverance.
- The first church had several attributes:
 1. They were deeply committed to the Word of God—sound doctrine.
 2. They had godly leaders who came from multi-cultural backgrounds.
 3. They had godly teachers who strove to give a clear understanding of Biblical truth, equipping the people to grow in Christ and become effective disciples.

TEACHING TIP: Timewise, this occurred between eleven and twelve years after Paul’s conversion.

TEACHING TIP: To make disciples is to make learners who obey what they learn and grow more like Christ.

4. They were willing to send out their key leaders to the mission field in obedience to God and for the good of others.

Study One:

Acts 13:1-12 Barnabas and Saul Sent to Antioch

- Chapter 13 opens with a list of five men, very diverse, who were ministering in the church:
 1. Barnabas—a native of Cyprus whose name meant ‘son of encouragement.’
 2. Simeon—who was called Niger (Latin for ‘black’), an African Jewish believer.
 3. Lucius—who was a Gentile from Cyrene or North Africa.
 4. Manaen—who had been raised in King Herod’s household.
 5. Saul—who was a converted Pharisee, well-educated, and a teacher.

QUOTE: R. Kent Hughes, *Acts The Church Afire*— “This was the church staff at Antioch ... The perfect profile for a missionary church was exhibited there in Antioch. They were a microcosm of what the church would become in the world. This was no accident, but rather a deliberate work of God.”

- As they all ministered to the Lord and fasted, time that they had dedicated to God alone, the Holy Spirit spoke.
- ✠ Acts 13:2 “... Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

→ **NOTE:** God set these two men apart for a purpose, a specific lane in which He wanted them to run the Christian race. And they were divinely enabled as they were sent on their way by the Holy Spirit.

- The two men sailed sixty miles to Cyprus (familiar territory for Barnabas). Their first stop was Salamis. At some point they picked up John Mark, Barnabas’ young cousin, who joined them as their assistant. (Acts 13:5)

TEACHING TIP: Salamis had a substantial population of Jews and pagan slaves. It had a significant idolatrous influence.

- Upon reaching Salamis, the three headed straight to the synagogue to proclaim God’s Word because there they had an audience interested in religious truths.
- **NOTE:** As they traveled, their pattern would become one of going to the local synagogue first wherever possible because Saul had a great burden for the Jewish people.
- They traveled through the whole island as far as Paphos, the capital of Cyprus. In this town we are introduced to two men: Bar-Jesus (who practiced in the occult) and Sergius Paulus.

Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7,12)

- The proconsul (the Roman governor) of Cyprus.
- A man of intelligence.
- The word “intelligence” describes a man of great understanding.
- He wanted to hear the word of God. He wanted to investigate their ‘new’ teaching.

TEACHING TIP: This man of rank invited Saul and Barnabas to speak, two unknowns with no political standing; and yet he summoned them.

Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6-11)

- A magician. (Not one who pulls a rabbit out of a hat, but one dealing with sorcery, divination, fortune-telling, etc.)
- A Jewish false prophet. (This was unusual because Jews typically shunned demonic activities.)

→ **NOTE:** He was with the governor who may have been seeking his counsel on spiritual things; thus, Bar-Jesus was not happy with the proconsul’s interest in these men or their message. (Acts 13:8)

TEACHING TIP: When the pure Word of God is preached, opposition will arise.

- His name was translated to Elymas. The name meant “sorcerer or the wise.”
- He opposed Saul and Barnabas; and sought to turn the proconsul away from the faith.
 - ~ Though there is no suggestion that he had been invited by the governor (like Saul and Barnabas) to consult him; he had the man’s ear. This direct contact was now threatened.

- In Acts 13:9-10 Paul filled with the Holy Spirit basically called out Bar-Jesus and exposed him before Sergius Paulus and any others listening—
- ✚ Acts 13:10 “*You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?*”

TEACHING TIP: This is the first time Saul (Hebrew name) is referred to as Paul (Roman name) in the New Testament. Some commentators suggest that as a Jewish Roman citizen, his full name was most likely ‘Saul Paulus.’ The name Paul signifies ‘little’—isn’t that how he viewed himself compared to the Jesus he so loved?

→ **NOTE:** Paul seemed to see into the heart of this man.

- Through the power of the Lord Paul struck Bar-Jesus blind; mist and darkness fell upon him.

▲ **QUOTE:** It has been said—“*The kingdom of Light defeats the kingdom of darkness and the physical blindness of one becomes spiritual sight for another. God used a miracle to confirm the authenticity of His messengers and the truth of the Word. The Governor consequently placed his faith in Christ Jesus.*”

- ⇒ **Sergius Paulus heard Paul’s teaching of God’s Word and witnessed his encounter with Bar-Jesus. He believed, amazed by the teaching of the Lord. (Acts 13:12)**

TEACHING TIP: R. Kent Hughes in *Acts The Church Afire* commented— “Interestingly, archaeology has confirmed Luke’s report. Sir William Ramsay reports that inscriptions bearing Sergius Paulus’s name have been found on Cyprus confirming that he was a Christian and that his entire family became Christians.”

Study Two:

Acts 13:13-25 Paul Preaches at Pisidian Antioch

- Paul and Barnabas continued their travels; yet in Acts 13:13 we are informed that John Mark had left them and returned to Jerusalem. Now there are only two traveling and serving together.
- They traveled 112 miles from Paphos to Pisidian Antioch, the capital of Pamphylia.

TEACHING TIP: No reason is given as to why John Mark left. Anything we might add would be speculation. But we will learn in future chapters that the choice John Mark made here had very tragic consequences.

~ This was considered a very difficult and dangerous trip due to the threat of robbery by pirates, the steep terrain to traverse, and the danger of wild beasts.

TEACHING TIP: Pisidian Antioch was architecturally impressive. It was a Roman colony and considered very cosmopolitan in the heart of Asia Minor.

- Paul and Barnabas arrived in town on the Sabbath. (Sabbath is sundown Friday to sundown Saturday.)
- As was their custom, they headed first to the synagogue. There they sat down and listened to the reading of the Law and the Prophets. Paul was invited by synagogue officials to speak a word of exhortation for the people. (Acts 13:14-15)

TEACHING TIP: This is Paul’s first recorded sermon. It resembles Stephen’s trial speech in Acts 7. In it, Paul gives the people a ‘knitting’ lesson on the Old Testament history. He urged them to see how perfectly Christ *knitted* the past with the present—he was placing the coming of Jesus in historical perspective. The Jews did not have to forsake their history to believe in Jesus.

Paul’s Sermon (Acts 13:17-25)

- Beginning in verse 17, Paul started with Israel and the promise given—chosen by God, protected by God in Egypt, and led out of slavery with God’s mighty power.

- He reminded them how God had destroyed seven nations and had given them the land of Caanan (land flowing with milk and honey) as an inheritance.
- All this took four hundred-fifty years to accomplish—four hundred years in slavery, forty years in the wilderness because of their disobedience to God; and ten years to conquer the land.
- Paul recapped how when they were oppressed by their enemies, God gave them Judges, deliverers to preserve Israel from destruction.
- Israel, however, wanted to be ruled by a human king rather than a divine king. In His divine patience, God gave them Saul for forty years.
- According to God’s promise, God raised up David and through the line of David came a Savior, Jesus.
- In Acts 13:24 Paul reminded them that a prophet was to announce the Messiah’s coming. He did—the prophet, John the Baptist.

TEACHING TIP: His listeners knew the Messiah was to come from David’s line.

Study Three:

Acts 13:26-43 A Longing to Hear More

Paul’s Sermon (continued)

- ⇒ **These Jews knew the history that Paul had laid out; they now needed to accept that Jesus was part of God’s story for them. They needed to accept Jesus for Who He was—their Messiah, Savior.**
- ✚ Acts 13:26 *“Brethren, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent.”*
- Paul continued by charging them with having executed their own Messiah with ‘no grounds’ for what they did. (Acts 13:27-28)
- Paul shared the gospel message—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He stated that this was a message of good news—the promises God had made to their fathers had now been fulfilled in Jesus.
- **NOTE:** If we consider Paul’s message, knitting the Old Testament with Jesus, this was not ‘new’ news (it had been prophesied); it was, indeed, good news!
- ✚ Acts 13:32 *“And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers.”*

TEACHING TIP: Remember the setting—a synagogue. He used Messianic Psalms (Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 16:10), ones that the Jews were familiar with to support his argument.

- Paul explained how true forgiveness of sin was obtained—*only* through believing in Jesus Christ.
 - ~ Keeping the Law of Moses would never free them from their sins. (Acts 13:39)

TEACHING TIP: These Jews had now heard the Good News, and an invitation to believe it and receive it had been made.

- He closed His message by quoting the prophet Habakkuk—*“Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; For I am accomplishing a work in your days, A work which you will never believe, though someone should describe it to you.”* (Acts 13:41)

TEACHING TIP: Think about this warning given in this moment—knitting the old and new. God had raised up the Chaldeans to chasten His people. He had used an evil pagan nation (Gentiles) to punish His chosen (Jews). But now the ‘wonderful work’ in Paul’s day was God using the Jews to save the Gentiles.

- The response to Paul’s requested exhortation for the people? The people begged him to stay, to share again on the next Sabbath. Many Jews and Gentiles believed. (Acts 13:42-43)

Study Four:

Acts 13:44-14:7 Acceptance and Opposition

- Paul’s message had an obvious impact. On the next Sabbath, almost all the city gathered to hear the Word of God. The Jews were filled with jealousy and contradicted what Paul had to say, and they blasphemed.

QUOTE: William Penn—*“The jealous are troublesome to others; a torment to themselves.”*

- Paul’s second message threw open wide the door of salvation to everyone who would believe in Jesus Christ, as their Savior!
- † Acts 13:46 *“It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you [Jews] first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”*

TEACHING TIP: In v47 Paul quoted Isaiah 49:6— *“For so the Lord commanded, ‘I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, that You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.’”* Paul understood that God would have a ministry for him specifically with the Gentiles.

- The response?
 - ~ The Gentiles: rejoiced, glorified the word of the Lord.
 - ~ The Jews: filled with jealousy, they rejected the word and planned opposition and persecution. The Gentiles’ joy only increased the Jews’ fury.

TEACHING TIP: Don’t miss v49— *“The word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.”*

→ **NOTE:** Wherever there is revival, the second group to be revived is the devil.

- We have seen in the past how Satan can affect masses of followers through a few leaders. That was the scene in Acts 13:50.
 - ~ The Jews incited the most influential, God-fearing women and the leading men of the city.
 - ~ These leaders instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of town.

"Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet." (Matthew 10:14)

- Paul and Barnabas "shook the dust off their feet" in protest and left town, as Jesus had commanded his disciples.
- They did not lose heart or quit over this turn of events; instead, they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:52)
- In Chapter 14 we find Paul and Barnabas in Iconium.
 - ~ This was an eighty-mile journey, southeast of Paphos, and in the Roman province of Galatia.
 - ~ A city considered more Greek than Roman.
 - ~ There was a strong colony of Jews in this Gentile pagan city.

- Once again, they headed first to the synagogue and spoke in such a manner that a large number believed, both Jews and Greeks.

→ **NOTE:** They continued to meet resistance. The Jews who rejected Paul's words stirred up the Gentiles and sought to embitter them against Paul and Barnabas.

TEACHING TIP: The New Living Translation—"... *the Jews spurned God's message and poisoned the minds of the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas.*" (Acts 14:2)

- Paul and Barnabas were not deterred in spending considerable time there and speaking boldly, relying on the Lord—and in that God granted signs and wonders be done by their hands. (Acts 14:3)
- In Iconium they experienced immediate success with the great number of Jews and Greeks believing. But they also experienced immediate opposition from the Jews.
- A plot was devised by the riled-up Gentiles, the unbelieving Jews, along with their rulers, to mistreat and stone Paul and Barnabas. Once they learned of this lethal plan, they fled the city.

QUOTE: Tim Keller—"The greater the effectiveness of ministry, the greater resistance and opposition."

Study Five:

Acts 14:8-28 A Lame Man at Lystra

- They continued their mission trip into Lystra and Derbe.
 - ~ Lystra was eighteen miles from Iconium and Derbe was forty miles southwest of Lystra.
 - ~ Both were districts in the Roman province of Galatia.

➤ **Lystra**

- ~ A frontier outpost of the Roman Empire.
- ~ Its population was mostly Roman military veterans.
- ~ It had no synagogue, so there was a very small Jewish population.

TEACHING TIP: Rome ruled the land, but the Greeks controlled the commerce. The Jews had little influence and were, for the most part, uneducated.

- Because there was no synagogue, Paul and Barnabas headed to the marketplace.

- In Acts 14:8-10 we are introduced to a man who had never walked (born lame) and witness his encounter with Paul.

- ~ He was listening to Paul as he spoke—whether preaching or in conversation.
- ~ Paul discerned that this man had faith to be healed.
- ~ Through the power of God, Paul performed a miracle.
 - * He told the man to stand!
 - * Remember: this man had been lame since birth.
 - * And the man not only stood but he leaped up to stand! And he began to walk.

QUOTE: John MacArthur—
“Miracles are supernatural signs pointing men to the truth.”

- The crowd witnessing this event had been steeped in ancient legends and mythology; with that mindset they began to worship the two missionaries as messengers of their gods (Zeus and Hermes).

TEACHING TIP: Because Satan could not derail these two servants with persecution, he tried praise.

- Paul understood the audience was mostly Gentile, so he appealed to them to turn from their worthless idols and used the witness of God Himself in Acts 14:15-17.

- ~ He is a living God (not an inanimate or dead statue).
- ~ He is the Creator of heaven, earth, the sea, and all that is in them.
- ~ He is the Provider—of rains from heaven and fruitful seasons.

TEACHING TIP:
Paul’s emphasis to these Gentiles—there is only ONE God and He is a living God.

- The crowd would not listen; they wanted to make sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. But these two godly servants would not succumb to pride.

TEACHING TIP: Have you ever heard the phrase, ‘from hero to zero?’ Satan could not win with the ‘praise’ approach, so he resorted to murder by using ‘outsiders.’

- The unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium had followed Paul and Barnabas into town! They stirred up the crowd and the people stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, and assumed he was dead.
- **NOTE:** Stoning was a Jewish punishment, rarely heard of in Greek society.

TEACHING TIP: Imagine this scene! Paul—caked with blood and dirt, wounds on his body, no Tylenol, no casts, no medical ambulance to pick him up—got up! Put yourself in one of the disciple’s shoes who was standing over him, thinking he was dead! Instead, he was ready to continue with the mission to share Jesus!

- **NOTE:** Don’t miss the timeframe in v20. The **next day** Paul and Barnabas left for Derbe, which was a forty-mile walk. Paul’s ability to do this was nothing short of supernatural.
- **Derbe:** Also, a frontier town and no mention of a synagogue there.
- They had no apparent opposition or persecution in Derbe. They preached the gospel to the city and made many disciples. (Acts 14:21)
 - With dauntless courage, they chose to return to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch—cities that had expelled them, threatened them, stoned them.
 - Why would they return to places with people who actively opposed them? (Acts 14:22)
 - ~ To teach and disciple.
 - ~ To strengthen the souls of the disciples in these cities.
 - ~ To encourage them in the faith, recognizing the opposition and persecution.

TEACHING TIP: These new converts saw living examples of perseverance through suffering. Hardship was Paul’s first lesson in exhortation. It was to be expected as a normal and necessary part of the Christian life.

Acts 14:22b *“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”*

- With prayer and fasting, they organized the new churches by establishing elders in every church to lead and care for the flocks, committing them to the Lord.
 - They passed through Pisidian and Pamphylia and Attalia on the way to Antioch in Syria. They did NOT return to Cyprus on the return trip.
- ▲ **QUOTE:** The American businessman David Sarnoff said— *“The will to persevere is often the difference between failure and success.”*

TEACHING TIP: We have all seen pictures or videos of soldiers returning home from war with emotions running high with tears of joy and warm fellowship. When Paul and Barnabas returned to their home church in Antioch, there must have been joyful rejoicing as they gathered and heard all God had done—how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. These two had been gone more than one year, covered seven hundred miles by land and five hundred miles by sea—all strategic.

- The trip was a great success for the kingdom of God, but not without great obstacles.
- Paul and Barnabas considered themselves instruments through whom God had accomplished HIS purposes and all the glory went to Him.
- They spent a long time here with the disciples for a time of refreshment.

ILLUSTRATION: There was another missionary who persevered through hardship and also accomplished much for the kingdom. Her name was Amy Carmichael. She was born in Ireland in 1867, the oldest of seven. Amy had brown eyes but wanted blue eyes. Her mother told her God answered prayers and to pray about it. She prayed for blue eyes, jumped out of bed the next morning to look in the mirror and still saw brown eyes. Her mama told her that ‘no’ was an answer as well. She accepted Christ as Savior at 15.

In 1887 she heard Hudson Taylor speak about missionary life and soon after became convinced of her call. She was an unlikely candidate since she suffered with a disease of the nerves that made her whole body weak and achy. She often had to go to bed for days and weeks at a time. She began in Japan but the climate there bothered her disease, and it was suggested she move to India.

Dressed in a Sari and skin stained, she passed as an Indian and now knew why God had given her brown eyes. She opened an orphanage, a sanctuary for children that were temple runaways. Temple children were young girls dedicated to the gods and forced into prostitution to earn money for the priests. Temple prostitution was outlawed in 1948, but the foundation continues today.

She served there for fifty-five years without a furlough. She was a prolific author, publishing over thirty-five books. She had spiritual passion, perseverance, singleness of purpose (the Gospel) and a focused life. She rescued more than one thousand children. She inspired others to missionary life including Jim and Elisabeth Elliott. She died at 83.

Amy Carmichael— *“One can give without loving but cannot love without giving.”*

✦ FINAL THOUGHTS

✦ We can learn lessons from the life of Paul and Barnabas.

1. They modeled a willingness to follow their Savior.

- ~ Grounded in the Word and filled with the Spirit of God, they found strength and stability.
- ~ They obeyed God's call on their individual lives.

2. They modeled 'flexible' preparedness—in other words, they were prepared for unexpected opportunities to arise in which they could share Christ.

- ~ Walk through open doors and help take the Gospel to others.
- ~ Fierce resolve and determination will help you meet every roadblock with faith.

⇒ **At the exit of a local church a sign reads, "You are NOW entering the mission field."**

3. They modeled perseverance through adversity and opposition.

- ~ The young man in our opening illustration surely wanted to quit in the middle of that marathon, but sheer will and determination helped him persevere to finish the race.
- ~ Paul and Barnabas faced countless and extreme obstacles and did not quit—they did not do this through their own sheer will but empowered by the Holy Spirit.

▲ **QUOTE:** Henry Ford— *"Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off the goal."*

APPLICATION: How about you? A life of ease or a life of sacrifice? Will you persevere? We get to choose.