

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-23 The Gentile Mission is Launched

The wise man said, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (Ecc 3:1). In the book of Acts, the time had come for the church to enter into a new era of missions. Up to now missionaries had gone out on their own, or because they were driven out by persecution. Now the time had come for the church to purposely send missionaries to unreached peoples and places. And God intended to use the church in Antioch to launch this new era of Gentile missions.

We learned about the church in Antioch a couple of lessons back (on Day 21). We discussed how the church was founded, and how it developed into a strong, Spirit-empowered missionary church. Luke presents the Antioch church as a model for how our churches should be today. You may want to re-listen to that lesson at this time. Today’s story picks up where that story left off.

The church in Antioch was blessed with strong spiritual leadership. Among those leaders were a number of prophets and teachers. Prophets speak by the Spirit encouraging the saints to follow God and pursue his mission. Teachers also speak by the Spirit; however, their main focus is to lead people into a clearer understanding of Scripture. The prophets and teachers in Antioch included Barnabas, whom we have already met in previous lessons; Simeon, who was sometimes called Niger, meaning “the black man”; Lucius from the North African province of Cyrene; and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod Antipas, the Roman governor. Saul of Tarsus was also one of the Spirit-anointed ministers in the church in Antioch. He was a prophet, a teacher, and an apostle. Beginning with this story, he becomes the main character for the rest of the Book of Acts.

The church at Antioch entered into a time of prayer and fasting. On one of those days they gathered for worship. As they waited on the Lord, the Spirit moved powerfully in their midst. One of the prophets lifted up his voice and began to speak. Through him the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). The time had come for the Gentile Mission to commence. It was time for Saul and Barnabas to launch out on their first missionary journey.

This word from the Lord led to more fasting and prayer. Finally, the church elders laid their hands on the two apostles and sent them to the work. Everyone knew, however, that it was not just the church sending them out. They were being sent on their way by the Holy Spirit. The two apostles set out for the coastal city of Seleucia. From there they sailed for Cyprus, an island in the northeastern Mediterranean Sea.

The move of the Spirit in the church in Antioch marks another major turning point in the history of the church. It signals the beginning of the Gentile Mission. Thus far the church has focused its evangelistic efforts almost entirely on Jews. However, step by step the Holy Spirit has transformed the church. It has grown from a local, single-culture mission into an

international, multi-cultural redemptive force. In Acts, Luke traces how the Spirit brought about this transformation.

First, the Spirit of God came upon and filled the mixed-race Samaritans. Next, he transformed and empowered Saul of Tarsus, who was to become the great apostle to the Gentiles. Then, he came upon Cornelius and his household in Caesarea. The Spirit empowered these new Gentile converts as Christ's witnesses to the lost. In doing this, God was showing that Gentiles could become full participants in God's mission to redeem the nations. The Holy Spirit had opened wide the door for the gospel to go to the ends of the earth.

In similar manner, we should allow the Spirit to move in our local churches today. As we do this, we will explain to the people the missional purpose of the Spirit's coming. Then he will transform our churches into powerful Spirit-anointed missionary churches just as he did the church in the book of Acts.

The Antioch Outpouring is yet another key example of Luke's *empowering-results-in-witness* pattern first presented in Acts 1:8: "You will receive power ... and you will be my witnesses." It is the **sixth** key outpouring in the Book of Acts. As you will recall, the previous five outpourings occurred in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, in Jerusalem again, in Samaria, in Damascus, and in Caesarea. Each time the Spirit came upon individuals they became powerful witnesses for Christ.

Now, here in Antioch, another powerful outpouring of the Spirit occurs. This powerful move of the Spirit launches the Gentile Mission. By repeating this pattern over and over throughout the book of Acts, Luke has one emphasis. It is that every church, and every believer in the church, needs to be empowered by the Spirit to effectively participate in God's mission. Stated another way, any church or believer who will be empowered by and remain full of the Holy Spirit can become a powerful witness to the lost.

From this story we learn three more important lessons concerning our participation in God's mission. First, we learn that it is the Spirit who calls and directs people to participate in God's mission. The Spirit spoke in Antioch, saying, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Once again the Holy Spirit is acting as the Superintendent of the Harvest (Director of Missions). As such, he calls individuals into Christ's service and empowers them as Christ's witnesses. Then he sends them to the work and guides them along the way. He will do the same for us today if we will yield our lives completely to him.

A second lesson we learn from this story is that we should strive to develop our churches into strong missions sending bases. The church in Antioch is an example of such a church. At the beginning the Antioch Christians reached out only to people from their own tribe and language group. However, as the Spirit continued to move among them, and as they were taught about God and his mission, they were transformed into a missions sending base. It was this church that sent Paul out on each of his three missionary journeys in Acts.

A final lesson we learn from the story of the move of the Spirit in the Antioch church is if we are to have powerful missionary churches, we must be ever open to the moving of the Holy

Spirit in our midst. We must ensure that our members have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and that they thoroughly understand their responsibility of actively participating in the mission of God. A truly missionary church, like the church in Antioch, will reach out aggressively in evangelism and church planting. At the same time, it will remain focused on the nations that need to hear the gospel. Such a church will be strong in pastoral care and discipleship training. The gifts of the Spirit will be in operation, and the people will be taught to give generously and sacrificially to the work of missions. The truly missional church will gather often for Spirit-anointed worship and times of intensive prayer and fasting. It is God's will for every local congregation to be a Spirit-empowered missional church.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches us that every local church should be empowered by the Spirit and active in missionary work.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is that if our churches, like the church in Antioch, are to become powerful forces in our communities and in the world, they must be led by Spirit-filled pastors. These leaders must teach them how to pray and fast, to respond to the moving of the Spirit, and to participate in the evangelistic and missionary outreach of the church.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. What took place in the church in Antioch that caused them to send Barnabas and Saul to the mission field?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that there was a powerful move of the Spirit and a prophetic word saying that it was time for them to send the missionaries to the field, you answered correctly.
2. Why do we say that the move of the Spirit in the church in Antioch marked another major turning point in the history of the church?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that the move of the Spirit in Antioch marked a major turning point in the history of the church because it signaled the beginning of the Gentile Mission, you are right.
3. The Antioch Outpouring is the sixth key outpouring of the Spirit in the Book of Acts. What was the result of each of these six outpourings?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that each of these outpourings resulted in powerful missional witnesses according to Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8, you answered correctly.
4. What lesson do we learn from the church in Antioch about the kind of churches we should strive to develop today?
 - A [PAUSE] If you answered, "We should work to develop our church into strong, Spirit-empowered missions sending bases," you are right.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this lesson several times until you can accurately share the story of the Antioch Outpouring with someone else. Then pray about how you can develop your church into a Spirit-empowered missionary church like the one in Antioch. What are the steps you can take?