

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

It is now around 48 A.D., 18 years from the church's birth on Pentecost. The church in Antioch was not fragmented into scores of denominations separated by doctrine and traditions. Rather, the believers, who regularly gathered in houses in many locations, considered themselves to be members of one church. The leaders, knowing Jesus' commandment to love one another, did just that, regularly gathering themselves. They included more than just elders/pastors/overseers (all the same New Testament ministry), but also prophets and teachers (13:1).

Those leadership gatherings apparently included times of "ministering to the Lord and fasting." Keep in mind that one may fast by skipping just one meal. It was during one of those times that the Holy Spirit spoke, likely through prophecy: "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

First, notice that the prophetic word was not telling anyone that she would be married within two years, or that he would soon be landing a better job (as so many alleged prophecies do in some modern church circles). Rather, the prophetic word was focused on God's plan to expand His kingdom.

Second, notice the Holy Spirit did not tell Barnabas and Saul (Paul) precisely what their "work" was. They already knew it in their hearts, where the Holy Spirit speaks to all true believers, and the prophetic word was simply a confirmation. The lesson? Don't be led by prophecy! Follow the inward guidance of the Spirit. If you receive a prophecy that doesn't confirm what you already know, forget it.

So Barnabas and Saul (Paul) were "sent out by the Holy Spirit" (13:4), and from then on were classified as apostles, or "sent ones" (see 14:14). God sent them first to the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea. Upon arrival, they began preaching in synagogues, hoping that the Jews and God-fearing and proselyte Gentiles would be receptive to hearing their message. Not all were, and Luke highlights one named Bar-Jesus, a Jewish false prophet and magician. Don't you just love God's gentle tact as He spoke to Bar-Jesus through Paul's lips, "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?" (13:10). Bar-Jesus soon found his physical eyes as darkened as his spiritual eyes.

From Cyprus the missionaries sailed to Perga and Pisidian Antioch, in the ancient region of Galatia, on the western coast of modern Turkey. Much of Paul's ministry would be focused on this part of the world during his missionary journeys, and he experienced great success. Today, however, among modern Turkey's 70 million people, the majority are nominal Muslims, while Christians number only in the thousands.

Paul's first sermon in the Jewish synagogue in Pisidian Antioch was a simple telling of the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, how it fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, how it could benefit those who would believe, and how it spelled the doom of those who would not believe. God was offering forgiveness and freedom from sin through His Son.

Note that Paul did not give an altar call at the conclusion of his preaching or lead anyone in a "sinner's prayer." Those who believed were born again and naturally wanted to learn more about Jesus, so they followed Paul and Barnabas to seek more understanding. The preachers didn't have to chase down the new "converts." Rather, the new disciples followed the preachers. That is biblical "follow up!"

Tragically, many of the Jews in Pisidian Antioch did not believe, but the Gentiles were amazingly receptive, "rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord" (13:48).

Does the phrase "as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" indicate that God has predestined some to be saved and others to be damned? No. The New Testament teaches that, before the foundation of the world, God chose to save all who would believe in Jesus. He foreknew who would believe and appointed them to eternal life, recording their names in His book. Peter wrote that we are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Pet. 1-2). If you believe, you were also "appointed to eternal life!"