

LESSON 6

STUDY SIX – A MISSION FOCUS FOR THE CHURCH

In Acts 13-14, Luke describes what is called Paul's first missionary journey (it really includes Barnabas and for part of the time Barnabas' cousin, John Mark). The sending happened in Antioch of Syria and the ending occurred in the same city with a report to the church of their mission activity.

This mission work was the work of the Holy Spirit. He directed its beginning, guided them on the way, filled them with words and boldness, and planted faith in the hearts of many people. It is exciting to read these two chapters and hear how the outreach/mission work of the early church met with success.



Many people from an ever-expanding area came to confess Christ as a result of the Spirit working through the proclaimed message of forgiveness and freedom and fellowship with God

through faith in the crucified and risen Savior Jesus.

Mission work - proclaiming Christ to the nations of the world.

Mission work - bringing Christ to the cities and communities.

Mission work - sharing Christ with people of different cultures, languages, and beliefs.

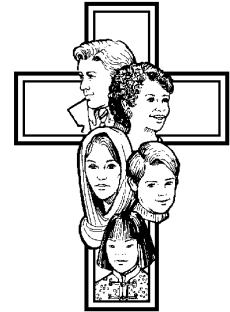
Mission work - meeting opposition to the proclamation of Christ with renewed zeal to continue with boldness the sharing of Jesus.

Mission work - meeting opposition even from within the religious establishment with renewed zeal to take the message to other people.

Mission work - lives changed, souls won for

Christ, the lost found.

Mission work - God opening doors to faith and using God's people as instruments to reach other people for Christ and for an eternity.



And, we're all missionaries (all God's people) on a mission field (our communities and world) walking through the "open doors" God places before us to share Christ. That's what Acts is all about. That's what the work of the church is all about. That's what you and I are all about (1 Peter 2:9-10). Focus on missions.

Take a piece of paper (or newsprint) and divide it into three columns. At the top of the columns write: Place and Text, What was Done, and What was the Response. Go through Acts 13-14 and discover what happened on Paul's first missionary journey. In the first column write down the following nine places and texts where the mission work occurred:

1. Salamis, 13:4-5
2. Paphos, 13:6-12
3. Antioch of Pisidia, 13:13-50
4. Iconium, 13:51-14:4
5. Lystra & Derbe, 14:5-7
6. Lystra, 14:8-19
7. Derbe, 14:20-21
8. Back through Lystra, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, 14:21-23
9. Perga, 14:25

Scan each section and write in columns two and three what was done and what was the response(s) to what was done by Paul and Barnabas.

⇒ What does this exercise teach about variety and diversity in getting the Word of the Lord to people?

⇒ What ways do you and your congregation employ to get the message of Jesus to people, especially to those without Christ as Savior?



⇒ Share your initial reactions to the variety of responses to the Gospel in this first missionary journey? Surprised? Discouraged? Frightened? Encouraged?

⇒ How will you and your church handle opposition or lack of enthusiasm to bold proclamation of Christ in your community/mission field? Opposition from the "inside"? Opposition from the "outside"?

⇒ What help can you anticipate from the Lord in dealing with strong reactions to the presentation of the Good News?

A CLOSER LOOK AT MISSION WORK

Acts 14:19-23

19 *Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.*

20 *But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.*

21 *They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,*

22 *strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.*

23 *Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*

Opposition to the Gospel by religious people

didn't stop Paul and his mission to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. He pressed on! What opposition to the Gospel have you encountered? Share your stories. How did you handle the opposition? Evaluate your handling of opposition in light of this passage.

According to these verses Paul had a three-pronged mission strategy: 1) Evangelize the unsaved; 2) Edify the believers; and 3) Establish local churches. Put another way, mission work for Paul was about proclaiming, perfecting, and planting. Mission work by individuals, congregations, and church bodies includes all three. It is not either/or; it's both/and.

Take another piece of paper or newsprint; divide it into sixteen sections - four across the top and four along the side.



Across the top write these headings: Our Mission, Evangelize the Unsaved, Edify Believers, Establish Local Churches. Down the left side write these headings: Me, My Church, and My Church Body. Fill in the blank boxes: how am I evangelizing the unsaved, edifying believers, etc. Then, how is my church evangelizing the unsaved, etc.

Assign a number from 1-10 (One being lowest and ten being highest) to each of the nine areas. Share your observations. Where are we weak? Where are we strong? Discuss specifically what can be done in the next year to bring about better balance in the nine areas, improve our weak areas, and build on our strengths and celebrate them.

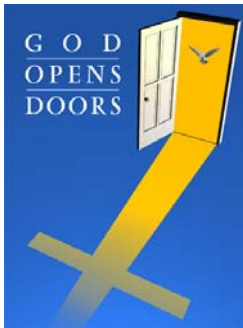
Paul got other people involved, "appointed elders" (verse 23): how do you involve laity in mission work in your congregation? Mission work involves clergy and laity! Share stories of lay involvement in mission work at home and overseas.

How can you employ more effectively in your ministries and mission work God's great gift of people (laity)? Be specific!

NOTES:

Prayer plays a key role in mission work. How often do you and your congregation pray specifically for missionaries and mission work? A challenge: individuals pray for God's mission every day; congregations pray for missions as a part of every worship service. Why not?

The first missionary journey of Paul ends with these words (27-28): "And when they arrived (at Antioch in Syria), they gathered the church together and declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples."



This passage is the theme verse for our Acts studies. What image is used to describe mission opportunities before us?

Who brought about the growth and success of mission activity?

Who did God use to get the mission work accomplished?

What reporting goes on in your church when it comes to what God is doing through you, your church, your district, your synod? It is important to tell the mission story. Paul sure did! Why? What more can you do to report the story of missions in your church?