

Paul's First Journey: The Gospel Spreads and the Church Grows

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the year 1774, a man named John Chapman was born in the state of Massachusetts, in the newly emerging country of the United States of America. Later in his life, Chapman was known by a different name: Johnny Appleseed; and of course, that was because he was an expert in growing trees, and especially apple trees; and he introduced such trees to a great many states in the early 19th Century. Sometimes, the Apostle Paul has been compared to this figure, because even as Johnny Appleseed planted trees everywhere he went, so Paul planted churches everywhere he went in the 1st Century. With this episode of *Groundwork*, we begin an examination of Paul's missionary journeys. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are beginning, with this program, a five-part series on the three major missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul; and essentially, those travels occupy the second half of the book of Acts, where all those stories are recorded for us by Luke...Luke, who wrote his gospel, and then Acts Luke wrote as a sequel. So, in a way, this is a series on that last half of the book of Acts.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, we won't be getting into Paul's conversion story. I would recommend that people read the book of Acts in its entirety to go back and see how Paul used to be called Saul, and he was as persecutor of Christians; and in Chapter 9 it talks about his conversion...dramatic conversion...on the Damascus Road. So, we see in the book of Acts Paul's conversion from an enemy of the gospel to one of the biggest champions of the gospel, and we are going to be talking about his journeys today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right; and we are going to begin, in this episode, with Acts 13 and 14, and that is the first missionary journey that took Paul from Antioch in northern Syria, to the island nation of Crete; and from Crete, Paul went to Pamphylia, and then a region known as Galatia; and today, both of those places are inside modern-day Turkey. But Darrell, we should point out that we are not just reviewing history here—we are not just looking at this for historical curiosity—but we are looking at it because what happened to Paul and his companions along the way, and how they reacted to all that is still very instructive for us today.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is, Scott, and I think it is important for us to understand how the gospel continues to spread as part of God's plan, that he was telling us through Jesus in Matthew 28, with the Great Commission...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And Acts Chapter 1, how the gospel would go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. We are starting to see that spread out in this context.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we should begin with the commissioning of Paul, and also another figure...another apostle named Barnabas; and we get that at the very beginning of Acts 13; and as we get ready to read the first three verses here, just a quick note: The Apostle Paul is still being referred to here as Saul; although, this is about the last place in the New Testament where we get Saul. He was Saul of Tarsus before his conversion on the Damascus Road, and we will use Paul from here on out, but just so it is clear why they use Saul here. But let's hear these verses.

Acts 13:1:

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ²While 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." ³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

DARRELL DELANEY

What I love about what you just read, Scott, is the diverse company that they find themselves in in Antioch; and how they are all in one accord, praying and fasting; and the Holy Spirit is the one who selects. It is not my friends; it is not I am doing you a favor; it is actually God, the one who is making the decision.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is always God's mission, first and foremost, right? And Darrell, you are right. That becomes very clear. Paul and Barnabas are being directly called by the Holy Spirit; and that call comes, not just privately to them, but it comes to the whole Christian community, where they were engaged in worship; and you know, sometimes, Darrell, we talk about the internal call and the external call. So, a given person, like you and I, had an internal call to the ministry, but we always need that confirmed externally by the community that sees the requisite gifts in us, that confirms that we heard the Holy Spirit correctly; and we see that here. Yes; Paul and Barnabas are called as two individuals, but it is the community that authorizes; it is the community that commissions and blesses, and sends them on their way.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a beautiful thing. Os Guinness had a book called *The Call*, and it talks about this very thing: This internal and external call; and that is how we got called to ministry; and we see that Paul and Barnabas are getting that affirmed in them, and the reason, I think, they are getting it affirmed to them is because earlier in the book of Acts, they get sent to Antioch, and they spent over two years ministering and serving, people seeing their gifts; people seeing how they operate in the Spirit; and so, it was a no-brainer for them to say: We have seen them and we have seen what God has done in them; therefore, we affirm the call that they have; and sent them off.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, they have been commissioned; they have been sent; and now they go, and Darrell, let's read a little bit more from Acts 13, starting at verse 4.

DARRELL DELANEY

All right; it says: The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. ⁶They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. ⁹Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked

straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰“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? ¹¹Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.” Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All right; interesting story. Several things to notice: First, it is interesting that on many of Paul’s stops, the initial venue for proclaiming the gospel were Jewish synagogues, which makes sense, right? That was the traditional gathering place for God’s chosen people. Jesus is the one who is the fulfillment of their anticipation of the Messiah, so it made sense to start in the synagogue. God made a promise to the Jewish people—to the Israelites—and now Paul goes to show them the fulfillment of that promise. But then we get that plot twist with Elymas, the sorcerer, who was kind of proclaiming an anti-gospel, wasn’t he?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it seems that he was doing his best to try to get people to turn away from the faith; and he is literally standing as a roadblock between these people receiving the true faith of the gospel, and what they are getting from him. So, he is a problem; he is in the way; and Paul handles it in a very interesting way. I mean, it is not typically what we would see in most of the Bible; so, it is really interesting how he addresses this issue.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is kind of funny; it is not unusual in the Bible to see people coming to faith in Jesus after watching a miracle, like curing someone of blindness...a positive miracle. Here, the proconsul is going to come to faith after seeing a negative miracle, making somebody blind as a punishment for his standing in the way; and as you say, Darrell, it is not real typical. I mean, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us to pray for those who persecute us and to forgive those who rough us up; and here, Paul zaps somebody. Probably, we shouldn’t conclude that that is a model for the Church today; you know: Oh, yeah; we gotta play hardball with our critics, too. But it seems like, on this occasion anyway, Paul really sensed the forces of evil at work, and so something dramatic had to be done to prevent that.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is the spiritual warfare that Paul is sensing. It is not about Elymas, it is not about Paul, it is about God’s work, and it needs to continue...it needs to go forth...and he addressed the issue accordingly in that instance. So, we see Paul addressing it in a way that normally we probably wouldn’t do, but in this case, it still brought the person to faith. The proconsul saw that and he still became a believer.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A rather bracing beginning for that first missionary journey, but there is more to look at, so stay tuned.
Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Let’s jump right in and dig back into more of Acts 13. Now, we are at the 13th verse: From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. ¹⁴From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.”

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is interesting that...I mean, they went to these different places and they usually tried to, as their custom, go into the Jewish synagogue. Usually when you go into a Jewish synagogue, the leader of the synagogue will speak, but in this case, they asked Paul if he had a word of exhortation. That is interesting, isn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; you know, people wanted to hear what these men had to say, and so they do; and basically...we are not going to read it all here because it is fairly lengthy...but basically, when Paul takes them up on their offer and he stands up to speak and to teach, he gives a really fairly long recounting of the whole history of Israel. He does that because he is setting the stage to get these Jewish people to the climax of the whole story in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. So, that is what he is doing; and again, we are in Pamphylia here...modern-day Turkey. There is a synagogue there, too. So, this is where this is happening, but he gets them to the point of Jesus, and then he also summarizes Jesus' life story, including his death and resurrection; and then Paul continues.

DARRELL DELANEY

He says: ³²We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors ³³he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "You are my son; today I have become your father." ³⁴God raised him from the dead... ³⁸Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. ³⁹Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, interesting sermon, and those with ears to hear those last couple of lines of Paul there, that is what he is going to write famously about to the Romans eventually, in Romans 4 and 5; Justification apart from the law. So, Paul has already got that theology that he will write down many years later when he writes to the Roman church. Anyway, that is what he says in the synagogue.

You know, you and I are preachers, Darrell, and we really like it when people like what we say, and the people loved what Paul had to say. They were so thrilled, in fact, that they invited Paul and Barnabas to preach the next Sabbath; and when they did, Luke, who wrote Acts...Luke said it was as if the whole city of Perga showed up; but as we will see, alas, not everybody was pleased. So, now we are in Acts 13:45: When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him. ⁴⁶Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." ⁴⁸When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. ⁴⁹The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. ⁵⁰But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. ⁵¹So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. ⁵²And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Scott, you can see that they are excited about making their testimony clear of what the gospel is, and what it has done and who it includes. So, they make sure that everyone knows that salvation is available to everyone, but the opposition that they received... So, there is a pattern, right?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

There is a pattern of spreading the gospel and then persecution that comes, and then they are getting spread out to somewhere where they do it again; and it happens over and over. It is really a cycle that you see in the New Testament.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And instead of reading: And so the disciples were discouraged by this and prayed to God for help... No! They were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. I mean, even this persecution, getting expelled, cannot take away their joy. You know, we don't know how many years after the original Pentecost all this happened on this first missionary journey, but it has been a while. We read about it in Acts 2, ten chapters earlier; but you know, Darrell, Pentecost was not the only time the Holy Spirit got poured out. The Holy Spirit keeps getting poured out. Every day can be Pentecost for those who believe and who seek to do their work in the power of the Spirit of Christ Jesus the Lord. So, that is just a wonderful thing as we see the gospel really spreading.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, even when we go into worship, and worship is going on; they are singing. After that, there is the preaching of God's word. The Holy Spirit is being poured out through all of those actions. When the community welcomes in people who are new, and when they are showing God's love to one another, they are passing the peace of Christ to one another, the Holy Spirit is being poured out. Then the pastor sends them into the community, where they work, where they go to school, where they live in their communities; and the Holy Spirit has another opportunity to go out, even today. So, this kind of community is what was happening in the book of Acts; but it is also encouraging for us to have that same community happening today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, we are seeing here the fulfillment of Jesus' Great Commission, which I think you mentioned earlier in the program, Darrell. I mean, the Church has come a long way. They started in Jerusalem in Judea, but now they are going to the ends of the earth. If you walked from Jerusalem to Perga...if you didn't take a boat...it would be a journey of 1,500 miles, which is a long trip, even today, with automobiles; but back in that day, where nothing moved much faster than a donkey, that was a real hike. But again, they are going to all nations. This is what Jesus told them to do, and Jesus is staying true to *his* Great Commission promise: Surely I will be with you always; because Jesus has the Holy Spirit traveling with them at every step along the way.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is beautiful to see Jesus' words fulfilled. You could actually call the book of Acts the continuing acts of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Because that is exactly what it is. It isn't the acts of the apostles; it is the acts of Jesus through his Spirit continuing. So, he is having the Great Commission being fulfilled; and also, he promised before they went in Pentecost...you said this...that they would be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth; and we finally see that happening in a wider scale when Paul goes on missionary journeys.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if a lot of the Jews were opposing the gospel, a lot of the Gentiles were welcoming it; and we might remember that three chapters earlier, in Acts Chapter 10, the Apostle Peter comes to the realization that had never really occurred to him. You know, Peter had to go visit that house of an Italian, the Roman centurion Cornelius, and he saw the Holy Spirit get poured out on them instantly. Now, Peter had been sure what everybody else thought: You had to become a Jew before you could become a Christian, but all of a sudden,

the Holy Spirit gets poured out without waiting for any of that. So, Peter realizes that God does not show any favoritism and we shouldn't either. Peter actually had a longer learning curve on that, but that is a different story. But the point, Darrell, is that the gospel really is on the march. The Holy Spirit is getting poured out over and over and over; and as you said, that is also happening today. That is what we said at the beginning of this program, that we are not just looking at this for history, because this is still relevant for us today.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; the gospel is still going forth throughout the whole world, and you see these two responses. You see a variety of people of different nations and languages and communities and cultures coming to respond to that gospel message, but you are also seeing the opposition in the persecution, not just globally, but locally. So, we see the Holy Spirit still bringing us power to be able to share the Word, and we see that if we remind people that Jesus is the power that is actually the reason why this is happening, then people can be blessed.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is the source of our joy. Well, Darrell, we have only got one segment left in this program, and the whole of Acts 14 is waiting for us, and we will get to that in just a moment. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, let's get right back. We have a whole chapter to cover in the next few minutes; let's go right to Acts 14.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed. ²But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. ³So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders. ⁴The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. ⁵There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them. ⁶But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe and to the surrounding country, ⁷where they continued to preach the gospel.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, great irony here; the more they tried to shut Paul and Barnabas up, the more they were emboldened to keep on preaching the gospel; and you know, they were forced to flee here, but even that has a positive effect. Now, they bring the gospel to another whole region.

You know, it reminds me of that old saying that the Church is the anvil on which many of history's best hammers have gotten worn out. The more you persecute the Church, the more it grows, ironically. So, that is how they end up in Lystra and Derbe. Again, cities said to be Lycaonian, but again, this is actually the wider region known as Galatia back then; and so, these places, and the new churches that Paul planted there, we think those would be the churches that later received what we now call Paul's letter, or his epistle, to the Galatians. So, those churches are getting planted right here.

Here is what some of the stories in those places look like. We are in Acts 14:8:

In Lystra there sat a man who was lame. He had been that way from birth and had never walked. ⁹He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed ¹⁰and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. ¹¹When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" ¹²Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. ¹³The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the

crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, how this passage starts reminds me of not only the passage in the book of Acts, where there is a lame man at the gate called Beautiful, who is begging, that Peter heals; and then, before that there is a lame man who Jesus heals, who has been an invalid for 38 years; and so, you see why we call it the continuing acts of Jesus. You see those things happening, but some of the people are misunderstanding this, and they begin to call them by their gods, and then worship them; and Paul and Barnabas are not going to have that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; they are not Hermes and Zeus, and they don't want sacrifices being made to them. This is not exactly the reaction they were looking for when preaching the gospel. So, they had to try to straighten out the confusion and try to get people to the real Jesus; and here is how that went, starting at verse 14.

DARRELL DELANEY

But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ¹⁵“Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. ¹⁶In the past, he let all nations go their own way. ¹⁷Yet he has not left himself without a testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.” ¹⁸Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them. ¹⁹Then 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. ²⁰But 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, not a happy ending for their time in Lystra. They could barely prevent a pagan sacrifice in their honor, but then it turned out that it was not the Zeus and Hermes crowd that was the real threat, but fellow Jews, who managed to turn enough people on the apostles that they were nearly killed.

So, you know, Darrell, I think it goes without saying that in the Church and in the work we do for the gospel even yet today, things just don't always go the way we hoped.

DARRELL DELANEY

No, they don't. What is interesting is that you could be a person who shares the gospel with someone, and they begin to put you on some sort of pedestal that you know you don't deserve, so you have to remember who the glory goes to when that happens to say: Oh, no; this isn't me, this is God. God is the one who did this; and then, what is also interesting is the fact that he was beaten and taken out and left for dead, but he gets back up and goes right back into the city; and I don't know if I could have done that!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

I mean, he went through a lot, and he still made sure that the gospel went forth in that situation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; Paul is like a little gospel Energizer bunny. He just gets up and keeps on going. And they preached more, even after they flee; and along the way, they planted churches and appointed leaders. This is verse 23 of Acts 14: 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.

So, this isn't about Paul and Barnabas; it is about Christ—it is about the growing of Christ's Church; and so, they are planting churches that are going to outlive and outlast the witness of Paul and Barnabas, and any of

the apostles. Then, you know, once they return from this first missionary journey, they go back to Antioch in Syria, where they started, and we read this:

²⁶From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. ²⁷On 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. ²⁸And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, imagine the stories they had to tell about what God had done, as they had come back from all those journeys. I think metaphorically speaking we could think about our journeys with Christ, and what God has done in our lives, and we would be actually in good company if we begin telling the stories of what God has done in our lives as well, as a testimony.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They were very encouraged by it, and well they should have been, right? This is the work for which they sent them out, and look what happened. Yes, there was a lot to be discouraged about, you know; they were opposed in all those places. They had organized opposition to the gospel. They almost got killed. They were stoned. Very terrible things, but none of that...none of that makes it into the story...none of that makes it into the report. No, no, no; it is all focused on the Holy Spirit and what the Holy Spirit is doing. So, it is quite the adventure; but you know, Darrell, at the end of the day, what we celebrate is not just this story, but we celebrate that this is part of God's grand story, in which we are still participating today as latter-day disciples of Christ Jesus the Lord; and by the Holy Spirit, this Jesus is working through us, even as the Spirit worked through Paul and Barnabas; and for that, we give great thanks to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we study the story of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and discuss its impact on the early Church then and its continued impact on the Church today.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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