

# Acts 13:13-15

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*The team sails north to Pamphylia, where John Mark abandons them to go home to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas go further inland into the province of Galatia, to the capital city of Pisidian Antioch. There, they visit a synagogue, and Paul is invited to preach.*

Luke, the author of Acts, chronicles the progress of Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey. After successfully preaching the gospel throughout the island of Cyprus, ending with the conversion of the local Roman proconsul in the port city of *Paphos*, they depart from the island:

*Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos (v. 13).*

They boarded a ship, sailing away from Cyprus ([See Map](#)), which was Barnabas's home country (though he was Jewish and raised as Jew—Acts 4:36). It is notable that Luke now puts *Paul* at the forefront of this mission. Up until this point in Acts, Luke has referred to *Paul* by his Hebrew name, Saul. In verse 9, he noted that Saul was also known as *Paul*, the Greek rendering of his name. From here on, Luke will refer to Saul as Paul, as Paul himself referred to himself in his many letters to the churches scattered throughout the Roman Empire (Romans 1:1, Galatians 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1).

Luke formerly identified this team as “Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 13:2, 7), but here in verse 13, he shifts the focus to *Paul* and calls the rest of the team *his companions*. This is not to diminish Barnabas, who was by all accounts a faithful and generous man, well-respected by the other apostles (Acts 4:36-37, 11:22-24).

But it seems very likely that Luke wrote the book of Acts in part to bolster Paul's authority and influence among the churches all over the world. This shift seems to be an indication that after this event, Paul became the primary leader of the mission effort, or at least the primary subject of Luke's historical account.

The remainder of the book of Acts focuses on Paul's travels and ministry.

Throughout Paul's ministry there will be a contingent of men who will try to make all Gentile believers practice Jewish religious customs such as circumcision and devotion to the Jewish religious traditions. Some of Paul's epistles came to us at least in part because he was contending with competing Jewish “authorities” who were trying to convince Gentiles that they must be circumcised (Romans 4:9-10, Galatians 5:1-2, 1 Corinthians 7:18).

Paul's rivals consistently tried to undercut his authority as an apostle. So it seems probable that one of the main motivations to write the Book of Acts was to authenticate Paul's calling to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, having been commissioned directly by Jesus (Acts 26:15-18, Galatians 1:1), and that his authority and teaching was as valid as the other apostles. This defense was necessary in keeping the early churches centered on Christ alone (Galatians 3:1, 1 Corinthians 9:1-2, Romans 3:21-25).

After departing from Paphos in Cyprus, they sailed a couple hundred miles northwest to *Perga in Pamphylia*. *Pamphylia* was a southern region of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), and *Perga* was the capital city of *Pamphylia* built on the river Kestros (or Aksu, its ancient Hittite name), some 7 or 8 miles flowing inland from the Mediterranean coast. ([See Map](#))

At *Perga*, there is a sudden breaking in their team: *but John left them and returned to Jerusalem* (v. 13).

We are not told why *John left them*, but it seems clear he no longer wanted to participate in preaching the gospel in the west. He was a young man, apparently unmarried and still living at home with his mother before he travelled with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 12:12). Perhaps he was homesick, afraid, or unhappy. So *John Mark* found a ship which would sail back to Judea, likely landing in Caesarea, and from there he would go home to *Jerusalem*.

This abandonment was the first crack in what would grow into a complete shattering of the partnership of *Paul* and Barnabas. In a couple chapters, Paul and Barnabas will no longer travel or minister together, precipitated by *John Mark's* departure. In Acts 15, Paul will propose a return journey to all the churches they planted on this first mission trip. Barnabas will agree, and put forth the idea that John Mark should go with them, as before.

Barnabas wanted to give John Mark another chance, but Paul apparently thought John Mark would abandon them again. So they went their separate ways (Acts 15:38-41).

After this separation, Luke writes no more about Barnabas or what he did in the last decade of his life. According to tradition, Barnabas returned to Cyprus, his home country, which would be the ultimate site of his death. Tradition says that Barnabas was killed in Salamis in 61 AD, eleven or twelve years after breaking ministry with Paul.

Although Barnabas disappears from Luke's accounts, Paul mentions him again in 1 Corinthians 9:6. They probably reconciled, though never to the point of traveling and teaching together again. Barnabas seems to have continued to preach the gospel until his death. And ultimately John Mark would become someone Paul considered a "useful" "fellow worker" (Philemon 1:24, Colossians 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:11). This could have transpired through a reconciliation with Barnabas.

According to early church tradition, John Mark is the author of the Gospel of Mark, which he wrote as a scribe recording the testimony and recollections of Peter. In spite of his unreliability on this first mission journey, John Mark would grow to be a faithful helper to Paul and the spread of the gospel.

Down one companion, Paul and Barnabas carry on:

*But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch* (v. 14). This in and of itself was no small journey. *Pisidian Antioch* was roughly 100 miles north of *Perga* ([See Map](#)). It was called *Pisidian Antioch* to distinguish it from Antioch in Syria, which was a far larger and more prominent city in the Roman Empire and home to the Antiochian church where Barnabas and Paul taught and from where they were commissioned (Acts 13:1-4). *Pisidian Antioch* was a part of Galatia at the time (now its ruins are in modern-day Turkey).

*Pisidian Antioch* was also home to a Jewish community who had their own synagogue there. Paul and Barnabas seek out the Jewish population, joining the congregation at the local synagogue:

*and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down* (v. 14).

They are called on to speak:

*After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it"* (v. 15).

The *synagogue officials*, the local rabbis (teachers), first read from *the Law and the Prophets*. *The Law* contained Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, while *the Prophets* contained Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor Prophets. In Jewish understanding there is a third category of Hebrew scripture known as "the Writings," which contain the Psalms, Proverbs, Chronicles, Job, Daniel, Esther, and so on. There is no consensus on when this threefold categorical division was decided. To this day, synagogues conduct a reading from the Law and a reading from the Prophets every Sabbath. It is possible that at the time of Jesus the term "*the Prophets*" could have been used to describe the book of Psalms and the other writings, both of which indisputably contain prophetic insight.

It seems that the local rabbis had previously learned that Paul and Barnabas were traveling prophets of God, and so the *officials* welcome them as *Brethren* and invite them to teach *any word of exhortation for the Jewish people* in attendance to the *reading* that day. Paul may have introduced himself as a scholar of the Law, having been trained in Jerusalem under the renowned teacher of Jewish law, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

In the following passage, Luke records Paul's sermon to the Jews of *Pisidian Antioch*, where he leads his audience on a journey from God's activity in the Old Testament to the news that He had sent the Messiah, Jesus His Son, and that the Messiah had died for the sins of the world, and had been raised back to life in fulfillment of God's promises found in the *Law and the Prophets* (Acts 13:33).

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>13</sup>Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. <sup>15</sup>After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it."**