

Traveling

Paul's missionary journeys brought the message of salvation to the "Gentiles who worship God."

Saint Paul's First Missionary Journey

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Chapters 13 and 14 of the Acts of the Apostles contain the account of St. Paul's first missionary journey. The first three verses of Chapter 13 show the first deliberate and professional missionary activity of the early Church.

Up to this point Acts has presented the earliest spread of the Church as a consequence of persecution. Now we read that at Antioch leaders of the local Church held a departure ceremony and sent off two men for missionary work elsewhere. Look ahead to verse 26 of Chapter 14, and I think you will

agree that they were sent to definite places and that there was some sort of planning involved. However, if you wish, you may hold with some scholars that Luke really didn't know where Paul went, that he arbitrarily constructed the route given here, and that the journey is Luke's way of summarizing the 13 years of missionary activity mentioned in Paul's Letter to the Galatians (1:21-2:1).

Notice that those who send and those who are sent are called "prophets and teachers." Notice that the missionary idea and the choice of the two men came from the Holy Spirit. Notice, too, that the divine inspi-

ration came while those prophets and teachers "were serving the Lord and fasting." The picture is one of devout Christian life in which a call for wider witness can develop.

Apparently a prophetic member of the community articulated the inspiration of the Spirit, and the rest of the community accepted what he said as coming from God. As a result, the faith spread through Cyprus and the coastal region of what we now call Turkey and Syria.

Chapter 13 contains a very important speech attributed to Paul speaking at Antioch in Pisidia. The basic idea of the

speech is that Jesus brings Israel's history to completion because he is the promised Messiah, or Saviour, of Israel. This message of salvation, it is asserted, has also been sent to the "Gentiles who worship God."

Do you see here the idea that where Jesus is confessed as Messiah there the true Israel is, even among the Gentiles? Do you see here that the author has a secondary apologetic intention, namely, to show that Paul is not an apostate Jew?

These are some of the things that probing scholars have dug out of the speech. One difficulty against the first idea is that "Gentiles who worship God" probably refers to proselytes, pagans who have become Jews, and that the speech therefore is really directed only to worshipping Jews. It is only afterwards (see 13:46) that Paul speaks of going to the Gentiles, meaning those who are not Jews and who still worship other gods.

At the end of Chapter 13 notice that Paul and Barnabas are thrown out of town; in

Chapter 14, at Iconium, they manage to get out of town before they were thrown out (they had learned in time that they were in danger of being stoned to death); at Lystra "the crowds" threw stones at Paul and dragged him, unconscious, out of town.

It is a certain element of "the Jews," his own people, who are at work against Paul. Notice, in 14:19, that "some Jews came from Antioch of Pisidia and dragged him out of town thinking that he was dead." Paul has run into the very kind of person that he was before his conversion to Christianity. You remember that he had been on his way from one city to another to arrest Christians.

Some scholars say that in these two chapters more than in other parts of Acts one can see the hand of a redactor, someone later than Luke who went over an earlier composition and touched up the text to show that despite Jewish opposition the transition of Paul's mission from the Jews in the synagogues to the Gentiles in the streets was divinely inspired and directed.

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Variety is the spice of life.

If it's so, this is a very spicy country and a well-seasoned Church. There are 200 million Americans, and some days it seems like every one of them is clamoring for recognition. There are 48 million Catholics, and sometimes it seems they, too, are all shouting at once.

It's a common condition, but sometimes it's hard to sort out the voices without getting angry at the crowd. Hard, but not impossible.

Next week, the "Courier-Journal" will begin a new series of articles, photographs and essays, "Dateline U.S.A.," aimed at identifying some of the voices—our attempt at savoring the spice of America without the aftertaste.

Reknowned folk singer Pete Seeger will be the subject of the first article.

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