

Regarding the six Marys that we discussed in last week's lesson, and Mary's sister in John 19:25: John is polite and respectful toward those of whom he writes. He knows he is writing the Eternal Word of God. For the most part, the only person he never names is himself. I do not think he would have failed to name one of the women standing near the crucifixion, especially one as notable as Jesus' aunt: *'... Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.'*

Acts 13:1: *'Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.'*

Remember, when those in Jerusalem heard of the many in the North coming to faith, they sent Barnabas up to Antioch to investigate; he then traveled to Tarsus to find Paul whom he took back to Antioch where they lived and taught for a year. Then we learned that prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem; Antioch was becoming a very important Church; it seems to have evolved into the *'mother church'* of the mission up and out into the Gentile world; with these prophets and teachers having come to stay, teaching and prophesying, it became a seminary of sorts for teaching and training Gentile pastors and teachers; remember: Christianity is not a small deal (as Luke would have written); it will grow and expand throughout the World and, it was in Antioch that the believers were first called Christians, probably having been meant as a term of derision: *'little Christs'* and also, perhaps, as a term of derision toward the True Christ, Himself but the believers embraced the name because it verbalized reality; we are small, individual representatives of and literally *'parts'* of the Lord Jesus Christ; we in Him and He in us as we comprise His literal Body; we are *'little Christs;'* we are Christians! We are *in Him* and we are *of Him*.

Now we learn the names of some of the prophets in Antioch: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius and Manaen. Notice that Simeon had a nickname: Niger/Nee'ger, meaning: *'black,'* which was surely without any kind of *'racist'* connotation. And, yes, it is pronounced Nee'ger which sounds suspiciously like another word which we are never allowed to even think, let alone say, under penalty of death even though a certain segment of our population uses the word constantly, incessantly and without end.

That brings us to this point: that so-called terrible word probably had its genesis right here in Scripture. It was simply a word meaning black, a way to describe a black person, with its use as innocent as here in Antioch... think about it... words have meaning and words have beginnings. It would have been a simple transition for the pronunciation of Niger: nee'ger to morph into a slightly different pronunciation and connotation...

Another prophet in Antioch is Lucius: loo'kee-os which means bright/light/white; we have black Niger and white Lucius working hand in hand to build up the Church in Antioch; no one cares that some are black and no one cares some are white; God looks on the heart and He expects His children to do the same but the fact that God looks at the heart means that we, His Children, should do so, also, as far as possible: *'For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.'* Matt 12:34 and *'out of the abundance of the heart, a person acts.'*

Here in Antioch we see black and white ministers working together but, unlike so many dark and dying *'churches'* today, we don't see avowed homosexuals in leadership ministry.

Here is an interesting phrase: *'... and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.'*

Manaen/Ma-nah-ane' seems to have been raised in the palace of Herod the tetrarch; perhaps his mother had some function. Having been brought up with Herod he would have been, at this time, about 55 years old.

Herod the Great, king over Judea, under Roman rule, ordered the massacre of all the baby boys in the effort to kill Jesus, the prophesied Messiah; Herod died shortly thereafter. His son, Herod Antipas (tetrarch) began to rule as a young man shortly after the birth of Jesus Christ. His title, tetrarch, means: quarter; he ruled, by order of Caesar Augustus, over a quarter of *'Palestine;'* his rule was over Galilee and Perea. I think, last time, I said he ruled over Judea but that would have been his father.

In Luke's listing of the teachers and prophets in Antioch, notice that Saul is named last; he was not, yet, Paul and he was not, yet, recognized as the Scriptural giant whom God was in the process of developing.

Verse 2: *'As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. ³ And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.'*

'As they ministered to the Lord': these in leadership are Godly men who pray, fast and worship God in their goal to hear from Him, and to be directed by Him. I've heard teachers say, 'God can only direct a moving ship; get up and start moving; then God will direct you.'

God directs a man or woman from their knees, not from their moving feet.

'And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.' Ex 14:13

'Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.' Psa 27:14

'Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.' Psa 46:10

'I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.' Psa 40:1

'I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. ⁶ My soul waiteth for the Lord...' Psa 130:5

Then, after waiting upon the Lord, it was time for Saul and Barnabas to get up and move out.

Now Saul will begin being lifted up, by God, into the ministry for which he'd been in training since birth. He and Barnabas will be used of God to plant many churches, being responsible for countless conversions but then, later, God will inspire Paul to write so much of God's Word to man. Although Paul would have seen his writings as simply letters of instruction and encouragement to the churches for which he was responsible but, in fact, God's Holy Spirit would inspire him to record most of the True Church's Doctrine and revealed Mysteries of God for the next 2000 years.

Though never as visible as Paul, Barnabas was, with Paul, God's chosen instrument for evangelization.

This is about 25 years past Pentecost and the birth of the True Church which grew and spread out from Jerusalem and Judea, up throughout Samaria and Galilee; Peter took the Gospel to the Gentiles in Caesarea to the clan of Cornelius. Finally, the True Church was established in Antioch; that became the beachhead, D-Day, Normandy as the Lord Jesus Christ began to grow His Church out, into and throughout the Gentile World.

Antioch is a Spirit-filled and Spirit-led Church; they prayed; they fasted; they sought God's guidance and rather than try to hold fast to Paul and Barnabas as their own private pastor/teachers, they willingly sent them out according to God's Word and Will.

A church can only be Spirit filled and Spirit led if it is led by Spirit filled men; only Spirit filled men are in the position to hear and recognize the Voice of the Holy Spirit as He said: *'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.'*

The leadership in this Church, the pastor, the teachers, the elders and bishops... they understood the Word: *'But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.'* Acts 1:8

What was the primary difference between the new Church of Jesus Christ and Israel? Israel had no Spirit filled, Spirit led men in leadership; *'But when (Jesus) saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. ³⁷ Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; ³⁸ Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.'* Matt 9:36

When a church dies, its people are scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. When Jesus said to pray for laborers to be sent into His harvest, He didn't just mean missionaries because missionaries are not the primary source of new believers coming into the Body of Jesus Christ; local churches are: pastors, teachers, neighbors, friends and family... all these are the laborers needed for the harvest.

The Pharisees did exactly what false teachers and leaders have always done: create a religious system so complex and convoluted that the people must rely on the priests (as in Catholicism) for their supposed salvation instead of being led into true Salvation and taught to rely on the Holy Spirit.

What leads to the downfall of any church... what led to the downfall of every church that has been destroyed from within... a dearth of Spirit filled men in leadership! To be sure, there are many spirit filled men and women leading these false groups but the spirits who lead and animate them are not God's Holy Spirit.

Verse 4: *'So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵ And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.'*

Here we see Saul's first missionary journey; he is not yet Paul and not yet sent primarily to Gentiles; he and Barnabas are still preaching to the Jews and we see young John Mark with them as helper but the time will come, when Paul will finally begin to fulfill his ministry from God to reach the Gentile World: *'And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. ⁶ And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; **from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.**'* Acts 18:5

By the way: that's an odd phrase in Acts 18:5: *'they opposed themselves'* the Jews fought against their own selves, against their own self-interest in rejecting Jesus Christ as Messiah; they were sinning against themselves just as, to the Corinthians, Paul wrote: *'Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.'* 1Cor 6:18

Luke might write: *'Flee rejecting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, Jews; you sin against your own eternal soul.'*

Verse 6: *'And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: ⁷ Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.'*

Elymas Barjesus is a wicked sorcerer and false prophet. The deputy, Sergius Paulus wants to hear the Word of God; he has heard reports of this new Faith and God is drawing him to Himself; God is the One Who puts it into Sergius Paulus' heart to seek Him because God had chosen Sergius Paulus from the foundation of the World but this evil Barjesus, a servant of Satan, withstands the Truth and tries to keep the deputy from the Truth but Satan and his children are never any match for the Holy Spirit and His children.

Verse 9a: *'Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) ...*

*and just like that... Saul is now, and hereafter: Paul; no Word from Heaven, no dream or vision... now his name is no longer Saul, meaning: chosen, having been named for Israel's first king; now he is called Paul, meaning: small/little: just one more way in which God has determined to humble Paul before Himself and before other men... to be a constant reminder in Paul's heart, along with the ever-present 'thorn in the flesh,' a dis-ease of his eyes,' Paul will write: *'... lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. ⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. ⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. ⁹ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.'* 2Cor 12:6*

Verse 9: *'Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him. ¹⁰ And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the deputy, (Sergius Paulus) when he saw what was done,*

believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.'

The hand of the Lord is upon Sergius Paulus and upon Barjesus but for very different reasons and results! Last time we learned that young John Mark would accompany Paul and Barnabas until a time of difficult ministry and demonic resistance; this is that time... it was not the fun and exciting times that John Mark had hoped and expected; he may have held romantic notions of great receptions, large crowds, first rate hotel rooms and hot baths with plenty of miracles but found, instead, hard travel, demonic resistance, bad food, poor sleeping, few salvations with little to no appreciation...

Verse 13: *'Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.'*

John Mark deserted them; the why is not revealed but it was enough that Paul refused to take him again when the time came for his next missionary journey; instead, he ended up taking Silas with him.

Verse 14: *'But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. ¹⁵ And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.'*

Antioch in Pisidia is a different place than the previous Antioch, in Syria, which held a strong and growing church. Antioch in Pisidia was smaller, more difficult to reach and had no church as yet. Antioch in Syria was a large and bustling city with strangers coming and going always. Antioch in Pisidia was more isolated so when Paul and Barnabas, strangers, came into the synagogue, they were noticed and singled out.

Debbie and I had a similar experience many years ago. We wandered into a little church in Santa Ana, mistakenly thinking it was a different church; all the people were black; we were the only white faces. As soon as we sat down in the back row, a man came to us and beckoned us to sit in the front, asking if we were ministers. I've often wished that we were then who we are now... but we weren't and the opportunity passed.

That's how it was with Paul and Barnabas in Antioch in Pisidia: *'Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.'*

Unlike me, Paul was more than ready.

Verse 16: *'Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.'*

He immediately had their full attention.

Verse 17: *'The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. ¹⁸ And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. ¹⁹ And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot. ²⁰ And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. ²¹ And afterward they desired a king; and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. ²² And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave their testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.'*

Paul has given a clear recitation of the history which all these Jews know and understand but next he will name the Name of Jesus as he veers off into potentially dangerous territory but, if they will hear, he will offer them the Truth which will bring them Everlasting Life:

Verse 23: *'Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus:'*

This is the story of Paul's life after conversion: Anywhere, and everywhere, he will name the Name of Jesus Christ and he will fearlessly give the Gospel message of God's Love and Forgiveness which is held out to everyone who hears... oh that we would seek to always do the same: anytime, every time, all the time.