

III. The Trip To Asia Minor. Acts 13:13.

From the island of Cyprus the missionaries returned to the continental shore. They went from Paphos to Perga because they were following the usual lines of commercial travel. Sailing or commercial vessels were frequently passing from shore to island and from island to shore. By one of these the apostles came from Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia, a distance of over 150 miles by sea.

At Perga John Mark deserted the others and went back to Jerusalem. The world despises a deserter. A mantle of shame rests on the man who deserts his post in the army and flees. The captain of a ship who deserts his duty when peril faces him is despised by the world. The man who deserts his wife and children and leaves them to suffer while he runs away seeking liberty and ease is a wretch who is unfit for the respect of the public. Such a worthless creature reminds us of the first stanza of the poem entitled "Disinherited."

"Three monkeys sat in a cocoanut tree,
Discussing things as they're said to be.
Said one to the other, 'Now listen, you two;
There's a certain rumor that can't be true;
That man descended from our noble race.
The very idea is a disgrace.
No monkey ever deserted his wife,
Starved her babies and ruined her life.
And you've never known a mother monk
To leave her babies with others to bunk,
Or pass them on from one to another,
Till they scarcely know who is their mother.'"

This verse tells us of a man who deserted the Lord and his religious responsibilities. John Mark deserted when the romance of the missionary journey died. The newness of the missionary project, the romance of travel and the novelty of work filled him with a burning enthusiasm to do something. But after a season the novelty gave way to the ordinary, the excitement died out and the drudgery alone was left. Then he ran away. Sensational preachers will draw crowds, but they cannot remain very long in any place, for when the sensation ceases to be novel, the people will not be drawn. There has been too strong an inclination to push the churches into the entertainment business. People want entertainment, but they need instruction in and information about the things of God. The cause of Christ cannot be built by merely tickling the fancy of the people.

John Mark deserted when the responsibility became irksome. Criticism increased and hardships became more numerous and more difficult. His enthusiasm cooled, and he was strongly tempted to run away. This explains why many preachers move so often. Moving is much easier than hard work. If one remains long in a place he must plow new furrows, dig a little deeper and press out to new frontiers. John Mark was not willing to work for Christ. He was willing to sing and shout and pray, but not willing to work. He was not willing to suffer hardships for Christ, but he was willing to enjoy the ease and comfort of popularity. He was not interested in bearing burdens, enduring criticisms or suffering persecution.

John Mark deserted because he loved the things of normal life better. He was religious, but he was not willing to undergo hardships in order to be a useful man. He wanted the approval of God, but he was not willing to pay the price for it. When a man deserts a good cause, he forfeits the confidence and respect of good people. Later John Mark wanted to go with Paul again, but the Apostle was not willing to risk him. John Mark had lost the respect of a great Christian because he had given away to his weakness.

Mark lost the greatest opportunity of his life. His mistake was a blunder of youth. He did not denounce his faith, nor criticize Paul and Barnabas, nor join the enemies of Christianity. He was youthful, fickle, sentimental, inexperienced and unable to stand hardships. His turning back may have seemed an unimportant thing to John Mark at the time, but later he realized that it was more serious than he had thought. He had a hard time living it down. Every way he turned he found that the doors were closed in his face because of that earlier blunder. How often he wished he could undo that deed! That one act of disloyalty branded him; other things were forgotten but that fact remained. It followed him; he has been known to this day for this weakness. Whoever sows wild oats will reap wild oats.

IV. Their Experiences In Antioch In Pisidia. Acts 13:14-52.

1. Their arrival in Antioch. 13:14a.

Accompanying the people, and evangelizing as they went, the apostles found their way to Antioch, the central city of Asia Minor. It was approximately one hundred miles north of Perga. And remember they were not motoring, but walking and Paul was ill.

This Antioch is to be distinguished from the Antioch in Syria. Like its namesake, Antioch in Pisidia was Greek in origin and Roman in government. It was an important military and administrative center. More military roads diverged from it to all parts of the compass than from any other city in the Orient. It was also on the great central route from east to west on which passed the numerous and richly-laden caravans of commerce. If here, as in Corinth at a later day, Paul was obliged to support himself by the labor of his own hands, he could not have chosen any better place for working at his trade. Tent-making would be in demand, and Paul and Barnabas could support themselves through the week and preach the gospel on the Sabbath.

2. Their visit to the synagogue. 13:14b-15.

Within the city of Antioch was a Jewish synagogue. On the very next Saturday Paul and his company were seated as strangers in the synagogue. There was something about the men that arrested attention. Paul and Barnabas would have been men of mark in any assembly. They were men of dignity, mien, grave and reverent in demeanor, listening to the reading of the law and the prophets. Observing them, the rulers thought such men must have a message worth hearing, so the officers of the congregation invited Paul and his associates to give any word of exhortation they had for the people. Paul arose, waved his hand, which was both a Jewish characteristic and a oratorical gesture, and addressed his racial kindred in terms of exquisite courtesy and profound respect.

This incident shows us that opportunity for service comes to those who put themselves in the way of them. Strangers in a city will find friends in the house of God.

3. Paul's sermon in the synagogue. 13:16-41.

(1) The audience. 13:16.

Since Paul and his company were now in a Jewish synagogue, it was only natural that the audience would be made up predominately of Jews. We see this in Paul's opening words, "Men of Israel," but there were also others in the group who were in the sons of Abraham, for he added the words, "and ye that fear God." These two expressions are interpreted as indicating two separate classes within the hearing of the Apostle.

(2) The address. 13:17-37.

There is a similarity between Paul's address and the one that Simon Peter delivered on the day of Pentecost. Jews and proselytes constituted the audience in both cases. At the heart of each message was the gospel—a record of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In

contrast with the sinfulness of man, the sovereignty of God was clearly set forth in the first recorded sermon of Paul.

a. God chose the Jewish fathers. v. 17.

God chose them from anything. At the time he had called Abraham he was too old to have an heir, yet, in time he became father of many nations according to the promise and power of God. God chose them; they did not choose Him. Here we are introduced to the sovereignty. He chose them--sovereignty; they chose to become His people--man's free agency. God's sovereignty is here magnified over man's free agency thus demonstrating the goodness, the love, and the mercy of God.

b. God exalted them. v. 17b.

At the time that Jacob moved to Egypt the Jews were few in number. "All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were threescore and six." Genesis 46:26. In that furnace of affliction, Egypt, they multiplied within a nation. We are told that the more they were persecuted the more they grew numerically and the mightier they became nationally. It was there in Egypt--the house of bondage, that they began a great nation, and the very place where God saw fit to exalt them, through "making the wrath of man to praise Him."

God can bring good out of any situation. He made a mighty nation out of a single family in a land of hate. He made Moses a giant in the desert where he lived alone with God for forty years. He made Paul the greatest preacher of the ages in the desert of Arabia, where he spent three long years alone with the heavenly Christ. Surely God's ways and means are not man's.

c. God delivered them. v. 17c.

"And with a high arm brought He them out of it." This was the bit of news over which they never ceased to rejoice. The Jews had been hopelessly enslaved by the Egyptians. There was no possibility of their escape, and they did not have the weapons to fight their way to freedom. There is great significance in the signs before us--"With a high arm brought He them out of it." It was necessary for God to send ten different plagues on the land before His people were allowed to depart.

d. God fed them. v. 18.

The American Standard Version says "And about the space of forty years as a nursing-father bare he them in the wilderness." We have here a very tender scene--that of a nurse caring for the sick and the hungry. Ordinarily we associate nursing with women. Here, God the Father is pictured as a loving nurse healing the sick and feeding the hungry.

e. God chose their lot for them. v. 19.

"And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He gave them their land for an inheritance." A.S.V. God cleansed the land of its human rubbish by destroying the godless inhabitants who had formerly lived there. Then He presented the entire land to His people. But even here nothing was left to chance. He divided the land among the twelve tribes of Israel according to His own sovereign will.

f. He gave them rulers. v. 20-21.

God did not forsake them. He gave them judges. Next, He gave them a king in the person of Saul. This, however, was not His choice, but the people's. What grief they came to the time they rejected the sovereignty of God! Then God removed Saul, because of his disobedience and enthroned David in his place. David is described as "a man after God's own heart."

Used the following sermons in the sermon book: "The Man After God's Own Heart"
"A Genuine Life."