



Gospel Encounters in Acts

Acts 13:13-52: Paul's Missional Strategy

Context: Paul and the Church's Spread

- In Acts 7, we see Saul approved of Stephen's stoning.
- In Acts 8, we see Saul ravaging the church, with great persecution coming to the church at Jerusalem.
- As a result, the church scatters throughout Judea and Samaria.
 - Note: This is actually the first fulfillment of Jesus' command to preach the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth! (Acts 1:8)
- In Acts 9, Saul is converted miraculously when the resurrected Jesus appears to him on the road to Damascus.
 - God makes it clear in Acts 9:15-16 that Paul was a "chosen instrument" of His to take the gospel to the Gentiles. God also makes it clear that Paul would suffer much for the advance of the gospel.
- In Acts 9, Paul immediately begins preaching Christ starting in the synagogues.
- In Acts 10, the Holy Spirit is poured out on the Gentiles through Peter's bold proclamation of the gospel.
- According to Acts 11:19, those who were scattered in Acts 8 planted a church in Antioch.
- Barnabas was ministering to the church at Antioch and brought Paul there to join him (Acts 11:25-26).
- In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas are sent out by the Holy Spirit (and the church at Antioch) to preach the gospel and plant churches.
- It's in this context that we begin to see patterns that would mark Paul's ministry.

Paul's Foundation

- Paul knew and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Acts 9)
- Paul knew his calling.
 - **Romans 1:1** ¹*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,*
 - **1 Corinthians 2:2** ²*For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him*

crucified.

- Paul knew his particular role in preaching to the Gentiles.
 - **Acts 13:47** ⁴⁷*For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”*
 - **Acts 22:21** ²¹*And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’*
 - **Acts 9:15–16** ¹⁵*But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”*
 - **Romans 1:14** ¹⁴*I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish.*
- Paul was burdened for those who had no gospel witness among them.
 - **Romans 15:23–24** ²³*But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, ²⁴I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.*
- Paul sought to plant churches wherein new believers could mature in Christ.
 - **Colossians 1:25–29** ²⁵*of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.*

Paul's Strategy

- Followed the Spirit's leading
 - Paul seemed to preach in cities and towns that served as cultural or mercantile hubs for regions.
 - “Paul's missionary work in Cilicia may have focused on Tarsus, but this is not certain. His ministry in Antioch was certainly a “metropolitan mission.” When he moved to Cyprus, he did not go straight to Paphos, the capital of the province, but to cities on the eastern and southern coast of the island. When he reached Asia Minor, he bypassed the large cities in the province of Pamphylia to evangelize in the relatively small towns in southern Galatia, without attempting to reach Ancyra, the capital of the province of Galatia in the north. When he reached the province of Macedonia, he did not go straight to Thessalonica, the provincial capital, which could be reached by ship, but to Philippi. When he had to leave Thessalonica, he did not go east on the Via Egnatia to reach larger cities further west, nor did he travel straight to Corinth, the capital of the province of Achaia, but to Athens, a city with great history and reputation but with a more humble present role.”¹
 - “The geographical scope of Paul's missionary work was not controlled by a “grand

¹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods*, Illustrated edition (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2008), 281–82.

strategy” that helped him decide in which cities to begin a new missionary initiative. The evidence indicates that Paul moved to geographically adjacent areas that were open for missionary work. This is true for provinces, regions and cities.”²

- Proclaimed to the Jews first (those who had some revelation of the truth).
 - **Luke 24:47** ⁴⁷*and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*
 - **Acts 13:13–15** ¹³*Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, ¹⁴but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. ¹⁵After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.”*
- Proclaimed to the Gentiles second (those who had no revelation of the truth).
 - **Acts 13:44–47** ⁴⁴*The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “ ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”*
- Contextualized his presentation of the gospel depending on the audience. Two examples:
 - In **Acts 13:16–41**, Paul leans heavily into Old Testament Scripture, Jewish history, and fulfilled prophecy to point people to Jesus.
 - In **Acts 17:22–34**, Paul uses a gospel bridge from their culture, explains Scriptural truth without reciting passages verbatim, and quotes the Greek poets Epimenides and Aratus to develop his argument leading to Christ’s substitutionary atonement and resurrection.
- Utilized skills to provide for himself and develop relationships.
 - **Acts 18:1–4** ¹*After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.*
- Moved on willingly when his witness was rejected.
 - **Acts 13:50–52** ⁵⁰*But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. ⁵¹But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. ⁵²And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.*
- Endured much suffering for proclaiming the gospel.
 - **Acts 14:19** ¹⁹*But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.*
 - **2 Corinthians 11:23–28** ²³*Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking*

² Schnabel, 287.

like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

- Trusted the Spirit’s leading in planning next steps.
 - **Acts 16:6–10** ⁶*And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*
- Embraced structure and flexibility.
 - Paul may have followed patterns in his approach, but he importantly was willing to go and serve wherever the Spirit would lead.
- Trusted the churches to carry on the mission.
 - **2 Timothy 1:14** ¹⁴*By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.*
 - **Titus 1:5** ⁵*This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—*

Applications for Our Evangelism

- **Develop a Strategy.** It is helpful to have regular patterns of outreach or ministry that will put you in the path of nonbelievers with whom you can share the gospel. As such, an intentional strategy will help you become more effective in evangelism.
- **Inventory Your Giftings.** Consider how God has uniquely gifted you to fulfill the Great Commission. What skills, interests, and abilities do you have that you can leverage for the Gospel?
- **Evaluate Your Relationships.** Think through the concentric circles of your relational spheres. Who doesn’t know Christ? Do you know who does and does not believe? How can you be a light for the truth to them?
- **Consider Your Audience.** How can you make the gospel clear to the people you can share with? What steps can you take to be better equipped to share with them? (More on this in the contextualization lesson).
- **Follow the Spirit’s Leading.** A Spirit-led life starts with a Spirit-filled life. Are you actively taking in the Word and going to the Lord in prayer? Are you involved in the church, the body of Christ?
- **Be Willing to Suffer...and Move On.** Ask the Lord for strength to bear under the small persecutions that come our way. Be willing to humbly proclaim the truth as an ambassador and move on.

- **Personal Strategy Framework: Connect -> Engage -> Disciple -> Send**
 - This pattern comes from Jesus's example in Luke 10:1-16, but is embraced by Paul as well. He proclaims the gospel with an emphasis in relationship and ongoing investment, making *disciples* instead of merely converts, trusting God's providence and direction.
 - **Connect** for relationship
 - Patterns of life and hospitality
 - Common interests and activities
 - Frequently attended locations
 - Business relationships
 - Special events, etc.
 - **Engage** with the gospel
 - Look for gospel bridges – Themes and concepts present in the culture or perspective of the people you're trying to reach that overlap with gospel themes (even if it make be askew from Biblical truth). For example, does this individual have a concept of sacrificial service? Do these people already worship something? Do they have a sense of right and wrong, and are there any areas of overlap?
 - Weave gospel threads – Gospel themes and concepts that you intentionally bring up, following the Spirit's leading in what may interest the hearer(s). For example, when asked how your day went, respond with, "It's been somewhat difficult, but God's grace has sustained me."
 - Share gospel impact – Aspects of your witness and testimony that testify to the gospel's transformational and redemptive power.
 - Proclaim gospel truth – Share the message of the person and work of Christ, situated in the grand redemptive narrative, with urgency to respond.
 - **Disciple** to maturity
 - Church membership – The laboratory of ongoing development, maturity, and participation in mission.
 - Discipleship in truth and practice – "Teaching all I have commanded" (Matthew 28:18-20).
 - **Send** on mission
 - Encourage them to share the gospel with instruction and modeling.
 - Help them develop and deploy gifts.
 - Give them a vision for multiplication.