

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you (Jews). Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles." Acts 13:46

Paul is known as God's missionary to the Gentiles (non-Jews). Since nearly everyone reading this devotional booklet is a Gentile, we have a deep affinity for this great teacher. Here is what is interesting. Initially Paul focused only on working and teaching Jewish people. When he entered a town his first stop was the Jewish synagogue. Yet time after time he was beaten, humiliated or run out of town by a group of Jewish people. Finally, he gave up and began to teach Gentiles.

That is what happened in this short passage in the 13th Chapter of Acts. Paul and Barnabas had stopped in Antioch, a city in present day Turkey, to conduct their teaching and preaching ministry. One Sabbath they were greeted warmly and a number of Jews and Jewish converts invited them back the following week to, "tell us more." The next Sabbath "the whole city," gathered to hear them.

The positive response to this new teaching set off a number of Jews, who went wild with jealousy and tore into Paul, contradicting everything he was saying, and causing an ugly scene.

Paul and Barnabas didn't back down. "Well, " they said to the crowd, "we tried to start our mission with you who are Jewish, but it is obvious that you want no part of this message of eternal life. Therefore, we will refocus our attention on non-Jews."

They did, and along with thousands of other teachers, were so successful that nearly all of Europe, and later, the United States, converted to Christianity.

Recently, however, fewer and fewer people in Europe embrace faith in Jesus Christ. Those same trends seem to be taking place in our country. Are we the equivalent of those first century Jews who harassed Paul in Antioch? Some people are predicting that the flame of Christianity that once spread across Europe and the United States, will go out.

Not so! The flame will not go out. Instead it will burn brightly elsewhere. Today the flame is spreading to South American, Africa and Asia. Perhaps it is time for them to send missionaries to us.

Loving God, continue to spread the flame of your word though our cities and villages. Light our hearts with the warmth of your Spirit so that we can love you and the people you have made to be our neighbors. Amen.

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