

NEW TESTAMENT EVANGELISM

Done the New Testament Way

By Robert J. Sargent

EVANGELISM

Our English word “evangelism” (“evangelize,” “evangelist”) comes from the Greek word, $\epsilon\upsilon\alpha\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\sigma\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$, *euangelion* — meaning “good news” or the “Gospel.” In its basic meaning, evangelism (*euangelidzō*) is the preaching of the Gospel. It is the fulfillment of Christ’s Great Commission to His churches (Mark 16:15).

THE WORK OF AN EVANGELIST

Timothy was instructed to “do the work of an evangelist” (II Timothy 4:5). This work is exemplified in the ministry of Philip — the only man in the Bible who is directly called an evangelist (Acts 21:8).

Philip’s ministry involved three things: preaching the Gospel (Acts 8:5,35), baptizing those who believed (Acts 8:12,38), and organizing churches (Acts 8:14). Therefore, New Testament evangelism is church-planting and an evangelist is what most people would call a “missionary.”

The sending of two pastors from the “mother” church in Jerusalem to Samaria demonstrates that Philip was not a freelancing evangelist. He remained (and evangelized) under the authority of the church he once served as a deacon (Acts 6:5).

The ministry of evangelism is itinerant (Acts 8:40). As churches are organized, evangelists move on to start other churches. Philip evidently planted several churches along the coastal plains of Israel, including those at Lydda (Acts 9:32) and Joppa (Acts 9:38), before settling down in Caesarea.

THE CALL OF AN EVANGELIST

According to Ephesians 4:11, evangelists (like pastors) are a gift to the Lord’s churches from Jesus Christ. This means first of all that they are recipients of a divine call into the ministry (I Timothy 1:12) and, secondly, that God raises them up in the churches and equips them to spearhead a church’s fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The example of Acts 13:1-2 shows that pastors can be separated for evangelistic ministry (and later return to the pastorate when they have completed their mission, Acts 14:28; 15:35). Apparently the office of a bishop and the work of an evangelist were much more fluid than is commonly practiced today.

THE TRAINING OF AN EVANGELIST

Just as there is a natural law of physical reproduction (Genesis 1), there is a law of *spiritual* reproduction (“Christians produce Christians; Churches produce Churches; and Preachers produce Preachers”). God-called men are prepared for the ministry in the manner set forth by II Timothy 2:2.

This scriptural pattern is exemplified by the church at Ephesus, a church that was planted by Paul and his team (Acts 19). Almost a year after he left that city, Paul met in Miletus with the church’s pastors and reminded them in his parting charge that he had spent three years “night and day” teaching and training them (Acts 20:31). During that time, two things were accomplished: first, God-called men were trained as elders or pastors (Acts 20:17) to shepherd the church; second, God-called men must have been trained and sent out by the church as evangelists — because “all Asia heard the Gospel” (Acts 19:10). One such man was Epaphras, who labored at Colosse (Colossians 1:7).

THE METHODS OF EVANGELISM

There are two key passages that deal with methodology.

New Testament evangelism was first instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ — a year-and-a-half *before* He left His church with the Great Commission. It is recorded in Luke chapters 9 and 10. The account of the sending of the seventy in Luke 10:1-17 yields several principles of evangelism that are mirrored in the evangelistic activities of the church at Antioch in Acts 13&c.

For example:

EVANGELISM IS 	Luke 10	Acts 13&c.
Church Centered It is not a man-centered ministry.	This event is set in the context of the church that was founded by Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry (Luke 6:13; I Corinthians 12:28)	<i>“Now there were in the CHURCH that was at Antioch” (13:1)</i>
Church Sent No mission boards, clearinghouses, or man-made sending agencies are found in the Word of God.		<i>“And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they SENT them away” (13:3).</i>
Divinely Appointed The Lord selects men out of the church for the work.	<i>“After these things the LORD APPOINTED other seventy also” (verse 1)</i>	<i>“the HOLY GHOST said, SEPARATE me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (13:2)</i>
Team Ministry Evangelists work in teams of two or more.	<i>“And sent them TWO AND TWO” (verse 1)</i>	<i>“Barnabas AND Saul ... and they had also John to their minister” (13:2,5)</i>
Spirit Led Evangelists depend on the Spirit’s leading as to where and when they preach.		<i>“being sent forth by the Holy Ghost” (13:4)</i> <i>See: Acts 8:39; 10:19-20; 11:12; 16:6-7.</i>
Itinerant Evangelists take the Gospel everywhere, rather than to a fixed place.	<i>“into EVERY city and place” (verse 1)</i>	Salamis (13:5) Paphos (13:6) Perga (13:13) — <i>twice</i> Pisidian Antioch (13:14) — <i>twice</i>

<p>Paul was an international evangelist.</p>		<p>Iconium (13:51) — twice Lystra (14:6) — twice Derbe (14:6)</p>
<p>Vulnerable Evangelists serve on the “front lines” of a spiritual war.</p>	<p><i>“Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves” (verse 3)</i></p>	<p><i>“Elymas the sorcerer ... withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith” (13:8)</i> <i>“When the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming” (13:45)</i> <i>“There came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead” (14:19)</i></p>
<p>Faith Dependent Evangelists depend upon the giving of God’s people. They are NOT mendicant beggars (verse 7d).</p>	<p><i>“Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes” (verse 4)</i> <i>“And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you” (verses 7-8)</i></p>	<p>Paul was willing to work with his hands (Acts 18:3; 20:34) Paul was dependent upon the sacrificial giving of God’s people (Philippians 4:11-18; I Corinthians 9:4-14) As team leader, Paul was responsible for the welfare of his fellow workers (Acts 20:34d)</p>
<p>Benevolent Evangelists may meet the physical needs of people as an avenue to the spiritual.</p>	<p><i>“And heal the sick that are therein” (verse 9)</i></p>	<p>The exercise of the [temporary] “sign gifts” was to authenticate and confirm the Gospel message that was preached (Mark 16:17-18,20).</p>
<p>Purposeful Evangelists preach the Gospel.</p>	<p><i>“Say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (verse 9)</i> <i>“Be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (verse 11).</i></p>	<p><i>“they PREACHED the word of God” (13:5)</i> <i>“Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is PREACHED unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (13:38-39)</i> <i>“And there they PREACHED the Gospel” (14:7)</i> <i>“And when they had PREACHED the gospel to that city” (14:21)</i></p>

<p>Limited A church’s responsibility is to preach the Gospel to every creature — not to win every soul to Christ. When evangelists have faithfully fulfilled their responsibility, they must move on. <u>See:</u> Matthew 16:19.</p>	<p><i>“Into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you”</i> (verses 10-11)</p>	<p><i>“It was NECESSARY that the word of God should first have been spoken to you ... lo, we turn to the Gentiles”</i> (13:46)</p>
<p>Eternal When people reject the Gospel, they only condemn themselves.</p>	<p><i>“But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to HELL.”</i> (verses 12-15)</p>	<p><i>“but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life”</i> (13:46)</p>
<p>Ambassadorial Evangelism is not about the preacher and “his” ministry; it’s about Jesus Christ.</p>	<p><i>“He that heareth you heareth ME; and he that despiseth you despiseth ME; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me”</i> (verse 16)</p>	<p><u>See:</u> II Corinthians 5:20</p>
<p>Fruitful <u>See:</u> Psalm 126:5-6.</p>	<p><i>“And the seventy RETURNED again with joy”</i> (verse 17)</p>	<p><i>“And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles”</i> (14:26-27)</p>

THE CHALLENGE FOR 21ST CENTURY EVANGELISM

Evangelism has long been an “Achilles heel” for Bible-believing Baptists. Godly men, with a sincere and zealous desire to see precious souls saved and the cause of Christ advanced throughout the world, have devised well-meaning methods that have not only moved away from established New Testament principles, but have created the seeds of destruction and apostasy. For example, in 1814, the seeds of demise were planted when well-intentioned Baptists formed the American Baptist Missionary Union to sponsor Adoniram Judson’s ministry

in Burma. This move led directly to conventionism and the “Cooperative Program.” Even to this day, many Baptist groups almost instinctively feel a need to organize some kind of mission-sending agency. While they vociferously claim to be independent, history is not on their side.

It’s not a question of whether man’s methods will work. They do! Anytime the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed it will have its intended effect (Isaiah 55:11; Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12). The real question is, “Can God’s way be improved upon?”

Here is the challenge:

- Why not allow the Lord to direct His CHURCH to seek a vision for the “regions beyond?” The church at Antioch and its pastors did!
- Why not allow the Lord to raise up men from WITHIN a church to fulfill that vision? The church at Antioch did!
- Why not train God-called men within a church, rather than sending them off to an institution where others will teach them?
- Why not practice TEAM ministry? The Lord Jesus Christ did. The Church at Antioch did. Peter and Paul did. Employ the Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 principle.
- Why not send evangelists out directly FROM the Church? The church at Antioch did. A Baptist church is able to do all that a “mission office” can do ... and more!
- Why not see evangelists as being responsible and accountable to their sending, sponsoring, and supporting church?
- Why not send evangelists to a PEOPLE rather than a place? Paul was an apostle to the gentiles; Peter to the Jews.
- Why not allow evangelists the liberty to follow the SPIRIT’S leading as to where they should go and how they should labor?
- Why not view failure as success? An ITINERANT ministry seeks people who will listen, and moves on when they won’t.
- Why not allow PASTORS to do the work of an evangelist by practicing team ministry IN the Church as well as through its outreach? The church at Antioch did.

Evangelism is to be the heart and soul of a Bible-believing Baptist Church. The parting commandment of the Lord Jesus Christ is reiterated five times in the Gospels and the book of Acts (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8), and in the last gracious invitation of the Word of God (Revelation 22:17). It is that important!

Evangelism is not a question of “IF,” but of “HOW?” We all acknowledge the Commission; may we also see that the Master has also given us the “how” in the principles and practice of the New Testament churches.