

Commission Catalysts

Week 20: May 14-20 – Acts 9-13

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Helpful Resources

Map of Palestine (p.47), Map of Paul's Missionary Journeys (p.59)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

In the realm of chemistry, a catalyst is a substance that causes or accelerates a chemical reaction. Outside the realm of chemistry, a catalyst would be a person or thing that hastens an event or change. Since Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, God had begun a new work in starting the church. That new work was fueled by several key catalysts.

For example, the indwelling Holy Spirit empowered followers of Jesus to be Christ's witnesses (*Acts 1:8; 2*). Thousands of people came to believe in Jesus. Another catalyst was the selecting of the seven servants (deacons) to assist the Apostles in meeting the church's physical needs (*Acts 6:1-7*). Persecution also fanned the flame of this new work. When the enemy attempted to stop the church, he accelerated its spread to other regions (*Acts 6-8*).

While this new work was already off to a great start, the Lord continued to open new doors and add new chapters to the story. In this review, we will discover five more catalysts and consider how God used them to fulfill *Acts 1:8* and the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:19, 20*).

- Commission Catalysts
 1. **Saul's Conversion** (*Acts 9:1-31*): Perhaps the most exciting catalyst in the early church (outside of the arrival of the Holy Spirit) was the conversion of a Pharisee named Saul. Originally dispatched to harass and arrest Christians, the Lord transformed Saul's life. Instead of zealously persecuting Christians, Saul (or Paul) began zealously preaching Christ to others.

Catalyst for the Commission? Imagine the New Testament without the Apostle Paul. He wrote nearly half of the New Testament books (13). Furthermore, outside of Christ, Paul is the greatest example we have of the Christian life. God would use his life and ministry to accelerate the spread of the gospel (and church) "to the ends of the earth" (*Acts 1:8*).
 2. **Jews and Gentiles** (*Acts 9:32-11:18*): At first, the Apostles focused on sharing the gospel with the Jews in Jerusalem. But eventually, people like Philip and Peter began sharing Christ with Gentiles (non-Jews). Even Saul was chosen "as an instrument of God to take the gospel to the Gentiles" (*Acts 9:15*). God revealed to Peter that Gentiles were no longer to be considered as unclean. They, too, could receive Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Catalyst for the Commission? While Jesus was on earth, He hinted in His teaching and parables that salvation was meant for the Jews and Gentiles. He also told His followers that they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea (Jewish territories) but also in Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Gentile territories). The gospel is for everyone!

3. **A New Hub** (*Acts 11:19-30*): As persecution intensified, Christians relocated to other regions. One location where many Christians settled was Antioch, far to the north, away from danger. So many exciting things were happening in Antioch that the Apostles sent Barnabas to investigate. He affirmed believers there and helped strengthen the church.

Catalyst for the Commission? As Jerusalem was the hub or headquarters for sharing the gospel with the Jews, Antioch would be the hub for sharing the gospel with the Gentiles. For example, the Antioch church would commission Paul and Barnabas for their journeys.

4. **Peter in Prison** (*Acts 12:1-25*): The enemies of Christ persecuted the young church to discourage or destroy their momentum. However, persecution accelerated the spread of the gospel. Even though the Apostles (like Peter and John) were arrested and sentenced to die, the Lord protected them and delivered them from prison.

Catalyst for the Commission? Every time that the Apostles were delivered from harm, the believers grew in faith and confidence and the gospel spread (*4:31; 12:24*).

5. **First Missionary Journey** (*Acts 13, 14*): God used the church at Antioch to commission Paul and Barnabas to take the gospel to distant places (Cyprus and Galatia in Asia Minor).

Catalyst for the Commission? While they probably didn't know it at the time, this journey would lead to two more trips, as well as the planting of dozens of churches. God was using Paul to take the gospel "to the ends of the earth" and open the west to Christ.

- Backdrop for *Galatians*

Paul's first missionary journey (*Acts 13, 14*) provides the backdrop for his letter to the Galatians. Galatia is the region in Asia Minor where he and Barnabas traveled. Though they started out sharing the gospel with the Jews, when the Jews rejected Christ, Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles. Those Jews who followed Christ also formed churches in their communities. However, enemies of Christ infiltrated the churches and led Christians astray with false doctrines (primarily having to do with following Jewish laws and rituals). Thus, *Acts 13* provides the context for *Galatians*, in which Paul emphasized the freedom that believers have in Christ, compared to the bondage of the Law of Moses (*Acts 13:39*).

- Secondary Heroes

Though Peter and Paul are the main characters of the book of *Acts*, there are several secondary characters who played key roles in the early church. For example, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, Agabus, Jesus' brother James, the other Apostles, the seven servants, and others were integral to the success of the early church. While we may not be a Peter or Paul, we each have an important role to play in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Let us play our part well, even if we are behind the scenes.

The Bottom Line

The Lord provided several key catalysts to accelerate the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Questions to Consider

1. Which character in the early church encouraged or challenged you most? Explain why.
2. What is your role in fulfilling *Acts 1:8* and the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:19, 20*)?