

## **ACTS CHAPTER 13**

Starting in chapter 13 and continuing to the end of the book (chapter 28) Acts focusses on the ministry to the Gentiles and the spread of the Gospel around the world. Once you are saved you are to begin engaging in the Great Commission – Go and share the Gospel. Paul completes three missionary journeys and ends up being imprisoned in Jerusalem and transported to Rome. Paul said in Romans 15:19 “So that from Jerusalem, and round about Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” That would represent all of the then known world. What a record. Now when we get to Acts chapter 28, the book of Acts will end abruptly reflecting the history of the church was not yet complete and “we” are to be apart of the sequel.

**Vs. 1-3** - In **Acts 12:25**, we learn Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark were all at the church in Antioch, having returned from delivering a gift of support to the church in Jerusalem (**Acts 11:27-30**). Saul, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen were serving as prophets and teachers in the church. The prophets helped lay the foundation for the church as they proclaimed the Word of God (**Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 14:29-32**). They were “forth-tellers” more than “foretellers” though at times the prophets did announce things to come (i.e. **Acts 11:27-3**). The teachers helped to ground the converts in the doctrine of the faith (**2 Timothy 2:2**). When the text says, “*Simeon who was called Niger*” Luke is highlighting the fact Niger means black, so Simeon was presumably a black African among the congregation at Antioch. This is to show “all people” are included in God’s plan of redemption. Simon of Cyrene a North African helped Jesus carry His cross to Calvary. Luke also highlights “*Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch*” - well this Manaen

mentioned here grew up with Herod the tetrarch. This was the same Herod who beheaded John the Baptist and presided over one of Jesus' trials (**Luke 23:7-12**). Herod and Manaen grew up together, but went very different ways. One killed John the Baptist and presided over one of the trials of Jesus before His crucifixion. The other became a Christian, and a leader in the dynamic congregation at Antioch – see **Psalm 1**). Although all these men were different, the common thread among these five was their deep faith in Jesus the Christ. Notice they hear from God after they worshipped and were fasting in **vs. 2**...it is when we engage in spiritual disciplines, we will hear from God best. To dedicate means to set apart; we should ask God what He wants us to set apart for Him. In **vs. 3** the phrase “*having fasted and prayed*” – Paul and Barnabas had a God-sized task to do and this whole work required a substantial dependence on God, thus fasting and prayer demonstrated that dependence. *Laying of hands* was the church's way of identifying with and affirming the mission to which God has called to a particular person. Finally, it says in **vs. 3**, “*they sent them away*” - notice that the church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul out. They were supported and sent by a specific congregation. As far as we know, this had never happened before in the history of the church. Many went out as “*accidental missionaries*” (as in **Acts 8:4 and 11:19**) but there was never a concerted and organized effort to win

people to Jesus like this. And being intentionally sent by the church in Antioch, many regard this as the first real known missionary effort of the church.

**Vs. 4-5** - Regarding the phrase *“So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit”* - the Christians of the church at Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul; but more importantly, the Holy Spirit sent them. Any group of Christians can send someone, but if the Holy Spirit doesn't send them, it won't amount to eternally effective ministry. Regarding **vs. 5**, we are not told why they went to Cyprus first, but we do know Barnabas grew up on that island (**Acts 4:36**). *“They preached the word of God in the synagogues”* - this custom of the open synagogue gave Barnabas and Saul many opportunities to preach. This tradition invited any learned man to speak to the people of the synagogue at the Sabbath meeting (I think it is imperative that a church's pastor has some formal seminary training; because we find it in Scripture). They also had John (also known as John Mark) as their assistant who was previously mentioned in **Acts 12:25**. He traveled with Barnabas and Saul on this trip and was the same Mark who later wrote the Gospel that bears his name. Mark was a valuable companion for Barnabas and Saul. He grew up in Jerusalem, and was an eyewitness of many of the events in the life of Jesus and could

relate them with special power to Barnabas and Saul, and to others whom they preached to.

**Vs. 6-7** – Paphos was a city on the west coast of Cyprus was known for its immorality. Here Barnabas and Saul faced a combination of immorality (they worshipped Venus, the goddess of eros sexual love)” and spiritual darkness that was common across the pagan world of the Roman Empire. Sergius Paulus was an important man. He was a Roman proconsul who was responsible for an entire province and answered to the Roman Senate. Regarding the phrase, “*This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God*” - While ministering in Paphos (presumably after the same fashion – going into the synagogues and presenting Jesus), *an unexpected door opened* – the proconsul wanted to *hear the word of God*. It is so important for Christians to pray for *divine appointments*; God is willing to open doors for the Gospel to be presented and heard. The name Bar-Jesus could also be translated to mean “son of Joshua.”

**Vs. 8-12** - Elymas the sorcerer (also Bar Jesus, son of Joshua) was some kind of advisor to the proconsul) attempted to frustrate the missionary efforts of Barnabas and Saul. You see like in the Parable of Tares (**Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**) wherever the Lord sows His true children (wheat), Satan will come along and sow a counterfeit (the tares), a child of the devil. Paul, using

spiritual discernment and operating in the gift of faith, rebuked and pronounced the judgment of God upon Elymas. Paul by the power of the Holy Spirit recognized that Elymas was a child of the devil (**John 8:44**), and he inflicted blindness on the false prophet as a judgment from God. And this miracle also proved to Sergio Paulus that indeed Barnabas and Paul were servants of the true God and preached the true message of salvation (**Hebrews 2:4**). Regarding the phrase “*then Saul who is called Paul*” Saul, was the Jewish name given to Paul after the first king of Israel. But his Roman name was Paul – which meant “Little” and sounded similar to “Saul.” **Acts 13:9** **is the first place you find the familiar name of Paul in the New Testament.** And notice in **vs. 12** what happened, to the Roman official: he believed and was saved. Paul was harsh in his confrontation against Elymas because the eternal destiny of the proconsul was at stake. If one wants to commit spiritual suicide, that’s one thing. But it is never right to bring others down also. If you want to give up on the things of God and grow bitter in your heart against God, that’s your choice. But it is a heavy sin to draw anyone else away with you, either with your words or your example.

**Vs. 13** – Regarding the phrase “*Now when Paul and his party set sail*” - the missionary group is now described as “Paul and his party.” Previously – as recently as **Acts 13:7** – the group was described as **Barnabas and Saul.** From

this point on, Paul's leadership and prominence will be evident. We see the missionary journey moving from place to place, "*They came to Perga*" - they left the island of Cyprus, coming to Perga on the mainland of what is today Turkey. Regarding the phrase, "*John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem*" - We don't know exactly why John Mark went home to Jerusalem. Perhaps he was homesick. Perhaps he was afraid of the tough and dangerous travel through the mountains ahead of them. Perhaps he resented that the team of his cousin Barnabas and Saul (**Acts 12:25**) had now become Paul and his party. Perhaps he lost confidence because Paul suffered poor health (according to **Galatians 4:13**). Now it will be clear from **Acts 15:36-41**, Paul didn't appreciate the departure of John Mark here, and to some degree he seems to have lost confidence in him as a missionary companion, a member of the team. This reminds us that as great and godly as these men were, and as great as the work was that they did, *they still had problems*.

**Vs. 14-15** – I love this “gospel on the move” way Luke is walking us through the book of the Acts. "*They departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia*" - Perga was a coastal, harbor city, where the ship from Paphos came to the mainland. Antioch in Pisidia was about 135 miles inland, to the north. This general region was known as Galatia, and later Paul wrote a letter to the Galatian churches. Paul and the Party went into the synagogue on the

Sabbath day and sat down. A first-century synagogue service followed this general order: Opening prayers were offered, and then there was a reading from the Law (the first five books of the Old Testament). Then, a reading from the Prophets. Then, if there was an educated person present, they were invited to speak on subjects related to the readings. The rulers of the synagogue gave Paul the customary invitation, and he was more than happy to use the opportunity. Preparation plus opportunity equals success; Paul was ready in season and out of season to share the Gospel; so should we.

**Vs. 16-23** - Paul begins his sermon in the synagogue explaining how God's work in history leads up to Jesus. Regarding the phrase, "*Men of Israel and you who fear God*" – the word "and" lets us know "*Men of Israel* and "*you who fear God*" refers to two different groups; saved and unsaved. The church must never become a "country club" for religious people. Unserved people need to be invited to come hear the Gospel. The phrase "*According to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior; Jesus*" - in this survey of Israel's history, Paul noted important events – the choosing of the patriarchs, the deliverance from Egypt, the time in the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, the time of the Judges, the creation of a monarchy – but it all led up to Jesus. Additionally, this survey of Israel's history demonstrates that God has a plan for history, and we need to sense a connection to that plan. Jesus is the goal of

history, and as we are in Jesus, we are in the flow of God's great plan of redemption. Although the Jewish people were rebellious and not faithful to God; God has always been true to His covenant.

**Vs. 24-29** – Regarding the phrase in **vs. 25** *“As John was finishing his course, he said”* - John the Baptist responded to Jesus the right way. He prepared the hearts of others for Jesus, and he saw Jesus as who He really was. In **John 1:29** it says, *“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* As John the Baptist's ministry was coming to a close, he announces Jesus' earthly ministry is about to start. A foreshadow of Jesus is seen in **Genesis 3:15** and **21**. John knew Jesus was the One greater than all others. He knew Jesus was more than a teacher; He was the Lord God we must all answer to. Regarding the phrase in **vs. 25** - *“The sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to lose”* - this statement shows that John knew Jesus was high above him. John insisted he wasn't even worthy to do this for Jesus. In **vs. 27** regarding the phrase, *“For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him”* - those who didn't know the Scriptures rejected Jesus, and delivered Him to Pilate to be executed. This was true even though they lived in Jerusalem and were rulers among the Jews. Therefore, Jesus was executed and laid in a tomb. In **vs. 29** regarding the phrase, *“They took Him down from the tree”* In

calling the cross a tree, Paul drew on the idea from **Deuteronomy 21:22-23**. In that passage, it says that God curses a person who is hanged from a tree. Paul wanted to communicate the idea that Jesus was cursed so that we could be blessed (**Galatians 3:13**).

**Vs. 30** – The many “**but God**” phrases reflect the authority, majesty, and sovereignty of God. These are wonderful words. Man did his best to fight against God – even to kill Him (*temporarily*) – **but God** was greater than man’s sin and rebellion, and Jesus rose from the grave, winning over sin and death with all power in His hands. He is currently seated at the right hand of God making intercession for us.

**Vs. 31-37** – The phrase “*He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him*” - we should not miss an emphasis on events in Paul’s preaching here; it is so evident that it can be missed. **1 Corinthians 15:3-11** speaks of those who saw Jesus. Paul in these verses focused on things that actually happened, not on philosophy or even theology. “Christianity is not just a philosophy or a set of ethics, though it involves these things. Essentially, Christianity is a proclamation of facts that concern what God has done” – it’s about a relationship and Christianity is summed up in **John 3:16-17**. Now regarding the phrase in **vs. 33** – “*God has fulfilled this for us their children*” - then Paul applied the truth of Jesus’ resurrection. The resurrection means that Jesus

truly is the unique Son of God (**Psalm 2:7**), and it proves that He was utterly holy even in His work on the cross (**Psalm 16:10**).

**Vs. 38-41** – Regarding the phrase in **vs. 38** – *“Through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins”* - the promise is that, because of who Jesus is and what He did for us, forgiveness is offered to us freely in Jesus. We may be justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Justification – Sanctification, and Glorification are the 3 platforms salvation sits on. (Read **Romans 5:1**). We can never justify ourselves before God. To think so assumes God grades on a curve, a measure that bends according to human weakness. To think so also gives us the glory for our own salvation instead of simply saying, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). Some refuse to embrace the salvation of Jesus in the secret place of their heart, because they want a salvation of their own making. They want to be saved the old-fashioned way – they want to earn it. Only a few months after this, Paul wrote a letter to these churches in Galatia, dealing with these same themes of being justified by God’s grace, and not by keeping the law. Regarding the phrase in **vs. 39** *“everyone who believes is justified”* - Jesus not only forgives us, but we are also justified by Him. Forgiveness takes care of the debt of sin, but justification puts a positive credit

on our account before God. In **vs. 40** “*Beware, therefore*” - the warning is that if we do not embrace the person and work of Jesus with our whole lives, we are despisers who will perish. In this warning, Paul quoted a passage from **Habakkuk 1:5** regarding the judgment that came upon Jerusalem. If God judged them, He will also judge those who refuse and reject His offer of forgiveness through the atoning and finished work of Jesus on the Cross. Yes, we live in the age of great grace, but God is also the God of great judgment, and sin must be judged if it is not atoned for by the work of Christ. Paul’s sermon was very similar to Peter’s at Pentecost because Paul and Peter were preaching the “same gospel.”

**Vs. 42-44** – Now both Jews and Gentiles at the synagogue responded positively, yet Luke noted an even greater response from the Gentiles present. The Gentiles were especially excited about Paul’s message and wanted him to tell them more, which he did the next Sabbath. **The people had done a great job of spreading the news, because a great crowd gathered. Do you believe the Gospel is being shared at TMFBC during SMBS, Wednesday Noonday/Evening Bible study, and Sunday mornings at 10:15am? Then are you inviting and sharing the news of it and inviting others to come hear it with you?** Regarding that phrase in **vs. 43** – “*Persuaded them to continue in the grace of God*” - continuing in grace is as important as beginning in grace. We

must never leave it as the basic principle of our relationship with God. Far too many only think of grace as the introduction to the Christian life, but God wants grace to remain as the foundation for our life with Him. In vs. 44-45 we see on the next Sabbath, envy creates opposition. In our day, people are overwhelmed with information. We have radio, television, the internet, and newspapers. People did not have any of this in that day. So, when somebody came through from another city, the person was a source of precious information and people naturally thronged about him. The missionaries were proclaiming something new. And the primary power that was the attractant of the people was the *“word of God.”* Look at the phrase in vs. 44 *“But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy”* - the dramatic response made the leaders of the synagogue envious. This is inevitable for those who are more concerned about being popular than serving God. Often times when you are a part of a group and someone becomes more popular than you; it can become the seeds of envy. *We can’t all be popular to the same degree, but we can all serve and please God to the same degree in Jesus Christ.* Regarding the phrase in vs. 45 *“contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul”* – when the Jewish leaders saw the crowds following Paul, they changed their minds about Paul and became filled with jealousy, especially since many of the people who had gathered were Jews. Regarding

the phrase *“They opposed the things spoken by Paul”* - it seems strange that these religious people who waited so long for their Messiah would now reject Him when Jesus was presented to them. A primary reason was they wanted to keep the division between Jew and Gentile, and if Jesus was to be the Messiah of all men, they wanted no part of Him. The Jews could not accept the fact that the Gentiles should be equal to them.

**Vs. 46-48** – *“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold”* - they had wonderful zeal for the things of God. They wouldn’t let this challenge go unanswered, because they really believed the truth about Jesus. The phrase *“Since you (Jews) reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles”* - they rebuked those who rejected Jesus, letting the Jews know that it was a privilege that this message should come to them first, a privilege they were now rejecting. Paul later on says the Jews and the Gentiles have been fused together to form one body called the church; this was a mystery until at that very moment in history (**Ephesians 3:1-7**). When you want to tell others about Jesus, begin with your own group. But if they don’t receive it, or when they start to reject it, don’t stop telling others about Jesus. Just find others to tell because others will listen. Regarding the phrase *“Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed”* – the Gentiles also responded with

more evangelism to open hearts, now directing their efforts to the Gentiles, in obedience to God's command (read **Romans 1:16**) and in fulfillment of prophecy (the quotation from **Isaiah 49:6**). The Gentiles responded to Paul's invitation with enthusiastic belief, learning with joy that God does not hate Gentiles, but offered them salvation in Jesus. Paul showed wisdom in not spending all his time trying to persuade hardened hearts. We know that even after he made Gentiles the focus of his evangelistic efforts, he still prayed earnestly for the salvation of Israel (**Romans 10:1**), but he spent his missionary time ministering to more open hearts.

**Vs. 49-50** – Regarding the phrase *“And the word of the Lord was being spread”* - it was being spread through the efforts of Paul and Barnabas, but especially through the lives of these people being brought to Jesus Christ. It's remarkable to think that this church was born in a little more than a week. On one Sabbath Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue and there was a wonderful response. The following Sabbath there was a mixed response, some very hostile and some very receptive. They took the receptive ones and started a church that has lasted for hundreds of years and through that church, the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region (**Acts 13:49**). Sometimes remarkable works of God happen quite quickly. We should be happy for such seasons of rapid progress in God's work; but this is not the

norm. In **vs. 50** we must know when an authentic revival is prepared for (prayer for a spirit of repentance to come over the people) and God sends revival; the devil always raises up “another group.” Jewish opposition was strong enough to force Paul and Barnabas to leave the area.

**Vs. 51-52** - Here we see Paul and Barnabas reacting to their expulsion from the city of Pisidian Antioch. Regarding the phrase “*But they shook off the dust from their feet against them*” – in doing this, Paul and Barnabas treated the city as if it were a God-rejecting Gentile city and by leaving, they were saying we don’t want to take anything from this Gentile city with us. They then carried on the work, going next to Iconium. All too often, rejection and opposition for the sake of the gospel makes us want to give up. But Paul and Barnabas responded with appropriate determination. The phrase “*filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit*” - being filled with joy and being filled with the Holy Spirit go together. Paul and Barnabas had joy that contradicted their circumstances. Paul is a great example of his own command to be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit (**Ephesians 5:18**). The happiness of a genuine Christian lies far beyond the reach of earthly disturbances, and is not affected by the changes and chances to which mortal things are exposed.