

Jesus Brought the Promised Blessing

Acts 13



ACTS CHAPTER 13

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY BEGINS

A. Barnabas and Saul are called and sent by the Holy Spirit.

1. ([Acts 13:1](#)) The people at the church in Antioch.

Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

a. **Now in the church that was at Antioch:** 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 and Barnabas were among the teachers and prophets there, as were **Simeon**,

Lucius, and **Manaen**.

b. **Simeon who was called Niger**: Since **Niger** means *black*, he was presumably a black African among the congregation at Antioch, and possibly the same **Simeon** who carried Jesus' cross ([Luke 23:26](#)).

c. **Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch**:

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](#)).

i. 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.

2. ([Acts 13:2](#)) The Holy Spirit calls Barnabas and Saul.

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

a. **As they ministered to the Lord**: This was part of what happened at the congregation in Antioch. Barnabas and others

certainly ministered to the congregation, and the congregation also ministered one to another. Yet they also **ministered to the Lord**.

i. This is the first job of any servant of God, to minister unto the Lord. In doing this, they did the service of priests under the new covenant, offering their bodies as living sacrifices ([Romans 12:1](#)). Ministering to the Lord means doing what pleases Him and honors Him — worship, praise, prayer, listening to, honoring God.

ii. “The word translated *worshipping* [*ministered*, NKJV] is that usually employed in the LXX (Septuagint) for the service of priests and Levites in the temple.”

b. **They ministered to the Lord and fasted**: As part of their service to the Lord, they also **fasted**. Presumably, they fasted because they sensed a need to seek God in a special way.

i. Judging from the calling described in the text, it is possible that they sought God about the need to spread the gospel to all the earth.

ii. If we assume they fasted and prayed about the need of the world for Jesus, we can see how God answered their prayer — by using them. This is often how God moves, by sending the people who have it on their hearts to pray.

iii. Many want to be “back seat drivers” in God’s work. They hope to say, “I’ll have the burden and you do the work.” But God’s typical way of working is to send the people who have the burden to do the work.

c. **The Holy Spirit said:** As they ministered unto the Lord, God spoke to them. This was a word of *calling* that would guide **Barnabas and Saul** into a specific work.

d. **The Holy Spirit said:** Presumably, the call came through the ministry of prophets in the church at Antioch, though it could have come simply through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit.

i. “I do not for a moment imagine that the assembly heard a voice. That is the mistake we too often make. We try to force ourselves into ecstasies in order to hear the voice, then we imagine we hear it!”

e. **Separate to Me:** Before Barnabas and Saul could do anything significant for God, they first had to be separated to Him. If you will separate **to** God, it means you must separate from some other things.

i. You can't really say "yes" to God's call on your life until you can say "no" to things that will keep you from that call.

f. **Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work:** It is significant that the two men called to missionary service were — as far as we know — the two most gifted and able men in the congregation.

g. **For the work to which I have called them:** God had a specific **work** He had appointed to Barnabas and Saul to do. Paul would later write in [Ephesians 2:10](#): *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* Here, God called Barnabas and Saul to those kind of good works.

i. The calling God had for the life of Paul had already been stated in [Acts 9:15-16](#): *He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear*

My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake. This was not a touchy-feely “feel good” call — it was a serious call to a serious ministry.

h. **Now separate to Me:** God gave a timetable — **now**. Before, God had told Paul through Ananias what his calling was, but not that it was **now**. **Now** meant there was to be no delay.

3. ([Acts 13:3](#)) The sending of Barnabas and Saul.

Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent *them* away.

a. **Having fasted and prayed:** They were sent with fasting and prayer. This whole work required a substantial dependence on God and fasting and prayer demonstrated that dependence.

b. **And laid hands on them:** The laying on of hands was a formal commissioning to this work. Certainly, Barnabas and Saul were “ordained” before this, but now they entered a different sphere of ministry.

c. **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.

- i. Being intentionally **sent** by the church in Antioch, many regard this as the first real known *missionary* effort of the church. “The word ‘missionary’ has to do with sending. The Latin word *mitto, mittere*, means ‘to send’; ‘mission’ and ‘missionary’ come from the forms *missi* and *missum*.”
- ii. They seem to have done this without a committee report, without a demographic analysis, without a marketing survey, without what is sometimes called “spiritual mapping.” Barnabas and Saul went out without any of these things, only with the call and power of the Holy Spirit.

B. Ministry in the cities of Seleucia, Salamis and Paphos.

1. ([Acts 13:4](#)) First stop: **Seleucia**

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

a. **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 **Spirit** doesn't send them, it won't amount to eternally effective ministry.

b. **Went down to Seleucia:** We aren't told of any specific work that took place in **Seleucia**, a city near Antioch. Saul and Barnabas may have gone there merely because it was the port city near Antioch, but it is hard to imagine them not doing *any* ministry there.

i. Since **Seleucia** wasn't far from Antioch, where there was a thriving church, it isn't difficult to assume there was already a group of Christians there in that city.

2. ([Acts 13:5](#)) On the island of Cyprus: The city of **Salamis, on the east coast.**

And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as *their* assistant.

a. **When they arrived in Salamis:** We are not told *why* they went to Cyprus first, but we do know Barnabas grew up on that island ([Acts 4:36](#)).

b. **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.

c. **They also had John as their assistant:** This man, also known as *John Mark*, was mentioned previously 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.

i. 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.

3. ([Acts 13:6-7](#)) Meeting the Roman proconsul in **Paphos**.

Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.

a. **Paphos**: This city on the west coast of Cyprus was known for its immorality. Here Barnabas and Saul faced a combination of immorality and spiritual darkness that was common across the pagan world of the Roman Empire.

i. “Paphos was infamous for its worship of Venus, the goddess of [sexual] love”. “Athanasius styled its religion ‘the deification of lust.’ Neither men nor women could resort to the shrine of Venus without being defiled in mind and depraved in character.”

b. **The proconsul, Sergius Paulus**: This was an important man. A Roman **proconsul** was responsible for an entire province and answered to the Roman Senate.

i. “All Roman provinces were divided into two classes, those that required troops and those that did not. The latter were administered by the Senate and ruled by proconsuls; the former were under the administration of the emperor.”

ii. “Sir William Ramsay reports that inscriptions bearing Sergius Paulus’ name have been found on Cyprus confirming that he was a Christian and that his entire family became Christians.”

c. **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.**

4. ([Acts 13:8-12](#)) **The resistance of Elymas the sorcerer.**

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness,

will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?

“And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

a. **Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated):** Paul was opposed by a man named **Elymas**. His real name was *Bar-Jesus* ([Acts 13:6](#)) which means “son of Jesus,” and Luke couldn’t bear to call him that. This **Elymas** (who was some kind of advisor to the proconsul) attempted to frustrate the missionary efforts of Barnabas and Saul.

i. We should not be surprised or shaken by opposition.

“Wherever there is likely to be great success, the open door and the opposing adversaries will both be found. If there are no adversaries, you may fear that there will be no success. A boy cannot get his kite up without wind, nor without a wind which drives *against* his kite.”

b. **Saul, who also is called Paul:** It was common for people in that day to have names that were similar yet different according to the language or culture they were in. Certainly, Saul's given name was **Saul**, a Jewish name after the first king of Israel. But his Roman name was **Paul** — which meant “Little” and sounded similar to “Saul.”

i. “Saul's father gave the child a Roman and a Latin name because he was a Roman citizen with all the rights in the Roman Empire this implied. The child had both names from infancy. When his father called him he shouted, ‘Saul, Saul!’ but when the Greek boys with whom he played called him they shouted, ‘Paul, Paul!’”

c. **Filled with the Holy Spirit... Said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud”:** Paul, using spiritual discernment and operating in the gift of faith, rebuked and pronounced the judgment of God upon Elymas (**you shall be blind**).

i. As Elymas was struck with blindness, we can't help but think Paul would remember his own experience with God. Paul was

struck blind at his conversion on the road to Damascus ([Acts 9:9](#)). Certainly, those who resist God are blind spiritually, so God just gave Elymas a physical blindness that matched his spiritual blindness. Sadly, we never hear of Elymas repenting, as Paul did.

d. **Then the proconsul believed:** Paul was harsh in his confrontation against Elymas because the eternal destiny of the proconsul was at stake.

i. 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 Him, that's your choice. But it is a heavy sin to draw anyone else away with you, either with your words or your example.

ii. "The severest words of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, are reserved for those who stand between men and truth, for those who stand between men and God...It must be the heart that loves Sergius Paulus that speaks in anger to Elymas the sorcerer."

e. **When he saw what had been done:** Among other things, we can say that the proconsul saw something in Paul and something in Elymas.

i. He saw the *courage* of Paul. Here was a man of conviction, bold in his belief, and willing to make a stand for what he believed.

ii. He saw the *just result* of Elymas' sin, physical blindness corresponding to his spiritual blindness. When we see the trouble sin brings people into, it helps us pursue God more earnestly.

f. **Being astonished at the teaching of the Lord:** As amazing as the miracle of Elymas' sudden blindness was, the good news the proconsul heard from Paul was even more amazing. His astonishment is said to be at the **teaching of the Lord** (presumably, the doctrines of God's gracious gift to man in Jesus, through the cross) not the miraculous work before his eyes.

5. ([Acts 13:13](#)) From Paphos to Perga.

Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.

a. **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.

b. **They came to Perga:** They left the island of Cyprus, coming to Perga on the mainland of what is today Turkey.

c. **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](#)).

i. As 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.

C. The sermon at Pisidian Antioch.

1. ([Acts 13:14-15](#)) The customary invitation in the synagogue gives Paul an opportunity to preach Jesus.

But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men *and* brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

a. **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 (220 kilometers) inland, to the north. This general region

was known as Galatia, and later Paul wrote a letter to these churches that is included in our New Testament library.

i. "Pisidian Antioch was in the mountains at an altitude of about 3,600 feet. Since Paul mentions in the letter to the Galatians that he had a bodily affliction at this time, some scholars have supposed that Paul caught a disease, perhaps malaria, while living in Pamphylia's lower coastal plains and that he had his party pressed on into the healthier mountain climate because of it."

b. **Went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets.** A first-century synagogue service followed a 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.

c. **Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on:** The **rulers of the synagogue** gave Paul the customary invitation, and he was more than happy to use the opportunity.

2. ([Acts 13:16-23](#)) Paul begins his sermon in the synagogue, explaining how God's work in history leads up to Jesus.

Then Paul stood up, and motioning with *his* hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness. And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land to them by allotment. After that He gave *them* judges for about four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they asked for a king; so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave

testimony and said, ‘I have found David the *son* of Jesse, a man after My *own* heart, who will do all My will.’ From this man’s seed, according to *the* promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior; Jesus.”

- a. **Men of Israel and you who fear God:** Paul addressed both groups at the synagogue on a typical Sabbath; both Jews and “near Jews,” those Gentiles who admired the Jewish religion but did not make a full commitment to Judaism.
- b. **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.
 - i. 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.

3. ([Acts 13:24-29](#)) Using the examples of John the Baptist and the Jewish rulers, Paul shows how people both received and rejected Jesus.

“After John had first preached, before His coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his course, he said, ‘Who do you think I am? I am not *He*. But behold, there comes One after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose.’ Men *and* brethren, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to you the word of this salvation has been sent. For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled *them* in condemning *Him*. And though they found no cause for death *in Him*, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took *Him* down from the tree and laid *Him* in a tomb.”

a. **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. 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.

i. **The sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose:** This statement shows that John knew Jesus was high above him. In that day, it was not uncommon for a great teacher to have disciples follow him, and it was expected that the disciples would serve the teacher in various ways. This arrangement came to be abused, so the leading rabbis established certain things that were too demeaning for a teacher to expect of his disciple. It was decided that for a teacher to expect his disciple to undo the strap of his sandal was too much; it was too demeaning. Here, John insisted he wasn't even worthy to do this for Jesus.

b. **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.

c. **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](#)).

4. ([Acts 13:30-37](#)) Paul preaches the resurrected Jesus.

“But God raised Him from the dead. He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings; that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm:

**‘You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.’**

And that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He has spoken thus:

‘I will give you the sure mercies of David.’

Therefore, He also says in another *Psalm*:

‘You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption.’

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption; but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.”

- a. **But God:** These are wonderful words. Man did his best to fight against God — even to kill Him — **but God** was greater than man’s sin and rebellion, and Jesus rose from the grave, winning over sin and death.
- b. **But God raised Him from the dead:** Here, the fact was simply stated. Yet, evidence from eyewitnesses was also offered (**He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him**).
 - i. We should not miss an emphasis on *events* in Paul’s preaching here; it is so evident that it can be missed. He

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.”

c. **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](#)).

5. ([Acts 13:38-41](#)) With a promise and a warning, Paul applies the truth of who Jesus is and what He did for us.

“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:

**‘Behold, you despisers,
Marvel and perish!
For I work a work in your days,
A work which you will by no means believe,
Though one were to declare it to you.’”**

a. **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.**

i. 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](#))

ii. 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.

iii. 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.

b. **Everyone who believes is justified**: Jesus does not only forgive 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.

c. **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 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 work of Jesus.

- i. “Although ours is an age of great grace, God is nevertheless also a God of great judgment, and sin must be judged if it is not atoned for by the work of Christ.”
- ii. Some commentators complain that Paul here preached too much like Peter did on Pentecost. It is a strange complaint. This shows us that Peter and Paul preached the same gospel, and the same gospel was preached some fifteen years after Pentecost as was preached on that first day.
- iii. Others note similarities between Paul’s sermon here and the sermon of Stephen in [Acts 7](#). That was a sermon that Paul heard when he still hated the name of Jesus. Perhaps the sermon of the first martyr of the church still rang in the ears of the man who presided over his execution.

D. The Response to the sermon at Pisidian Antioch.

1. ([Acts 13:42-43](#)) Many people, both Jews and Gentiles, express interest in Paul’s message.

So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next

Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

a. **When the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next**

Sabbath: Both Jews and Gentiles at the synagogue responded positively, yet Luke noted an even greater response from the **Gentiles** present.

i. We should assume that many of these believed for two reasons.

- First, because **many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas**. There was a continuing interest in their message.
- Second, because Paul and Barnabas **persuaded them to continue in the grace of God**. This means they had already started to trust in the grace of God.

b. **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.

2. ([Acts 13:44-45](#)) **On the next Sabbath, envy creates opposition.**

On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.

a. **On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together**

to hear the word of God: The scene is easy to picture. The whole city was ready to hear the gospel from Paul on the next Sabbath.

- i. "In our day, people are overwhelmed with information. We have radio, television, newspapers, magazines. 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.”

ii. Yet there was not merely the power of novelty; there was more notably the power of **the word of God**. *This* was the primary power that attracted people, and Luke emphasized it in his account.

- *The whole city came together to hear the word of God ([Acts 13:44](#)).*
- Paul and Barnabas spoke *the word of God* to them first ([Acts 13:46](#)).
- The Gentiles responded to *the word of the Lord* ([Acts 13:48](#)).
- *The word of the Lord* spread through the region ([Acts 13:49](#)).

b. **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. When someone else is more popular, they become **filled with 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.

c. **Contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things**

spoken by Paul: Suddenly, Paul's preaching was opposed as if he were conducting a debate, with his opponents **contradicting** him and **blaspheming** God.

i. The blasphemy mentioned probably has to do with abusive and degrading language directed towards Jesus, whom Paul preached.

d. **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. One great 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.

i. “They simply could not accept a teaching that opened such floodgates. For themselves and their adherents they could accept a message as God-sent and tolerate some change in their teaching and practice, but they could not endure that the Gentiles should be made equal with God’s ancient people.”

ii. “The Jews could not endure that the Gentiles should be equal to them, being as much concerned against the Gentiles being exalted, as against their own being depressed.”

iii. Some people end up rejecting Jesus because of the way He changes our relationship with other people. Some would rather hold on to their bitterness and animosity towards others than turn to Jesus and be reconciled.

3. ([Acts 13:46-48](#)) Paul and Barnabas respond to the Jewish opposition.

Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life,

behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us:

**‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’”**

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.

a. **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.

b. **Since you 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.

i. 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, others who will listen.

c. 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: They also responded with more evangelism to open hearts, now directing their efforts to the Gentiles, in obedience to God's command ([Romans 1:16](#)) and in fulfillment of prophecy (the quotation from [Isaiah 49:6](#)).

i. 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.

ii. 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.

4. ([Acts 13:49-50](#)) Blessing and opposition.

And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

a. **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.

i. 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 lasted for hundreds of years and through that church, **the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region** ([Acts 13:49](#)).

ii. Sometimes remarkable works of God happen quite quickly.

We should be happy for such seasons of rapid progress in

God's work.

b. **But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region:**

Wherever there is revival, the second group to be revived is the Devil. Jewish opposition was strong enough to force Paul and Barnabas to leave the area.

5. ([Acts 13:51-52](#)) **Paul and Barnabas react to their expulsion from the city of Pisidian Antioch.**

But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and came to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

a. **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.

i. If Jewish people had to go in or through a Gentile city, when leaving the city they shook the dust off their feet as a gesture saying, “We don’t want to take anything from this Gentile city with us.” In this sense, Paul said “I don’t want to take anything with me from you Jesus-rejecting religionists.”

ii. This rejection did not make Paul and Barnabas think there was anything wrong with *themselves*. They knew the problem is with their opposition, not themselves.

b. **And came to Iconium:** They 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.

c. **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.

i. Paul is a great example of his own command to *be constantly being filled with the Holy Spirit* ([Ephesians 5:18](#)).

ii. “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. The martyrs were happier in the *flames* than their persecutors could be on their beds of down.”