**Introduction – Acts 13:1–52**

* **General Overview:** This section covers the first half of Paul’s “First Missionary Journey” to the Gentile world. Every “day” of this study contributes to the larger message of how the Holy Spirit is driving the mission to evangelize Gentiles at the end of the earth (cf. 1:8), and how He’s advancing it *by means of* the unbelief and opposition of unsaved Israelites. This can be seen in the summary below:
  + **Day 1:** Luke begins by explicitly stating how the Holy Spirit was working through the Church to launch Saul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey into the Gentile world (13:1–3; cf. v. 4).
  + **Day 2:** The missionary team has its first “showdown” on Cyprus involving 1 Jew and 1 Gentile (13:4–12). It’s effectively a small-scale version of what happens later on the mainland. Elymas, the Jew they meet with on Cyprus, proves to be a wicked man who tries to hinder the Gentile from getting saved. For this reason, Paul curses the Jew with blindness, and Luke then shows how the act of judging this Jewish man’s unbelief becomes the very means by which God works to bring salvation to the Gentile. And so, the Cyprus showdown is a sketch that illustrates how God’s judgment on unbelieving Israel is the means by which Gentiles are saved and blessed.
  + **Days 3–4**: As the mission continues to the mainland, Paul and Barnabas still retain a “Jewish priority” in their preaching by entering a synagogue and appealing to unbelieving Jews and proselytes, urging them to believe in Christ for salvation (13:13–41).
  + **Day 5:** Upon hearing the message, however, only some of the Jews and proselytes believe in Christ. Many others choose to revolt and persecute the Church. However, as has already been illustrated on Cyprus, the Jewish opposition to the gospel turns out to be a blessing for the Gentiles, and Luke shows the missionary team moving to enjoy great success in the Gentile world (13:42–52).

**Day 1 – The Holy Spirit Sends His Men (13:1–3)**

* **Overview:** The scene begins with a snapshot of the church in Antioch (13:1). Here, the Holy Spirit commands the leaders to set Barnabas and Saul apart for a special work—the first missionary journey (13:4). What this demonstrates is that it is *God* who is behind the expanding evangelistic efforts of the Church. This would be all the more reassuring to Theophilus as he would see that the Gentile mission was anything but a human idea.
* **V. 1 –** The overarching emphasis of this first paragraph shows how (1) *God* sent His servants out from Antioch—a Gentile city—and (2) He worked *through* *the church* to do it. So the church history recorded in Acts is a legitimate work of God Himself. Verse 1 sets the scene at “Antioch” and “in the church that was there,” but the main grammatical point draws attention to the presence of “prophets and teachers” who were present. What this does is emphasize the church’s fidelity to God’s word (given the presence of teachers) and its direct connection to God (via prophets). As Paul was an apostle, he was technically both prophet and teacher, so the roles are not mutually exclusive, but the language itself is simply referencing the assets available to this church.[[1]](#footnote-1)
  + Luke finds it important to list out who these prophets/teachers are, and his arrangement and descriptions of these people may hold a clue as to why.[[2]](#footnote-2)
  + Notably, Barnabas appears first and Saul last. This makes sense as we have seen Saul in the shadow of Barnabas already (9:27; 12:25). Only later in this chapter does Saul rise to a level of prominence such that, from here on out, he is always listed first (cf. 13:42, 43, 46, 50). For now, however, Barnabas is working like a booster engine for Saul’s ministry.
  + In addition to this, Luke names and describes three more men in between them. This is certainly an eclectic bunch, demonstrating how varied the base of prophets/teachers was in this church, and since Luke has already done a lot of wordplay with names and their meanings, it’s possible that he’s doing the same thing here, to further emphasize the group’s diversity.
    - First you have “Simeon who was called Niger.” This is significant because “Simeon” means “hearer/believer” and “Niger” suggests that he was a Gentile by birth, since Niger is the Latin word for “black,” perhaps referring to his dark skin.[[3]](#footnote-3) This is effectively a nickname (cf. 4:32; 8:10), highlighting how he is a believing *Gentile*.
    - Second, what’s also interesting is that, next, you have “Lucius of Cyrene,” with “Lucius” meaning “light” and Cyrene being a Gentile city in Africa (Lybia, west of Egypt) that once a notable home of unbelievers (6:9), but now has a growing detachment of believers (11:20). So, putting it all together, this man is effectively a light from a Gentile land that was once opposed to the gospel.
    - Finally, there’s “Menaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch.” The Greek word used for “brought up with” is literally “foster-brother,” indicating he was raised in the same court as the man who killed John the Baptist.[[4]](#footnote-4) What’s interesting, however, is that the name “Menaem” means “consoler,” which contrasts him sharply with Herod, the persecuting tyrant of the last chapter. And given that Herod just died in the previous chapter, Theophilus could see from this note how, though Herod was evil, all along God had chosen someone from his very court to advance the gospel. Thus, these names could help to underscore God’s glorious plan for a global church.
* **V. 2 –** Having introduced the prophets/teachers of this church, Luke describes how the Holy Spirit gave a prophetic message while they were busy being faithful (ministering to the Lord and fasting).[[5]](#footnote-5) He specifically called the church to “Set apart…Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them,” and all this was to be done, He says, “for Me.” This shows yet again how God is behind the advance of the Gentile mission, and it was done for His sake. Also, “the little word “work” (*ergon*) refers to Paul and Barnabas’s mission. It forms an [bookend] for the whole mission [narrative], occurring here at its inception and again at its conclusion (14:26).”[[6]](#footnote-6)
* **V. 3 –** Having received verbal revelation from God, the prophets/teachers fasted (recognizing the seriousness of the moment), prayed (demonstrating their submission to align their minds with God’s), and laid their hands on the pair (publicly identifying with Barnabas and Saul) before ultimately sending them away. This demonstrates that God is advancing the gospel *through* the instrumentality of His church, not apart from it. If there was any doubt about Luke’s intent, he gives the interpretation of vv. 1–3 in verse 4, with the phrase “So, being sent out *by the Holy Spirit*.”

**Day 1 – Questions**

1. What’s the significance of a missionary journey being launched from Antioch, as opposed to another city like Jerusalem? How does this illustrate the purpose of the church in Acts?
2. Why is Barnabas listed before Saul at every point these men appear earlier in Acts? What does this tell you about Saul’s ministry at this point in time?
3. Should we expect the Holy Spirit to work through FBC like He did through the church at Antioch? What might be some areas of similarity or difference?

**Day 2 – The Cyprus Showdown (13:4–12)**

* **Overview:** As Peterson says, “The mission to Cyprus provides a [sketch] of much that will occur in subsequent narratives.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Here on the island, Luke gives Theophilus a straightforward example of Jewish opposition to the gospel that illustrates just how evil and satanic it really is. This showdown on Cyprus then acts as a sort of parable to help Theophilus understand the larger-scale Jewish opposition that will swell as the story continues.

**4–6a – The Trip to Cyprus**

* **Vv. 4–6a –** Luke recalls the Holy Spirit’s sending of these men and moves to give context for where this mission took Barnabas and Saul. The journey described in vv. 4–12 can be mapped as follows:

A map of a country

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* Simply put, the team sails to Cyprus (the home of Barnabas 4:36), and their “preaching route” (red) begins at Salamis and extends across “the whole Island as far as Paphos” (v. 6).
  + **Emphasis on the synagogues**: Luke emphasizes how—first things first—Barnabas and Saul “began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews.” This reemphasizes how the apostles knew the Jews played a central role in God’s global plan of redemption (cf. Rom 1:16).
  + **The inclusion of John**-**Mark**: The little note about how “they also had John as their helper” appears to function in two ways: 1) It shows Barnabas and Saul were not working alone; 2) It shows that John-Mark, first mentioned in 12:12, has an intense character arc of his own. This otherwise obscure son of Mary is literally venturing across the Gentile world on the church’s first-ever missionary journey. Granted, his story is developed later on, so this note is essentially a tease, but it shows how Luke wants Theophilus to be sure he doesn’t forget about this man.

**6b–12 – The Showdown at Cyprus**

* **Summary:** Luke has given no details about the men’s reception on Cyprus thus far, but here he sees something he wants Theophilus to slow down and remember in detail. The pair meets a Gentile dignitary, a man of intelligence, who’s eager to hear the word of the Lord, and yet—of all people—a Jewish false prophet tries to hinder him from doing this—calling for a showdown. The most important part of the story—and what Theophilus will remember—is that Paul literally blinds this Jewish false prophet in the power of God, and *the blinding of this unbelieving Jew is the means by which the Gentile sees God working in the church—and comes to faith*. It is effectively a narrative illustration of what Paul wrote in Romans, “God gave them [unbelieving Jews]…eyes to see not…and David says…let their eyes be darkened to see not…[and] by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:8–11).
* **The Sides:** Interestingly, the narrative focuses on two pairs of men whose names are near parallels to each other. On the side of the missionaries, you have “Barnabas” and “Saul/Paul,” and on the side of the unsaved, you have “Bar-Jesus” and “Paulus.” Ironically, Bar-Jesus turns out to be nothing like Barnabas, since he’s a total fraud, whereas Barnabas is renowned for his sincerity (cf. 4:32–37). And by contrast, Luke reveals that Saul, who has thus far been at the back of the pack and listed last, “was also known as Paul,” (13:9), and he rises to become a very important and powerful person, like Sergius Paulus, as they both wield the power of judgment (13:10–11; 18:12).
* **Vv. 6–7 –** Having traveled the entire island, Luke says the men met a Jewish magician. The fact that this man is listed first once again helps to show how their focus is on the Jewish people. However, this is no ordinary Jew. He’s a perfect contradiction. This man is described as a “magician,” like Simon in Acts 8—one who meddles with evil spirits. Luke also gives Theophilus a huge clue by simply calling him a “false prophet,” which gives the added dimension to how this man’s works and words were ungodly. His name “Bar-Jesus” is important because it’s fake news. The name means “son of Jesus,” or “son of Yahweh’s salvation” and yet this guy is soon rebuked for being what he really is: a “son of the devil” (13:10). On top of that, he’s the perfect foil for Barnabas—as their names rhyme and parallel each other, but one is genuine and the other is a total fraud.
  + Peterson comments: “The words *Jewish* and *sorcerer* (*magos*, ‘magician’, ‘astrologer’) do not really belong together, because of scriptural condemnation of those involved with magic and the occult (e.g., Dt. 18:10; 2 Ki. 17:17; Je. 27 (LXX 34):9; Ezk. 12:24). As a *false prophet*, he was also one of a long line of pretenders who opposed God’s revealed truth and its messengers (e.g., 1 Kings 22; Je. 23:9–32). With the Aramaic name *Bar-Jesus* (‘son of Jesus [Joshua]’) he appears to be a devilish alternative to the true saviour (cf. v. 10, ‘child of the devil’). This man was an apostate Jew, who had succumbed to the attractions of heathenism, using his power and influence as *an attendant of the proconsul.* Perhaps he functioned as a court astrologer or magician.”[[8]](#footnote-8)
* **Vv. 8–9 –** Unfortunately, Bar-Jesus is a poisonous influence on an otherwise respectable Gentile. Bar-Jesus was “with the proconsul [governor], Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence.” And this high-ranking Gentile actually “summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But…the magician…was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.” There are several key facts to point out here:
  + Elymas, the magician’s true name – Ironically, Luke further unmasks this so-called “son of Jesus” by giving a better name, “Elymas,” which refers to someone with wise insight or insight into supernatural dreams.[[9]](#footnote-9) In either case, this name sets this so-called “seer” up to get blinded, and shows that he’s not who he first appeared to be.
  + Saul-Paul **–** Now is when Saul has his shining moment. Luke chooses this time to reveal that he was also known as Paul, which literarily ties him to Paulus, a man of power and judgment.
  + The rhythm of description in verse 8 also parallels that for Paul in v. 9, so as we see who Elymas truly was in v. 8, we see more of who Paul truly was in v. 9—and the power is on Paul’s side. Whereas Elymas was “opposing them” and “seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith,” Paul’s actions are a direct counter. He was “filled with the Holy Spirit” and “fixed his gaze on Elymas”—language for an impending apostolic show of force (Acts 3:4). Ultimately, this is not about Paul, though, since his being filled with the Holy Spirit draws attention to what *the Holy Spirit has to say against such Jewish opponents as this*.
* **Vv. 10–11 –** Saul names three truths about this man before giving a sharp appeal and judgment:
  + Paul’s three-part accusation roughly corresponds to the three-part introduction that Luke has given to this man. He’s “full of all deceit and fraud,” which brings to light how he was a “false prophet” (v. 6). He is “a son of the devil,” which brings to light the truth behind his ironic name “Bar-Jesus” (v. 6). He’s also an “enemy of all righteousness,” which brings to light what he was really doing as he “was opposing” the apostles (v. 8). With these accusations, Paul names Elymas for what he really is and discredits him before the proconsul.
  + Paul then gives an incriminating appeal: “Will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?” This is ironic as Paul himself was once a man who attacked “the Way” (9:1–2), but now he’s calling for such people to cease and desist. It also holds out an olive branch to give this man the chance to repent, should he come to his senses.
  + Paul then issues what is effectively a judgment curse upon Elymas, “Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.” Referring to the hand of the Lord upon someone is OT judgment language (cf. Exod 9:3; 1 Sam 5:6; Job 19:21). Readers should therefore understand that it is *God* who is judging this unbelieving Jew, and He’s doing it through Paul—much like how it was Godwho sent Paul, but through the church (vv. 1–4). Ecclesiastes 11:7 says, “The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun,” but now this goodness is being withheld from Elymas in judgment.
  + Upon Paul’s word, Luke says, “Immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.” Readers should see the parallel to Paul’s testimony, as he was similarly blinded and needed to be led by the hand (Acts 9:8). And since Paul was once a Jew in a similar situation to this, and he repented, it’s been supposed that the “lack of resolution” on Elymas’ story leaves the door open for his repentance as well.[[10]](#footnote-10) This is not the primary point, however, since Luke’s primary point is what this act of judgment does to bless *the Gentile* in the scene.
* **V. 12 –** Luke ends the story with the climactic takeaway: “Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” The main point is that the proconsul believes *when he sees this judgment*. Of course, Luke is quick to point out that—as should always be the case—that the miracle drove the proconsul to better consider “the teaching of the Lord,” so it was always faith in the word (Rom 10:17). But Luke’s point is the means by which this man came to faith. It was by the blinding of this Jew that salvation came to the Gentile.

**Day 2 – Questions**

1. In what ways is Bar-Jesus an ironic name for Elymas?
2. How does this text demonstrate that the power of God is with Paul?
3. Why do you think the Lord chose to help bring the proconsul to faith via the judgment on Elymas? How does this help us understand the expansion of the gospel in Acts?

**Day 3 – Paul’s Sermon to the Synagogue – Part 1 (13:13–26)**

* **Overview:** Having recounted the “Island showdown” for Theophilus, Luke now tracks the team over to the mainland. Here, he gives Theophilus an in-depth look at how these gospel preachers went about seeking to serve those in the synagogues of the Gentile world.
* **Vv. 13–14a –** Luke transitions the narrative by tracking the team’s travels to Perga in Pamphylia (mapped below). Notably, the crew is now identified as “Paul and his companions”—which now treats Paul as the main character. Perga is not significant *for the narrative* besides being the location at which “John left them and returned to Jerusalem”—again serving as a tease for how John Mark will come into play later in the narrative. Verse 14 tells of how the team kept plowing on without John Mark until “they arrived in Psidian Antioch.” This is of course a different Antioch than the one they were sent from, but the similarity may be intentional, if even for the sake of Theophilus’ memory.

A map of the greek island of cyprus

Description automatically generated

* **Vv. 14b–15** – The crew waited for a “Sabbath day” and then “went into the synagogue and sat down.” The following details then provide the only in-depth account of how this kind of synagogue visit would have gone.[[11]](#footnote-11) As such, it helps to demonstrate that the synagogues weren’t in need of an immediate table-flipping, and the missionary team didn’t come in “guns blazing” to advance the “new and improved” ways of the church. The fact that they sat down and waited for “the reading of the Law and the prophets” demonstrates that they were respectful of their hearers and submitted to the word of God. Providentially, “the synagogue officials sent to them” and essentially handed them the microphone, “saying, ‘Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.” Importantly, the phrase “word of exhortation” (cf. Heb 13:22) is the biblical language for what we would call a “sermon,” but this language helps to tie Paul’s ministry to the existing outflow of gospel-*exhortation* that has already begun in Acts (cf. Acts 2:40). Now the gospel is going to Psidian Antioch.

**Paul’s Sermon to the Synagogue (13:16–41)**

* **V. 16 –** Taking the opportunity presented to him, “Paul stood up, motioning with his hand” and began to speak. The hand motion is a gesture to gain their attention and seems to be recorded to help tie Paul’s ministry to that of Peter (12:17), again as a further authentication of the gospel ministers going forth. His message can be broken up by the two punctuated addresses to the audience:

1. “Men of Israel, and you who fear God…” (v. 16);
2. “Brothers, sons of Abraham’s family, and those among you who fear God…” (v. 26).[[12]](#footnote-12)

* The language of Paul’s first address is very intentional because it addresses Jews as those who are tied to “Israel” and their nation’s history (the point of this section). The inclusion of “and you who fear God” shows how he’s also addressing unsaved Gentile God-fearers (like Cornelius, cf. 10:2), but his main intent is to make a point about “Israel.”
* Paul calls them to “Listen” to the words he will say as he recounts what “the God of this people Israel” has done. The sermon can be outlined as follows:

God’s Plan for Israel’s Salvation in History (13:16b–25)

* The focus of this message is clearly on God because “God is the subject of all the verbs.”[[13]](#footnote-13) He’s the main Actor superintending Israel’s history and constituting them as a nation. Recounting God’s providential care for Israel throughout their nation’s history is a way of preparing the audience to see and appreciate what He has done for them in bringing them Jesus Christ so that they might be forgiven of their sins.

God’s Provision of Land (16b–19)

* **V. 17 –** Paul labels God as “The God of this people Israel” in order to further tie Him to the nation. As God, He is their strength and provider—which is a point made so clearly through what follows. Paul mentions God’s first act of election in that He “chose our fathers” (at least referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, cf. Luke 1:55; Deut 7:6–8). He then gives a wordplay by saying that He “lifted up the people during their stay in the land of Egypt,” and then “with an uplifted arm he led them out from it.” So God was making them great *during* their stay, likely referring to how He made them mighty even under bondage (Exod 1:7). And then in a similar vein He showed His greatness in lifting them *out* of Egypt altogether.
* **V. 18 –** Having led the people of Israel out of captivity, He then “put up with them in the wilderness,” highlighting His patience and commitment to their wellbeing, since it was “for a period of forty years.” We often think of what it must have been like for the people to endure an extra 40-year detour, but this text emphasizes God’s patience during that time, which should spark gratitude and worship in God’s people.
* **V. 19 –** Beyond this, God “distributed their [promised] land as an inheritance” after having “destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan.” The mention of destroying seven nations—with seven signifying wholeness—emphasizes just what level of power He was willing to exert in order to gift them with their “inheritance.
  + Paul mentions that all of this took “about four hundred and fifty years,” which demonstrates again, in context, to what lengths God was willing to go—how many years He was willing to “spend”—in order to provide for His chosen people.

God’s Provision of Rulers (20–25)

* Next, having constituted a people and given them their own place to live, Paul turns to the subject of their rulers. This is the setup for his main point about Jesus.
* **V. 20 –** He records how God “gave judges until Samuel the prophet.” The judges were effectively temporary governors/intermediate who were raised up in times of crises to deliver Israel to a state of peace in the land. The book of Judges records an ongoing cycle of judges, the salvation they bring to the people, and then the people’s eventual compromise back into crises. This cycle continued until Samuel the prophet, himself a judge.
* **V. 21 –** The phrase “Then they asked for a king” shows something was wrong with Israel. Thus far, God has been the subject of all the verbs, but now *the people* step in to ask for something God has not chosen to give them. It’s an assertion of their own will over God’s. 1 Samuel 8:1–9 confirms this as God said this request demonstrated that “they have rejected Me [Yahweh] from being king over them” (1 Sam 8:7). Moreover, the fact that He gave them “Saul the son of Kish, a man from the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years” demonstrates that Saul, the king they wanted, was not the right fit for the nation. After all, the scepter rightfully belongs to Judah (Gen 49:10), not Benjamin. And yet, the heart of the people wanted Saul-tall-and-handsome (1 Sam 9:2) because they wanted to be like the other nations (1 Sam 8:5). They were wrong in all this. The mention of how his reign lasted “forty years” could possibly tie to the earlier mention of “forty years,” when God was patiently putting up with Israel in the wilderness as they went astray. The situations are similar, and Paul could be emphasizing the same point about God.
* **V. 22 –** Next, Paul shows how God went on the move again. He says, “And after He removed [Saul from being king], He raised up David to be their king.” This was God’s counter. Rather than grant the people’s wishes, He stepped in with His own choice. In 1 Samuel 16:1, this point is emphasized as God sends Samuel to Jesse saying, “*I* have selected a king *for Myself* among his sons.” The emphasis is clearly on how this is God’s choice, not Israel’s. Paul is picking up the same emphasis when he says, “[David] about whom [God] also said, bearing witness, ‘I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will” (13:22).
  + This witness is a citation from a few different passages, and it’s important to note this.[[14]](#footnote-14)
  + The language “I have found David” is taken from Psalm 89:20, in which God confirms His commitment to strengthen David, crush his enemies, and exalt his throne above the nations in loyalty to the Davidic Covenant.
  + The next passage is 1 Samuel 13:14, in which God shows how He took the kingdom from Saul and “has sought for Himself a man after His own heart.” The language of Psalm 89, then, shows how God has “found” what He “sought for.” And while it’s common to think that the phrase “a man after My heart” refers to David as someone who pursues God’s heart, Derouchie notes how “the Hebrew construction [used here] *can’t mean* ‘a man who pursues God’s heart.’[[15]](#footnote-15) Instead, he suggests that it is better to take the phrase “after My heart” as an adverbial phrase, describing how God sought this king (which is the main idea in that verse). In other words, God chose David to be king *according to His heart’s* desire, whereas the people chose Saul to be their king *according to their heart’s* desire. And while, granted, David’s character was better than Saul’s, the phrase here refers to God’s sovereign choosing/finding of David, not a trait of David that caught God’s eye.
  + This also makes better sense of the last phrase “who will do all My will” (which seems to be taken from Isaiah 44:28 but applied to David) since someone can only do God’s will with God’s help. So, this is not about David having inherent goodness, but about God moving His chess pieces to accomplish His will. Again, the focus is all on God.
* **V. 23 –** Paul continues to emphasize God’s sovereign election and plan for Israel’s salvation in verse 23. He says, “from the seed of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus.” The language of “seed” shows David’s dynasty, unlike Saul’s, is the true kingly dynasty in which the seed of the woman would come (cf. Gen 3:15). And the emphasis on “promise” shows how God’s act of bringing Jesus to Israel was according to His sovereign will for them revealed long ago. Again, God has planned for Israel’s salvation for a long time. The fact that He brought Jesus “to Israel” demonstrates again how Jesus is the Savior offered to even the “Men of Israel” whom Paul is addressing.
* **Vv. 24–25 –** Verses 24 and 25 serve to stress the point that Jesus was in fact offered to Israel by God. After all, the ministry of John the Baptist existed precisely to prepare Israel to receive her Savior. Paul says God brought Jesus to Israel “after John had preached before His coming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel”—preparing the nation to receive Him. This is only further stressed in verse 25, when Paul says, “And as John was fulfilling his course [i.e. nearing the time of Christ], he kept saying, “What do you suppose that I am? I am not He. But behold, one is coming after me of whom I am not worthy to untie the sandals of His feet.” Taken from Paul’s perspective, this is all calculated to stress how the moment Jesus was brought to Israel was in fact the culmination of God’s plan—over the course of centuries—to provide a Savior for His chosen people. This becomes the background for part 2 of the sermon below.

**Day 3 – Questions**

1. Why is it important to see that Paul and Barnabas were respectful during their engagement in this synagogue?
2. Of the ways that Paul says God provided for Israel in her history, which one is most impressive to you and why?
3. Why does Paul want to show that God is providing everything for Israel’s wellbeing, from their land to their leaders?

**Day 4 – Paul’s Sermon to the Synagogue – Part 2 (13:26–41)**

**Overview:** Building on the last section, Paul moves to stress how it is *in Jesus* that salvation is offered to Israel *right now*. The history he has recounted now culminates in Jesus being given to those who accept Him by faith. Some of the Jewish people have already missed Him, but Paul’s current audience has not yet made up their minds. For that reason, he urges them to heed what is being said and believe upon the Lord, lest they join the others who rejected their Savior.

God’s Word for Israel’s Salvation Today (13:26–41**)**

* **V. 26 –** Paul signals a chance in the sermon with another direct address to his audience. This time, he draws more attention to the present day and how his audience is a part of history—the very history he’s been describing. By contrast, his earlier address emphasized more basic national loyalties (“Men of Israel”) and an allegiance to God (“you who fear God”). But here, along with a reiteration of “those among you who fear God,” Paul calls the Jews who are present his “Brothers,” and those who are the “sons of Abraham’s family,” tying them more tightly to Israel’s history. Last time, he spoke of “our fathers,” but now the focus is on those who are “sons of Abraham’s family,” drawing greater emphasis to the present moment. This is confirmed as he leads with his main point, “to us the word of this salvation was sent.” Paul is effectively holding out open hands and saying, “The entire history of God’s work for Israel has led to a message of salvation being given *to us here and now*!”
* **Vv. 27–29 –** Paul then explains why the word of salvation was sent “to us.” The simple answer is because *some* of the Jewish people rejected Jesus. This would mean that Paul is looking over his current audience to find the elect remnant of Israel who would not be hardened like those in Jerusalem.
  + He says, “For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning Him.” Note how Paul can see how they missed the words of God spoken to them week-in and week-out, and for that reason they killed Jesus. This point will prepare for his earnest closing address to his current listeners, in which he effectively urges them, “Don’t disregard what I am saying to you now!” (cf. vv. 40–41).
  + Verse 28 describes how senseless the people were in their ignorance, such that “though they found no ground for death, they asked Pilate that He be executed.” The word “asked” is the same word used for how they “asked for a king” in Saul (v. 21), which again demonstrates how they are living senselessly and rejecting God as their king.
  + But as bad as this is, Paul says that *even this* was foreordained by God, since “when they had finished all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.” While there are some unfortunate Jews who rejected Jesus, Paul is talking to some whom he hopes would not repeat this mistake. After all, the rejection of Jesus has led to salvation being offered both “to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16; cf. 9:22–24).
* **Vv. 30–31** – While the people were ignorant, God then made His move. The text says, “But God raised Him from the dead.” And this is the same rhythm of language used earlier when the people first “asked” for a king and then God “raised up David” according to His own choice. Here, they “asked” Pilate to kill their king and then God “raised” Jesus up from the dead. And just as God bore “witness” to how he would work through David (v. 22), so too did Jesus appear for many days to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, thereby enabling them to be “His witnesses to the people” (v. 31). The language is similar and shows God is at work despite the sins of His people.
* **V. 32 –** Verse 32 shows the hearers how the sermon Paul is giving right this moment ties to everything he’s said before. He says, “And we proclaim to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers.” This promise is then explained by citing 3 passages in vv. 33–35.
* **Vv. 33** – Paul’s first point is “that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.”
  + Interestingly, Paul says that God has raised Jesus from the dead as fulfillment of a promise “to our children.” The textual evidence strongly favors the reading “to our children,” and yet one letter difference would lead this to read, “to the children, [namely], to us.” Some later manuscripts add the word “their,” so it reads “to us, their children,” but adding another word is a far greater change than supposing a one-letter difference. Regardless, while an amended reading makes better sense of the context, Paul could have said “to our children” as a manner of speaking on behalf of the collective people of Israel. In other words, he would be saying, “to our people’s *children* [namely, us]” which would stress how the promise was fulfilled in a different generation than those to whom it was given. Thus, God’s faithfulness transcends generations.
  + The connection between the raising Jesus and Psalm 2 is important. It first clarifies that “Jesus” of Nazareth is God’s “Son,” but more importantly, the phrase “Today I have begotten you” refers to how being given life from the dead demonstrates God is His Father. It was that act which declares His divine sonship under the Father, as Paul wrote elsewhere (Rom 1:4). So there is a sense in which the resurrection is a kind of “birth” and it is so miraculous that it reveals God is behind this Man.
* **V. 34** – Verses 34–35 effectively show how the resurrection provides blessing for believing Israel as a whole. Paul goes on to add another layer to his point, repeating the phrase, “that He raised Him up from the dead,” and going on now to emphasize, “no longer to return to corruption, He has spoken in this way: I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY *and* FAITHFUL *lovinkindnesses* OF DAVID.”
  + In order to stress how the resurrection of Jesus provides a fountainhead of blessing for the people of Israel as a whole, Paul emphasizes how Jesus will “no longer return to corruption.” And Jesus’ indestructible life is evidence of the faithfulness of God to grant such life to Israel. The reason we know that God’s commitment is to Israel as a whole is because the quotation of Isaiah 55:3 (and its citation here in Greek) uses the *plural* form of “you.” So this is not referring to Jesus Himself, but rather it is saying in context that Jesus’ life—as a descendent of David—is used as a reference point for the blessings that God is giving to Israel corporate. For context, Isaiah 55:3 calls for the people to “Listen, that your soul may live,” and it goes on to describe how the New Covenant would be made with the people in order to provide the “faithful lovingkindnesses of David [the Davidic Covenant]” to the people. In other words, because Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant, His indestructible life would grant everlasting blessings to Israel.
  + Interestingly, the word “holy” does not appear in the original of Isaiah, and so from that we know Paul is expounding on the nature of the lovingkindnesses that are promised to David in order to strengthen the tie between this and his citation of Psalm 16 in v. 35.
* **V. 35** – Paul says that the promise of Isaiah 55:3—to give blessing to the people—necessitates that God *not give* His Davidic King over to corruption. That’s why Paul quotes Psalm 16 in saying, “Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*, “YOU WILL NOT GIVE YOUR HOLY ONE OVER TO SEE CORRUPTION.” Because Jesus is God’s “Holy One”—one set apart by God for the purpose of being the Davidic King through whom the everlasting blessings of the Davidic Covenant would come to God’s people—He could not be given over to corruption, because He has an everlasting role to play. Therefore, God raised Him from the dead.
* **Vv. 36–37** – Paul then explains quite simply how Jesus was the one of whom God was speaking, not David. “For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid among his fathers and saw corruption; but He whom God raised did not see corruption.”
* **Vv. 38–39** – This leads to Paul’s driving exhortation: “Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers, that through Him [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” So Paul wants his audience to have it clear in their minds that Jesus stands behind the message they are hearing. His repeated emphasis is on how Jesus is making all of this possible (note how he pushes the phrases “through Him” and “in Him” to an emphatic front position in these verses). He then mentions in shorthand that “forgiveness of sins” is the message Jesus has brought to His people, and such is explained in the next phrase, “and in Him, everyone who believes is justified from all things which you could not be justified from through the Law of Moses.” Thus, everyone who believes in Jesus is justified through Him from all the sins that sinners could not be declared righteous from via the Mosaic Law. Jesus is the only way to the blessing of divine justification.
* **Vv. 40–41 –** Because the message is so clearly set before the Jews to whom Paul is speaking, and now they have a choice either to believe or perish, Paul issues a warning: “Therefore watch out, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you.” The “thing” Paul is referring to is explained in verse 41, where Paul says, “LOOK, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH; FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS, A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD RECOUNT IT TO YOU.” This is a pronouncement of judgment on those who scoff at the work being done by God in their days. It's a citation of Habakkuk 1:5, and the language carried its own referents there, but here the phrasing is extracted and laid over the present-day context because the scenario is so similar. Paul has so clearly said that the Savior of Israel has been brought to them in their days, and yet now he calls them to believe, lest they perish. He’s effectively saying, “Watch out, that you not join those in your generation who miss Jesus and perish.” With this, Paul gives them their ultimatum.

**Day 4 – Questions**

1. What kinds of things does Paul say to make it clear that he’s talking to the current generation of Israelites who are listening to him?
2. Why do you think Paul wants to emphasize so badly that Jesus as the means of his hearers being forgiven, as opposed to the Law of Moses?
3. Summarize the warning and ultimatum Paul gives at the end of his message.

**Day 5 – The Mixed Responses to the Gospel Message (13:42–52)**

**Overview:** The closing section describes the people’s response to the words of Paul. While some believe, there is also a contingent of Jewish people who, from jealousy, seek to contradict Paul, blaspheme God, and ignite persecutions against the Christians. All the while, however, Paul and Barnabas continue to preach to the Gentiles and plow on in ministry as more come to faith.

* **Vv. 42–43** – After issuing their ultimatum, Paul and Barnabas were leaving but the people “kept pleading that these words might be spoken to them next Sabbath.” This demonstrates that the people were indeed interested in what was being said, and the mention of “next Sabbath” tells the reader to expect that there’s more to come. Verse 43 gives a parenthetical explanation of why there was such interest, saying, “Now when the synagogue [gathering] had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God.” So clearly many of the original crowd were saved, but as the next episode shows, some were not.
* **Vv. 44–45 –** One week later, on “the next Sabbath,” Luke tells us that “nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord.” Schnabel says “it is not impossible that several thousand people gathered to hear Paul speak.”[[16]](#footnote-16) This turnout is not only astonishing, but Luke’s language ties the heart posture of this people to his earlier description of the proconsul, who “sought to hear the word of God” (v. 7). That observation gives a clue as to what’s going to happen here as well. Luke proves this when he says, “But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, blaspheming.” The term “jealousy” shows that these unbelieving Jews are cut from the same cloth as the Jewish rulers who got jealous at the apostles earlier and sought to oppose them in 5:17. And in order to cut down Paul’s popularity, they resorted to “blaspheming,” which is Luke’s way of demonstrating how ungodly and ridiculous their efforts are.
* **Vv. 46–47** – In the face of stiff opposition, “Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly.” They were not deterred in the least. They knew that God’s story was still advancing according to plan, since they go on to say, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first.”
  + The term “it is necessary” is used abundantly in Luke-Acts and seems to be one of Luke’s favorite terms to help describe events that occurred in order to fulfill the story God had scripted. Recalling the sovereign will of God in the face of opposition serves to stress how His work is unstoppable.
  + Yet, at the same time, there’s complexity to how His work advances despite Jewish opposition. Paul explains this when he says, “Since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we are turning to the Gentiles.” Such a statement is deeply ironic, since these Jews are self-righteous and self-justifying (cf. Rom 10:3). But Paul shows that, if they reject free grace, they are actually judging themselves unworthy of eternal life.
  + For that reason, Paul calls them to look (“behold”) at the fact that these gospel preachers are therefore going to the Gentiles with the message of salvation. It is as Paul wrote in Romans, “By their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:11). And even this fulfills God’s plan for the people of Christ, since Paul quotes, “For so the Lord has commanded us, I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.”
    - This is alluding to Isaiah 42:6 and 46:9, both of which speak about how the work of Christ will extend not only to Israel but also *beyond* Israel to the Gentile world. So a Gentile mission was always God’s plan. And reading the phrase “to the end of the earth” in the greater context of this passage helps to stress to the reader of Acts what exactly is driving the third phase of the expanding global witness in Acts (cf. 1:8): It is the rejection of the gospel by some of the Jewish people. So, God is actually wielding the unbelief of some of the Jewish people to advance His word to the world.
    - Some may wonder why these verses refer specifically to Jesus (singular “You”), whereas Paul says “us,” but note how there is not even a command in the verse. Because of this, Paul is inferring a command. The language of being “a light for the Gentiles” is already used uniquely of Jesus Himself in Luke 2:32, so the point is that Paul and others bear witness *to Jesus* all over the world. In that sense, Jesus is being displayed to the world through the preaching of His Church (cf. Gal 3:1).
* **Vv. 48–49 –** Understandably, the Gentiles are thrilled to hear that salvation is being brought to them. The irony part of this is that *they* have the response that we all wish we would see among the Jewish nation. The Gentiles are seen “rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord,” drawing attention to how great God’s word is, as opposed to rejecting it and downplaying God’s plan. Paul adds, “and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed,” which gives proof-positive that God has elected Gentiles to salvation. He ends on a note of triumph: “And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.”
* **V. 50** – Despite the fact that they’re working against God, the Jewish opponents do not stop showing aggression. Luke continues, “But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.” Clearly these Jews are strategizing in their selection of “prominent” and “leading” men and women, and it shows their personal connections with people of caliber. This would again repeat the theme that God’s people carry the upper hand in debates, but not in the realm of political power (cf. 9:24–25).
* **Vv. 51–52 –** Despite legitimate persecution, Paul and Barnabas know what they’re here for and they continue plowing on. The text reads that they made the gesture to shake the dust “off their feet against them” as a testimony against the people being left behind.
  + As Peterson says, “the missionaries followed the practice commended by Jesus in Luke 9:5; 10:11: *they shook the dust from their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium.* It is likely that this was a particular warning to their Jewish opponents, who would understand the significance of this prophetic-type action, rather than a wholesale condemnation of the city. Those who reject the message of eternal life will themselves not receive eternal life. God’s judgment against scoffers (v. 41) will surely come. By shaking the dust from their feet, the missionaries indicated that they did not want to be associated with such unbelief and its consequences.”[[17]](#footnote-17)
* The group went ahead “to Iconium” (the scene of chapter 14), and in all this, Luke tells us that the true “disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit,” demonstrating again the futility of any efforts to stop the Church.

**Aside: God’s plan for the Jews**

* Peterson adds helpful clarity: “As a conclusion to this chapter, it is worth noting again that Luke presents further scenes in which Jews reject the gospel and there is a definite shift to ministry amongst Gentiles (e.g., 18:5–7; 19:8–9; 28:23–28). However, he also records some success amongst Jews (e.g., 17:5, 10–12; 21:20) and repeated attempts to win Jews for Christ in new situations. Luke and the characters in his narrative seem to be driven by the theology expressed in Paul’s sermon here. The election of Israel and God’s provision of the Saviour Jesus for Israel remain first as foundational truths, despite the rejection of the gospel by many. Here is the impetus for continuing evangelism among Jews, while continuing to share the gospel with ever-widening circles of Gentiles. Paul’s approach to the problem in Romans 9–11 makes it clear that ‘not all who are descended from Israel are Israel’ (9:6) and that it is only because of God’s mercy that some believe (9:14–29). God has not rejected his people, but ‘at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace’ (11:5). Paul continues to preach the gospel to Gentiles ‘to make Israel envious’ (11:11). Although he acknowledges that ‘Israel has experienced a hardening in part’, he anticipates the salvation of all who are truly elect in Israel, when ‘the full number of the Gentiles has come in’ (11:25–27). Paul’s argument in Romans 9–11 offers a further explanation of the mission strategy he pursues in the narrative of Acts and confronts every generation of Christians with the theological importance of bearing witness to unbelieving Jews.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

**Day 5 – Questions**

1. Why do you think Luke portrays these jealous Jews like the earlier opponents to the apostles in chapter 5?
2. If you were in Paul’s shoes, how would knowing that God always planned for a Gentile mission help you face down Jewish opposition to your work?
3. What does it mean to “glorify the word of the Lord?” Why should we as Gentiles be doing the same thing today?

1. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac13.1&off=1560&ctx=the+local+churches.+~The+roles+of+prophet), 554. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Many have simply thrown in the towel and assumed the order is mysterious, e.g. Vaughan, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/fsgc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac13.1&off=1942&ctx=king+up+the+second.+~Why+they+are+grouped), 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac13.1&off=282&ctx=ade+them+stand+out.+~Their+diversity%2c+whi), 132–133. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Vaughan, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/fsgc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac13.1&off=2755&ctx=he+tetrarch%E2%80%9D+(asv).+~The+Greek+word+for+%E2%80%9C), 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac13.2&off=2188&ctx=re+(Luke+5%3a33%E2%80%9335).%0a%0a~During+one+of+the+re), 555. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac13.2&off=958&ctx=expectant+devotion.+~The+Spirit+was+not+s), 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac13.4-12&off=32&ctx=in+Cyprus+(13%3a4%E2%80%9312)%0a~The+mission+to+Cypru), 377; Also Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac13.13-52&off=1974&ctx=actions+of+Jews+and+~Gentiles+to+Paul%E2%80%99s+p), 564 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac13.6-8&off=1142&ctx=t+of+the+proconsul.+~The+words+Jewish+and), 380–381. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac13.8-10&off=1455&ctx=13%3a8%E2%80%9310+~Any+number+of+suggestions+have+b), 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. E.g. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac13.9-11&off=1768&ctx=s+4%3a28%2c+30%3b+11%3a21).+~Paul%E2%80%99s+limitation+of), 381–382. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac13.14-43&off=40&ctx=ynagogue+(13%3a14%E2%80%9343)%0a~The+message+that+fol), 384. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. One could see a third section beginning in v. 38, but since the address there is a repetition of “brothers,” which began the section, and because it ties directly to Jesus, the main theme of the second section, it’s taken as a part of section 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac13.16-20a&off=200&ctx=%E2%80%99s+redemptive+acts.+~God+is+the+subject+o), 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac13.22&off=471&ctx=ment+of+King+David.+~After+God+removed+Sa), 576–577. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*, 183–84. He also writes, YHWH’s “heart/will” serves as the standard or norm by which he sought a new king: “YHWH sought for himself according to his own will a man.” In this reading, the verse says nothing explicit about the man’s character or loyalty. Instead, it focuses on how YHWH’s act of discretion in selecting David grew out of a previous act of willing—he sought in accordance with a mental image he had in mind.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac13.44&off=1832&ctx=+days+of+his+visit%2c+~it+is+not+impossible), 586. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac13.48-52&off=2018&ctx=eference+to+Jesus).+~So+the+missionaries+), 400. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Page.p+400&off=1949&ctx=l+for+the+Jew+First%0a~As+a+conclusion+to+t), 400–401. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)