

The
Acts
of the Apostles



Bold Gospel presentations ignite
both opposition and reception

Acts 13:4-52

Introduction

- Luke begins his record of Paul's first missionary journey, a trek which also includes Barnabas and John.
- The first two stops on their journey are Cyprus (an island) and Pisidian Antioch (a Roman colony in southern Galatia).
- As the team is faithful to share the Gospel in these places, the boldness of their speech ignites both opposition and reception.

The Word of God
exposes spiritual blindness

Acts 13:4-12

Paul and Barnabas

- The Antioch church commissioned Paul and Barnabas as missionaries (13:1–3).
- Luke records that their journey took them to a coastal city to the east called Salamis (center for both commerce and the Jewish religion on the island of Cyprus).
- Notice that Luke again describes Paul and Barnabas as being “sent out by the Holy Spirit.”

Paul and Barnabas

- Now that the “word of God” is spreading to Gentile areas, a new pattern emerges as it relates to the apostle’s evangelistic efforts.
- Their strategy, as we see in this verse and throughout the rest of Acts, is to start with the Jews (“in the synagogues”) and then continue to the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas

- Paul will later write down the principle that, though the Gospel is presented to the Jew first and then to the Greek, anyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 1:16, 10:13).
- The apostles make their way to the city of Paphos, a major worshipping area for the Syrian goddess, Paphia (equivalent to Aphrodite), as well as the seat of Roman government on the island.

Paul and Barnabas

- Before Sergius becomes a follower of Christ, however, the apostles encounter a serious obstacle: Bar-Jesus, who is a Jewish false prophet, magician, and likely a court astrologer intent on thwarting their missionary efforts.
- Luke records that the proconsul was “a man of intelligence” and actively sought out Paul’s teaching (verse 7), but he tried “to turn the proconsul away from the faith” (verse 8).

Paul and Barnabas

- At that time, Roman leaders ascribed great value to a sorcerer's ability to forecast future events. Bar-Jesus's opposition to the Gospel was likely out of fear of losing his lucrative career if the proconsul trusted Christ instead of his sorcerer.
- Discussion question: Have you ever had a time when you felt you were competing for the heart of a non-Christian?

Paul and Barnabas

- Bar-Jesus's effort to thwart the Gospel is futile.
- Paul pronounces judgment from the Holy Spirit on Bar-Jesus, rendering the man temporarily blind.
- Paul's interaction with Bar-Jesus shows that darkness of mind leads to darkness of sight.
- His physical condition parallels the spiritual blindness of his heart (John 3:19–20; 9:39).

Paul and Barnabas

- Luke reveals the irony of the situation in two ways:
- First, the sorcerer was revered for seeing future events, but he now cannot physically see and must rely on others to guide his steps.
- A second ironic twist Luke is that “Bar-Jesus” means “son of the Savior,” but Paul pronounces him the “son of the devil” (verse 10).

Paul and Barnabas

- This battle seems to be man-against-man, but Paul's inversion of Bar-Jesus's name reveals that the confrontation is actually between God and the Devil.
- We see here that all earthly opposition to the Gospel is really a spiritual battle (Ephesians 6:12).
- John Calvin's commentary on Acts: "Satan never stops trying to overthrow the faith."

The timeless Word of God
enables spiritual sight

Acts 13:13-52

Paul and Barnabas

- This section introduces Paul's first missionary sermon by recording the setting of his speech. First, we are given the apostles' itinerary.
- They leave Cyprus, stop for a short stint in Perga, where John Mark departs, then travel one hundred miles to Antioch in Pisidia, a Roman colony in the southern region of Galatia (verse 14).

Paul and Barnabas

- The trek would have been incredibly difficult, given that the route was notorious for bandits who beat and robbed travelers and was also a barren terrain overtaken by the frequent flooding of mountain streams.
- Though the conditions to get there were tough, the city was a strategic place for the Gospel, since it was a civil and military center for the entire Roman province and contained a large Jewish population.

Paul and Barnabas

- Upon their arrival, the apostles go directly to the synagogue, a wise strategy since the Jews had already received revelation of God's promised Messiah.
- After reading a portion of the Law and Prophets, as was customary during synagogue gatherings, the Jewish leaders ask if their apostolic guests have anything to share (verse 15).

Paul's Sermon

- At their invitation, Paul stands up and delivers the most developed speech recorded in the book of Acts.
- His sermon unfolds in three distinct sections.
- First, Paul surveys the history of God's people, from the time of their fruitfulness in Egypt (verse 17) to the establishment of Israel's kingdom (verses 19–22) to the prophetic ministry of John the Baptist (verses 24–25).

Paul's Sermon

- This history records God's faithfulness to keep His promises and accomplish redemption for His people.
- Paul says all of this to undergird the truth that Christ, as a descendant of David (verse 23), is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises through history and the ultimate expression of redemptive actions toward His people.

Paul's Sermon

- Second, Paul plainly states the Gospel, the message of salvation found in the work of Christ alone.
- He highlights two failures of the Jewish leader:
 - They have failed to recognize Christ's nature and ministry as the Son of God.
 - They have failed to understand the very literature they study with such dedication (verse 27).

Paul's Sermon

- Paul declares that, though they failed to comprehend—and even took part in carrying out the predictions of Christ's suffering and Resurrection (verses 28–29).
- The climax of Paul's message is in verse 30, where the subjects of the sentences change from earthly to divine.
- Though Jews and Pilate led Jesus to his death, God brought Him back to life.

Paul's Sermon

- Paul finishes this section by reminding his hearers that Christ's Resurrection is validated not only by witnesses, but by the fulfilled promises of Scripture itself (verses 32–37).
- Discussion question: Do you know someone who has heard the Gospel but whose eyes are not opened to who Jesus is? How can we pray for that person?

Paul's Sermon

- In the third section of Paul's speech, the apostle moves on to the applications of his Gospel message (verse 38).
- He issues a call to repentance for his hearers to grab hold of the forgiveness that is available to "everyone who believes" in the resurrected Christ (verse 39).
- He further adds that Jesus can provide what Moses and the Law could not, namely, "freedom," which translated means "justification" (verse 39).

Paul's Sermon

- Luke records the two opposing responses to Paul's Gospel message, the faith of the Gentiles (verses 48–49) and the unbelief of the Jews, a common theme throughout the rest of Acts (verse 50).
- The empowered disciples moving on to the next town, filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (verses 51–52).
- We see that, regardless of opposition, God will move His plan forward.

Paul's Sermon

- Most of the city want to hear more (verse 42) and begin seeking instruction from Paul and Barnabas (verse 43).
- They gather on the following Sabbath to hear Paul preach again (verse 44).
- After the sermon, the Jews are enraged with jealousy over the city's great interest in the Gospel and try to oust the apostles (verse 45).

Discussion

- Have you ever had a time when you felt you were competing for the heart of a non-Christian?
- Do you know someone who has heard the Gospel but whose eyes are not opened to who Jesus is? How can we pray for that person?
- How do you respond when people reject your Gospel presentation? How might you minister to these individuals after their rejection?

Ask Kerby

Where did Jesus go after He died
on the cross and was buried?

Apostles' Creed

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell.

Two Words - Abode of the Dead

- Hell (Greek word *Geenna*) is also called the lake of fire and eternal fire. It was made for the Devil and his demons (Matthew 25:41). They will be case there after the last judgment (Revelation 19:11-16).
- Hades (Greek word *Hadas*) was the region of the dead before the ascension of Jesus. Now all believers go directly to be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:1-8).

Apostles' Creed

- The earliest form of the Apostles' Creed (A.D. 14) did not have the phrase, "He descended into Hell."
- It also did not appear in the Nicene Creed (A.D. 325).
- It appeared later in the Latin (*descendit in inferno*) to explain that Jesus descended into Hades.
- By the time we get to the Middle Ages, the words Hell and Hades have become confused and Jesus was thought to have descended into Hell.

Ephesians 4:7-10

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

Ephesians 4:7-10

- Some Christians teach that Jesus went to hell to release the captives held there and take them to heaven.
- Before His death, all Old Testament believers were in Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:19-31).
- Because Christ had not yet died to pay the penalty for their sin, they were not yet able to go directly into the presence of God. After His death, the barrier was removed and He took them out of hell to heaven.

Ephesians 4:7-10

- This passage in Ephesians only refers to His descent to earth or perhaps to the grave.
- The phrase “of the earth” can be understood as the descent of Jesus (at His incarnation) into the lower parts (of the universe). It could also refer to his descent to the grave in His burial after His death on the cross.
- The captives are those who Christ defeated at the cross, namely Satan and his demons (Colossians 2:14-15).

1 Peter 3:18-20

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

1 Peter 3:18-20

- Some believe this passage teaches that Jesus went to hell to preach the gospel to those in spiritual prison.
- The Greek word is *kerusso* which means to proclaim. That is a different word than *euaggelizo* which means to preach the gospel.
- So even if Jesus did go to Hades, it was not to preach the gospel but to proclaim the truth of the gospel.

Weekend in Hell

- Some TV preachers today sometimes take these passages to argue that Jesus spent a “weekend in hell.”
- They will teach that Jesus had to suffer in Hell for three days to “finish the atonement.”
- They also teach Satan owned “the keys” to death, hell, and the grave, and Jesus had to go win them from him.
- There are no scriptures which even suggest that Satan ever had keys to anything.

Luke 23:42-43

And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Discussion

- Have you ever had a time when you felt you were competing for the heart of a non-Christian?
- Do you know someone who has heard the Gospel but whose eyes are not opened to who Jesus is? How can we pray for that person?
- How do you respond when people reject your Gospel presentation? How might you minister to these individuals after their rejection?