

ACTS 13.13-52

vv. 13-15 Where, why and who

SLIDE #1 MAP

Perga (12km from coast) ->

Pisidian Antioch (160km N), one of 16 cities bearing that name!

- Antioch unlikely destination (v's coastal plain), most likely because know Sergius Paulus had strong family connections there, so presumably urged Paul and Barnabas to go there from Cyprus. May even have written him a letter of recommendation.

John Mark leaves at Perga -> Jerusalem.

- Luke doesn't say why
 - Missing mummy?? (Stott!)
 - SLIDE #2 Daunted by prospect of climbing/traversing Taurus mountains, over 1000m above sea level (cf. Ps 121.1)?
 - Upset that Paul had taken over the leadership from cousin Barnabas (Col 4.10)?

Clear from 15.37-38 though that seen to be defector/abandoned the mission/work

On Sabbath attend synagogue.

After the reading from the law and the Prophets the rulers of the synagogue

ask: "Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it."

Influence of Sergius Paulus?

vv. 16-25 Paul's Message

Paul's sermon, addressed to Jews and God-fearers

NB. No signs and wonders in ministry at Antioch, solely the appeal to the scriptures and their fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, son of David.

vv.17-20a

- Election (of Patriarchs)
 - Made great in Egypt
 - Exodus
 - Wilderness wanderings – where "cared for" rather than "put up with" them, given positive context – refer Deut 1.31 "where the LORD carried you as a man carries his son"
 - Conquest and settlement of land
- = c.450 years (400 years in Egypt + 40 in wilderness + 10 for conquest)

NB. Notable that, unlike Stephen, Paul makes no mention of Moses, or Jesus as the prophet-like-Moses. Focus instead on Davidic Messiah.

Stress = “on God’s sovereign hand in the entire process – God is the primary actor in all these events” (Witherington). He is the subject of nearly all the verbs (Stott).

v.20b

- Judges until Samuel, the first prophet

vv.21-25

Kingship climaxing in Christ

- King Saul, the first king (40 years)
- King David “a man after my own heart”
- The promised Saviour brought from David’s house
- Whom John the B announced as he baptized in preparation (making the way straight), declaring Jesus the one whose sandals he wasn’t worthy to untie.

“Just as Israel and David were God’s chosen ones, so, too, is Jesus, and this must be recognised, for the promises of God are fulfilled in him.”
(Witherington)

NB. Paul emphasises that he is not an innovator, this is not new teaching. Written about/foretold long ago.

Summary of implication of message:

Just as God chose Israel, made her great in Egypt, delivered her from the Egyptians, carried her through the wilderness, and gave her prophets and kings, so – in their day – God has acted (in sending his Son Jesus - to liberate, make great, conquer and rule, and not just Jews, but all who believe this Gospel.

vv.26 Appeal part 1 – to divinity of Jesus: Resurrection and Davidic promises

- to Abraham's descendants and God-fearers
 - to us (Paul & Barnabas) has been sent the message of this salvation (by God)
 - vv.27-29 Jerusalem and its rulers failed to recognise Jesus as King, or understand the scriptures, and condemned him, thus fulfilling the scriptures.
 - vv.30-31 BUT God raised him... (cf. Peter's words in 2.32). It is the resurrection which proves Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed
 - vv.32-37 we bring the good news that God's promise to the fathers is fulfilled by raising Jesus, as foretold in the scriptures
 - Ps 2 "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"
 - Isa 55.3 I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David" (= an everlasting covenant)
 - Ps 16.10 "You will not let your Holy One see corruption"
- i.e. All the **prophecies/words applied to David** in OT which speak of everlasting blessing could not have been fulfilled in David as he died and his body "saw corruption". Must have their ultimate fulfilment in one who "does not see corruption", i.e one raised from death – Jesus!
- To him belongs the eternal kingdom promised to David. That kingdom comprises all who believe and trust in the king, Jew and Gentile. All who have received and been marked out by the presence of God's Spirit.

vv. 38-39 Appeal part 2: through this man, forgiveness of sins is proclaimed... everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses

- that sin offerings, according to the OT, were provided to expiate inadvertent sins, but no sin offering could expiate sins committed deliberately or with premeditation... 'with a high hand.
- Jesus sets one free from all sins, none of which the Law of Moses could really deal with." (Witherington)

vv. 40-41 Warning: Beware that don't scoff and disbelieve. Quoting Habbakuk, stressing urgency of need to respond positively. SLIDE #3

vv.42-43 Positive response from "the people" in the synagogue – begged to be told more the next sabbath; and after the meeting "many Jews and devout converts to Judaism "followed Paul and Barnabas", who urged them to continue in the grace of God.

vv.44-52

Sequel:

Next sabbath: Almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord
v.45 Jewish religious leaders jealous and contradicted and reviled Paul (cf. Elymas v.8)

- perceived threat It is the 'elites' of the old order
- a theological argument presented, probably defending the distinctiveness of Jews,

vv.46-47 Paul & Barnabas respond boldly:

- necessarily to the Jew first
- but since you thrust it aside and adjudge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, -> the Gentiles, quoting Isa 49.6. Fulfilment of 1.8 and Luke 2.32.

BUT NOTE: Paul continued to take the Gospel to the Jew first. God had not rejected the Jews, only those who reject his word.

Paul, in himself, personifies the vocation of repentant (servant) Israel – to be a light to the Gentiles – Isa 49.6.

Ironically, this is the role all Israel called to, so these Jews rejecting their own call (Isa 49.6).

It was ironic if the very thing they were most offended by, and which caused their opposition to Paul – that in Christ Jew and Gentile equally God's people – led to Paul taking the Gospel to the Gentiles.

BUT NOTE: many Jews did believe (v.43). It seems that Luke uses the term “the Jews” in a similar way to John in his Gospel – to refer to the elite leadership.

vv.48-49 Gentiles rejoice and those chosen believe, the word of the Lord spreading

vv. 50-51 Jews stir up persecution (through devout women of high standing and leading men of city). The leading men may well have been Roman magistrates.

- the high-status God fearers (in this case apparently mainly women) provided the link with the Greco-Roman majority in the city, which if lost to conversion to Christianity might threaten the stability of the Jewish community in this city.

The Jews in Antioch react in the same way as the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem of whom Paul spoke to them (v.27)

Paul and Barnabas shake dust from their feet and move to Iconium (cf. Luke 9.4; 10.11).

Not a fearful flight without fight, but a prophetic protest (Wall)

v. 52 The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. They had farewelled Barnabas and Paul, but were not left spiritual orphans as had HS/
NB. Just as not all Jews rejected God’s word, so not all Gentiles should be understood to have believed.

Belief/faith, not ethnicity, is the important and determining factor.

Application

1. There is still an urgency for all people to hear the Gospel and receive it in faith.
 - a. All need Jesus.
 - b. All need sin forgiven and HS.
 - c. Scoffers remain in peril.
2. Key evidence = resurrection and fact that Jesus fulfilled of scriptures – promises and prophecies
3. It is possible to say you believe in God, and read and study scriptures, and yet not understand/recognise its Truth, acting in ignorance, doing evil, and collaborating with 'Romans', i.e. the powers of this age. E.g. to reject the created order, and God as Creator, denying God's perfect plan for marriage, sexuality, identity, the uniqueness of Jesus, his atoning sacrifice for sin, the historicity and significance of his bodily resurrection, the reality of his return and judgment etc.

Reinhold Niebuhr:

"A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

4. God's mission won't be thwarted. Still the need to take light to the nations

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. Paul preached to an audience who professed faith in YHWH and were familiar with the scriptures. But how do we point biblically illiterate people to Jesus? What do we need to tell them for Jesus to 'make sense', both as a historical person and the Saviour and Lord of the universe?
2. Paul told them that "through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed". How do we convey this message to people today? How do we convince them that sin is the problem (or even a problem) and that Jesus is the answer to it?
3. Who/which groups feel most threatened by Jesus' popularity and followers today? Why? What do we learn from this passage about how to respond to them? What does this mean in practice?
4. Assuming that v.45b indicates that Paul's opponents disagreed with his interpretation of the scriptures, how do people today refute the claims the Bible makes about Jesus? How well equipped are you to respond? E.g. if someone says to you (as they have to me) that the New Testament wasn't written until 300 years after Jesus' death, what factual evidence could you

present to them to show that the NT was written in the 1stC drawing on eyewitness accounts?

5. Please do spend time in prayer praying for the desperate needs in the world, esp. in Afghanistan, but also Sri Lanka and Nepal (as well as many other countries of course). I am now getting personal emails from Ps Sylvester and Ps Kabi Raj (the Storey's pastor) telling me of food and medical crises (in Sri Lanka and Nepal) respectively, seriously impacting members of their congregations. Thank you.