

# Acts 13:1-12

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn your Bibles to Acts chapter 13. If you haven't got a Bible with you, there's Bibles by the door. I think it would really help you to have a Bible with you and follow me along in this long chapter.

I'm sure you all read it in preparation and so you're totally familiar with it. The key text in the passage is right at the end. It's verses 48 and 49.

And when the Gentiles, that's the non-Jews, heard this message, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord. And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

And then this familiar phrase, and the word of the Lord was spreading through the region. Up till now, in the book of Acts, this fledgling church has been very Jewish.

In Acts chapter 2, when the church explodes and grows, do you remember it explodes out of Jerusalem. And from there it spreads out all around the world, but it's still very Jewish.

[ 1 : 01 ] You've got Cornelius. He became a Christian. He got converted recently and he was on the coast. He was Roman and not Jewish at all. He's come to the Lord, but it's all very much like that he's joined something Jewish.

There's still a Jewish flavour to it. There's a new church in Antioch and Syria and it's got lots of Gentiles in it. Lots and lots, but they've still joined something Jewish.

There's a Jewish flavour running through it. But the Christian gospel is for everybody without distinction.

The gospel is not for everyone without exception, but it is for everyone without distinction. You can't say this morning, I'm a worm so I can't be saved.

You can't say I'm from Iran so I can't be saved. You can't say I'm homeless so I can't be saved. It's for everyone without distinction.

[ 2 : 15 ] And that's the message really of Acts 13, how that came to be. It's what Luke is going to answer. And he answers it by taking us to three cities.

Come with me to chapter 12 and verse 25. And Barnabas and Paul have gone to Jerusalem. They've come back with someone else, a guy called John Mark, back to Antioch.

That's our first city. Look at the church in Antioch, verses 1 to 3. There are prophets in this church and teachers.

Prophets, people who receive new revelations from God. There aren't people like that today.

Because we have the Bible. The Bible is complete. But it wasn't in Acts chapter 13.

And so there were prophets. And teachers who can teach the Christian faith. And they don't only teach the Christian faith, the scriptures. But they receive new revelations from God, these teachers and prophets.

[ 3 : 21 ] Just look at their names with me. Look at verse 1. You've got Barnabas, he's a Jew. You've got Simon from Niger. He's a black man from Africa. You've got Lucius from Cyrene.

You've got Manion. Maneon. Who's been brought up. He's an old family friend of Herod the Tetrarch. And you know Herod the Tetrarch. Because he's the man who chopped John the Baptist's head off.

Can you see the mixture in the church? It's a great mixture, isn't it? This church in Antioch. Which is going to become the great missionary centre.

There's already within it tremendous diversity. And amongst these men who are prophets and teachers. Look at what they're doing in verse 2. They are worshipping. These five men have got together.

And they are worshipping God. Trusting God. And they are giving God the praise. They are seeking God in a special way. They're fasting. And they're going without their food.

[ 4 : 23 ] Because they're so intent on seeking the Lord. And as they do so. Because they are men who receive special revelations. Because they are prophets.

The Holy Spirit speaks to them directly. And the Holy Spirit says verse 2. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting. The Holy Spirit said. Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul. For the work to which I've called them. Saul has already been to Galatia. And he comes from Tarsus. Now there's a map. I should have done a map. Because I'm so wanting you to understand. Can you see where they are? We are on your right. Antioch. That's where we are. Alright. So Paul has been in Galatia. And he's come up from Tarsus. He's been in Galatia 10 years. He's already got this great sense of conviction. That the gospel. The good news of the Lord Jesus. Should go to non-Jews. Barnabas has come up from the Jerusalem church.

[ 5 : 19 ] To this church in Antioch. Which was a Jewish and a Gentile church. And Barnabas already had this great conviction. That the good news of the Lord Jesus. Was for Jews and for Gentiles.

And now the Holy Spirit tells them. In a special way. To get to the work. Of taking this gospel. Outside Jewishness. So we read verse 3.

There's a commissioning ceremony. Can you see it? Then after fasting and praying. They laid their hands on them. Sent them off. There the elders. Act as representatives.

Of the whole church. And they're sent off. With the whole church's blessing. And the church is now being taken. Under the Holy Spirit's guidance. Do you remember Jesus' command? Take the gospel.

To the ends of the earth. Up till now. The gospel has mainly. Gone to the Jews. There have been some Gentiles. Converted haven't there? You think of the Ethiopian eunuch.

[ 6 : 17 ] You think of Cornelius. And his household. These people in Antioch. And in Syria. But now there is going to be. A great number of. Non-Jews.

Who come into the kingdom. And they are taking very seriously. This command. That the gospel is to go to. Every creature. Just as Jesus commanded. Every person.

Wherever they live. Whoever they are. Whatever they've done. Whatever they believe at this moment. Must hear the gospel. And so Antioch is the first place.

We visit. So we now leave Antioch. And we go to Cyprus. Look at verses 13. Verses 4 to 12. Paul and Barnabas leave Antioch.

And go to the coast. It's about 16 miles. And they go to Salusia. Which is the coastal port. They're going to set sail to Cyprus. Let's find out what happened there. Look at verse 5. They arrive in Salamis.

[ 7 : 15 ] Which is about 6 miles from the port. And in that city. There are synagogues. Plural. Look at verse 5. Barnabas and Paul go and preach. In those synagogues. Which suggests that they spend several weekends there.

John Mark is with them. He's their kind of assistant. And it was there they preached the word of God. They go through the whole island. We don't know how long they spent there. But most people think about two months.

They get to the other end. Paphos. The great port. The Phoenicians built it. The Romans developed it. And there's no Jewish synagogue there. But there are some Jews.

And one of them is in particular favor with a Roman governor. The pro-council of Cyprus. The boss man. Sergius Paulus. But this guy's a rogue. Things at this point change.

You'll see the change. Look at verse 9. Then Saul who is called Paul. Remember most people in the ancient world spoke several languages. And while Paul moved amongst the Jews.

[ 8 : 19 ] He was called. He was named Saul. He was named after the first king of Israel. From the tribe of Benjamin. But now he's going to be mixing amongst the Romans. And civil servants.

And governors. And pro-councils and sentries. So he starts using the Roman form of his name. Paul. And so at this point he becomes the leader of the mission really. It's been Barnabas and Paul. But now it is Paul. You'll see verses further down. Verse 13. It's Paul and his party. Verse 46. It's Paul and Barnabas. Paul has now emerged in Acts 13 into the place of leadership.

And there's going to be a great showdown. Because there is a Jew who's very close to the governor. And the governor is an intelligent man. But the Jewish guy.

He's a quack. He's a sorcerer. He's a wizard. He's a wizard. He's someone. We thought to me of Mr. Omar. Standing outside Ealing Broadway Station.

[ 9 : 19 ] It's that kind of guy. He claims to speak in God's name. And he's losing his influence with the pro-council. Because of this guy Paul. The pro-council wants to hear the gospel.

He's sent for Paul and Barnabas to hear the gospel preached. And this quack of a man tries to get the doors shut towards the gospel.

He tries to get the gospel preachers turned away. Kicked out. Look at verse 9. But Saul, who's also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him. And publicly said. Well look what he says.

Verse 10. He says. You son of the devil.

You enemy of all righteousness. Full of deceit and villainy. Will you stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And let's just imagine that this morning I stood up.

[ 10 : 24 ] I looked someone in the eye. And I said to them. You son of the devil. You enemy of all righteousness. There'd be complaints to presbytery by half past one, wouldn't they?

Some of you would think this is so outrageous. How dare a preacher speak like this? But this man is filled with error and with wickedness. Now why does Paul speak so strongly to him?

Understand this. People would say, Paul, the way you're speaking, it's not very Christian, is it? But what is this man doing? Let's think about what he's doing. He is trying to stop people's ears so that they don't hear the gospel.

And Paul says. You son of the devil. And you're an enemy. You try to stop people hearing the gospel.

You try to stop people hearing the good news of the Lord Jesus. Like many religious leaders do in this country. What does the Bible say about them? You're a son of the devil. You're an enemy.

[ 11 : 34 ] And now, verse 11. Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you. You'll be blind and unable to see. Immediately, a mist and darkness fall on the man. And he goes about seeking people to lead him by the hand.

And then the proconsul believed. I bet he did. When he saw what had been done. But can you just notice, what was the proconsul astonished by? He's astonished by, isn't he, the teaching of the Lord?

He's shaken by the miracle. So would you be. So would I be. But the proconsul believed because of the message. Although he was amazed that someone should be struck blind by an apostle.

But it was the teaching of the Lord that shook him the most. And brought him to faith. The proconsul, he got converted. The Roman official is converted.

Now, what I've battled with, and I've battled lots with this passage this week, is why did they go to Cyprus? Why did they leave Antioch to go to Cyprus?

[ 12 : 37 ] Why, when they were called by the Holy Spirit to a mission that was to all the world, why make Barnabas' home Cyprus the starting point?

Why do that? The Holy Spirit says, go out into all the world, Barnabas goes home. Paul had already been evangelising for about ten years around his home, Tarsus.

And Barnabas was going to evangelise with Paul. Tarsus was Paul's home, and Cyprus was Barnabas' home. And I think the answer is this, that we start at home.

We start amongst the people that know us best, and who understand us best. This Antioch church was the least Jewish of all the churches.

There were so many Gentile Christians in it, who'd been brought into being by Jewish Christians from Cyprus. Undoubtedly, this church had a concern for their home.

[ 13 : 42 ] Missions started where they were known best, and amongst the people that they understood best. We start at home. Here's light shines furthest, shines brightest, nearest home.

And that's the Holy Spirit's strategy, isn't it? I was going up, people would talk about going to do beach missions. You know beach missions, where you'd wear a kind of red outfit, and you'd stand on a beach, and you'd kind of do little skits for children.

And you'd hand out, you would hand out tracts and all sorts of things. And it was looked on as this is a great thing for young people to go and do beach missions.

This is standing for the Lord. It's so easy, isn't it, to go to Scarborough, where no one will ever meet you again, and be really bold for the Lord. It's really easy to do mission thousands of miles away from your home.

It's much harder, isn't it, to speak to your grandparents about the Lord Jesus. It's much harder to speak to mum and dad for some of you. It's much harder for you to speak to your brother and sister

who know you best and know all your faults, and to speak to them about the gospel.

[14:55] But mission starts at home. To be bold as a lion at holiday Bible club or on camp, but actually to be unwilling to speak to people at school.

God's ways we start at home. Okay, city number three. And this is where the confusion starts. It's Antioch again, but it's not the Antioch it was before. There are 16 Antiochs, alright?

This Antioch is in Syria. It's Antioch towards Pisidia. Now when did all this happen? It's about 47 or 48 AD. It's coming up towards 49 AD.

No one knows the exact date, but it's in that realm. They leave Cyprus. They sail towards the Turkish coast. Look at verse 13. They arrive in Perga and Pamphylia, but they don't preach there. They depart. In verse 14, they go inland. About 100 miles to Antioch towards Pisidia. That's the name of the city. Why didn't they preach in Perga?

[15:59] Why did John Mark go home? Paul tells us a little bit about that in Galatians. It's clear that when he arrives on the southern coast of what is modern Turkey, Paul is ill.

He's ill for a while. He's pretty seriously ill. But why did John Mark go home? We don't know apart from that Paul refused to take him on the next journey.

The next missionary ship. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, but Paul didn't. They fell out over it. The reason is this. There was one thing that Paul could not stand all his life.

And it was this idea that Gentile Christians, people like you and me who are not Jews, are somehow inferior to Jewish Christians. The very idea that there are Gentile and Jewish Christians was an awful thought to the Apostle Paul.

There are only Christians. The idea that Gentile Christians have to be flavoured with Jewishness. Paul understands the gospel much better than that.

[17:04] And Paul was coming to that point, obviously nearer and nearer to that point where he could see it wasn't enough just to take the gospel to the Jews. And hope that they would go to the Gentiles.

No, missionaries had to go to the Gentiles directly and bypass the Jews. And perhaps John Mark didn't follow that. Perhaps that is the reason. What is clear in Acts 15 is that John Mark refused to go to the work.

The work, of course, is what is described in Acts 13, verse 2. The work of evangelising the Gentiles directly. John Mark would come to see that directly later.

Clearly later. And Paul would love John Mark dearly later. Mark would write the gospel. Mark would be restored. But at this point he goes home. He wasn't yet ready for the work that was ahead.

So Paul is ill. John Mark is gone. And Barnabas is walking these hundreds of miles. And at last coming to Antioch and Pisidia. Verse 14. They arrive.

[18:09] They go into the synagogue. And there are Jews. In fact, there's loads of them. In fact, there's 20,000 of them in that city. One of the emperors had encouraged the Jews to settle in Antioch in Pisidia.

So they arrive, Paul and Barnabas. They go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and they sit down. We're not in a Christian church. We're in a synagogue. There's the singing of Psalms, which would be familiar to us.

There's the reading of the law, which we would understand. And there's the reading of the extracts of the prophets. And then there's the rulers of the synagogue. Who are talking to the congregation. They recognize Paul and Barnabas as visitors. Do they recognize Paul as a visiting rabbi? And they say to Paul, have you got something for us? Have you got a sermon for us?

And now is the moment. What we do know is verse 16. Paul stood up. It's an interesting thing, isn't it? Paul stood up. And as the New Testament often tells us, he motions with his hand.

[19:15] Paul's gestures are often commented on. We don't know whether it was the kind of claw that Paul Levy uses. Or whether it was the finger that Reuben Hunter uses.

We don't know what the gesture was. And it's why you shouldn't comment on preacher's gestures. And so he begins to preach. Look at verse 16, man of Israel.

He's speaking to the Jews, but there's non-Jews there. Men of Israel, you Jews, and those who fear God. There were people who feared the Jewish God.

But they were not Jews. And they'd not yet become Jews. But nonetheless, they came because they were interested. And he begins to preach.

It's a really interesting thing. We haven't got time to do it now. But if you go to Acts chapter 2, and you compare Peter's sermon at Pentecost with Acts chapter 13, there's tremendous similarities. Look at Paul's sermon in Antioch of Pisidia.

[ 20 : 14 ] Both sermons, both in Acts 2 and in Acts 13, tell how God chose Israel. Both of them give a potted and quick summary of Israel's history.

Both of them focus very quickly on David. Both of them explain that Jesus is a descendant of David. Jesus is the Messiah according to the promise. Both of them say that Jesus is the fulfillment of what the prophet spoke.

Both of them emphasize his life, his death. And they tell us particularly that he didn't stay dead. He didn't rot in the grave. But according to Acts 16, he's risen from the grave.

Both of them make reference to the Psalms. And Peter in Acts chapter 2, and 15 years later in Acts chapter 13, Paul says the same thing.

Let all the house of Israel know that God has made this Jesus both Lord and Christ. He's in charge. This Jesus whom you crucified is Lord and Christ. But Paul goes a step further.

[ 21 : 16 ] Look at verses 38 and 39. Let it be known, therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. And by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

You see that? Just by believing, you are put right with God. Just by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, his righteousness is put to your account.

Nobody, nobody has ever been able to keep all the rules and ceremonies of the Old Testament. But when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, then your breaking of every rule is forgiven.

And you are justified, whoever you are. Whether you're an Israelite, whether you're a God-fearer, whoever you are, everyone who believes. Now you see, Peter was preaching, wasn't he, to Jews on the day of Pentecost.

And his sermon is very Jewish, but Paul is preaching to the world here. Everyone without distinction, just by believing, is saved.

[ 22 : 41 ] Can you see the influence of Stephen? How Stephen's sermon, on the Old Testament scriptures, all came and coming to fruition. And this message is going to cause a massive row in the church.

There's going to be a great conference in Jerusalem about this, in Acts chapter 15. And it will become clear that this really is the gospel. That you do not have to become a Jew first.

You do not have to take on a Jewish flavor. You come to Jesus Christ just as you are, as someone who is a sinner. Acknowledging that you are a lawbreaker, and believing and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, and your sins can be forgiven.

You don't have to make up for them. You have to believe. And you are justified, and God's righteousness is put to your account.

That is the gospel. It's tremendous news. It's tremendous preaching. It's tremendous news for you today. That there's nothing that you can do to put yourself right with God.

[ 23 : 53 ] But Jesus Christ has done it all. And if you will trust in him, your greatest need can be met. What's the reaction? Well, verse 42. Can you see it? Tremendous enthusiasm.

I love it. They went out, the people begged them to be told these things again next Sabbath. Come and preach this sermon again. You put yourself in the place of one of those Gentiles. Week by week, month by month, you've gone to the synagogue.

You've had a seat and said to the kind of cheap seats, you're welcome, but you know you're not welcome. You enjoy it, but you know it's not fully for me. And week after week, month after month, year after year, you go, you admire the Jewish God.

You've heard the glorious stories of his greatness. And people have been telling you for years, you've got to become a Jew to become one of the people of God.

And now you hear that the Messiah has come. And the proof that the Messiah has come is that Jesus didn't rot in the grave, but he's risen from the dead. And your sins can be forgiven by coming to Jesus Christ.

[ 25 : 03 ] And you do not have to keep all the minute regulations of the Old Testament because all of those things pointed forward to Jesus. But those things are not the way of salvation.

Jesus Christ is the way of salvation. And so here's the truth. You can be a fully fledged child of God and of all the benefits of godliness by coming to Jesus Christ.

And they are begging to hear that message again. Congregation breaks up, verse 43. And after the meeting and the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas.

You can picture the scene down the street urging them, urging them, come back. Here are Jews and Gentiles and proselytes asking them questions.

And he's speaking to them and he's trying to persuade them, live, continue in the grace of God. God saved us by his grace and kindness, not by our works, not by our performance.

[ 26 : 07 ] And a week goes by, it's the following Saturday. You can imagine the talk through the week, did you hear what went on in that synagogue? Did you hear the message that man brought? We've never heard anything like it.

Get there early next Saturday, verse 44, the next Sabbath, almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of God. Wouldn't you have loved to have been there? Can you imagine this synagogue bursting its walls with Jews and with Gentiles?

But can you imagine what the Jewish people thought about their precious synagogue being invaded by all these unholy Gentiles? Trampling in.

They go in, someone's sitting in their seat. They say, I've not seen you here before. And all these people are there to hear this visiting preacher preach the word of God.

You can imagine, can't you, if you've been running a straight down the line synagogue for years and years and years and the same old people come week after week after week after week. And one new preacher comes from out of town, he preaches just once and the following week the whole city turns up.

[ 27 : 27 ] How would you feel? How would you feel if 600 people turn up next Sunday morning and you can't get in and you've got to sit not in the overflow but in the kind of overflow of the overflow rooms and there's a massive queue to the toilet and you didn't get any tea and coffee and biscuits.

And all these new people, how would you feel? Well the effect of some people is jealousy. Because this Sunday, Saturday, when Paul is preaching verse 45, there's people contradicting and shouting. They're shouting out in opposition. And while he's preaching we're told they're blaspheming and they're opposing the things spoken by Paul and now Paul and Barnabas grow bold. They don't shrink back, they grow bold.

Bold. They've just called a man an enemy and a child of the devil. They get bold. Even more bold. Because when the opposition increases, the true Christian leader strength increases.

The tension mounts. The spiritual might also mounts. The opposition becomes ferocious. The word of God becomes more ferocious. And Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said what's necessary.

[ 28 : 43 ] They say it's necessary that the word of God will be spoken to you first but since you reject it, since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, isn't that interesting?

I don't need this. I don't need this. Behold, we're turning to the Gentiles to the world. For so the Lord has commanded us saying I have made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.

Paul explains from the Old Testament that God's purpose in choosing the people of Israel was that from them light, his light, would go out to the ends of the earth.

When God chose Israel, he chose Israel to be a light to the nations. And God didn't choose Israel just to bask in the sunshine of God's light and say, isn't God good to his people?

God chose Israel so that they would take his light to the ends of the earth. But since you reject the gospel and you judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we are going to bypass you.

[ 29 : 48 ] And we're going to go directly to the Gentiles. Well, the Jews are not too pleased by that. Look at verse 48. What a city that there's joy.

Now when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing, glorifying the word of the Lord. And as many were appointed to eternal life, believed. And we learn that God's electing love from before the foundation of the world is working in history.

It's showing itself in the eyes and ears of men and women and boys and girls of Antioch and Pisidia. And as many as appointed to eternal life, believed. And we read that that wasn't the only effect.

Verse 49, the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region. There's revival, but there's also a riot. Verse 50, the Jews incited devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city and they stirred up persecution.

It's Paul and Barnabas and drove them out of their district. Think of that. Paul and Barnabas have brought the word that brings everlasting life. And because of that word, countless, hundreds of people will go into an eternity safely and with joy and with peace.

[ 30 : 54 ] all they've done is bring good news that everyone without distinction who believes in the Lord Jesus may be saved.

There's no further condition and they're expelled for it. So they shake the dust off their feet and they go to the next town. Amen. Verse 52, the disciples, they are filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. And Luke is explaining, Luke is explaining to us how the gospel goes around the world. And the response to that is joy but also fury.

And the truth is will Paul stay his ground? The question is will he stay his ground? There's going to be a great conference of this in chapter 15.

Is it really true that you can become a child of God without becoming a Jew? Is it truly true that by believing in Jesus Christ this morning you can have everlasting life without adopting Jewish customs and rites and ceremonies?

[ 32 : 16 ] Is it really true this morning that you can become God's child without going through the synagogue door? It is. And that will be confirmed later on.

But Paul stands his ground on that and he will not give an inch. Is it really true that circumcision won't actually save anybody and is necessary?

Is that really true? And what we'll see is we will see that the Apostle Paul will be maligned, he'll be opposed, he'll be made fun of, he'll be rejected, he'll be boycotted, he'll be cancelled.

He'll be cancelled. He'll be stoned for it, he'll be left half dead for it, but he will insist there is no middle wall of separation. So whether you're a Jew or a Greek, a Roman, an Iranian, a Brit, you're from Japan, an American, an Indian, whatever the message remains, anyone who believes in Jesus Christ is justified by all things, from all things, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

And so our message in this church is this, we are saved by the grace of God and salvation is free to all. Thank you.