

What If? Influence Factor: The Book of Acts

What If We Are Breaking New Ground?

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

What If? Influence Factor: The Book of Acts — What If We Are Breaking New Ground?

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Text: Acts 12:25-13:52

Introduction

With the closing words of Acts 12:24 — "But the word of God increased and multiplied..." — a major division in the book of *Acts* has been reached. The first half of Luke's account of the early church has been dominated by the work of the apostles and other believers connected with the Jerusalem Christ community — most especially Peter. With the revelation of Acts 10-11 that the Gospel must be taken to the Gentiles, and that they have full membership in the covenant community of Israel, a fresh momentum builds for an outward movement into the wider Gentile world — wider than Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria! Already, Antioch has equaled Jerusalem in importance for this new mission.

What follows is a narrative largely dominated by Paul and what has come to be called his "Three Missionary Journeys." If we consider his final trip to Rome as part of the mission (and *he* certainly thought of it that way, according to Acts 19:21, "I must also see Rome."), that number rises to *four*. The punctuation for each "journey" is his return to the starting point (Antioch), and eventually to Jerusalem. These periodic "breaks" mark times of reporting to the "mother churches" what God has been doing "among the Gentiles," an experience that brought Paul great delight. Nurtured in the womb of Judaism and baptized by the Spirit of the risen Jesus, "Saul also called Paul" becomes the prophetic light to the nations in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that through his "family" (literally, "seed"), the nations of the earth would experience God's covenant blessing.

The first missionary journey appears in 13:1-14:28 forming a major unit surrounded by 13:1-3 where Paul and Barnabas depart *from Antioch* and 14:25-27 in which they return *to Antioch*. Key to this larger section is how it fulfills Paul's original commission found in Acts 9:15-16: "¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, '...he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name (1) before the Gentiles and kings and (2) the children of Israel. ¹⁶ (3) For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.'"

1. His Gentile ministry receives attention in 13:7-12, 46-48; 14:8-18, 17, and part of that ministry takes place before a government official.
2. His Jewish ministry appears in 13:5; 13:14-41 and 14:1.
3. His sufferings are found in 13:50; 14:2, 5; 14:19.

Geographically (see map, p.4), the movement is from Antioch in Syria (13:1-3) to Antioch's port in Seleucia (13:4) where they set sail to Cyprus, passing through the cities of Salamis (13:5) and Paphos (13:6-13a). From there their route goes to Perga, a main city in Pamphylia (13:13b), followed by Antioch of Pisidia which is accessed by a paved road called the *Via Sebaste* (Road of Augustus) which then leads them to Iconium (14:1-5). The extent of this first mission climaxes with visits to Lystra (14:6-20a) and then Derbe (14:20b-21a). Once this western-most point is reached, they retrace their steps back through many of the same towns until once more they arrive in Antioch of Syria, their originating point (Acts 14:21b-28). From a literary perspective, the first missionary journey follows a pattern where ministry to Jews (A) and to Gentiles (B) becomes woven into a fabric which looks like ABAA'B'A"B" and reflects the notion, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (3:26; 13:46; Romans 1:16; 2:10).¹

¹ Charles Talbert, *Reading Acts*, Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., p. 115.

This week we witness the earliest phases of the Pauline mission, beginning with the commissioning of Paul and Barnabas by the Antioch church. The following outline reflects Luke's organization of his material.

Outline

1. Barnabas and Saul Sent From Antioch as Missionaries (13:1-3)
2. Mission: Cyprus (13:4-12)
 - a. Arrival: Salamis (13:4-5)
 - b. Paphos: (13:6-12)
3. Mission: Antioch in Pisidia (13:13-52)
 - a. Arrival: Perga (13:13-15)
 - b. Paul's Sermon (13:16-41)
 - c. Response to Paul's Sermon (13:42-43)
 - d. Jewish Opposition (13:44-47)
 - e. Gentile Joy and Gospel Growth (13:48-52)

Barnabas and Saul Sent from Antioch as Missionaries (13:1-3)

Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

This is a classical *commissioning* account, modeled after God's call of Abraham in Genesis 11:31-12:5. A brief introduction is followed by the direct call of the Holy Spirit for Saul and Barnabas to "be set apart" (Greek: from *aphorizō*). This parallels Abraham's leaving his father's household for the appointed place where he would eventually go and begin his long-term task of being a light to the nations. Ironically, Saul had been a "Pharisee," a word which implied "separation" from the pagan world and from unholy things within Israel. None of those expectations truly fulfilled Saul until he met the risen Jesus, and in the present case, now that the Holy Spirit has commissioned him, he is truly *set apart*.

Antioch was blessed with gifted "prophets and teachers," those who knew the inspired word and could explain it to others. We must include the possibility of both writing and speaking prophets in this first group, to the extent that the New Testament had not yet been written (and would need prophets to do so), and since Spirit-led interpreters of the Old Testament were needed to show how God's word was reaching fulfillment in their time. We have already met Agabus who predicted the famine and laid the groundwork for the relief mission from Antioch to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27ff) in which Saul and Barnabas participated. These two offices regularly appear in lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament letters (1 Corinthians 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:11). Although Saul and Barnabas undertake what we would consider an apostolic ministry, and certainly saw themselves as "apostles," that did not preclude the specific ministries and gifts of prophecy and teaching which accompanied their preaching of the Gospel. The Christian church needed both, and those needs have not changed for two thousand years.

Diversity characterizes the list of persons found here. We know from the ancient biographer Plutarch, that certain names applied to individuals exemplified personal traits. In the case of Simon, the surname "Niger" suggests he was black, whereas Lucius "from Cyrene" was likely also dark-skinned. Manaen had political ties to the old Herodian dynasty. Surrounding this diverse group were Barnabas and Saul who are given no special surnames, probably because they will become the main subjects of Luke's narrative and need no further designation. They will become distinguished by the "name of God" which they will carry to the nations.

The Holy Spirit guides the Antioch church in its decision to send Barnabas and Saul. It was a familiar Old Testament theme for God to appear in an unusual way to commission his prophets: Moses (Exodus 3), Isaiah (Isaiah 6) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1) are classic examples. We are not told *how* the Spirit indicated his choice of

these two men, but it had to be clear and unmistakable, much as the signs he gave to show that God had once more visited Israel (Acts 2) and then the Gentiles (Acts 10-11). What the Holy Spirit revealed, the church confirmed by the laying on of hands, a ceremony of special approbation but also of support and acknowledgement that God's choice was also their own. See also Numbers 8:10-11; Deuteronomy 34:9; 2 Kings 3:16; 2 Chronicles 29:23 as Old Testament examples; for the New Testament, read 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6; Hebrews 6:2; Revelation 1:17. We might say they were "*set apart by the Spirit*" and "*sent off by the church.*"

Spiritual preparation played a significant role in the lives of the Antioch believers who heard the voice of the Holy Spirit, as he issued his call for the commissioning of Saul and Barnabas. Luke writes of the church *worshipping* (Greek: from *leitourgeō*, present active) and *fasting* (Greek: from *nēsteuō*, again present active). The verb forms reflect the consistent nature of these actions: they were not driven by a momentary impulse or impromptu desire but rose from what Watchman Nee called "The Normal Christian Life." When God's people nurture the spiritual disciplines, they become open to the leading of the Spirit *on his terms* and *in his time*.

But the verb forms change as the church sends off their two missionaries. This time Luke uses aorist forms of the words for fasting and praying (Greek: *proseuchomai*), stressing the focused and decisive actions directed toward the *specific task* facing Saul and Barnabas in their mission to the world.

A series of *missions* follow this royal send-off of God's chosen servants. They are geographically arranged, and told like a typical travel log, common in the ancient world. Consistent with Luke's commitment in his Gospel (1:1-4) to present his material "in order," he meticulously describes the first missionary journey down to the level of detail, beginning with the short commute from Antioch to the coastal-port town of Seleucia. It was the seaport for Antioch 16 miles away and located 5 miles north of the Orontes River. Constructed by Seleucus Nicator (d. 280 B.C.E.), Seleucus belonged to the Syrian Tetrapolis, along with the cities of Apameia, Laodicea and Antioch. The city was considered invulnerable and strategic for Syria. The Roman Pompey made it a free city in 64 B.C.E. as a reward for being his ally and was later improved by the Romans, making it a vibrant city in the days of Saul and Barnabas. From here they sailed to Cyprus.

Mission: Cyprus (13:4-12)

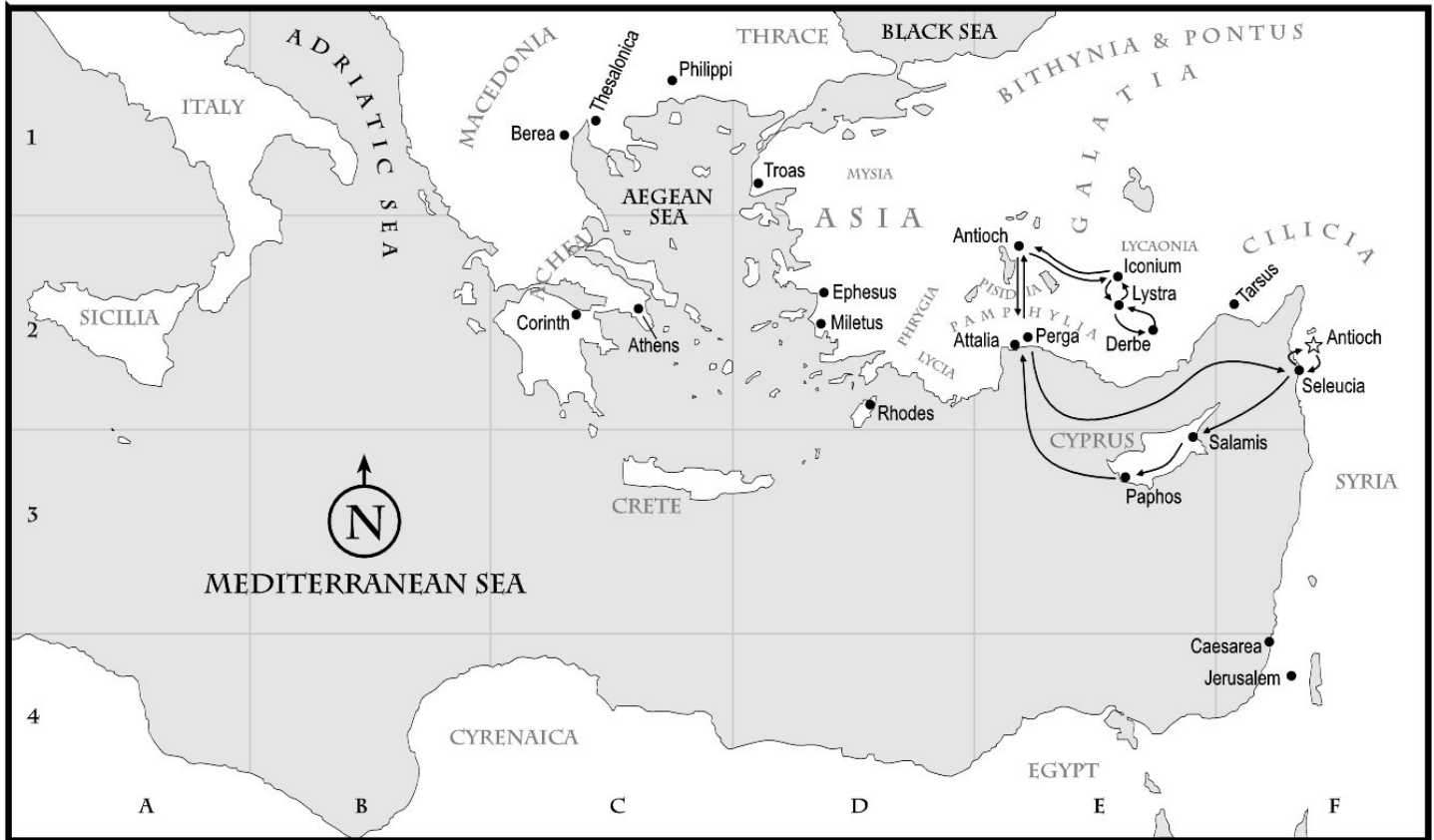
So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.⁶ When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus.⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.⁸ But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him¹⁰ and said, "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?"¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time." Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

The Old Testament referred to the island of Cyprus as "Kittim" (Genesis 10:4; Numbers 24:24; 1 Chronicles 1:7; Daniel 11:30). As F.F. Bruce reminds us, it was an important exporter of copper, and this explains the meaning of its name.² Thanks to the Romans it passed through changes in its political status several times until eventually, under Caesar Augustus, it became a senatorial province governed by a proconsul. Luke correctly uses that word (Greek: *anthupatos*) in 13:7 as a title for Sergius Paulus, reflecting once more the writer's attention to historical detail.³

² Bruce, p.254-255.

³ David W.J. Gill, "Paul's Travels Through Cyprus (Acts 13:4-12)," *Tyndale Bulletin*, 46 no 2 1995, p 219-228.

The Jewish presence is noted in the town of Salamis, a predominately Hellenistic city on the eastern side of the island with a history dating to the sixth century B.C.E. Salamis served as the main center for Cyprus and ruled its eastern regions. Lying at the mouth of the river Pedieos, its excellent harbor facilitated trade with Phoenicia (east), Egypt (south) and Cilicia (north).⁴ Saul and Barnabas set their long-standing precedent of bringing the Gospel *first to the Jewish synagogue* — in this case to more than one of them (13:5). Both previous (9:20) and later (13:14, 46) references confirm this practice. Since God-fearers (Greek: *phoboumenoi*) commonly attended synagogues in the *diaspora*, the apostles could also count on seeing a Gentile presence at the same time.



At the outset, John Mark supported (was a "helper," *hupēretēs*, usually meaning "servant") the apostles. This Greek word for "helper" actually means "under-rower, under-seaman," reflecting, perhaps, the surrounding harbor and the nautical setting of Salamis. In classical usage, it also meant the servant who attended men-at-arms, carrying baggage and shields. Such persons are vital to the ministry of the kingdom, and without them, those who are "front and center" would be greatly hampered in their work. In many ways, he served like the Seven in Jerusalem, lifting the weight of details so that the Twelve might be free for the ministry of the word. However, as in the case of the Seven, John Mark's future would not be limited to such service, as he eventually became the writer of the first published Gospel which bears his name (see also 12:12, 25; Colossians 4:10). He likely took good notes and would become a rich source of information for Luke in writing *Acts*.

At the western rim of Cyprus was Paphos, a coastal town and the provincial capital. From either Syria or Phoenicia, Paphos was introduced to the goddess Aphrodite whose religion and temple dominated since the 8th

⁴ The mythical founder of Salamis is Teucer, son of Telamon who could not return home after the Trojan war because he had failed to avenge his brother Aias. The earliest archaeological finds go back to the 11th century (Late Bronze Age III). Children's burials in Canaanite jars indicate a Phoenician presence. A harbour and a cemetery from this period have been excavated. The town is mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions as one of the kingdoms of Ia'. The first coins were minted in the 6th century, following Persian prototypes. In 450 BC Salamis was the site of a simultaneous land and sea battle between Athens and the Persians.

century B.C.E. The ruins of her temple are still visible. Legend proclaimed that the goddess herself "rose from the sea." Also visible are remains of the governor's palace, dating from the days Saul and Barnabas made their visit sometime around 45 C.E. Thanks to the Romans an efficient network of roads connected all the major towns and cities.

No doubt wanting to speak in a Jewish synagogue, Saul and Barnabas encounter yet another anomaly of Judaism in the diaspora: "a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet." Luke uses the words *magos* and *pseudoprophētēs* without the intervening "and" to connect them. Stringing these nouns together he tells us that they found a certain man: "a Jewish magician false prophet." He was called *Bariēsous*, that is, "son of Yeshua" — "Jesus" in the Greek transliteration. Nothing is made of this seeming imitation of Jesus' name or that this man intentionally adopted it knowing its more recent notoriety in Israel. After all, this man has an important patron: the Roman proconsul! Painfully, no doubt, for Saul and Barnabas (who himself was from Cyprus, Acts 4:36), the thought of having Judaism represented outside of national Israel by such a man was odious in the least. The idea of "magicians" holding sway over countless souls in a quasi-religious climate is nothing new to Luke's account. In Acts 8:9ff he told the story of Simon the *Magos* who transfixed his Samaritan audience and had them nearly believing he was the promised *Taheb*. However, in the case of Barjesus, the offence against God becomes greater, since all forms of magic and false prophecy provoked strong censure in the *Torah* (see Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 13:1ff; 18:11; 20-22) and elsewhere throughout Scripture (Lamentations 2:14; Ezekiel 13:9; 22:28; Matthew 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; Luke 6:26; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1; Revelation 16:13; 19:20; 20:10). As some of these texts indicate, Jesus warned about the coming of such persons, and the apostles wrote about "many false prophets" who "have gone out into the world."

In the case of Barjesus, he had attached himself to a prominent Roman official, Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus seated at Paphos. Considering the enormous popularity of Aphrodite in this city, it's impressive that Barjesus acquired this connection. Magic, then and now, is based on illusion and deception. While we might accept it as a form of entertainment, the ancients put far more stock in its practitioners. From the available ancient literary sources, we have solid evidence that other rulers "kept" such persons within their royal retinue: Caesar Tiberius had Thrasyllus (Suetonius, *Tiberius* 14.4; also, others Juvenal, *Satires* 10.93-94); Nero consulted Babillus (Suetonius, *Nero* 36.1); Otho listened to Seleucus (Suetonius, *Otho* 4.1; 6.1); Domitian listened to Ascleterion (Suetonius, *Domitian*, 15.3) — to name a few examples from among the Emperors. Mary Todd Lincoln and Nancy Reagan weren't alone! Perhaps the sheer weight of responsibility and the horrific daily decisions faced by the ruler made them vulnerable to men like Barjesus. Sadly, as a Jew, this charlatan could have offered his Gentile patron so much more, but opted for opportunism and the benefits of ingratiating a person of power and influence.

As to Sergius Paulus himself, we actually receive a more favorable impression from Luke. Though partnered with this spiritual counterfeit, he nonetheless had an open spirit to what Saul and Barnabas had to say, and sent for them. Why? We are told, "he wanted to hear the word of God." Not even the false wisdom of Barjesus could forever fetter the will of a man who wanted more — whose heart had been prepared by God for a better word than the incantations of a lapsed Hebrew. The text calls Sergius Paulus "an intelligent man," from the Greek word *sunetos* which refers to the "capacity for understanding" (Louw-Nida, 32.27). The classical meaning also suggests "prudence" and "wisdom." The proconsul had a wider field of spiritual vision than could be satisfied by the machinations of Barjesus.

But the false prophet would not go down without a fight. Luke calls him "Elymas the *magos*" in 13:7 with the explanatory note that "Elymas" translates in Aramaic the actual meaning of *magos*. Hebrew scholar Delitzsch suggests the form *'elîmāh*, "powerful," as the likely root. The writer probably is drawing attention to the underlying *power struggle* taking place between the new arrivals and the favored magician. Missionaries often report such *power conflicts* in their initial work among people groups where the dominant power adheres to a central shaman figure whose bag of tricks keeps the populace within his orbit. If the preachers of the Gospel can overturn the power figure's strategies, they can find an opening for their message. Throughout the book of

Acts we have noted how "signs and wonders" often accompanied the proclamation of the word. Elymas-Barjesus mounts his own power defence by trying "to turn the proconsul from the faith." The likely meaning of "faith" in this context is the "act of putting trust in" the message Saul and Barnabas preached, rather than in a body of doctrinal truth.

When the apostles finally mount their offensive, it is Saul who speaks on behalf of the Gospel. At this juncture Luke announces that Saul "is also called Paul" (13:9), and the famous change in name *use* appears in the account. As we noted in previous studies, Saul did not change his name to Paul, nor was his conversion (Acts 9) the occasion for such a transformation. Rather, as Saulus Paulus, like Sergius Paulus, he had a pronomen and a nomen — we would say first name and family name. Did Sergius discuss such similarity in nomen with Saul? Such seemingly coincidental trivia often make friendships.

More important than this change in name usage is Luke's statement that Saul a.k.a. Paul was "filled with the Holy Spirit," yet another reminder that "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). Furthermore, the battle Paul would engage with Elymas went beyond human power tactics. To follow the words of the prophet Zechariah, "Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). It was the "word of God" which attracted the proconsul to Paul's message; it will be the word of God which confronts the false prophet. What ensues is not a polite dialogue or an attempt to build bridges between pagan magic or prophecy and the Gospel message. What we hear is the clear, concise and courageous word, spoken without compromise:

You are a child of the devil and an enemy of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun (13:10-11a).

Several key words structure this oracle of Paul spoken like a prophet against Elymas:

1. **Devil.** Greek: *diabolos*, literally, one who "throws" himself against or toward another. Used of the supreme leader of evil in God's cosmos: Satan, Lucifer-fallen, Serpent, Abaddon (see Matthew 4:1-11; 13:39; 25:41; Luke 4:2-13; 8:12; John 6:70; 8:44; 13:2; Acts 10:38; Ephesians 4:27; 6:11; 1 Timothy 3:6-7, 11; 2 Timothy 2:26; 3:3; Titus 2:3; Hebrews 2:14; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 3:8, 10; Jude 1:9; Revelation 2:10; 12:9, 12; 20:2, 10). Ironically, Jesus had once compared the upstanding Jewish leadership to "your father the devil." Elymas Barjesus, in his opposition to the Gospel, showed himself to be the *huios tou diabolou*, "son of the opposer."
2. **Enemy.** Greek: *echthros*, "enemy" with the nuance of "hostility" and "hatred." Not only does Elymas emulate Satan in his opposition to the Gospel, he does it because he is utterly at war with the purposes of God. This is reminiscent of Genesis 3:15 where "enmity" persists between the "seed of the Serpent" and the "seed of the woman," a typological way of saying that the devil's children wage war against God's children until finally the Messiah comes who will crush the head of the serpent. Elymas is called "enemy of all righteousness," which is to say that he is hostile to anything intended to "make things right." Instead he prefers to keep things uneven, unjust, and chaotic since such contrived realities facilitate his magical craft. In this, he has many accomplices in the world who can't stand resolving conflict, but prefer keeping things in turmoil. "Righteousness" (Greek: *dikaiosunē*; Hebrew: *tzadîq*) is the great achievement of Jesus. Through his cross and resurrection, he provided the basis for "putting the world to rights" and back into relationship with God. Elymas, son of the devil, is the enemy of such an achievement and tries to prevent the proclamation of the Good News by Paul and Barnabas. That Good News is the Gospel, the royal proclamation that Jesus is Israel's Messiah and Lord of the world. To Elymas' great consternation, if Jesus is Lord then he, Elymas, is not!
3. **Deceit.** Greek: *dolos*, "treachery, deceit." Matthew 26:4 uses this word to describe how the Jewish leadership were finally able to arrest Jesus. Passages like Romans 3:13 use the word in connection with deceit through *words*. Since Elymas was a *magos*, he dealt in deception as part of his magical arts. Satan relies on "power, false signs and wonders" for the purpose of misleading people (2 Thessalonians

2:9). Humanity at the beginning fell prey to the deceit of the devil (2 Corinthians 11:3). Can we forget the words of Eve to God in her own defence: "The serpent deceived me and I ate"? Satan transforms himself into an "angel of light" even though he is the devil of darkness, and "his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). He is "the deceiver of the whole world" (Revelation 12:9). "Deceivers have gone out into the world" (2 John 1:7), and among them "the false prophet" who "deceives those who dwell on earth..." (Revelation 13:14). However, a day is coming when such deception will end (Revelation 19:3; 20:3, 8, 10).

4. **Villainy.** Greek: *hradiourgia*, "unscrupulous, lacking principle." This is a compound word which combines *ourgia*, pertaining to "work" or "doing" and *hradios* which means "easy, light, complaisant, reckless." Together, these components produce the idea of actions which are done lightly and not taken seriously. For Elymas, nothing is as it seems, and nothing is serious in itself. He is the quintessential *Big Easy*⁵ for whom life is nothing but a game, and he intends to win at all costs, without scruple and without consequences.
5. **Perverting.** Greek: *diastrephō*, "to cause someone to believe something that is quite different" (Louw-Nida, 31.71). If anyone had radically changed his own mind, it was Elymas Barjesus, born a Jew with all of its privileges and honor, one of God's chosen people, and conversant in the Torah. But, like Esau of old, he bargained away his birthright for a bowl of stew. In the words of Paul written elsewhere, he was like those who "exchanged the truth of God for a lie" (Romans 1:25), a bad bargain indeed! How radically different from Joseph, whose integrity and wisdom earned him a place at the side of the Pharaoh of Egypt! What a contrast to Daniel who stood in the palaces of Babylonian and Persian kings alike and counseled them on weighty matters of international importance while keeping his holiness before God! Elymas had a golden opportunity as a Jew in a strange land to be Israel's light to the nations, and he traded it away for selfish ambition in the interest of God's archenemy. Sergius Paulus would need to wait for Paul and Barnabas if he wanted to "get it right."

Paul followed closely the ancient practice of bringing a *covenant lawsuit* against Elymas. The bill of particulars has been read, and the charges made clear. In Acts 13:11, Paul announces the sanctions (judgments) which will be brought against Elymas for violating God's holy covenant. Familiar forensic language appears: "the hand of the Lord is against you." Other instances of the Hebrew *yad Yahweh* ("hand of Yahweh") with the preposition "against" appear in the Old Testament: 1) Egypt (Exodus 7:5; Ezekiel 30:22); Israel (Deuteronomy 2:15; Judges 2:15; Isaiah 5:25; Jeremiah 6:12;); Philistines (1 Samuel 5:6-9; 7:13; Ezekiel 25:16); David (1 Chronicles 21:17); Babylon (Jeremiah 51:15); Edom (Ezekiel 25:13); the leaders ("shepherds") of God's people (Ezekiel 34:10). In this case, Luke uses *cheir kuriou epi se* to express the same idea. The "hand" of the Lord has both a saving and a judging connotation in Scripture, and these are two primary actions of His covenant. Elymas broke covenant with Yahweh by his outrageous decision to become a *magos* and false prophet, *peddling his wares* to the Roman proconsul rather than *proclaiming the word of God*.

The form of the covenant sanction against Elymas was blindness *for a time* (*achri kairou*), and the sanction fell immediately in confirmation of Paul's word of judgment. The specific judgment brings a certain irony to the text: Saul himself was struck blind on the road to Damascus — the event which began his incredible journey to becoming an apostle. Perhaps Paul knew precisely what Elymas needed, *for a time*. The Greek phrase (cited above) uses one of the two words normally applied to *time*, and this one emphasizes the qualitative aspect, much like our "season." The words "groped around" and the reference to needing someone "to lead him by the hand" (13:11b) compare with similar terminology found in Acts 9:7-9 where Saul's own blindness was described. Did Paul see his old self somehow in the life of Elymas? Saul had been zealous for Torah, but completely misguided in his attack on the Christ followers. Elymas had been in complete violation of Torah,

⁵ The movie by that name concerns a good cop, who has *allowed his principles to be compromised once too often*, and has it catch up with him amid allegations of internal corruption and what appears to be an impending war between the criminal elements of New Orleans, in 'The Big Easy,' directed by Jim McBride. Dennis Quaid stars as Remy McSwain, an eleven year veteran of the New Orleans Police Department, who from the day he joined the force learned that the 'perks' that went along with the job were all just a natural, acceptable part of the way things are done in the city they call "The Big Easy."

and quite opposed to the message the Gospel. Both men were sinners, under God's judgment and in need of His salvation. Blindness was a suitable way to "turn out the lights" on the old day, awaiting new light when another day dawned — the day of the Gospel. Did Elymas respond? We are not told.

Although the story does not recount how this all turned out for Elymas, it allows for repentance in much the same way Simon Magus was granted that opportunity in Acts 8. But of greater importance to Luke is to inform us about the impact on the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, who *believed* (from *pisteuō*, in the aorist form), after witnessing what happened to Elymas and who was *amazed* (from *ekplēssomai*, in the present form) at the teaching about the Lord (13:12). His faith was immediate and decisive, whereas his amazement at the teaching was ongoing and persistent.

The achievements of the Cyprus mission were impressive, particularly in gaining a hearing with the Roman official. To what do we attribute the decision to choose Cyprus and how would Paul and Barnabas have known the best places to begin their work? The answer lies earlier in Acts 4:36 and in the person of Barnabas himself who was "a native of Cyprus" according to that passage. He would have known his own landscape and how to work with Paul in mapping an effective urban strategy. A mark of early Christian missionary work was its concentration on significant urban centers where a cross-section of people groups could be found. Nor did the Christian missionaries shy away from the seats of power, knowing how social influence flowed from such centers to those around them.⁶ In time, Paul would acquire a growing desire to go "to Rome also" (Acts 19:21; 23:11; Romans 1:15), the very center of power in the Empire. He consistently tried to keep himself free of real offence against the Empire, so as to have a free path to proclaiming the Gospel to its rulers (see Acts 25:8, 10-13, 21; 26:32; 27:24; 28:19). In his letter to the Philippians, he makes explicit mention of his companions as belonging to "Caesar's household" (Philippians 4:22).

Mission: Antioch in Pisidia (13:13-52)

Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem, 14 but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. 15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." 16 So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen. 17 The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. 18 And for about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. 19 And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance. 20 All this took about 450 years. And after that he gave them judges until Samuel the prophet. 21 Then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years. 22 And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.' 23 Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised. 24 Before his coming, John had proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 And as John was finishing his course, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but behold, after me one is coming, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.' 26 "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. 27 For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. 28 And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. 29 And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead, 31 and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. 32 And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, 33 this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "' You are my Son, today I have begotten you.' 34 And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, "' I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' 35 Therefore he says also in another psalm, "' You will not let your Holy One see corruption.' 36 For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, 37 but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. 38 Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from

⁶ Read Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods*, (Intervarsity, 2008); W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale, 1983), pp. 51-73; J. E. Stambaugh and D. L. Balch, *The New Testament in its Social Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), pp. 110-116.

everything 39 from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. 40 Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: 41 "Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you." 42 As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. 43 And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God. 44 The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. 46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 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." 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Arriving and Listening (Acts 13:13-15)

Ordinarily, the journey from Paphos to Antioch in Pisidia via Perga in the province-territory of Pamphylia was long and arduous.⁷ The sail from Paphos to Perga was less than 150 miles across the sea or bay of Pamphylia. Perga was the chief city of Pamphylia, located on the river Cestrus, some seven miles from its mouth. Paul and Barnabas likely sailed up this river and docked near the temple of Diana. They had now entered the interior of Asia Minor, a region of "plains mountains" rising between 3,000-6,000 feet above sea level, surrounded by snowy peaks. Residents escaped the extreme heat of the lowlands in the summer by retreating to these highlands. Their ascent threaded through narrow passes, overhung by cliffs and shadowed by hidden recesses, the common haunts of marauders and robbers. In his later letters, Paul would write about "perils of waters and perils of robbers" (2 Corinthians 11:26), a fitting way of describing the highland terrain of Asia Minor. The port of Perga, through which they passed, gave easy access to the districts of Pisidia and Lycaonia, beyond the Taurus mountain range, and where there were many Jewish synagogues. Once beyond this chain, they had passed beyond the limits of Semitic civilization and squarely into the Greco-Roman.

However, Luke races through this part of his account, pausing just long enough to record the defection of John Mark (13:13), a matter which will rear its head later in the book of *Acts* (15:37-40). The proconsul, Sergius Paulus, probably came from Pisidia in central Asia Minor, from another city named Antioch, where according to recent scholarship his family owned large amounts of land. It was to this city that Barnabas and Paul would travel next. Did the proconsul suggest that they go to his home region to deliver their message to his family? After all, his relatives could have given help and support and contacts in the Roman colony. It seems a good enough reason for Paul and his party to have sailed from Paphos to Perga on what is today the southern Turkish coast. With their helper gone, the men began the difficult journey from Perga across the challenging Taurus Mountains to Antioch, about 3,600 feet above sea level. For much of the time since its founding around 280 B.C.E. by Seleucus Nicator, Jews had lived there. It was a Roman administrative center in the province of Galatia, which had been named a Roman province in 25 B.C.E. by the emperor Augustus. By Paul's time, some of the inhabitants were descendants of Roman veterans who had been allowed to retire there. It was a city under significant construction—so much so that its magnificence was said by some to resemble that of Rome. The letter to the Galatians was, according to the "Southern Galatian" theory, written to the churches planted by Paul and Barnabas in this region.

When Paul and Barnabas arrived in the city, Luke tells us that they "went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day" (Acts 13:14). The leaders of the congregation asked the Jewish visitors to speak to the people. Once again the synagogue community to whom Paul spoke was both Jewish and Gentile. Recall that many in the Roman Empire were impressed with Judaism, which was regarded as a very old religion—perhaps even the primary

⁷ Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and Its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology*, JNTSup 110 (Sheffield, 1995), p. 148.

religion. Many adopted the Hebrew God, Yahweh, and Judaism was granted special religious liberties in some parts of the empire—including freedom to worship on the Sabbath. So it would not have been so strange to find non-Jewish Romans in synagogues outside Judea. This explains why Paul addressed the audience in Antioch as “sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God [the Gentile *phobomoumenoi*]” (verse 26). Here is a clear indication that Paul was speaking to two distinct groups—some of the same kinds of people that formed the Church in other parts of the *diaspora*. His discourse about the history of ancient Israel and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was so effective that some Jews and proselytes and/or God-fearers joined with him. Others asked that the same message be given to them the next Sabbath, when we are told that “almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” (13:44).

A few remarks about synagogue Sabbath services. Usually they consisted of 1) the *Shema* ("Hear, O Israel..."); 2) prayer; 3) reading of Torah and Haftorah; 4) a sermon (see Philo, *de spec. leg.* ii.62; Rabbinic writings: *Mishnah Berakhot* 1:4; 4:3; 3:5; 1:2). Luke himself gives us a glimpse of the typical pattern in his Gospel where Jesus begins his public ministry:

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²² And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" ²³ And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." ²⁴ And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. ²⁵ But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, ²⁶ and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹ And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, he went away. ³¹ And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, ³² and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority (Luke 4:16-32).

The Hebrew Bible was read by selected males from the synagogue who were called up to take the appropriate scroll for their assigned reading. Torah and Haftorah (or Prophets, *Nebiim*) supplied the texts. Torah readings usual preceded Haftorah ones. Several of each would be read according to the annual *Parasha* which consisted of fifty-four Torah sections and correlated sections from the Prophets. In the case of Jesus, he was, on this occasion, assigned a reading from the Prophets, namely, Isaiah 61. Following his reading, the man would make comments, perhaps drawn from the wise saying of the Rabbis. Jesus follows this pattern but in an unexpected and provocative fashion. His "gracious words" (4:22) give way very soon to strident prophetic ones, in which he cites stories from the earlier prophets, in keeping with the *targum* method of interpreting one Scripture through stories told in another. However, his application is so pointed that his audience nearly kills him.

In the case of Paul and Barnabas, we are not told explicitly what Scriptures were read, but we are told that certain passages from the Torah and Prophets had already been read while the two attended service. However, when the leaders of the synagogue asked their visitors to address the congregation, it was assumed they would speak about the readings for the day. Judging from Paul's remarks, those texts might have come from *Deuteronomy*, as well as from *Joshua*, *Judges* and *Samuel*. When Paul began to develop his Gospel themes — those concerning Jesus — he drew from the *Psalms* (*Tehelim*), *Isaiah* and *Habakkuk* in support of his explanations. Were these part of the original *Parashot* (Scripture "portions" for *Shabbat*), or rather did Paul expand his interpretation by reference to them? One thing we do know: the rabbis frowned on the use of

portions from the Writings (*Kethubim*), the third section of the Hebrew Bible, on the Sabbath day,⁸ and the *Psalms* belonged to that third division. This suggests innovation on the part of Paul, and may reveal his desire to enlarge the perspective of his audience beyond the limits of traditional liturgy. That said, we must marvel that Paul arrives in Antioch-Pisidia for a Sabbath service, listens to the assigned readings, and then proceeds to preach the Gospel based on *whatever texts* had been read! This is possible because "in all the [Hebrew] Scriptures, Torah, Prophets and Psalms" Jesus can be found. Luke records Jesus' own words to this effect in his own Gospel (Luke 24:27, 44). We must bear in mind that when the early Christian missionaries preached the word of God, it was the Old Testament which they used, interpreted by the Holy Spirit as fulfilled in Jesus, Israel's Messiah and Lord of the world.

After the "reading" (Greek: *anagnōsis*, usually, "public reading" in such contexts), the synagogue rulers invited Paul and Barnabas to give "a message of encouragement." Literally, the Greek says "If some word (*logos*) is in you of encouragement toward the people, speak!" "Encouragement" translates *paraklēsis*, a noun related to the verb *parakaleō* which is applied to the work of the Holy Spirit by Jesus himself. Luke uses it in his Gospel where it refers to "the [coming] consolation of Israel" — positive (2:25) and the present reward of the rich — negative (6:24). In *Acts* it is used to explain the meaning of Barnabas' name — "son of encouragement" (4:36), what the Holy Spirit brings to the persecuted church (9:31), and the report of the apostles to the Jerusalem council (15:31). Paul, in his letters, employs the term in referring to certain spiritual gifts or ministries involving "exhortation" (Romans 12:8; 1 Corinthians 14:3). A meaning closer to the one we are studying comes from 1 Timothy 4:13 where Paul writes to the young preacher, "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching." "Scripture" in this context means the Old Testament, that is, the Hebrew Bible. Similarly, in *Romans* Paul comments: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (15:4). From a Jewish perspective, Scriptures were the bearers of *paraklēsis*.

In a time when copies of Scripture were scarce, the people in the *diaspora* look forward to the synagogue services where they could hear the word of God read publicly. Theirs was largely an oral culture and such shared public readings were primary sources of information. On the day Paul and Barnabas attended synagogue, a fresh word would greet the congregants.

Paul's Sermon (13:16-41)

A number of important features appear in Paul's sermon and contribute to the development of apostolic preaching in the early church. Among them are:

1. The *logos paraklēseōs* (13:17-22). That is the "word of exhortation.
2. The *logion* of John the Baptizer (13:24-25). Such *logia* were examples of "sayings" material preserved as the earliest traditions about Jesus.
3. The *kerygma* or *logos tēs sōtērias* (13:26b-31a). The "preaching" or "word of salvation."
4. The Jerusalem *martyrion* (13:31b). The witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus, events which happened in Jerusalem.
5. The *tekmēria* from Scripture (13:33-37). These are the arguments drawn from the Hebrew Bible which support the claims of Jesus' coming and his work.
6. The *didachē* of the apostles (13:38-39). The "teachings of the Twelve" (see Acts 2:42).
7. The eschatological *parainesis* (13:40-41). The ethical code of conduct Christians must follow in light of the second coming of Jesus to judge the world.

These seven elements appear with regularity in the preaching of the early church. In addition, we see the common practice of incorporating segments of Israel's narrative history. Paul, in 13:17-22, reminds his audience of what they already know about God's choice of His people in the persons of Abraham, Isaac and

⁸ *Eighteen Treatises from the Mishna*, by D. A. Sola and M. J. Raphall, (1843). 15.1 All the books of the Bible [except the Pentateuch] are here designated: those read on the Sabbath are the Prophets; those not read, the Kethubim (Hagiographa).

Jacob (13:17). This "election" of the holy people takes the form of the covenant, marked by grace and promise which binds the believing individuals to Yahweh, their God, and offers them the assurance of deliverance when they find themselves as slaves in Egypt. This choice depends on God and not on them, although they will ratify the covenant through faith in God's promises and express that faith through the ritual of circumcision ("the sign of the covenant") and obedience to the other covenant requirements.

Since Paul made his remarks in a *diaspora* setting where Greek literary forms were recognized, his sermon took shape as a fine piece of *rhetoric* using the common sections. Following Witherington's suggestion⁹, we offer this outline:

1. *Exordium* or proem (13:16): This functions as the introduction and initial connection with his audience.
2. *Narratio* (13:17-25). Contains historical information relevant to the theme of the sermon.
3. *Propositio* (13:26). The main thrust or thesis of the sermon.
4. *Probatio* (13:27-37). Arguments, largely from additional Scriptures, for the thesis.
5. *Peroratio* (13:38-41). Final appeal or exhortation, as Paul uses the phrase "to you" (13:38) to personalize this message.

Exordium (13:16)

The main purpose of this verse is to invite an audience of both observant Jews and God-fearing Gentiles to "listen" to Paul's message. The force of the Greek *akousate*, an imperative aorist from *akouō*, is likely to carry the idea found in the Hebrew Bible when a prophet would address Israel with an important word from God (see Isaiah 41:1; 46:3, 12; et. al.) It may also imitate the familiar *Shema* with which the synagogue service began: "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God is One" (from Deuteronomy 6:4). The combination of "men of Israel" with "Gentiles who worship God" bristles with recent developments in *Acts* where Gentiles have been invited to join with Jews as part of the renewed people of God. The very fact that Paul speaks *one message* for both is crucial. Within the synagogue, Gentiles were welcome in their limited role as "God-fearers," but still lacked full entitlement since they lacked all the ritual elements for membership in the covenant community. Paul recognizes no such distinctions in his address: both groups are invited to "listen." It's as if the *Shema* had been expanded: "Hear, O Israel *and you Gentiles who fear God....*"

Narratio (13:17-25)

One mark of early apostolic preaching — exemplified by Paul's sermon — was the telling of Israel's old, old story, reaching back to its election by God. We see this pattern in Stephen's lengthy speech to the Sanhedrin, and similar elements were scattered throughout Peter's various speeches. In the mind of Paul (and the others), there is a single, unbroken narrative of God's people which began with the call of Abraham. The Christian preachers made every effort to connect that ancient narrative to the more recent one, namely, the arrival of Jesus the Messiah who fulfilled the promises of the earlier narrative and also poured fresh reality into its types and symbols.

When he tells about the Exodus from Egypt, Paul reminds his audience that "with mighty power" (literally, "uplifted arm")¹⁰ God led them out of that country, though he does not once mention Moses by name as Yahweh's mediator of the covenant deliverance. What happens to Israel during the forty years in the desert is something which *matters deeply to God*. The Greek word *trophoreō*, translated as "put up with," may not be the original reading of 13:18 where a variant *trophoreō* fits better how God "cared for," not "endured," his people in the wilderness. This is affirmed in Deuteronomy 1:31 (the likely background passage). Further, Paul continues, it is not Joshua who overthrows the "seven nations" in Canaan and gave Israel their land, but God Himself. The notable absence of names (Abraham, Moses or Joshua) from Paul's earliest historical survey of Israelite history strongly suggests that he wanted to shift the focus away from the celebrity status of Israel's "founders" and place the honor on God alone. He also reminds his synagogue listeners that the events he

⁹ Witherington, *Acts*, p. 407.

¹⁰ See Exodus 6:1, 6; 32:11; Deuteronomy 3:24; 4:34, and elsewhere, for this meaning.

describes in 13:17-20a required some 450 years to unfold.¹¹ Why this numerical observation? If Egyptian slavery lasted 400 years, wilderness sojourn 40 years, and the conquest 10 years, we then reach the 450 years calculated by Paul.

The transitional word in 13:20b is "after this" (*meta tauta*) when the first major chronological break occurs in the telling of the ancient narrative. So then, Paul sees the election of Israel, the Exodus, the wilderness, the occupation of Canaan — these events — as forming a single movement in God's grand story. Effectively, it's the story told in Torah and Joshua. This is followed by Judges, Samuel the Prophet, Saul the King (40 years) and finally David the king, "a man after God's own heart who does everything I want him to do" (13:20b-22). Paul's use of numbers is interesting. Does he intend the reader to connect the 40 years in the wilderness — a time of testing and refinement — with the reign of Saul, a period with similar features? A long period — 450 years — separates the beginning of the narrative from this second major movement which climaxes with David.

At this point in the *narratio*, a quantum leap takes place, as Paul presses on to the more recent developments of Israel's story. In so doing, Paul ignores the kings who ruled after David, as well as the Exile and return. The goal of the ancient story was to bring Israel to David's reign because finally God had found the man for the job of being His king — the man who "will do everything I want him to do." This seemingly unblemished account of David's character leaves out a great deal, of course, including the sin with Bathsheba and the census taking — which brought David under covenant indictment and judgment. However, David's response was repentance and a willingness to be punished for his sins — qualities consistent with Paul's accolades in 13:22 and found in various Old Testament texts (see Psalm 89:20; 1 Samuel 13:14; 16:1; and Isaiah 44:28). The idea that God "found" such a person comes from Psalm 89:20 where the Hebrew word *matza'* actually shifts the emphasis to "something sought and then found," rather than simply "coming across something unexpectedly." Yahweh was looking for the right person to rule Israel, and directed Samuel His prophet to find such a man among the sons of Jesse, guiding each step of that process until David was *found*.

We should also note that before David became king, Saul needed to be "removed," as Paul reminds the audience. Anyone hearing this part of the story would recall the warning God issued through Samuel when Israel tried to dictate what sort of king they wanted (1 Samuel 8:18). That warning proved warranted *and fatal*, as Saul's life fell into madness and sin. Hosea, writing some years later, recited the words of God: "I gave you a king in my anger, and I took him away in my wrath" (Hosea 13:11). A further thought: did Paul see himself in his ancient namesake, Saul? Was not Saul of Tarsus a man who needed to be "removed" so that a reborn Christ follower, willing to do what God wanted" could take his place? Did not God take away Saul's heart of stone and give him a heart of flesh as a result of their meeting on the Damascus road? Something to ponder.

With equal care, Paul goes on to explain, "God brought to Israel from David's descendents, the Savior Jesus, as he promised" (13:23). As with David, so with Jesus: God took the initiative and gave to Israel, not the Savior *they wanted*, but the one *they needed*. Like his forefather David, Jesus came to do the will of his Father: "Not my will, yours be done," he prayed in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). Or, as the writer of *Hebrews* reminded his readers about Jesus' own mission, "I have come to do your will, O God..." (Hebrews 10:7-9).

"As he promised" is an essential element in the sermon, for it reveals what the apostles believed about the Hebrew Bible: that it contained predictions, types, promises and foreshadowings which all found their fulfillment in Jesus. And, once this fulfillment took place, a new order was launched in the world, one in which both Jew and Gentile would share together in the promises God made to His ancient people.

¹¹ Scholars have squabbled over the accuracy of the 450 years when derived from the various time periods of Judges and 1 Samuel. Eugene H. Merrill makes a contribution to this discussion in his "Paul's Use of 'about 450 years' in Acts 13:20," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 138 no 551 JI-S 1981, p. 246-257.

Paul's last main historical point (13:24-25) has to do with John the Baptizer. As the prophet who precedes Jesus and prepared the way for his coming, John functioned in much the same way as did Samuel for David. The point is made that John preached "repentance" (*metanoia*) through both his words and the symbol of water baptism. Repentance meant "agenda change" and a turning toward God. This had been the prediction of Israel's last "writing prophet," Malachi (see Malachi 3:1ff), whose words brought to an end the ministry of prophecy *until the appearance of John the Baptizer*. Without putting too fine a point on it, we are looking at another 450 years passing between the Malachi prophecy and the appearance of John and Jesus. Did Paul intend that his audience make this connection? More importantly, Paul wants to stress that John himself denied being the Messiah (see Luke 3:16-17 and John 1:19-27 in this connection). Why was this important for Paul's audience to know? Apparently, many *diaspora* Jews had known John from previous visits to Jerusalem and its environs, but then returned to their homes in places like Antioch-Pisidia without ever hearing *the rest of the story*. Some good examples of this appear later in *Acts*: 1) the case of Apollos (18:24-25); 2) the Ephesian followers of John (19:1-4). We might go so far as to suggest the existence of a "John the Baptist Sect" within Judaism. Consequentially, one need of the apostolic message was to make certain that such persons heard *the whole story* and what part John played as the way-preparer for Jesus, but not as the Messiah.

Propositio (13:26)

We come now to the major thrust of Paul's synagogue sermon. In a single all-embracing statement, Paul focuses the Gospel on his audience with these words of address:

1. Brothers
2. Children of Abraham
3. God-fearing Gentiles

I suggest a chiasmus in this phrasing which places "children of Abraham" at the center of the symmetry. Both Israel and the Gentiles are intended by the phrase "children of Abraham," and Paul makes it eminently clear that "this message of salvation" has been sent to all of "us." Later, in his letters, Paul will lay stress on the significance of Abraham's children, and how they include not only natural Israelites but also Gentiles who share the faith of Abraham (see Galatians 3:1-14). Already, at this early stage of his preaching, Paul has this union of both groups firmly in his grasp. Notice how the pronouns shift from "you" to "us."

The phrase "this message of salvation" comes from the Greek words *logos* and *sōteria*; the "word" of "deliverance" by God. Jesus is "the Savior" in 13:23, and when he comes, *salvation comes also*. The language of "salvation" is Exodus language, and reminds the audience that God once delivered His people from Egyptian slavery, but now, in Jesus comes to deliver them once more. To Jews living in the *diaspora*, this was very good news, since their isolation from land, Temple and holy city carried its own sign of exile. To Gentiles who, although belonging to those who "feared God," yet lacked full partnership among God's people, this message meant deliverance from this *segregation* within the community. Or, as Paul would later write, Gentiles are no longer "aliens" but "fellow citizens" (Ephesians 2:19). This, then, is at the heart of the "word" which God has sent into the world, announced by the preaching of Paul.

Probatio (13:27-37)

Until this point in his sermon, Paul has confined himself to telling Israel's ancient narrative and bringing it to a climax with the arrival of Jesus and with the wonderful announcement that salvation has come to both Jew and Gentile. However, for the next few verses, Paul adopts an argumentative mode, for he must confront a number of unpleasant realities within the life of Israel, and also, he must explain how Jesus has fulfilled the promises made by the Scriptures. We treat these here in brief form.

1. In 13:27-31, Paul relates how Israel's leadership in Jerusalem conspired with the Roman procurator, Pilate, to put Jesus to death. He makes the point that the arrest, trial and sentence lacked "proper ground" (Greek: *aitia*, used in its technical legal sense). Justice was miscarried by those who killed Jesus, Paul is saying. However, this was no accident of history, since 1) the prophets' words heard every Sabbath predicted this *would happen* and their words were fulfilled in what *did happen* (13:27b). 2) God raised him from the dead

- (13:30), His vindication of Jesus, and, by implication, condemnation of what Israel's leaders did. 3) Witnesses, who knew him before he died, saw him alive afterwards (13:31). That's the bad news which turned into Good News!
2. Then, in 13:32-37, Paul mounts a Scriptural argument, showing how the Psalms and the prophet Isaiah, foreshadowed the resurrection of Jesus following his death. "What God promised our fathers..." Paul begins in 13:32, "he has fulfilled for us their children." And the way God did this was by raising up Jesus. The declaration that Jesus is God's Son was already present in Psalm 2:7, although many always thought that passage pertained to David, the one God raised up to be "king." But the "holy and sure promises" made to David, were not fulfilled in David, Paul argues by citing Isaiah 55:3, but to the Messiah, David's future descendent and God's Son (13:34). "The Holy One," mentioned in Psalm 16:10, refers, not to David, but to Jesus, since David's tomb remained in Israel as the firm reminder that he was still dead (13:35-36). If the Psalm did not refer to David, it must have predicted the coming of Jesus who *did rise from the dead and did not see corruption*, as the Psalm indicated.

One of the consistent marks of early apostolic preaching was the use of such Scriptural arguments to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and that the main events in the life of Jesus were foreshadowed by the Hebrew Bible long before they happened. Since Jewish people regularly heard these texts read in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, it would not require much coaxing for Paul to get his audience to *remember those texts* and see the connections he was making between them and Jesus. Similarly, the Gentile God-fearers would have been quite aware of Israel's grand narrative. As we have noted in previous studies, this special group of Gentiles had a fondness for the Scriptures of the Hebrew people, and loved to hear them read. With Paul's exposition of these ancient texts, even the Gentiles have good reason to be joyful: what they once merely admired they may now freely embrace — as intended for *them as well as for their Jewish friends*.

Peroratio (13:38-41)

We come to the final section of Paul's speech, following the rhetorical pattern. The *peroratio* was an opportunity for the speaker to do a number of things, not the least, to gather up the loose ends of his message, but, more importantly, to focus them on a strong and lasting appeal to the audience. I suppose we might call this the "altar call" or "invitation to respond."

Beginning this section is the word "therefore" (Greek: *oun*) which alerts us to this climatic push for *decision*. Paul has made his case and focused that case on *this audience*. He now addresses them fondly with the words, in Greek, *Andres adelphoi*, or literally, "men brothers." This comes closest to the idea of "dear family." Notice how all references to ethnic distinction are gone, and how Paul considers his whole audience, Jew and Gentile, as part of one family, dear to him. How far Saul of Tarsus has come from his fire-breathing days of opposing anything that would compromise the sharp boundaries between Judaism and the Gentile world!

"Let it be known to you" introduces his final appeal. We find similar language in Acts 4:10 and 28:28. In each case, it has the force of an "official announcement," and that once the audience hears it, *they are responsible for making a decision for or against it*. What is the essence of this official appeal? Several things get emphasized:

1. **Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.** Such an announcement had enormous implications. Among those who knew the Jewish Scriptures, "sins" had placed Israel in its present state of exile and subjugation. The "promised blessings" had failed to materialize for the current generation of Jewish people, and to the truly honest among the Jews, the cause was sin yet unforgiven. They saw themselves as living under God's judgment and they prayed for God to return once more to Zion and "take away their sins." Reading texts like 2 Chronicles 7:14 led many devout Jewish people to pray fervently for God's deliverance of His people *through the forgiveness of their sins*. When we read the early accounts announcing the birth of Jesus, we hear words like, "call his name 'Jesus,' for *he shall save his people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21). Nor would Paul's synagogue audience have failed to remember Daniel 9 in which the prophet prayed for this forgiveness (Daniel 9:19). If we read the entire 9th chapter, we come

across the great prophecy which announces the arrival of Messiah the Prince (9:25-26). His coming would, according to the prophecy, result in "putting an end to sin" (9:24). This forgiveness (Greek: *aphesis*, "cancellation, release") refers to more than just individual granting of pardon for sin, though it surely includes that. A whole people stood in need of God's forgiveness, and to this people, the Gospel now promises just such release and cancellation of sin's debt.

2. Second, **Through Jesus, everyone who believes is justified.** We can hardly miss the scope of this announcement: "everyone" (Greek: *pas*) who "believes" (Greek: *pisteuōn*, "trust," "believe" used in the present active participle). *Faith* means more than intellectual assent or acceptance of a body of truth. As Paul would later write in his letters, faith means "trusting" God's word and placing oneself wholly at His disposal. The ideas of "rely on" and "rest upon" regularly appear in the Hebrew roots for words pertaining to belief, trust or faith. What Paul calls upon his hearers to do is "believe the Good News" that God has, in fact, offered the forgiveness of sins through Jesus. It means believing that this Jesus is Israel's promised Messiah and Lord of the world.

The word "justified," from the Greek term *dikaioō* and its noun form *diakaiosunē*, "justification," is a bit trickier to define. Recently, Bishop N.T. Wright devoted several hundred pages to exploring the rich meaning of this idea. We can hardly summarize that research in such a small amount of space. However, the heart of its meaning is: *God's declaration, as Israel's Judge and the world's King, that persons are innocent before Him, based upon the work of Jesus Christ on the cross as vindicated by his resurrection from the dead.* Paul is telling his audience, using the language of the covenant (Jewish) and the law court (Roman), that God stands ready and willing to acquit them, thus allowing them to assume their *status* as fully participating members of His covenant community.

By contrast, there was something about "the law of Moses" which could not grant this acquittal to them. Whether as Jews or Gentiles, if they looked to this "other" legal remedy, they would not find acquittal, but a pronouncement of guilt instead. As Paul would later write, "the Law is good if a person uses it lawfully" (1 Timothy 1:8), but the Law largely serves to reveal the reality of sin without making the promise for its removal (Romans 7:12ff). To Gentiles, the Law threw up the obstacle of circumcision which many "God-fearers" would simply not accept, though they truly wanted to "know the God of Israel."

Then, as if to drive home the *seriousness of making a decision*, Paul makes his strongest appeal in 13:40-41. The operative words are "take care," based on the Greek word *blepete*, which might well be translated "Beware." Preceded by the word *oun*, "therefore," it places a *moral consequence* on everything Paul has said up to this point. What the audience decides *matters deeply* in the larger landscape of their lives. The quotation Paul uses at this juncture comes from Habakkuk 1:5, a passage written on the eve of serious judgment about to fall on the southern kingdom of Israel, the nation of Judah. As a matter of fact, God would bring similar judgment on Israel in Paul's generation, not many years distant, for Jerusalem would fall to the Romans and the Temple would be destroyed in 70 C.E. much as it had in 586 B.C.E. — the focus of Habakkuk's prophecy.

Deciding for or against the Gospel had *national* as well as *personal* consequences. The future of Israel rested with its acceptance of Paul's message. And the future of Israel as *the renewed people of God, including Gentiles within its ranks*, also rested with believing God's gracious offer of forgiveness through Jesus. The prophecy of Habakkuk stressed the problem of being a "scoffer" and of "never believing" what God would do. That was also the danger facing Israel and the Gentiles in Paul's day. The Gospel, as preached by the apostles, required faith — acceptance and trust — for its benefits to flow into the lives of those who heard it. Paul was a realist, for he had already heard God's word that he, Paul, would suffer much for the name of Jesus. That suffering would be inflicted by those who "scoffed" at the message he proclaimed. Would those in the synagogue scoff? To that we will now turn our attention.

Response to Paul's Sermon (13:42-43)

Initially, the reaction of Paul's audience is favorable. Jews and Gentiles-become-Jews alike prevail on Paul and Barnabas, and they "followed" them. To these, the two apostles offered encouragement "to continue in the grace of God." This seems to be a stock expression for *discipleship* and some form of instruction. The expression "continue in the faith" appears in Acts 14:22 with similar connotations (see also Colossians 1:23; 1 Timothy 2:15; 2 Timothy 3:14). At the very least, the phrase urges on the new believers that they take seriously the "grace" shown to them by God in the giving of His Son for their salvation and the forgiveness of their sins. Similar inducements appear in Hebrews 6, where the writer urges his readers to be diligent in the continuation of their Christian walk.

Jewish Opposition (13:44-52)

When the subsequent Sabbath arrives, the audience has grown considerably: "almost the whole city" gathers to hear "the word of the Lord." Luke is careful not to put the spotlight on Paul and Barnabas, but on the "word" instead. The appeal of these first encounters in the wider Roman world rested not with the messengers and their charismatic style. In his letters, Paul frequently referred to his own limitations as a public speaker, and that the effectiveness of his preaching lay not in the "wisdom of men" or "the eloquence of speech," but in the "power of God" (see 1 Corinthians 2:1-4). We must assume that a significant number of Gentiles were in this audience, and it's hard to imagine that the leaders of Antioch were absent! No crowd of such size could go unnoticed by the rulers of such an important city.

Opposition arises, however, from "the Jews," an expression which normally referred to *the leaders* of the Jewish people and not to the whole population as has been sometimes falsely assumed. Obviously a positive Jewish response led to the invitation to return the following Sabbath. What provoked the opposition was, oddly enough, not the message as much as the overwhelming response to the message. The real animosity arose over *jealousy* (13:45). This is *not* a new theme in the ministry of Jesus and his followers! In Acts 5:17 it was jealousy which drove the first persecution of Peter and the Twelve by the high priest and his colleagues. Stephen, knowing the hostility of the leadership toward him, specifically used the example of Joseph's brothers who were jealous of him (7:9). Later, in Greece, Paul would encounter the same attacks based on jealousy (17:5). No doubt the presence of large numbers of Gentiles contributed to this attitude on the part of the Jewish leaders. In his letter to the Romans, Paul would eventually treat jealousy as the expected reaction of Jews toward Gentiles as the Gospel reached more and more such persons (see Romans 10:19; 11:11ff).

Jealousy (Greek: *zēlos*) fueled abusive speech against Paul's message. And, Paul was fully prepared for this reaction. In 13:46-47, he develops a clear picture of how his ministry logically unfolds. First, he goes to the Jewish people who *rightfully* should get advance billing for hearing the Gospel. They were, after all, the chosen people through whom God sent His promised Messiah. Had the Jewish communities largely accepted this message, they could have taken up the Gospel banner and become "light to the nations," and shared in the promise to Abraham, namely, that through his family *the nations of the earth would be blessed*. That family had shaped up as the Jesus family, starting with Jesus himself who was "the promised seed of Abraham." Had the Jewish people largely accepted this message, they would have joined Paul's effort, become his fellow-travelers throughout the Roman Empire, bearing witness to their Messiah Jesus. After all, had not the hope of "eternal life" become a reality for them since Jesus their Messiah had risen from the dead?

Apparently, Paul proceeds to tell them, "you don't consider yourselves worthy of this eternal life which I proclaim in the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah" (13:46). In every city, like Antioch-Pisidia, Jewish people would be given the right of "first refusal (or acceptance!)" with respect to the message of Jesus. However, should they reject it, those who brought the message had a duty before God to "turn to the Gentiles." On what basis does Paul make this critical calculation? On none other than the ancient text of Isaiah 49:6 where God tells Israel "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." For the Jewish leadership of Antioch-Pisidia to refuse this message meant that they also refused their world-wide mission

required by the prophets of Israel. Such refusal carried serious consequences for both the leadership and the nation.

Gentile Joy and Gospel Growth (13:48-51)

By contrast, the Gentiles "were glad and honored the word of the Lord." Ironically, the Jewish leaders to whom the Lord had given His holy word, failed to honor it by refusing to obey it. The word translated "honor" is actually the Greek term *doxazō* which means "to glorify" or "to honor." Based on the noun form *doxa*, "glory," the underlying meaning is the "brightness" of "majesty" of something. The sun in its brightness is spoken of in terms of this word. The prophetic quotation from Isaiah made reference to being "a light for the Gentiles." What Luke tells us is that national Israel failed to be the light, and thus, failed to be the "glory" of God reflected outward for the Gentiles to see. Ironically, the Gentiles, by accepting with gladness the word Paul preached, thereby glorified God's word, and they themselves became the glory that Israel failed to be.

The Old Testament foreshadows the Gentiles acceptance of God's message, whereas Israel would reject it. An example is found in Ezekiel:

⁵ For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel- ⁶ not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you. ⁷ But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me. Because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart. (Ezekiel 3:5-7).

Notice the prediction that the "house of Israel would not be willing to listen," while the "many peoples" "would listen." Jesus communicated a similar message in the Parable to the Tenants (Matthew 21:33-44) when he predicted that the "vineyard would be leased to other tenants" when the original ones failed to respond to the owner. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, explains how Gentiles accept the Good News when national Israel refused to do so: Romans 9:22-33; 10:19-21; 11). He considered the Gentile believers to be "firstfruits" of the harvest within God's New Creation (Romans 1:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). In an eloquent text which draws heavily on Old Testament material, Paul writes of how the Gentiles "glorify God:"

⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised [Jews] to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might **glorify God for his mercy**. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." ¹⁰ And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." ¹¹ And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." ¹² And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles **hope**" (Romans 15:8-12).

Why then do the Gentiles "glorify" the word of God? They do so, Paul says, because of His *mercy* shown toward the most unlikely people. And, furthermore, they do so, because at last they have found a place to put their *hope*.

According to 13:48b, the Gentiles who believed were those who "were appointed to eternal life." What is the meaning of the word "appoint" in this context? Luke uses the participle of the verb *tassō* in its perfect passive form. The word means "to assign someone to a particular task, function, or role; to appoint, to designate, to assign, to give a task to" (Louw-Nida, 37:96). Does this suggest some form of predestination? Because the tense of the verb is perfect, the action *precedes and persists* through the action of the main verb, "to believe." Though the word has sometimes been interpreted as meaning "to choose," there seems to be far more involved than merely a matter of selection. In Luke 7:8 the centurion who wants Jesus to heal his servant, explains how he is a man "set under authority," where "set" is the same verb, giving the sense of "being placed or arranged." When Paul and Barnabas are assigned to go up to Jerusalem from Antioch, Luke uses *tassō*. Similarly, when Jesus called Saul on the road to Damascus, he describes that calling as "all that is appointed for you to do," using the same expression for "appointed." Putting Paul on the "calendar" to speak to an audience in Rome is referred to "appointing a day for him." Persons in places of secular authority are "instituted" by God according to Romans 13:1. However, an especially interesting use for this term appears in 1 Corinthians 16:15:

Now I urge you, brothers- you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have **devoted** themselves to the service of the saints. Be **subject** to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer.

The concept "devote" comes from this same term, *tassō*, and may supply part of the clue to its meaning in the present passage. I suggest the following translation for 13:48b,

"...and as many as were *devoted* to eternal life believed."

By using this translation, the clause now parallels 13:46b where the Jewish agitators' response to the word of God was to "thrust it aside and judge [themselves] *unworthy* of eternal life..." That is, "judge unworthy of eternal" stands in contrast to "devoted to eternal life." Thus, Luke is making no comment about either election or divine choice, but rather telling his readers about how *devoted* the Gentile converts were to God's gift of eternal life.

A few words about the phrase "eternal life" are in order here. The Greek phrase is: *zōē aiōnia*, where *aiōnios* refers to "for all time." The emphasis is not only on *quantity* (how long) but also on *quality* (what kind). In Biblical terms, the phrase means more than simply "life after death." After all, the non-Jewish cultures would have recognized that souls go somewhere when the body dies, usually to a place called *Hades*, the "unseen" (the Greek meaning) abode of the dead. Once in this place, nobody ever "rose from the dead." Of course, this is where Hebrew and, later, Christian thought diverges dramatically from the pagan one. *Eternal life* meant "life of the Eternal One," that is, it referred to the life of the One True Creator God, Yahweh. According to certain prophecies of the Hebrew Bible, God would one day raise up the righteous ones among His covenant people. The notion of resurrection was the natural outworking of belief in "life of the Eternal One." God would prove Himself ultimately faithful to his covenant by not forgetting His people, even in death. If they left this life in covenant favor, He would "remember" them by raising up their bodies and uniting them once more with their spirits. Several examples illustrate this idea of "eternal life" as resurrection:

Daniel 12:2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Ezekiel 37:9-10 ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Job 19:25-26 ²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God,

Psalms 16:10-11 ¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. ¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Hosea 6:2 ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

Jesus, like his contemporaries the Pharisees, would affirm the idea of resurrection and apply it to himself. In one of the more famous passages, he told the grieving family of dead Lazarus:

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die (John 11:25-26).

In other parts of his teaching, Jesus would explain the hope of resurrection by saying that "God was the God, not of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 12:32; Mark 12:27; Luke 20:38). Perhaps the clearest text about the phrase "eternal life" appears in John's Gospel:

John 17:1-3 "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

To "know the true God" does not mean to simply have intellectual information about Him. The Hebrew concept of "know" was relationship-based. A man who "knew his wife," in the Biblical sense, shared intimacy with her. God's knowing us and our knowing Him comes close to the idea of God loving us and we loving Him. We "know" God by having a relationship with Him. God shows us His greatest love by sending Jesus so that we might "have eternal life" (John 3:16).

1. This "eternal life" is something which God gives: the gift of God is eternal life (Romans 2:7; 6:23; 1 John 5:11). Since it is a gift, we receive it, not as a reward for our works, but by the grace of God.
2. Eternal life is the "promise" God makes to us about our future (1 John 2:25).

3. As such, it is our "hope" (Titus 1:2; 3:7).
4. It is our destination and goal, that toward which our lives take aim (Romans 5:21; Galatians 6:8; 1 Timothy 1:16; Jude 1:21).
5. But eternal life is also a present experience: we already experience the life of God in us (1 John 5:13).

The theme of eternal life also points to the fact that God has begun His *new creation* in which the old world passes and the new world takes shape (2 Corinthians 5:17). "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). Because we have eternal life, we pass from death to life, and this becomes evident in the loving fellowship created within the Christian community (1 John 3:14). Just as Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, so also we are raised up with him into the very life of God (Romans 6:4; Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:1). The Holy Spirit is the energy and sustaining power of this new life (Romans 7:6).

Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the Gospel to the Gentiles in Antioch-Pisidia, they were announcing how the formerly alienated nations of the world are now invited to share in the life of God, just as the national Israelites. This "new life" made them "alive" — those who once were "dead in trespasses and sins" (see Ephesians 2:5; Colossians 2:13). Paul chides his Jewish brethren for not "counting themselves worthy" of this eternal life, while Luke remarks how devoted the Gentiles were to it!

The success of the Gentile mission in Antioch-Pisidia led to a wider growth "throughout the whole region." This all came at a price, however, since opposition arose from the more devout members of the Jewish community who incited two groups of Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas. Luke groups the Gentiles this way: 1) devout women of high standing; 2) leading men of the city. The first group is described by the Greek verb *sebomai* in its present participial form. These were women who worshipped within the synagogue community as Gentiles — God-fearers, but who also held important socio-political positions in the great metropolis of Antioch-Pisidia. Ordinarily, Luke offers complimentary remarks about women *within the context of the Christ community*. In this case women were among the Greek-speaking elite who were amenable to certain aspects of Jewish culture. Allied with their male counterparts within the power structure, they "stir up persecution" against the apostles. The verb *ekballō* describes how Paul and Barnabas were removed from the city. It was sometimes used to describe how cargo was jettisoned from a boat. Classical meanings includes "to banish," which comes closest to the current idea. Along with this connotation is the loss of power or influence over other people.

What is the significance of "shaking off the dust" as the apostles leave Antioch? Jesus instructed his followers to do the same *if the message of the kingdom was not received by some household* (Mark 6:11). Craig Evans tells us:

The dust of Gentile lands was considered unclean, even Gentile lands within Israel itself (cf. *m. Oholot* 18:6; *m. Tohorot* 4:5; *t. Miqwaot* 6.1). Indeed, herbs from outside Israel may not be imported into Israel, because the earth in which they grew may still be clinging to them (*b. Sanhedrin* 12a). It was also taught that a man may not enter the temple precincts "with the dust upon his feet" (*m. Ber.* 9:5; *Sipre Deut.* §258 [on Deut. 23:15]). Presumably, one had to shake the dust off one's shoes and feet if one had passed through Gentile land or one was about to enter the temple precincts, the holiest land of all. It is therefore possible that Jesus' command to **shake off the dust** was meant to imply that the village that rejected his message is, so far as renewed Israel is concerned, a village of Gentiles (cf. Matt. 10:5, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles").¹²

This explanation of the practice raises some curious and paradoxical applications to the situation in Antioch-Pisidia. First of all, the whole region was essentially Gentile and located *outside of Israel*. Virtually *anyplace* they walked constituted Gentile territory. However, the same situation obtained in the case of Jesus' command — only in reverse. Although the disciples were on Israelite soil, they might as well have been addressing

¹² Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary*, David C. Cook, 2003, p. 208.

Gentiles hostile to their message. For Paul and Barnabas, leaders within the Jewish community — including proselytes — *became like Gentiles* in their forceful opposition to the Gospel. The pagan "soil" was not the ground on which they walked, but the hardened hearts of their critics. Much like Jesus' Parable of the Sower and the Seed, this account at the end of Acts 13, reveals the "soil" which refuses to believe the message. The act is a "witness against them," Luke writes. This is covenant language and has its roots in passages from the book of *Deuteronomy*, in particular, 4:26; 30:19; 31:19, 26, 28. Yahweh called "heaven and earth" to be witnesses against His people *if they chose to turn away from him*. What happened in Antioch-Pisidia was a conscious turning away from the Gospel, God's new covenant, and the opposition was led by Jewish people. It was just such unbelief which drew a warning from Moses that a covenant lawsuit and covenant sanctions would come against Israel.

Closing Comments

We began the main section of this week's reading with the words "The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit..." (13:4). To which we are tempted to add, "And he knew what he was doing!" — which, of course, goes without saying. That said, it's worth noting that Barnabas and Paul were suited for their initial forays into "foreign" missionary work. Certainly Barnabas had the advantage in going to Cyprus, since this was his home ("a Levite from Cyprus," Acts 4:36). Paul hailed from Tarsus some two hundred miles east of places like Perga and Antioch-Pisidia, and he would have been at home in a large metropolitan city like Antioch. In some ways, each man returned to his native soil before reaching out into "the regions beyond." Yet, in so doing, they both broke new ground, testing the veracity of both Saul's Damascus road experience and Peter's vision and subsequent experience with Cornelius. What they joyfully discovered was that the commission of the Holy Spirit proved fruitful. According to 13:49 "the word of the Lord spread" and from 13:52 we learn that "the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit." Although Barnabas and Paul left the region, under pressure from the aristocracy, the work which they left behind proved stable and healthy.

The pattern, "to the Jew first and also to the Gentile," became firmly established in missionary practice. As Paul's own letters reveal, the deep desire for the conversion of Israel never left his heart (see Romans 9:1-5; 10:1), as he visited every synagogue that would receive him. Had they all responded, a large corps of Jewish evangelists would have transformed the *diaspora* tragedy into a triumph. But God is not mocked, and a very different kind of sowing took place as the remnant of Israel reaped an enormous harvest of Gentile lives, filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Glory to God! Amen.

Digger Deeper: *What If? Influence Factor: The Book of Acts — What If We are Breaking New Ground?*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *What If? Influence Factor: The Book of Acts — What We are Breaking New Ground?*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. This week's reading is Acts 13:1-52. Using the following section divisions, outline the chapter. 1) 13:1-3; 2) 13:4-5; 3) 13:6-12; 4) 13:13-52.
2. What does Luke tell us about the makeup of the church in Antioch of Syria (13:1)? What sorts of gifts were present, and how were those especially important?
3. How did the church prepare itself to commission Saul and Barnabas? How did the church decide on these two people?
4. Who traveled with Saul and Barnabas (13:5)? What was his role? His full name? Read Acts 12:12, 25; 15:36-41; Colossians 4:10, and note the additional information we have about this man. For what other main contribution is he known? Hint: "*Matthew, Luke, John.*"
5. What was Saul and Barnabas' first destination (13:4)? Why do you think they might have started here (see Acts 4:36-37)?
6. When they arrived in Paphos (13:6-12), what two important people did they meet? How did each affect their ministry? Does the idea of a "Jewish sorcerer" strike you as unusual? Why? What role did he have, and how was his life changed by the arrival of Saul and Barnabas?
7. Explain the significance of 13:9, "Saul, who was also called Paul..." Compare this with 13:7 where another compound name appears. How might these two texts help explain each other?
8. When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Antioch-Pisidia, how did the geography of their mission change? Refer to a map if necessary. Who left their group? What was their first destination in this city? Why?
9. Briefly summarize the content of Paul's sermon in the synagogue, noting the main points. What was his main message, and how did he make "the case for Christ"?
10. List the main Old Testament quotations Paul used in support of his arguments? Hint: check the footnotes or marginal references in your Bible.
11. Why did Paul include the "story of Israel" in his sermon, and how did he use this story in the rest of his message?
12. How did the people in the synagogue respond to his message? How did his second visit to the synagogue differ from the first? Does this surprise you? What seemed to fuel the opposition to Paul?
13. What *change* did Paul make in response to the opposition? On what did he base his decision? Who was most affected by the decision? How? Compare this with Romans 9:1-4 and 10:1.
14. Under what circumstances did Paul and Barnabas leave Antioch-Pisidia? Who were these people whom Luke calls "God-fearing women and leading men" in 13:50, and who was responsible for inciting them against the apostles?
15. When Paul and Barnabas finally left Antioch-Pisidia, in what condition did they leave the church (refer to 13:52)?
16. In what ways did Paul and Barnabas "break new ground" in this, the first, "missionary journey"?