

Acts Chapter 13

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we welcome you to our August 8th session. We are working our way through the first missionary journey of the Apostle Paul. At the expense of being repetitive, I just want to remind you that these three journeys by the Apostle Paul have had such enormous impact upon all of civilization from that time to the present, perhaps exceeded only by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

And the reason it is so important is because of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that the Apostle Paul was instructed by the Holy Spirit to launch this series of missionary journeys.

I'm sure he had no idea what was involved, and he may well have thought that there was just going to be this one journey. They were taking this gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, why it matters, why it's so important, how it applies to the individual.

He is taking that message primarily to the Gentiles. They are non-Jews. But Jesus Christ is not the Savior of Jews only.

He is the Savior of the whole world, Jews and Gentiles. So this is God's most important message ever communicated to humanity, and he entrusted that message to one individual who was an avid opponent of Jesus Christ, and he commissioned him to take that message that he once sought to destroy to the regions beyond.

[1 : 4 0] And that's the story of Paul the Apostle. And we engage him now in chapter 14, and they are meeting a lot of opposition, a lot of acceptance, and a lot of opposition, because everywhere the gospel is proclaimed, there are some who buy it and some who reject it.

Very often the rejecters later turn into the buyers, but often there is an initial rejection of the message, and it is the same today as it was then.

Is there anybody here who recalls having embraced the gospel and received Christ as their personal Savior the first time they ever heard the message?

Anybody? Probably not. I don't see any hands. It wasn't that way with me either. There usually are repeated hearings, because the message, when we first hear it, comes into conflict with where we are, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and we do not readily accept that message upon the first hearing.

But after repeated hearings, there can be a thinking process set in, where we consider and reconsider and rethink, maybe there's something to this. And very often we come to faith after repeated hearings.

[3 : 0 4] That is not unusual. That's the way it is. Anytime you hear a message about anything that conflicts with a position that you already hold regarding that issue, the tendency is rejected.

Why? Because, well, that's not what I've always believed. So there is a natural mechanism there that has to be overcome. We have to do some unlearning before we can do some learning or acceptance of new things.

That's just the way it works. So we have read in chapter 14, down at the bottom, this is page 524, came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude, both of the Jews and also of the Greeks, believed.

And what they believed, of course, was that message, death, burial, resurrection of Christ. God sent his son to be the savior of the world. And what he requires from you as an individual is your placing your faith and trust in God's provision for the salvation from your sin.

And that's the message that was preached. That's the message that many believed. This was like manna from heaven. Because lurking within the inner heart of all of us, there are serious questions about what happens when we die.

[4 : 39] We know we're going to. We come to grips with our mortality. What then? Man in his heart of hearts has this inner suspicion that there is something more.

There is something after this life. What is that all about? And how can one be made acceptable to God, assuming that there is a God and that there is a day of accountability? And how can we connect with this being called God?

And what's it all about anyway? That's the essence of the message. So this great multitude, and we are not told how many that is, but it is both of the Jews and also of the Greeks, believed.

But the unbelieving Jews, there are always those rock-ribbed who dig their heels in and they reject it. And Paul is in complete sympathy with those who reject his message because he remembers when he was one of them.

He rejected it too. He knows exactly where they're coming from. He knows why they can't see it, why they reject the message, why they want him dead, because that's exactly where he was coming from until shortly after the stoning of Stephen.

[5 : 56] So it's an amazing thing. The unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles. What did they do? Well, they started a whispering campaign.

They started opposition. They started talking them down. They started bad-mouthing these guys who just blew into town from who knows where. And they've got this cockamamie story made up that God, the deity of the universe, that God came to earth in human flesh and then died on a cross and was buried and then came back from the dead.

Have you ever heard anything so preposterous in all your life? What a bunch of baloney! And that's exactly the way many of these saw it. That's the way many see it today. Nothing has changed.

So these people are lobbied, if you will, to oppose Paul and Barnabas. They stirred up the Gentiles and made their minds evil-affected against the brethren.

They bad-mouthed them. They talked them down. They circulated all kinds of rumors about them. They promoted lies about them and everything, all with the idea, hey, do you see this going on today in the world of politics?

[7 : 15] What's changed? Nothing. Everybody is pushing their own agenda. Did I see a hand? Raj? Were there mostly Gentiles in this city? Oh, yeah. In fact, there were mostly Gentiles in every city because wherever the Jews were, they were in a minority, unless you were talking about Jerusalem or Jewish towns in Israel.

So you can count on the Jew being in a minority in whatever town they would go to. But they always went to the synagogue first. That was their launching platform in each city because they knew they had a ready-made audience.

They knew that they had familiarity with the Old Testament. And bear in mind that when Paul is preaching his gospel, the Old Testament is all that exists. But that's all he needed because he could easily point out Christ in the Old Testament, and he did.

So, yeah. Was the Jews looked up to in those cities? In some cases, they were. In some cases, throughout history, the Jew has been largely marginalized, vilified.

And one of the things that they really held against them back in this day was the fact that a Jew was a monotheist. A Jew believed there was just one God. And that was an aberration in that day because these people, whether they were Greeks or Romans, they were all into multiple gods, multiple deities.

[8 : 39] And the Jew kind of stood out. But he had other qualities and characteristics that Gentiles could not help but admire because many of them had gained and earned certain successes in different ways in different areas.

So they would sometimes just kind of shake their head in unbelief at these Jews at some of the ways they prospered and the positions they took, etc. So the Jew was admired by some and hated by some.

The Jew made some jealous and the Jew made some admire them. And they still do. Yeah, they still do. I'll tell you, there is no people, there is no people in the world like the Jew.

And they are just a breed apart. And all you have to do is some superficial research in history and you will discover that no one, no tiny, tiny entity like the Jew has been so relatively successful and at the same time so vilified, so persecuted, so hated, so misunderstood as the Jew.

They are an utterly unique people. And when God called them and said, you are a peculiar people unto me, that was no overstatement.

[10 : 09] There is a peculiarity about the Jew that is just undeniable. Joe? Well, this was their faith, the Jewish faith, that Paul was dealing with, see. Absolutely. Plus, he was now going to bring in the Gentiles into it and they would be jealous of that.

Oh yeah. He's our God, not their God. I mean, what's going on here? Absolutely. Absolutely. It became a big, big item. And the Jews are, who are opposed, of course, to Christ, they are going to give him lots of difficulty.

Verse 3, Long time, therefore, abode they, Weymouth translates it, for a considerable time, however. Paul and Barnabas remained there for a long time.

We aren't told exactly how long this is, but they were speaking boldly in the Lord. Speaking out fearlessly in dependence on the Lord. And this means they had to do this in the face of opposition. This was not smooth sailing. Everywhere they went, there were probably people who would boo them, try to shout them down, try to intimidate them, and later we're going to see, even stoned him to death.

[11 : 25] And that's upcoming. So, we read that they spoke boldly in the Lord, and the reason they did, guys, is because they knew what they were talking about.

And they knew that they knew. And when you absolutely know your material, and you know your message, you can speak it with confidence, without hesitation, and knowing that you are going to face opposition.

And this is a really curious thing, because on the one hand, we have got a message that is the only message that is life-saving and life-enriching, and can actually change a person's eternal destiny. You would think it would be welcomed everywhere with open arms, but again, we've got that unlearning thing. So, opposition is predictable. And in fact, remember back in Acts 9, when Paul was converted, and God spoke to Ananias to go to the house of, I can't remember where he was staying, wherever Paul was staying when he got in Damascus.

And he says, and you lay hands on him that he may receive his sight three days and three nights without food or drink. And he goes on to say to Ananias, for I will show him what great things he must suffer.

[13 : 06] Is that what God calls people to do? Suffer? And what's this suffering all about anyway? Why would God raise up somebody and send them into a nest of hornets to suffer?

What's that all about? And the answer is found in realizing human makeup. And human makeup is such that we are all entrusted with a volition, with a will.

and this will is going to be exercised positively or negatively when it confronts certain messages. And God is not going to take away human volition so that everybody who hears the gospel will be pliable and open and accepting and receiving.

God doesn't do that. He doesn't give people the power to make choices and then take it away from them. So when you go into a place and proclaim a message like this, you can expect some opposition.

Happily, you can also anticipate some acceptance and some glad hearing. But very often there's opposition. And despite that opposition, we are to proclaim the message because each time a person hears the message and goes negative against it, you have still planted a seed.

[14 : 38] You've still given them something to think about. And other situations may come into their life, other speakers, other messages, other sources that can add to that.

And all that is, is a watering of the seed that has been sown. And eventually, they may be able to connect the dots and get the connection and embrace the truth.

And that's what happened almost in the case of all of us. That's the way this thing works. Here a little, there a little, line upon line, precept upon precept. Paul said, I planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase.

So we are not responsible for making converts, we are not responsible for converting anyone, but we are responsible for just sowing the seed, giving out the gospel, pouring a little water on, and leave the results with God.

It would seem that, and some Christians naively think that if you've got a message of truth and God has called you to deliver it, you're just going to have smooth sailing.

[15 : 48] Everybody's going to applaud you and gratefully receive your message and all the rest. Well, that's not reality. And God is not going to step in here and run interference for his chosen apostle and just remove all the obstacles.

You know, just like a pulling guard or whatever is protecting a running back who's carrying the ball, and you've got these guys in front of you, and they just go along and knock the opposition out of the way, and you sail right on through for the touchdown.

It doesn't work that way. Sometimes there is a heavy price to pay. for doing the right thing. And that's an important concept to remember, guys.

We know there is a price to be paid for doing the wrong thing. We know that. We live in a cause-and-effect world. But it seems eminently unfair to have to pay a negative price for doing the right thing.

But that's often what has to be done. And we can be thankful for men and women in the past who were willing to pay a stiff price for doing the right thing.

[17 : 02] After all, God has not called us to be successful. He has called us to be faithful, to enter the fray, to put up a fight.

And we are not responsible for the victory. But we are responsible for competing, being in the fray. So they gave testimony unto the word of his grace and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

And this is another phenomenal thing. How can people deny the truth in the presence of signs and wonders?

Miracles. How can you gainsay that? How can you overcome that? How can you dismiss that? Isn't seeing believing? Well, one of the most powerful passages of Scripture, I think, that I've often quoted, because I have such occasion to do so, is in 2 Corinthians 4, where Paul says, if our gospel be hid, some translate it veiled.

If our gospel be veiled or hid, it is hidden to those whose minds, thinking process, logic, whose minds have been blinded by the God of this age.

[18 : 33] Satan, the God of this age. Lest, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, which is the image of God, should shine unto them.

The opposition is out there, and the natural residue of the old nature in the heart and mind of all of us wants to reject that message.

And part of it is linked to our personal pride, because we all like to think we are good enough, and if I'm not good enough, I can be. And I can make it. I can succeed on my own. I can measure up to whatever it is that God requires.

Just give me time. Just let me work on a few of my vices and get them out of the way. And all of this is part and parcel of the rejection of the gospel of the truth. Did I say a hand? What, Rog? Would the evil spirits be doing signs and wonders?

I mean, wasn't there sorcery and stuff so these people would see stuff like that and maybe this wouldn't be as great a thing? There was. There was a certain amount of that going on.

[19 : 35] We encountered Simon the sorcerer earlier on in Acts. I think it was in Acts chapter 8.

And there were charlatans and phonies and sleight-of-hand men. We would call them magicians or sorcerers.

And they always dazzled the people. Hey, Pharaoh had those in his court way back in Egypt a long time before this. So there have always been people who have engaged in this.

And some of this stuff is real. some of it has to do with the occult. And it is very much satanically involved. And if you want to get a real baptism of this stuff, you can go to areas in Tibet and Nepal and other places of India, some places of Africa, where witchcraft and everything that goes along with it is blooming in full force.

And believe me, it is real. it is not sleight of hand stuff. It is satanic. It is occultic to the core.

And it is nothing to dabble with. And some of that, no doubt, was involved here. And we know our Lord encountered that on numerous occasions when he cast demons out of individuals.

[20 : 52] And Paul, in Acts 16, is going to cast a demon out of this girl who brought great gain to the silversmiths because of the idols they were making.

He had a little business going and it was very lucrative. And we'll see that upcoming. But the opposition is here even in the midst of signs and wonders. Our Lord said on one occasion during his earthly ministry, he said, Woe unto you, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum, for if the mighty miracles that have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, Gentile areas, they would have repented long ago.

But you didn't. You dug your heels in. Well, we know how this Jesus of Nazareth, we know how he's casting out demons. He does it by the power of Beelzebul.

He's in league with Satan. That's how he does that. And Christ identified that as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. That is attributing the miracles done by the Spirit of God to the Spirit of Satan.

And that was their explanation for the miracles. Yeah, well, sure. And Christ countered by saying, Hey, you realize how stupid that is? A house divided against itself cannot stand.

[22 : 21] Most people think that Abraham Lincoln, he did say that, but he didn't originate it. Our Lord did. And he's saying, if Satan fights against himself, how can he survive?

And he put their argument to bed right there. So, these signs and wonders, we are puzzled as to how they could look at that kind of evidence.

So, we've got in verse four, the multitude of the city was divided and part held with the Jews and part with the apostles. So, here you've got a polarized community.

People are choosing up sides and you can be sure that it is the talk of the town. Everybody is discussing these guys, Paul and Barnabas, who came from afar and here's what they're preaching and here's how the people are receiving it or rejecting it.

And in verse five says, And when there was an assault made, both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews, with their rulers, to use them despitefully and to stone them.

[23 : 29] What this means is there was a polarization, but the sides were obviously unequal. God's people, I do not recall God's people ever having been in a majority about anything.

It goes all the way back to Noah. How much of a minority-majority situation was that? And this is because truth always faces opposition from the air.

It's always been that way. And truth is always in the minority. Air is always in the majority. That's just the way it is. And that's the way it is here.

Assault was made, both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews, with their rulers. That means they had gotten to the power brokers and had convinced them these guys are poison for our community.

They are teaching all kinds of things that are not true and they're stirring up the people and they're hoodwinking the people and all the rest. And we need to deal with these. And they would look to their councilmen or their presidents or whatever their authorities were called and say, listen, you've got to do something about these guys.

[24 : 55] You've got to take care of these guys. You owe it to the people. You can't let them run around and do blah, blah, blah. And all this bad-mouthing is going on. And these guys are under pressure because people in positions of authority are always besought by those under them to make things happen, to do things, to effect changes and all the rest of it.

And of course, it's always the changes that they want. And they were going to set them up for execution. And verse 6 says, and they became aware of it.

The apostles heard of it. Now, no doubt, the scuttlebutt got around and they heard nasty things that people were saying. And some came to Paul and Barnabas and said, listen, things are really getting hot here.

And you know what we heard? we heard just the other day from good source, they're laying for you. They're just waiting for the right opportunity and they're going to take you out.

So word got to Paul and to Barnabas and as soon as they were aware of it, they fled unto Lystra, got out of town, fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lyconia.

[26 : 04] And I know you don't have your maps here. I gave you a map some time ago, but we'll get them out back again. Unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lyconia, and unto the region that heth round about.

And there they preach the gospel. They continue to tell the good news. And the food is here and we'll just leave off with this certain man at Lystra that's on the next page and we'll entertain any questions that you may have while they're delivering the food.

Anybody? Yeah. Would you say that when the country was first founded that the Christians probably were in a majority, although it certainly didn't last forever. Is that a fair statement you think?

I can't say that when the country was first founded that Christians were in the majority, but we can say without equivocation that when the country was first founded Judeo-Christian principles, ethics, values, standards were undoubtedly in place and were generally embraced and accepted as authoritative by the multitude, even though many people didn't live by them.

But insofar as being able to say that they were what we would call real born-again Christians, Christians, I don't know. I would doubt that.

[27 : 37] But percentage-wise, I would say percentage-wise, there were probably a lot more believers, actual believers then, than what there are now, if you're talking in terms of percentage.

But it's a good question. Any other thoughts or questions? Yeah, Raj? In the first couple of verses, it said the great multitude of the Jews, the Gentiles believed, and then they were stirred up.

Was that the same Gentiles that believed that the Jews Judaized them and got them of fault in Galatians? No, it wasn't the believers who stirred them up.

You can be sure of that. It was the negative crowd that stirred them up, that fomented the revolt. They agitated things. They do what people do.

They connive. They conspire. They set up people. Nothing has changed, has it? Anything else?

Was it the Judaizers in Galatians that stirred up the believers to get back under the law and all that?

[28 : 44] Was that what was going on you think? I don't know that that was involved here. I don't think it was involved here. But the Judaizers will definitely be involved in the next chapter, chapter 15.

We'll get into that and we'll have to tie that in with the Galatians too also. John? When Jesus told them Capernaum and those cities that if Tyre and Sidon had seen the miracles that they'd seen, they would have repented.

So those people in Capernaum and those towns you're talking about, they're going to be more accountable. Absolutely. Absolutely.

They had more information, more verification than he was Absolutely. And to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.

The more light that we receive, the more responsible we are for that light. Absolutely. Our Lord said one time when he was confronted, I think it was the Canaanite woman.

[29 : 46] And you've got to bear in mind that the Canaanite was not a Jew. She was a pagan in her background and a heathen. And yet she besought the Lord for healing.

And here she came to a Jew for him to apply his healing powers. And Jesus said, you know what? I have not found such great faith.

No, not in Israel. And this woman isn't even a Jew. And her belief and her faith puts to shame those of you who are Jews.

And he commended the woman for her confidence in him and his ability to do that.