What God Has Done

Acts 13:13-52
Key Verse: Acts 13:39
“Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.”

Last week, Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem and became prominent members of the church in Antioch. As they were worshipping and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Once they were finished worshipping, Barnabas and Saul were sent out and they sailed for Cyprus where they shared the gospel message to the people there. They made their way across the island and arrived at the western most side of the island to the city of Paphos. In Paphos, Barnabas and Saul tried to meet with the proconsul Sergius Paulus, but a Jewish sorcerer, Elymas, who tried to undermine the gospel message. But Saul, now called Paul, looked straight at Elymas and blinded him through the Holy Spirit. Paul had come into prominence on the mission, so much so that for the remainder of the journey, they are no longer referred to as Barnabas and Saul, but as Paul and Barnabas, and you see that at the beginning of this passage. “From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.” (13) See, there it is “Paul and his companions”.

When it was time to leave Cyprus, Paul, Barnabas and John Mark, returned to the mainland to the region of Pamphylia, which is in the southern portion of modern-day Turkey. When they arrived in Perga, John left them to go back to Jerusalem. We don’t know why John left, but whatever the reason, Paul felt so strongly about it that he didn’t want John on the second missionary journey and it caused a divide between Barnabas and Paul. At any rate, Paul and Barnabas only spend a short time in Perga as they prepare to go to Pisidian Antioch. Even though the Bible simply says that they went on to Pisidian Antioch, the journey from Perga to Antioch was not a light one. To get to Antioch, they would have to travel 100 miles north over the Taurus mountains. The route was barren, often flooded by swollen rivers and bandits patrolled the region. It was a long and dangerous journey. This Antioch was one of the sixteen cities that were named Antioch and was an important city for the region. Paul and Barnabas knew that if the gospel were to spread to the whole region, it would need to start in an important city like Pisidian Antioch.

After they arrived in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas went looking for the synagogue. There were a large number of Jews in the city and the synagogue was the center of Jewish lifestyle in the city. The synagogue was a place of worship, center of education, judicial center, social gathering place, and a civic center for the community. It was the best place for Paul and Barnabas to go and share the gospel. “On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, ‘Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak.’” (14-15) It was time to worship God, the passages were read and the leaders of the synagogue asked Paul and Barnabas to share a

©2026 IIT UBF. All rights reserved.
http://www.iitubf.org

sermon if they had one.

In response to the request, Paul stands up and begins the sermon. I find it interesting that Paul is the one that gets up and speaks. At the beginning of the missionary journey, Barnabas is the primary figure, but during the course of the journey, Paul became the voice of the two. What Paul says here is the first time that we actually can see what Paul's sermons actually look like. Prior to this point, there isn't much recorded about what Paul said, but starting here, we can see how the Holy Spirit is working in Paul. Paul's sermon has some similarities to other speeches that are in the book of Acts, like Peter's speech in Acts 2 and Stephen's speech in Acts 7. Like here, Stephen's speech, just before the people kill him, is a historical narrative that stretches from early Old Testament time to Jesus. Whereas Stephen used his speech to show the disobedience of the Israelites throughout the course of history, Paul only touches on that topic in a couple of places. Paul's main theme seems to be God's faithfulness and seeing what he has done.

Paul starts out, "Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country; for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness; and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about 450 years." (16-20) Paul directs his speech to the Jews and any Gentile converts or those in the process of being converts. Again, the message here was primarily for the Jews, as they would know the history surrounding the coming of the Jewish Messiah. If you look at the section of text from verses 16 through 20, you will notice that the focal point of the message is God. It was God who chose the Israelites. It was God who made the people prosper. It was God who led the people out of Egypt. It was God who endured the people during their stay in the wilderness. And it was God who overthrew the people in the land of Canaan. Paul never mentions what the people did because it was entirely God who dealt with them and performed the mighty wonders.

Paul continues in verses 20-22, "After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'" This section here is after the time of conquest and about the time of the judges and subsequent kingship. In this section, we find something that the people did: they asked for a king and God gave them one in Saul. After Saul was removed from the kingship, God made David their king. Up to this point, Paul is very quickly going through history, but when he reaches King David, he slows down and begins to expand on his sermon. The people were enamored with Saul because of his physical stature. He was a head taller than any other Israelite and he looked kingly, but in God's eyes, Saul was not. God doesn't look at the physical appearance, but the heart. So, "God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'" (20) When David was first anointed as king, he was just a boy, perhaps a teenager, the youngest of Jesse's sons, but his heart was a heart that would follow

©2026 IIT UBF. All rights reserved.
http://www.iitubf.org

God. Saul tried to rule the people on his own and took matters into his own hands, but David would follow God and God could build the future on him.

Again, Paul continues, “From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. As John was completing his work, he said: ‘Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’” (23-25) God used David to bring about the Savior Jesus. During David’s rule, the prophet Nathan told David of God’s plan to establish his throne forever. God’s promised salvation would come through David’s line. Paul also talked about John the Baptist, who was an important figure that bridged the Old Testament prophets to Jesus. John was the last of the prophets and he prepared the way for the coming of Jesus. His message was a message of repentance to get people’s hearts to turn back to God. John became popular among the people around Jerusalem, so much so that the religious leaders wondered if John was the promised Messiah. However, John deflected those thoughts saying that there was someone that was coming after him who was much greater than he was.

In all of God’s history that Paul shares we can see that God was not some impersonal God, but he was involved in the lives of his people. It was God who gave them everything. He promised and fulfilled time and time again. He was faithful to his people even when they were not faithful to him. Paul says in this passage that God endured their conduct in the wilderness for forty years. That doesn’t sound like a very positive thing. If you are enduring someone, you are putting up with them. The Israelites did a lot of complaining in the wilderness and a number of times desired to go back to their lives of slavery. They were willing to give up the freedom that God had given them for a few creature comforts that they had back in Egypt despite the fact that they were treated like trash. They were not thankful for what God had done for them. Later on, the people asked for a king so that they could be like all the other nations. God had clearly shown his people that he was their king, but they wanted to be like everyone else out there and have a human king, even though that would mean hardship for the people. But God bore with them. After God gave them the king that they wanted in Saul and it failed, God put into power a man after his own heart David, because he still loved his people and did not want to abandon them.

All of God’s history, all the faithfulness he had was leading up to Jesus. He didn’t have to endure anymore; he could save. “Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.” (26-31) God had given the message of salvation to Paul and Barnabas and they were now giving it to the people of Antioch. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers handed Jesus over

©2026 IIT UBF. All rights reserved.
http://www.iitubf.org

to be killed, even though there was no basis. By doing so, they were fulfilling Scripture. Jesus was crucified, a death that is more painful that we can imagine. Crucifixion was devised as a way to keep a person alive as long as possible while inflicting the most pain possible. Jesus died on the cross, was taken down and buried in a tomb. There was no doubt that Jesus was dead. People had prepared Jesus' body and placed it in a tomb, but God raised him from the dead, and he was seen for forty days after his death by people who were still living at the time.

Jesus' body did not see decay in the tomb because God raised him from the dead, as was promised in Scripture. Paul quotes that Scripture in verse 34, "You will not let your holy one see decay." This is a verse that Peter also used in Acts 2, and Paul uses it in the exact same way. The Scripture was not referring to David, because he died and his body was entombed in Jerusalem. His body saw decay. "But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay." (37) This is all significant because this is how God chose to save the world from sin. Paul said, "Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses." (38-39) Jesus' death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection brings forgiveness of sins to everyone who believes. We are all sinners who have done some horrible things in our lives. We can't be set free from our sin by following God's law, because we have already broken it. Just because I decide to follow the law from this point on does not forgive my past offenses. Plus, the law itself is impossible to follow. The law's purpose was not so that by following it, we are made righteous, but that in the law, we can see the fullness of our sins and our need for a Savior.

Many mistakenly believe that being a Christian is about doing what is right and not doing what is wrong. While it is good to do what is right, that does not absolve us of our sins. Doing more good than evil does not make you a good person. If you were to follow all of the laws perfectly, and then kill someone, it doesn't matter how much good you have done, you are still a murderer. There is no cosmic scale that balances our good deeds and our bad. If you have any bad deeds, you are a sinner and no amount of law will remove your being a sinner. That's why we need a savior. On our own, we can remove the blemish of sin from our lives, but Jesus took the punishment for our sins on the cross so that we could be set free from every sin. Jesus took the punishment for every sin. There is no sin that is too great because God's grace is greater than all our sin. This is the gospel message: that it is by grace that we are saved.

At the end of the sermon, Paul appeals to the people listening, "Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: 'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, â€¨for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.'" (40-41) Paul pulls out a verse from Habakkuk to implore the people to believe. If they didn't believe, then something would happen that the people would not expect to happen. When I see this verse by itself, it looks like a very strange way to end a sermon. But, when viewed in context to the rest of the passage, what Paul was saying was prophetic.

©2026 IIT UBF. All rights reserved.
http://www.iitubf.org

After he finished speaking, the people wanted Paul and Barnabas to speak again on the next Sabbath. It looks like their message was received well, but many of the Jews weren't fully convinced. They wanted Paul and Barnabas to speak more on the subject the following week. They hadn't heard enough to form an opinion. On the other hand, "When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God." (43) There were a number of people who were excited about the news of salvation. They followed Paul and Barnabas and continued to talk with them. These people had a genuine interest in the gospel message and they were urged to continue in the grace of God.

The following week, something amazing happened, nearly the entire city showed up at the synagogue to hear Paul and Barnabas speak on salvation. Word had gotten around the city and everyone showed up to hear what these two guys had to say. It was really amazing. Who wouldn't want to have an entire city come to hear the gospel? Well, when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. It doesn't exactly say why they were jealous but it could be because the Gentiles had come. Judaism was an exclusive club and they didn't like the idea that just anyone could get in. It could also be because the entire city came to hear Paul and Barnabas, but they never had this many people come to one of their services before. I'm inclined to think of the former, because the synagogues didn't really have regular speakers to become jealous about a larger crowd. However, many of the Jews revel in the fact that they are God's chosen people. The message of salvation was for them, why are all these people here. It is an empty exercise. In their jealousy, they began to contradict what Paul was saying. They didn't want the message to be true.

In response, Paul and Barnabas answered them, "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' (46-47) Paul and Barnabas chose to speak to the Jews first. It was their duty to share the gospel to their fellow Jews, but when they rejected the message and the eternal life that comes with it, they knew that their goal was to share the gospel to the Gentiles. And they were extremely eager to hear. That happens a lot. The people you would expect to have an open heart to the gospel, like those who are religious, are the ones who reject it first. The religious like their morality and don't see a need for a Savior. On the other hand, the immoral know that they are immoral, they've been told that for years by the religious people. I remember a man who would set up on the street around State and Washington downtown. He would have a microphone and would tell people how sinful they were. If he saw someone smoking, he would tell them that they were going to hell. The immoral people always know that they are immoral and they know that there is no way for them to become good. For those people, the message of salvation is a breath of fresh air. They didn't have to follow a set of rules to be saved, they had to accept that a savior came for them and died for them. It was a marked difference from what they were used to hearing and it was not without effect. "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed." (48)

©2026 IIT UBF. All rights reserved.
http://www.iitubf.org

The word spread throughout the region, but the Jewish leaders were not done. They began to stir up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and had them expelled from the region. They were kicked out of town, but the seeds of the gospel were planted. Even though they were gone, God's work continued. We might think that the gospel is something complicated, but when you look at what Paul says in this passage, the gospel is simply the story of what God has done. It is the story of what God has done in the past, how he brought Jesus to us, how Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead. It is the story of what God continues to do now. The story itself is simple. You don't need a seminary degree to understand or share. We all have experiences of what God has done in our lives. God does remarkable things and he just needs us to share it.

©2026 IIT UBF. All rights reserved.
http://www.iitubf.org