

Bible Study Guide

PASTORATE

May 1, 2013

Lectionary Readings

Psalms 145; **Acts 13:44–52**; Revelation 19:1, 4–9; John 13:31–35

Key Background Passages

Isaiah 42:1–9; 49:1–7; Acts 13:1–3, 13–43

Context

This passage from Acts is the continuation and conclusion of Paul and Barnabas' visit to Pisidian Antioch that is described in verses 13–43. They are on their first missionary journey just after being commissioned in 13:1–3. As usual, they attend the local synagogue on the sabbath, and then, after the readings, they are asked to share an exhortation with the congregation. Speaking to fellow Jews and Gentile proselytes, Paul recounts the story of Israel and highlights God's promise to provide them with a Savior from the line of David. God proves himself faithful to his promise by sending Israel their Messiah in the person of Jesus. Though the Jewish leaders did not recognize him and so ended up rejecting him, it is this crucified and risen Jesus who now offers liberation from the captivity of sin. Paul urges the synagogue audience not to likewise reject Jesus and so perish as the prophets had warned. The people are so captivated by the message that they ask Paul and Barnabas to return and share more on the next sabbath. Here's what happens next.

Acts 13:44–52

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 blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul. ⁴⁶ Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles,
so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' "

⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. ⁴⁹ Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region. ⁵⁰ But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region. ⁵¹ So they shook the dust off their feet in protest against them, and went to Iconium. ⁵² And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

Commentary

The following sabbath draws a significantly larger crowd, many of whom were Gentiles. The high turnout of Gentiles brings many Jews to jealousy, and so Paul is verbally attacked (the word for “blasphemy” in Greek can also mean “slandering”). Both Paul and Barnabas respond by appealing to the purpose of Israel’s election: God chose Israel in order to bless the nations. In other words, God is particular in his election of Israel in order to be universal in the scope of his salvation. That’s why the gospel is first preached to Israel, because the story of Jesus is the fulfillment of their story. But within the hope of Israel always lay the promise that when God did for Israel what Israel longed for him to do, then the Gentiles would come into the picture as Gentiles and not as Jews. They too could now experience the life of God’s promised age, which is what “eternal life” means. Paul and Barnabas even view themselves as assuming the role of the Servant in Isaiah by quoting 42:6 and 49:6, which was the role Israel was supposed to play all along. And yet in their reaching out to the Gentiles with this Israel-shaped message of salvation, Paul and Barnabas are ironically rejected by the Jewish leaders and thrown out of the area. In contrast, the Gentile converts are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some things that stand out to you in this story?
2. Why do you think many of the Jews who heard Paul and Barnabas’ message rejected it with such anger and hostility?
3. Do you think it’s still important today to emphasize the Jewish nature of the message of salvation? Why or why not?
4. In what ways do we as the church allow feelings of jealousy to creep in when God works among those who are not like us? How can we guard against this?
5. For eight verses in 13:30–37, the resurrection of Jesus is expounded upon, which then leads to the only two references in the book of Acts to “eternal life” (verses 46 and 48). What connections might there be between the resurrection (of Jesus) and the promise of eternal life?
6. Ironically, many of the Jews in this passage failed to view their election as God’s people as a calling to reach out to the Gentiles. Do you think Christians today fall into the same trap? Why or why not?
7. How does this story encourage you and your faith?

The Collect of the Day

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.