

## **THE TASK**

### Acts 13:42-52

Before Barnabas, Paul and Mark left Cyprus, there appeared to be a transition in Luke's account from seeing Barnabas as the leader of the group to a recognition of Paul as the leader. Up until and including verse seven of chapter thirteen, Luke listed Barnabas first; however, during and after the confrontation with the magician Elymas, we see Paul taking the lead for the remainder of their travels.

After Paul and Barnabas left the island of Cyprus, they sailed back to the mainland to the port city of Perga located on the southern coast of present-day Turkey. It was there that John Mark decided to return to Jerusalem before Paul and Barnabas traveled north (about 100 miles) to Antioch of Pisidia which had a population of about one hundred thousand people. On a modern-day map of Turkey, this city would be close to the city of Isparta.

In a sermon by Dan Browning, Jr., he noted that "Antioch of Pisidia was a typical Roman-Hellenistic city, with the usual institutions and structures: the Temple of Augustus, public fountains and baths powered by an aqueduct, and a minority community of Jews with a synagogue. As in many Roman cities, some number of non-Jews (Gentiles) attended the synagogue because of their interest and belief in the one God of Judaism. Such Gentiles were called "God Fearers" and were part of the synagogue community, but not considered Proselytes (converts)—no doubt because of the difficult requirement of circumcision for full conversion."

Since there was a Jewish community along with a synagogue, Paul and Barnabas started there when they were in Antioch of Pisidia. They did not request permission to speak when they went into the synagogue, but simply entered and sat down. Apparently, they were recognized as visitors and were then invited to share a "word of exhortation for the people." We learn from Luke's record that Paul started with the descendants of Israel being enslaved in Egypt and concluded his discourse with the resurrection of Christ after He was crucified. The conclusion of all that he shared was that God had provided salvation for all humanity.

#### Mixed Responses – 13:42-45

<sup>42</sup> As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. <sup>43</sup> 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. <sup>44</sup> The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. <sup>45</sup> But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. Acts 13:42–45 (ESV)

The initial response on the day they spoke to those in the synagogue was apparently very positive. The people were saying, "we need to hear this message again." Those who heard Paul's message that day were Jewish men and women along with Gentiles who had converted to Judaism. Some believe that other Gentiles who had not become proselytes were also there. Various translations of verse forty-two have created some confusion regarding who went out of the synagogue and who begged to hear the message the next week. Some translations render the verse as "when the Jews left the synagogue" while others have "when Paul and Barnabas left the Jewish synagogue." In the first case, it would have been the Gentiles who pleaded with Paul and Barnabas to present the message again to them on the next Sabbath. In the second case, it was "the people" (maybe Jews and Gentiles) who made the request.

Verse forty-three indicates that many Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas who urged them (the people) to continue in the grace of God.

We might suspect that those who welcomed the message of Paul's account of what God

was doing shared that information with others because a very large number of people came to hear what Paul might tell them the next Sabbath. Luke indicated that “almost the entire city” came in crowds. Even allowing for possible exaggerations, there may have been thousands of people who came out that day. Since the synagogue was not that large, perhaps the events that followed were in the area around the synagogue and out in the nearby streets.

As noted in verse forty-three many Jews as well as Gentiles wanted to hear more from Paul; however, in verse forty-five we read that the Jews were filled with jealousy or envy. What seems like a conflict in these two verses may simply be that the Jews who embraced the message were different from the Jews who opposed the message. It is likely that those who showed opposition were the influential leaders of the Jewish community and those who wanted to hear more were those who were without a lot of influence. If that is an explanation of the different responses, then that probably indicates that the common people were struggling in life and the good news of God’s salvation for all humanity gave them some hope for relief. At the same time, those who were in the influential group saw this message as a threat to their influence and their social position. This would be a similar response to what had happened decades before in Jerusalem as the church was growing among the common people and was drawing resistance from the religious leaders in Jerusalem.

Luke indicated that those who contradicted what Paul had said the week before (or perhaps what he was saying at that time) were doing so out of jealousy or envy when they saw the size of the crowds. Some commentaries imply that the large number of Gentiles who were responding was the major issues with the protesting Jews. Apparently, many of the Jews believed that Jehovah was for the Jews only and everyone else was unworthy to worship Him unless they first converted to Judaism. We know from other accounts in the letters of Paul that this belief was a continuing issue in other churches during that time period. Some commentaries associate the issue with a more fundamental problem of the non-believing Jews rejecting the fact that Messiah had come and His name was Jesus. Of course, they may have been contradicting both ideas.

In addition to saying that Paul was not presenting the truth which would be difficult to prove in light of all the Old Testament scripture references that had been fulfilled by the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ, these protesting Jews were said to be blaspheming. It is not clear from the text whether they were reviling Paul or reviling Jesus. John Gill’s commentary indicated that they were contradicting Paul and blaspheming Jesus. Even today, most Jews do not believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Promised Messiah (the Christ). Is that blasphemy?

#### Gentile Believers – 13:46-48

<sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> 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.’ ” <sup>48</sup> 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. Acts 13:46–48 (ESV)

The strong opposition of the Jews who rejected the message of salvation by grace for all who will believe was met with strong words by Paul and Barnabas directly to these Jews. Their message started with information Jews should have already known regarding why God called Abraham and why his physical descendants through Isaac and Jacob were essential parts of God’s sovereign intent to restore humanity to a right relationship with Him. Many Jews had already been used by God to prepare the way for the message of salvation to go out into all the world. Thousands of Jews had responded and had formed the core of the church which began in

Jerusalem. It would be reasonable to think that as the word went out to the predominantly Gentile areas of the world that those who were familiar with the Law and the Prophets (the Jews living in those areas) would be useful in introducing the Gentiles to the Kingdom of God that had been proclaimed during Jesus' earthly ministry to the Jews in Judea. Some of the Jews living in Gentile areas responded positively, but most rejected and opposed what God was doing since they did not fully understand the prophecies that had been given to them regarding their roles in God's plan.

Those who continued to resist God's sovereign plan were exercising their free will and God allowed them to choose their path in life since they valued their own ideas and beliefs more than what the scriptures clearly revealed about God's will and intent. In effect, they decided that they had rather die than carry out God's will in their lives which would have resulted in what we commonly call "eternal life." Paul and Barnabas did their job as Christians. They told the opposers what God wanted them to hear. Our job as a Christian is not to convince the unbeliever of the Gospel. Our job is to give them the Gospel. What they do with it is their choice.

The true Israel of God has both Jews and Gentiles who have and exercise faith in the manner of Abraham. When the Jews in that area refused to believe and become part of what God was accomplishing, then the emphasis was focused on the Gentile population which had gone away from God and choose to worship pagan gods. Paul then quoted from Isaiah 49:6 that God had chosen the nation of Israel to be a "light" to those who were living in a "dark" pagan world. That is still the mission of the true Israel of God (the church) today.

The response of the Gentiles can be contrasted with that of the Jewish opposition. The Gentiles rejoiced when they heard the Good News and as they embraced and gave value to the message by simply believing and putting their trust in what God had done for them in providing a Savior who paid the penalty of sin and provided a pathway to the one true God.

The last part of verse 48 "those who were ordained or appointed to eternal life believed" has been used as a proof text that "some are predestined to be saved and others are predestined to be lost." Alexander MacLaren noted that this statement was intended to show the contrast of the envious Jews and the receptive Gentiles. I would see this also as a contrast between those who value a life of eternal quality (Godly character) versus those who see no value in being conformed to the ways of God. The "ordination" is determined by us in what we value. As Simon Peter pointed out when he was in the home of Cornelius "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." Alexander MacLaren's Commentary has the following observation: "In lands where Christ's name has not been proclaimed there are souls groping for the light, and seeking to obey the law written on their hearts. That there are such, and that such are 'accepted of Him,' and led by His own ways to the fuller light, is obviously taught in these words."

### Spread the Gospel – 13:49-52

<sup>49</sup> And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. <sup>50</sup> 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. <sup>51</sup> But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup> And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Acts 13:49–52 (ESV)

When people learn about something that is really beneficial and good, they want to share it with others. Apparently, this is exactly what happened in Antioch of Pisidia. How far outside the city this contagion spread is not stated. Those who had embraced the gospel message had experienced a real change in their lives. As they shared what had happened to them, others believed. These new Gentile believers were not Bible scholars but they could certainly

remember the main points of Paul's message of what God was doing and they knew the personal impact on themselves of believing and putting their trust in what Christ had done for all mankind. That is what sharing our faith and witnessing are all about – just telling what a difference had happen in our lives when we truly believed.

We know from Luke's record that Paul's message made a big difference in the lives of many people because others clearly saw what was happening. While some were positively influenced and were interested in learning more; others were negatively influenced and organized opposition arose. This opposition was initiated by the Jewish leaders (maybe the rabbis) in that area. It seems probable that the "devout women" and the "leading men" who were stirring up persecution against Barnabas and Saul were also Jewish. That would lead us to believe that the Jews were quite influential in Antioch.

Paul and Barnabas responded in the way Christ had advised those whom He sent out during His earthly ministry. He told them to simply depart and shake the dust off their feet if they were not welcomed in a particular area. An important lesson for all of us to learn is that some people will not accept the message of the gospel because they have other agendas and/or spiritual matters simply are not important to them. In such cases we need to realize that planting a seed and then moving on to find other opportunities of people who are earnestly seeking spiritual truth is the best alternative.

There had to be a sense of joy with both Paul and Barnabas that many in that area did believe and had become disciples in the faith as they followed the leading of the Holy Spirit. Luke reported that these new disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit even though they were still living in an area where many were followers of pagan gods. There was no mention of any type of organize groups or church and no mention of elders being called out or recognized. They had the essentials in that they believed and they were filled with God's Spirit.