

Acts 13:1–52

The Setting in Antioch

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers—Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been raised alongside Herod the tetrarch, and Saul (Acts 13:1). Their backgrounds were diverse, yet God had woven their stories together into one body. Barnabas was from Cyprus, Simeon carried both Hebrew and Roman identity, Lucius came from North Africa, Manaen grew up in a royal court, and Saul of Tarsus had been schooled in Jerusalem. This mixture of culture, calling, and experience formed the leadership team God would use for the next major step in the spread of the Gospel.

Luke tells us that these men were *ministering to the Lord* (Acts 13:2). Their service to people was ultimately service offered to God, and this kept their hearts steady. Ministry can be difficult—people often misunderstand or fail to appreciate what is done on their behalf. But when we remember that our work is offered first to God, we can remain faithful even when the task is tiring.

The Holy Spirit's Call

As they prayed and fasted, the Holy Spirit spoke: “*Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*” (Acts 13:2). Most likely this direction came through the prophetic gifting present in the church—God speaking through one of His servants.

They fasted again, prayed, laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, and sent them out. Yet Luke clarifies that it was truly the Spirit who sent them (Acts 13:4). Human hands may commission, but divine hands send.

Cyprus and Opposition

Their first destination was Cyprus. In Salamis they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues, with John Mark assisting (Acts 13:5). Crossing the island to Paphos, they encountered a false prophet—a sorcerer named Bar-Jesus—who served as spiritual advisor to the Roman governor, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6–7).

Sergius Paulus, being a thoughtful man, wanted to hear the Gospel. Bar-Jesus, fearing the loss of influence, opposed them. The apostle—now referred to as Paul—confronted him boldly: “You child of the devil... will you not cease perverting the right ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:10). By divine action, Bar-Jesus was struck blind for a time, and the governor believed, amazed at the teaching of the Lord (Acts 13:11–12).

John Mark Departs

From Paphos they traveled to Perga in Pamphylia, where John Mark left them to return to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). Scripture does not reveal why. Later, Mark's departure would become the source of sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas, yet eventually all wounds healed and Mark became a valued helper in Paul's ministry.

Into Galatia

From the malaria-ridden coastal plains they traveled to the highlands of Pisidian Antioch. Paul was likely suffering from severe illness, perhaps malaria, which may explain their route and later comments in Galatians about Paul's weakness and the believers' willingness to *"have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me."*

Paul's Sermon in Pisidian Antioch

On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue. After the readings from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers invited them to speak (Acts 13:15). Paul stood, motioned with his hand, and addressed both Jews and God-fearing Gentiles.

He reviewed Israel's history: God's choice of their ancestors, deliverance from Egypt, patience during the wilderness years, the conquest of Canaan, the time of the judges, the rise of Samuel, and the people's request for a king (Acts 13:16–22). God gave them Saul, and later David—a man after God's own heart.

From David, Paul leapt forward to God's fulfilled promise: *"Of this man's seed God has raised up for Israel a Savior—Jesus"* (Acts 13:23).

John the Baptist prepared the way, insisting he was not the Messiah but the forerunner. Then Paul spoke of Jesus' rejection: although the scriptures were read every Sabbath, the leaders in Jerusalem failed to recognize Him and fulfilled those very scriptures by condemning Him (Acts 13:27).

They found no cause for His death, yet pressured Pilate to crucify Him. When all was completed as foretold, Jesus was taken down from the tree and laid in a tomb—but God raised Him from the dead (Acts 13:30). He appeared to many witnesses, confirming beyond question His resurrection.

Paul quoted Psalm 2, Isaiah 55, and Psalm 16 to show that God had long promised a risen, incorruptible Messiah—prophecies fulfilled only in Jesus (Acts 13:32–37).

The Heart of the Gospel

Paul then proclaimed the heart of the good news:

"Through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38–39).

The law reveals our need; Jesus provides our rescue. The law condemns; Jesus pardons. The law exposes sin; Jesus removes it through His shed blood.

Reactions: Hunger and Hostility

As Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue, many begged to hear more the next Sabbath. They urged the new believers to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13:42–43). Yet the following week, when nearly the whole city gathered, jealousy stirred among many of the Jewish leaders. They contradicted Paul and verbally attacked him.

Paul responded with bold clarity: *“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles”* (Acts 13:46).

Their rejection was their own choosing. Every person must decide what they will do with Jesus. Our response to Him determines our own eternal destiny—not His.

The Gentiles rejoiced. The Gospel spread throughout the region. Opposition rose, and Paul and Barnabas were expelled. Shaking the dust off their feet, they went to Iconium—and the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:49–52).

Practical Application

1. Ministry begins with God, not people.
If we see ministry only as serving people, we will grow weary. When we serve as an offering to God, strength returns and joy flows.
2. God still calls and sends.
The Spirit desires to place believers wherever they can best bear witness to Jesus. Our responsibility is to listen, respond, and obey.
3. Opposition does not mean failure.
Paul met resistance at nearly every turn, yet the Gospel advanced. When doors close, God often opens others.
4. The resurrection remains the center of our message.
Jesus’ death removes our guilt; His resurrection proves His victory. A living Savior is the foundation of living hope.

A Challenge to Believers

Are you ministering *to people* or *to the Lord*?

Is your life shaped by your own will or by the will of God?

Like David, will you be a person after God’s heart—someone who chooses obedience even when costly?

Consider whether God is calling you to step into a new work, new ministry, or new obedience. The Holy Spirit still says, “Separate to Me...” but He speaks most clearly to hearts that worship, fast, listen, and surrender.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

Paul’s message still stands: through Jesus comes the forgiveness of sins.

You were created for a relationship with God, but sin separates you from Him. Jesus, through His death on the cross, bore your sin, and His resurrection proves He is God, Savior, and Lord.

Eternal life is not earned—it is received.

If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and genuinely entrust your life to Him, He will forgive your sins, restore you, and bring you into a relationship with God now and forever.

You can respond even now:

“Jesus, I believe You died for me and rose again. Forgive my sins and make me Yours. I choose to follow You.”

If this expresses your desire, God hears and responds.