
a ***Grace Notes*** course

The Acts of the Apostles

an expositional study
by Warren Doud

Lesson 217: **Acts 13:38-52**

ACTS, Lesson 217, Acts 13:38-52

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Acts 13:38-52

Acts 13:38

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

Men and brethren

Paul and his listeners are on the same level; all are sinners, and all can be saved by grace.

Paul now draws the conclusion to be drawn from the preceding statements; and he applies it to his listeners in a very direct and forceful way. He tells them that salvation, forgiveness of sins, is offered in Jesus Christ, the One who died, was buried, and who rose from the dead.

forgiveness of sins

(afesi- ahartiwn) This is a subject in which the Jews, and devout Gentiles (e.g. Cornelius), had always been deeply interested, "How do I obtain forgiveness of sin?". And they had always worked to adhere to all of the old ceremonials and practices, to get relief from the terrible burden of sin. Now Paul comes to them and teaches them that (1) their attempts to fulfill the Law will never remove their sin and (2) Jesus Christ forgives sins! No wonder that there was so many who were relieved and happy to hear this news. Paul presses the message home in his exhortation.

Acts 13:39

And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

By him all that believe

Faith alone (*believe*) in Christ (*by him*) alone (*from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses*).

are justified from all things

Definition: Justification is God's act of grace by which He pardons a sinner and accepts him as righteous on account of the atoning work of

Jesus Christ on the Cross. Remission of sin, absolution from guilt, and freedom from punishment are part of justification.

In order to be justified, a person must be given a righteousness equivalent to God's perfect righteousness. Therefore, imputation precedes justification.

Imputation is the charging to the account of one person something which properly belongs to another. The Lord Jesus Christ shares his perfect righteousness with the believer, Rom. 3:22; 4:11; 9:30-32; 4:4,5 **.

READ Romans 4:1-5

Because righteousness has been imputed to us, God calls us "justified". "Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him for righteousness." Imputation of righteousness on the basis of faith brings about justification.

The means of justification is redemption, Rom. 3:24. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

- Justification produces reconciliation. Rom. 5:1
- Because God the Father is satisfied (propitiation), we are freely justified.
- Justification occurs at the moment of a person's faith in Jesus Christ, Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal.3:24.
- Justification does not occur through keeping the Law of Moses, Gal. 2:16.
- Justification during the believer's lifetime is described in James 2:21-25. This is the function of the Faith-Rest principle in living the Christian Way of Life under grace.

Related Topics: Reconciliation, Propitiation, The Barrier, Imputation

TOPICS: JUSTIFICATION, RECONCILIATION, PROPITIATION, IMPUTATION

Acts 13:40-41

Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets;

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Behold, you despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which you shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

The phrase “you despisers” is not in the Hebrew of Habakkuk, but it is in the Septuagint (**of katafrontaiy**), so Paul is quoting the Septuagint here. The Jews, at least, would have been familiar with the LXX text; and there were undoubtedly many scoffers among the people in the synagogue that day; so the phrase is quite appropriate.

The quotation is from Habakkuk 1:5

Habakkuk 1:1-5, “The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw. How long, O Lord, will I call for help, And You will not hear?

I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save. Why do You make me see iniquity, And cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; Strife exists and contention arises.

Therefore the law is ignored And justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore justice comes out perverted.

Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder!

Because I am doing something in your days - You would not believe if you were told.

The Jews of Habakkuk’s day had refused to believe that the Chaldeans would invade their nation, yet the Chaldeans had some.

Acts 13:42

And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles sought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.

It seems from this statement that it was the Gentiles who were the receptive hearers of the teaching that Paul and Barnabas were doing. There were some Jews in the assembly who were saved, as we see in the next verse, but

there were many who did not believe the gospel of Christ and hardened their hearts against it.

The Gentiles sought

The people “begged” or “beseeched” (**parakalew**), Paul and Barnabas to make sure that they continued teaching them; they were eager to hear much more.

Acts 13:43

Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

when the congregation was broken up

The synagogue services were dismissed in the usual way.

many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas

These people stayed with Paul and Barnabas in order to get more teaching, this in spite of the obvious displeasure of many of the Jews. The “devout proselytes” (**sebomewn oj proshloutwn**) were godly people, people with positive volition to the things of God. The term usually refers to

A proselyte was any non-Jew who lived among the Jews and followed their religion..

The word “proselyte” is from the Greek **proshluto~**, a “stranger” or “foreigner”, a person who has come from his own people to live in a new country, with people of another culture.

Among the people who lives among the Jews, all of those who were not descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, were known as “strangers,” or “proselytes.” The Jews recognizes two types of proselytes, the “proselytes of the gate” and the “proselytes of the covenant.”

The “proselytes of the gate” were people who wanted to live among the Jews but who would not submit to circumcision. However,

they usually acknowledged Jehovah as the true God, avoided idolatry; but they were not obliged to observe any of the Mosaic institutions. They were not allowed to eat the Passover or partake of any of the sacred festivals.

The “proselytes of the covenant” adopted the Jewish religion completely, even agreeing to follow the rite of circumcision, observe all the ceremonies of the Law. In fact, they were no different from the Jews in their culture and practice, except that they had once been “heathen,” or gentile. They had the same rights, spiritual and secular, as the Jews themselves.

persuaded them to continue in the grace of God

A considerable number of people were saved during the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in the various cities they visited on this first missionary journey, as we see in Acts 14.

READ Acts 14:21-23

The doctrine of grace, free justification and remission of sins based on the work of Christ on the Cross, the blood of Christ, not on the works of the Law.

Acts 13:44

And the next Sabbath day almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.

almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.

If not the whole city, a large part of it. It was not that there was no teaching for a whole week. There are two or three days of teaching at the synagogue during the intervening days between Sabbaths. And certainly Paul and Barnabas would have taken every opportunity to converse with groups or individuals wherever they went in town. Now all these people thronged to the synagogue in a large crowd, to hear the good news.

Acts 13:45

But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

We note that it wasn't the God-fearing Gentiles but the Jews set themselves against Paul and Barnabas. The Jews have now seen the Paul and Barnabas reap an evangelistic harvest, after the Jews had tried to interest the Gentile population in Judaism.

filled with envy

Or, “filled with zeal”. (**zhlo~**) This word can mean either “zeal” or “envy”, I suppose depending on your point of view. The Jews would have characterized themselves as “zealous”; but their actions were motivated by intense jealousy.

From a human point of view, their jealousy is understandable; but from a divine perspective, the Jews should have been first in accepting the gospel of salvation. Instead of obeying the teachings of God's word, they begin to contradict the words spoken by Paul. Luke even adds that they do so abusively. They turned on the apostles and made an uproar, opposing the words of Paul with all anger and malice.

contradicting

This is the imperfect active indicative of **ajtilegw**, “they began to contradict” what was spoken by Paul.

Note this from Titus 1:9, “Holding fast the faith word, as he has been taught, that he might be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”

“the gainsayers”: (**ajtilegw**), literally, “those who speak against; those who contradict”; therefore, “those who are in opposition”.

READ Romans 10:19-21

Rom. 10:21 (NAS), “But as for Israel He says, All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and **obstinate !!**

By such conduct they did, in fact, pass sentence on themselves. ³

They declared themselves unworthy of eternal life because they had rejected the gospel. But they did so in point of fact : by contradicting and blaspheming the gospel, they furnished matter for their own condemnation. ⁴

They have passed a verdict on themselves.

we turn to the Gentiles

In Acts 1:8, the Lord Jesus had commanded the apostles to go first to Jerusalem and Judea, that is, to the Jews first, then the Gentiles. But He then said, “to the uttermost parts of the earth”, making it clear that Gentiles were included in any missionary effort.

READ Romans 1:13-16

Acts 13:47

For so has the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set you to be a light of the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

The quotation is from Isaiah 49:6.

Isaiah 49:6, “And he said, It is a light thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give you for a light to the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation unto the end of the earth.”

Isaiah 42:6, “I the LORD have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand, and will keep you, and give you for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles”

Paul says, “This is what the Lord has commanded us.” These are explicit directions from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah; these

³ Acts 13:46

⁴ Acts 13:46

should have registered in the minds of any Jew who was the least open in his thinking.

unto the ends of the earth

Compare Isaiah 49:6 with Acts 1:8.

Acts 13:48

And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

The Gentiles responded with great eagerness. They listened to Paul’s teaching and responded joyously to the Word, praising God for providing the gospel message. It is not that all of the Gentiles in the community were converted; only a part of them. However, as we see from the events on the apostles’ return journey, in the short period between their visits to these cities, enough Christians had been gathered to constitute congregations, over which pastors (elders) could be appointed. (Acts 14)

as many as were ordained to eternal life believed

The word “ordained” is **tetagenoi**, the perfect passive participle of **tassw** “to assign to a place; to appoint; to decide:

The commentators all speak at length about this phrase, because some have inferred that it helps to prove the doctrine of election, the idea that God moves some people to acceptance of Christ, and does not move others. I am not going to enter the arena of those discussions here, but I will refer you to the commentaries on Acts in the bibliography, especially those of Barnes, Clarke, Robertson, Gill, Gloag, and Furneaux. Here I will copy what Robertson has to say.

“The word “ordain” is not the best translation here. “Appointed,” as Hackett shows, is better. The Jews here had voluntarily rejected the word of God. On the other side were those Gentiles who gladly

accepted what the Jews had rejected, not all the Gentiles. \

“Why these Gentiles here ranged themselves on God’s side as opposed to the Jews Luke does not tell us. This verse does not solve the vexed problem of divine sovereignty and human free agency.

“There is no evidence that Luke had in mind an *absolutum decretum* of personal salvation. Paul had shown that God’s plan extended to and included Gentiles. Certainly the Spirit of God does move upon the human heart to which some respond, as here, while others push him away.”

Acts 13:49

And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

The word “published” is **diaferw**, “to carry through; to spread; to tell everywhere”.

What does this imply? Some of the new believers were trained well enough to be able to spread the gospel beyond the city limits of Antioch. It was certainly not Paul and Barnabas who did the “publishing”, as we see just below.

“A Church was formed of united Jews and Gentiles; and all who were destined to enter the path of eternal life were gathered into the Catholic brotherhood of the hitherto separated races. The synagogue had rejected the inspired missionaries, but the apostolic instruction went on in some private house or public building belonging to the Heathen. And gradually the knowledge of Christianity began to be disseminated through the whole vicinity.”⁵

5 8

⁵ 8

13:50

But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.

devout and honorable women

“Devout”, here, is the same word translated “religious”, to describe proselytes. in verse 43. Some commentators take this to mean that these women were, in particular, Gentile proselytes that were being stirred up. But it seems to me that Jewish women could also have been a part of the persecution against Paul and Barnabas. That they were women of high standing in the community is evident from the term “honorable women”, and Jewish women would have had higher standing than Gentile proselytes. Josephus said that almost all of the married women in Damascus were attached to the Jewish religion (Wars of the Jews, II.20.21).

chief men of the city

Probably city officials; certainly leaders of the Jewish community, rulers of the synagogue, the same who had only recently invited Paul and Barnabas to speak.

raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas

The key people of the city raised the mob against the apostles. Paul seems to allude to this persecution in 2 Timothy 3:11 “persecutions, sufferings, what things befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, what persecutions I endured.”

expelled them out of their coasts

That is, they ran them out of town, out of their borders, or their province. This was not a legal expulsion; Antioch was a Roman colony, and banishing someone would have had to have official sanction from a Roman legate or other authority, which it was very unlikely that the Jews could have obtained.

Acts 13:51

But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

The Lord had given this advice to the disciples whom He sent to witness in Judea.

READ Luke 9:2-5

This was not a sign of contempt (Meyer), but of rejection and condemnation : that they renounced all fellowship with them, and that even the dust of their city was a witness against them.

“As a protest against the injustice which cast them out. The sandal was taken off and the dust shaken out as a symbolic token that the very soil of the country was defiling” ⁶

1Q:14.

... Heathen country was thought by the Jews to do; so that by this action they signified that they would have nothing more to do with them, or say to them, and that they looked upon them as impure and unholy, as any Heathen city or country. There seems to be an allusion to some maxims and customs of the Jews, with respect to the dust of Heathen countries.

“On account of six doubts, they say, they burn the first offering, for a doubt of a field in which a grave might be, and for a doubt “of the dust which comes from the land of the Gentiles”, etc.”

“On which Bartenora has this note; ‘all dust which comes from the land of the Gentiles, is reckoned by us as the rottenness of a dead carcass; and of these two, “the land of the Gentiles”, and a field in which is a grave, it is decreed that they “defile” by touching, and by carrying.’

“Again (from the Mishnah), “the dust of a field in which is a grave, and the dust

without the land (of Israel) which comes along with an herb, are unclean.”

“Upon which Maimonides makes this remark, ‘that the dust of a field that has a grave in it, and the dust which is without the land of Israel, defile by touching and carrying; or if, when it hangs at the end of an herb, when they root it out of the dust of such a field, it is unclean.”

Hence they would not suffer herbs to be brought out of an Heathen country into the land of Israel, lest dust should be brought along with them; so they say “any of the dust of the land of the Gentiles”, which defiles in the tent, and pollutes the purity of the land of Israel.” \

and came unto Iconium

This city, which today is known as Konya, actually was part of Phrygia (according to Xenophon, *Anabasis*, i. 2.19; but Pliny, Strabo, Cicero, and Pliny the Elder, all state that Iconium was in Lycaonia), even though it bordered Lycaonia.

“There is a tetrarchy out of Lycaonia, where it borders on Galatia, composed of fourteen states, the capital of which is Iconium;” (Pliny the Elder, Nat. Hist. v. 25).

Iconium was about 50 miles east of Antioch of Pisidia. It was not a Roman colony in the time of Paul, but it became one in later years. There was a population of about 30,000.

Situated on a large, fertile plateau (mesa), Iconium was surrounded by fertile fields that received sufficient water from streams flowing down from the nearby mountains. It was a commercial center that served the agricultural communities of that area. It became an important city along a major highway, and from this center at least five roads spread into the countryside. ⁷

⁶ [unclear]

⁷ [unclear]

The majority of Jews in the Diaspora were Hellenists, that is, they spoke Greek and followed Greek customs. This was especially true of Jews from such areas of Greek influence like Alexandria or Cyrenia (coast of Libya). The contact of Jews with Greeks first began when Alexander forcibly settled 8,000 Jews in Egypt, in the Nile delta, where they formed a large part of his new city, Alexandria. From Egypt the Jews gradually spread along the whole North African coast. Jews were also removed by Seleucus Nicator, from Babylonia to Antioch and Seleucia, and under various persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes and other Greek rulers, scattered themselves through Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia, and the Greek islands of the Aegean.

The majority adopted the Greek language, and many forgot the Aramaic dialect which had been the Jews' language since their captivity.

“Hebrews”

Any man was a **Jew** [יְהוּדִי] who could trace his descent from Jacob. The word “Jew” is a racial identity.

A **Hebrew** was a Jew who spoke Hebrew and retained Hebrew customs, following the ancient religion closely.

The Hebrews whose families had come from Aram were called **Arameans**. This word refers to Aram, or Padan-Aram, the district of Mesopotamia surrounding the city of Haran, and the territory included the city of Damascus. Aram was the 5th son of Shem, Noah's oldest son; Haran was the elder son of Terah and Abraham's brother; he was the father of Lot. The Jews from these areas spoke Aramaic (Assyrian), as did the Palestinian Jews of the time of Christ. Parts of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic, and Jesus spoke Aramaic.

Note: King Ahab fought against Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, whose capital was Damascus.

The distinction between a Hebrew and a Hellenist was a distinction within the Jewish

nation, not between the Jews and other nations. Paul calls himself a “Hebrew of Hebrews,” that is, a Hebrew and of Hebrew parents, speaking Hebrew and following Hebrew customs.

In this verse, both Hebrews and Hellenists are Christian believers, but there is still the line of cleavage between the two groups, which had the potential for conflict.

A **Hellenizer** was a Jew who followed Greek philosophy and culture instead of the Jewish religion and practices.