

# Lesson 1 | June 4, 2023

## Gospel Proclamation to Jews and Gentiles

**Study Text:** Acts 13:1–5; 13:13 through 14:7

**Central Truth:** The forgiveness of sins and eternal life are available to all who believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.

### Key Verse: Reference

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [Jesus Christ] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins (KJV).

“Brothers, listen! We are here to proclaim that through this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins” (NLT).

### Learning Objectives

- Students will see how God worked with the church at Syrian Antioch to move Paul and Barnabas into their mission to Gentiles.
- Students will have a spirit of commitment to reach every person with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Students will participate in evangelistic outreach both locally and at a distance.

## Introducing the Study

**Say:** Jesus commanded His followers to reach everyone with the message of His loving sacrifice. After ascending to heaven, He continued to guide His people in the mission He had given them. Paul and Barnabas were called to leave Antioch and go on a mission for Christ; the church was called to release them into ministry.

### Opening Activity—Travel Planning Pays Off

*Ask.* How long does it take to plan a weeklong vacation? A trip overseas? What is the most important thing you have ever overlooked when planning . . . and how much trouble or expense did it cause you? (Allow time for discussion.) Few things are worse than being lost in an unfamiliar place or misplacing documents necessary to board a jet or cross international borders. When we spend time preparing to travel, we are usually rewarded with fewer emergencies and less panic.

**Say:** In our service to God, it’s important that we move in His timing and His direction. The apostle Paul and his companions heard from God and followed Him in their ministry of the gospel. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Barnabas and Paul (first called Saul) had been active in ministry for some time. Barnabas appeared first in Acts 4 as a generous giver. Later he introduced Paul to the church at Jerusalem and traveled to Syrian Antioch to strengthen new believers. Paul experienced a dramatic conversion from being a persecutor of Christians to spokesman

for Christ. He then witnessed and debated for Him, despite danger of persecution. Now together in Antioch, Barnabas and Paul would recognize God's call to extend the message of Christ's forgiveness to both Jews and Gentiles.

## **Part 1—Commissioned for the Gospel Called by the Spirit**

Acts 13:1–2

**Say:** The church at Antioch in Syria benefited from the ministry of prophets and teachers among them. Barnabas, a Levite from Cyprus, had earlier been part of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 13:1: see 4:36–37). Simeon, whose first name was Jewish, had a Roman surname, Niger, which means “black” in Latin (13:1, KJV). Lucius may be mentioned in Romans 16:21. Manaen, “brought up with Herod the tetrarch” (verse 1, KJV), was possibly Herod's foster brother. Saul, later called Paul, was a former persecutor of the Church who was confronted by Jesus Christ and transformed on the road to Damascus (9:1–6, 19–20). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God gave specific guidance to His people at Antioch when they were worshipping and fasting (13:2). Fasting commonly involves abstaining from food for a period of time to focus on God.

God told them to recognize and accept His call on the lives of Barnabas and Saul. He had already called them to the next phase of their ministry; now He called the church to release them from service in Antioch and willingly send them out to regions far beyond with the gospel of Christ.

### **Resource Packet Item 1: The Spirit Testifies about Jesus**

Distribute the information sheet and draw attention to the various ways the Holy Spirit uses people to spread the gospel. Allow class members to share their own experiences of the Spirit's help in witnessing or His work leading to their own salvation.

### **Discuss**

? What types of gifted individuals has God placed in your church?

? How can Christians seek God's guidance together for their mission to the world?

## **Sent by the Spirit**

Acts 13:3–5

**Say:** After additional fasting and prayer, the church at Antioch was ready to send Barnabas and Saul on their way (Acts 13:3). They were following the example of Jesus, who prayed all night before choosing twelve disciples to send out as apostles (Luke 6:12–16). The believers at Antioch showed the importance of seeking God's help in

every way as they prepared to send out two men on a missionary journey. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In addition to fasting and prayer, the church laid hands on Barnabas and Saul. Laying on hands to set a person forth for ministry took place as early as Moses' commissioning of Joshua (Numbers 27:22–23). This practice also appears earlier in the Book of Acts when the apostles commissioned the deacons to serve the practical needs of widows (Acts 6:6).

Through this act, the church at Antioch recognized the authority of Christ and His command to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). Christ himself had chosen Barnabas and Saul to carry out His mission in a specific way, and the local church echoed His choice by sending them out with their blessing.

Acts 13:4 states that they were “sent out by the Holy Spirit” (NLT). The Holy Spirit initiated their mission by speaking this call to their own hearts. He further confirmed that call by speaking to the assembled body, who responded in obedience to this message by commissioning them to the ministry. In the entire series of events, the Holy Spirit worked in and through the hearts of His people to move Barnabas and Saul into their mission. Accompanying them was John Mark (verse 5).

The Holy Spirit works in this way yet today, as individuals are called to be missionaries and go out from our churches and fellowship to other nations. We can bless newly appointed missionaries with our finances and with our prayers as they travel to sometimes remote locations and countries, often under difficult conditions, to share the gospel. When we pray and give, we are confirming to those willing to go that we recognize and bless the call of God on their lives.

### ***Discuss***

? What kinds of requests should we make to God for those going into ministry?

? Why is it vital to acknowledge Christ himself as the sending authority for evangelism and missions?

## **Part 2—Example of Gospel Proclamation**

### **The Foundation of the Gospel**

Acts 13:13–25

**Say:** Having overcome the opposition of a sorcerer and false prophet (Acts 13:6–12), the apostolic team sailed from Paphos, on the west end of Cyprus (verse 13). They came to Perga in Pamphylia, a province of Asia Minor. From there, John Mark returned to Jerusalem. Although his departure is not explained, Saul (now called Paul) later rejected his assistance because he had “deserted” them (15:38, NLT). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul and Barnabas moved inland to Antioch, in the province of Pisidia (Acts 13:14–15). Paul accepted the invitation to speak in the synagogue, and used the Old Testament—likely the Scripture passages read that day—to illustrate his message.

Beginning with the Exodus, Paul drew attention to God’s grace toward Israel in choosing them, multiplying them, and bringing them out of Egyptian bondage into Canaan, despite their testing Him in the wilderness (Acts 13:16–19).

After being ruled by the judges, Israel “begged for a king,” wanting to be ruled like the nations around them (verses 20–21, NLT; see 1 Samuel 8:4–6). Although God’s intent was to rule them directly, He gave them a king, Saul, who was later removed for rebellion against Him (Acts 13:22; see 1 Samuel 15:1–23). Saul was replaced by David, whom God trusted to serve Him wholeheartedly (see 1 Samuel 13:14; 16:1,13).

From David, Paul goes immediately to David’s descendant, Jesus—“God’s promised Savior of Israel” (Acts 13:23, NLT). Some in the synagogue may have heard of John the Baptist, who preached repentance and baptism as a forerunner of Jesus (verse 24). John made it clear to his listeners that he was not the Messiah—who was far greater than he was—soon to arrive (verse 25; see Matthew 3:11).

### ***Discuss***

? Why do you think Paul used Israel’s history to proclaim the gospel in the synagogue?

? How can believers act as forerunners of Christ today, preparing people to consider who He is and what He has done for us?

## **The Message of Salvation**

Acts 13:26–41

**Say:** Paul made a powerful declaration in Acts 13:26 when he addressed both Jews and Gentiles as objects of God’s salvation. Later, Paul would write extensively about how God’s grace reached out to Gentiles, pulling them into His covenant family (see Ephesians 2:11–13). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Salvation for all who believe comes through the work of Jesus Christ. Despite His innocence, He was crucified and placed in a tomb (Acts 13:27–29). These events were no surprise to God, and they fulfilled prophecy.

In further prophetic fulfillment, God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 13:30–35). This fact was attested to by many witnesses, by the twelve disciples, by 500 followers at one time, and by Paul himself (1 Corinthians 15:3–8; Acts 13:31). The Resurrection confirmed that Jesus was indeed the Son of God (verse 33; see Romans 1:3–4).

The prophet Isaiah wrote that God would give Christ the blessings He promised King David (Acts 13:34; Isaiah 55:3). One of these promises was the assurance that God’s “Holy One” would not decay in the grave (Acts 13:35, NLT; Psalm 16:10). Although

David was the human author of Psalm 16, the Holy Spirit inspired him to look forward some one thousand years to the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:36–37). David served God as King of Israel, then died and decayed in a natural way. Jesus served His Father by dying for the human race and was freed from death and decay by the power of God.

Jesus Christ, by His death and resurrection, made possible the forgiveness of every sin (verses 38–39). The synagogue audience should have been prepared for this good news by their knowledge of “the law of Moses and the prophets and . . . the Psalms” (Luke 24:44, NLT). The Law exposed human sin; the psalms and prophets pointed to the One who would release all who believe from sin’s penalty.

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Forgiveness through Jesus Christ**

Hand out the case study sheet. Ask volunteers to read each case study and the accompanying verses. Discuss responses to the questions and other examples from the experiences of class members.

Paul ends his sermon by warning them not to meet this good news with unbelief, but with faith (Acts 13:40–41; see Habakkuk 1:5).

#### ***Discuss***

? How can the example of Christ move believers to reach out to groups of unbelievers ignored or overlooked by others?

? What are some challenges unbelievers make to the resurrection of Christ? How should believers answer those challenges?

## **Part 3—One Gospel; Two Responses**

### **Eternal Life Rejected**

Acts 13:42–52

**Say:** God’s word of salvation through Jesus Christ immediately bore fruit in the lives of those who heard Paul’s preaching (Acts 13:42). Their excitement at hearing God’s plan made them beg to hear more the following Sabbath. Followed by both Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism, the apostolic team urged continued dependence on God’s grace (verse 43). God’s grace results in salvation and empowerment for believers. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

God’s grace results in both salvation and empowerment for believers to live consistently for Christ.

When a much larger crowd gathered the next week, the unbelieving Jews envied the apostles, contradicted the gospel, and insulted Paul (verses 44–45). The apostles did not return the attack, but affirmed the priority of reaching the Jews first with the gospel

(verse 46; see Romans 1:16). Sadly, those attacking them rejected God's Word and the promise of eternal life it brings (see John 6:68).

### **Resource Packet Item 3: How Would You Answer?**

Distribute the worksheet. Divide the class into groups and ask each to discuss one or two objections and to share their responses with the class.

This same Word was sanctioned by God for the entire Gentile world, some of whom would receive it that very day (Acts 13:47–48). Not satisfied to keep the good news of Christ to themselves, they spread the message “throughout that region” (verse 49, NLT).

The Jewish unbelievers continued their attack by inciting others against Paul and Barnabas, who were then expelled from the city (verse 50). As Christ had commanded those He sent out to preach, they “shook the dust from their feet” (verse 51, NLT; see Matthew 10:14). Afterwards they went to Iconium, on the road to Ephesus.

The account concludes with believers in Psidian Antioch being filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52). Christ intends for every person who receives Him to also receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit and be marked by joy in receiving that fullness (Luke 11:13).

### ***Discuss***

? How has the gospel of Christ changed your life? Others' lives around you?

? How should you handle those who insult you personally because they do not share your faith in Christ?

? How can the joy given by the Holy Spirit make the gospel attractive to those who do not know Him?

## **Perseverance and Miracles**

Acts 14:1–7

**Say:** In Acts 1:8, Jesus promised His followers the Holy Spirit would bring power for effective ministry. This power results in bold speaking, conviction in unbelievers, even in signs and wonders confirming the spoken word. In Iconium's synagogue, Paul and Barnabas brought many Jews and Greeks to Christ as they preached in the power God provided (Acts 14:1). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Opposition arose from unbelieving Jews as it had at Antioch. These Jews then stirred unbelieving Gentiles against the apostles (verse 2). Paul and Barnabas responded to this challenge by committing themselves to remain in the city for some time (verse 3). God honored their faith by enabling them to perform signs and wonders, bearing witness to the truth of Christ (see Mark 16:20).

God's truth brought division, as some responded joyfully and entered His kingdom and others flatly rejected the message (Acts 14:4). A mob of Gentiles and Jews threatened the apostles with stoning (verse 5). Paul and Barnabas left Iconium at this point rather than risk this danger (verses 6–7). This was not a sign of fear; this departure was followed by continued witness in Lystra, Derbe, and the surrounding area. Jesus said, "When you are persecuted in one town, flee to the next" (Matthew 10:23, NLT).

Although Christians in the western hemisphere are not often physically persecuted, some are threatened verbally or abused in some manner because of their faith. And Christians in certain countries today are treated similarly to how Paul and Barnabas were treated at Iconium. We can learn from their story how to respond when we are mistreated

### ***Discuss***

? Read 1 Corinthians 2:1–5. How did Paul say he came to the Corinthians? Why must all believers remain dependent on the Holy Spirit in their witnessing efforts?

? How dire should persecution become before Christian witnesses flee from its danger?

## **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** The message of God's forgiveness, made possible by the sacrificial death of Christ, is the center of the Christian faith. God has opened the door for human beings to know Him in an intimate way. This door is open for every person willing to repent of their sins and exercise faith in Jesus. For those who have already done so, the next step is beginning to share the good news of Jesus Christ with friends, family, and neighbors who are still outside God's family. God is ready to guide, to empower, and to work through every believer willing to become His instrument to extend His invitation to the world just as Paul and Barnabas did.

## **Living It Out**

### **Ministry in Action**

- Take time to thank and praise the Father for sending His Son to die on the Cross for our sins.
- Make a list of family, friends, and regular acquaintances who need to hear the gospel, and use it as a prayer reminder.
- Look for an opportunity to share the gospel with someone entirely new this week.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

Monday:

Joshua Calls for a Response.  
Joshua 24:14–25

Tuesday:

Nathan Confronts David's Sin.  
2 Samuel 12:1–14

Wednesday:

Jonah Preaches in Nineveh.

Jonah 3:1–10

Thursday:

The Baptist Calls for Repentance.

Luke 3:1–9

Friday:

Jesus Preaches the Good News.

Mark 1:14–15,35–39

Saturday:

Early Christians Proclaim God's Word.

Acts 8:1–8