

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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ACTS 13 v 16 – 41

Introduction

This is Luke's summary of the sermon preached by the Apostle Paul in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. Paul was accompanied by Barnabas on this, the first of his great missionary journeys. They had been to Cyprus and were then travelling into the heart of Galatia, in present-day Turkey. As was Paul's regular custom when he was visiting a new city, on the first sabbath they were there they went to the local synagogue and sought to bring the Gospel to their fellow Jews first (Romans 1 v 16).

As a one-time ultra-orthodox Jew himself, Paul needed to know exactly how the things promised by God to Israel throughout Old Testament times were to be fulfilled through Jesus Christ by that same unchanging God. Paul couldn't accept the luxury of ignoring Israel's past which, sadly, often happens with some Christians today, who attempt to divorce the promises of God through Israel in Old Testament times from God's plans and promises in the Church era. For the Apostles, especially Paul, God's redemptive purposes had to be a seamless, legal and logical progression from all the promises, types and symbols of His dealings with Israel over its history. Jesus had to be the exact fulfilment of all that had gone before or He was an imposter. This was the ground on which many of the leading religious leaders of the day rejected Jesus. They couldn't see how, if He was the Messiah, He would apparently disobey many of their legal observances. His answer was that they had wrongly interpreted the Law of Moses, for their own selfish purposes, and He spent a lot of His ministry showing the true understanding of what God had taught them through Moses (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount: "You have heard that it was said....but I tell you...").

This sermon, in summary, shows how the apostle was utterly persuaded that Jesus was the perfect and only fulfilment of all that God had revealed through Israel. Indeed, God's plan goes right back to Eden, when God told Satan that the seed of the woman would bruise his head.

A synopsis of the sermon

v 16 Salutation

Paul addresses the congregation, which included Jewish people and Gentiles who to a greater or lesser extent accepted the Jewish view of God and wanted to worship accordingly.

v 17 – 23 The importance of Israel

Paul reminds his audience that Israel was a chosen nation (Deuteronomy 7 v 7 – 8). God's dealings with Israel were on the basis of His grace, patience and sovereign purposes. These great providences of God gave them blessings in Egypt, miraculously sustained them through the wilderness, drove out seven tribal peoples in Canaan (Deuteronomy 7 v 1), gave them a series of judges and prophets, and then the first two kings. Saul, the first, initially gained the favour of the people by his physical bearing and stature. David, the second, eternally gained the favour of God by his godly shepherd heart. As the prophets foretold, the promised Messiah would then come from the regal line of descent from David (e.g. Isaiah 9 v 7).

v 24 – 29 The hostility of the Jewish authorities towards Jesus

The coming of the Messiah was heralded by John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets, but John made it plain that the One who would follow him was greater than he was. Paul emphasises that this was not just an isolated religious incident in recent history; it was in fact the long-foretold “message of salvation”, given first to Israel (John 1 v 11). The total rejection by the authorities of both John and then Jesus, leading to Jesus’ execution, fulfilled the prophetic scriptures about the suffering servant read weekly (e.g., Isaiah 53 and many others). With His death and burial, the authorities felt they had disposed of this dangerous provincial imposter once and for all.

v 30 – 31 The resurrection of Jesus

The intervention of God through the resurrection of Jesus changed everything. The fact that Jesus was alive was so well attested (1 Corinthians 15 v 3 – 8) as to be beyond any contradiction. The apostolic authority of Paul and the former disciples was based on their own first-hand witness of the risen Christ (Acts 1 v 22b).

v 32 – 37 The hope of Israel is completely met in Jesus Christ

Paul continues by resting the whole of Israel’s messianic hopes and security upon the resurrection of Jesus. That was the prima facie evidence that all that they had been waiting for had been, or would be, fulfilled in Him. Death is God’s judgement on sin, and is mankind’s greatest and most-feared enemy. Thus, taking full authority over death was the confirmatory sign of the long-promised and true Messiah. He was the One who would have the most intimate relationship with God the Father, through Himself being God the Son. And He would be the One who eventually would reign on David’s throne, and death’s decay would not taint Him.

v 38 – 41 Jesus fulfils all the legal requirements of the Law.

To the Jew, the most important objectives of a relationship with the one true God is the forgiveness of sin and a full declaration by God of innocence before the Law; justification, in a word. That would lead to the gift of eternal life overcoming the punishment of death. Throughout history, all humanity’s religious and legalistic tendencies and observances are designed to achieve these great objectives, and that includes those who sought to obey the Law of Moses. Only in Jesus could these objectives be achieved. So, Paul’s final appeal to these people is that they should avoid perishing because of sarcastic unbelief in Jesus, the only true Messiah and Saviour.

The accompanying video

In the video which accompanies these notes we consider four important issues raised by Paul’s sermon.

1. The continuity of God’s purposes. Of all the many sermons Paul must have preached, why has this one been given to us fairly fully?
2. The position of Jesus in history. What does this sermon teach us about His story?
3. The eternal reality of redemption. Why does the resurrection of Jesus change everything?
4. The covenant promises of God. By rejecting Jesus, did Israel lose their chosen position with God forever?