

**Study 5 27/2/14**

**Grace For All Nations**

**Acts 13:13-41**

**The setting (vv. 14-15)**

The gospel has been announced to and received by Gentiles under Peter. 'Hellenists' in (Syrian) Antioch have also believed (11:20) and been embraced within the church as Barnabas comes and 'sees the grace of God' (11:23). They too have been granted 'repentance that leads to life' (11:18). Then, in spite of a tangle with a third generation Herod (Agrippa 1—his grandfather tried to murder a new king and his uncle tried to get Jesus to talk) trying to please jealous Jews, the word of God increases and multiplies (12:24) and the section on the breakthrough of the gospel to Gentiles is concluded.

After three years in Damascus and 10 in Tarsus, Paul is introduced to the (Syrian) Antioch congregation (11:25-26), and soon becomes the leader of the travelling team (13:13). He and Barnabas head for Cyprus (Barnabas' homeland), and then, the Roman colony of another Antioch near Pisidia (actually Phrygia) in the province of Galatia. 'Paul attached great importance to the evangelization of Roman colonies, which were planted at strategic points along the imperial roads to safeguard the interests of Rome' (F. F. Bruce on *Acts*, p. 267).

While this city is a Roman colony, it includes many Jews and Paul begins with the synagogue because the gospel is for the Lord's chosen people. He may already be known, or is at least recognized, as a teacher in Israel and is given opportunity to exhort the gathered Jews and God fearers.

Apart from the Jerusalem Conference (chapter 15), the remaining speeches we will study are all by Paul. We are not finding 'the mind and heart of the church' from a representative sample but are finding the mind of Christ, given to the church through those he appoints.

**The speech (vv. 16-41)**

Paul confesses the faith of Israel—their gospel (vv. 16-19). He wants to base what he will say in what they know God has done: chosen them, made them great, lead them out (Psa. 136:11-12), borne them (Deut. 1:31) and given them their inheritance (Deut. 7:1). He uses phrases from the Old Testament that evoke these confessions of Israel in the past. The 450 years he refers to would be their time in Egypt (7:6), the wilderness, and until the settlement announced in Joshua 14:1-2. *The church loves God's people because of the truth they bear.*

Paul passes quickly over the Judges to Samuel and the reign of Saul (a Benjamite like Paul himself) whom God 'removed' (vv. 20-22). It was not the most auspicious time in their history and is a foil to God 'raising up' David, the man who loved God and lived in the privileges and calling of God. Israel's blessings are not for their gloating or presumption but for their obedience and enjoyment and Paul is about to show them how they may now enter into their inheritance. . *God's blessings are for living in.*

Jesus has taught Israel to live in God's providing (Matt. 6:33), to be truly free by being free from sin (John 8:32), that their inheritance will go to those worthy of it and that 'many are called but few are chosen' (Matt. 22:8, 14). But even so, 'the promise is to you'—the Jews, as Peter has said (Acts 2:39).

All Israel knows David's reign was their highest moment. The prophecies of God fulfilling his promises to the nation were couched in Davidic terms (e.g. Psa. 89:49; Ezek. 21:27). 'The true Son of David has come!' says Paul. 'He is Jesus' (v. 23). *Jesus will fulfill all God's promises.*

Like Peter before him, and perhaps using common material collected from Jesus' own teaching on the kingdom, Paul starts the story of Jesus with John's preparation for him, as a call to repentance (vv. 24-25). Israel needs to live in their privileges. Many knew he had been sent as a prophet, but he pointed to one who would be vastly greater. He would be the one by whom Israel's repentance will be possible. *Again, God's truth is for living in.*

The coming of Jesus is a 'word of salvation' (not just of 'encouragement'—v. 15) sent to all Israel (v. 26). God has again visited them as he visited their forefathers. Everything he says is geared to make a connection between their life and the good news of Jesus.

Again, Israel's (and the world's) rejection of Jesus is part of telling the good news (vv. 27-29). They are ignorant of the prophecies they know so well, blind to their own Messiah, and 'kill' their own future, asking Rome to murder the man they confess is innocent, and he is buried—done with. Even in this, they simply fulfill what the prophecies predict; God has been in charge of the whole process and is greater than their abominable ignorance and rebellion. *God's grace is greater than Israel's sin and all sin.*

And God raised him up (vv. 30-31)! (Cf. David being 'raised up'.) We should never lose sight, not just of the well attested physical miracle of the resurrection but of the moral miracle. God has taken our greatest sin and turned into his word of salvation. It is the joy of the gospel that sustains the whole church throughout its history. *Resurrection is the sign that sin and death have been routed.*

Israel knows that a new David will secure her future. He will be God's Son to rule the nations (vv. 32-33; Psa. 2:7). The eternal Son is 'begotten' in history by the coming of the Spirit (Luke 3:22), and now, by being raised from death and to glory. *Jesus is reigning.*

Israel (and the world) needs to know God's generosity promised to Isaiah (v. 34; Isa. 55:1-5). Those who are thirsty should come and God will make a covenant with them, 'the sure blessings of David'—that is, David as King reigning over their enemies. Israel will then have a message for the nations. *This is a truth to be enjoyed and shared.*

What about the resurrection? It fulfills David's faith that his flesh would not finally be corrupted (vv. 35-37; Psa. 16:10). This is fulfilled, as Peter (Acts 2:27), and as Paul now explains, not in David but in Jesus.

Paul lists blessings that pour from this work of God in Jesus (vv. 38-39). 'Your sins are forgiven!' That is, forgiven for being ignorant of God and dismissive of his salvation in Jesus. It is an announcement to all who believe. Paul adds his signature insight: 'You are justified from the all that the law condemns'. Israel's law had never been able to justify them, though they fondly thought that it would do so. They have received the grace of God (v. 43), and eternal life (v. 46). *We live in the fruits of Christ's victory and reign, the full blessing of Christ.*

The repentance needed right now is that the scoffing of what God has done among them stop forthwith (vv. 40-41).

### **The sequel (vv. 42-52)**

The gospel has come to Jews in this city but Gentiles, God fearers and others, have heard that Israel's blessings, life from the dead and forgiveness of sins are given to Israel *for* the Gentiles and the whole city is attracted. Jealousy, always linked with self-justification, stirs the Jews to contradict and revile Paul, but he resolves to do precisely what the prophecies said Israel should do, and take the gospel to the Gentiles. This of course was his calling, but he knows the message is still for Jews and continues to reach out to them and pray for them.

The grace of God has 'landed' and Jews together with Gentiles are filled with joy and with the Spirit. *The gospel will go to the nations!*