

On the Mission Field II (Continued): Antioch in Pisidia

Text: Acts 13:42-52

Introduction:

Barnabas and Saul have moved on, from the island of Cyprus, to the mainland of Asia Minor. Passing through Perga of Pamphylia, they made their way into Antioch of Pisidia. While in a synagogue there, Paul is given the opportunity to preach the Gospel, and he does so, by tracing God's gracious blessings toward Israel, throughout the Old Covenant, and now, into the New Covenant, in the sending of the Christ, the Son of God, and David's promised Seed, to save His people from their sins. All of this was not hindered, but rather fulfilled by His death, as God had raised Him from the dead, according to the Scriptures. With the testimony of John the Baptist, prior to His death, and the testimony of His Apostles and disciples after His resurrection, the affirmation of Jesus's Messianic role is most certain, such that all who believe in Him, will be forgiven for their sins, and reckoned "just" in the sight of God. Indeed, the news is very encouraging, but Paul also left them with a warning. In keeping with the Scriptures as well, there would be many, who would refuse to believe, leading to their eternal condemnation. And so, the call is for all to repent and believe in this Jesus, unto eternal life, while avoiding eternal condemnation!

This morning, we move on then, to consider the response of the people, keeping in mind, that Paul is addressing Jews, Proselytes (Gentiles, who have become Jews), and God-fearing Gentiles (Gentiles, who fear God, but have not been circumcised, and have not kept the dietary/ ceremonial laws).

I. The Response of the People

"So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God."

Here, it would seem to be that we have three types of responses to Paul's message:

1) Some of the Jews, being indifferent or antagonistic toward the Gospel, merely left, having no interest in pursuing forgiveness of sins, or a righteousness, outside of their own. To the self-righteous, Christ is of little value at all; a good and decent man, at best; an imposter, at most.

2) The gentiles, who were present, took a keen interest in all that had been said, so much so, that they *begged* to hear these words, preached again to them, on the next Sabbath. The free offer of salvation, apart from the law, greatly appealed to their hearts, and seemed to present them with a "longed after" freedom, that they could never find before. They humbly saw their need, and so, they begged to hear the message again.

3) Among the congregation, many of the Jews and devout proselytes, followed Paul and Barnabas. That is to say, they believed the Gospel and entered the Way of salvation, preached by Paul. This being the case, Paul and Barnabas persuaded them to "continue in the grace of God?" [Persevere!; Prove out your confession!; Opposition will come!]

Question #1: Why are some people indifferent to the preaching of the Word today? Why are some hungry for it? What is the difference? What is going on, at the level of the heart, in both cases? Where does "realized need," come into play, here?

Question #2: What does it mean to, "Continue in the grace of God?" Why is this important? How is this done? How does this compare to continuing on, "in our own strength?" [See also Acts 11:23; 14:21-22]

Question #3: How does Question #2 relate to the following context?

"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God" (vs. 44)." The hope of the Gospel, which was heard by some, now spread throughout the entire city, such that "almost the whole city" came to hear the Word preached, on the following Sabbath! Such a great and precious opportunity, here opens up! But, as we have seen all along, where the Gospel seed is being faithfully sown, the enemy is nearby, seeking to pluck up the seeds, before they take root. Notice, the conflict that arises, and the primary motivation for that conflict:

"But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul" (vs. 45)

Question #4: Why were the Jews envious of Paul and Barnabas? Why did they feel threatened? What might happen to them, if the Gentiles embraced the Gospel?

Question #5: How does this relate to what happened at Paphos, with Elymas? How does this relate to what happened to Christ? In what way does all of this relate to the Creator/creature contention, which exists since the time of the fall? How does this relate to the natural man? In what ways, do people "contradict, blaspheme, and oppose" true preachers of the Gospel today? [Note, also Acts 5:17]

"Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "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" (vs. 46).

The Jews were given the priority, in accordance with the will of God, as per their natural privilege, as the Old Covenant, chosen people. Rejecting that privilege, however, leads Paul and Barnabas to turn their attention then, to the Gentiles.

Question #6: How might we relate this matter, to Esau, the firstborn son of Isaac?

Question #7: How did "rejecting the Word of God," necessitate the fact that the Jews, here, judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life?

"For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (vs. 47)

In the face of the rejection of the Jews, Paul brings forth his Scriptural warrant for turning to the Gentiles.

Question #8: This would not have been an option for the Old Covenant people of God. Why is it not only an option here, but a *command*? [Consider Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; Luke 2:32] At what point in Biblical history, did God reveal His will, concerning the Gentiles?

"Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (vs. 48).

Question #9: Why were the Gentiles glad? How might we relate this to the unreached peoples of our own day? In what way, did they "glorify the Word of the Lord?"

Question #10: Not all of the gentiles believed? Who believed? Why did they believe? How does this relate to the whole "Calvinism/Arminianism" debate?

"And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region" (vs. 49).

Question #11: Who "spread" this Word? Why did this happen? How did this happen? Who is responsible for evangelizing?

"But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region" (vs. 50).

Question #12: How does God's sovereignty relate to this situation? Put yourself in Saul and Barnabas's shoes. What might we be tempted to think, if this happened to us, at this precise time? How ought we to view this providence? How do they handle this [see next verse]? [Possibly note and relate John 19:12-15]

"But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium" (vs. 51).

Question #13: Why did they shake the dust off of their feet? What did this mean? What did they do next? What relevance, if any, do these things have for us, today? [See Matt. 10:5-15; Mark 6:7-11; Lke 9:1-6]

"And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (vs. 52)

Question #14: Why were they filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit? How could this be the case, when Paul and Barnabas were just "expelled" from their region? Whom did these new converts truly depend upon, at this point? How, again, might this relate to Paul and Barnabas's words in verse 43b, and how did Paul and Barnabas practice what they, themselves, had preached, in this regard? Amen!!!