From Antioch to Antioch

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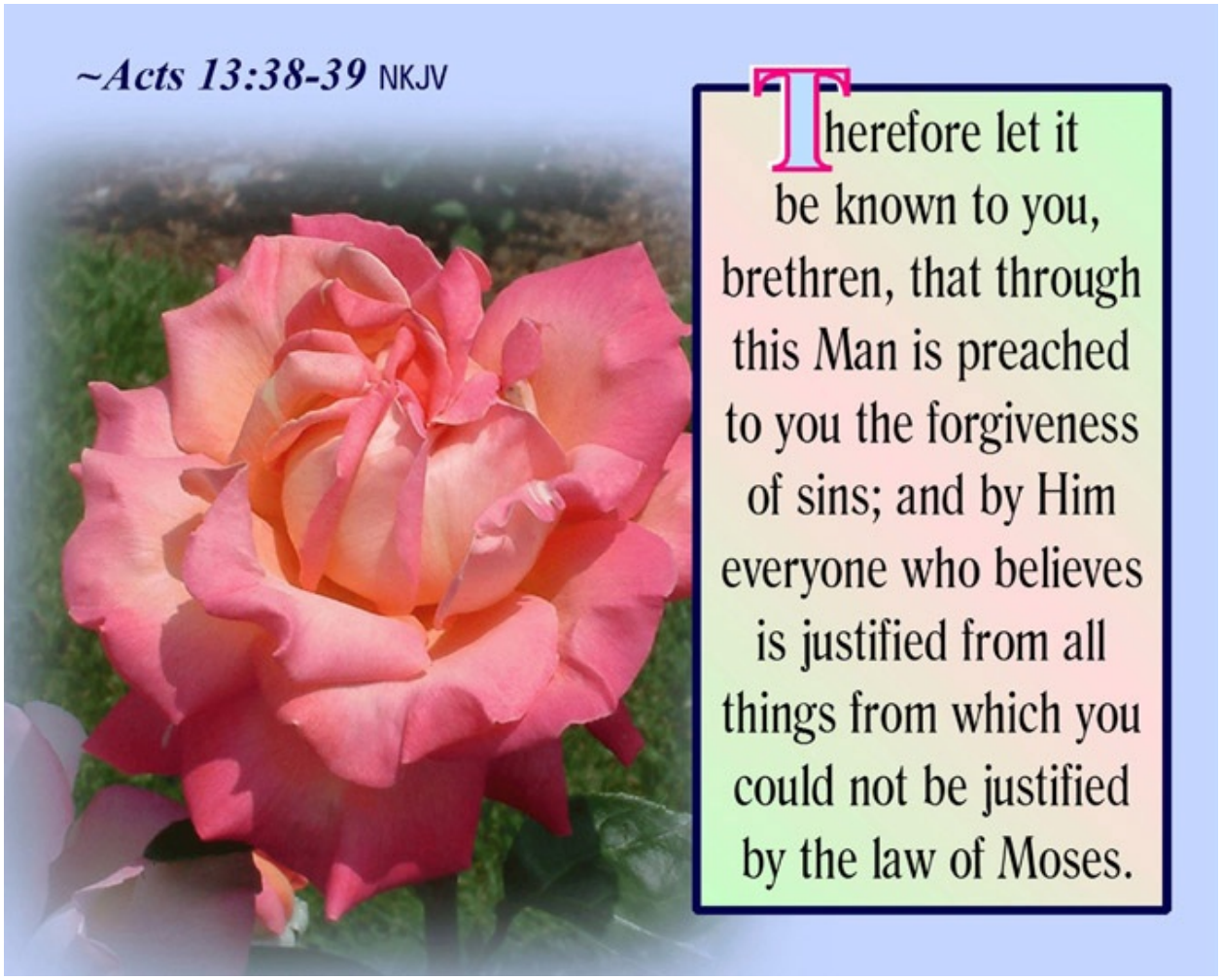
The First Missionary Journey Begins

A Study in Acts Chapter 13



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Published by:
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Acts Chapter 13

From Antioch to Antioch

(The First Missionary Journey Begins)

Acts 13:1

This chapter begins in Antioch (Antioch of Syria, 300 miles north of Jerusalem) and ends in Antioch (in Pisidia, in present-day Turkey). The city of Antioch in Syria was the third greatest city of the Roman Empire in population and importance. The city was named after Antiochus, one of the Selucid kings. The population at that time was approximately 800,000 people. We learn of the first outreach to Gentiles in this city in Acts 11:20-21. Antioch was becoming a powerful center for Gentile evangelism.

Believers today take it for granted that the gospel is to go to the Gentiles, and we fail to see how revolutionary this was at the beginning of church history, and how contrary to the Jewish mindset it was. According to the gospel, believing Gentiles were on an equal standing with believing Jews before a holy God. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but all believers are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). Today we have no problem with Gentile evangelism because the Church has been preaching the gospel to Gentiles for over nineteen centuries. Yet at the beginning of the Church age, believing Jews were often very uncomfortable evangelizing the Gentiles. Many thought that if Gentiles were to be saved they should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. In other words, to be saved they should become Jews!

Although Gentiles were being saved elsewhere, Antioch was the most significant and influential Gentile church, even though we know that there were Jewish believers there as well. Antioch was a missionary-minded church, and in this chapter Paul and Barnabas are sent forth from Antioch on their first missionary journey. It was true then and it is true today, that evangelism is the lifeblood of the Church. When a local church fails to have a healthy outreach, it begins to die. Those who do not evangelize tend to fossilize.

News of these events in Antioch had spread to Jerusalem (Acts 11:22). Some of the Jewish brethren there questioned the validity of reaching Gentiles, even though they knew about the conversion of Cornelius and his household (Acts 10). At this point it was well known in Jerusalem by the apostles and the elders that a Gentile outreach was legitimate. However, there were still some in the Jerusalem church who had very serious questions about what was taking place in Antioch. For this reason they sent Barnabas to this great city to check things out. Barnabas was an outstanding, godly, humble, gracious, Spirit-filled servant of the Lord (Acts 11:24). When Barnabas saw what was taking place in Antioch he was glad and encouraged the brethren to cleave to the Lord (Acts 11:23).

Barnabas soon realized that the work in Antioch of Syria was so enormous that it would need special help, and the man who came to his mind was Saul of Tarsus. Saul had been in Tarsus for a number of years, so Barnabas went there to find him (Acts 11:25-26). Believers were first called Christians at Antioch (Acts 11:26), and Antioch became the great hub for missionary outreach to the Gentile world.

The first twelve chapters of Acts might be called "The Acts of the Apostle Peter." The last sixteen chapters, beginning with Acts 13 might be called "The Acts of the Apostle Paul." From this point forward, the focus shifts from Peter's ministry to Paul's ministry.

Barnabas had become the most prominent of the teachers in Antioch. He was the official representative of the church of Jerusalem whose assignment was to go to Antioch and evaluate what God was doing there. He was sent there to supervise and teach these dear believers, many of whom were Gentiles.

Other prophets and teachers were named in verse 1; last but not least was Saul. Simeon had a Jewish name, but he also was called by the name "Niger." The Roman name "Niger" meant "black" and may indicate that this man was dark skinned, probably of African origin.

Lucius was from Cyrene. Cyrene was a city in Africa located on the Mediterranean coast west of Egypt. If you travel by ship from Greece and sail due south, you will arrive at Cyrene. Some of the Jews who were gathered at Pentecost were from this city (Acts 2:10). Simon, the man who bore Christ's cross, was also from this city (Matt. 27:32). Cyrenian Jews even had a synagogue at Jerusalem (Acts 6:9). Believers from Cyrene were among the first to preach the gospel to the people in Antioch, and Lucius was probably one of them (Acts 11:20). A man named Lucius is mentioned in Romans 16:21 and perhaps he was this same individual.

Another teacher or prophet in Antioch was Manaen. We know nothing about this man except for one simple fact. He "had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch" (v. 1). This was none other than Herod Antipas (Matt. 14:1), the son of that monster of iniquity, Herod the Great (Matt. 2). The term "tetrarch" means that he ruled over one fourth of his father's kingdom. This vile ruler was the murderer of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:1-12). The Lord Jesus referred to him as "that fox" (Luke 13:32). He has been described as sly, ambitious, luxurious and immoral. Manaen was brought up with this corrupt man. The Greek verb indicates that Manaen was a companion of Herod in childhood and youth. Herod was either his close childhood friend or, as many understand it, he was brought up in Herod's home as a foster brother. It is fascinating that from the same home could come a godless ruler whose administration was characterized throughout with cunning and crime, and also a man who became a devoted follower of the King of Kings and a leader in the church at Antioch.[1] F. F. Bruce shared the following:

> Josephus (*Antiquities XV. 10.5)* mentions an earlier Manaen, an Essene, who was honoured by Herod the Great for having foretold his rise to royal estate; he could well have been the grandfather of this Manaen. It is natural to suppose that Luke's special knowledge of members of the Herod dynasty may have been derived from Manaen. But what a commentary on the mystery and sovereignty of divine grace that, of these

[1]So indeed, from the same family came Cain and Abel, sons of Adam and Eve. One was a believer and one was a child of the devil (1 John 3:12).

two foster-brothers, one should attain honour as a Christian leader, while the other should be best known for his shameful behaviour in the killing of John the Baptist and in the trial of Jesus![2]

"Manaen became a believer; Herod became a beast; Manaen became a minister, Herod became a murderer; Manaen found salvation in the arms of Jesus, Herod found shame in the arms of Herodias, a woman who goaded him on to ruin."[3]

Many errant psychological theories suggest that our character is formed permanently by our upbringing and childhood circumstances. Yet, this information about Manaen illustrates that a person does not have to be wrongly influenced by his family members or close childhood friends. He can instead choose to be different, avoid peer pressure, and embrace by faith the true and living God. We are not slaves to early childhood circumstances which we cannot change. God in His grace can bring us into glorious liberty where we are free to serve Him and to do His will.

In what sense were these men prophets? New Testament prophets were necessary in the early days of the Church because the New Testament books had not yet been written. God could reveal His truth to His local churches through gifted prophets who would communicate the Word of God as needed (Eph. 4:11-12). When the New Testament Scriptures were completed, there was no longer a need for the gift of prophecy.[4]

Acts 13:2

Fasting occurs when believers voluntary refrain from eating for a period of time. Spiritual needs can become so urgent that physical needs take a back seat. Apparently these believers sensed a special movement of the Lord and they wanted to be in the place to receive His direction. In the Bible, prayer and fasting are closely associated together, as in verse 3. Their prayer time was so important that regular meals could be skipped.

Whether or not the Spirit's message came by an audible voice, we are not told. He probably spoke through one of the prophets. The work of the third Person of the Triune Godhead is often overlooked, neglected and underestimated. Some of this may occur because of an overreaction against some of the extremes of the Charismatic Movement. We tend to think more about what Jesus is doing since He is the Head of the Church and the Bridegroom of the Bride, yet we must not neglect what the Holy Spirit is doing. The Spirit's ministry is indispensable and we must never minimize it.

The Divine Personality of the Holy Spirit in the Triune Godhead is unmistakably set forth in Acts 13:2 ("the Holy Spirit **said (spoke)**, Separate Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which **I have called** them."), as it is elsewhere throughout the Book of Acts (13:4; 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12;

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[2]F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts,* p. 261.

[3]John Phillips, *Exploring Acts,* Vol. 2, p. 246.

[4]Are there prophets today? See http://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/doctrine/charis04.htm

20:23; 21:11; 5:3-4; 28:25-27), not to mention the rest of the Word of God. The Spirit of God should always be given His proper place.

The Lord decided who should be on this missionary team. "Separate Me" means "set them apart for My service." It was God Himself who called them to this work, not the local church, although the church in Antioch was fully supportive of what God was doing.

Acts 13:3

Why did they fast? Fasting was important because it set aside the tremendous encumbrances and distractions of meal preparation, meal serving, cleaning up after meals, etc. "They denied the legitimate claims of the body so as to give themselves more undistractedly to spiritual exercises."[5] There was nothing magical about fasting. There is no New Testament command for believers to fast, and if it is done, it is to be done voluntarily. Today people will often fast for dietary or health reasons, but Biblical fasting was always done for spiritual reasons. A person does not gain some special merit with God for fasting and skipping certain meals. Biblical fasting is done to remove distractions so that believers can concentrate on effectual and fervent prayer. So often the last thing people make time to do is to pray to the Father in the Name of His Son through the Holy Spirit.

The laying on of hands was a formal sign that Barnabas and Saul had been approved for this ministry. The local church leadership was identifying with this missionary team and were pledging their support for the mission and their continued prayers. They were saying, "We are standing with you and identifying with you and showing our oneness with you. You have our full support." God's people need to have a strong connection with their missionaries, as they are co-laborers together for the glory of God.

What took place in this local church was historic. It was the launching of the global missionary outreach of the true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ and it needed to be done on the firm basis of undistracted prayer and holy fellowship with the Lord of the harvest.

"They," that is the church, sent them away (literally, "let them go"), in full cooperation with the Holy Spirit who was the One who sent them, as the next verse shows.

Acts 13:4

It was the Holy Spirit who called them to this work and it was the Holy Spirit who sent them forth. The Lord was behind this missionary endeavor from start to finish. This was the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey which concluded in Acts 14:26.

First, Paul and Barnabas went to the coastal city of Seleucia, and from there they sailed to the island of Cyprus. Salamis (v. 5) and Paphos (v. 6) were cities on the island of Cyprus. They first went to Salamis on the east coast of Cyprus and then to Paphos which was on the west coast of the same island. Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. This island was the home country of Barnabas who was born and raised on Cyprus (Acts 4:36). Barnabas must have had a great burden

[5]William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, p. 1619.

to reach the people of his homeland with the gospel message.

Acts 13:5

What they did at Salamis was typical of their strategy in other cities. They would first go to the Jewish synagogue where often they would be given an opportunity to speak, as in Acts 13:15. Without neglecting Gentile evangelism, they followed the divine order of bringing the gospel "to the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16; Acts 3:26; 13:46). God in His grace and mercy reached out first to the very people who had rejected His Son.[6]

John Mark, who later would be the human author of the Gospel of Mark, ministered with this missionary team. Mark is not mentioned by the Holy Spirit in verse 2 where we learn that Barnabas and Saul were set apart for the Lord's service. However, Mark came along as a helper. In the Gospel of Mark, the author is very humble about describing himself: "And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him, and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked" (Mark 14:51-52). This fascinating verse does establish that Mark was an eyewitness of the amazing events which took place during the final days of our Lord's earthly ministry.[7] Why did God choose Mark to write an inspired Gospel of the New Testament? There are things in the life of John Mark that are both sad and encouraging. He was a man of like passions as we are. For young men who fail in the ministry in some way, there is hope to be reclaimed for the glory of God, as John Mark's life illustrates. Another man with a record of failures was the Apostle Peter himself. What amazing spiritual lessons we learn from his life and shortcomings! God prepared Peter and equipped him for a very effective, Spirit-empowered ministry. Let us learn from these examples not to ever give up on each other. More will be said about John Mark in verse 13.

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[6]Note that Rom. 1:16 is **not a command** to bring the gospel to the Jews first in evangelistic efforts. It is a statement of fact of the Jews being first in terms of responsibility, given the historical privilege that they enjoyed ("it is God's power to salvation, to every one that believes, both to Jew first and to Greek"). Just as responsibility is the key thought again in Rom. 2:9-10: "Tribulation and distress, on every soul of man that works evil, both of Jew first, and of Greek; but glory and honour and peace to every one that works good, both to Jew first and to Greek."

[7]Whitcomb and Zeller, along with numerous commentators identify this young man as John Mark. In fairness, it should be pointed out that the Bible does not identify him with certainty. R. T. France sees the identification of the young man with Mark as possible, yet also as mere conjecture. See France, R. T. (2002), *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (pp. 595–596); Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press. William Hendriksen gives numerous reasons why he identifies the young man as Mark. See *New Testament Commentary—The Gospel of Mark,* pages 599-602.

God can use broken, flawed and imperfect people. Our strength lies neither in ourselves nor our perfections, but in our God. Our Saviour is perfect. He is the God of the flawed, the defective and the damaged. Moses was a stammerer. John Mark was a deserter. Jacob was a deceiver. David had an affair. Abraham was too old. David was too young. Peter was afraid of a servant girl. Paul was a murderer, as was David. Jonah ran from God. Gideon and Thomas both doubted. Elijah ran away. Martha was always worrying. Noah got drunk. Moses was hot-tempered.

We are not an impressive lot, but Jesus is an impressive Saviour. He is superb in who He is and in all that He does. God doesn't call many wise, mighty and noble (1 Cor. 1:26). The truth is, we are so flawed that each one of us is unworthy to be called into the service of the Lord Jesus. Yet, there is no bruised reed whom Christ cannot restore and heal. Not one of His people has gone beyond His grace. Not one of us is useless. Perhaps too many people have told us that we are useless, and that God has finished with us. Oh, and yes, that quiet, accusing, inward voice has continually endorsed that sentiment. But God does not go down to Perfect Street to choose His material. God can and does use the unusable.

Have you failed the Lord in the past? Take it to the Lord, confess your sins, and then move on with life. You are made righteous by the blood of the Lamb (Romans 5:9; Hebrews 9:22; 1 John 1:7; Romans 3:25). If God can use the dead, dried jawbone of an old donkey (Judges 15:11-17), He can use you, and He can use me. –Miles McKee and George Zeller

Acts 13:6

In Paphos (on the west coast of Cyprus) Paul and Barnabas found a Jew who was a sorcerer and a false prophet. His name was Bar-jesus, meaning son of Jesus. His father had the name Jesus (Yeshua or Joshua) which was not an unusual name in that day since Joshua was such a key personality in Hebrew history. Ever since the Lord Jesus came, Christians do not normally name their children "Jesus." That holy name is rightfully assigned to only one Person, the blessed Saviour of sinners, but in the first century it was a common name for Jewish men.

The word "sorcerer" is the Greek word "mágon" from which we get our word "magician." The same word is used of the wise men ("magi") in Matthew chapter 2. Here the meaning is "sorcerer," someone who claims to have magic (demonic) powers. This man was a Jew. He claimed to speak for God, but he was a false prophet and his messages were not of divine origin. He was a tool of the devil.

Acts 13:7

Sergius Paulus was a prudent man, a man of integrity, an administrator under the Roman Empire. The word "deputy" (KJV) is the word "proconsul." His function was similar to a governor. A proconsul was appointed by the Roman Senate, not by the Emperor. Often in the book of Acts Luke speaks highly of Roman officials. Paul's biggest resistance to the spread of the gospel did not lie with the Romans but with his fellow Jews. Sergius Paulus wanted to hear the Word of God from Barnabas and Paul. God opened up a wonderful opportunity to speak to a leading official of the Roman Empire in that island. He had an open heart and was willing to hear what God had to say.

When Paul was converted on the Damascus road he was told that he would appear before kings and rulers and would suffer many things for the cause of Christ (Acts 9:15-16). This was one of many rulers that Paul would bear witness to, although in this case he appeared before Sergius Paulus without needing to suffer for the cause of Christ. Paul was moving unhindered through this island in his first step of missionary endeavor.

Acts 13:8

We find similarities between Elymas the sorcerer and Simon the sorcerer mentioned in Acts chapter 8. Elymas tried to turn away the deputy from the faith. The name "Elymas" was his Greek name, and means "sorcerer" or "wizard." When the true gospel goes forth we should always expect Satanic resistance. Satan does not want people to "believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). Those who seek to prevent others from hearing the gospel will receive greater judgment (compare Acts 18:6).

Acts 13:9

From this point on in Luke's sacred history, Saul is referred to as Paul. Saul was his Jewish name and Paul was his Roman name. Both names were probably given to him at birth, but from this point forward his ministry would focus on Gentile evangelism and his Gentile name would be used. The name "Paul" means "Small One."

Paul was taking over the leadership of this missionary team and becoming more prominent. It was not Barnabas who talked to Elymas, but Paul. We have no record of Barnabas ever objecting to Paul's leadership. It was the Holy Spirit that Elymas was blaspheming and withstanding, and it was the Holy Spirit who filled Paul in order to deal forcefully with this man. Paul set his eyes on him with a piercing glance.

Acts 13:10

Paul by the Holy Spirit exposed this man as a child of the devil. He was not Bar-jesus; he was Bar-devil, child of the devil. Once Jesus spoke to Jewish religious leaders and said, "You are of your father the devil" (John 8:44).

Elymas was full of all **subtlety**, even as his father Satan was subtle (Gen. 3:1). The word carries the idea of deceiving animals by putting bait in a trap. Thus the word means deceit or trickery (dirty tricks). We must not be tricked by Satan's alluring baits. This sorcerer was also full of all **mischief**. This word "mischief" is found only in this one place in the Bible, and seems to convey cunning mischief or villainy. Elymas was an evil troublemaker and an enemy of all righteousness. The verb "pervert" means to turn aside from the right path, to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord. The same verb is used in Acts 13:8 where we are told that wicked Elymas tried **to turn away** the deputy from the faith.

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, spared no words to describe the deceptive wickedness of this vile tool of Satan.

Acts 13:11

Immediately Paul's word was fulfilled and Elymas was struck with blindness. Apparently this blindness was not permanent, but "for a season." We are not told how long his blindness would last. This sorcerer was already spiritually blind, and this divine judgment made the physical match the spiritual. He who had led others astray now had to be led by the hand.

Acts 13:12

The deputy (proconsul) may have been the first man saved on Paul's first missionary journey. The deputy shared Paul's name (**Paulus**).[8] Was Paulus saved because he saw the miracle? Faith based solely on miracles is dangerous. Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Faith does not come by seeing a sign miracle. The Pharisees and scribes continually said to Jesus, "Show us a sign. Show us a miracle." He replied, "This is an evil and adulterous generation that seeks after a sign." The only sign He would give them would be the sign of Jonah, namely His resurrection.

Contrast the proconsul's faith with Simon Magus who believed with purely human faith, "beholding the signs and great works of power which took place, was astonished [at such, not at the doctrine of the Lord]" (Acts 8:13)

> Faith grounded on such evidence is only natural, and has no divine root. The senses are struck, the reason is convinced, the mind receives the testimony, and the mouth confesses it. But there is no life apart from conscience exercised about one's own evil before God, and from Christ the object of the soul as the gift of God's love to a guilty sinner in pure grace. This was true of Sergius, not of Simon. The one was amazed at the miracle, the other at least as much or more at the teaching which brought God before his soul and himself into His presence. This only is effectual. It is eternal life. And this is just the difference between a true divine work in the soul and a mind convinced by evidence or carried along by tradition. The latter may be all well in itself, and be a reasonable homage to facts which cannot be got rid of fairly but which compel honest acknowledgment from all who bow to adequate proofs. Yet this may be and is where the soul has never met God in the conscience, where sin and even our own sins are not an unbearable burden, where the love is not trusted that gave His only-begotten Son and laid the burden on Him to suffer atoningly that the believer might have life, pardon, and peace. No displays of power, however wonderful, are so amazing in the eyes of faith as the grace of God in saving the lost through His own Son. This the governor was enabled to receive from God. —William Kelly

How do sign miracles fit into early church history? This is a complex issue. Thankfully the Spirit of God added a footnote here: Paulus was astonished "at the **doctrine** of the Lord." He heard the doctrine, the teaching, the gospel message. Where are we told that this man heard the gospel message, the doctrine of the Lord? Keep in mind that much of the book of Acts is a summarization and reduction of the lengthy messages that Paul and others gave. Luke often gives just a brief

[8]The names "Paul" and "Paulus" are identical in the Greek.

summary of what was said. Paul certainly preached the gospel to this man. That is what he believed and that is what saved him.

What then was the function of the miracle? It was the same function miracles had during Jesus' public ministry. Merely seeing the miracles of Jesus did not save anyone. Why then did He perform thousands of sign miracles? It was to confirm His claims to be the Messiah. He gave physical and public demonstration of His authenticity as Israel's Messiah in order to attract and hold attention to Himself and His message. If people would listen to the message and believe it, then they could be saved. Nicodemus was a prime example. He saw the miracles of Jesus and was convinced that they were genuine and not demonic. He came to Jesus one night and said, "No man can do the miracles You do unless God is with Him." He was convinced that the miracles of Jesus were genuine and performed by God. Did that save him? The response by Jesus was to the point: "(paraphrased) You must be born again! Unless you are born again you cannot even see the kingdom of God. You are so far from the kingdom you cannot even see it." God warns us about the limitations of sign miracles.

The miraculous striking of Elymas with blindness attracted the attention of this Roman ruler, but it was the message he believed ("the doctrine") that saved him. We should note that this was the first sign miracle that Paul performed by God's power. The result was that this sorcerer was walking about totally blind and helpless. We remember those who tried to destroy the two angels who came to visit Lot in Sodom. They also were struck with blindness. Blindness is not a sign of evil or sin. After Jesus healed the blind man in John chapter 9, He said, "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind" (John 9:39; compare with John 3:19). The Jewish religious leaders thought they knew everything about God and His ways, but they were spiritually blind and they were condemned because of their pride, arrogance and self-sufficiency. Paul himself was blinded for two days after his experience on the road to Damascus. That gave him an an opportunity to think through all the things he had said and done against the Lord Jesus and His people.

Acts 13:13

Here mention is made of "Paul and his company." This clearly indicates who was in charge of this missionary team. It was Paul, not Barnabas. Barnabas was the one who was sent to Antioch to take charge of what was going on in that city and to supervise the work there. Barnabas also went to Tarsus to find Paul who had returned to Tarsus for a number of years after his conversion. We can only imagine what may have happened to Paul during these years. Was he disowned by his parents? Was he excommunicated from the synagogue? Was he caught up to heaven and given a glorious vision during these years (2 Cor. 12:1-7)? We know little about what Paul did during these years in his home town of Tarsus. Barnabas found Paul and enlisted him to come and help in the ministry of the Word at Antioch. Barnabas was a great, godly leader, but a greater than Barnabas was there, even Paul the thirteenth apostle, born out of due time, but born, nevertheless, into apostolic ministry. The twelve were still a separate and distinct group of men. But in a secondary sense of apostleship, Paul and Barnabas were commissioned and endorsed and honored by God.

Paul and his company left Cyprus and came to Perga (a city) in Pamphylia (a region), located on the southern tip of what is today Turkey. It was here that a tragic and disappointing event took place. "John departing from them returned to Jerusalem." John Mark decided to abandon the missionary

team. What went wrong? We are not told for sure. In Paul's eyes John was at fault for forsaking the ministry. We can speculate that John Mark was not up for the difficulties and persecutions which they encountered on their journey. It was necessary to travel 110 miles across mountainous territory infested with robbers. It was a dangerous journey. John Mark felt he needed to return home to his mother in Jerusalem. "Oh John Mark, why have you returned from your missionary trip with Paul and Barnabas?" "Mother, I'm so sorry, but you do not understand all the trials and hardships." There are many Christian workers who have failed in the ministry. The good news about John Mark is that he was later reconciled to Paul and accepted. Barnabas nurtured him back into a good standing of usefulness for the Lord. After many years he was able to recover from this colossal failure. What a lesson! If we are honest, all of us must admit to having failed the Lord in little ways or great, but God does not give up on us. We can thank God for the story of John Mark in the book of Acts. The book of Acts is brutally honest, even regarding the flaws of the believers it describes. God does not cover up things just because they are sinful or bad.

Acts 13:14

The missionary team of Paul and Barnabas traveled from Perga to Antioch in Pisidia, a journey which was fraught with danger:

> The road from Perga to Pisidian Antioch, some one hundred miles away, was difficult and dangerous. It wound its way through the rugged Taurus mountains, clinging to cliffs that ascended to dizzying heights. Travelers also had to cross the turbulent and flood-prone Cestrus and Eurymedon rivers. The Taurus mountains were notorious for the robber bands who infested them. When Paul wrote, "I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers" (2 Cor. 11:26), he may well have had this journey in mind.[9]

Antioch in Pisidia was due north of the coastal city of Perga. It was located on a great trade route between Ephesus to the east and the Cilician Gates to the west. The Cilician Gates (also known as the Gülek Pass) is a pass through the Taurus Mountains which served as a major military and commercial artery for hundreds of years. The Hittites, Greeks, Alexander the Great, the Romans, Byzantines and Sasanians, Mongols, and the Crusaders all traveled this route during their campaigns. Antioch was midway between Ephesus and the Cilician Gates.

Paul went from one Antioch (in Syria) to another Antioch (in Pisidia). In this second Antioch Paul would give his Spirit-filled message which is recorded in this chapter. Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue at Antioch on the Sabbath day (Saturday) and sat down with their fellow Jews and with some God-fearing Gentiles who were also in attendance (compare Acts 13:16, 26, 42, 48).

Acts 13:15

As was the common custom, the Scriptures would be read in the synagogue. First was a reading from the Torah (the law) and then a reading from the prophets. Something about Paul and Barnabas apparently impressed the rulers of the synagogue, and they gave them an opportunity to speak.

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[9]John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Acts 13-28*, pages 16-17.

These rulers of the synagogue did not realize who it was that they were asking to speak! You don't say to the Apostle Paul, "If you happen to have anything to say, say on." Paul was capable, as will be seen later at Troas, of speaking all night long, until interrupted by one man falling out of a window to his death (Acts 20:7-9)! We can imagine the conversation at Antioch: "If you have a word for us, please speak!" "Well, thank you very much. I just happen to have a ten-hour lecture for your audience!"

Keep in mind that these verses contain a drastic reduction and summarization of the lengthy speech which Paul gave. It has similarities to the message Peter preached in Acts chapter 2, condemning the rulers in Israel and yet giving the gospel clearly. It is also similar to the message Stephen preached in Acts chapter 7, in which he gave a long introduction from Old Testament history before pointing to the Lord Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior. Thankfully, what God wants us to know about that sermon is recorded here in Acts chapter 13, yet how fascinating it would be to have a transcription or a video recording of Paul's lecture at Antioch in Pisidia!

Acts 13:16

Notice that it was Paul who stood up, not Barnabas. Paul was the spokesman (compare Acts 14:12). Paul began by rehearsing Old Testament history. He addressed the "men of Israel" as well as those who fear God, a reference to God-fearing Gentiles (proselytes) who were present.

Acts 13:17

Paul reminded his Jewish audience that God chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. While in Egypt God "exalted" His people. This may be refer to the way God prospered them and made them greatly multiply (Exodus 1:7). With a mighty arm God brought His people out of Egypt, a miracle of redemption that the nation would never forget (Deut. 17:8; 9:26; 13:5; 15:15; 24:18; 2 Samuel 7:23-24; 1 Chron. 17:21-22).

Acts 13:18

The wilderness wanderings lasted about 40 years. During this time God suffered their manners and endured their sinful ways. He put up with a people who murmured and complained and refused to trust the God who had redeemed them from Egypt. It reminds us of our Lord's words in Matthew 17:17, "How long shall I suffer you (bear with you, put up with you)?" Those forty years were characterized by God's amazing longsuffering. We ourselves should look in the mirror and be wonderfully amazed that God is so longsuffering with us, in spite of our stubbornness and many sins.

Acts 13:19-20

In two short verses Paul summaries the entire book of Exodus (verse 19) and the entire book of Judges (verse 20)!

How should we understand the four hundred and fifty years mentioned in verse 20? The King James

translation could be somewhat confusing because it seems to suggest that the 450 years represent the time of the judges. The NKJV basically does the same thing. The NASB gives a clearer understanding. Notice the following comparison of the KJV with the NASB:

King James Version	**New American Standard Version**
19) And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, He divided their land to them by lot 20) And after that He gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.	19) When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about 450 years 20) After these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet
The KJV and NKJV translations seem to be saying that the period of the judges lasted 450 years.	**The NASB reading suggests that the 450 years took place prior to the time of the judges and would include the time in Egypt (going back to v. 17), the time of the wilderness wanderings (v. 18) and the time of Joshua's conquests (v. 19).**

To say that the period of the judges lasted 450 years is very problematic. We know from 1 Kings 6:1 that the period from the Exodus to the dedication of Solomon's Temple was 480 years. This would obviously include the period of the judges. We know that Saul and David reigned for forty years each (Acts 13:21; 1 Kings 2:11), and so subtracting 80 years from 480, we are left with only 400 years. So without doing any further calculations, this falls far short of 450 years. Indeed, Dr. Whitcomb, in his chart *Old Testament Patriarchs and Judges* (available from Whitcomb Ministries), shows the period of the judges to be only about 327 years (more than a century less than 450 years).

On the other hand, the NASB and other translations understand the 450 years as the period of time from the bondage in Egypt (Acts 13:17) to the end of Joshua's conquests (Acts 13:19), which would also include the wilderness wanderings (Acts 13:18). In this case the math is very simple:

Israelites were slaves in Eygpt (Acts 7:6)—400 years.
Israelites wandered in the wilderness (Acts 13:18)—40 years.
Israelites conquered the land under Joshua (Acts 13:19)—about 10 years
For a total of about 450 years (Acts 13:19 NASB)

The actual meaning of verse 20 might be paraphrased as follows: "And after these events (Egyptian bondage, wilderness wanderings, conquest under Joshua)—about 450 years of these events—He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet." That is, the 450 years all took place prior to the period of the judges.

Acts 13:21

In one short verse Paul summarized the entire book of 1 Samuel!

Israel desired a king like all the other nations (1 Samuel 8:4-9). God gave them their request (King

Saul) but sent leanness into their souls (Psalm 106:15). He was a fleshly king after their own hearts, but he was not a king after God's heart. He ruled over Israel for forty years.

Paul was also from the tribe of Benjamin. Could it be that his parents named him after the first king of Israel ("Saul") who was also from the tribe of Benjamin?

Paul's audience knew that Paul was very familiar with the history of the people of Israel. He was forming a bond with his listeners in preparation for the gospel message that would follow.

Acts 13:22

God removed Saul from being king because of his total failure and serious disobedience to the commands of the Lord (1 Samuel 15).

David was God's choice to be the true king of the theocracy of this world and to be the ancestor of the Lord Jesus, through Mary. What does it mean to be a man after God's own heart?

There were three kings who reigned during Israel's united monarchy: Saul, David and Solomon. Let us consider the first two of these. The first king was the people's choice because they rejected God as their King and wanted a king like all the other nations (1 Sam. 8:4-7; Acts 13:21). The second king was God's choice. The first king was of the tribe of Benjamin; the second king was from the tribe of Judah. The first king was an amazing human specimen who stood taller than any of his peers (1 Sam. 9:2) and whose father was "a mighty man of power" (1 Sam. 9:1). The first king excelled in outward appearance; the second king had a quiet and inner devotion to the Lord (1 Sam. 16:7).

God's choice for the second king was a young shepherd, the youngest of eight boys, an unlikely candidate that not even his father Jesse would have chosen (1 Sam. 16:6-13). The first king lacked courage against Goliath; the second king faced him bravely (1 Sam. 17). The first king pleased the people; the second king pleased the Lord. The first king had a wicked heart of disobedience and a rebellious spirit (1 Sam. 15:19,22-23); the second king was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14).

God was looking for a man whose heart would beat with His own heart, a man who would be in tune and in harmony with Himself. The identical expression is used in 1 Samuel 14:7 where the armor bearer was a man after Jonathan's heart, that is, he was willing to do whatever Jonathan wanted: "Jonathan, I'm with you all the way. You speak the word and I'll do it!" The first king had his kingdom ripped from him (1 Sam. 15:28); the second king, David, would have his kingdom established forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13).

Acts 13:23

The background of this statement is found in 2 Samuel chapter 7 where God promised David that from his loins He would raise up a son who would be loyal to the Lord and never depart from the living God. This is also confirmed in Psalm 89 where David was promised with an oath that he would be the progenitor of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. From David would come God's Son

(Rom. 1:3-4).

In verse 23 Paul moves from David to David's greater Son, the Saviour. There were a number of Messianic prophecies which promised that the Messiah would come from David (Isaiah 9:7; 11:1; Jer. 23:5-6; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; compare also Luke 1:31-32).

Acts 13:24-25

The man who came to prepare the way for God's Son was the greatest man who ever lived (Jesus being the obvious exception), namely John the Baptist. Jesus said of him, "Among those born of women there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7:28). This was a truly remarkable statement. Those born of women would include David himself, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, etc. John was a burning and shining light (John 5:35). John was an absolutely spectacular, faithful, God-honoring witness to the Lord Jesus.

John, in his humility, always pointed away from himself. He knew he was not even worthy to loosen the Lord's sandals. John acknowledged that Jesus was infinitely superior to himself. He even directed his own disciples to Jesus. He clearly explained that he was not the bride (as the Church will be), but that he was merely the friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29). John's greatness was in his humility: "He must increase; I must decrease" (John 3:30). John recognized that he was fading out. This was hard for John. John was the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3–"the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness." His purpose was to prepare the way of the Lord. He came to announce the kingdom. He preached with power: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." John was also the fulfillment of Malachi 3:1. He was the messenger who would prepare the way for the Savior.

John never lived to see the Savior being inaugurated into His kingdom, and in a weak moment John sent two disciples to Jesus. They asked, "Are you the One who should come or should we look for another?" (Matt. 11:3). Jesus very tenderly responded, "look at all these people that are being healed. Everything is fine, John. The kingdom is right on schedule in God's time. Blessed is he who is not offended in Me" (Matt. 11:4-6, paraphrased). There was nothing wrong with John. He did not fail. It was Israel that rejected him. In fact, John was so great that Jesus said to Israel, "If you had accepted him, he would have been Elijah" (Matt. 11:14, paraphrased).

John the Baptist admitted that he was nothing compared to Jesus. How did people in Antioch know about John the Baptist? By the time Paul and Barnabas got to Antioch, John the Baptist was well known all over that part of the world. Apollos, born in Egypt, was a disciple of John the Baptist (Acts 18:24-25). In Acts 19 there were about a dozen men in Ephesus who were also disciples of John the Baptist, years before Paul ever arrived there. John the Baptist's influence was spreading all over the eastern part of the Roman Empire. His message was simple: "Repent, the Messiah is coming." Those disciples in Ephesus had not even heard that Jesus had come!

Paul was telling his audience at Antioch, who undoubtedly had heard about John the Baptist, that a greater than John had come. Paul was eager to tell them who Jesus was.

Acts 13:26

Paul was addressing both Jews ("children of the stock of Abraham") and Gentile proselytes ("whosoever among you feareth God"). The good news was that salvation had been sent in their direction (compare 1 Tim. 1:15; John 3:17; Tit. 2:11).

Acts 13:27

Paul here outlined the sad case of the Jewish rejection of the Messiah by those in Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. They were ignorant of who Jesus really was and they rejected the voices of their prophets who pointed so clearly to Him. Even though they read these prophets every Sabbath day, "a veil [was] upon their heart" (2 Cor. 3:15) and they were blind (2 Cor. 3:14). Because of unbelief they could not see the Saviour who was so clearly revealed in the Scriptures. How sad that today the great majority of Jewish people are spiritually blind and have not recognized Jesus Christ as their promised Messiah-King.

In their rejection of the Messiah, they actually fulfilled the very prophecies which they read in their synagogues every week. Here is one example: "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner" (Psalm 118:22; Acts 4:11).

Acts 13:28

The Lord's enemies found no legitimate reason that He should be put to death, and even Pilate knew that He was an innocent and righteous man. "They hated Me without a cause" (John 15:25). They foolishly claimed that Jesus threatened to destroy the temple (Matt. 26:61) which was a total misunderstanding of what Jesus had said in John 2:19-21. Finally, the only cause of death they could find was that He claimed to be the Son of God (John 19:7). This would have been blasphemy and a crime worthy of death, except for one fact. What He said was true!

Acts 13:29

Notice the interplay between the responsibility of man and the sovereignty of God. These wicked men fulfilled their desires and put Jesus to death and buried His body. They thought they had finally gotten rid of Him once and for all. And yet the very wicked acts that they performed perfectly fulfilled all that was written about Him. God was in total control, using the deeds of depraved men to fulfill His perfect plan! This is a common theme in this book (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28).

It is astounding how much the Old Testament speaks of the death of Jesus. Psalm 22 contains His cry from the cross, and speaks of the jeering and mockery He received (verses 7-8), the piercing of His hands and feet (v. 16), and the soldiers gambling for His clothing (v. 17). None of His bones would be broken (Psalm 34). He would be accused by false witnesses (Psalm 35) and betrayed by a familiar friend (Psalm 4). He would bear reproaches from His enemies (Psalm 69) and would be given vinegar and gall to drink (Psalm 69). He would be beaten and spit upon (Isaiah 50). People would not believe in Him (Isa. 53:1). Jews would reject Him (Isa. 53:3). His death would be a vicarious sacrifice (Isaiah 53:5) as He would bear our sins (Isa. 53:6). He would be silent before His

accusers (Isa. 53:7). He would die with criminals (Isa. 53:12). He would come riding on a colt, the foal of an ass (Zech. 12:9). He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zech. 11). His side would be pierced (Zech. 12). These prophetic statements should have at least provoked a curiosity and some reflection on the part of the Jewish leaders. Yet they hated Him with indescribable hatred that can only be attributed to Satanic and demonic blindness resulting ultimately in His crucifixion. As Paul said, these Jewish people fulfilled all that was written about Him!

Acts 13:30-31

How significant are the words "But God..." Christ was crucified and buried (v. 29), "But God..." "This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. **But God** raised Him from the dead" (Acts 2:23-24, NASB). They put to death the Prince of Life but God raised Him from the dead (Acts 3:15). Jesus said, "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:18).

In verse 31 Paul gave tribute to the twelve apostles who were with Jesus from the beginning of His public ministry. Paul recognized that he was not part of the twelve. Yes, there were twelve witnesses who spent three and a half years with Him and walked with Him and learned from Him and ate with Him. After His resurrection He appeared to these men over a space of forty days. They were witnesses of His integrity, truthfulness and genuineness. They were familiar with all of His claims. Paul did not qualify to be one of the twelve because he was not with the Lord Jesus from the beginning of His public ministry (Acts 1:21-22). At the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every matter be established. God provided twelve witnesses to bear testimony to His Son. There were also over 500 brethren who saw Him one day in Galilee in His resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:6). Paul himself saw Jesus alive on the road to Damascus a few years later (Acts 9).

Paul emphasized the great essential facts of the gospel (see 1 Cor. 15:3-4): Christ's death (Acts 13:27-28), burial (Acts 13:29) and resurrection (Acts 13:30-37), devoting much more space to the resurrection. While the cross of Christ is foundational and indispensable to the gospel message, we must not neglect the message of the empty tomb.

Acts 13:32-33

In Acts 13:23 we have a reference to 2 Samuel 7:8-17. God said, "He will be My Son." So here in Psalm 2:7, "Thou art My Son."

What "day" is Paul referring to in verse 33? On what day was Christ begotten? There are two main interpretations of this phrase, "This day have I begotten Thee." Consider the following:

> 1) **The view which says that "this day" refers to the time of Christ's incarnation.** The verb "raised up" in verse 33 (anistémi) is used of God raising up a Prophet (Jesus Christ) like unto Moses (see Acts 3:22,26; 7:37). God raised up this Prophet by bringing Him onto the scene by way of the incarnation. Compare also Hebrews 7:11,15. In Acts 13:23 we have a similar usage: "Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise **raised** unto Israel a

Savior, Jesus."[10]

2) **The view which says that "this day" refers to the time of Christ's resurrection.** The verb "raised up"in verse 23 (anistémi) is very frequently used of Christ's resurrection. See Mark 8:31; 9:9,10,31; 10:34; 16:9; Luke 18:33; 24:7; 24:46; John 20:9; Acts 2:24; 2:32.

The stronger argument is the second option where "raised up" (verse 33) refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The context of this passage is speaking of the resurrection of Christ both in verses 30-31 and in verses 34-37. In verse 34 the same verb (anistémi) is used, clearly referring to the resurrection. Thus we conclude that the phrase "This day have I begotten Thee" refers to the day of Christ's resurrection when His Sonship was declared (Rom. 1:3-4). It was at the resurrection that Christ proved Himself to be everything that He had claimed He was.

For further study on this important point, we would recommend two papers:

1) In Appendix 3, see the paper, *The Meaning of Psalm 2:7* by Dr. Renald Showers, in which he argues that "this day" (Psalm 2:7) refers to the day of Christ's resurrection.

2) In Appendix 4, see the paper, *The Term "Son of God" in the Light of Old Testament Idiom* by S. Herbert Bess, in which he argues, based on Hebrew usage, that the phrase "Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten Thee" should be rendered "Thou art My Son; this day have I declared Thy Sonship."

Christ's Sonship did not begin at the incarnation, nor did it begin at the resurrection. He is the eternal Son of God.[11]

Acts 13:34

The promise was, "I will give you the sure mercies of David" (Isa. 55:3). God's sure mercies are personified in the person of His Son as risen from the dead.

Acts 13:35-37

These verses emphasize the corruption that takes place in the body of a dead person. Christ would not see corruption, in sharp contrast to David who died and did see corruption. After Jesus died, He was placed in the tomb for three days. During that time of burial, He did not see corruption, and did not experience any kind of decay or deterioration of His physical body. His body never began to

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[10]The Greek verb "raised" [egeirō] in Acts 13:23 is a different verb than the verb translated "raised" in verse 33 [anistémi]. To complicate matters, some Greek manuscripts in Acts 13:23 have the verb "brought" [agō] instead of the verb "raised" [egeirō], and this would make the verse read as follows: "Of this Man's offspring God **<u>has brought</u>** to Israel a Savior Jesus" (see the translations by John Darby and William Kelly).

[11]See George Zeller and Renald Showers, *The Eternal Sonship of Christ.* Available from the Middletown Bible Church. See http://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/sonship/sonship.htm

decay, unlike the body of every other person who has ever died, including Lazarus (John 11:39). God brought an end to His humiliation when Jesus cried, "It is finished." He was put into a rich man's tomb and His body was not subject to corruption. The Lord Jesus' enjoyment of His relationship to the Father was reestablished after those three hours on the cross when He bore our sins and was forsaken by God (Matt. 27:46). Jesus entered into victory, even though He went down temporarily into Sheol/Hades to make certain announcements. He did not go there to suffer; His suffering took place on the cross. He would never suffer again, with the exception of the suffering He would experience due to His connection with His body, the Church (Acts 9:5; Col. 1:24). When the Church suffers, the Head feels that pain!

The Same Argument By Different Preachers

Bible teachers will often use the same arguments to establish sound Biblical truths. Valid logic and healthy Biblical arguments are effective and worth repeating. We find this practice among the early Christian preachers. As we carefully compare the above Scripture passages we will find remarkable similarities between Peter's argument in Acts 2 and Paul's argument in Acts 13. Both preachers were addressing Jewish audiences. Both were demonstrating that the Hebrew Bible foretold the resurrection of Christ. Both men appealed to Psalm16, a prophecy about the resurrection. Both argued that the prophecy could not have been about David because his body suffered corruption and decay from lying in a tomb for centuries. Both men presented evidence that the "Holy One" was a reference to Christ, who was risen indeed. Did Paul plagiarize Peter's argument? Thankfully there are no copyrights when it comes to God's truth.

Other examples can be given. Peter (1 Peter 2:21-25) and Philip (Acts 8:30-35) both used Isaiah chapter 53 to proclaim Christ as the perfect Substitute to pay for man's sins. James and the writer of the book of Hebrews both used the account of Genesis 22 to establish the fact that Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac (James 2:14-24; Hebrews 11:17-19). At that time Abraham proved that his faith was living and genuine. The Lord Jesus and Paul both argued that the Messiah was not only David's Lord but also David's Son (Matt. 22:41-46; Rom. 1:3-4). As the Son of God He was David's Lord (His perfect deity); as the seed of David He was David's son (His perfect humanity). Do not hesitate to use sound and solid arguments which have been used by godly saints for centuries. Learn from other men of God how to handle the God-breathed Scriptures, being diligent to show yourself approved unto God (2 Tim. 2:15).

Acts 13:38

Forgiveness is one of the greatest gifts God could ever offer to sinful men and women. Paul's preaching was fulfilling the Great Commission: "...that repentance and remission (forgiveness) of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). The preaching of forgiveness was faithfully carried out by God's messengers (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38). The Lord Jesus Christ took care of the sin problem when He bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18). The forgiveness of sins is not automatically bestowed on anyone. Each sinner must personally appropriate and receive God's forgiveness by faith in the Savior. Those who refuse to come to Christ and believe the gospel will die in their sins (John

8:21,24). That is, they will die with their sins unpardoned.

The Tragedy of a Pardon Refused

In 1833 George Wilson was convicted of robbing the U.S. Mail in Pennsylvania and sentenced to death. Due to his friends' influence, Wilson was pardoned by Andrew Jackson. Wilson, however, refused the pardon. The Supreme Court was thus asked to rule on the case. The decision was that if the prisoner does not accept the pardon, it is not in effect: "A pardon is a deed, to the validity of which delivery is essential, and delivery is not complete without acceptance. It may then be rejected by the person to whom it is tendered; and if it is rejected, we have discovered no power in this court to force it upon him." Wilson was hanged.

The living God, based on the crosswork of His beloved Son, has made it possible for God to remain righteous, and at the same time justify [declare righteous] the ungodly sinner: "To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). Christ died as a Substitute for all humanity (Heb. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:6; 1 John 2:2). Based on Christ's finished work at Calvary, God offers a full and free pardon to every sinner on planet earth. The only condition is that the offer must be accepted, and the guilty must receive Jesus Christ and trust in Him and in Him alone. You would think that guilty men and women who are sentenced to death (Rom. 1:29-32; 6:23) would greatly rejoice in such an offer and receive it at once. But tragically, the great majority of hellbound sinners refuse the God-offered pardon and choose instead to remain in their sins (John 8:24) and face their certain doom. How foolish not to receive God's gracious and complete forgiveness: "whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

Acts 13:39

This statement was something very shocking to Paul's listeners. "Sir, are you implying that the law of Moses is no longer relevant and essential, and is no longer the means by which we are to approach a holy God?"

Actually God's law was never meant as a means of salvation. The law can condemn a person, but it can never save a person. It can show how unrighteous a person is, but it can never impart righteousness to a person.

"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The law reflects God's holy and righteous standards to which we have all miserably failed to measure up. Grace involves God's love and unmerited favor, freely bestowed on wretched sinners who do not deserve one drop of kindness. They deserve judgment and wrath instead. The law demands righteousness; grace freely justifies (Rom. 3:24). The law utterly condemns the best person; grace saves to the uttermost the worst person (1 Tim. 1:15). The law kills; grace makes alive (2 Cor. 3:6). The law says, "Do;" grace says, "It is done!" The law is prohibiting and demanding; grace is beseeching and bestowing (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 4:1). The law curses; grace blesses. The law shuts every mouth before God; grace opens the mouth in praise to God (Psalm 40:3). The law says, "Pay what you owe;" grace says, "I freely forgive you all!" The law says, "The wages of sin is death;" grace declares, "The gift of God is eternal life."

While the law reveals sin, grace atones for it. The law demands obedience; grace bestows power to obey. The law brings distance between guilty man and God; grace reconciles man and draws him near to God (Rom. 5:1,10). The law promises life only on the basis of perfect obedience; grace offers good news to disobedient, guilty lawbreakers. Mt. Sinai has its place and its purpose, but thank God for Mt. Calvary, the place from which all grace abounds: "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). *"Run, John, run, the law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands; far grander news the gospel brings; it bids me fly and gives me wings!"* (John Bunyan). Have you experienced God's superabounding, life-transforming grace?

What the law could not do, God in His grace could do: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). If a person wants eternal life, all he needs to do is keep the commandments (Matt. 19:17; Luke 10:25-28)! This involves keeping the law perfectly every second of his life without one failure, without one broken law. A total impossibility! If a person had kept the law perfectly all his life, then he would not be a sinner, and would not need to be saved. Christ came to save sinners, not righteous people (Luke 5:30-32). God in grace devised a plan whereby the unrighteous sinner could be justified (declared righteous) by faith. The believing sinner is "justified from all things" (Acts 13:19), that is, "from every charge of guilt that might be brought against him."[12]

Acts 13:40-41

What a way for Paul to end a sermon! "You despisers! You are going to perish!" The Jews, for the most part, rejected Paul's message. If a person rejects God's message, then he is in great trouble, as the Old Testament prophets emphasized repeatedly. The prophet whom Paul quoted was Habakkuk (Hab. 1:5), a passage which was referring to the dreadful invasion of the Babylonians due to Israel's idolatry and sin. Such an ominous prophecy also applied to Paul's audience because in less than 25 years the destruction of Jerusalem would take place by the hands of the Romans. Even though Paul's Jewish audience did not live in Jerusalem, it was still Israel's capital city, the home of their great temple. They would make pilgrimages there three times a year in order to attend the chief Jewish feasts (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles/Booths). Of course, eternal judgment and everlasting destruction also await all those who reject the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

Acts 13:42

What were Gentiles doing in this Jewish synagogue?[13] These were the God-fearers mentioned in

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[12]William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, p. 1623.

[13]In some manuscripts the phrase "the Gentiles" is omitted. So Darby's translation: "And as they went out they begged that these words might be spoken to them the ensuing sabbath." Gentiles as such would have had no place or business at the synagogue, though proselytes from among the Gentiles would, as the next verse makes clear. The text of Acts 13:42 (without "the Gentiles") is general enough to include Jews as well as proselytes who became new believers (as v. 43 makes clear).

verses 16 and 26. The Jews left the synagogue, having rejected Paul's message. The Gentiles and believing Jews lingered there and indicated that they wanted to hear more from Paul on the following Sabbath. The word "besought" (KJV) is strong. It means that these people, who responded well to Paul's preaching, begged and strongly urged Paul to give them another message. It is the same word used in 2 Corinthians 5:20 where God strongly urges people, through His ambassadors, to be reconciled to God.

Acts 13:43

Thank the Lord that there were some Jews in Antioch who responded positively to Paul's message, along with Gentile proselytes who had embraced the Jewish faith. These sincere people had tasted of the grace of God and Paul persuaded them to continue in that grace. Barnabas had given a similar word of exhortation when he told the believers in Antioch (in Syria) to cleave to the Lord (Acts 11:23). We are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 15:11) and we must live by grace (Tit. 2:11-12; 2 Cor. 9:8; 1 Cor. 15:10). The Christian life is to continue in the same way it commenced (Col. 2:6). God forbid that we should abandon the grace of God and seek to put ourselves under the law, which would entail being governed by the flesh.

Acts 13:44

The whole city was impacted by Paul's ministry, and even those who rejected the message the previous week came again, not wanting to miss his second message. Paul drew all men to him, both haters and followers. One wonders if the synagogue in Antioch was able to accommodate this huge audience or whether they had to meet elsewhere.

Many in England and in America rejected the open-air messages of George Whitefield, and many others loved his peaching. Between the two he attracted huge crowds. In 1739 he preached an open air message in Philadelphia. Ben Franklin was not very interested in hearing the gospel, but he was fascinated by Whitefield's oratory skills. Franklin also made a profit by selling Whitefield's sermons. One evening Whitefield preached from the courthouse steps to a huge crowd which had gathered. Franklin, instead of paying attention to the sermon, decided he would do a mathematical calculation to determine how many people could hear Whitefield's voice. He walked backwards until he reached the point where he could no longer hear the preacher distinctly. He then imagined a semicircle with this distance as the radius, and the whole semicircle filled with auditors. He calculated that Whitefield could have preached to 30,000 people who would all be within hearing range of his voice. This agreed with newspaper reports that Franklin had read of Whitefield preaching to 25,000 people in the open fields. Yet, how much better it would have been for his soul if Ben Franklin had listened intently to the gospel instead of concentrating on this scientific experiment.

Acts 13:45

Why would the Jews react so negatively to Paul's gospel preaching? Was Paul inaccurate in his quotations of Old Testament Scripture? Was he wrong in his use of Old Testament history? Was his application of the message to their hearts faulty? No, but they were jealous and filled with envy,

especially when they saw the huge crowd that Paul was attracting. In Romans 11, Paul says that one of the reasons the natural branches (the Jews) have been broken off of the olive tree of blessing and Gentiles grafted in is so that the Jews might be **provoked to jealousy**. The cause of this jealousy is seeing thousands of Gentiles coming to Jesus while their promised kingdom has not yet been established on earth (Rom. 11:11,14). Thus the unbelieving Jews contradicted Paul's message and opposed him fiercely. They blasphemously considered Jesus to be an imposter and a liar, and they refused to recognize Him as their Messiah. They considered Paul an apostate to the Hebrew faith.

These Jews were not unlike the Jews of Jerusalem who had crucified the Savior. Their hearts were hardened by sin and they sank into the darkness and despair of unbelief. How amazing is the capacity of the human heart to reject the light, suppress the truth and turn away from the good news of salvation. Therefore Paul later said in Romans 11:28, "they (the Jews) are enemies for the gospel's sake, but they are beloved for the fathers' sake." They are still objects of God's purposes through the unconditional promises of the Abrahamic covenant. This is a conundrum, a great dilemma that is very real even today.

Acts 13:46

In spite of intense opposition to their message, Paul and Barnabas became even more bold and courageous in their stand for the truth. They did not cower in the presence of their opponents.

It was necessary that the Word of God should first be spoken to the Jews, and it was (Rom. 1:16; Acts 3:26). They were the first to hear, but since they rejected the preaching of the gospel, Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles. Apparently, Paul never returned to the synagogue in the city of Antioch. Yet, that does not mean that he refused to share Christ with individual Jews, as God would open up doors of opportunity. It's as if Paul were saying, "This synagogue has officially and publicly and openly repudiated the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and we will never come back here again. There are many Gentiles in this city who desire to hear our message of good news and we will turn our attention to them."

The Jews judged themselves "unworthy of eternal life." Obviously, none of us are worthy of eternal life. Instead, we have earned for ourselves eternal death (Rom. 6:23). Yet, Christ through His substitutionary sacrifice has made it possible for us to receive eternal life as a free gift (Rom. 6:23; 5:15,17). To receive this priceless gift we must simply come to Christ and believe on Him (John 6:35). In view of the finished work of Christ, those who judge themselves unworthy of eternal life are those who refuse to come to Christ: "you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life" (John 5:40, literal translation). Oh the wondrous grace of God that sinners so unworthy of eternal life have been "made fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12).

Acts 13:47

Paul and Barnabas quoted from Isaiah 42:6-7 and made a valid application from that passage. This is not the only place where Isaiah speaks about light and salvation going to the Gentiles. The gospel will go to the Gentile world, even to the entire human race: "I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6). Even in the Abrahamic Covenant, God made it clear that the Gentile world would be the ultimate target of the

message of salvation. Through Abraham's Seed, all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). But as time passed, the Jews became blinded to the fact that God intended them to be instruments through whom He could reach the Gentiles. They were never meant to be the ultimate and final target of God's love. They were an instrument to reach the Gentile world, and when it came to worldwide outreach, they were colossal failures. One of the worst missionaries on record was Jonah who was sent by God to the Gentile world, and to the Assyrians in particular. Nineveh was the center of the most hated empire in the ancient world, and the Assyrians were notoriously cruel. Jonah's unloving desire was that those who heard his message would reject it and be destroyed by God.

Naomi was not the greatest testimony before the Gentile world either. She left the promised land and fled to Moab due to a famine. Her husband and sons died and she was left with her two daughters-in-law, Moabite women. She was so discouraged and so depressed and so defeated by the circumstances of her life that she, in essence, said to these girls: "Just go home to your people and to your gods." What kind of missionary attitude was that? Ruth replied, "No, your God is my God and where you go, I will go. Your God is my God forever (paraphrased)." So in spite of Naomi's bad attitude and depressed spirit, she turned out to be an effective missionary for Israel. All this is typical of Israel's failure to be concerned about and to be praying for the Gentiles who lived round about them.

There was one man that David and his men may have led to the Lord, namely Uriah, a Hittite. He proved to be such a faithful man that he ended up being a general in David's army. However, David murdered him one day in order to cover his sin and to take his wife as his own.

Yes, the failure of Israel as God's witness was remarkable. And yet, as we look in the mirror, how well has the body and bride of Christ done in reaching out to a lost and needy world?

Acts 13:48

The Gentiles were delighted that God's message of salvation was available to them, as foretold by the Hebrew prophets. They were excited to be partakers of the grace of God and welcomed into the family of God (John 1:11-12).

In the last part of this verse we have the wonderful balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility:

God's Sovereignty: "As many as were ordained (appointed) to eternal life"

Man's Responsibility: " believed"

God does the saving; man does the believing. Those who are saved have only God to thank. See 1 Corinthians 1:29-31 (God must get all the credit); Ephesians 2:8-9 (there is no basis for boasting); Matthew 16:16-17 (Peter did not open his own eyes); John 6:44-45,65 (no one can come to the Saviour apart from supernatural enabling). Those who are lost have only themselves to blame: 1 Timothy 2:4 (God desires all men to be saved); Romans 10:12-13 (God is rich unto all that call upon Him); Matthew 23:37 (God was willing; man was unwilling); John 5:40 (the reason man does not have eternal life is because of his stubborn and sinful **refusal** to come to the only Saviour); 2

Thess.1:8-9 (those who suffer eternal punishment are those who **disobeyed** the good news of the gospel). Man must take full blame and responsibility for his eternal destination.

The saved person thankfully says, "I'm in heaven because of God!" The lost person must truthfully say, "I'm in hell because of me!" Those who are damned will never be able to blame God or say, "I'm damned because God did not choose me!" Their damnation is not based upon God's rejection of them but upon their rejection of God: "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). "Of sin, because they believe not on Me" (John 16:9). "And still you are not willing (but refuse) to come to Me, so that you might have life" (John 5:40--Amplified Bible).

Man does not contribute to his own salvation. It is the work of God, "not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). God does not contribute to man's unbelief. That is man's work. God alone must do the saving. Man must do the believing. God must get all the glory and all the credit. Unbelieving man must take the blame. "To God be the glory great things **He hath done**!" "Oh to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!"

This verse does not say, "As many as were ordained to eternal life were saved." No, they had to first respond to the Word that was preached. They had to believe the gospel message. To not believe the gospel message is described as not obeying the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8).

Notice also that the verse does not say, "As many as believed were ordained to eternal life." The verse seems to be saying that being ordained or appointed to eternal life would result in a person believing. Compare also John 6:37 and 6:44.

For a detailed discussion of Acts 13:48, see Appendix 5.

Acts 13:49

God's law of spiritual multiplication is wonderful. When people come to know the true and living God, what is the first thing they want to do? They desire to tell others! Such a wonderful salvation is not something that we can keep secret. We should shout it from the rooftops. If a medical researcher should discover a perfect cure for cancer, would he want to keep this a secret? It is our duty and delight to publish and spread the Word of God in view of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15). God has a perfect cure for sin and we must let it be known far and wide.

A very extreme Calvinist position would deny that a believer has a responsibility to the lost: *"If God does the electing then I need do nothing. If God wants them saved, He will save them. Either God will bring them to faith in Christ or He will not. It's totally God's work and He does not depend upon our efforts."* The Biblical answer to this is best expressed by the Apostle Paul himself:

> Therefore I endure all things *for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10,* emphasis mine*).*

Yes, Paul labored for the lost, prayed for the lost, preached to the lost, suffered for the lost and

poured out his energy for the lost. Why? *That the elect "may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."* Paul knew that God's sovereignty did not interfere with man's responsibility. Paul knew that God would do His part, but he must do his part: "Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16). Paul did not say, "I don't need to do anything because God will save His elect." No, the elect are saved only as the message is taken to them and they respond to it. Thus, there are two sides of this antinomy which cannot be rationalistically resolved by the human mind. Another example is found in John chapter 6:

The divine side: "No man is able to come to Me except the Father...draw him" (John 6:44).

The human side: "The one who comes to Me I will never cast out" (John 6:37).

No one can say, "Well, Lord, I can't come to You because I am not one of the elect." This antinomy is infinitely beyond our comprehension and even Paul said, "God's ways are past finding out" (Rom. 11:33). God's thoughts are infinitely higher than our thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9). And yet how delicately and how beautifully God interweaves these two perspectives all through the Bible!

Acts 13:50

Paul and Barnabas encountered fierce Satanic opposition at the hand of the Jews. The Jews stirred up certain women. Women were very prominent in Greek cities, as we notice from the book of Acts. Luke frequently mentions the function and significance of women in this book which he wrote. We will especially see this as we come to the next chapters in Acts. Women were very influential in the city of Antioch. Important men of the city were also stirred up by the Jews, and the result was that Paul and Barnabas were expelled. All those who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12).

Acts 13:51

The shaking off of the dust of their feet was a symbolic means to say, "We are finished with you people. You have heard the message and have rejected it, and now we are out of here!" This was the very thing that the Lord Jesus, in Luke 5:9 and Luke 10:11, had told His disciples to do. It was a symbolic and public demonstration showing that something drastic had happened in this city, namely, an open and public rejection of God's gracious offer.[14]

After they left Antioch, Paul and Barnabas came to Iconium. The missionary team was moving eastward. This city was 80 or 90 miles to the east. Iconium reflected Greek culture and was less

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[14]In the early 1980's, two cult members came to George Zeller's office in Connecticut dressed in Biblical attire (robes and sandals). They were followers of a man named "Brother Julius," who claimed that he was the Messiah. We talked for a little while and soon they could see that it was useless to try to convert me to faith in their fake Messiah. As they left the office they both announced that they were going to shake off the dust from their feet. I was okay with that. The church owned a good vacuum. This is said in jest, yet the spiritual deception of such people is not a joking matter.

influenced by Rome. It was an isolated but very prosperous city. Their journey to Iconium followed the famous Sebastian Way, a route which started in Ephesus and ultimately reached to the Euphrates River. It was named after Augustus. The name "Sebaste" was the Greek equivalent of the Latin "Augustus," the great emperor who did a magnificent job of paving highways all over the Roman Empire. In God's wonderful providence, the Roman highway system was a great help for the messengers of the gospel, to make it easier to travel around that vast empire.

Acts 13:52

We find this cycle all the way through the book of Acts:

Proclamation
Resistance and Rejection
Persecution
Moving on to the Next City
Proclamation
Resistance and Rejection
Persecution
and on it goes!

The "disciples" mentioned in verse 52 were the disciples who were left behind in Antioch, most of whom were new converts. Even though there was an apparent defeat due to the expulsion of Paul and Barnabas, yet the disciples who remained were not defeated. They were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Paul and Barnabas were no longer there, but God was, and the work would continue. The Jews were able to drive out Paul and Barnabas from the city, but they could not drive out the Holy Spirit. The Spirit made His home in the heart of every new convert. "As the missionaries started for Iconium, they left behind them two completely different groups: the rejecting, prejudiced, hate-filled Jews; and the joyous, Spirit-filled believers."[15]

[15]John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary–Acts 13-28*, p. 40.

Appendix 1
Dr. Whitcomb's Comments on the Jewish Rejection of the Gospel at the Close of Acts Chapter 13

We thank the Lord for giving us this record of the initial thrust of the gospel into the Gentile world along with the Jewish opposition that accompanied it. The Jews were especially enraged by this obvious intrusion into their supposed monopoly of how to approach God. Paul's message was revolutionary: One does not need to become a Jew in order to be acceptable to the Lord.

Consider the situation the Jews faced in these synagogues. For one thousand and four hundred years God had insisted that the law of Moses be observed. God never intended the law to be a means of salvation. Rather, it was to be a means of instruction and a way of life, to demonstrate God's ways, God's will, and God's holiness in a corrupt and demonically-depraved world system. It served with powerful effectiveness to attract literally millions of Gentiles. Gentiles came to these synagogues and saw a pure worship system that was infinitely superior to the corrupt and horrible demonic systems of pagan worship with which they were familiar. God was spreading light as to His holiness and His righteousness.

Suddenly, the Apostle Paul appeared in their synagogue and said in effect, "One does not have to obey the law to be saved." That created an enormous revulsion within the Jewish conscience and minds. The Jews had been, for hundreds of years, progressively blinded to the basic realities of the Old Testament system. What was the purpose of those animal sacrifices in the temple? The purpose was not to take away sin (Heb. 10:4). Rather it was to cover the sinner from immediate judgment by a holy God in whose presence they came with their sacrifices, and to guarantee that they were still His people. Yet, these sacrifices never took away their sins and were never intended to.

A similar situation occurred when the people of Israel came out of Egypt and God said, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." The Passover did not save anyone, but it merely protected them from immediate destruction. For centuries, the Jews horribly distorted the whole program of God and completely misunderstood the sacrificial system. We see in Isaiah chapter 1 that they would bring their sacrifices thinking that they were doing God a favor and earning merit with Him. This was an abomination. They did not understand their own Mosaic law which included the sacrificial provision.

The Lord Jesus was crucified by the Jews because He told them how wrong they were: "Ye are of your father the devil" (John 8:44). John the Baptist and Jesus demanded that the people repent and have a profound and total transformation of their perspectives on who God is, what He is like, what He requires, and how to approach Him. Most of all they had to see themselves as hopelessly sinful. They needed a complete revolution of their thinking. This offended them deeply and shocked them horribly, and they crucified Him.

Even today, Jewish people struggle with these same issues as they are told about the necessity of coming to Jesus by faith. How difficult it is for them to recognize that their system of worship does not save them. Our prayer is ever, "Lord, how can we help Jewish people today? How can we reach them?" We can love them, as God tells us to. They are God's chosen people indeed. The worst possible thing we can do is what has been done since the Holocaust. When those six million Jews

died in Germany, there was a drastic change of thinking on the part of ecumenical, liberal theologians in the World Council of Churches. The same could be said of the Roman Catholic Church. There was a profound sense of shame and horror that Jews had been persecuted and attacked and killed. These religious systems did not wish to fight or persecute the Jews, and yet sadly, neither did they have the true gospel to present to them. In many ways they were like the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day, religious but lost.

Replacement Theology is now very popular in many Christian circles. It teaches that God's chosen people, the Jews, are being set aside completely and finally. Israel has an invisible yet powerful enemy named Satan. He hates Israel and he hates Israel's God. He opposes the program God has for that nation which involves His coming kingdom. All of this became very obvious to the Apostle Paul and his companions right from the beginning of their first missionary journey. They went to the Jew first, as much as they possibly could, as we see throughout the whole book of Acts. As their message was rejected by the Jews, Paul said, "We are going to turn to the Gentiles since you have rejected the gospel message and rejected the Messiah. We are finished with you!" And yet every place they went, they continued to go to the Jew first over and over again.

As we evangelize today, it is impossible, for many reasons, to go to the Jew first. For example, if one has a campus ministry at a college, how practical would it be to stop all evangelism until you first find all the Jews on campus? Our message needs to go to all the students, whether Jews or Gentiles. Yet this does not mean that our gospel ministries should be "to the Jew last." And certainly our ministry is not to Gentiles only. Our outreach is to Jews and Gentiles as God gives opportunities to reach needy souls, regardless of background or ethnicity.

Appendix 2

Ultradispensationalism and Acts Chapter 13

Many ultradispensationalists see Acts chapter 13 as a significant turning point as Paul "turned to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Based on this and other reasons, they teach that the Church began in Acts chapter 13.

The following is taken from the booklet, *Modern Trends and Positions* by George Zeller:

> We reject the extreme teaching known as "Hyper (or Ultra)-Dispensationalism" which opposes either the Lord's Supper and/or water baptism as Scriptural means of testimony for the Church in this age. Ultradispensationalists err in saying that the Church began years after the Day of Pentecost mentioned in Acts 2. (Some say it began in Acts 13; others say it began in Acts 28.) Other characteristics of ultradispensationalists: 1) They teach that the "Church" in Matthew 16:18 is different from the "Church" revealed by the Apostle Paul. 2) They teach that the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:2,8) is not for the Church today. (They say it was a Jewish commission relating to the Gospel of the Kingdom.) 3) They teach that Church truth (mystery truth) was revealed exclusively to Paul (but see Eph. 3:5) and that no Church truth was revealed prior to Paul's revelation of the mystery (but see John 10:16; 14:3; 14:17; 14:20; 17:20-23; etc.). 4) They teach that there is a difference between Paul's early and later ministries. See Ryrie's helpful discussion in *Dispensationalism*, Chapter 11. (Ryrie also lists some additional characteristics of ultradispensationalism.)[16]

Determining when the Church began is crucially important, and we have dealt with this question in detail in our study of Acts chapter 2.[17]

Key leaders of "moderate" ultradispensationalism were Cornelius R. Stam, J. C. O'Hair, and Charles F. Baker. O'Hair and Baker placed its beginning at Acts 13, whereas Stam thought it began as early as Acts 9. They are in agreement that the Church did not begin at Pentecost (Acts 2), although they disagree as to when it did begin. Even though we strongly disagree with many of their interpretations, moderate dispensationalists are, for the most part, genuine born-again believers.

For an additional study which refutes ultradispentational teaching, see *Baker's Dozen* by Jeff Raymond and George Zeller.[18]

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[16]See http://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/doctrine/clarifys.htm

[17]See also George Zeller's study, *When Did the Church Begin?* http://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/dispen/begin.pdf

[18]See http://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/dispen/baker12.htm

Appendix 3

THE MEANING OF PSALM 2:7

By Dr. Renald Showers[19]

"I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee...And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead"

(Psalm 2:7 and Romans 1:4)

SIGNIFICANT QUESTIONS CONCERNING PSALM 2:7

Psalm 2 begins on a tumultuous note. Verses 1-3 describe world conditions at the time that Messiah is to return to earth to take back the rule of the world system on behalf of God, to establish the Millennial Kingdom and to administer God's rule worldwide as His representative. With grim determination Gentile rulers and their armies will unite together to try to prevent the restoration of the divine-messianic rule to planet earth (cf. Rev. 16:12-16; 19:11-21).

Verses 4-6 portray God's response to this stubborn rebellion. He will laugh at the puniness of the opposition to His omnipotent power, will pour out His wrath upon the rebels and will establish His Messiah as King in spite of the resistance of the godless Gentiles.

Verse 7 begins to relate what Messiah will say when He returns in His second coming to administer God's rule as His representative. At the time that Messiah takes over the rule of the earth He will declare what God had already decreed concerning Him: "Thou *art* my Son; this day have I begotten thee."

This part of God's decree concerning the Messiah prompts crucial questions: How does this Psalm 2:7 statement relate to the issue of the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ? Does it indicate that Christ **became** the Son of God at some point in history (on the day that God begot Him) and that He, therefore, is not eternally the Son of God, or does it mean something else? Any attempt to answer these questions must examine Paul's use of the Psalm 2:7 statement in Acts 13:33.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF PSALM 2:7 TO ACTS 13:33

Having talked about God's promise to the Israelite fathers to give Israel a Savior from David's line of descent, Paul made the following declaration in Acts 13:33:

God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus

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[19]This appendix is taken from Chapter 8 of the book *The Eternal Sonship of Christ* by George Zeller and Renald Showers, published originally by Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune, NewJersey.

again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee.

Paul's statement indicated that God's raising up of Jesus was the fulfillment of His Psalm 2:7 decree concerning the Messiah. Paul seemed to be saying that the day in which God begot Messiah as His Son was the time when He raised up Jesus.

This declaration by Paul prompts a question. What did he mean when he said that God "hath raised up Jesus"? Many interpreters believe that Paul had the following meaning in mind: God raised up Jesus to deliver Israel from its oppressors in the same sense that He raised up Moses to deliver Israel from its oppression in Egypt. God raised up Jesus by sending Him into the world incarnated in human flesh to be the Deliverer. According to this interpretation, the raising up took place at the time of Christ's incarnation, on the day that God begot His humanity.

Some who propose this interpretation conclude that, since the raising up of Jesus was the fulfillment of God's Psalm 2:7 decree concerning the Messiah, and since the raising up took place at the time of Christ's incarnation, then Christ **became** the Son of God at the time of His incarnation, on the day that God begot His humanity.

There is a major problem with this conclusion. In the previous chapter it was noted that the expression "Son of God" indicates absolute deity for Jesus Christ and the expression "the Son of man" indicates His humanity. In light of this, since it was Christ's humanity, not His deity, that God begot at the time of the incarnation, then it can be concluded that Christ **became** the Son of man, not the Son of God, at the time of His incarnation.

Other scholars propose a different interpretation of Paul's statement concerning the raising up of Jesus. They believe that Paul was referring to the bodily resurrection of Christ. According to this interpretation, God's Psalm 2:7 decree concerning the Messiah was fulfilled on the day that Jesus rose from the dead. This would mean, then, that Paul was indicating that there is a link between three things: Christ's resurrection and His being the promised Deliverer and His being the Son of God.

This writer favors this resurrection interpretation for the following reason: the context (vs. 23,32) of Paul's Acts 13:33 statement indicates that he was saying that the raising up of Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise to the Israelite fathers to give Israel a Deliverer from David's line of descent. In a parallel passage (Acts 26:6-8, 22-23) Paul made it clear that hope for the fulfillment of God's promise to the Israelite fathers was dependent upon resurrection from the dead, specifically upon Christ's resurrection from the dead:

> And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which *promise* our twelve tribes, instantly serving *God* day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? (Acts 26:6-8)

> Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, *and* that he should be the first that

should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:22-23).

F. F. Bruce made the following comments concerning Paul's Acts 26 statements:

> That a faithful Pharisee believed in the resurrection of the dead, and saw no fulfillment of Israel's ancient hope apart from the resurrection, went without saying. But the amazing and indeed absurd feature of the present dispute was that he was being prosecuted for his proclamation of this very hope--and prosecuted by Jews, of all people! But this hope was the hope that God would keep the promise which He made to the fathers of the nation long ago; it was the hope which gave life and meaning and purpose to the ordinance of divine worship, faithfully maintained by all twelve tribes of Israel generation after generation--the hope that God would one day come down to deliver His people as He had done when they were slaves in Egypt, that He would raise up a horn of salvation for them "in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old" (cf. Luke 1:69f.). Why should they think it incredible that God should raise the dead? The Pharisees would answer that they did not think it incredible; they ardently believed in God as the raiser of the dead. But Paul's point was that this belief had now been validated in that God had already raised up one man from the dead, and had by that very fact demonstrated that man to be Israel's long-expected Messiah and Deliverer, the one in whom the age-old hope was realized. Why should those who believed in the resurrection of the dead refuse to believe that God had in fact raised up Jesus, and so declared Him to be the Son of God? [1]

Since in Acts 13:33 Paul was saying that the raising up of Jesus was the fulfillment of God's promise to the Israelite fathers, since Paul's Acts 13 and 26 statements are parallel to each other, and since his Acts 26 statement made it clear that the fulfillment of God's promise to the Israelite fathers was dependent upon Christ's resurrection from the dead, then it would appear that the Acts 13:33 reference to God's raising up of Jesus is a reference to His bodily resurrection from the dead.

This understanding of Paul's statement that God "hath raised up Jesus" requires the following conclusions: God's Psalm 2:7 decree concerning the Messiah was fulfilled on the day that Jesus rose from the dead; there is some sense in which God begot Christ on His resurrection day, and there is some sense in which Christ's being the Son of God is related to His resurrection.

In what sense did God beget Christ on His resurrection day? It should be noted that the Hebrew word which is translated "begotten" in the Psalm 2:7 statement, "this day have I begotten thee" does not always mean "beget" in the sense of conception. Its more frequent meaning is that of "bear, bring forth" in the sense of giving birth (1 Kings 3:17-18; 2 Kings 19:3). [2]

In light of this more frequent meaning, this writer is convinced of the following sense for God's begetting of Christ on His resurrection day: Just as a baby is hidden from sight in its mother's womb until it is brought forth on the day of its birth, so Christ after His death was hidden from sight in the womb of the earth until God brought Him forth on the day of His resurrection. Thus, on Christ's resurrection day God begot Him in the sense of bringing Him forth alive from the grave.

But in what sense is Christ's being the Son of God related to His resurrection? Historical

background sheds light on this issue. In the ancient Roman Empire crucifixion was regarded as the most cruel, disgusting and shameful form of death ever devised. [3] Cicero, Roman orator and writer (106-43 B.C.), described it as "that most cruel and disgusting penalty." [4] On another occasion he said that "the very word `cross' should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, he eyes and his ears." [5] Josephus, famous Jewish historian (37-95 A.D.), called crucifixion "the most wretched of deaths." [6] Ancients classified death on a cross as the supreme Roman penalty, even worse than burning and decapitation. [7]

Because crucifixion was so horrible, the ancient world believed that only rebellious foreigners, violent criminals and robbers and slaves deserved to die that form of death. [8] In light of this belief, any person who died on a cross was automatically classified as a rebel, criminal or slave.

As a result of these beliefs, both Jews and Gentiles were convinced that it would be impossible for a Son of God to be crucified. [9] On the basis of Deuteronomy 21:23 which states, "he that is hanged is accursed of God," the Jews drew the following conclusion: to be hanged on a cross is to be cursed of God, and certainly God, if He had a Son, would never curse His own Son. [10]

To the Gentile way of thinking, since the gods of Greece and Rome were immortal in contrast to mortal men, it would be impossible for them to die on a cross. [11] Thus, to the Greeks and Romans,

> To believe that the one pre-existent Son of the one true God, the mediator at creation and the redeemer of the world, had appeared in very recent times in out-of-the-way Galilee as a member of the obscure people of the Jews, and even worse, had died the death of a common criminal on the cross, could only be regarded as a sign of madness. [12]

The fact that the Jews were convinced that no Son of God could die by crucifixion is evidenced by the abuse which they hurled at Jesus while He was on the cross:

> And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth (Mt. 27:39-44).

The fact that the Gentiles held the same conviction is evidenced by the following statement concerning Jesus which was made by Celsus, a very vocal pagan opponent of early Christianity: "But if he was really so great he ought, in order to display his divinity, to have disappeared suddenly from the cross." [13]

Because both Jew and Gentile were convinced that no Son of God could die by crucifixion, they automatically rejected any claim to divine sonship by anyone who died on a cross.

How does this historical background shed light on the sense in which Christ's being the Son

of God is related to His resurrection? In His first coming Jesus claimed to be both the Messiah (the representative ruler of God for the Millennium and Israel's promised Deliverer) and the Son of God (the one who has the same nature as the Father). If anyone would be uniquely qualified to be the representative ruler of God for the Millennium, it would be His only-begotten Son who has the same divine nature as His Father.

Israel rejected Jesus' claim to be the Son of God and Messiah (Mt. 26:63-66; Acts 13:27-29). His death by crucifixion convinced the Jews all the more that their rejection of Him was correct, for they believed that no Son of God could die by crucifixion.

In light of this conviction, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead after crucifixion had tremendous significance in relationship to His being the Son of God. Paul presented this significance in Romans 1:4. After pointing out the fact that Jesus Christ, God's Son, "was made of the seed of David according to the flesh" (v. 3; cf. Acts 13:22-23), Paul asserted that He was "declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (cf. Acts 13:30-33). In other words, on the day of Jesus' resurrection God reversed the wrong conclusion concerning Him. Israel had concluded that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, the One uniquely qualified to be the Messiah, the nation's Deliverer. God's resurrecting of Jesus was His way of decreeing to the world that, in spite of His crucifixion, Jesus is the Son of God, the One uniquely qualified to be the representative Ruler of God for the Millennium. In harmony with this, in Acts 17:31 Paul declared that by raising Jesus from the dead God gave proof to all men that Jesus is the Man whom He has ordained to have authority over the world.

In light of what has been seen, the following conclusion can be drawn concerning the relationship of Psalm 2:7 to Acts 13:33: In Acts 13:33 Paul indicated that God's resurrecting of Jesus from the dead fulfilled His Psalm 2:7 decree concerning the Messiah. It fulfilled the decree in the following way: on the day that God raised Jesus from the dead He begot Him as His Son. He begot Him in the sense that He brought Him forth from the womb of the earth by resurrection and thereby publicly demonstrated or decreed Him to be His Son. He did not beget Jesus in the sense of conceiving or making Him His divine Son on His resurrection day (Jesus was already the Son of God before His resurrection--Mt.3:16-17; 17:1-5).

Acts 13:33 sheds tremendous light on the meaning of God's decree concerning the Messiah in Psalm 2:7. That meaning indicates that the decree has great significance in relationship to the rest of Psalm 2. As noted earlier, Psalm 2 foretells world conditions at the time Messiah is to return to earth to take back the rule of the world system, to establish the Millennial Kingdom and to administer God's rule worldwide as His representative. The Gentile rulers and armies of the world will gather together to reject Gods's Messiah as the legitimate Ruler of the world (vs. 1-3). Psalm 2:7 foretells that at that time Messiah will declare what God decreed concerning Him by resurrecting Him from the dead (He is the Son of God, the One having the same divine nature as the Father, and, therefore, the One who is uniquely qualified to be the representative Ruler of God). This declaration of God's decree will be Jesus' way of asserting that He is the legitimate Ruler of the world and, therefore, has the right and authority to take over the earth.

CONCLUSION

In light of what has been seen, it can be concluded that Psalm 2:7 does not militate against

the eternal Sonship of Jesus Christ. It is not referring to a point of time when Christ **became** the Son of God through a begetting act of God. Instead, it is referring to the day of Jesus' resurrection from the dead when God brought Him forth from the womb of the earth and thereby publicly demonstrated or decreed that He is who He always was--the Son of God.

NOTES

1. F. F. Bruce, Commentary On The Book Of Acts (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), pp. 489-90.

2. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, "yalad," A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 408.

3. Martin Hengel, Crucifixion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 22-32.

4. Cicero, as quoted by Hengel, p. 8.

5. Ibid., p. 42.

6. Josephus, as quoted by Hengel, p. 8.

7. Hengel, Crucifixion, pp. 33-38.

8. Ibid., pp. 46-63.

9. Ibid., pp. 1-10.

10. Ibid., p. 10.

11. Ibid., p. 7.

12. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

13. Celsus, as quoted by Hengel, p. 17.

APPENDIX 4

The following article originally appeared in the *Grace Journal,* Spring 1965, Volume 6, Number 2 (pages 16-23) and is used with permission granted by Grace Theological Seminary and by the author.

THE TERM "SON OF GOD" IN THE LIGHT OF OLD TESTAMENT IDIOM

by S. Herbert Bess

The Second Person of the Trinity is frequently referred to in the New Testament as the Son of God (Luke 1:35; John 1:34; 3:18; Acts 9:20; Romans 1:4; et passim). In developing a statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, the early church encountered a problem arising from the use of the word "son." Early church fathers stressed the word *logos,* but when attention shifted more to the term "son," the problem became more acute. The difficulty stems from a too-literal interpretation of the word "son," and from assuming that the expression refers to origin or to generation, rather than to relationship; from understanding the word too much on the analogy of human experience and therefore supposing the existence of a Father who existed prior to the Son.

Church leaders of the third and fourth centuries composed a doctrine of the Trinity and a statement on the nature of Christ which took account of the problem and

sought to deal with the word "son" in such a way as to do justice to the deity of Christ as well as to his human nature. This was not done without many conferences and councils, nor without many restatements of doctrine so as to correct heretical views or distortions occasioned by too great a stress on one factor to the neglect of some other. A satisfactory formulation was arrived at finally at the Council of Nicea in 325 A. D., after a long history of discussion and controversy.

The Alexandrian scholar, Origen, had in the preceding century contributed to the formulation of the doctrine when he discussed what he termed the *eternal generation* of the Son. He did not mean by the term, however, exactly what the Nicene theologians later meant by it. For while Origen used the term *eternal generation,* he nonetheless taught that Christ was less than God the Father in respect to *essence.* He maintained that the Son did not participate in the self-subsistent substance of the deity, and he should not be thought of as consubstantial *(homoousios)* with the Father.[1] Origen's inadequate and unfortunate definition of the Sonship of Christ laid the groundwork for the heretical views of Arius and his followers on the nature of Christ. Their heresy is being perpetuated today by the so-called Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Nicene Council in clarifying the doctrine of eternal generation adopted the statement that "the Son is begotten out of the essence of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not created, consubstantial with the Father *(homoousion tōi patri).*"[2] Exposition of this position and controversy over it proceeded for years following, but the statement stood as the orthodox view on the nature of Christ.

It is not my intention to try to improve on the statement. Rather, I intend to show that the idiomatic usage of the word "son" in the Old Testament supports the above statement and sheds light on it. I believe that such a study

will show how Jesus is properly called the Son of God, the term not implying anything about his origin, or that he had an origin. For we must admit that such an expression as "the eternal generation of the Son" is a highly sophisticated concept quite difficult for some professed theologians, to say nothing of the laity. I suggest that an inductive study of the idiomatic use of "son" will make it easier to explain how Jesus is the Son of God, while avoiding the heretical idea that he ever had a beginning.

The word "son" is used in the Old Testament so frequently as to discourage the effort to count the occurrences. In the overwhelming majority of cases it is used in the literal sense of offspring or descendant. In a significant number of cases, however, the word "son" is used in the non-literal sense, indicating a person's profession, his status or circumstance, or his character. Following are some examples of this usage, the number of them being more than sufficient to demonstrate the point, but employed to show how common was this usage among the Israelites.

I. Showing membership in a profession or a guild

1. Sons of the prophets *(bᵉnē-hannᵉḇî'îm,* 1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3 ff.) refer to men belonging to a prophetic band. Likewise, Amos' assertion (Amos 7:14) that he had not been a prophet or the son of a prophet meant that he had not been a member of such a professional group, but God called him to the prophetic office while he was pursuing another line of work.
2. Sons of oil *(bᵉnē hayyiṣhār,* Zech. 4:14) are ones anointed with oil, in this case members holding the priestly office.
3. Son of the perfumers *(ben-haraqqaḥîm,* Neh. 3:8), a member of the perfumers' trade.
4. Son of the goldsmiths *(ben-haṣṣōreḇî,* Neh. 3:31), a goldsmith.

5. Sons of the gate-keepers (Ezra 2:42) are simply gate-keepers.
6. Sons of the troop (2 Chron. 25:13) are men of the army.

Non-biblical texts from ancient times make use of the word in the same idiomatic way. The Code of Hammurabi, para. 188, uses the expression "son of an artisan" to refer to a member of the artisan class.[3]

II. Showing participation in a state or condition

1. Sons of the exile *(b^{e}nē haggôlah,* Ezra 4:1; 6:19; etc.) were Jews who had lived in exile but were now returned to the homeland. The expression is equivalent to exiles.
2. Son of a foreign country *(ben-nēḵār,* Gen. 17:12,27; Exod. 12:43) is a foreigner. The term is translated "stranger" in the KJV.
3. Sons of pledges (2 Kings 14:14) are hostages, and the term is so translated in KJV.
4. Sons of affliction (Prov. 31:5) are afflicted ones.
5. Sons of passing away *(b^{e}ne h^{a}lop,* Prov. 31:8), are orphans. The KJV failed to catch the sense of this construction.
6. Son, or sons, of death (1 Sam. 20:31, Psa. 79:11) refer to those who are condemned to die.

Again, the Code of Hammurabi gives us an example of the non-biblical usage of this idiom. Paragraph 196 refers to the son of a free man and the son of a slave. The expressions may be translated properly as a member of the aristocracy and a member of the slave class.[4]

III. Showing a certain character

1. Son of valor *(ben-ḥayil,* 1 Sam. 14:52) is simply a brave man. KJV translates the expression "valiant man."
2. Son of wise ones (Isa. 19:11) refers to one of the wise men.

3. Sons of rebellion (Num. 17:25; 17:10 in English Bible) is properly translated in KJV as "rebels."
4. Son, or sons, of wickedness (Psa. 89:23; 2 Sam. 3:34; 7:10) are wicked people.
5. Son of murder (2 Kings 6:32) denotes a murderer.
6. Sons of foolishness (Job 30:8) refer to senseless people.
7. Sons of no name (Job 30:8), translated in KJV as "children of base men," means a disreputable brood.
8. Son of smiting (Deut. 25:2) signifies a person who deserves to be beaten.
9. Son, or sons, of worthlessness (1 Sam. 25:17; Deut. 13:14, English Bible, v. 13) may be translated "worthless fellow," or "base fellow." The KJV has virtually left the term untranslated when rendering it "son of Belial."
10. Sons of tumult (Jer. 48:45) are tumultuous people.

IV. Possessing a certain nature

The expression "son of man" clearly exhibits the use of the word "son" to show the possession of a certain nature. Numbers 23:19 reads: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent. . . ." This part of the verse might be paraphrased as follows: "God is not like a man, who frequently lies; nor does he possess the nature of man, who by reason of his own limitations must often change his mind." In Psa. 8:4 (Hebrew, 5) man and son of man are put in parallel to each other and obviously are used as synonyms. The same is true of Psa. 80:17 (18), and in Job 25:6 and 35:8. In Job 16:21 the phrase "son of man" is translated simply as "man" in the KJV. The term "son of man" is used frequently in Ezekiel as addressed to the prophet (Ezek. 2:1,3; 3:1,3,4,10; 4:16; etc.) and means something like "O man," or "mortal man." The term puts the emphasis on the nature of man.

All the examples in the above categories show that we are being consistent with a well established usage of an Old Testament idiom when we maintain that the expression "Son of God," when applied to Jesus Christ, means possessing the nature of, displaying the qualities of, God. By comparison with Old Testament usage, the term need not refer to his origin.

Some may object that the New Testament was not written in the language of the Old Testament, and that therefore the above examples do not really apply. The obvious answer is that Old Testament thought patterns and Old Testament idioms abound in the New Testament, in spite of the difference in language. This is certainly true of the idiom in question. Below is a table of some of the New Testament examples of the non-literal use of the word "son."

Barnabas (Acts 4:36) was so named because the word literally means "son of consolation." He was called that because he was a consoling person.

Sons of thunder was the appellative applied by Jesus to James and John (Mark 3:17) because it signified something outstanding about their character.

Son of peace (Luke 10:6) refers to a peaceful person.

Sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:7) are those like him in the exercise of faith.

Sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2) are those characterized by disobedience.

Son of perdition (John 17:12; 2 Thess. 2:3) is the lost one.

It is clear from the above that the New Testament uses the idiom in the same way as the Old Testament, especially

when indicating nature or character. We are not misguided then, in applying this connotation to "son" in the term "Son of God."

Since we are dealing then with a Semitic idiom, we can test ourselves for accuracy in the understanding of it as applied to Christ, by observing how the Jews responded or reacted when Jesus taught concerning his relation as Son to the Father. They understood that when Jesus said God was his Father he was making himself equal with God and sought to kill him for it (John 5:18). At another time when Jesus spoke concerning the Father and Son relationship they accused him of blasphemy and would have stoned him, because with such terminology Jesus made himself God (John 10:28-36). Now the enemies of Jesus did not respond this way because they misunderstood his terminology, but because they understood him perfectly well. They knew that when Jesus said he was the Son of God he was claiming to be of the nature of God and equal with God. It was on this basis that they demanded his death in the trial before his crucifixion (John 19:7; Luke 22:70; Mark 14:61-64). We are to understand the expression "Son of God" when applied to Jesus just as his enemies did.

If the term "Son of God" when applied to Jesus is to be taken in the sense not strictly literal, that is to say, if the term when applied to him does not allow for any thought of his having been brought into existence, of his beginning, then certain terms will have to be dealt with which might imply the contrary. I refer to "firstborn," "only begotten," and "begotten."

The Term "Firstborn"

The word "firstborn" is employed in reference to Christ in five places in the New Testament (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15,18; Rev. 1:5; Heb. 1:6). Most theologians rightly understand that the word refers to *rank* rather than origin. He is first rank in the whole creation, first rank in the inhabited

world, first rank among the resurrected, and first rank among the glorified. None is comparable to him.

This meaning can be illustrated from the Old Testament. In the economy of ancient Israel the eldest son was given preferential treatment. He assumed more responsibility than the others, and was rewarded with honor and given two shares in the family inheritance instead of the single share that each of his younger brothers received. Occasionally, however, the eldest son fell out of favor with his father and was replaced in the favored position by a younger brother. Some examples of this are:

> Joseph, who replaced Reuben (Gen. 4:3, cf. 1 Chron. 5:1,2)
>
> Ephraim, who replaced Manasseh (Gen. 48:13-20)
>
> Jacob, who replaced Esau (Gen. 27)
>
> Solomon, who replaced Adonijah (1 Kings 1:5-53)

Examples can also be adduced from the cuneiform documents from Mesopotamia, particularly from Nuzi.[5]

In such cases as the above the younger became the firstborn, i.e., he attained to first rank. The term will not confuse us if we remember that in the Old Testament it was not always the one born first who became the firstborn. The word is used in this sense of the nation of Israel. Although among the nations of the ancient Near East Israel arrived upon the scene much later than others, God elevated the new nation to the place of the most favored. Therefore He said: "Israel is my son, even my firstborn" (Exod. 4:22). Therefore, in the light of Old Testament usage, when the term "firstborn" is applied to Christ it means that he rightly deserves the preferential share in honor and inheritance; it does not refer to his origin.

The Term "Only Begotten"

The word translated "only begotten" *(monogenēs)* is used nine times in the New Testament. It is used in reference to a certain widow's son (Luke 7:2), to Jairus' only daughter (Luke 8:42), and to another only child (Luke 9:38). It is used five times in reference to Christ (John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9), and once in referring back to an Old Testament character (Heb. 11:17).

The Greek translations of the Old Testament (Septuagint, Aquila, Symmachus) also employ the word nine times, each time translating a form of the Hebrew word *yāḥîḏ.* Each one of these occurrences refers to an only child, seven of them to an only child in the ordinary sense. But twice the term is used of Isaac the son of Abraham (Gen. 22:2, Aquila; 22:12, Symmachus), and these occurrences are particularly instructive.

Isaac was called Abraham's only son *(yāḥîḏ. monogenēs),* although Abraham had fathered another male child who was still living. However, the other male offspring, Ishmael, never at any time enjoyed the status of son, as Isaac did. The Code of Hammurabi illuminates this point. Paragraphs 170, 171 show that a man's offspring by a slave woman were not ordinarily given the rights which belonged to the sons borne of his wife. Only if the father in the course of his lifetime had said to the male offspring of his slave woman (in a public and official manner), "Thou art my son," was the slave woman's offspring treated as a real son of the father. If the father had made such a declaration, then the slave woman's offspring was counted among the sons and given an equal share in the inheritance of the father's estate. If no such declaration was made, the offspring of the slave woman were given gifts and separated from the household before the inheritance was divided.

Abraham was evidently at one time eager to legitimize the child of his slave woman and count him as a son and

heir. At the incredible announcement that his own wife Sarah would bare a son, he said: "O that Ishmael might live before thee" (Gen. 17:18). But God did not look with favor upon this, and in due course of time, after Sarah gave birth to Isaac, Ishmael was expelled from the household. "Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac" (Gen. 21:10; Gal. 4:30).

Isaac remained Abraham's only son in the legal sense. Though Abraham had several other offspring (Gen. 25:1-4), he had only one son in the unique sense, and to him he gave his entire inheritance (Gen. 25:5,6). Isaac was his unique son, and when the New Testament refers to Isaac (Heb. 11:17), it calls him his only begotten *(monogenēs).*

It is clear from the above that the expression "only begotten" refers to status. It is certainly used this way of Christ. He has status as the *unique* Son of the Father. The term does not signify that He had a beginning, and the consistent testimony of Scripture is to the contrary; He was and is eternally God's unique Son.

The Term "Begotten"

Psalm 2:7, in a passage that traditionally has been treated as Messianic, reads: " . . . Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." The verse is quoted and applied to Christ three times in the New Testament (Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5, 5:5), thus introducing the word "begotten" into the doctrine of Christ.

The verb translated "begotten" is used a great number of times in the Old Testament both in the simple (qal) and in the causative (hiphil) conjugations in the ordinary sense of to generate, or to beget, just as anyone familiar with the content of the Old Testament would expect. It appears twenty-eight times in the fifth chapter of Genesis alone in this ordinary sense.

As the verb appears in Psa. 2:7, it is pointed by the

Massoretes as from the simple (qal) conjugation, and is so understood by Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley,[6] by Brown, Driver and Briggs, by Franz Delitzsch, and others.

There is no compelling reason, however, why one may not take this verb to be in the causative (hiphil) conjugation. No consonantal changes would be required to so understand it. The causative conjugation is more natural in this context moreover, since its function is not only causative, but declarative. I will show below the necessity of seeing the force of this verb to be declarative. That the causative (hiphil) conjugation sometimes functions as declarative is demonstrated from the following examples:

hiṣdîq, which means to declare righteous or justify, as in Exod. 23:7; Deut. 25:1; and elsewhere.
hiršîa', which means to declare guilty, or condemn, as in Deut. 25:1; Exod. 22:8 (English, v. 9); Job 9:20; and elsewhere.
he'ᵉqîš, which in Job 9:20 means to declare perverse.

Taking the verb in Psa. 2:7 to be declarative, i.e., hiphil, that verse may be translated as follows: ". . . Thou art my Son; *this day have I declared thy sonship.*" To understand the verb as declarative removes from it, of course, any necessary reference to beginnings.

Whether one takes the verb translated "begotten" in Psa. 2:7 as hiphil or as some other grammatical form, its meaning in that verse must have to do with the *declaration* of sonship. This assertion is supported by four arguments from Scripture:

(1) *The argument from parallelism.* It is of the nature of Hebrew poetry to phrase itself in parallels. The parallel exhibited in Psa. 2:7 is of the type called synonymous parallelism. In such the idea expressed in the first clause is repeated in the second clause with different vocabulary. In Psa. 2:7 the clause "Thou art my Son" is matched by the

clause "this day have I declared thy sonship," which repeats the same idea.

(2) *The presence of the phrase "this day" (hayyôm).* The day referred to is the day of the declaration of the decree, —the decree which announces the coronation of the king (cf. v. 6). The coronation day could certainly not be the day of the king's generation, but it certainly would be a day in which the proclamation of his sonship would be in order!

(3) *The fact that the New Testament quotes this verse as a prediction of the resurrection.* Acts 13:33,34 refers the words in question, "this day have I begotten thee," not to the incarnation, but to the resurrection of Christ. That being so, the action of that clause must be declarative, for it is the resurrection which declares to all the world that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. As it is stated in Rom. 1:3,4: "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and *declared to be the Son of God with power,* according to the spirit of holiness, *by the resurrection from the dead.*"

(4) *The content of the following verse (Psa. 2:8) requires such an interpretation.* Verse 8 has to do with the inheritance rights of the Son, who is to have the nations for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. Now it has been shown above that formal recognition of sonship was a prerequisite of heirship. The Son of God, whose sonship has been publicly declared by means of the resurrection, is constituted the proper heir to the nations of this world.

The fifth chapter of the Revelation depicts in a vision the Son's acceptance of his heirship, offered to him in Psa. 2:8. There one beholds the Lamb that was slain (and thereafter resurrected) step forward and receive that seven-sealed book, the inheritance document of the nations, and thus assume heirship of the world. When this vision shall have become a reality, then shall it be said, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of

his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

The above arguments show that the verb translated "begotten" in Psa. 2:7 does not refer to generation. The terms "firstborn," "only begotten," and "begotten," as used in the Old and New Testaments concerning Jesus Christ, do not contradict, but are in harmony with, what has been written concerning the meaning of the word "son" as applied to him. The terms "son," "firstborn," "only begotten," and "begotten," as defined by the Bible's own use of them, all declare that Jesus is the uncreated, ungenerated, co-eternal, co-equal Son of God the Father.

DOCUMENTATION

1. William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner and Co., 1871), I, 294.
2. *Ibid.* Cf. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 6th ed., 1931), I, 29.
3. Conveniently consulted in English translation in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament,* ed. by James B. Pritchard, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, N. J., 1955), p. 174.
4. *Ibid.,* p. 175.
5. Collected in the author's unpublished (except by microfilm) doctoral dissertation, *Systems of Land Tenure in Ancient Israel* (University of Michigan, 1963), pp. 26- 35.
6. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar,* ed. by E. Kautzsch (28th German ed.), trans. by A. E. Cowley, 2nd English ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1910), p. 120.

Appendix 5

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 purpose of this paper is not to argue for any particular view (Calvinistic, Arminian, etc.) but to analyze the meaning of the term "ordained" in light of its usage, in light of the meaning given in the standard lexicons, and in light of how the verb is translated in the various English versions. We will then also discuss an alternate translation and the reasons behind it.

First of all, how should the verb be parsed? It is from the verb tássō. The form of this verb that appears in Acts 13:48 is tetagménoi. In Wigram's *Analytical Greek Lexicon of the N.T.* it is listed as a perfect passive participle nominative plural masculine. *A Parsing Guide to the Greek New Testament* by Nathan Han also agrees with this parsing ["perf. pass. ptc. nom. pl. masc"]. A. T. Robertson identifies the verb as a "past perfect passive."

The perfect tense indicates that they were ordained in the past and that they continue to be ordained. They were appointed with the result that they continue to be appointed. The passive voice indicates that they did not ordain or appoint themselves, but that someone else ordained them (they were ordained by someone else). The nominative plural masculine agrees with the group of people he is talking about, those people who will eventually believe.

[It should be noted that the verb tássō is the root verb of another very common NT verb hupotássō which means "to rank under, to submit."]

New Testament Usage

Usage determines meaning. The verb tássō is used eight times in the New Testament. Let us consider each of these:

1. Matthew 28:16 "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had **appointed** them."

   The eleven disciples went into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. This was an appointed meeting place, a time and place to meet which had been predetermined (compare 28:10).

2. Luke 7:8 "For I also am a man **set** under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it."

He was a soldier placed under his superiors and placed over others. He assumed his proper and appointed place in the military.

3. Acts 13:48, the passage under discussion, the KJV has "**ordained**".

4. Acts 15:2 "When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they **determined** that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."

   They determined that Paul and Barnabas and others should go to Jerusalem to settle a major doctrinal question. [NIV–"Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem"].

5. Acts 22:10 "And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are **appointed** for thee to do."

   God had beforehand appointed a number of things for Paul to do.

6. Acts 28:23 "And when they had **appointed** him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening."

   Paul was a prisoner and there was an appointed day which had been chosen for Paul to meet with a group of Jews, a day which had been predetermined as the best time to meet.

7. Romans 13:1 "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are **ordained** of God."

   Rulers are ordained of God. That is, they are appointed by God and placed in their positions of authority by God.

8. 1 Corinthians 16:15 "I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have **addicted** themselves to the ministry of the saints)."

   They appointed themselves to this ministry and gave themselves wholly to it and devoted themselves to it.

In keeping with the above, the usage of the intensified form of the word (**diatásso**, occurring 16 times in the NT) carries the sense of being commanded, directed, ordered, appointed (see Matt. 11:1; Luke 3:13; 8:55; 17:9; 17:10; Acts 7:44; 18:2; 20:13; 23:31; 24:23; 1 Cor. 7:17; 9:14; 11:34; 16:1; Gal. 3:19; Tit. 1:5).

Conclusion: The New Testament usage seems to indicate that the basic meaning of the verb [**tassó**] is "to appoint."

Lexical Meaning of the Term

1. Bauer, Arndt & Gingrich Lexicon

   "To place or station a person or thing in a fixed spot, to appoint or establish in an office...to order, fix, determine, appoint." This authority recognizes the verb in Acts 13:48 to be passive and says "belong to, be classed among those possessing [eternal life]."

2. United Bible Society Greek NT Dictionary.

   "Appoint, designate, set aside, command, order, direct, devote (to service), fix, set."

3. Bullinger.

   "To arrange, put in order, to order anything to be done, to appoint."

4. Vine Expository Dictionary

   "To place in order, to arrange, to appoint."

5. Liddel and Scott Lexicon

   "To arrange, put in order, to draw up in order of battle, to form, array, marshal, both of troops and ships, to appoint to any service (military or civil), to be appointed to do, to assign to a class, to place in a certain order, to appoint, ordain, order, prescribe."

6. Moulton and Milligan

   "Put in its place, appoint, enrol." "Those who had been appointed to the administration in the Serapeum" "That his name may be placed on the list of deceased persons."

7. Theological Dictionary of the NT

   "Tassō in Greek means to appoint."

8. Thayer's Greek Lexicon

   "To place in a certain order, to arrange, to assign a place, to appoint, to appoint, ordain, order." And under Acts 13:48–" 'as many as were appointed' (by God to obtain eternal life or to whom God had decreed eternal life)." Thayer sees the verb in Acts 13:48 as passive.

9. Greek Scholar A. T. Robertson (*Word Pictures*, Vol. III. pages 199-200).

   "The word 'ordain' is not the best translation here. 'Appointed,' as Hackett shows, is better."

10. *Expositors Greek New Testament*

"Ordained to eternal life"

Conclusion: The basic meaning of the verb according to the lexicons is "to set in order, to appoint."

English Bible Translations

KJV–"As many as were ordained to eternal life"

NKJV–"As many as had been appointed to eternal life"

Revised Version 1881–"As many as were ordained to eternal life"

John Darby–"and believed, as many as were ordained to eternal life" [this reflects the word order in the Greek]

William Kelly–"and as many as were ordained unto life eternal believed"

Tyndale – "The Gentiles...believed: even as many as were ordained unto eternal life"

John Wesley (not a Calvinist!)–"as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

RSV–"As many as were ordained to eternal life"

NASB–"As many as had been appointed to eternal life"

NIV–"All who were appointed for eternal life"

Net Bible–"All who had been appointed for eternal life"

Amplified–"As many as were destined (appointed and ordained) to eternal life"

ESV–"As many as were appointed to eternal life"

Holman Christian Standard Bible–"All who had been appointed to eternal life"

Wuest–"As many as had been appointed to eternal life"

J. Adams–"As many as were destined for eternal life" [Adams is Reformed in his theology.]

Good News for Modern Man–"And those who had been chosen for eternal life" [I've never considered this a reliable translation.]

The Jerusalem Bible–"All who were destined for eternal life became believers"

Moffat's—"All who had been ordained to eternal life"

New English Bible–"Those who were marked out for eternal life"

The Twentieth Century NT–"All those who had been enrolled for immortal life"

Douay Version (Catholic)–"And as many as were ordained to life everlasting"

The New Testament Recovery Version–"And as many as were appointed to eternal life"

Conclusion: The translations are unanimous that the translation should be "as many as were appointed to eternal life." The translations either use the term "appointed" or they use terms which are basically synonymous.

Conclusion based on the New Testament usage, the lexicons and the N.T. versions

As we have seen, NT usage, the lexicons and the translations all strongly support this reading: "And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed."

An Alternate Understanding

There are a number of men who have a different understanding of this passage, and they translate it as follows: **"as many as were disposed to eternal life believed."** "Disposed" means "to give a tendency to, to be inclined." According to *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* "dispose suggests an affecting of one's mood or temper so as to incline one toward something." So according to this definition, the people described in Acts 13:48 would be inclined favorably toward eternal life resulting in a decision to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and in Him alone for salvation.

Before trying to understand this position better, I want to reiterate that the New Testament usage of the verb tássō, the standard lexical authorities and the overwhelming testimony of the English translations all argue against the above translation ("as many as were disposed to") and they all support the commonly accepted translation, "as many as were appointed" or other renderings which reflect this same meaning.

Where then did this alternate understanding come from?

One common denominator among those holding to this alternate translation is that those who favor this rendering ("as many as were disposed to") all seem to hold a non-Calvinistic position. This possibly suggests that the men holding such a view are doing so based primarily upon their theology. They reject the rendering of the KJV and most all other versions because they seem to be uncomfortable with what those translations may be suggesting. On the other hand, there are some non-Calvinists (such as George Bryson whom we will discuss later) who do not have a problem with the traditional rendering reflected in the English translations.

Where did this alternate view originate? I don't have the answer to this. I can only tell you where I have found it and the reasons given for it. Alford, a good Greek scholar, says this in *Alford's Greek Testament*: "The meaning of this word [tetagménoi] must be determined by the context. The Jews had *judged themselves unworthy of eternal life:* the Gentiles, **as many as were disposed to eternal life**, believed. *By whom* so disposed, is not *here* declared: nor need the word be in this place further particularized. *We know, that it is GOD who worketh in us the will to believe,* and that the preparation of the heart is of Him: but to find *in this text* pre-ordination to life asserted, is to force both the word and the context to a meaning which they do not contain" (pages 153-154). Alford discusses this passage further and shares his belief that the Vulgate translation had an influence on the Western church and even upon the leaders of the Reformation toward a strong Calvinistic view, whereas he feels that the Eastern Church, that was more

at home with the Greek language and more in line with Alford's view, stayed away from this Calvinistic view. Alford's use of the word "disposed" in this verse is the earliest I could find (Alford's works were done in the 19th century) although Barnes (another 19th century writer) also refers to others who held this view.

Acts 13:48 in the Latin Vulgate with English Translation

audientes autem gentes gavisae sunt et glorificabant verbum Domini et crediderunt quotquot erant praeordinati ad vitam aeternam

And the Gentiles hearing it were glad and glorified the word of the Lord: **and as many as were ordained to life everlasting believed.**

John Gill (18th century), a strong Calvinist, was aware of the alternate rendering ("as many as were disposed to eternal life") and strongly opposed it based on the ancient versions and for other reasons. Here are some of his comments on Acts 13:48:

> Some would have the words rendered, "as many as were disposed unto eternal life believed"; which is not countenanced by the ancient versions. The Arabic renders it as we do, and the Syriac thus, as many as were put, or appointed unto eternal life; and the Vulgate Latin version, as many as were pre-ordained. Moreover, the phrase of being disposed unto, or for eternal life, is a very unusual, if not a very improper, and an inaccurate one; men are said to be disposed to an habit, or to an act, as to vice or virtue, but not to reward or punishment, as to heaven or hell; . . . it follows then, that their faith did not arise from previous dispositions to eternal life, but was the fruit and effect of divine ordination unto it; and the word here used, in various places in this book, signifies determination and appointment, and not disposition of mind; see ch. xv. 2 and xxii. 10 and xxviii.23. The phrase is the same with that used by the Jews [Zohar in Exod. fol. 43. 4], who are ordained to eternal life; and [Targum in Isa. iv. 3. Vid Abkath Rocel, p. 5], everyone that is written to eternal life; i.e. in the book of life. [*John Gill's Exposition of the Old & New Testaments*, under Acts 13:48.]

Another early work presenting this alternate view is *God's Way of Electing Souls to Eternal Life as Revealed in His Word* by a Brethren author who only gives his initials as M. S. B. He wrote in the later part of the 19th century. He wrote the following on Acts 13:48:

> The word here translated "ordained"...means literally "were set for," or "disposed for" (in contrast with verse 46, "put from" or "indisposed for"). Parkhurst translates the passage thus, "and as many as were disposed, adapted, or in a right disposition and preparation for eternal life believed"....Here then there is no such doctrine as foreordination to eternal life, but the simple statement that "*as many as were disposed for eternal life believed*" [pages 83-84].

Albert Barnes lived in the 19th century and has a prolonged statement on this verse in his commentary on Acts. Barnes recognizes the alternate view ("disposed themselves") but then argues strongly against it:

> There has been much difference of opinion in regard to this expression. One class of commentators has supposed that it refers to the doctrine of election–to *God's ordaining*

men to eternal life, and another class to their being *disposed themselves* to embrace the gospel–to those among them who did not reject and despise the gospel, but who were *disposed* and *inclined* to embrace it...[Barnes then discusses the New Testament usage of the verb tássō]...The word is *never* used to denote an internal *disposition* or *inclination* arising from one's own self. It does not mean that they *disposed themselves* to embrace eternal life. It has uniformly the notion of an *ordering, disposing,* or *arranging from without;* that is, from some other source than the individual himself; as of a soldier, who is arranged or classified according to the will of the proper officer....It does not properly refer to an eternal decree, or directly to the doctrine of election—though that may be *inferred* from it....It was not a disposition or *arrangement* originating with themselves, but with God. This implies the doctrine of election...It was nothing but God's disposing them to embrace eternal life (pages 214-215).

F. F. Bruce mentions the alternative view, but strongly disagreed with it:

> Many of them believed the gospel—all, in fact, who had been enrolled for eternal life in the records of heaven. We cannot agree with those who tone down the predestinarian note of this phrase by rendering "as many as were disposed to eternal life." There is papyrus evidence for this verb in the sense of "inscribe" or "enroll." [Bruce gives an example of this] The idea of being enrolled in the book of life is found in several Biblical passages. *The Book of the Acts,* p. 283-284.

C. Gordon Olson, in his book *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* (1981) argues for the alternate view ("as many as were disposed for eternal life"). Later his book was titled, *Getting the Gospel Right*, in which the same arguments were made. Olson recognizes that the overwhelming testimony of the English translations favors the rendering of "appointed" and yet he managed to find two translations that favored his view: "as many as had become disposed for" (Rotherham) "having been disposed" (Alfred Marshall's Interlinear). Olson argues that this participle may be either middle or passive and he argues for the middle voice with a reflexive sense, and so he translates the phrase as follows: "as many as had devoted themselves to eternal life believed" or "as many as had arranged (positioned) themselves toward eternal life believed." Olson sees a parallel between verse 46 and verse 48. In verse 46 "the Jews had put themselves in a position hostile to eternal life." Olson goes on to explain: "the apostles were very explicit by the use of the reflexive pronoun ('yourselves') to attribute the cause to their attitude. Then Luke in explaining the opposite response of the Gentiles (v. 48) would be most likely intending a reflexive middle voice, rather than a passive, in attributing the cause of the Gentiles' faith to their attitude."

Olson's conclusions are only as good as his assumptions. Is the verb really in the middle voice with a reflexive idea as he supposes, even though the majority of Greek scholars see it as a passive? Should the verb really be translated as he suggests, contrary to almost all English translations?

David Hunt supported the "as many as were disposed to eternal life" rendering in his book *What Love is This* (2002), pages 210-211.[1] To support his position Hunt quotes from Alford and A. T. Robertson. He also quotes from Cook's *Commentary:*

> The A.V. [KJV] has followed the Vulgate. Rather, [it should read] were set in order for,

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[1]Hunt's view on Acts 13:48 is found to be very defective by David M. Doran in his review article on Hunt's book, *What Love Is This?* This critique of Hunt's view is found in the Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal, Fall 2003, pages 110-112.

> i.e., disposed for eternal life, as in Syriac...and repeatedly in Josephus, as many as had...placed themselves in the ranks of those who welcomed the offer of eternal life.

The problem with this rendering ["placed themselves"] is that the verb in Acts 13:48 is perfect passive. It does not mean that they appointed themselves or placed themselves, but it means that they were appointed or placed by someone else.

David Dunlap agrees with the alternate view in his book *Limiting Omnipotence* (2004), pages 95-96. He states the following:

> Verse 48 stands as a contrast between the Jews who set themselves against the gospel and the Gentiles who disposed themselves to believe it. So we read, "as many as were disposed to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48 Alford).

In support of this view Dunlap quotes A. T. Robertson (see above), although he conveniently omits Robertson's statement that the best translation of the word "ordain" is the word "appointed."

In 2004 George Bryson wrote *The Dark Side of Calvinism*, which some consider to be the most carefully reasoned recent rebuttal of Calvinism. Bryson recognizes the alternate view ("as many as were disposed") and quotes Henry Alford on this, but Bryson seems to realize that the arguments for this alternate translation are weak. In fact he quotes Albert Barnes who said, "The word is *never* used to denote an internal *disposition* or *inclination* arising from one's own self. It does not mean that they *disposed themselves* to embrace eternal life."

Bryson assumes, for the sake of his discussion, that "ordained" or "appointed" is a perfectly good translation of the original Greek word. Then based on the context of the passage, Bryson argues that the passage does not teach what the Calvinists say it teaches. His argument is long, but here is a brief summary: "The Calvinist wrongly argues that people are unconditionally ordained or appointed to eternal life, and therefore believe as a consequence of that appointment. The abundant and unequivocal testimony of Scripture is that a person is ordained or appointed to eternal life on condition that they believe in Jesus Christ, making faith *logically*, but not necessarily *chronologically* before this appointment, as a prerequisite to receiving eternal life....The text clearly says that those who believed were ordained to eternal life. Conversely, the text also says that those who were ordained to eternal life believed. That is, believers are one and the same as those ordained or appointed to eternal life. It does not say they believed *because* they were ordained to eternal life." [This statement by Bryson is somewhat puzzling to me. The text does not clearly say that those who believed were ordained to eternal life. Rather the text clearly says, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (KJV). It's important to stick to what the text actually says.]

Conclusion

Considering all of the above, Acts 13:48 should be rendered "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." I have always endeavored to take a verse such as this at face value even if I do not fully understand it. Letting it say what it says is better than forcing it to say what I might want it to say.

Hopefully we can all agree on the following:

The Bible makes it very clear that **those who are saved and heaven-bound have only God to thank and those who are lost and damned have only themselves to blame**.

1) **Those who are saved have only God to thank**: See 1 Corinthians 1:29-31 (God must get all the credit); Ephesians 2:8-9 (there is no basis for boasting); Matthew 16:16-17 (Peter did not open his own eyes); Acts 16:14 (Lydia did not open her own heart). 2) **Those who are lost have only themselves to blame**: 1 Timothy 2:4 (God desires all men to be saved); Romans 10:12-13 (God is rich unto all that call upon Him); Matthew 23:37 (God was willing; man was unwilling); John 5:40 (the reason man does not have eternal life is because of his stubborn and sinful REFUSAL to come to the only Saviour); 2 Thess.1:8-9 (those who suffer eternal punishment are those who DISOBEYED the good news of the gospel). Man must take full blame and responsibility for his eternal destination.

The saved person thankfully says, "**I'm in heaven because of God!**" The lost person must truthfully say, "**I'm in hell because of me!**" those who are damned will never be able to blame God or say, "I'm damned because God did not choose me!" Their damnation is based not upon God's rejection of them but upon their rejection of God: "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). "He that believeth not is condemned already, because he bath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). "Of sin, because they believe not on Me" (John 16:9). "And still you are not willing (but refuse) to come to Me, so that you might have life" (John 5:40--Amplified Bible).

Man does not contribute to his own salvation. It is the work of God, "not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph.2:8-9). God does not contribute to man's unbelief. That is man's work. God alone must do the saving. Man must do the believing. God must get all the glory and all the credit. Unbelieving man must take the blame. "To God be the glory great things He hath done!" "Oh to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!"