

Introduction:

1. The last time we visited brother Saul (Paul) we left him on the isle of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea. (I will use "Saul" because it is a Jewish name and he preaches a distinctly Jewish sermon.)
  - a. It was there at the city of Paphos that he met an enemy of the gospel, the sorcerer, Bar-Jesus.
  - b. It was there that he also met a Roman governmental official named Sergius Paulus.
  - c. By the end of this episode, Sergius became a believer, and Elymas became a blind man!
2. We pick up our story with Paul and his party leaving Paphos, sailing to Perga, Acts 13:13-14.

The Lesson:

**I. Saul at Perga and at the Synagogue in Antioch, Acts 13:13-16.**

- A. Perga is a city on the southern coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey).
  1. This city is not to be confused with Pergamos, one of the cities of the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 2:12).
  2. It was at Perga that John Mark deserted Paul's group. We don't know why he left, only that he did. This later resulted in a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41). When a man is committed to a preaching trip he can't just quit and go home.
- B. From Perga, Saul and Barnabas travelled northward to Antioch in Pisidia.
  1. This is to be distinguished from Antioch in Syria (from which this trip began—Acts 13:1ff).
  2. Antioch was a very common geographic name in New Testament times. The name is derived from the line of Syrian rulers named Antiochus (there were at least ten men who wore this name who ruled over Syria; and there were 16 cities that wore the name Antioch). In the time of Caesar Augustus, because of its importance to Rome, this city where we find Paul was given the name *Antiochia Caesareia*.
- C. Saul went to the Jewish synagogue at Antioch.
  1. While this was an important Roman city, it was also important to the Jews as evidenced by the presence of a synagogue in that city. A large number of Jews lived in Antioch. Even though Paul's mission was to the Gentiles, he always preached first to the Jews in any city to which he went (Romans 1:16; Acts 13:5).
  2. The synagogue was simply a meeting place. The Greek word for synagogue simply means "an assembly of people." It could refer to any kind of assembly, whether religious or not. In process of time the word came to be used of the place of assembly rather than the people who were assembled. To the Jews, it was a building that was designed as a place for them to gather for worship. The word is even used of a place of Christian assembly in James 2:2. (The Greek word for assembly in James 2:2 is the word *synagogue*; a few translations so render the word in that way—ASV, BBE, DBY, TCNT.) Synagogue worship for the Jews was very simple. It involved a reading of the Scriptures, prayer and hymns. Our text refers to a reading of the Law and the Prophets (Acts 16:15).
- D. The Jews met in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Saturday, the seventh day of the week). This was the most natural time to preach to Jews since they gathered for worship on this day.
  1. Paul's reason for being in the synagogue on the Sabbath is to fulfill the mission given him by the Lord in Romans 1:16.
  2. Passages such as this are not to be construed to mean that Paul and the other Christians were Sabbath-keepers. (Don't be deceived by teachers of error who say that Paul and the early Christians were under the Sabbath law of the Old Testament. They were not.) This is not an assembly of Christians. It is an assembly of Jewish who do not believe in Jesus. It is true that they might believe in Jesus before this episode is over, but as yet, no one has preached to them about Jesus. That's what Paul is there to do. That's why he was there on the Sabbath. Don't be led astray by those who don't know the truth.

**II. Saul's Sermon at the Synagogue, Acts 13:17-26.**

- A. We should really appreciate what Saul presents here at the synagogue.
  1. Saul understood something that all the Jews understood very well, yet something that is hardly understood at all by religious people today: That there is continuity in the Bible. There is a story that begins very early in the Bible and consummates in Christ.

2. The Bible is not a jumbled up bunch of stories about people who lived a long time ago and had faith. There is in the Bible the unfolding of the plan of God that was carefully orchestrated and controlled by God. There is a continuous story that begins in Genesis 12:1-3 and progresses through the Bible. Because of the layout and order of the Bible books and because of our culture's general lack of Bible knowledge that story is not always apparent. But Saul knew the story because, being a Jew, he was a student of the story.
- B. The Bible story taught by Saul. What we have in this chapter may be a summary of his words.
1. It is a story about God (v. 17). It is not a story so much about theology and the nature of God but rather a story about what God has done in human history.
  2. It is a story about the people of Israel (v. 17). This was the special people God used to fulfill His purposes. But what were his purposes? Read on.
  3. It is a story that begins when God "chose our fathers," says Saul (v. 17). The fathers he refers to are the fathers of the nation of Israel—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God made three promises to Abraham and then repeated those promises to Isaac and Jacob. The rest of the Bible is about God fulfilling the three promises made in Genesis 12:1-3. The promise of a great nation, the promise of a great land and, finally, the seed promise.
  4. The nation promise was fulfilled as God "exalted the people...in Egypt" (v. 17). While it appeared that the Israelites were mere slaves, God was building them into a great nation.
  5. When the time was right, God delivered them from slavery by the hand of Moses (v. 17).
  6. It was God's intent to fulfill the land promise at that time, but their stubborn hearts brought upon them forty years of wandering in the wilderness (v. 18). God "put up" with them.
  7. After forty years God fulfilled the promise to the fathers and brought them into the Promised Land (v. 19). The first two promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were fulfilled.
  8. From that time until the time of Samuel, God gave judges to rule the land (v. 20).
  9. It was during the time of the prophet Samuel (who was among the last of the judges) that the people asked for a king (v. 21). God gave them Saul, whose failed kingship over Israel lasted forty years.
  10. God removed Saul and gave them a much better king, David, a man after God's own heart (v. 22). This was a pivotal moment in the history of Israel because it was through King David that the third promise to Abraham would be fulfilled—the seed promise!
  11. Saul, as he tells the story, makes a leap of 1,000 years in history to pinpoint the very person that all of this had been aiming toward—Jesus (v. 23). Jesus was the seed of David, yet this was still according to the promise made to Abraham that it would be of his seed. David was in the lineage from Abraham to Jesus, Matthew 1:1. God raised up a Savior for Israel. This was what all the promises to the fathers were about! The consummation!
  12. Jesus did not come without preparation. John the Baptist was His forerunner (v. 24-25) John was not the Promised One. Only Jesus could fulfill that role!
  13. Saul draws this part of the story to a close by declaring that the word of salvation through Jesus has been sent to the sons of Abraham (26).
- C. In these few words Paul quickly summarizes 2,000 years of Jewish history. What a blessing it would be if the whole world knew this story. But sadly, almost no one knows the story. Our children's Bible classes and some of our adult classes are designed to tell the Bible story.

### III. Three Things to Take Home from the Synagogue.

- A. The Bible can be understood. Saul expected the Jews in the synagogue at Antioch to understand the Old Testament Scriptures. They were familiar with the theme of the Old Testament. It was a theme they knew. But it is a theme that requires study in order to understand.
- B. The Bible has a theme. It is the story of how God was bringing salvation to the world through the seed of Abraham. Even if you don't know the whole story, it is there, waiting for you to learn it. But for now, just know that it is there. The Bible is not a jumbled up mess.
- C. Christ is the heart of the Bible story. The message to Abraham and the prophets is that the Christ is coming; Saul's message is that He has come; the message of the epistles is that He is coming again.

#### Conclusion:

1. The story of the Bible is about you. See Genesis 12:3. You are included in the blessing promise!
2. You can be part of Abraham's seed, Galatians 3:26-29.