

Acts

■ A Study of Acts 13

LESSON

11

DAY ONE

Work as Worship

Read Acts 13, focusing on verses 1-3.

1. Who was set apart? (See verse 2.)
2. For what purpose were they set apart? (See verse 2.)

All around us we see the beauty of God's creation. We are the beneficiaries of His work. The apostle John says that all things were created through the word of God. Then the Word became flesh and lived among us (John 1:14), and they called His name Jesus.

Jesus was not exempt from work during His time on earth. He certainly had chores as a boy, learned a trade as a young man, and likely applied that trade at some point in His adult life. He had to grow, learn, work, and do the common things that are part of all of our lives from birth to adulthood.

In the days in which Jesus lived, Jewish fathers taught their sons a trade. Jesus' father was a carpenter. Under His father's tutelage, Jesus likely experienced the joy of cutting his first board and the frustration of making a corner joint. He knew firsthand the difficulties and satisfaction of a good day's work. The carpenter's shop was a place where He could learn the trade of His earthly father and the wisdom of His Heavenly Father.

3. Luke summarizes the early years of Jesus' life in Luke 2:52. Write the verse below.

This verse provides only a small glimpse into these years of Jesus' life but enough to discover that before His public ministry began, His life and work made a positive impact on people. In John 5:17 Jesus said, *My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.* Through Jesus we see the nature of the Father. God created the world and then rested, but He did not quit working. He is still at work, and He offers His followers the incredible privilege of joining Him in His work. In fact, the Word says that we are *God's fellow workers* (2 Corinthians 6:1).

4. Look up 2 Corinthians 5:20, and record below one of the ways in which we work with God.

Some of us are not only responsible for our own work, but we also have responsibility over the work of others. Leaders must handle that responsibility with wisdom and compassion. For those in this position, there is even a great need to unite work with worship. Through the prophet Isaiah, God expressed His anger toward those who had separated the two.

5. Read Isaiah 58:3-8.
 - a. According to verses 3-4, what were the people accused of doing on the day of fasting?

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Psalm 63:7

*Because you are my help, I will
sing in the shadow of your wings.*

- b. Using verses 6-7, list the things that describe the kind of fast God has chosen.
6. We are told in Acts 13 that many in the church at Antioch were using their gifts for the work of the Kingdom. Some are described as prophets and teachers. Five of these individuals are mentioned by name. List them below.
- a. How is Barnabas described in Acts 11:24?
- b. Some think that Simeon may have been the same man mentioned in Mark 15:21. If it is the same man, what does that verse say he did?
- c. Lucius is probably one of the men mentioned in Acts 11:20. If that is true, what had he been doing?
- d. Manaen was a “foster brother” to Herod. They were raised together in the palace court. They played, laughed, and studied together. However, as adults they had very little in common. The personal choices they made took them in different directions. Manaen became a prophet or teacher of the gospel. Look up Matthew 14:6-11. What would you say Herod became?
- e. Read Acts 9:27-28. What are Saul’s characteristics?
7. Have you ever felt that God has called you to do a “special assignment”? If you are willing, share that assignment with your group.
8. How does God’s work coincide with your vocational work?

DAY TWO

Double Blind

Read Acts 13:1-12.

1. According to verses 1-3, who sent Saul and Barnabas off?
2. According to verse 4, who sent Saul and Barnabas on their way?
3. What do we learn about the way the Church functions in relationship to the Holy Spirit?

The Church is blind without the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It wanders aimlessly, accomplishing little, unless its actions are Spirit-led. After the church at Antioch had worshiped and fasted, the Holy Spirit gave them direction. They continued to fast and pray as they followed the Spirit’s leading. Many of us seek God’s leadership before a decision is made but fail to continue that process after the decision has been made. One lesson we can learn from this early group of believers is that it is important to seek God’s direction both before and after a decision has been made. Sensing God’s direction is not the end of the process but rather the beginning.

After praying and fasting, Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen (and possibly others of the church at the Antioch) laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul, identifying with them as their Spirit-chosen substitutes, and sent them on their way. The two of them were joined by John Mark.

4. The home of John Mark’s mother was a place where the early Christians gathered. According to Acts 12:12, what was one of the activities of the believers when they gathered at her home?

The three sojourners—Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark—left Antioch and walked about 16 miles to Seleucia, the port city of Antioch, where they boarded a ship sailing for Cyprus, Barnabas's home. They landed at Salamis, the commercial capital of the island, and preached God's Word. They went first to the synagogues, to their own people who had some knowledge of biblical things. There they preached the Good News.

The trio traveled the length of the island from Salamis to Paphos, the political capital. Here they met a Jew named Bar-Jesus (also known as Elymas), who was not only a sorcerer but also a false prophet. Elymas apparently had no reverence for the Old Testament scriptures, because God commanded Jews to have nothing to do with divination or sorcery (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). He was the attendant to Sergius Paulus, the proconsul governor. But Sergius Paulus wanted to hear the Word of God from Barnabas and Saul and sent for them. Elymas tried to prevent his boss from accepting the faith. However, Elymas overestimated his own influence, underestimated the courage of Saul, and discounted the power of God's Spirit to intervene.

Elymas was blind to the truth of God. His tricks and sorcery had left him in spiritual darkness. Saul might have recognized himself in Elymas. It had not been very long since Saul had been *breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples* (Acts 9:1). The Lord struck Saul blind and through that process called him to be a chosen instrument to carry the name of the Lord before Gentiles, their kings, and the people of Israel (Acts 9:15). Here in Acts 13, Sergius Paulus became Paul's first recorded Gentile convert. At the same time, Saul proclaimed God's judgment of blindness on Elymas. The outward condition of Elymas now matched his inward futility.

Our outward talents and blessings can often prevent us from seeing our inward poverty. When those outward gifts are taken away, we might call it a tragedy. However, if it causes us to confront our emptiness and leads us to God's truth, then what was perceived as a tragedy could be the greatest blessing of all. We do not know how the story ends for Elymas, but we can hope that his blindness did for him what it did for Saul.

5. Read 2 Kings 6:8-23.

a. Who was healed of blindness in verse 17?

b. Who was blinded in verse 18?

c. Based on what you read in verses 22-23, what was Elisha's intent in asking God to blind the men?

6. Read 2 Peter 1:5-9. When can a follower of God be spiritually blind?

7. Explain what you think Jesus means in John 9:39.

8. Give an example of when God has healed a "blind spot" in your spiritual journey.

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Why do we sing?

DAY THREE

History Lesson

Read Acts 13:13-25.

Paphos was a port city on the west end of the island of Cyprus. It is still a beautiful small harbor town today, but back then it was also a political center for the island. Paul and the others sailed northwest, back to the mainland, to the city of Perga. There John Mark left them and went back to Jerusalem. Based on this passage, we might think that he went back to Jerusalem to report the good things that happened on Cyprus. However, there is another passage of Scripture that indicates the fact that his departure was not so positive.

1. Read Acts 15:36-38. How is John Mark's departure described?

This incident became part of John Mark's history. It was not an event that would define his character but was nevertheless a part of his history. God does not ignore our history or erase our history. Instead, it is often through history that God brings redemption. We will read more about John Mark later in Acts. However, this passage contains another history lesson regarding God's redemptive work.

On the Sabbath day Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue. They sat down and listened to the reading of the Law and the Prophets. Following the reading, the synagogue rulers asked if Paul and Barnabas had a message of encouragement. This was all Paul needed. He was on his feet and began to lay the foundation for telling the people the Good News, reciting some of the history of God's dealings with Israel. This was probably a familiar speaking style to the audience. Peter and Stephen used this approach, and so did Paul. He wove together the centuries of history to point the audience toward Jesus, the Messiah.

2. Paul made reference to several specific events out of Israel's history. Match his statements to the appropriate Scripture reference. (If it would help you, write a one-word description by the Acts scripture.)

Acts 13:17

2 Samuel 5:3

Acts 13:18

Joshua 12:7-24

Acts 13:19

1 Samuel 8:4-5

Acts 13:20

Matthew 3:1-2

Acts 13:21

Exodus 1:6-7

Acts 13:22

Luke 3:16

Acts 13:23

Joshua 5:6-7

Acts 13:24

1 Samuel 3:10-11

Acts 13:25

Matthew 1:6-16

Paul's audience would have been very familiar with the events to which Paul referred. Their faith was tied up in their history. Their confidence in God's redemption in the future was based on their observation of His protection and guidance in the past. Paul showed them how God, through Jesus, had stepped into history and provided redemption for all.

3. To whom did Paul address his comments? (See Acts 13:16.)
4. What did God promise? (See verse 23.)
5. What was the historical setting when Jesus first entered your life?
6. Can you describe a part of your history (such as difficult events or circumstances) that God has redeemed (used for His glory and your growth)?

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Look up the memory verse, and read it in the context of the verses that surround it.

DAY FOUR

The Puzzle Pieces

Read Acts 13:26-31.

1. Who did not recognize Jesus? (See verse 27.)

2. What did the rulers and people of Jerusalem inadvertently do when they condemned and executed Jesus? (See verses 27 and 29.)

3. Match the prophecies from only one psalm (Psalm 22) to the events of Jesus' life.

Psalm 22:1	Matthew 27:39
Psalm 22:7	Matthew 27:43
Psalm 22:8	Matthew 27:46
Psalm 22:14	Mark 15:25
Psalm 22:15	Luke 23:34
Psalm 22:16	John 19:28
Psalm 22:17	John 19:33
Psalm 22:18	John 19:34

Once when I was a child I was given a very simple puzzle consisting of two thick nails, each of which was bent into a loop. The two looped nails were connected to one another with the loop of the first nail interlocked with the loop of the second nail. The object was to separate the two nails. The puzzle looked simple, but the more I tried the more frustrated I became. I soon came to the conclusion that the nails had been bent into their current configuration and that, without bending the nails again, it was impossible to separate them. I handed them back, and within seconds my friend had the two nails separated. He then asked me to put them back together. I could not do that either. I was looking at the same two puzzle pieces he was looking at, but I could not make the connection. Fi-

nally, he showed me the proper angle that allowed the nails to slide into an interlocking connection and slide back out again. Once I learned how to separate the nails, it was simple. I have never forgotten the solution.

In a similar fashion, the people in Paul's audience had the puzzle pieces given them by the prophets. Paul lays out the puzzle pieces and explains that the "solution" for which they have been looking is Jesus, the Messiah. This is truly good news. They had probably heard of Jesus, but on this day they heard a man, an obvious scholar and a trained rabbi, convincingly declare that Jesus was the long-awaited Christ. The puzzle pieces had all been there. Now the pieces came together.

4. According to Acts 13:26, who was in Paul's audience?

5. To whom was the message of salvation sent? (See verse 26.)

6. Who saw Jesus after His resurrection? (See verse 31.)

7. What were they doing on behalf of Jesus? (See verse 31).

8. How has Jesus been an answer to some of the puzzle pieces in your life?

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Write what you think the memory verse meant to the first people who heard it or read it.

DAY FIVE

God's Great Gift

Read Acts 13:32-43.

1. In Acts 13:36-37, what distinction did Paul draw between King David and Jesus?
2. What is the good news? (See verses 32-33.)
3. Find the story of the Resurrection in each of the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Record the chapter references below.
4. What is proclaimed through Jesus? (See verse 38.)
5. Read the following verses about forgiveness, and summarize them in your own words.

Acts 10:43

Ephesians 1:7

Colossians 1:13-14

1 John 1:9

6. As we learned yesterday, the Old Testament writers had foretold the coming of the Messiah. The apostle Peter tells us that the prophets searched intently to try to determine the time and circumstances in which the Messiah would come, suffer, and then be glorified. Read 1 Peter 1:10-12. The beginning of verse 12 tells whom the prophets were serving when they spoke of Christ. What was their conclusion?

Both the prophets Micah and Isaiah spoke of a person who would announce the coming of the Messiah. John the Baptist was that man. Before Herod beheaded him, John emphatically declared that he was the herald of the coming King, that his ministry was to announce and introduce the Messiah. His words fanned a flame of hope for all Jews, in Israel and abroad, that God would soon reveal the promised One. John was highly regarded by most Jews, and Paul used John's credibility to confirm his own declarations about Jesus. The Messiah had come. Furthermore, He had come for the benefit of both the Jews and Gentiles.

The Gentiles were particularly attracted to Paul's message, which made no distinction between Jew and Gentile. They had learned about the law, but forgiveness through faith in Jesus was better than the law. The law could not justify guilty people. It could corner them, convict them and condemn them, but it could never cancel their sin. It could cover sin but never remove it. According to Paul, what God's law could not do had now been done through God's Son, Jesus. His listeners were stunned and sobered by what they heard. They wanted to hear more, so they invited Paul and Barnabas to come back the next Sabbath day.

7. The good news is that the Messiah has come and has provided a way of salvation for everyone. What the law could not do Jesus did by His life, death, and resurrection. Paul explains this amazing truth in greater detail in his letter to the Romans. Three simple verses taken from that letter explain God's great gift. Write these verses that follow:

Romans 3:23

Romans 6:23

Romans 10:9

Pray a prayer of confession or a prayer of thanksgiving, or both.

MEMORY CHALLENGE

When you are away from the house, call home and leave the memory verse on your answering machine. Check yourself for accuracy when you get home.

DAY SIX

Joy in My Heart

Read Acts 13:44-52.

1. Who showed up on the Sabbath? (See verse 44.)
2. What had they come to hear? (See verse 44.)
3. What caused the Jews to talk abusively against what Paul was saying? (See Acts 13:45.)
4. Why did Paul and Barnabas turn to the Gentiles? (See verses 46-47.)
5. Whom did the Jews incite to stir up persecution against Paul and Barnabas?
6. According to Acts 13:52, were the disciples discouraged? How are they described?
7. As a result of the time spent in Syrian Antioch, what happened to the Word of the Lord? (See verse 49.)

Word quickly spread throughout the city concerning Paul and Barnabas. The city was comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. Both groups were interested in what they might see and hear from the two visitors. However, the Jews had a different reaction than the Gentiles when they saw the large crowds—they were filled with jealousy. We do not know if they thought their power was being threatened or their authority was being undermined, or if they

were simply upset that the visitors were getting more attention than they were.

Jealousy can be a silent killer. Much like resentment (or a spirit of unforgiveness), it usually does more harm to the person who harbors such feelings than it ever does to the object of the jealousy. It can rob a person of spiritual vitality, destroy relationships, and produce vicious language. Jealousy presumes to know the motivation or thoughts of another person, assumes an attitude of self-righteousness, and ceases to believe that God is in control.

The jealousy of the Jews produced abusive language. They spoke against what Paul was saying. They rejected the good news and incited others to do the same. Their jealousy burned so hot that they were not satisfied with simply rejecting the words of Paul and Barnabas—they had to physically reject them as well. They stirred up persecution against the two and had them thrown out of the region. Jealousy is never fully satiated, just temporarily appeased. The only antidote is confession, forgiveness, and renewal. Ironically, the Jews had rejected the very thing that could forgive their sin and heal their jealous hearts.

In contrast to the Jews, the Gentiles received the truth and were filled with joy (verse 52). When I was a kid, my dad led music at our church. Every once in a while he would lead us in this Sunday School chorus:

I have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.

Where? Down in my heart.

Where? Down in my heart.

I have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.

Where? Down in my heart to stay.

He would add other verses, like “I have the Sunday School enthusiasm down in my heart” or “I have the peace that passeth understanding down in my heart.” But I have always loved the original verse, because it perfectly describes the feeling that accompanies the receiving of the good news of Jesus Christ. Maybe the Gentiles sang a similar song when the truth of Paul’s words gripped their lives.

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Find some way to use the Memory Challenge in a conversation today.