

# ***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **ACTS LESSON 4**

### **The Gospel into All the World (Acts 13-16)**

#### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.* Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“But the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24). Welcome to our study of the Book of Acts. Acts 13-16 takes us into the last division of the Book of Acts. In Acts 1:8, Jesus said to His disciples, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” With the missionary journeys of Paul (which begin in Acts 13), we will see the Gospel spread into the uttermost parts of the world. Paul eventually will take the Gospel all the way to Rome itself. Today, therefore, we are going to discuss Paul’s preaching of the Gospel and the responses that the people to whom he preached had to his message. Acts 13 begins with the dedication of Paul and Barnabas to God’s work. The Holy Spirit said in Acts 13:2, “Separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” These two men were set apart (or “sanctified” as we might say) to do the work of God, especially among the Gentiles. Even in passages such as these, there are practical applications that can be made. As we think about Paul and Barnabas being separated for the work of God, we can realize that as Christians, we, too, have been separated, set apart, or sanctified in order to do the work of God. We no longer are to live for sin and for the devil. Rather, we have been called to be Christians. As such, we have special purposes and goals. Our lives are to be lived in such a way that we shine the light of Jesus everywhere we go. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Not only are we lights, but we are seen as servants and diligent workers in the kingdom of God. In Matthew 20, the kingdom is likened unto a vineyard—a place of work where fruit is produced. That is what Christians are called and separated to do—work to produce spiritual fruit for God. We should live our daily lives for Jesus. We ought to feel separated, with a special purpose in our hearts, as we go about doing the Lord’s work. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 we read, “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Why is that? Jesus explained it in John 9:4 when He said, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day for the night is coming when no one can work.” **Now** is the time to be workers. Now is when we have the opportunity. We have no promise of tomorrow. Thus, we must be diligent in the kingdom of God today. Consider the commendation that Paul gave to the Christians in Thessalonica. They had a “work of faith, labor of love, and perseverance of hope” (1 Thess. 1:3). These Christians were working, active, and faithful in the kingdom. Paul told them, “I do not need to tell others about you because they’ve heard for themselves about all that you are doing.” We today, then, also need to be workers, knowing that we have been set apart and separated for special tasks within the kingdom of God. In Titus 1:9-11 we are told that we are God’s own people and that we have been called for His purposes. It is important for us as Christians to realize that each one of us is special. You are special to God. You are dear to God. As a special, called-out person, you need to be separated for His work, just as Paul and Barnabas were.

In Acts 13, as Paul enters the region of Antioch, he preaches the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles alike. His sermon in Acts 13 is, in several ways, similar to the sermon that Stephen preached in Acts 7. Paul begins with the Israelites' Egyptian bondage. He preaches about how, by Moses, God led the Israelites out of Egypt. He speaks of the blessings that God had waiting for them in the Promised Land, and how they received those blessings. He talks about kings like Saul and David, and how Samuel was the last judge and great leader. He talks about how Saul was a king, and how God used him. He talks about how David, the greatest king of all, led God's people toward the Messiah. Ultimately, as Paul preaches about David, he also preaches about one Who was greater than David. He preaches about Jesus Himself, and about how He is the way to salvation. Paul says to these Jews, "The word of salvation has been brought to you today. It is here for you folks to receive." Thus, we need to recognize the importance of preaching the Gospel to the lost. Notice especially Paul's comments in Acts 13:38-39. As Paul preaches Jesus in Antioch, here is the climax of his sermon:

"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses."

Paul said, "Let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man [Jesus, Who is of the lineage of David] is preached to you the forgiveness of sins." The idea of forgiveness of sins would have been such a great comfort to the people who lived under Old Testament law. Did they have the promise of forgiveness? Yes, they did. But it was predicated upon the Messiah. Hebrews 10:3-4 says, "But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins." Hebrews 9:15-17 teaches us that when Jesus died on the cross, His blood also covered those who had been faithful under the Old Law. So, yes, in the sense of it being predicated upon the Messiah, they had the idea of forgiveness of sins. But **immediate** forgiveness being preached in the name of the Messiah?! **That** would have been a message of great comfort to those people. Notice how Paul told the people that they could be "justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses." What can we learn from this point? The Law of Moses is not what justifies people. It did not, in and of itself, justify them then. And it does not justify us today. This is one of the clearest passages available to show that we are no longer under the Old Law. The Ten Commandments have been nailed to the cross. Colossians 2:14ff. and Ephesians 2:14ff. both teach that we are no longer under the Old Testament. Hebrews 8:13 says (quoting Jeremiah 31:31), "In that He says, 'a new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." The writer's point was that we no longer live under the Old Law. We are no longer under the Ten Commandments. We do not worship like they did under the Old Law, and we are not saved as they were under the Old Law. Rather, we do what Jesus has told us to do as we follow the teaching of the New Testament. What is our law today? It is Matthew through Revelation. The New Testament is what we follow now. People today need to know that we are not called to sacrifice animals, to burn incense, or to worship on the Sabbath. Colossians 2:16 teaches us that we are not to judge people according to new moons or feasts or Sabbaths. We cannot condemn people for not keeping such things. Those things are not part of the New Law today.

As Paul finishes his sermon, a great response from the people occurs. Many of the Gentiles hear the sermon and are responsive to it. Some of the Jews like it, and some do not. But what is amazing is that in Acts 13:42-44, the Gentiles said, "We liked your sermon, and we want you to preach the same sermon next Sabbath." Can you imagine someone saying, "We want to hear the same sermon this time next week"? That had to be a powerful sermon. How many preachers do you know who had such a powerful sermon on one

Sunday that the people said, “That was so good, we want to hear it again next week. We want a double dose of it”? That was the kind of preaching that Paul did, because Paul preached what God expected—a sermon that was both biblical and relevant to the lives of the people who heard it. It was not full of humorous stories. It was not filled with lots of emotion and a little bit of Bible. Paul taught the people exactly what God wanted him to say, and he made it relevant to their lives. When they got through listening, they knew what they needed to do to be saved. That is the kind of preaching (and people) we need today. We need people who are hungering after the Word of God, just as Jesus said in Matthew 5:6—“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.” We also need Gospel preachers who are men of God, and who will preach a “thus saith the Lord,” and who will give book, chapter, and verse during their sermons. What a wonderful response we see to the Gospel message in Acts 13.

As Paul continues on his journeys, he finds himself (Acts 14) in the regions of Iconium and Lystra. This is a region that was engulfed in idolatry. The people had many false gods, and their worship was not correct. They were idolatrous people. In Acts 14:1-18, therefore, Paul preaches first about repenting of the sin of idolatry. He tells the people that they need to turn from the idols that they had made. What is so odd about idols is that people make them, and then the same people turn around and worship them. What’s so unique is that God—the living God—created us, and that we, in turn, are to worship Him. Do you see how idolatry has it backwards? People create idols and then worship them. Yet God—Who is still alive—created us so that we worship Him today. That is the true idea of the living God. Paul therefore preaches repentance from idolatry. He preaches about God being the Creator of all things. In Acts 14, not only does Paul condemn idolatry, but he also preaches about God and about how He has created all things. God has not left Himself without witness. Look at what Paul says in Acts 14:17, where he states, “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.” What is one of the proofs of God as the Creator? It is the very fact that this world works in such an orderly fashion. We have winter, spring, summer, and fall. There is a continuous, orderly cycle. We have rain, which causes plants to spring up from the ground to provide food for us. These things prove that the world is orderly and that there is a Creator. The world did not just “happen by chance.” If you have ever seen anything happen by accident, you know that it is not very orderly and that it does not have a lot of purpose associated with it. This world is incredibly orderly. Things are predicated upon each other, which proves that there is a Creator. The psalmist said in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork.” Paul said in Romans 1:20, “Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” Thus, Paul preached about God being the Creator of all things, and how He has left evidence in the world around us for us to see.

In Acts 14, we see another response to the Gospel. This time the Gentiles loved what Paul preached. Some of them obeyed the Gospel, and the Jews loathed it. As a result, because those Jews hated what Paul had said (the same Jews who, in Acts 13, had already gotten upset with Paul because of his preaching), they wreaked havoc on his preaching. Because of this, Paul suffered great persecution. The Jews took him out of the city, stoned him, and left him for dead. Paul rises up in Acts 14:22 and says, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” What a great man of God. He preached the Gospel. Some people did not like it, and even took him out and stoned him. No doubt he was in great pain and agony. But his attitude was, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” We need to be faithful, even in the face of suffering.

In Acts 14, Paul also takes some time to go around to various cities to set up elders in those congregations. In every congregation that Paul went to, he set up elders as the congregation's leadership and organization. From Acts 14:23 we can learn a practical lesson for leadership in the church today. God's desire is that every congregation of the Lord's church have elders. Titus was left in Crete for that very purpose, as Titus 1:5 establishes ("For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you"). God's design regarding the hierarchy in the government of the church is that elders serve as the spiritual leaders in matters of option. Jesus is the Head, and He has already decided upon matters of doctrine. Elders are to be put in place as spiritual leaders and as shepherds. In matters of option, they have all authority. Whenever the Word is taught, we need to heed and listen to them because they watch out for our souls (Heb. 13:17). We also have deacons who, according to 1 Timothy 3:11-12, are special servants. Then there are Christians as well. Jesus is the Head; then there are elders, deacons, and all Christians. That is the hierarchy of the government of the church. Any kind of religious group that has a government contradictory to that is not following the New Testament pattern in worship.

In Acts 15, we turn our attention to Paul, Barnabas, James, and others who are going to attend a council of first-century Christians over a matter that brought great trouble to the church. In Acts 15 this seems to be the problem. There were certain Jews who were saying that the Gentile converts who had obeyed the Gospel needed to be circumcised in order to be right with God. This created a great stir (and some confusion) among the people because they were unsure as to exactly what they should believe. Thus, the men were called together (including especially the apostles, who were inspired) and they had a "meeting of the minds" about this matter, with the Holy Spirit being there and preaching the Word through the apostles. We learn in Acts 15 that whenever false doctrine is taught, it must be dealt with. Circumcision was not for the Gentiles. Nor is circumcision part of the Gospel today. We do not have the right to tell people, "Yes, you can become a Christian. You must be baptized **and** you must be circumcised in order to go to Heaven." In Galatians 5:4-6 we are told that in Christ, "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith, working through love." That is what we must teach people today. We must have faith working through love, not circumcision. Circumcision is not what God commands. So, here we see in Acts 15 that we must stand up for the Truth whenever error is taught. Perhaps some were teaching these things out of confusion, but it was still error, and it was still causing harm to the Gospel. When people teach things that are not true, we, out of a love for their souls, and out of a love for God and His Word, need to teach what the Bible says. Jude 3 said, as he was writing to Christians, "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Christians must stand up and do battle when false doctrine is taught. Ephesians 5:11 says, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." Does this mean that we should be unkind or unloving? No. The Bible says that we must "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), but when error is taught we must stand up and say what God says on the matter. We must not let people be tempted to obey the teachings of Satan.

In Acts 15:3-35, we see that these men who have met together hear the words of the apostles and of the Holy Spirit. They come to realize that the Old Law is no longer in effect, and that they cannot bind circumcision (or anything else from the Old Law) on people. Thus, this passage clearly shows us that neither Gentiles nor anyone else should follow the teachings of the Old Law. In John 1:17 we read, "The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." The council then makes its decision and sends a

letter to the Gentiles to tell them that they should abstain from sexual immorality, abstain from things strangled and from blood, and live a good, moral, righteous life. That is what the Gentiles were commanded to do.

In Acts 16, as the Gospel goes into the region of Macedonia, we find ourselves introduced to two more conversions in the Book of Acts. First we have the conversion of Lydia and her household, and then we see the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his household. In Acts 16, we learn that Paul comes to the river in the area, where he finds certain women gathered together for prayer. Evidently (we learn from the text) Lydia was a religious woman. She had gathered at the place for the purpose of praying to God. She was a religious woman, but she still needed to be saved. We learn in this context that the Lord opened Lydia's heart. The women asked Paul to preach, and he did so. The Lord then opened Lydia's heart to hear the Gospel. How did the Lord open Lydia's heart? Was it something miraculous? Was it something that God did against Lydia's will? How are people's hearts opened today? There is a passage in 119:130 that sheds some light on this subject. The psalmist wrote, "The entrance of Your words gives light, and gives understanding to the simple." How was Lydia's heart opened? How do people receive a "spiritual light" and an opening of their hearts? It occurs via the entrance of God's Word, which gives light. Lydia's heart was opened by the preaching that Paul did. That is what the text reveals to us. Paul preached the Word to her, and her heart was opened by its receptivity to that Word. Today, people's hearts are opened by the Word of God. God does not move miraculously—against people's will—to open their hearts. We are free moral agents. We can choose for ourselves whom we will serve (Josh. 24:15). Because we are free moral agents, and because we have a heart, a conscience, and personality, when we hear the Word of God and we want to believe it, then our heart is opened by the Word. In Acts 16, Lydia hears the Word, and her heart is opened. Lydia and her household then obey the Gospel by being baptized, and beg Paul to stay a little longer.

From this text, some have tried to imply that this teaches infant baptism. We can know that this is not true because of teaching elsewhere in the New Testament about baptism. We always have to interpret the Bible by itself. The best way to interpret the Bible is to let the Bible interpret itself. Let me illustrate what I mean. When Lydia and her house were baptized, we can know that it did not include infants because of some of the requirements to become a Christian that are mentioned elsewhere. For example, must a person hear and understand the Word of God to be baptized? Absolutely. Must a person have the cognitive/thinking ability to believe in Jesus? Absolutely. Must a person be able to repent of wrong in his life? Yes. Must one be able to verbally, orally confess Jesus as the Son of God? Yes, the Bible teaches that very thing. If those things are true, then we know that infants cannot be baptized. Why not? Infants do not have the cognitive ability to believe. They have nothing of which to repent. They cannot orally confess Jesus as the Son of God. Therefore, since they do not meet the criteria, then we know that when it says in Acts 16 that Lydia "and her household" were baptized, it is referring to those who were "of age" and who were qualified (i.e., amenable to the law of God). That is all that the Scriptures are talking about. If we will allow the Bible to be its own best commentary, then will know what passages such as these mean. In fact, it is impossible for a child to be scripturally baptized because that child has no sin. The Bible teaches in Matthew 18 that children are innocent. Jesus said that people needed to become "like a little child" in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Was He suggesting that there were a bunch of little, depraved children running around? No, that was not what Jesus was saying. "Becoming like a little child" refers to the fact that we must be innocent and pure like a little child. That is how children are described in the Bible.

Next we turn to the conversion of the Philippian jailer—one of the most interesting conversions in all of Scripture. Paul and Silas are in prison in Philippi. The text tells us that the jailer is asleep. As a soldier, he is not supposed to be asleep, but he is. The prison walls begin to shake, the cell doors fly open, and then he awakes, thinking, “Oh no! I was not supposed to be sleeping. My life is going to be put on the line.” So, he pulls out his sword and starts to take his own life. But before he can do that, Paul speaks up and says, “Do not do that. We are all here and safe.” Upon the heels of that encouraging idea, the Philippians jailer asks the greatest question ever. In Acts 16:30 we find him asking, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” This man realized that his life had been saved. He was at the point of life or death, and thus was thinking about greater things. Oftentimes when people are at that point, they begin to think beyond the mere physical to what happens after this life is over. So, this man begins to think about his soul and his spirit, and what he needs to do to be right with God. Paul, of course, tells him exactly what to do.

There are several important things implied by this man’s question. The man asked, “What must I **do**?” This implies that there is more that someone must do than merely “accepting Jesus.” There are steps that have to be taken. The man asked, “What **must** I do?” We see here that salvation is a necessity, and something that a person must take very seriously. It is something that is urgent, and is something that a person must do in order to be right before God. The man asked, “What must **I** do to be saved?” This is not about family or about someone else doing something for you. You have to make a personal decision to be saved. Only you can do that. Your mother and father cannot do it for you. Friends cannot do it for you. A preacher cannot do it for you. The decision to obey Christ is a personal decision. So what did Paul tell this man? He said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (vs. 31). The first step for this man was to believe. But was that **all** he had to do? No. As we read in other accounts, there is more to do than merely believing. The jailer washed their stripes, which was a sign of his repentance. No doubt he would have been willing to confess the name of Jesus. So, they took him that same night, at that very hour, and baptized him. He heard the Word. He believed in Jesus. He wanted to be saved. He was willing to repent and change his life. He was willing to confess Jesus as Savior (as other passages teach), and so he then was baptized for the remission of his sins. This man and his family (all those who were of age) then became New Testament Christians.

We read something about the Philippians a little later in the New Testament. Paul referred to this group of people as his crowning joy (Phil. 4:1). It was even a joy for Paul to be in prison and be able to preach the Gospel. We learn a lesson about Paul in Acts 16:25. He was in prison, but what was he doing before the doors were opened and he was released? Was he moping and whining, saying, “Oh, poor me!”? No. Acts 16:25 says that Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Paul is a great example of a man who trusted in God in every situation.

Are you like Paul? Do you trust the Lord—and trust Him enough that you are willing to do what He says you need to do to go to Heaven? I want you to know today that God loves you so much that He gave His only Son so that you could have the hope of eternal life. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). God wants you to be saved. He wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Will you today do what they did in the first century to become a Christian? The Book of Acts clearly bears out for us what a person must do. You must hear the message of Jesus Christ. You must hear that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He is the only way to salvation. In Acts 4:12 we are told, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be

saved.” Jesus is the only way a person can be saved. Then you must believe that Jesus is God’s Son and that He is the sacrifice Who provides the sole avenue of salvation. I am reminded of Acts 8. As Philip and the Ethiopian nobleman were riding down the road in a chariot, they came to water and the nobleman asked, “Here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Philip then said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may” (Acts 8:36-37). You must believe in Jesus. But you also must be willing to change your life. In Acts 3:19, the people were commanded to “repent and turn again.” That is the idea. Repentance is a 180-degree turn. We turn from sin, and make a turn back to God. That is the idea. Then you must be willing to confess Jesus as God’s Son. Remember the Ethiopian nobleman? Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The Ethiopian then said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” There is the idea of the “good confession” that a person needs to make. Then, having made that good confession, like the Ethiopian nobleman, like Saul, and like those on the Day of Pentecost, you need to hear the word, repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins so that you can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are praying today that you will make the decision to become a Christian. May God always show His love in your life as you live the Gospel of Christ.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE GOSPEL INTO ALL THE WORLD” (ACTS 13-16)

1. According to Acts 12:24, what happened after the apostles and other disciples preached the Gospel?
2. Acts 13 begins with the Holy Spirit directing that two men be “set apart” for a special work. Who were those two men?
3. In Matthew 20, the kingdom is likened unto a vineyard. What is the implication of that analogy for Christians today?
4. According to Jesus’ statement in John 9:4, why is it important for Christians to be busy in the Lord’s vineyard **now**?
5. Paul told the Christians in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:3) that they were engaged in three things. What were those three things?
6. In Acts 13, Paul preached a sermon that was similar to a sermon that another disciple had preached in Acts 6-7. Who was that disciple?
7. According to Paul’s statements in Acts 13:38-39, something was being preached to the people of that day in the name of Christ. What was that “something”?
8. What does Hebrews 10:3-4 tell us about the blood of bulls and goats?
9. What important point is found in Acts 13:39 regarding the Law of Moses?
10. What does Colossians 2:13-14 teach us about the Old Law?
11. In what activity were the people in the regions of Iconium and Lystra engaged?
12. In Acts 14:17, Paul speaks about a specific member of the Godhead. Who was it, and what was the thrust of Paul’s comments?
13. In Acts 14, what happened to Paul after he had preached the Gospel?
14. What did Paul mean in Acts 14:22 when he said, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God”?
15. What important point is contained in Acts 14:23 about the earthly government of congregations of the Lord’s church?
16. In Acts 15, what controversial teaching had occurred among Jewish Christians?
17. In Acts 16, what was the name of the woman who was converted along with her household?
18. In Acts 16:30, what question did the Philippian jailer ask that ranks as one of the most important questions a human could ever ask?