

h. Paul and Barnabas returned to the synagogue the following Sabbath, this time encountering a crowd of people that Luke described as nearly the whole city of Pisidian Antioch (13:44). Doubtless many of the city's residents weren't present at that gathering, but Luke's language emphasizes how widely the news of these visitors and their message had spread in one week. Paul and Barnabas had left this synagogue the previous Sunday with a group of Jews and proselytes deeply affected by their gospel; just how deeply is evident from what transpired in the following week. *Not only did they propagate this gospel throughout the city, they did so in a way that moved their hearers to assemble with them on the next Sabbath to hear more about this Messiah and His word of forgiveness and life.*

- 1) Luke described a massive, enthusiastic gathering, but juxtaposed it with the contrasting reaction of the city's Jews: On the one hand, multitudes of excited people were gathered together to learn more of this "Way"; on the other, a different group was assembling in order to oppose it and those who embraced it. What brought the latter assembly together was mutual *jealousy*, implying that these Jews were significant figures in the Jewish community in Pisidian Antioch.

They opposed Paul and Barnabas and their message, not because it was demonstrably untrue or unbiblical, but because it threatened their status and power among the people. If the synagogue community embraced this gospel of fulfillment in Jesus, Judaism would lose its hold over them; more importantly, *they* would lose their place of power and influence.

Not surprisingly, these Jews responded by seeking to contradict what Paul and Barnabas were proclaiming. No doubt they did so under the guise of jealousy for God, His Law, and the Scriptures, but their true concern was themselves. In the name of defending God's truth, they were denying it; these who accused Paul and Barnabas of blasphemy were the ones who were guilty of blaspheming (13:45).

- 2) Paul's response to this opposition was pointed and highlighted his own understanding of what was transpiring and how it fit into God's revealed purposes in salvation history. As previously noted, Paul understood clearly the salvation-historical dynamics of Israel's unbelief: He recognized what he was experiencing there in Pisidian Antioch as the continuance of God's judgment against the nation – His judicial hardening by which He would effect the ingathering of the Gentiles (13:46-50).

As a nation, Israel's eyes were blinded and her ears stopped, and yet God had preserved a remnant within it that would receive the Messiah sent to it. Unto that remnant, and for the sake of His faithfulness to the patriarchal promise, God decreed that the word of life should first go to Abraham's offspring. As promised, they would mediate Yahweh's blessing to the nations, whether by proclaiming His gospel or by opposing it (v. 46).

Paul understood God's role and purposes in the opposition he was encountering from his countrymen, but he also recognized their culpability in their own unbelief.

- God had smeared over the eyes of their forefathers, but only as His just condemnation of their refusal to acknowledge their unfaithfulness and return to Him; *He had merely certified and sealed what had been true of the nation from the beginning*. And so, though God had acted sovereignly against Israel, the responsibility for this outcome lay entirely with the rebellious nation (ref. Isaiah 1-5 as the context for chapter 6).
- What had been true of the fathers was true of the children: These Jews opposing Paul and Barnabas were part of the nation under God's judicial hardening, and yet they bore the responsibility for their blind eyes and stopped ears. Ever faithful to His promise, Yahweh had brought His message of forgiveness and deliverance to them and they consciously and willfully repudiated it.
- Most importantly, this word wasn't some new teaching or scriptural interpretation; it was the word of life to be gained in the Messiah promised by all of Israel's Scriptures. Paul understood that this good news was to the Jew first and he honored that design by taking his witness first to the synagogue (cf. 3:26, 9:17-20, 14:1, 16:13, 17:1-2, 10, 16-17, 18:1-4, 19, 19:8, with Romans 1:16, 2:9-10). These sons of Israel enjoyed a unique heritage and privilege, but when they rejected Paul's gospel, they effectively testified to God and men that they had judged themselves unworthy of the eternal life promised to their fathers. Whatever their convictions and claims, the truth was that they had no interest in the life held forth in the Scriptures (cf. John 5:37-40).

- 3) This Jewish rejection served as a turning point in Paul's ministry. Up until this time he had directed most of his energies toward his own kinsman; henceforth he would turn to the Gentiles (13:46c). This decision didn't mean the end of Paul's witness to the Jews; in every place he continued to enter the synagogues and proclaim Jesus as Israel's Messiah. But the events at Pisidian Antioch impressed upon Paul the centrality of the Gentiles in his calling as the Lord's apostle. Jesus had told him that he would be His witness among the Gentiles (9:15), and now he realized that this mission wasn't to be a secondary labor. And though he'd known that the salvation of the remnant of Israel meant the ingathering of the Gentiles (Isaiah 11:1ff, 49:1ff; Amos 9:11-15; Zechariah 6:9-15), that knowledge had been enhanced with the realization that the gospel's global mission depended on Jewish unbelief as well as Jewish proclamation. Either way, Israel would fulfill its calling and God would regather His own.

Luke's account highlights this dynamic and God's role in it by showing that Paul regarded his kinsmen's rejection and his transition toward Gentile mission, not as an unfortunate development, but as a matter of divine initiative. He recognized this shift in the focus of his ministry to be God's leading *in accordance with His unchanging, revealed design*: Paul fully believed that God was commanding him to redirect his energies toward the Gentiles, but not because He directly communicated with him. *God's command to him came through the word of His prophet recorded in the Scriptures centuries before Paul was born* (13:47).

Many readers pass over this verse, but it is profoundly important to Luke's overall treatment of salvation history and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Put a different way, it provides another crucial insight into the relationship between the Old and New Testaments and the fundamental truth that all the Scripture testifies of Jesus.

Paul drew his citation from the section of Isaiah's prophecy pertaining to Yahweh's Servant and the work He was to perform. Specifically, it comes from 49:6 and a passage highlighting the Servant's worldwide saving mission. This passage (49:1-13) is one of Isaiah's four "Servant Songs" (ref. also 42:1-9, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12).

- In the larger context of Paul's citation, Yahweh raises up this Servant to be His True Israel. Israel had been chosen and "birthed" to fulfill the servant role – the beloved son of God and seed of Abraham through whose faithful devotion the world would come to know Him as the true and living God (cf. 41:8-10 with 43:1-13 and 44:1-5). But Israel failed in its calling; rather than testifying to God, it testified *against* Him by joining with the nations in their idolatry and unbelief. For that reason, Yahweh was sending His unfaithful servant into exile, but not forever; He would restore Judah through the Persian king Cyrus, His "anointed" (44:1-45:7).
- Yahweh promised to recover His chosen servant from captivity and restore Jerusalem and its temple, but that recovery wouldn't fulfill His promise of deliverance and renewal. Israel had failed to be Israel, and its destiny depended upon another "Israel" – another Servant who would fulfill Israel's identity and calling. Isaiah spotlighted that role of the Servant in chapter 49, there asserting that this "Israel" was going to secure the salvation of a remnant of Israel and Judah. But as the True Israel – the true Seed of Abraham – He would also extend Yahweh's saving work to all the earth's peoples, mediating to them the promised divine blessing (49:6). This is the context from which Paul drew his citation. (Note that Isaiah alternately ascribes the same global ingathering to the *Son of David* in 11:1-13; cf. also Amos 9:11-15 and Zechariah 6:9-15).

This brief consideration of the context of Paul's excerpt shows that the Lord's words were directed toward His messianic Servant, not Paul and Barnabas. That Paul himself recognized this is implied by his use of the singular pronoun in his citation – "*I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the end of the earth,*" even while applying that divine commission in plural fashion to himself and Barnabas: "*For thus the Lord has commanded us...*"

Once again, some conclude that Paul was merely drawing an analogy: He knew that the Isaiah context didn't apply to him and Barnabas, but he saw in his own perceived call to go to the Gentiles a commission similar to that which the Lord had prophetically issued to His Servant. Though convenient, this interpretation actually obscures Paul's meaning.

First of all, Paul's language doesn't support this view. He didn't say or in any way imply that his commission was analogous to the Servant's, but that this Isaianic charge was *itself* God's charge to him and Barnabas. Only two conclusions are possible from Paul's treatment of the passage:

- The first is that Paul was guilty of flagrant eisegesis – of reading into the passage what is completely foreign to it.
- The second is that Paul was correct in his interpretation: *He rightly understood that the Lord's commission to His Servant was His commission to Paul and His counterparts.*

The presumption of New Testament inspiration alone demands the latter conclusion, but the issue need not be left there. The explanation of Paul's interpretation is found in understanding – as Paul did – the way in which this prophetic promise was to be fulfilled in Christ.

- Paul's treatment of this passage might appear to violate its contextual meaning, but nothing could be further from the truth. In context, Yahweh's commission was to His Servant; the Lord placed *Him* as His light to the nations in order that His salvation should come to all men.
- Jesus embraced this commission for Himself (cf. John 8:12 with 3:16-19 and 1:9-10); He is the Lord's chosen Servant, sent into the darkness as the light of the world in order that Adam's fallen race might no longer walk in darkness but have the light of life.
- God's commission to the messianic Servant is His commission to His only-begotten Son, the Son of Abraham and David. But the Son's light and salvation were to go out to the ends of the earth, not through Himself, but through His appointed witnesses.

*The Servant's work of global ingathering is the work of His servants accomplished through the leading and power of His indwelling Spirit. The Isaianic Servant is indeed fulfilling His commission, but in and through those who share in His life and likeness. Paul understood this, as did Luke, who made it the centerpiece of his account (cf. John 15:26-27 and Matthew 28:18-20 with Luke 24:44-49 and Acts 1:1-8).*

- 4) Paul's statements were a rebuke of the Jews' unbelief, but became the source of exultant rejoicing for the Gentiles who heard him (13:48). The reason for their joy was their realization that the Messiah of Israel is the Savior sent by God on behalf of all mankind. The Scriptures that promised the salvation of the sons of Israel equally promised the ingathering of the nations. What had occurred in Cornelius' house, at Antioch in Syria, and now in Pisidian Antioch wasn't an anomaly sparked by Jewish unbelief; it was the precise outworking of the eternal counsel of the one true God. *The salvation of the Gentiles and the forming of a composite covenant people was exactly what God purposed and revealed from the beginning.*

Thus the emphasis of Luke's present account: Entrance into the light of life stands upon divine appointment. First and foremost, the Lord appointed His *Servant* and sent Him into the world as its saving light. But He further appointed the *objects* of that salvation – an appointment that extends equally to Jew and Gentile. The Servant is the glory of Israel, but also the light to illumine the nations. Finally, the Gentiles' appointment for eternal life stands upon the Servant's appointment, not only as the Savior of all men, but also as a sign to be opposed (Luke 2:25-35).

- 5) Divine determination was bringing salvation to the Gentiles through Jewish opposition as well as Jewish proclamation. Paul's turning to the Gentiles and their entrance into the light of life was according to God's unchanging counsel, and in this they had every reason to rejoice and glorify Him. They, along with the remnant of Israel, were partakers in God's wise ordination, but so were their adversaries. Even while exulting in the incarnate consolation of Israel, Simeon had proclaimed in the Spirit the opposition appointed against Him. God had set Him for the rise and fall of many in Israel, and there in Pisidian Antioch, even as many Jews – Paul and Barnabas included – were bringing Gentiles to faith in Christ (ref. 13:43-44, 49), many others were fulfilling their own appointment as His opponents (13:50). Nevertheless, the Lord's counsel stands.

*“Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘It will yet be that peoples will come, even the inhabitants of many cities. And the inhabitants of one will go to another saying, “Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I will also go.” So many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord.’ Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘In those days ten men from all the nations will grasp the garment of a Jew saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”’”*