

Series: Acts

Lesson: #43

Title: The God of this People

Scripture: Acts 13: 14-17

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Place: Sovereign Grace Baptist Church of Princeton, New Jersey

**Acts 13: 14: But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. 15: And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, *Ye men and brethren*, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. 16: Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with *his* hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.**

Tonight we will consider the opening statement of Paul's sermon to those in the synagogue in Antioch, Pisidia.

If you wonder how the folks in this assembly in the synagogue might have regarded God and his Christ all you have to do is remember how you regarded him before the Holy Spirit quickened you to newness of life. We do not have to know the backgrounds, or the cultural influences around them, all we have to consider is the natural heart. Whether a sinner is a direct descendant of Abraham or whether they are a Gentile, the unregenerate heart has always hated God the same and loved the self-righteous deeds of the flesh the same. Paul knew that.

In verse 16 Paul addresses this congregation as, **Men of Israel and you that fear God.**

- *Men of Israel*--were the natural descendants of Jacob, whose name was Israel.
- *You that fear God*--were the Gentiles. Some were proselytes, meaning they professed Jehovah and were circumcised; others professed to worship Jehovah but had not submitted to circumcision which was required to be a true proselyte—these particularly were called God-fearers.

So in this synagogue sits Jew and Gentile, all with the same unregenerate heart. They each believed they were the children of God because of some thing accomplished in their person. The Jews believed they were children of God because they were the natural-born descendants of Abraham. The Gentiles believed they were the children of God because they had converted to the Jews religion.

Both Jew and Gentile reveal this is the natural heart of all men. Every unregenerate sinner thinks God favors sinners because God has respect to something in our persons. When the Jews boasted that God loved them because they were the natural descendants of Abraham, they were saying God loves me because I am--not because of THE I AM—but because I am.

Gentiles make the same boast when saying God loves all men without exception. By nature we consider ourselves gods, surely god would love me, I am somebody! When the descendants of Abraham made their boast that they were righteous because they were sons of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ said, “**Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.**” By God’s grace, he carries sinners in the spirit, back before the foundation of the world to behold that our salvation began in sovereign grace with THE I AM—THE TRIUNE GOD OF GLORY—long before we came along boasting of what I am. Paul knew men had to be brought down to the dust because he once made the same boast and had to be brought down to the dust.

Paul begins at the very point of their vain confidence--and it is the same vain confidence every sinner must have stripped away—if we would be brought to believe on Christ we must experience the sovereign grace of God which alone saves sinners.

**Acts 13: 17: The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.**

### **The God of this people of Israel**

Paul begins where we always must begin, that is, with God. The law of Moses and the prophets had just been read—the word of God. They had just read of “this people of Israel.” Everyone to whom Paul speaks professes themselves to be “this people of Israel”—some by blood, others by their own will. Paul says we have to go back further than your fathers and further than your decision for Jehovah. Paul says, “The God of this people of Israel whom you just read about is the God I am about to declare to you.”

So Paul sets forth three things in this one verse that declares the whole gospel of God and will be our text.

#### **I. The God of this people of Israel...chose our fathers—**

We noted last time that the Lord Jesus Christ began his first message declaring God’s sovereign electing grace. We see here that by the Spirit of Christ, Paul begins with the same doctrine, with the same boldness. If these sinners to whom he speaks shall be brought by God to a saving union with Christ then Paul is obligated to tell them the truth.

Fact is, the place where Paul begins is the place where the salvation of every true child of God began...**Of God are ye in Christ.**

Speaking to believers at Ephesus Paul declared in: **Ephesians 1: 3: Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ: 4: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself,**

according to the good pleasure of his will, **6: To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.**

**2 Thessalonians 2: 13: But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: 14: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The doctrine of God's sovereign election sets the theme of salvation which self-exalting sinners need to hear from the outset. The doctrine of God's sovereign choice sets God upon his throne in Supremacy. The truth of God's sovereign choice declares God the Alpha and the Omega of salvation. This doctrine sets the sinner in the dust at his feet; the true meaning of grace is understood only when we behold God whose right it is to withhold and bestow grace as it pleases him. We must be brought to see that it is no more grace if it is based on something in the sinner. Grace is no more grace if there were some merit in the sinner. If by works then salvation would be a debt owed, not grace freely given.

Paul proclaims, "**The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers.**"

A. The folks in the synagogue considered Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be their fathers. Paul declares:

1. God passed by every sinner in Ur of the Chaldees and called out Abraham, saying, **In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.** In like manner, God looked nowhere else but to his own Son. It is God who first trusted his Son, and said, "In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

2. The God of this people of Israel rejected Ishmael because he was the product of man's will, of man's wisdom, of man's strength. But Isaac was the child promised by God, the child born, and the son given thus God said, "**In Isaac shall thy seed be called.**"—Isaac was a type of Christ for so it is written of Christ the Son of God, **Isaiah 9:6: For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. 7: Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.***

3. The God of this people of Israel said, "**Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated.**" Not because of any good or evil in the two. Jacob's name means supplanter. But Jacob's name was changed from supplanter to Israel. Look in **Genesis 32:28: And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.** Jacobs name was changed because Israel is the name which describes Jacobs Savior, Christ Jesus the Son of God who as a prince hast power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. **Isaiah 42: 1: Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine**

**elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. 2: He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. 3: A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. 4: He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.** Really, the phrase “the children of Israel” is the same as saying “the children of Christ Jesus the Lord.”

Listen up, write this statement somewhere so you can think upon it later: Man’s rejection of the doctrine of election is against God, not only because it exalts the sinner, but even worse, it denies the Son who was elected of God to do the saving and who alone saves. If I can reject God chooses whom he will, then maybe I can reject his Son whom he chose.

Paul declares, “This is how this people of Israel became the children of God.”

**Deuteronomy 7: 7: The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: 8: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9: Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he *is* God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; 10: And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face.**

Point: So as Jew and Gentile sat before Paul in the synagogue thinking they were the people of Israel because of something in their person, Paul declares that the father’s in Israel did not make themselves the people of Israel, but God choose them.

So it is with God’s Israel. God chose his Son, and God choose whom he would in his Son. Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, rich and poor makes no difference, God chose before any of things were. At the end of this account in Acts 13, look over to verse 48, the Spirit of God declares: **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.**

**II. The God of this people of Israel...exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt.**

This word “exalted” means to “raise.” From Moses writings the word is translated, “Multiplied.” It means “God birthed them into a nation.”

Perhaps in the synagogue they had just read from the law of Moses, how that Moses wrote in Exodus 1: 7: how the people multiplied greatly and in verse 11, how Pharaoh did set over

their fathers, **taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.**

So Paul declares it was not the people who did this but God. Paul is declaring to Jew and Gentile that no man has room to boast but God alone births his children into his nation.

A. Whether Jew or Gentile, the natural heart imagines they can make themselves God's children three ways: by blood, by the will of the flesh, and by the will of man. In this congregation to whom Paul spoke you had:

1) Jews who believed they were of this people of Israel because they were natural born sons of Abraham—their boast was, “I am a child of God because mom and dad were children of Israel and Jacob was a child of God”—not so!

2) The Gentiles believed they were the sons of God because by the will of their flesh they had joined the synagogue and professed to believe Jehovah; Jew and Gentile believed they were holy because they truly imagined they had kept God's law—not so!—they merely continued in the idolatry of trusting the will of the flesh.

3) The Jews and Gentiles joined together to proselyte other Gentiles. They thought by the will of man—that is by their fleshly wisdom and persuasion—they had made others join with them and thus by the will of man they made them the children of God—not so!

**John 1: 11: He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12: But as many as received him, to them gave he power (the honor) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**

B. God's children are born into this world the first time by the predestinating grace and power of God then born a second time the same way by the Spirit of God. The Lord told Nicodemus:

**John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water (the first birth) and of the Spirit, (the second birth) he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.**

1. Satan would have destroyed all the children in Israel so that Christ the Seed would not be born, because he did not want his head to be bruised. But God frustrated all Satan's purposes in order to fulfill his promise to his Son, to his children in the garden, to Abraham, to David, to all his saints, so God brought forth the Savior. Look to verse 23: **Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus.**

2. Then concerning the second birth of Jesus from the dead, Satan and his children poured out all their power on Christ to see to it that he die, be buried, the sepulchre be guarded, but he was born a second time by the Spirit of God. **Verse 29-30: And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. 30: But God raised him from the dead: ...32: And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, 33: God hath fulfilled**

**the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.**

3. So it is for you who were chosen of God. Satan would have destroyed your father and mother and their father and mother so that you would have never been born. But God would not allow that for the sake of his Son to whom you were promised.

4. After you were born the first time, Satan used every means possible to destroy you during all your days of rebellion so that you could not be born of the Spirit, but God is not willing that any of his elect perish but that all come to repentance—that all be born the second time of the Holy Spirit.

**Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.**

5. Sinners are not only strangers to the Egyptians while in spiritual bondage, but strangers to God's covenant promises until he exalts them in power and grace. Paul told the Ephesians brethren, that while they were dead in sins, **Ephesians 2:12: That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:...[but now] 18: through [Christ] we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by one Spirit unto the Father. 19: Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;**

So Paul says to Jew and Gentile, the father's did not raise themselves to be a nation—neither can the elect of God—**God exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt.**

**Illustration:** David Eddmenson wife, Theresa Eddmenson.

Nagosaki—an 11 year old girl—got sick and went to the doctor instead of going to school—that day the atomic bomb fell—it burned the clothes off her back but she lived—every one of her school mates died.

Over 20 years later she gave birth to Theresa Eddmenson, who was one whom God was willing would be born of water and the

### **III. God of this people of Israel...with an high arm brought he them out of it.**

The arm expresses “might and power” in the old Hebrew language. With the highest power and might, God brought the people out of bondage, out of Egypt, out of their state as strangers and foreigners.

Just as Moses wrote in **Deuteronomy 7: 8: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought**

you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Everything about Israel's redemption out of Egypt foreshadowed the Preeminent Arm, the Mighty Hand of Power and Salvation--Christ Jesus the Lord, the Son of God.

**Exodus 13: 11: And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he sware unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, 12: That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males *shall be* the LORD'S. (all firstborn males of beast and of their sons)13: And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. (with the blood of a lamb) 14: And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: 15: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem. (because all the firstborn—all the elect of God are his firstborn, because they were created in sovereign electing grace in the Firstborn, Christ Jesus; and all the elect of God are his children; and all the firstborn of his children God the Father redeemed through the blood of his Spotless Lamb—Christ Jesus the Lord.) 16: And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt.**

**Isaiah 53: 1: Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?...7: He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. 8: He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.**

**John 1:36: And looking upon Jesus as he walked, [John] saith, Behold the Lamb of God!**

Here is the point: In his opening statement Paul strips away all the sinful pride of man, all the power which sinful man thinks is in his own flesh, and Paul declares that God's Israel—true Israel—is chosen by God the Father alone, created and born of God the Holy Spirit alone, and redeemed out of bondage by the Son of God, Christ Jesus the Lord. This is how God forms his spiritual Israel.

Paul is declaring something that it will take the grace and power of God to make a sinner bow to. The Jews thought they were of the children of God because of something in them, natural generation and circumcision or law—in other words by the flesh—so do unregenerate Gentiles.

**Romans 2:28: For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.**

Application:

I will give you the application which Paul gives at the end of this sermon:

**Acts 13: 38: Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: 39: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. 40: Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; 41: Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.**

This gospel is humbling to the pride of man. But God shall bring down before God will raise us up.

**Illustration:** Do you recall when the Lord revealed in you that he alone saves? It stripped away everything you had confidence in. But your vain confidence had to be stripped away if all your confidence would be made Christ Jesus alone. Has anything changed? Do you still need to be stripped of your vain confidence. I do constantly. That is what the Lord is doing here through Paul's gospel. That is what he continues to do through his gospel.

May God give us a heart like he gave to these Gentiles that we might beseech that these words be preached to us again. Amen.



