

**UNSTOPPABLE** GOD'S WORK  
IN THE WORLD

VILLAGE BIBLE  
CHURCH

# THE GOD WHO KEEPS HIS PROMISES

Lesson 2

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## DEVOTIONAL

In October, 1940, Presidential candidate Franklin Roosevelt promised, “I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars.” In October, 1964, candidate Lyndon Johnson promised, “We are not about to send American boys nine or ten thousand miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing for themselves” (both quotes in *No Matter How Thin You Slice It, It’s Still Baloney* [Quill], ed. by Jean Arbeiter, p. 85). We’re so used to politicians not keeping their campaign promises that those outrageous quotes hardly bother us.

But it does bother us greatly when someone we love and trust fails to keep an important promise. “I promise to love you in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, and to keep myself ever and only for you, till death do us part.” When those kinds of promises are broken, it leaves a trail of grief and pain. If I were leaving on a long trip and I entrusted to you a rare family treasure, which you promised to keep safe for my return, I’d be a bit stunned to return and find that you had sold it at a yard sale (even if it was for missions!). We’re hurt when people fail to keep important promises.

If you’re going to entrust your soul for eternity to God, it is important to know that He keeps His promises. Most of us have had the experience of being disappointed with God. We trusted Him for something that we thought He had promised, but it did not work out as we had hoped. Whenever that happens, it is we, not God, who were mistaken. We somehow failed to understand or properly apply His promises. But on the matter of our eternal destiny, it is crucial that we properly understand and apply God’s promise of salvation. To be mistaken here would be eternally fatal!

The apostle Paul’s first and longest recorded sermon deals with the theme of God’s promise of salvation: “*From the offspring of this man [David], according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus*” (13:23). “*To us the word of this salvation is sent out*” (13:26). “*And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children [or, to us, their children] in that He raised up Jesus, as it also is written ...*” (13:32–33). The sermon falls into three parts, each beginning with Paul’s direct address to the congregation: The promise given (13:16–25); the promise kept (13:26–37); and, your response (13:38–41). We have here only a synopsis of what undoubtedly was a much longer message. His main idea is **God’s promise to send a Savior and His fulfillment of that promise in sending Jesus demands a response.**<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-33-god-who-keeps-his-promise-acts-1313-41>

# *OPEN IT*

1. Share with the group your best or worst vacation experience. What things in general can make or break one's travel experience?

# *READ IT*

Acts 13:13–43

# *EXPLORE IT*

2. What did Paul and his companions do when they arrived in Antioch Pisidia?
3. Who gave Paul this opportunity to speak according to verse 15?
4. What major events, books, and figures from the Old Testament did Paul share about in verses 16–42?
5. Who and what does Paul bring front and center by the end of his message?

# APPLY IT

## A TEAM IN FLUX (Act 13:13)

Verse 13 records two interesting changes in the missionary team.

**(1) Paul seems to have taken the prominent role.** Prior to this Barnabas was always mentioned first. Now Barnabas is not even mentioned but is included as one of Paul’s “companions.” Hereafter, except in the description of the proceedings of the Jerusalem Council (15:12) and the letter it sent to the churches (15:25), the order is always “Paul and Barnabas.” This seems to be Luke’s way of saying that Paul has taken over the leadership slot or at least the place of prominence.<sup>2</sup>

**6. What qualities or gifts might have allowed Paul the opportunity to have been given this place of prominence to seemingly become the focal point and leader of this ministry team?**

**7. The New Testament pattern of church leadership is a team, not “Lone Ranger” leadership. Is it possible or even biblical for a gifted individual to rise above the rest as the leader of the team? What examples from Scripture do you know of that support your answer?**

**8. What temptations might a leader in Paul’s situation need to be careful of? How could the rest of the team help to protect him from these?**

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<sup>2</sup> Fernando, Ajith; Fernando, Ajith. Acts (The NIV Application Commentary Book 5) (pp. 337-338). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

**(2) John Mark leaves to return home to Jerusalem.** Paul later describes this departure as a desertion (15:38), but we are not told why he leaves. Is he homesick? Has he not planned to be away for so long? Does he find the rigors of travel, especially the prospect of a climb up the mountains to Galatia, too hard on him? Does he resent the fact that his cousin Barnabas is falling into second place? Does he have problems with the bold approach to Gentiles that Paul is developing? **We cannot be sure.**<sup>3</sup>

9. **John Mark was the youngest member of the team, probably in his early twenties. Put yourself in John Mark's shoes and think through some of the questions from the paragraph above. What reason might you have had for wanting to go home instead of staying on the team?**

10. **What things cause people today to quit their ministry? Distinguish between the valid and invalid reasons.**

11. **How can quitting a ministry positively and negatively affect both the individual as well as the rest of the team?**

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<sup>3</sup>ibid

Acts 15:36–41 (ESV)

<sup>36</sup> And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” <sup>37</sup> Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. <sup>39</sup> And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, <sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. <sup>41</sup> And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

**12. In light of Acts 15, there seems to be a connection to the promotion of Paul as leader of the team and John Mark’s quitting. How can a leader seek to reassure those who might be tentative or reluctant to follow his lead?**

**What approach should we take when we are being led by someone we struggle to follow?**

### **STEP UP TO THE MIC (Acts 13:14–41)**

In this message Paul does something very important. He shows how Judaism and Christianity are not different religions. Both are part of a single, wonderful, loving process by which God reveals himself to human beings and makes it possible for the estrangement caused by sin to be taken away so God and people can live together in peace. Judaism is the root from which Christianity grows. Christianity is the tree Judaism was always destined to become.<sup>4</sup>

To best understand the approach and meaning of Paul’s sermon here in Acts 13, let’s look at three elements surrounding it.

#### **Contextualization: Who am I preaching to?**

From this sermon we learn to proclaim Christ in a way that is suitable for a particular audience. To be sure, Paul always proclaimed Christ in evangelism. He never changed the fixed gospel. But Paul was flexible in approach. His sermon to this primarily Jewish crowd differs from his evangelism efforts to pagans. We will see this much more in 14:15–17 and 17:16–34. In addition, Paul’s sermon to a group of pastors also bears a distinct flavor (20:17–35). And his speeches before Felix and Agrippa (24:26) were also situational.

The way Paul addresses the Jews in a synagogue in Acts 13 makes sense. They were familiar with David, the law, and the Old Testament story. At issue here is the same challenge every missionary has today, whether speaking to large crowds or to individuals, to locals in their hometowns or to those who live among unreached peoples. They don’t try to evangelize a sixty-year-old grandma who spent some time in American Sunday school the same way they speak to a Chinese college student who has absolutely no clue about what is in the Bible. Similarly, your Muslim neighbor has a different worldview from the teenager that goes to the private Catholic school. This will require you to share the fixed gospel with flexible communication if you intend to reach them effectively.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Girard, Robert C.. The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 3030–3034). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Merida, Tony. Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (Kindle Locations 4260–4268). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

**13. What “context” do you find yourself living and working in? What are the different worldviews and levels of spirituality that those who live and work most closely to you have?**

**14. What unique ways might you be able to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in ways that might be conducive and productive to where they are?**

**Proclamation: What am I preaching about?**

Here’s the gist of Paul’s sermon in a few sound bites:

Sound bite 1—Israel has always been the object of God’s special care (Acts 13:17–19).

Sound bite 2—God gave Israel Canaan as their homeland and great leaders—judges, kings—especially King David, “a man after [God’s] own heart” (Acts 13:16–22).

Sound bite 3—God promised to send David’s descendant to rescue both Jewish children of Abraham and Gentile friends of God. He’s here! He’s the “Savior—Jesus” (Acts 13:23–26).

Sound bite 4—The people and their leaders in Jerusalem failed to recognize the Savior. He was crucified and buried, but God raised him from the dead. Everything God promised Israel is fulfilled in the resurrected Jesus (Acts 13:27–37).

Sound bite 5—Here’s what it comes down to: Anyone may be forgiven of his or her sins and justified (judged “not guilty” and “okay”) before God through Jesus and what he accomplished. The Law of Moses could never do that! This leaves you with a choice: Trust Jesus or play the cynic and refuse to believe (Acts 13:38–41).<sup>6</sup>

**15. Paul begins his message (verses 16–25) by speaking of God’s faithful and ongoing communication of the prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah. How can understanding the backstory of the Old Testament help Paul’s audience see their need for the Messiah?**

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<sup>6</sup> Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary). Holman Reference.

**How does our sharing the history and truths of the Old Testament help our listeners today understand their need for Jesus?**

**16. Paul then moves (verses 26-37) to sharing about their recent past. Jesus came and was the fulfillment of all that the prophets foretold. He is the Messiah. What proofs does he give that substantiate his assertions about Jesus being Savior and Lord?**

**Are these still valuable proofs in our context today?**

**17. Why must a person believe in the deity of Jesus Christ in order to be saved?**

**Application: What do we need to do?**

Paul's sermon gives abundant evidence that God faithfully kept His gracious promise to send Jesus as the Savior of all who will believe in Him. The word of this salvation is sent to you (13:26). Through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you (13:38). Through Him everyone who believes is justified in God's sight (13:39). But also, all who scoff at Him or ignore Him "will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Remember, Paul was speaking here to a religious audience. Everyone present believed in God. But they needed personally to put their trust in His promise of salvation through Jesus Christ so that the words of His warning did not come upon them.<sup>7</sup>

**18. In Acts 13:39 Paul says we are freed from sin. What does this mean, and if this is true, why do we still struggle with sin?**

**19. In what ways do people scoff at the gospel? What should be our response when people reject the gospel we proclaim to them?**

**20. In study #1, you asked what needed to change so you could venture out as God's missionary. This week, ask who needs you to preach the gospel to them? What approach needs to be taken that will enable them to hear and understand it?**

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<sup>7</sup> Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-33-god-who-keeps-his-promise-acts-1313-41>