



History is His Story

Acts 13:16-41

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**This original sermon was not written by A.I.*

We've been going through the book of Acts in our series titled, "Church Afire!" Today we're looking at Acts 13:16-41. This is the Apostle Paul's first missionary journey. At the beginning of Ch. 13, Paul is still called Saul, but starting from Ch. 13, his name is changed to Paul. There is no explanation given, but I think God changed his name to separate him from his anti-Christian past. Out of God's mercy, Saul was pulled from his disastrous past and given a new life, a new purpose on a new path, and a new name.

God giving a new name is something we see a number of times in the Bible. Is. 62:2 says, "...You shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give" (ESV). Rev. 2:17 says, "to the one who conquers... I will give ... a new name written on the stone..." A new name from the Lord signals transformation; a fresh start; redemption; a new life; a new identity derived from God; and triumph over sin. A new name is God's way of separating his redeemed people from their sinful past. More than that, it separates the people of God from the evil of the world. A new name is God saying, "this one is set apart as my own."

Let's look at the scripture. As I said, this is Paul's first missionary journey. Right now, he is in Pisidian Antioch, which is near Yalvac in modern Turkey. In Paul's time, this was a Roman colony in the province of Galatia. There Paul preaches a sermon that connects the history of Israel directly to Jesus.

I invite you to turn to Acts 13:16-41.

Acts 13:16-41.

16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! 17 The God of the people of Israel **chose** our ancestors; **he made** the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power **he led them out** of that country; 18 for about forty years **he endured** their conduct in the wilderness; 19 and **he overthrew** seven nations in Canaan, **giving their land** to his people as their inheritance. 20 All this took about 450 years.

"After this, God **gave them judges** until the time of Samuel the prophet. 21 Then the people asked for a king, and **he gave them Saul** son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years. 22 **After removing Saul, he made David their king.** God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'

23 "From this man's descendants **God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus**, as he promised. 24 Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel.

25 As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

26 "Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, **it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.** 27 The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him **they fulfilled the words of the prophets** that are read every Sabbath.

28 Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. 29 When **they had carried out all that was written about him**, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. 30 But **God raised him** from the dead, 31 and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

32 “We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors 33 he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

“ ‘You are my son;
today I have become your father.’

34 God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said,

“ ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’

35 So it is also stated elsewhere:

“ ‘You will not let your holy one see decay.’

36 “Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. 37 But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

38 “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. 40 Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

41 “ ‘Look, you scoffers,
wonder and perish,
for I am going to do something in your days
that you would never believe,
even if someone told you.’”

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ac 13:16–41.

The Word of God for the people of God.

History is His Story

I’ve titled this message “History is His Story” because Paul retells the story of the Israelites as if it was written by God’s own hand from the very beginning. Look at how Paul very intentionally and repeatedly places God as the One responsible for every turning point in Israel’s history, all the way to the coming of Christ, to his crucifixion, and to his being resurrected from the dead. So, there are at least fifteen times where Paul places God as the Architect of Israel’s history all the way through to the resurrection of Christ.

Beyond that, Paul finishes in a way that tells us that God is the architect of all human history, which unfolds through Jesus, the savior of the world. And there are two tracks for the course of human history: one track leads to justification and eternal life for those who believe in Jesus. The other track leads to destruction ending in judgment for those who reject Christ. God controls the outcome of both tracks. If you believe in Jesus, how good is it to know that God is writing your life story and weaving it into his own story?

The Master Architect at Work

First, let's walk through the Scripture to see how the Master Architect works. God's work in Israel's history pulls in all human history. Starting in vs. 17, Paul said, "the God of Israel chose our ancestors." It was God's choice. He personally picked out Abraham and chose him to be the father of not just the Israelites, but of many nations. God came down from heaven and started the path that would lead to Christ over thousands of years through Israel, but he left a little Easter egg in Abraham— saying, "I will make you a father of a multitude of nations." So, God had all of us in mind from the very beginning.

God's Gift of Children

Vs. 17b says, "He made the people prosper in Egypt." God was responsible for the growth of his chosen people while they were slaves in a foreign land. Ps. 127:3 says, "children are a gift from the Lord." God, as the Master Architect of human history is the giver and sustainer of all life, and children are his gift. If you have children, never lose sight that they are truly a gift from God. It doesn't matter what they do or what they've done, keep the baseline that they are a gift from God— never stop speaking that blessing over them. If you are struggling to have children, turn to God and ask him— God is the giver of good gifts. Amen.

God Frees from Slavery into a Promised Land

Continuing, Vs. 17c says, "He led them out of Egypt" with mighty power. Israel's freedom from slavery was by God's own mighty hand. Ps. 34:22 says, "the Lord will rescue his servants; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned." Praise God, the Master Architect of all human history steps in and rescues us without condemnation when we need rescuing!

Vs. 18 says, "he endured" their conduct in the desert for 40 years. Their survival in the desert came by the patience and grace of God alone, so that his path to reconciliation for the whole world would continue through his chosen people. 2 Cor. 5:19 speaks to us in the same way, saying, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them." The God of history rescues us and erases all our wrongdoing.

In vs. 19, "he overthrew" seven nations. Their military conquest came by God's hand, not their own. 1 Sam. 17:47 says, "the battle belongs to the Lord." Our battle belongs to the Lord. Your battle belongs to the Lord. God fights for his people; his will cannot be thwarted. He turns history for the sake of his people.

In vs. 19b, "[he gave] their land to his people." The Lord gifted the Israelites with their land and settled them into it. A promised land is not only a promise to Israel, but also a promise for all of us. In John 14, Jesus said let not your heart be troubled, I am going to prepare a place for you. The Lord will guide us to our heavenly land. Amen?

God Ordains All Leadership

God gives a land to call home, and he ordains all leadership. In vs. 20, "God gave them judges." He called and installed Israel's leadership for them. It is God who places leaders in authority. Jesus said to Pilate before he was crucified, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." Even evil rulers must answer to God for their power.

In vs. 21, “he gave them Saul” when they asked for a king. Israel’s request for a king was a rejection of God as their king, so the Lord gave them a wicked king first as the fruit of their rebellious behavior, while still ensuring that his path to the Messiah would remain. Evil leadership is not outside of God’s sovereign control. He bends the wicked heart for his will to continue on. Vs. 22 says, “after he removed Saul.” It was God alone who removed wicked Saul from his throne. Dan. 2:21 says, “God deposes kings and raises up others.” God is the true ruler of all the earth, and all rulers, kings, and governors must give an account for what God has given to them. At the name of Jesus every knee will bow.

The Promised Savior Comes through King David

In vs. 22b, “he made David their King.” Despite Israel’s rejection of their true king, the Lord established the Messiah’s line of descent through King David, a descendant of Judah. Even 900 years before King David, The Lord promised that the line of Judah would bring forth the Messiah (Gen. 49:5). God aligns history with his will for our sake. And in vs. 23, from David, “God brought to Israel the Savior Jesus.” God *brought* the Savior Jesus to Israel.

In vs. 26, “it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent.” Sent by whom? Sent by God. God has sent the message of salvation through his son Jesus to all of us. Paul was speaking to unbelieving Jews and Gentiles alike to prove that God is architect of all human history.

Jesus Fulfills All the Long-Proclaimed Prophecies of the Messiah

In vs. 27, the people and rulers “fulfilled the words of the prophets” by condemning Jesus to death, and in vs. 29, “they carried out all that was written about him and took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb.” Paul makes a point that it was God who foretold through the prophets hundreds of years prior all that would happen to the Messiah. Even the very actions of those who crucified Jesus were a part of God’s story of reconciliation for the world.

The Resurrection of Jesus and All Believers in the World

Finally, in vs. 30, “God raised him from the dead.” God can raise the dead because he is the Author and Finisher of all life. And even though we may die, we will be raised to life again if we believe in Jesus. 1 Cor. 15:52 says, “For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” Death is not above God.

History is God’s Own Story of Reconciliation for the World

So, we can see throughout his sermon that Paul paints the whole picture of Israel’s history as God’s very own story of reconciliation for the whole world, culminating with the resurrection of Jesus. Paul is not only giving an account of Israel’s history up to the Messiah, but he is also saying that God orchestrated the entire thing from beginning to end. And he is preaching it that way because God is truly in control of human history. But for what? Well, look at the way he finishes the message.

In vss. 38-39 he said, “Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. 39 Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.”

All of Israel's history was for the sole purpose of God sending his Son into the world. Jesus was sent to die on the cross and be resurrected on the third day so that forgiveness of sins may come to all who believe. God's work throughout history is all about his story of reconciliation. His story of justification. His story of redemption. God moves all human history under his story of Christ. We might think that history moves along as humans make decisions— no! History moves according to God's plan of salvation through Christ.

The Scripture says God has done all of these things— he chose a people, made a nation, fought for them, gave them a place to live, provided everything for them, patiently put up with them and their rejection of him, gave them a king after his own heart, and sent his own Son to die and be raised to life again SO THAT through Jesus, the message of forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in the world, and all who believe in him will be set free from sin.

Life is a History Book of God's Reconciliation for All Who Believe

That is the story of God's history. Redemption is the story that God is weaving into our history, into the lives of each and every one of us. You may not see it this way just yet, but your own life is a history book of God's story of reconciliation for you. When you look back on your life, you're going to notice that the parts that take on eternal significance are the parts where God came into your life and moved things on your behalf. In the end, you'll be able to point to God just like Paul did and paint your own history as God's story of redemption for you. If you believe in Christ.

What Side of History Are You On?

Paul's sermon finishes in a way that we cannot overlook. In vs. 40, he said, Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you..." then he quotes from the prophet Habakkuk, " 'Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you.'" This is the part of Paul's sermon that ties all human history into what God did in Israel's history.

Habakkuk was prophesying a warning about God's judgment coming to all who have rejected God— his judgment comes through evil people and their leadership. It is a harsh warning, but Paul says it applies to every person in all of history. You can either accept God's loving leadership or fall under the judgment of evil leadership. Please, accept the grace of God given through Christ, don't reject his offer of salvation! This resurrection day, put yourself on the track to eternal life.

My friends, there are two tracks that God has made in human history. One track is the path of redemption and eternal life through Jesus Christ. The other track is death.

My question to you is, what side of history do you want to be on?

Three Applications

On this Easter Sunday, here are three application points from this sermon:

1. Step Into Your New Identity in the Risen Christ

By the resurrection of Jesus Christ, you have been pulled into a divine story of reconciliation, justification, and redemption. Live in that new identity and leave the old identity that was shaped by sin and failure behind.

2. Trust That God Is Writing Your Story—even When You Don't See It

God is the architect of all human history, and he has written your story into his story. Since God is in control you can trust that your future is secure in his hands.

3. Choose the Right Side of History—Believe and Receive Life

There are two tracks: one leads to justification and eternal life through Jesus, the other to death. Easter is a call to respond to the resurrection of Christ. Don't wait, respond today and put your life on the right track. Amen.

Let's pray.

Study Questions
Read Acts 13:16-41

Observation Questions:

1. What repeated actions does Paul attribute directly to God throughout Israel's history in this passage?
2. According to Paul, how do the events of Israel's history lead up to Jesus?
3. Did God originally intend the Messiah to be only Israel's Messiah? How do you know?
4. In verses 38–41, what two different responses and outcomes does Paul place before his listeners (the two tracks in human history, per the sermon)?

Interpretation Questions:

1. Why do you think Paul retells Israel's history by emphasizing God as the one directing every major turning point?
2. What does the resurrection of Jesus mean in this sermon, especially in connection with David's body decaying but Christ not seeing decay?
3. Look at some of the ways that God's work in world history mirrors his work in Israel's history. What does that tell us about our future?

Application Questions:

1. In what ways do you still struggle to live out of your old identity instead of your new identity in Christ?
2. Where in your life do you need to trust that God is still writing your story, even if the situation feels confusing or unfinished?
3. How does the resurrection give you hope in an area where things seem dead, broken, or beyond repair?
4. What does it look like for you personally to choose the path of life in Christ with greater faith, boldness, and obedience this Easter season?
5. Given the two-track theory, how should you adjust the way you view life to align with how God is shaping human history?