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PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY
(Continued)

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 50
ACTS 13:14-21

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ACTS 13:14-21 "But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. 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. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. 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. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years."

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." When Paul and Barnabas came to Antioch in Pisidia, they had to cross some very rugged mountain terrain. Antioch in Pisidia was a trade center and the Roman road linking Tarsus and Ephesus ran right through Antioch. Here they found their first opportunity to witness on the mainland. They went to the Jewish synagogue and found a group of people there on the Sabbath. We will see that Paul was ready with a sermon, and his main theme will be the fact that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Jesus Christ of the New Testament. Before Paul and Barnabas would speak they would listen to the usual Sabbath service.

ACTS 13:15 "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." The Scripture lesson was given and since they saw that Paul and Barnabas were Jews, they wanted to hear from them. They were given permission to speak.

ACTS 13:16 "Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience." This Hebrew word "Stood up" carried the thought that Paul stood up quickly and confidently. Paul knew that he had a message that they needed to hear, and he was eager to give it. In that time it was customary for a speaker to hold up his hand in order to get attention. This Paul did and then began with a title--"Men of Israel". So his first salutation was to the Jews. Then he said, "Ye that fear God" and this is a title for Gentiles who had been converted to Judaism. "Give audience" were words he used very much like I say to you, "May I have your attention please". It is similar to Shakespear's words in "Julius Caesar" when he said, "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears".

In these next verses Paul is going to present Jesus Christ as the God of Israel. We are going to see the influence of the message of Stephen which we studied in Acts 7, which message resulted in the stoning of Stephen, as Paul stood by and looked on. Stephen died, but Paul never got away from that sermon and here he is going to use a similar approach. Stephen told the Sanhedrin that Jesus Christ was the God of Israel, and that the one they had crucified was the Saviour of the world. Paul is going to use this very same approach, and it goes to show that Paul had become a very brave man for he knew that he might be stoned just like Stephen was.

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." This is one of the truly great verses in the Book of the Acts. "The God of this people" is Jesus Christ. In your King James version the Hebrew word "Elohim" is always translated God. It is a plural word and it always refers to the essence of God. In your King James version the Hebrew word "Jehovah" is singular and is always translated Lord. It can refer to God the Father, or to Jesus Christ, and sometimes to the Holy Spirit. The only God we will ever see is the Lord Jesus Christ. When your Bible says, "Abraham believed in the Lord" it is referring to Jesus Christ. Then Paul said He "Chose our fathers". It means Jesus Christ chose those who believed and their salvation was perpetuated forever. Once they were saved, they were saved forever. This chose is aorist tense and middle voice, and the middle voice means that God was benefited by choosing them. The unique beginning of the Jewish race is that their race was founded on regeneration. No other race had this distinction. Abraham was converted and he became a Jew, but Nahor, his brother, was not converted and he remained a Gentile. Isaac was converted and was a Jew, but his brother, Ishmael, was not converted, and was a Gentile. The same is true of Jacob and Esau. "Chose our fathers" is another way of saying salvation by grace.

"Exalted the people" is another term that speaks of the grace of God. You see, they began down in Egypt as 75 souls and 400 years later they had become two million. So here was a nation in slavery, yet God exalted them and made them a great nation even against the odds of slavery.

1 PETER 5:5-6 "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" These two verses illustrate this truth. When men humble themselves, then God exalts them. He did this very thing in Egypt.

He exalted them is an aorist--active--indicative and means that God himself did the exalting. So you see, Paul is here illustrating the meaning of the grace of God.

Another illustration of this is given in JOSHUA 3:7 "And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee." Joshua had been the under-study of Moses for forty years, now God is ready to lift Joshua up and magnify him. It is a causative stem and means that God will cause him to be magnified. This verse says that just as Jesus was with Moses so he is going to be with Joshua. If it had not been for Jesus Christ, you would never have heard of Joshua. So you see, the principle is this--it all depends on who and what the Lord is, never on who and what we are. The grace of God is the thing that makes the difference. So the principle is this--Believe in Christ, learn his will for your life, and leave it to him as to whether you will be exalted or not.

God exalted the whole Jewish nation for a purpose and they got fat-headed and legalistic and they had to be disciplined. Under grace God exalts people, and under legalism people exalt themselves. But remember, you can't be truly exalted except by God. From 75 people to two million people in 400 years--that's the work of God. This is the miracle of God's grace and he did it while they were in slavery.

The word used for "dwelt" here is a noun in the dative case and it means a temporary residence. In other words, they just dwelt temporarily in Egypt, for God had a better home for them.

1 KINGS 6:1 "And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the Lord." This verse says it was a period of 480 years. Please notice here that Paul is going to say that it was a period of 573 years. One must be wrong. Here is an apparent contradiction.

In verse 20 Paul says the judges lasted for a period of 450 years. Then in verse 21 he says King Saul reigned 40 years and in verse 22 David reigned 40 years. Then three years into the reign of Solomon makes a total of 573 years. Is this an error in the Bible? No, the explanation is this--When Paul was preaching here and giving these dates, he is taking into account the years when the Jews were in apostasy as follows--

Judges 3:8 says they were in apostasy 8 years.
 Judges 3:14 says they were in apostasy 18 more years.
 Judges 4:3 says they were in apostasy 20 more years.
 Judges 6:1 says they were in apostasy 7 more years.
 Judges 13:1 says they were in apostasy 40 more years.

Now when you add these together, you have 93 years and this added to the 480 years spoken of in 1 Kings 6:1 gives exactly the same number of years Paul referred to in his sermon. So just remember, the Bible never makes a mistake. If there is a mistake, it is a mistake in our understanding or interpretation.

The principle is this--when God forgives our sins he remembers them against us no more, and even erases the years of our sinning. Paul included those years in his figures. But God never does.

So verse 17 is a great grace verse, it is God's grace all the way. Regeneration is the story of the grace of God.

ACTS 13:18 "And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness." That phrase "suffered he their manners" is a poor translation. It really means this, "God put up with their bad manners". He put up with their lack of faith when they sent the spies into the land and refused to go in at once and possess the land. He put up with their bad manners when they murmured for water, and when they cried for the flesh pots of Egypt, and when they complained about the Manna. Manna means "What is it?" and for 40 years they called the food God had given them "What is it? What is it?". It was the most perfect food that people ever ate in the history of the world and if someone could duplicate it and put it on the shelves in the supermarket today, he could make millions off this food. But for 40 years, "God put up with their bad manners".

ACTS 13:19 "And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot." At Kadesh Barnea they sent in the spies, then listened to the ten and their report of fear and failed to hear the report of Caleb and Joshua. When those reports were made they cried all night. I call it "Operation Crybaby". But God went on before them and drove out those seven nations that were in the land--The Canaanites, The Hittites, The Hivites, The Perizzites, The Girgashites, The Amorites, and The Jebusites. God kept his word. He always does.

ACTS 13:20 "And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet." Judges were like dictators, or kings, whom God raised up to carry these stubborn people through very hard days.

ACTS 13:21 "And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years." Up to this time they were a Theocracy, and God ruled them directly. But they saw other nations around them with kings and they wanted a king so they could be like other nations.

Let us read about it in 1 SAMUEL 8:5-9 "And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them." You see, God will never override the volition of people. He never has and he never will. When people would ask them, "Where is your king?" they would say, "Well, Jesus Christ is our King and he is a spiritual being and you can't see him." They got tired of saying that and they wanted a king as a status symbol, so they could be like other nations. They wanted a king in the form of a man so they could say, "There is our king. Isn't he a good looking man?"

So we read, "God gave them a king" and the word gave means that God acquiesced to their desire. It was not the direct will of God, but the permissive will of God.

You see wanting a king so they could have a status symbol is very much like Christians today who want a status symbol--it may be the second blessing, or speaking in tongues, or an emotional experience, or some strange miracle. You see, it is so easy to substitute something like this for the true knowledge of the Word of God.

King Saul led the nation down, but God kept on loving the nation just the same. So you see, this is the theme of the sermon Paul preached that day in the Synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. And some of them are going to catch the point and some will be converted. We will continue the sermon in our next study.