

A Study in Acts

Chapter Thirteen – First Journey of Paul



ACTS 13:6-12:

In our previous lesson, we began the first journey of Paul. It began in Antioch of Syria and from there; Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark went down to Seleucia. From Seleucia, they caught a ship to Cyprus and landed at Salamis. They would share the Gospel of Jesus as Christ in the synagogues of the Jews.

It is here, that we will begin this lesson, as they continue to work on the isle of Cyprus. As with the previous lesson, we will look at locations and the events that transpire in each, then summarizing the important points at each location.

Text #1:

Acts 13:6-8 “Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name *was* Bar-Jesus, ⁷ who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸ But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.”

Paphos: This is the Roman capital of the island of Cyprus, and found on the far western end of the isle. This is a newer city built by Augustus about ten miles north of the old Greek city.

Cyprus is extremely mountainous on the northern shores and western half of the island, and its character is defined by two high mountain ranges. One of which virtually blocks the western shores, except by the southern coastal area.

Bar-Jesus (Elymas – Greek – which may be a transliteration of the Aramaic ‘*wise*’): His Hebrew name renders ‘*son of Jesus*’, which was a common name and variance of Joshua.

Now first, we need to appreciate that this man, who is labeled by Luke as a sorcerer and a false prophet is a Jew.

A sorcerer is one who claims to have supernatural powers or knowledge (in his case, both). The significance of him being a Jew is that the Law of Moses strictly forbids this practice along with anything similar (witchcraft, soothsayers, divination, magic, etc.); see **Deuteronomy 18:9-14**.

This testifies, even before we have to deal with his obvious character issues, that he is someone who does not care for established authority and is only after the benefits of influence to be gained in keeping the proconsul’s ear.

Sergius – Paulus: Barnabas and Saul would find the sorcerer with this Roman ruler of the isle, who Luke defines as intelligent. Along with being intelligent, he is likewise inquisitive and wants to hear from Barnabas and Saul.

A remarkable memorial was found in recent archaeology (1887), discovered in Rome on a boundary stone of Claudius his name is found, among others, as having been appointed (A.D. 47). After serving his three years as proconsul in Cyprus, he returned to Rome.

Elymas is recorded by Luke as withstanding Barnabas and Saul in order not to lose his powerful sway over this ruler.

Text #2:

Acts 13:9-12 “Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰ and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? ¹¹ And now,

indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.”

And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.”

Saul – Paul: If you had not noticed up to this point; in all the listings of Saul and Barnabas together, Barnabas is always listed first up to this point by Luke. After this statement in **verse 9**, Luke will now always list Paul first.

Saul is from the Hebrew and means, ‘*asked of God*’, and has a Greek counterpart, ‘*Saulos*’; while Paul is from the Greek, ‘*Paulos*’ (meaning – ‘to make to cease or desist’).

This is not a renaming of the Apostle to the Gentiles, as Luke accurately describes that he is also “**called Paul**”. Why it is noted here as the primary designation is not noted; probably for Theophilus, to whom the letter is written; however, it should be noted that Paul will also record this name for himself in all of his writings to come after this.

Filled with the Holy Spirit: The Spirit of God is always referred to as the vehicle, by which these who were chosen to reveal and act as Ambassador’s for Christ, engaged in the promotion of the Lord’s truth and the miracles that would confirm that word (**Mark 16:20**).

Paul would describe, in his own words, that the Gospel he preached was not according to man, but that it came by the revelation of Jesus Christ (**Galatians 1:11-12**). In addition, he would tell the Christians at Corinth, that the process of this work of the Spirit in revelation and demonstration was such that to those who would hear and believe; they would know the mind of Christ – **1 Corinthians 2:10-16**.

Luke not only reveals that Paul, as one of the Ambassadors of Christ, was filled with the Spirit of God, but that which was to follow was the power of the Lord and not of Paul.

Son of the Devil: We have already glimpsed into the character of this man by noting that he was a Jew; yet, openly practiced that which was forbidden to him by God. Paul now leaves little doubt as to the limits of his debauchery, with extreme expressions (“**full deceit and fraud**”; “**enemy of righteousness**”; “**perverting the straight ways of the Lord**”).

The term “**son of the Devil**” is especially noteworthy. This is not literal, in the sense of a physical father, but used in the sense that he is a willing servant of the Devil. This is the same use of this term as the Lord used when speaking to Jews who believed in Him, because their belief in Him was superficial because at heart they saw no need to truly trust His words; note:

John 8:44 “**You are of *your* father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *resources*, for he is a liar and the father of it.”**

There can be no doubt that Elymas is of this same caliber, and Paul is now going to demonstrate the difference between the false claims of this sorcerer and the true power of God to the Proconsul.

You Shall Be Blind: The power of God made this deceiver and false advisor of the Roman Governor blind, and having to be led around (an interesting play as he wanted to lead and is now having to be led). Many who read this focus on this event, and miss a very important statement by Luke.

“Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.”

The event of the demonstration of the power of God was paramount, but only in coordination with the teaching of Jesus as Christ! This is something that Paul would continue to teach concerning the Apostolic authority that He had been privileged to demonstrate; it was never intended to accomplish what Paul as an individual wanted, but instead, note:

2 Corinthians 13:10 “Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction.”

Summary of Paphos: As Barnabas and Saul came to Paphos, they crossed paths with the proconsul and a sorcerer who had been acting as his advisor. As the proconsul wanted to hear from Barnabas and Saul, the sorcerer withstood them.

Saul, who will now be called from this point forward, Paul openly denounced the sorcerer and struck him blind by the power of the Lord. This would give cause for the proconsul to believe the words concerning the teaching of the Lord.