

Acts 13:1-12 Chapter Study

- I. The Church At Jerusalem Chs. 1-7
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1. The leaders at Antioch 13:1-3

¹ Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

The focus has shifted away from Jerusalem now to the thriving church in Syrian Antioch – the Roman Empire's 3rd largest city.

It was an important commercial hub for the Eastern Mediterranean and the perfect launching point for outreach.

God had brought together a fantastic leadership team there.

As we've already seen, **Barnabas** was a fantastic encourager and facilitator of ministry.

He had a sterling gift of recognizing the calling of others and helping them find a place of fruitful ministry.

Saul of course was the future Paul whose power in preaching was surpassed only by his zeal to take the Gospel where it had never been before.

Just as Barnabas was a nickname, **Simeon** had a nickname = Niger; a Roman word meaning "black."

Many scholars believe this Simeon is the same as **Simon of Cyrene** who was compelled to carry Jesus' cross, and whose sons later turn up as leaders in the Church. [Mark 15:21]

Cyrene was a port in North Africa.

Lucius was also from Cyrene, though we know nothing else about him.

Manaen came from the wealthy class & had been raised with Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great.

This was the Herod who'd executed John the Baptist, which means by this time he was a senior saint.

These men served together, each using his gifts to lead the church.

God has blessed us with a fantastic leadership team here at Calvary Chapel of Oxnard.

We have some wonderfully gifted workers.

When visitors remark on how great our church is, I always attribute it to the grace of God in bringing such a wonderful group of people together. We are blessed!

² As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them,

they sent them away.

What made the leaders at Antioch so effective was their perspective on ministry.

Though their *activity* was among people of Antioch, they saw it *as service to the Lord*.

And their focus was God's glory, not their own advancement – as proven by their fasting.

People who use leadership as a mean of personal advancement do not usually deprive themselves of food.

Satisfying self is the purpose of all they do, so they're not about to go hungry. That the leaders at Antioch fasted meant they were careful to keep self under so that the Lord could flow through them.

As they gave themselves to the Lord, He made it clear, probably through a word of Prophecy, that Barnabas & Saul were to be sent out.

So they fasted some more, laid hands on & prayed for them, then sent them off.

2. Cyprus 13:4-12

⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

From Antioch they would have sailed in a small riverboat down the Orontes River to Seleucia which was the main seaport for the area.

There they boarded a larger vessel and sailed west to the island of Cyprus, Barnabas' home.

⁵ And when they arrived in Salamis,

On the east coast of Cyprus -

they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John [Mark] as their assistant.

While Jews generally didn't like the sea & avoided marine occupations like sailing, they were extremely skilled in trade, so they tended to locate in ports & commercial centers like Antioch, Seleucia, and Salamis.

When Barnabas & Saul arrived in these places, they went to the synagogues and preached the Gospel because they knew the Jews would be the best prepared to hear it.

After all, Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah.

Barnabas' nephew, John Mark went along with them as an assistant, a schlepper of luggage, an attendant whose task was to assist in whatever way they needed.

⁶ Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos,

On the *opposite end*, the western coast of the island -

they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus,

Son of Joshua; remember – “Joshua-Yeshua” was a common name at that time.

This guy was a fraud, a magician who played on the superstitions of others in order to make a living.

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.

Sergius Paulus was the Roman appointed governor of the Island of Cyprus.

Bar-Jesus was one of his attendants, a counselor who advised him.

Many people of the Roman Empire were deeply superstitious.

Because of that, not a few rulers included in their board of counselors diviners, fortune-tellers, astrologers & spiritual prognosticators who used occultic means to advise them.

The *grand vizier* of the Aladdin story was such a person. *Merlin* was Arthur's counselor.

Bar-Jesus was Sergius Paulus' spiritual counselor.

But when Paulus heard about Barnabas & Saul, he was sharp enough to realize their message was different, and summoned them.

The Romans were always on the lookout for developments that could effect the Pax Romana – the peace and status quo.

They knew the volatile nature of religious devotion. So when Paulus heard about how these 2 guys from Antioch were stirring a spiritual awakening, he was all over it like stripes on plaid.

But more than just doing his job as governor – he wanted to know if there was any truth in the message Barnabas & Saul preached. He was hungry for 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.

Bar-Jesus was called "Elymas [el-lumas] = 'The Enlightened'.

He knew the truth of the Gospel spelled certain doom for the deception he'd we've round the governor, so he did his best to counter the preaching of Barnabas & Saul.

⁹ 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.

Paul did not just blow up at this guy and cuss him out.

V. 8 makes it clear that Bar-Jesus *kept on trying* to counter what the apostles were saying.

He was interrupting & resisting in a rude manner.

When it was obvious to Paul that Sergius Paulus' attention was being hindered by the sorcerer's interruptions, he spoke up with a rebuke.

Bar-Jesus was controlled by a spirit of deceit which could not overcome the power of the truth.

Paul knew this was the moment in which the reality of that ought to be manifest in the visible world, and announced Bar-Jesus' blindness.

When the influence of Bar-Jesus was divinely removed, the governor came to faith in Christ.

But Luke wants to make it clear it wasn't just the judgment of Elymas that convinced Sergius Paulus; what blew his mind and resulted in faith was the preaching of the Gospel.

The word "*astonished*" is literally – '*blown away!*'

Before we move on, note that in v. 9 Luke introduces Saul's new name of *Paul*.

'Saul' is Hebrew & means "desired." Paul is Latin, and means "little."

Now that Saul has embarked on his career as a missionary, moving around the Roman world, it's fitting he take a Roman name.

He understood the principle that when taking the Gospel to people, you *identify with them*.

That's what Jesus did when He was baptized in the Jordan; though sinless, He came to identify with humanity.

What's interesting is that Luke refers to Saul's name change to Paul in the story of Elymas.

Elymas was a lofty title meaning *The Enlightened One*. It was a claim to *greatness*.

Paul means *little, small*.

Paul made no claim to greatness. He knew he was just a little guy – but he had a great, big God!

And when it came to a showdown between Elymas & Paul; the Enlightened One & Little – Small smoked Big.

Here's the lesson: <i>Those who are little in the Lord will always be vastly bigger & greater than the great ones of this world.</i>
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