

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 13:1-12 | Session 33 | Saul, Paul, and the Message of Grace

Our last two sessions concerned a famine throughout the world. Barnabas and Saul were sent from Antioch to Jerusalem to take money to the *ekklesia* (Jewish assembly, called church in the passage). Last time we ended with Barnabas and Saul returning to Antioch, bringing along with them *John, whose surname was Mark* (12:25). We continue now in chapter 13.

Verse 1—

There were in the church that was at Antioch. A reminder to always put the word **church** (*ekklesia*) in context. **Certain prophets and teachers.** Not yet being in the dispensation of grace, the Jewish assemblies still had **prophets**, used by God to proclaim His message. But also, **teachers**, and the verse lists five men who filled those roles, **Barnabas and Saul** being among them. This may refer to two groups, prophets, and teachers. Some scholars argue that the first three were prophets, and the last two (Manaen and Saul) are teachers. But in 11:26, it appears Barnabas taught along with Saul. And Saul (later Paul) certainly revealed a prophetic message. So, we can only speculate. Nevertheless, these positions were *manifestations of the Holy Spirit*. (See Acts 11:27; 1 Corinthians 12:28,29; Ephesians 4:11; see my notes in 1 Corinthians 12:28,29 for more detail on this). Additionally, these men were from diverse backgrounds. Manaen for example had high contacts for he had been **brought up with Herod the tetrarch**, that is, Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist and treated the Lord so shamefully at His trial. The KJV adds a note that Manaen may have been Herod's *foster-brother*.

Verse 2—

The word **ministered** in Greek is *leitourgeo*, from which we get the word *liturgy*. That term is used more in catholic or ecumenical churches today. In the Jewish sense it certainly means service in the Temple. But here it most likely just means they served in the assembly; that is in the prophesying and teaching. **And fasted.** Fasting was a Jewish tradition. It is mentioned on rare occasion in the N.T. Jewish people fasted for various reasons: mourning, repentance, for the sins of others. But pagans also fasted for many of the same reasons. Fasting is not commanded for those in the body of Christ, and we should be careful not to make a doctrine for the church out of an historical account. **I have called them**, this was a prophetic call given during a prophetic dispensation. We don't need this kind of *call* to enter the ministry today. The church in Antioch was instructed by the **Holy Ghost to Separate me Barnabas and Saul**. Today a church can and should choose (separate) men and women for the ministry.

Verses 3,4,5—

We have, what is commonly called, *the first missionary journey*. Barnabas and Saul are sent away by the Antioch church to **preach the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews**. **John** was with them as their **minister**. This is different Greek word than the *ministered* we saw in verse 2. Here it means a *subordinate role*. We would say *an assistant*. We again have to presume their initial preaching was the Apostolic word, or what we have been calling the national Gospel to Israel; that is, the Gospel of the Kingdom. But in this chapter, we are going to see the beginning of the transition we have been talking about for so long.

Verses 6,7,8—

When they had gone through the isle, the word **through** can be translated as *walk*; apparently, they traveled by foot 150 miles across the island, so some time has passed and the details of the journey of, most likely, several days. **They found**, that is they came upon **a Jew** who was a **sorcerer**, and a **false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus**; literally son of Joshua (a common name). This false prophet was

with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus. What it means he was **with** him is uncertain. Maybe this false prophet (whose name is **Elymas** was paid to be a spiritual advisor of some sort. Nevertheless, when Saul and Barnabas arrived, **Elymas sought to turn Sergius Paulus from the faith**.

An interesting historical note is that a stone with the inscription L. Sergius Paullus was found on Cyprus. The name being rare, it is possible this is the same man of our passage. Later (verse 14), Saul and Barnabas will sail north and enter Antioch in Pisidia (not the same Antioch where they were sent from). History records another Sergius Paulus there who was a senator. Perhaps this was the son of Sergius Paulus in Paphos? Could it be Sergius Paulus of Paphos referred Barnabas and Saul, which is the reason they head in that direction? **Sergius Paulus** was a Gentile which also could account for the welcoming reception Barnabas and *Paul* received from the Gentiles when they arrived and preached in Antioch of Pisidia (vs. 42).

Verse 9—

It is quite possible, and this is my belief, but obviously cannot be proven one hundred percent, that this is the moment, when Saul is now referred to as **Paul**, is when he begins preaching the Gospel of the uncircumcision, that is, Salvation is by grace through faith, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works (Ephesians 2:8,9). From here on out, Saul will never be referred to again, only **Paul**. It is at this point **Paul** becomes the leading figure, notice verse 13; **Paul and his company**.

We know from Ephesians 3:3 that at some point, Jesus Christ revealed a mystery to Paul. This mystery was not made known in other ages (Eph. 3:5). In other words, it was something completely new. Ephesians 3:6 Paul tells us what the mystery is; *That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel*. This mystery was *from the beginning of the world...hid in God*.

At some point the gospel of grace began to be preached. Up to now in our study through Acts, we haven't seen it. All we have seen is the national gospel, the gospel of the circumcision; that is believe in Messiah, repent, and be baptized.

At this point the mystery is being revealed and the next several verses seem to show us a *type* of what is going on.

Verse 10—

Now, as Paul, Elymas is confronted. Paul calls him *subtle, mischievous, a child of the devil, enemy of righteousness, and perverter of the right ways of the Lord*.

Verses 11,12—

Thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season...and there fell on him a mist and a darkness; he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Could this incident be a picture of what will happen to Israel? That is Elymas is a sort of *type of Israel* here. And Sergius Paulus **the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord**.

We know that Israel is blinded for a season. It will take the Great Tribulation for them to finally look up and say, *Blessed his he who comes in the name of the Lord*. Until that time God is offering salvation to all men, women, boys and girls. Salvation for anyone who believes on the Lord Jesus and everlasting life comes simply as a gift and not of works.

It is rather uncanny that Saul's name is changed during this first missionary journey, and as we will see next week, the individual gospel of salvation is going to be voiced for the very first time.