

Acts Chapter 13

Chapter 13 marks a turning point in Acts. The first 12 chapters focus on Peter; the remaining chapters revolve around Paul. With Peter, the emphasis is the Jewish church in Jerusalem and Judea. With Paul; the focus is the spread of the entire church throughout the Roman world, which began at the church in Antioch.

Acts 13:1 "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul."

Three factors demonstrate the shift that takes place in chapter 13.

- (1) The spread of the gospel in the earlier chapters was often the result of persecution. Now it becomes the result of a program, missions.
- (2) As this evangelism spreads to the Gentiles the focus passes from Peter to Paul.
- (3) Likewise, the base of operations passes from Jerusalem to "Antioch" of Syria.

Antioch was the capital of the province of Syria and the third largest city within the Empire, being surpassed only by Rome and Alexandria. It was a cosmopolitan and commercial center.

"Prophets": These had a significant role in the apostolic church (see notes on 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 2:20). They were preachers of God's Word and were responsible in the early years of the church to instruct local congregations.

On some occasions, they received new revelation that was of a practical nature (11:28; 21:10), a function that ended with the cessation of the temporary sign gifts. Their office was also replaced by pastor-teachers and evangelists (see note on Eph. 4:11).

"Simeon that was called Niger": "Niger" means black. He may have been a dark-skinned man, an African, or both. No direct evidence exists to equate him with Simon of Cyrene (Mark 15:21).

The list of men who are leaders in the church at Antioch represent a wide spectrum within society, from "Simon called Niger" (the black), to "Manaen," the boyhood companion of Herod Antipas. Men from Cyrene had begun the ministry among the Gentiles in Antioch (11:20).

"Lucius of Cyrene": Not the Lucius of (Rom. 16:21), or Luke, the physician and author of Acts.

"Which had been brought up" can be translated "foster-brother". Manaen was reared in Herod the Great's household.

"Herod the tetrarch": Herod Antipas, the Herod of the gospel (see note on Matt. 14:1).

It seems at this time, that there was a very active church in Antioch. Prophets and teachers differ, in that the prophets foretell of future events, and teachers are speaking of things that need to be

learned that have already happened. This church at Antioch seems to be operating in the fullness of the fivefold ministry.

The name Barnabas means son of prophecy. Barnabas was a Levite. He was also a native of Cyprus. He was an early convert to Christianity. He seems to be closely associated with Saul (see note on 4:36).

About all we know of Simeon that was called Niger, is right here. His name indicates that he was a Jew. The other two here, we know nothing about, except that they grew up with Herod and Saul.

Verses 2-4: The commissioning of “Barnabas and Saul” for this missionary endeavor was the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit most likely spoke through one of the prophets since there were prophets within this group and that was the usual means of communicating the Spirit’s message (1 Cor. Chapter 14).

This sending forth was the work of the Spirit rather than the church. From the text, it appears that both “sent them.” But the Greek words are different. Indeed, they were “sent forth” (ekpempthentes) by the Holy Spirit, whereas they were “released” (apelusan) by the church.

This word denotes a releasing from any tie, whether contract or relationship, such as the contract of marriage through divorce. The church released them for their ministry at Antioch, but the Holy Spirit sent them.

Acts 13:2 "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

“Ministered”: This is from a Greek word which in Scripture describes priestly service. Serving in leadership in the church is an act of worship to God, and consists of offering spiritual sacrifices to Him, including prayer, oversight of the flock, plus preaching and teaching the Word.

“Fasted”: This is often connected with vigilant, passionate prayer (Nehemiah 1:4; Psalm 35:13; Dan. 9:3; Matt. 17:21; Luke 2:37), and includes either a loss of desire for food or the purposeful setting aside of eating to concentrate on spiritual issues (see note on Matt. 6:16-17).

Here we see a special call on Saul and Barnabas to go out as missionaries. I have found that the Lord speaks to us the most when we have set ourselves aside from all the earthly things for a few days and just pray.

God will not interrupt your favorite television program to speak to you. I have found that the Lord is still speaking to his people. We are just not listening. God has not changed, we have. Too many people give God too little of their time. Those whom God calls to work for Him, must make time for God to speak to them.

Acts 13:3 "And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid [their] hands on them, they sent [them] away."

“Laid their hands on them” (see note on 6:6).

“Ordination”: This act is the symbolic laying of hands on a candidate for the ministry, after he has been examined by the church and it has been verified that he is called by God and equipped to provide leadership for the church.

Following ordination, he is generally recognized to lead the church in ministry, to determine its soundness of doctrine, to administer its ordinances, and to educate its adherents. Ordination does not imply the communication of Power or authority but rather recognizes the minister’s being called and gifted by God.

In the Old Testament, God’s servants were often anointed with oil before undertaking a work to which He had called them. The practice of laying on of hands was a biblical act of identification and accreditation and was practiced by New Testament Christians in the initiation of ministries (6:6; 13:1-3). Jesus taught that all Christians are ordained to bear fruit and have their prayers answered (John 15:16. Num. 28:6; Acts 13:3; Mal. 3:10).

We see from this that even Saul and Barnabas needed extra power from God to undertake this missionary journey. Those who were earnestly praying and fasting were acting as agents of God when they laid hands on Saul and Barnabas. Their strength came from God and not man.

Acts 13:4 "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus."

“Seleucia”: This city served as the port for Antioch, some 16 miles away at the mouth of the Orontes River. It was like a suburb. This is truly a missionary journey, because they are sent forth by the Holy Ghost. Cyprus was an island. It was off the coast of Syria in the Mediterranean Sea. It also, was the native home of Barnabas, as we studied before.

“Cyprus” is a large island in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean, 60 miles from both the Syrian coast to the east and the Asia Minor coast to the north. The island is 140 miles long and 60 miles at its widest point. Though it has been ruled by the Phoenicians, Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, and Syrians, the ancient Mycenaean culture of southern Greece influenced Cypriot life more than the others. There was a large Jewish population there.

It was made into a Roman province in 58 B.C. Most of the references to Cyprus in the New Testament relate to Barnabas; all are found in Acts. When Barnabas led the new missionaries on their first journey, they traveled first through the island of Cyprus (13:4).

When Paul and Barnabas separated (15:39-41), Barnabas returned to Cyprus; Paul apparently never did. For that reason, Cyprus seldom enters into the narrative of Acts, even though churches had been established there since the early days of the church age (11:19).

Acts 13:5 "And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to [their] minister."

“Salamis”: The chief port and commercial center of Cyprus.

“Synagogues” (see note on 6:9). Paul established the custom of preaching to the Jews first whenever he entered a new city (verse 14:42; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19, 26; 19:8), because he had an open door as a Jew, to speak and introduce the gospel. Also, if he preached to Gentiles first, the Jews would never have listened to him.

“John to their minister” (see note on 12:12).

Salamis seemed to be a Jewish city, since the synagogues were mentioned. Saul would have been allowed to speak, since he was a Pharisee. It seems that the early Christians here were Jewish believers.

Acts 13:6 "And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name [was] Barjesus:"

“Paphos”: The capital of Cyprus and thus the seat of the Roman government. It also was a great center for the worship of Aphrodite (Venus), and thus a hotbed for all kinds of immorality.

“A false prophet ... Jew”: “Magician” originally carried no evil connotation, but later was used to describe all kinds of practitioners and dabblers in the occult. This magician put his knowledge to evil use (see note on 8:9).

This sorcerer had great power; the only problem was that this great power came from an evil source. Sorcerers of this day used astrology, and magic, and dark arts to convince the people. This has never changed. People are still consulting their horoscope, going to palm readers and practicing all sorts of sorcery. Sorcery is not of God, but is of Satan.

Satan has some limited power on this earth, but is not like Jesus Christ who is the source of all power. It seems this sorcerer had many deceived. Many thought him to be a prophet, because of the miracles he did. Barjesus was a Hebrew by birth, but a son of Satan in the spirit. He was a false prophet.

Acts 13:7 "Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God."

“Was the deputy”: A Roman official who served as provincial governor (18:12).

“Sergius Paulus”, the Roman ruler over the island of Cyprus, becomes one of Paul’s first prominent converts. Though translated “deputy,” Luke’s word calls him a proconsul (Greek *anthypatos*). Proconsuls normally were former Roman senators who had been commissioned by the Senate to govern the affairs of the peaceful provinces throughout the Roman Empire.

Over more turbulent provinces the emperor himself would send legates (like Cyrenius [Quirinius] in Syria; Luke 2:2), or procurators in lesser provinces, like Felix and Festus over Judea (chapters 24 – 26; see the note on 23:24).

Sergius Paulus (a Roman), was seeking the truth. Notice that God will accept the wealthy and famous the same as He will the poor. The requirement is the same. They must repent and earnestly seek the Truth. Those who seek the Truth, find it, and Sergius Paulus is no different.

Acts 13:8 "But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith."

“Elymas”’: The Greek name of Barjesus, a transliteration of the Arabian word for magician.

Barjesus and Elymas are the same person. This sorcerer had probably been living off Sergius Paulus, and he didn't want anyone coming in and tearing his little con game up. To work against God is a very dangerous thing to do, as this sorcerer will find out.

Verses 9-13: Whether or not “Saul” changed his name to “Paul” due to his prominent convert, Sergius Paulus, Luke at least uses this opportunity to change his name to Paul. Also, this is the point at which Paul takes the reins of leadership. The former designation had always been Barnabas and Saul; now it becomes “Paul and his company.”

This as much as anything may have prompted Barnabas's relative, “John” Mark (Col. 4:10), to abort the mission and return home to Jerusalem (Acts 12:12).

Acts 13:9 "Then Saul, (who also [is called] Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him,"

“Saul ... is called Paul”’: Paul's Hebrew and Roman names.

This “filled with the Holy Ghost” is more than what he ordinarily had. This was an extra portion of the Spirit. This gave Saul great boldness in the Lord. The words which came from Saul were really not his own, but words the Holy Ghost spoke through him. This is the Holy Ghost coming against this Elymas.

Acts 13:10 "And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, [thou] child of the devil, [thou] enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?"

He called him who he is, the son of the devil. Elymas' power was devil power. Saul is saying to him, you have now come against Almighty God. Elymas was not opposing Saul, but God.

Acts 13:11 "And now, behold, the hand of the Lord [is] upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand."

The judgment of God is swift when it does come. Those who oppose the Lord in our day can expect a like fate. Notice that this blindness is not a permanent situation, but is for a season. The blindness was so drastic that he could not even see to walk. This man had already been blind to the Spirit and now he is physically blind, as well.

Acts 13:12 "Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

This deputy really, was already believing what Saul and Barnabas had been saying. The sorcerer had tried to cause him not to believe. When the great power of God was manifest (made real), against this sorcerer, this deputy knew beyond a shadow of a doubt who was God.

The doctrine of the Lord was so different from all that he had ever been taught, but this miracle with the sorcerer erased any doubt he might have had. In (Romans 10:9-10), we see that the most necessary thing to salvation is to believe. We are not told whether he was baptized or not, but true believers want to be baptized as a show to the world that they have truly believed.

Acts Chapter 13 Questions

1. What ministries were going on in the church at Antioch?
2. How does a prophet and teacher differ?
3. Name four people involved in ministry at Antioch.
4. In verse 2, what do we read they were doing when the Holy Ghost spoke to them?
5. What did He tell them to do?
6. When will God speak to us the most?
7. The Lord is still speaking, we are just not _____.
8. What did the group do before they sent them out?
9. In verse 4, it tells us just who really sent Saul and Barnabas forth, who was it?
10. Where did they go?
11. Where was Cyprus?
12. In verse 5, we find that they preached in what building?
13. What were most of the people of Salamis?

14. What was the sorcerer's name?
15. What was he?
16. Who was the deputy of the country?
17. What are some of the things sorcerers do?
18. Who was the deputy?
19. What did this deputy desire to hear?
20. What are the requirements for a rich man to come to God?
21. What was another name for Barjesus?
22. What did he try to do to the deputy?
23. How could Saul have such boldness?
24. Under heavy anointing of God, what did Saul say to Barjesus?
25. Whose ways were the sorcerer trying to pervert?
26. What punishment came instantly to Barjesus?
27. What effect did this have on the deputy?
28. What was the deputy astonished at?