

Acts 13:1-12 (NIV)

¹In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ²While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. ⁶They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, ⁷who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. ⁹Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ¹⁰"You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? ¹¹Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. ¹²When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

44-13-02-Three Stories of Blindness

evangelism, apostasy, Spirit filling, conversion

Acts 13:1-12

The Holy Spirit reveals divine truth, regardless of our response to it.

INTRODUCTION: (Read **text**, if it was not the *Scripture reading*)

–This **text** records the church's 1st commissioning of missionaries, the 1st missionary journey, and the 1st conversion in the Apostle Paul's missionary career. It's also here that Saul starts being called Paul.

–**Title**, because this passage has 3 stories of enlightenment in the lives of the 3 prominent individuals. In each case, we see that **HOM.idea**.

I. The Blindness of Saul

- A. Saul's custom was to *preach to Jews*, so– v.5, *When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.*
- B. Later, he wrote about this in describing the saving power of the Gospel in Rom 1:16, "**first for the Jew**, then for the Gentile."
 1. Many Jews had migrated there (lots of synagogues to preach in!)
 2. Christian Jews there *did as Saul did*– Acts 11:19, Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, **telling the message only to Jews.**
- C. But God wants to expand our limited vision, even as Christ said in John 4:35, Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, **open your eyes** and **look at** the fields! They are ripe for harvest.
 1. Saul was so blindly focused on the Gospel harvest "**for the Jew**" that he *didn't see* that there was a Gospel harvest "**for the Gentile**."
 2. The evidence was there [Ethiopian eunuch; Cornelius & household], but his focus blinded him to the larger Gentile harvest field.
(Sticking only with what we're used to keeps us from *seeing* and *participating in* realities beyond the limits of our experience.)
- D. Any true ministry we have really comes from God– v.2, *While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."*
 1. God gave Saul a new job description (and eventually *he clearly recognized it*– Gal 2:8, "my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.")
 2. So clear was God's call, that, from this date onward, he set aside his Jewish name, using only the Gentile name Paul, like that of the Roman proconsul he led to Christ, *Sergius Paulus*.

TRANS: The Holy Spirit reveals divine truth, so that we can make the right response to it. [John Wesley didn't like *open-air preaching*, but he did it anyway, because the Spirit led him to, and it won many for Christ.] If Saul's understanding hadn't changed though his encounter with the Roman proconsul, God might have found someone else to be "*an Apostle to the Gentiles.*" God wants to *open our eyes* and *expand our vision*.

II. The Blindness of Elymas (Bar-Jesus)

- A. Who was he? (what can be known of him is only in this text)
1. He was a Jew named Bar-Jesus [*"son of Joshua"*] who *renamed* himself *Elymas* [*"sorcerer"*], because expertise in the occult brought prestige. (It won him a position as "*an attendant of the proconsul.*")
 2. He must have frequented Jewish synagogues (a "*false prophet*" likes to preach, and maybe that's where Saul met him.)
 3. Though responsible for getting the evangelists to meet the proconsul, he fought to keep from losing him to their message.
- B. The blindness of Elymas was in his rejection of truth:
1. As a Jew, he knew what God's Word said about *sorcery*, yet he had chosen that forbidden realm and even gloried in it.
 2. Even upon hearing about Christ's fulfillment of the OT, he saw no advantage for himself in accepting the Gospel. [quote: "*Light accepted brings more light; light rejected brings the night.*"]
- C. The Holy Spirit revealed the truth to Elymas about his blindness (They were God's words, though spoken by Paul— v.9-10, *Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?"*)
1. Elymas pretended to be a *magus* [*"a wise man"*], but Paul's words exposed his true character.
 2. God temporarily made Elymas literally blind to illustrate his true state of spiritual blindness that Paul had described.

TRANS: God was giving Elymas a chance to change. Before then, he made a career of misleading others. Now "*he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand.*" He needed someone who could see and lead him honestly, not someone who would mislead and take advantage of him, *as he had misled others.* This allowed him to review his life and repent. We don't know if he did so, but someone whom he had misled did.

III. The Blindness of Sergius Paulus

- A. His was a *common, seemingly innocent* but dangerous blindness:
1. He might have thought to himself, "*I'm of noble birth and of a noble nation. Why seek gods other than my own?"*
 2. Blind faith in whatever beliefs you inherit is a *dangerous* way to face eternity. (Paul reminded Gentile converts in Eph 2:11-13, "you who are Gentiles by birth...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, ...without hope and without God in the world.")
- B. But, as "an intelligent man," his logic might have told him: "*With so many views of truth, only the one from God must be right.*" (After all, he took a Jewish prophet as his counselor, and it says he, "*sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God.*")
- C. The spiritual blindness of those who seek truth is easily cured, but *how ironic* that his cure was facilitated by watching God make a false prophet go physically blind— v.12, "*When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.*")

CONCLUSION:

—Jesus preached the truth to heal spiritual blindness, and they crucified Him. But He rose again and went back to work. He said He would send the Holy Spirit to keep on *revealing truth*— John 16:8, When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. **The Holy Spirit reveals divine truth, regardless of our response to it.** —*Do we have any blindness like that in these 3 men? Are we like Saul, so focused on our experiences that we miss seeing important realities beyond them? Do we ever blindly sacrifice our convictions, as Elymas did, to gain clout or prestige? Or conversely, like Sergius Paulus, do we recognize our lack of knowledge and want it corrected by the Word of God? If we are willing to have our spiritual eyes opened, the Holy Spirit will show us aspects of truth that we might have missed, aspects of God's will that we've been blind to, the internal presence of Christ in us that we may not be feeling.*