



Message #29

“COMMISSIONED - AND ON TO CYPRUS” (Acts 13:1-12)

Barnabas and Saul were sent from Antioch with money for the Jewish Christians (11:30). Having done this, they recruit John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10), and return to Antioch. Luke then lists five key leaders in the Antioch church, describing them as prophets and teachers. Barnabas and Saul are included in this list and their names are the only familiar names, the other three are relatively obscure. These five names indicate both the cosmopolitan nature of Antioch and the diversity of background from which converts to Christianity now came. During a period of worship and fasting, the Holy Spirit “spoke” to them. We are not told whether this was in an audible voice or, more likely, through a prophetic word from one of the prophets, that Barnabas and Saul should be commissioned for a special ministry. This would not have come as a great surprise, at least for Saul. Remember, just after his conversion, the Lord revealed His purpose for Saul’s life, at least in general terms (9:15). But this was certainly a growing confirmation of the sense of call. After more praying and fasting (the prophetic word would have to be carefully tested – 1 Corinthians 14:29), Barnabas and Saul were commissioned by the church. They were released from their duties in the church in Antioch and sent out on their mission....the first organized and strategic missionary venture of the early Christian church.

Have you ever fasted? Why / why not? Should the whole church fast before major decisions?

Ralph Earle writes that fasting “emphasizes a state of uninterrupted concentration which made it possible to ascertain the will of the Lord. That is the main purpose and value of fasting.” (Carter and Earle, Acts, 175)

Five words seem to characterize the missionary program of this church in Antioch: prayer, fasting, guidance, release, commissioning. These features come from an earnestness to know and obey God’s will, which allows the Holy Spirit to superintend the whole process.

What do you think would be the most difficult thing about being a missionary?

Read ACTS 13:4-12

Barnabas, Saul and John Mark head off to Seleucia (the port of Antioch) and set sail for the island of Cyprus. Cyprus was the home of Barnabas (so he probably had connections there) and also the home of a significant Jewish population. They first landed in Salamis and proceeded to share the gospel in the Jewish synagogues.

This became the pattern for all of Paul’s missionary endeavours....first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles. Read ROMANS 1:16,17

From Salamis, the trip travelled through the whole island to the major city of Paphos, on the south-western side. And here they ran into some major opposition.



Paphos was the seat of Roman governance of the island, it was also the centre of a pagan cult dedicated to the worship of Aphrodite (Venus).

In Paphos they meet a “Jewish sorcerer” called Bar-Jesus (aka Elymas). Not only was this fellow involved in his occultic activities but he also had some influence in the court of the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus.

Sergius Paulus hears of the new message being preached by Barnabas, Saul and John Mark and, out of genuine interest has them brought before him so he can hear for himself. He seems to be a wise and thoughtful man who may have had some openness.

Of course, Elymas is not keen on losing any influence he may have had over Sergius Paulus and, consequently, interrupts Saul’s presentation of the gospel. Saul, faced with this direct opposition, does not squirm or shrink away. Instead, he boldly confronts Elymas with a dramatic accusation about the source of his power (the devil), the wickedness of his life and the manipulative nature of his actions.

(This is a similar type of confrontation to that of Philip and Simon the Sorcerer in Samaria (8:9f).

God then strikes Elymas blind (temporarily) and this powerful miracle underscores the powerful message of the gospel being presented to Sergius Paulus (notice he is amazed at the “teaching” not the miracle).

**Have you ever experienced direct opposition to your faith and witness for Christ? What happened?**

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**The devil is active today (13:10; 1 Peter 5:8). How can he be recognized and defeated? Where does “spiritual warfare” feature in our Christian lives?**

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**Paul does not seem to have been very polite to Elymas! Are Christians today too nice? Why are we afraid to be blunt and direct? How can we speak the truth in love?**

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Whilst Saul was confronting Elymas, I think it is quite likely that Barnabas and John Mark were praying hard. In any spiritual conflict, it is important that we recognize the necessity of prayer. The victory is not won through our own strength and efforts but only through the power of Christ.

**Ephesians 6:12:**

*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

**Romans 8:37-39:**

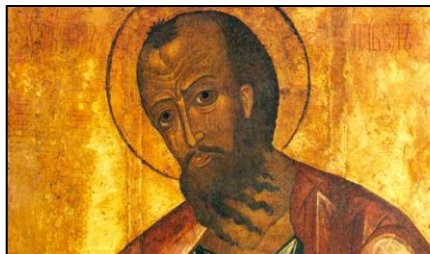
*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,<sup>[a]</sup> neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Our three missionaries in Paphos encountered spiritual opposition...the battle was for the soul of Sergius Paulus. The victory here was not just over Elymas, but over his master, Satan.

Satan does not want to lose anyone out of his evil grasp.

We must pray against the powers of darkness and the bondage of Satan in the lives of those we want to see saved and brought into the kingdom of Christ.

**Who are you praying fervently for? Don’t give up!**



And, as a little side-note in this passage, Luke makes two transitions in his writing. Firstly, he moves from the Jewish “Saul” to the Greek name “Paul”. He never calls Paul “Saul” again.

This change is appropriate now as he (Paul) moves into increasingly non-Jewish contexts.

And, from this point on Paul is always the first name mentioned (eg. Paul and Barnabas). This further indicates the important role that God has for Paul throughout the rest of the book of Acts.