

II. The Beginning Of The Journey. 13:4-12.

1. The Holy Spirit sent them out. 13:4.
There is no use in one going unless He sends him.
2. They did not stop in Seleucia. 13:4.
It was only fifteen or sixteen miles from Antioch and could be evangelized easily by the home church.
3. They sailed to Cyprus. 13:4.
Cyprus was the former home of Barnabas.
4. They landed at Salamis. 13:5.
It was a large port city and a commercial center. There were many synagogues there due to the large number of Jewish residents. How long they remained in Salamis, and what success attended the ministry of Barnabas and Saul we are not told. Probably their stay there was short. At any rate, the seed of the gospel had been planted there already. These evangelists did not wish to build on the foundations which had been laid by others.
5. They proceeded to Paphos. 13:6.
Here they were in a heathen city, and naturally they confronted entirely different problems. In Salamis many worshipped at the lascivious shrine of Aphrodite.

In this city two important events took place:

(1) The overcoming of the sorcerer--Bar-Jesus. 13:6b-11.

Bar-Jesus was an apostate Jew. He had enjoyed the light, but had deliberately thrown it overboard. He was a fortune teller who pretended to be inspired of God. He was an attendant of the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus. It was the custom for exalted personages to retain the services of astrologers. The professional name of this one was Elymas, meaning one powerful in secret wisdom.

This false prophet was a sorcerer by profession. As a magician or soothsayer he startled the people by his tricks and by his predictions for the future. Bar-Jesus was Satan's chosen instrument and, judging from his name and nature, apparently was the best specimen that hell could produce. He was a magician, therefore he was wise; he was a soothsayer, therefore he was given a place of honor; he was a prophet, therefore he was respected; he was a Jew, therefore he was accepted. Socially, he passed as one of the four hundred.

Satan always has his emissaries on the job when God's people are at work. He is a lot wiser than some of the children of light. He showed wisdom in resisting beginnings. Under the influence of Satan, Elymas sought to hinder another man lest he hear the gospel and be saved. The devil is not the hideous imp he is often pictured to be, with long, forked tail, fiery eyes, flashing tongue and strong horns. He more often takes the form of a person of culture, shrewdness, loveliness and attractiveness. Cunning as he is, he always adapts himself to any age and condition. He can be young or old, rich or poor, black or white, kind or brutish. The devil resorts to many tricks to keep people from hearing and believing the Word of God. He will appear as an angel of light in order to deceive men.

In verse ten Elymas is accused of four things: having craft and cunning, being a child of the devil, being an enemy of righteousness, and being a perverter of the right. As a tool in the hands of the devil Elymas tried in every possible way to prevent Sergius Paulus from hearing Barnabas and Saul preach the Word of God. In nature Elymas was both depraved and wicked, and in practice he was guilty of cunning and deceit. He was evil in character and in conduct, being full of deceit and depravity--deceit in his relations to men and depravity in his relation to God.

(2) The conversion of Sergius Paulus. 13:12.

Sergius Paulus was a Roman pro-consul of Cyprus. All that we know of him is that he was a "prudent man." The word, "prudent", is defined "practically wise; careful of the consequences of measure and action; judicious; cautious; circumspect." Being a man of understanding, he was a Roman officer of superior class. He was the highest and best type of a man the natural world can produce.

He was an honorable judge and a brilliant scholar. He was a product of the best schools of his day. His oath of loyalty to Rome was manifested in his being dependable and dutiful to the people he was commissioned to serve. In addition to these sterling qualities, he was moral, honest and fair in all his dealings. These qualities made him a social celebrity and a political giant. He had position, possessions and the praise of men. He had everything money can buy, and seemingly that heart could wish. But he lacked one thing--soul contentment.

Sergius Paulus was conscious of the hollowness of the heathen faith. He longed for more light. Being a searcher for the truth, he did not accept all that Elymas had said. Alarmed to all that transpired in his providence, the pro-consul had heard of the doings of the missionaries in their progress through the island. On their arrival at Paphos he summoned them before him, and, with his astrologer in attendance inquired into their propaganda. He had a sincere desire to know what their teaching was. They gladly expounded the gospel to him, and he listened with a keen interest. Elymas was standing by, and when he observed how his master was impressed, he became alarmed. He feared that they might supplant him in his master's favor and oust him from his lucrative office. Sergius Paulus sought to know the will of God, and the spirit of Satan in Elymas attempted to keep him in darkness. Satan always dreads a man who dares to think. He opposes every good work. Elymas kept interrupting Paul and Barnabas with arguments, denunciation and contradictions.

Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to stop the mouth of Elymas and to impose upon him a punishment that would demonstrate his hypocrisy and selfishness. His words to Elymas were severely searching and scorching. Paul used such words because Elymas was standing in the way of a soul finding the truth and the light. The severest words of the Bible are reserved for those who stand between men and God. Christ never said anything severe to a stumbling sinner. His severity was reserved to those who fail to guide a light when they profess to do so.

Notice Paul's scathing rebuke of this fortune teller in verses 9-11. "Oh thou full of every trick and every (form of) fraud," referring to his practices. "Son of the devil," referring to his disposition and motive. He was partaker of the devil's nature and resembled him in character and disposition. He was especially like him in perverting the truth. "Enemy of all righteousness," the effect of his character and conduct. He was hostile to all that was right and good, to purity of life, uprightness of conduct, and to all that was pleasing to God. "Will you not cease turning aside the straightways of the Lord?" He tried to render crooked the conditions of salvation as made known by the Lord, such as repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.

"And now," in view of your character and your bitter disposition, "the hand of the Lord is upon thee," in punishment, "and thou shalt be blind." This blindness was total but temporary. The infliction was immediate. A blindness fell upon him and he went about seeking a hand-leader. Note the fitness of the punishment in that he who deceived and blinded others should himself be made blind and dependent on others to lead him.

What was the outcome? The Spirit vindicated the truth which Paul and Barnabas were declaring. The final issue was that he believed. Then, he was glad that he had been extricated from the deceptive devices of Elymas, and to see such

clear evidence as to what was the truth. It is reasonable to suppose that a church was organized in Paphos.