

## Acts Chapter 13

In Chapter 13, we see Paul and Barnabas located at the church at Antioch. The Holy Spirit comes upon the followers there, and commands that they be set apart for a special ministry. From this point onward in the book of Acts, the focus is on Paul's ministry. Before Paul and Barnabas are sent away, we see the followers fast, pray, and lay their hands upon them. In regards to this last, it seems to be a way of "appointing a person to the ministry". Contrary to the times before, there are no tongues speaking or miraculous occurrences noted; possibly because in the times before an apostle was involved. In any case, this is probably similar to what many churches practice today; i.e. gathering around a person to pray, also utilizing physical contact.

At Salamis, they begin "Preaching the word in the synagogues". They then move on to the Isle of Paphos, where Paul has an encounter with a sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus. The deputy there, named Sergius Paulus, was very receptive to Paul's message, which upset the false prophet. Paul (first called Paul in verse 9) through the power of the Holy Spirit, cursed him with blindness, when he tried to stand against him. Due to this, it is said that the deputy "believed, when he saw what was done".

Although we cannot strike people with blindness through the Holy Spirit as Paul did here (generally speaking), we must always be prepared to defend the gospel, and withstand those who lead others away from the truth. Even when we do not see any immediate miraculous power, if we are truly standing on the word of God, his spirit is with us. It is worthy of noting that the incident caused the deputy to believe.

Going further, it is also an interesting point that Paul calls this false prophet "son of the Devil", and "enemy of all righteousness". A recurrent topic throughout the New Testament is the idea that either you are a child of God, or a child of the Devil. Those who are called a child of the Devil are said to walk in darkness; it is ironic that Paul makes this sorcerer's physical state match his spiritual one.

Then Paul and Barnabas head to Antioch of Pisidia. It is at this point that John Mark, for some unknown reason, leaves the group and returns to Jerusalem. As was their practice, they first go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. There Paul preaches the gospel to "Men of Israel", and "ye that fear God", an expression seemingly referring to gentile converts.

Paul expounds on Israel's history, mentioning the Exodus, Judges, Samuel, and David. In his discourse, he brings up the Davidic covenant (the

promise from God that one from the line of Jesse would rule over Israel as King and savior), and expounds upon it, demonstrating that Jesus Christ was its fulfillment. He also quotes from Psalm 1 and 16, and Isaiah 55, revealing them as fulfilled prophecy. The central theme of the Christian kerygma is preached (God raised Christ from the dead), and “many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas. They were invited to speak again the following Sabbath.

The following Sabbath saw trouble. Nearly the whole city showed up at the synagogue that Sabbath to hear Paul and Barnabas speak. This made the Jews in Antioch extremely jealous, and they began “contradicting and blaspheming”. Paul and Barnabas reply boldly, responding that although they had been commanded to preach first to Israel (Luke 24:47), that the Jews had given up any special privileges through their disobedience. They would therefore preach to the gentiles.

The gentiles were filled with joy because of this, and many believed. Paul and Barnabas were persecuted, and thrown out of the city. The disciples (presumably the new believers) were “filled with joy and the Holy Ghost”.

It is truly amazing the difference in the attitude demonstrated here, with that of many Christians today. These disciples were filled with joy for having been persecuted for the name of Jesus Christ; most today do not share that sentiment. Over and over again, through the early church, we see believers celebrating over afflictions suffered for the sake of Christ. So we too should find such joy, for it is an honor to suffer for his name. A moment of displeasure is not even comparable to the unspeakable bliss that awaits the faithful.

With no time to waste, Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet, and proceeded to Iconium.