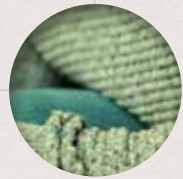
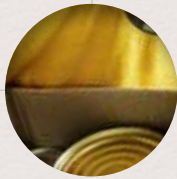
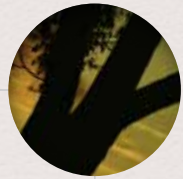
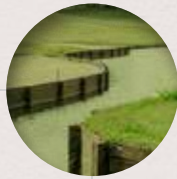


Acts 13–28 | *Commentary*



EXPLORE THE BIBLE®

Adults • Fall 2024

STARTING NEW

Fall means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. For some, it's the start of football season and the roar of the crowd on Saturdays and Sundays. For others, it's a season of beauty as leaves change colors and fall to the ground. For many, it's all about cooler temperatures—moderated by the warmth of a firepit and the smell of pumpkin spice.

For kids (and their parents), fall represents the start of a new school year. Regardless of how things went for students in the past, a fresh school year means new opportunities and adventures. It's a chance to try new things and maybe meet new people. New doors open, and the future feels unlimited!

In Acts 13–28, the early church experienced the power of new opportunities to an even greater degree. After planting their roots in Jerusalem, the members of the early church got down to the business of fulfilling Jesus's command to take His message to the ends of the earth. Like the first day of school, Paul and his missionary partners walked through new doors that God opened for them. They dealt with highs and lows, excitement and even some anxiety.

But while the situations shifted from day to day, one thing remained the same: the message. Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke, and the entire cast of characters in Acts 13–28 never strayed from the central theme of the gospel. Wherever they went, they preached that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

It's the same message believers are commanded to share today. We may not worship idols like so many in Paul's audiences, but we have rebelled against God in our own ways. We have turned away from Him, something the Bible calls "sin." And, because we've all sinned (Rom. 3:23), we all need a Savior. We all need Jesus to help start new. If you're ready to accept the salvation that only He can provide, here's what you need to do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God's Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: "Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen."

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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*Evangelistic Emphasis



MEET THE WRITER

Charles A. Ray Jr. wrote the commentary for these sessions drawn from Acts 13–28. An experienced contributor to Lifeway curriculum materials, Dr. Ray retired as professor of New Testament and Greek at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Before joining the faculty at the seminary in New Orleans in 1991, Dr. Ray served for five years as assistant professor of New Testament at the Korea Baptist Theological Seminary in Daejeon, South Korea. He is a graduate of Mississippi College (B.A., M.Ed.), New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div., Ph.D.), and the University of New Orleans (M.A.E.T.).

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Amber Vaden
Team Leader

Dwayne McCrary
Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

Ken Braddy
Director of Sunday School

John Paul Basham
Director, Adult Ministry

Send questions/comments to
Team Leader by email:
amber.vaden@lifeway.com;
or by mail to
Team Leader
Explore the Bible: Adult Commentary
200 Powell Place, Suite 100
Brentwood, TN 37027-7707;
or make comments on the web at
lifeway.com.

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FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**

My city is growing by leaps and bounds. Every month a new restaurant launches, with the news finding its way to social media, local news outlets, and conversations. It doesn't take long to know if it's great food—word travels fast. A strong beginning is important. A solid launch hints at healthy business for months to come.

The book of Acts gives us an inside look at a different kind of beginning—an incredible one. In Acts, the apostle Luke records the launch and growth of the Christian church. From these early Christians, we learn what the early church was like. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, these believers faced opposition, dealt with difficult theological issues, and worked to fulfill the task of carrying the gospel far and wide. The church's beginning was extraordinary. May this study of these early believers serve to equip and energize us to continue the task we've been given. "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have made you a light for the Gentiles to bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47).

In Him,
Amber Vaden
amber.vaden@lifeway.com



BIBLICAL **BACKGROUND**

The book of Acts is a record of the early church. It details the church's activity after the ascension of Jesus into heaven, tracing the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, then through the Roman Empire, and eventually to Rome itself.

AUTHOR

The book of Acts does not identify its author. Most likely the first readers were aware of who wrote it. But some things about the author can be gleaned from the Gospel of Luke and Acts. First, the same person wrote both of those books, which are both dedicated to "Theophilus" (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3). The Greek vocabulary and style are the same in both books, and many of the same themes appear in both as well. This also indicates a common author.

Second, Acts contains four passages known as "we passages" (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16), where the author switches from writing in the third person (he/they) to the first person plural (we). These passages are best understood as describing times when the author of Acts was a traveling companion of Paul's and an eyewitness to some events in Paul's ministry.

Third, the vocabulary and style of Acts also indicate the author was educated in the professional use of the Greek language. Finally, the author was aware of various compilations related to events of Jesus's ministry (Luke 1:1), and after carefully researching the events wrote an "orderly sequence" of those events (v. 3). Completing such a task indicates an educated author with financial support for the undertaking.

The unanimous testimony of church tradition from the second century beginning with the church father Irenaeus onward is that Luke, the companion of Paul, authored both Luke and Acts under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Luke himself is mentioned only three times in the New Testament, all in Paul's letters. In Colossians, Paul mentioned only three circumcised coworkers (Col. 4:10-11), while Luke was mentioned with two other coworkers (vv. 12-14), likely indicating that Luke was a Gentile. Luke's familiarity with the Old Testament may indicate that he was a God-fearer, a Gentile who believed in God but did not become a Jew. In his letter to Philemon, Paul mentioned Luke among five of his coworkers without any distinction between them (Philem. 23-24).

Paul identified Luke as "the dearly loved physician" (Col. 4:14). In the first century, physicians' social status varied greatly. Those who were attached to the wealthy and those who held high government positions

were well off, while physicians such as those who tended slaves were frequently slaves themselves. Luke's education and ability to travel with Paul suggests a relatively high social status.

Paul also reported that Luke was the only one who was left with him when he wrote 2 Timothy (2 Tim. 4:11). Paul probably wrote this letter from Rome during his second Roman imprisonment shortly before he was executed. The last two of the four "we passages" place Luke with Paul in the events that led to the apostle's arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-18; see 22:22-29) and traveling with him on the journey to Rome to appear before Caesar (27:1-28:16; Paul's first Roman imprisonment).

DATE

How Acts is dated depends on how the ending of the book is understood (28:30-31). Many date Acts prior to AD 64. At the end of Acts, Paul had spent two years in prison in Rome waiting for his appearance before the emperor (about AD 60-62). This argument hinges on Acts not detailing Paul's appearance before Caesar, his release from prison, and the later events in Paul's life. In this view, Luke could not have written about those things because they had not yet occurred when he composed Acts.

Others argue that the third Gospel, written before Acts, requires a date later than the early 60s for both Luke and Acts. So much of Mark's Gospel is paralleled in Luke that most believe Mark was one of the sources Luke used as he wrote his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4). Church tradition holds that Mark wrote his Gospel after Peter's death in the mid-60s. If this is accurate, then Luke would have written several years later, in the late 60s or early 70s. An additional argument suggested for a later date is Jesus's multiple references to the destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24; 23:28-31). Some argue that Luke included these predictions in light of the destruction of the city in AD 70. This would suggest a date sometime after AD 70. But those references do not necessitate a later date.

OVERVIEW

The book of Acts overlaps slightly with the Gospel of Luke, each book describing Jesus's ascension into heaven and the disciples return to Jerusalem (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12). In addition, the opening of Acts summarizes the content of Luke (Acts 1:1-3) and details Jesus's final words to His disciples before His ascension (vv. 4-8). The book of Acts as a whole can generally be divided into two parts: the mission of the church in and around Jerusalem (chap. 1-12) and the expansion of the church into the rest of the world (chap. 13-28). The events in the first half of the book feature leaders of the church in Jerusalem (Peter, John, Stephen, Philip),

while the second half of the book focuses primarily on Paul. However, this division is not absolute as Saul (Paul) appears in chapters 7–9, 11–12, and Peter appears in chapter 15.

The two major divisions of Acts end with events that can be dated with some certainty. Herod Agrippa I died in AD 44 (12:23), and Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, was replaced by Porcius Festus most likely in AD 58/59 (24:27). Festus was the governor who sent Paul to Rome to appear before the emperor (25:12), which means that Paul's two years in Rome were probably between AD 60–62. Most scholars believe that Jesus died in AD 30 or AD 33, which means that the events recorded in Acts took place over approximately three decades.

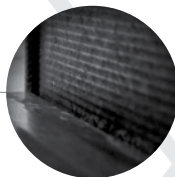
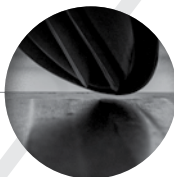
PURPOSE AND KEY THEMES

In understanding the purpose of Acts, it is best to start where Luke started (Luke 1:3–4). Luke wanted Theophilus to “know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed” (v. 4). Of first concern is the identity of the recipient, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). The name means “friend of God,” and many Bible students have interpreted the name as a way of addressing believers in general. However, Theophilus was a common Greek name in the first century, and some Bible students have suggested that Theophilus may have been a Greek believer who acted as Luke's patron, helping him financially in the research and writing of the books. Whether or not Theophilus was a real person or a way of referring to all Christians, Luke obviously intended for his books to be read widely. He wanted Christians to be grounded in the certainty of their faith. Luke achieved that goal by telling them the story of what Jesus had done (the Gospel of Luke) and continued to do through His church (the book of Acts).

Luke demonstrated for the early believers how God, in His providence, guided the church in sharing the gospel first with the Jews and then with the whole world. The inclusion of Jews and Gentiles into one body, the church, was part of God's plan from the beginning. The inclusive nature of the gospel (it is freely offered to both Jews and Gentiles) appears repeatedly throughout Acts until finally Paul, in Rome, preached and taught the things of Jesus “with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:30–31). Other major themes in Acts (like the role and power of the Holy Spirit, the importance of witness, and the role of prayer) work together to paint a picture of a united church welcoming all who responded in repentance and faith to the good news of salvation found in Jesus alone.

OUTLINE

- I. The Church Empowered (Acts 1:1–2:47)
- II. The Church’s Early Days (Acts 3:1–12:25)
- III. Paul’s First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1–14:28)
- IV. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–35)
- V. Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)
- VI. Paul’s Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23–21:16)
- VII. Paul’s Arrest and Journey to Rome (Acts 21:17–28:31)



Sent

Believers are set apart for God's purposes.

In our modern, mobile society, people often have to move from one city to another, one state to another, and even at times one country to another for various reasons. When a church member or family makes such a move, they leave behind both friends and ministry roles. While such a move is difficult on many levels, it can also be seen as an extension of the ministry of the church the individual or family is leaving. The leaving of one local church can be viewed as being sent out to a new location of ministry by that church. The home church can covenant to continue to pray for and support this individual or family. In this way, both those who are leaving and those who are staying behind can be seen as part of the ministry at this new church. One such New Testament example is Phoebe. The apostle Paul was aware of the work she had done in Cenchreae and urged the church in Rome to partner with her in the new phase of ministry to which she had been called (Rom. 16:1-2).

The church that I attend has a large world map on the wall in a well-traveled hall. We mark the place of service of each missionary who has come through our church on their way to service in other lands. We have a church member who is responsible for keeping the missionaries before the church and sharing prayer requests from our missionaries. The book of Acts details the special relationship the church in Antioch had with Paul and Barnabas. The men had dedicated a year of service in the teaching of church members (Acts 11:25-26). At the command of the Holy Spirit, these men were set apart by that church for missions (13:1-3).

These missionaries maintained their relationship with the church at Antioch throughout their time of service. Similarly, the church today has a responsibility to seek out and support those men and women God has called to missions as well as to other types of service. The home church of such people has the responsibility to affirm God's calling in their lives and support them in various ways in their mission.

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

Acts 13:1-12

Acts 13 is a pivotal turning point in the book of Acts. Prior to this chapter the primary focus had been on the apostles Peter, John, and James, among others. From chapter 13 to the end of the book, Paul takes center stage. Chapters 13–14 recount Paul’s first missionary journey with Barnabas, in which subtle yet significant changes occur. First, prior to chapter 13, Paul was consistently referred to by his Hebrew name “Saul.” After the ministry in Cyprus (13:4-12), the only time Paul was referred to by his Hebrew name is when the apostle recounted his conversion experience (22:6-21; 26:12-18).

Second, Luke initially referred to the two missionaries as “Barnabas and Saul” (13:2,7). When the missionary team left Cyprus for Perga, Luke referred to them as “Paul and his companions” (v. 13). After Cyprus they were referred to as “Paul and Barnabas” (vv. 43,46,50-51; except for 14:14).

As noted earlier, chapters 13 and 14 recount the first missionary journey of the apostle Paul. Chapter 13 begins with Barnabas and Saul being called out by the Holy Spirit to complete the work that was assigned to them (13:2). The team was sent out by the church at Antioch with fasting and prayer (v. 3). The mission trip also concluded with prayer and fasting as Paul and Barnabas appointed leaders in the churches they had established (14:21-23). Chapter 14 ends with the two missionaries returning to Antioch “where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now completed” (v. 26). The church at Antioch was called together, and Paul and Barnabas recounted everything that God had done through them, especially opening the door of salvation through faith in Jesus to the Gentiles (v. 27).

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

Listen (Acts 13:1-3)

During a time of fasting and worship at Antioch, the Holy Spirit called the church to set apart Barnabas and Saul for mission work. After the

believers fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent Barnabas and Saul off to serve.

VERSE 1

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Chapter 13 opens by noting that among the leadership of the church at Antioch were **prophets** and **teachers**. It is uncertain whether Luke was describing one leadership role with two functions or two separate leadership roles each with separate functions. Usually Luke used the title *prophet* to refer to the Old Testament prophets. However, in Acts 11:27-30 Luke noted that “some prophets” came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. Agabus, the only named prophet in that group, predicted a severe famine was coming; based on this prophecy, the church at Antioch took steps to aid believers in Judea. In another instance, after the Jerusalem Council agreed that Gentile believers were not required to adopt Judaism, two of those sent with Paul and Barnabas to deliver a message concerning the church’s decision to Antioch were Judas and Silas, both of whom “were also prophets” (15:32).

The Greek term for *teachers* only occurs here in the book of Acts. However, in his Gospel Luke frequently used the title to refer to Jesus. Although the title is rare in Acts, the function of teaching is more common. When Barnabas brought Saul (Paul) to Antioch, the two men engaged in teaching large numbers of believers within the church for over a year (11:25-26). After the delivery of the message of the Jerusalem council to Antioch, Barnabas and Paul remained in Antioch “teaching and proclaiming the word of the Lord” (15:35). Paul placed prophets and teachers along with apostles as those in positions of church leadership in his letter to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 12:28). Both prophecy and teaching were essential for the health of the first-century church.

Luke identified five individuals by name, but did not indicate whether these men were the only leaders in the Antioch church. With the exception of Barnabas and Paul, little is known about these men. **Barnabas** was a Levite, born on the island of Cyprus (Acts 4:36), who was the representative of the Jerusalem church sent to Antioch (11:22-24). **Simeon** is a Jewish name, but he was also identified by his Latin surname **Niger**, which means “dark complexion.” The surname suggests Simeon was from Africa. Regarding **Lucius of Cyrene’s** name, *Lucius* is Latin in origin, while *Cyrene* suggests he may have come from the town of

that name on the northern coast of Africa. It is worth noting that believers from Cyprus and Cyrene first proclaimed the gospel specifically to Greeks in Antioch (vv. 19-20).

Manaen is a Greek form of the Hebrew name *Menahem* (meaning “comforter”). He was identified as a **close friend of Herod the tetrarch**. The title *tetrarch* referred to one who ruled at the pleasure of the Roman emperor. Generally tetrarchs ruled over a smaller area and their authority was less than that of a king. *Herod* refers to Herod Antipas, the youngest son of Herod the Great, who ruled from 4 BC to AD 39 (Matt. 14:1; Luke 3:1,19-20; 9:7-9; Acts 4:27). The Greek word translated *a close friend of* could refer to someone who was raised together with another person as a foster-child, or it could refer to someone who was a close friend. Paul, still called **Saul**, was a diaspora Jew who grew up in the city of Tarsus.

VERSE 2

As 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.”

They could refer either to the leaders mentioned (v. 1) or to the congregation of the Antioch church as a whole. The Greek term for **worshiping** could refer to meeting material needs (Rom. 15:27), officiating as a priest (Heb. 10:11), or ministering in the Christian church (Acts 13:2). Luke was probably referring to the regular occurrence of worship involving the whole church body. **Fasting** was practiced regularly in some early Christian churches. However, in this context of worship, *fasting* likely indicates that the believers had given up normal practices such as eating in order to focus on seeking the Lord’s guidance as to their next step of ministry. While Luke did not indicate to whom **the Holy Spirit** spoke, the Spirit communicated that He had set apart **Barnabas** and **Saul** for a specific task.

VERSE 3

Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.

The church in Antioch responded in faithful obedience: they **fasted, prayed, and laid hands on** Barnabas and Saul. The identity of **they** is not stated, but it probably refers to both the leaders and members of the congregation. Fasting and prayer are later associated with Paul and

Barnabas's appointing elders in the churches they had established on their missionary journey (14:23). In this instance, the laying on of hands served as a symbolic gesture of setting Barnabas and Saul apart and commissioning them to the task to which the Holy Spirit had called them. The practice was previously used to set apart the seven men to the ministry concerning Greek and Jewish widows in the Jerusalem church (6:5-6). The laying on of hands in Acts is also associated with the reception of the Holy Spirit (8:14-17; 19:1-7). After doing this, the Antioch church **sent them off**.

Explore Further

Read the articles "Fasting" on page 558 and "Laying on of Hands" on page 998 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How were these practices used in both the Old and New Testament? How should they be used in the church today?

Share (Acts 13:4-8)

Barnabas and Saul sailed to Cyprus, where they preached in the Jewish synagogues. In Paphos, they encountered Bar-Jesus (also called Elymas) and Sergius Paulus, the proconsul who wanted to hear the Word of God. However, Elymas opposed this and tried to discourage Sergius Paulus from the faith.

VERSE 4

So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

While Luke affirmed the role of the Antioch church in sending out Barnabas and Saul, ultimately it was **the Holy Spirit** who had set them apart (v. 2) and **sent out** the two men. No explanation is given for how the mission team chose their initial destination. This is known as Paul's first missionary journey, which took place about AD 47-48.¹

Antioch was located on the Orontes River about sixteen miles inland from the port city of **Seleucia** (*sih LYOO shih uh*). From there the team set sail for **Cyprus**, a large island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea

approximately sixty miles west of Seleucia. Again, Luke gave no rationale for the choice of Cyprus, though it made sense for at least a couple of reasons. Barnabas was from Cyprus (4:36); in addition, believers from Cyprus and Cyrene were involved in planting the church in Antioch (11:20). Barnabas also may have been aware of needs in Cyprus that made it a logical starting place.

VERSE 5

Arriving in Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. They also had John as their assistant.

Salamis was the closest Cypriot port from Seleucia, located on the eastern side of the island. Throughout its history, Salamis was an important city on Cyprus. As would be Paul's pattern throughout his ministry (13:14; 14:1; 17:1-2,10,17; 18:19; 19:8), he and Barnabas began their missionary work by proclaiming the gospel in the **Jewish synagogues**. *Jewish synagogues* (plural) indicates there was a large enough Jewish community in Salamis to support multiple synagogues.

Luke noted that **John** was Saul and Barnabas's assistant. Also known as John Mark, he was Barnabas's cousin (Col. 4:10), which may help explain John Mark's presence on the trip. John Mark's role as a member of the missionary team is unclear. The Greek word translated **assistant** ("to assist them," ESV; "helper," NIV) referred generally to someone who served as a helper, usually in a subordinate role. John Mark may have been responsible for the logistics of the journey, making sure that physical needs were met. On the other hand, his duties may have included instruction for the new believers, perhaps baptizing those who believed. In either case, John Mark apparently played a significant role on the team. His decision later to leave the team and return to Jerusalem would have left a hole that needed to be filled (Acts 13:13).

VERSE 6

When they had traveled the whole island as far as Paphos, they came across a sorcerer, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus.

The missionary team left Salamis and worked their way across the island to **Paphos**, a distance of about ninety miles. While Luke gave no indication, it seems likely Barnabas and Paul ministered along the way. Paphos was located on the southwest side of Cyprus and was its capital.

When they arrived at Paphos, the team came in contact with a man by the name of **Bar-Jesus**. The name is Aramaic and could be translated as

“Son of Joshua” or “Son of the Savior.” Bar-Jesus was a **sorcerer** and a **Jewish false prophet**. The Greek word used here for *sorcerer* could also be translated “magician” (ESV). The verb form of the term (“practiced sorcery”) was used to describe the sorcerer Simon who Philip encountered in Samaria (8:9-11). A sorcerer was one who claimed to have an understanding of the spiritual world and used incantations and rituals to influence the spirits for the benefit of himself and/or others. The word was also used to identify the priests and wise men of Persia, including the wise men who came to pay homage to the baby Jesus (Matt. 2).

Luke referred to Bar-Jesus as a *Jewish false prophet*. This title associated him with the many false prophets of the Old Testament who had opposed God’s true prophets and told Israel’s kings and people what they wanted to hear rather than a true message from God.

VERSE 7

He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God.

Sergius Paulus was the **proconsul** of the island of Cyprus. The term *proconsul* referred to the head of the government in a Roman senatorial province. These were provinces that did not require a military presence and were under the control of the Roman Senate as opposed to imperial provinces which required a military force, were controlled by the emperor, and were ruled by a military prefect or procurator (governor). Pontius Pilate (Luke 3:1), Felix (Acts 23:24,26), and Festus (24:27) served as prefects in Judea.

The relationship between Bar-Jesus and Sergius Paulus is vague, but Bar-Jesus was in the service of Sergius Paulus in some sense. As Bar-Jesus was a sorcerer, he may have served as a court astrologer or magician. Romans strongly believe in divination. Sergius Paulus was an **intelligent man**, meaning he was wise in the sense that he possessed discernment or good sense. In addition, the proconsul took the initiative in his encounter with Barnabas and Saul, summoning the men because he **wanted to hear the word of God**. This action may have been out of curiosity or a genuine desire to hear the gospel.

VERSE 8

But Elymas the sorcerer (that is the meaning of his name) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

Luke introduced a second name for Bar-Jesus, **Elymas**. The name appears only here in the New Testament, and its background and meaning are unclear. It has been suggested that the name *Elymas* comes from an Aramaic word meaning either “sage” or “interpreter of dreams,” which would imply he claimed the ability to predict the future. That Bar-Jesus was a false prophet (v. 6) might help to explain his hold on Sergius Paulus.

Saul and Barnabas surely welcomed the opportunity to share the word of God with the proconsul and those assembled with him. As the missionaries preached the word of God, Elymas’s true character came out. Most likely realizing that if Sergius Paulus accepted the gospel that his influence over him would end, Elymas actively opposed Saul and Barnabas. He attempted to turn the proconsul, who was not a believer, away from placing saving faith in Jesus Christ as God’s Messiah.

Explore Further

Read the article “Cyprus” on pages 375–376 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Why might Cyprus have been a good starting point for Paul’s first missionary journey?

Rely on the Spirit (Acts 13:9-12)

Saul, filled with the Holy Spirit, faced Elymas and declared the hand of the Lord to be against him. Elymas was blinded for a time. After witnessing this incredible event, Sergius Paulus believed.

VERSES 9-10

But Saul—also called Paul—filled with the Holy Spirit, stared straight at Elymas and said, “You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery, you son of the devil and enemy of all that is right. Won’t you ever stop perverting the straight paths of the Lord?”

Up to this point in Acts, Luke had used Paul’s Hebrew name **Saul**. From this point on Luke consistently used the Greek name **Paul**, except when Paul recounted his conversion experience (22:7; 26:14). The use of the

apostle's Greek name may be due to the context of the Greco-Roman world of Paul's missionary journeys.

That Paul was **filled with the Holy Spirit** indicates that the apostle was under the guidance and control of the Spirit. Paul's response to Elymas was also the Holy Spirit's response to the man who was opposing the work of the missionaries. Elymas was opposing not just the missionaries but God Himself. Paul focused his attention on Elymas, declaring that he was **full of all kinds of deceit and trickery**. The Greek word translated *deceit* ("subtilty," KJV) describes one who takes advantage of a situation by using underhanded methods. The word translated *trickery* ("villainy," ESV; "mischief," KJV) characterizes someone who uses unscrupulous methods to achieve personal ends. While the first word emphasizes the use of deception, the second has the idea of violating moral principles.

The phrase **son of the devil** stands in contrast to the name Elymas went by—Bar-Jesus, possibly meaning "Son of the Savior." He was not, as the name might imply, a son of the God who saves but rather a *son of the devil*. His opposition of the word of God preached by Paul and Barnabas was a strong indication of the origin of his influence, the devil. As a son of the devil, Elymas was the **enemy of all that is right**. The Greek word translated *right* can also be translated "righteousness" ("enemy of all righteous," ESV). Righteousness "is a primary attribute of God throughout the Bible. Paul could have implied that Elymas had set himself up as an enemy of God."²

VERSE 11

"Now, look, the Lord's hand is against you. You are going to be blind, and will not see the sun for a time." Immediately a mist and darkness fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.

After describing Elymas in harsh terms, Paul addressed the punishment that Elymas was about to experience. The imagery of **the Lord's hand** is used elsewhere in Acts to describe God's power being at work to bring about the salvation of people (4:28,30; 11:21); here it indicates the power by which Elymas's judgment would come. He would be **blind**. However, the blindness would only last **for a time**. In addition to being a punishment for having opposed God and the spread of the gospel, Paul may have hoped that Elymas might realize the error of his ways and repent.

Paul spoke the judgment and it happened **immediately**. The effect of the punishment was that Elymas was left to grope about, seeking for

someone to lead him by the hand. Several Bible teachers have noted parallels between Elymas's and Paul's own blindness. Paul had opposed God's work by persecuting Christians. Paul received a direct word from Jesus in his vision, while Elymas heard the Holy Spirit speak through Paul. Like Elymas, because of his blindness Paul had to be led into town. His blindness was only temporary, lasting for three days (9:1-9). We know that Paul repented and fulfilled God's mission for him. There is no indication as to how Elymas responded to his blindness, whether he repented or not.

VERSE 12

Then, when he saw what happened, the proconsul believed, because he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

As a result of having seen God's judgment on Elymas, Sergius Paulus **believed**. While **the proconsul** was impressed with **what happened**, he also was **astonished at the teaching of the Lord**. His initial desire to hear the word of God had left him in awe of the teaching that he had heard from the missionaries. The Greek word translated *teaching* can refer to both the act of teaching and the content of such teaching. In this instance, it is more likely that Luke was referring to the content of the teaching. The term was used earlier in Acts in regard to "the apostles' teaching" (2:42). Later when Paul was at the Areopagus in Athens, the Greeks requested of the apostle, "May we learn about this new teaching you are presenting?" (17:19). The term for *astonished* carries the idea of being so amazed as to be overwhelmed. When Jesus taught in Capernaum, the people "were astonished at his teaching because his message had authority" (Luke 4:32). Sergius Paulus was amazed and overwhelmed by the gospel that he had heard from Paul and Barnabas.

Explore Further

Read the article "Holy Spirit" on pages 759–761 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What are the roles of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers?

1. All dates in this unit are from "Paul" by Charles L. Quarles in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand, rev. (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 1227–1232.

2. John B. Polhill, Acts, vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 294.