

Acts 13  
Verses 4-12

4-5 Seleucia is the port city for Antioch, fifteen miles down the Orontes River. It appears they wasted no time in obeying the direction of the Holy Spirit. Cyprus was 75 miles by sea and the eastern port of the island is Salamis. Cyprus is the third largest Mediterranean island, 138 mi. x 60mi. It has a long history. Conquered by Rome in 22BC, it was governed by a Roman proconsul in the city of Paphos. It had a large Jewish population.

Since Barnabas and John Mark were from the island, it was a good place for them to begin the missionary journey. They would have a place to stay and know where there were synagogues and potential converts.

The way they went about reaching a city followed the pattern they had seen in Antioch. First, they would preach in the synagogues. Paul felt a need to bring the message to the Jews first. (Romans 1:16) This was practical for several reasons. A Jewish believer in Messiah would already know the Scriptures and so would become a potential teacher for a new church. The other reason is that Gentile "God fearers" would come to the synagogues. These were people who had forsaken the plethora of Greek and Roman gods for a single Creator God. Though they rarely practiced the Jewish law, they had a hunger to hear of JHWH. The Good News was what they had been waiting for. They could be right with God without the temple sacrifices and keeping the law. These were perhaps the easiest people to reach. They would have relatives and friends to share with and so the Gospel would quickly spread.

6 It was a 106 mile journey to Paphos, the seat of government for the island. We don't have a record of how it went along the way there through numerous other cities. The city had a famous temple to Aphrodite. This city was the main port on the western side of the island.

Bar-Jesus was a man like Simon the Sorcerer. (Acts 8:9) People believed that through spells and incantations he could manipulate spiritual forces. (Jeremiah 23:30-32) Because Luke called him a false prophet, he was probably fortune telling. This was not limited to Gentiles. Jewish magic was famous at the time. A historical account tells of Felix hiring a Jewish sorcerer to win the affection of Drusilla. Bar-Jesus means son of Joshua/salvation.

7 The local proconsul was using this sorcerer as an advisor. It wasn't unusual for Roman rulers to use soothsayers and astrologers. He heard about Saul and Barnabas and called them in for an audience with him. Sergius Paullus first name was Lucius. He had a son by the same name. Two inscriptions have been discovered that mention him. He was probably from Pisidian Antioch where Saul and Barnabas will go next, and where he would retire in a short time. He may have invited them to his relatives home hoping his family would receive the Gospel.

8 Elymas – if Aramaic would mean “one who dreams” or if Arabic would mean “wise man”. If Sergius Paullus converted, Elymas knew he would be out of a job and lose his influence in the community.

9 Was it the encounter with Paullus that caused Saul to begin to use his Gentile name? From this point on there is an emphasis on reaching Gentiles. Perhaps the name change was for that reason. In Greek, saulos is an adjective describing the seductive way a courtesan walks. That may be another reason Paul began to use his Roman name. He was after all a Roman citizen.

When confronting evil, one had better be filled with and led by the Holy Spirit.

10 Paul declared Elymas isn't son of a savior, but a son of the devil. Those who try to keep seekers from coming to Jesus often fall in that category. John 8:44 “deceit and trickery” – Magic is really illusion, clever deception. Andre Cole has a standing offer to anyone for \$10,000 if he cannot discover the trick behind their illusion. The ways of the Lord are truth and righteousness. Instead, Elymas caused people to give glory to him by deceiving them as to what he could do. That is lying unrighteousness.

11 Elymas was in spiritual darkness, and at the word of the Holy Spirit through Paul, was in physical darkness. (4:30) “For a time” may mean that his sight would be restored if he repented. Paul was in tune with the Holy Spirit to the extent that he could voice God's judgment. This is a very rare occurrence in the Gospel. The most common sign is healing. What are other signs of judgment in the book of Acts? 5:3,5; 12:23. Is there any relationship with 9:8-9?

12 The result of Paul sharing the Gospel and speaking that word of judgment was the conversion of Sergius Paullus. Only God knows the far reaching effects of that conversion.

13 Leaving Cyprus, the missionaries traveled 150 miles across the Mediterranean Sea to the port of Perga, five miles up the Cestrus River. There were Jews that had come from this region in Jerusalem at Pentecost.

John Mark left the team at Perga. This became a source of contention between Paul and Barnabas later in Acts. 15:39

14 We don't know how long they stayed, but they moved on to Pisidian Antioch, a difficult journey over mountains. This city was considered to be the most important Roman colony in Asia Minor. It was laid out like a miniature Rome. There were numerous cult temples there as well as a Jewish community. The synagogue in which Paul delivered the message was recently discovered under the ruins of a Byzantine church. The rest of the chapter is Paul's message, one of the most complete records in the Bible of one of his sermons.