

## Lesson Text

### Acts 13:1-12 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. <sup>2</sup> While 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." <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

<sup>4</sup> The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. <sup>5</sup> When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.

<sup>6</sup> They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, <sup>7</sup> who was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. <sup>8</sup> But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. <sup>9</sup> Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, <sup>10</sup> "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?" <sup>11</sup> Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun."

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. <sup>12</sup> When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

#### Today's Lesson Aims

- **Learning Fact:** To recall the events from the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey.
- **Biblical Principle:** To trust the Holy Spirit's guidance to discern the will of God.
- **Daily Application:** To pray for the Holy Spirit's empowerment for bold witness in the week ahead.

Power Hour Lesson  
Summary for  
December 10, 2017

### "Faith to Discern"

Lesson Text:  
Acts 13:1-12

Background Scripture:  
Acts 13

Devotional Reading:  
Psalm 146

## Introduction

### Plot Twists

A mark of a memorable movie is the unexpected plot twist. The story of the film seems to be heading in an expected direction until it takes an unanticipated turn that keeps moviegoers thinking about it long after. In *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), Luke Skywalker battles Darth Vader, whom Skywalker believes murdered his father. But in a surprising plot twist, he learns that Darth Vader *is* his father! Astronaut George Taylor believes he is in an alien world in *Planet of the Apes* (1968). He (and the audience) is shocked to discover that he is actually on a future Earth nearly destroyed by humans and overthrown by apes. And who can forget the film *Psycho* (1960) in which the murderous mother turns out to be none other than Norman Bates himself!

Real life has its share of the unexpected as well—plot twists. We can react to those moments with surprise, with despair, or in any number of other ways. The apostle Paul was successful because his reactions to the unexpected were based on knowing God, who stands above all plot twists.

### Lesson Background

**Time:** A.D. 47-48

**Place:** Syrian Antioch

In Acts 8-12 Christians began to move out from Jerusalem as persecution and other circumstances scattered them. Acts 13-21 is a bit different as it identifies three distinctive missionary journeys of the apostle Paul and his companions. By the time of the episode in the current lesson text, Paul (known as Saul at the time) was linked with Barnabas by the need to assure the Jerusalem Christians that their former persecutor had become a faithful believer in Jesus (Acts 9:26, 27). Barnabas was already notable in the Jerusalem church for his generosity (4:36, 37).

After the gospel spread to Antioch, Barnabas invited Paul to join him there as a teacher in the church (Acts 11:19-26). Antioch, where the text begins, was a major city in Syria; we take care not to confuse it with a different Antioch of Acts 13:14. Syrian Antioch featured a multiethnic population and was one of the largest cities of the Roman Empire.

As the gospel spread to the city, both Jews and Gentiles became believers. This multicultural group found itself living in fellowship. As a famine approached, they generously provided relief for their fellow believers in distant Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30). Such a background prepared the church at Antioch well as the first to send missionaries to share the gospel with people in other places.

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### What Do You Think?

- What can we do to achieve more diversity in church leadership?
- How can the church do better in the area of prayerful decision making?
- What principles of and places for successful evangelism can we draw for today from the actions of Barnabas and Saul?
- What circumstances today call for strong confrontation rather than a gentler approach, if any? Why?
- What are some ways to present the gospel that will cause unbelievers to take notice?

### Points to Ponder

- Prayer and fasting focus us on discerning God's will, and can allow the Holy Spirit to empower us to speak the Word of God boldly! (Acts 13:1-3).
- Being obedient to the Holy Spirit allows others to be blessed as well (vs. 4, 5).
- Resistance to the gospel often arises from attempts to hold on to power (vs. 6-8).
- The enemy doesn't stand a chance against the power of God! (vs. 9-11).
- There is no distance too far for God to save even one soul! (v. 12).

### Conclusion

#### God's Surprises

- How has your life been different from what you expected a year ago? 10 years ago? How has your life been different from what you expected when you came to faith in Jesus?
- When we ask ourselves such questions, we may feel disappointed that we did not follow through in pursuing goals and dreams. Some of us may feel disappointment with God, that He did not deliver in the way we had hoped.
- But if we ask the question differently, perhaps our feelings will change. How has God worked in your life to accomplish His purpose in the last year, or 10 years, or since you came to faith in Jesus? While He may not have done with us what He did with Paul, through the Holy Spirit God is shaping us and using us to reclaim rebellious humanity. As He does so, He usually surprises us.
- How can we respond to such surprises? Like the leaders in the Antioch church, we need to share God's perspective on our broken world, ready to be His instruments by the Spirit's power in the next surprising situation. We need to accept each situation that lies before us as filled with potential for service in Christ's name. We need to trust the power of God's Holy Spirit to

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work in us when we know we are inadequate for the task. We need to act by a faith that sees God at work in even the most surprising circumstances.

### Prayer

- Dear Heavenly Father, may we trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance rather than our own planning as we serve as Your instruments in the various moments of life. Teach us to follow Your Son as we live in uncertainty at times. We pray this in His name, Jesus. Amen.

### Thought to Remember

- Success depends not on knowing what comes next in each chapter of our lives, but rather in knowing the Author of our story.

### Anticipating the Next Lesson

- Next week's lesson is **"Faith to Persevere"** and describes the experiences of Paul and Barnabas and their faithful persistence in challenging circumstances. Study Acts 14 and Colossians 2:6-7.

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