

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Sixteen
Acts 13:6-35

Day One

6 They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 7 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. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.

v. 6 – Here the team met a sorcerer and false prophet. What is a false prophet? It isn't always one who gives prophecies that are untrue. It can be someone who speaks for God who hasn't been sent by God. Here Paul and Barnabas met a Jew who was a heretic! And notice that he was the son of a man named Jesus or Joshua, which literally means salvation. So this Jew who had turned to demonic and deceitful ways that promised salvation came face-to-face with the true prophets sent by the real Jesus, the only source of true salvation. Not everyone who comes in the name of the Lord truly does, and it is up to leadership and the saints to test the spirits and the prophets to see if they are real or not.

But someone reading this may object, saying that this makes the people of God suspicious of others, and to some extent they are correct. And that is just what God wants! He wants us to be aware that there are spiritual counterfeits and fakers. Only God knows who they are, and He wants us to listen to Him so He can show us who they are. From his experience, Paul wrote:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Therefore, God's workers must not be offended when someone asks them for their "credentials"—the proof that they are sent by God. They must then let God prove that He has sent them, which He will always do. This is to safeguard God's flock and not to make God's workers uncomfortable or defensive. God is able to prove who is His and who isn't, if we are patient. **Are you growing in your ability to discern the difference between the things of God and the things that seem like they are from God?**

vs. 7&8 – This fake prophet had endeared himself to the Roman official on the island. But this proconsul wanted to hear what Saul and Barnabas had to say, so he sent for them, being an "intelligent" man." It is the height of intelligence to seek the things of God, not to mock, ignore or reject them. Elymas, the sorcerer, who dabbled in secret potions and magic tricks, tried to oppose this, probably because he enjoyed his influence

with the proconsul. The gospel is power and those who already have power are often threatened by its proclamation.

Day Two

9 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10 "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? 11 Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable 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. 12 When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

v. 9 – This verse contains a simple act that changed history, in my opinion. Paul changed his name from Saul to Paul. It was in this simple decision, I believe, that Paul embraced his purpose to go to the Gentiles. He would no longer be Saul the Pharisee convert, but Paul the Jewish missionary to the Gentiles. It is the height of moral courage to accept your purpose, to stand and say, “This is who I am!” When you stop trying to be who others say you should or who you think you should be, then you can follow in Saul’s footsteps and effectiveness. **Who are you? Are you walking in the fullness of your purpose? What, if anything, are you afraid of where your purpose is concerned?**

v. 10 – Paul looked at this sorcerer and, in the power of the Spirit, declared God’s judgment. First Elymas had perverted Judaism and now he was trying to pervert the Way. So Paul “called him out” and revealed him for who he really was!

v. 11 – When Paul decreed Elymas’ blindness, he was simply revealing the true state of the man: blind and helpless where true spiritual things were concerned! He needed someone to lead him about, which is what he truly did need where the things of God were concerned. This act, which is so dramatic, was done for two reasons: to remove an obstacle to those who were trying to come to faith, and to give the sorcerer a chance to repent! At that point, he could either see that what he had wasn’t nearly as good as what Paul had, and could then turn from his wicked ways. We don’t know if that happened, but it doesn’t seem like it did. But Paul’s action certainly enabled the first objective, as we will see in the next verse.

v. 12 – When the proconsul saw the reality of the spiritual power that went with Paul’s message, he believed and was taught the true ways of God. I think this contains an important lesson for us. This proconsul was open to the sorcerer because the proconsul was seeking God. Not everyone that is involved or dabbles in things like yoga and new age philosophy is evil; some are hungry for God. And God sent Paul and Barnabas because God knew the hearts of both Elymas and the proconsul. **Are you developing relationships with those who are seeking the truth? Are you reaching out to anyone who is searching for God, but currently in the wrong places? Perhaps God wants you to show them the better Way and help them satisfy their spiritual hunger?**

Day Three

13 From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. 14 From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down. 15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak." 16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!

v. 13 – We see here that John left the team and will discuss this more later. We do see that Luke mentions Paul first among the team from this point forward. This is due in part to Paul's encounter and role in Paphos and in part because Paul had accepted his new identity as signified by his new name—Paul. I may very well be reading too much into this name change, but from the perspective of purpose, this was a significant act. We also see that Paul and Barnabas had other people traveling with them. **Paul traveled with a team whenever possible, knowing that they were more effective. Who is part of your "team?" Who helps you accomplish God's purpose for your life? Of whose team are you a member?**

v. 14 – Paul always went to the synagogue first, and that was a personal value that he had. If it is a Scriptural mandate, we would have to do the same thing today! But this was unique to Paul and he undoubtedly did it because of the debt he felt to his Jewish heritage to try to win some for Jesus. But Paul was never an effective worker among Jews, even believing ones. That is because his purpose was expressed when he went to the Gentiles. When he went to the Gentiles, God went with him and he got results. So he would have gone to the synagogue because Gentiles who believed in one God were there as well. These Gentiles were not Jews, for they refused to live a kosher lifestyle and observe the rite of circumcision. But they rejected a multiplicity of Gods and that made them prime candidates for Paul's message. **Paul had a strategy to fulfill his purpose—take on a Roman name, go to the synagogues, preach until the Jews reject the message, then work with the Jews and Gentiles who wanted to follow Jesus. What is your strategy to fulfill your purpose?**

v. 15 – The synagogue was a place of "interactive" worship. Any visiting rabbi was asked to come and address the people, and then the leaders could comment. I wish our modern worship services were the same. Too many people leave and they haven't "connected" with the message, leaders or people. Perhaps this could be remedied if we took more time for questions or some other practice that would engage the people. **What can you do in your life, work and ministry to connect with people more effectively?**

v. 16 – Doesn't Paul sound like a prophet of God here? He stood up and commanded the people to listen to him. He knew he had something from God and didn't apologize for it. In fact, he commanded the people to pay attention, seeing that this was what God wanted

him to do. **Do you apologize for doing God's will? Don't! It's what you were created to do!**

Day Four

17 The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt, with mighty power he led them out of that country, 18 he endured their conduct for about forty years in the desert, 19 he overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. 20 All this took about 450 years. "After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. 21 Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled forty years.

v. 17 – In this and the following verses, we have a complete sample of what I would think was a typical Pauline sermon. Paul began at the beginning of what I call “covenant history” where God chose the Jews to be his people through Abraham. Then he led the people through a very cursory overview of salvation history.

v. 18 – Notice that Paul qualified God's actions during the Jews 40-year wanderings as “tolerance.” Don't ever mistake God's patience for His approval. He put up with the Jews for 40 years, but He wasn't pleased with them. Thank God for His mercy that causes Him to overlook our trespasses.

v. 19 – God fulfilled His promise to Abraham by giving the Jews the land and I believe He has fulfilled that promise again today. God always keeps His word. **Do you have any promises from God that He hasn't fulfilled yet? Be encouraged; He will in due time!**

v. 20 – Much has been made of this verse because it seemingly contradicts another verse:

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD (1 Kings 6:1).

The NIV, which I use for these studies, changes the text to read as I have copied at the beginning of today's study. The King James Version doesn't interpret this the same. What are we to do with this? We are to note the difference and move on! It's not important to the issue at hand. And there is no way, at this point, that we can know for sure who is correct. But is a difference of 30 years going to sidetrack my faith in God's word? Absolutely not! Which brings me to another point.

There is always new scholarship and archaeological findings that render new Bible translations necessary. I welcome new translations and the insight they can provide. I resist those who insist that the King James's is the best and most accurate. It isn't, although it is magnificent in its own right. I like the NIV, not because it is the most accurate, but because it is the most understandable. I may study from the NAS or KJV,

but for public ministry, I use the NIV. **What version of the Bible do you use? Do you know why you use it? Have you looked at any other versions lately? If not, why not? Perhaps it's time to make a change? Or time to study one and take another version to church?**

v. 21 – I wonder if Saul favored this piece of history, for he was named after King Saul and a descendant of the same tribe? At any rate, he gives a quick mention of his namesake. **This has led me to think: Could you give a quick history of the New Testament, just like Paul did here with the Old? Perhaps you want to try to do that? Or perhaps one of the Old, seeing what you include and what you exclude from your overview.**

Day Five

22 After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' 23 "From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised. 24 Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. 25 As John was completing his work, he said: 'Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but he is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.'

v. 22 – That is such a powerful testimony from God's own mouth concerning David. David was after God's heart to do *everything* that God wanted him to do. It's important to have a good name among men, but much more important for you to have a good name with God! Of course this probably pertained more to David's public posture, for he had his problems in his private life. But as the leader of Israel, he followed hard after the Lord. David did not allow idolatry and established the worship of the one true God as the only standard for behavior:

He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them (Psalm 78:70-72).

v. 23 – Now Paul came to heart of his message. He was doing a quick overview so he could establish Jesus' credentials, so to speak, with the listeners. Jesus was a descendant of David and thus qualified to fulfill the promise that a descendant of David would sit on the throne of Israel. Of course, Israel was expecting a political and not spiritual fulfillment of this promise, which is why so many dismissed Jesus as the coming promised King. It seems that Paul was assuming that everyone in the synagogue had heard of this man Jesus. I am writing this in Kenya and I have found it is so important to do what Paul was doing: build a bridge of understanding between you and the audience. In missions work, this is called "contextualization"—putting the message into terms to which the listeners can relate and understand.

vs. 24&25 – The listeners were also familiar with John, for he was considered by most as a contemporary prophet. So again, Paul attempted to establish Jesus' credentials, this time through a more modern, reliable source. It would have been easy, I would think for John to take on some of the glory that was intended for Jesus. People assumed that John was "the One," but he worked hard and deliberately to deflect the people's expectations and help focus their expectations on Jesus, the One to come. As mentioned in previous studies, leaders must always consciously work to focus the people on Jesus and not themselves. Yet the people today want a "king," just as Israel did in the days of Samuel:

But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Samuel 8:19-20).

Some think that it is easier to let someone else fight your battles, whether a pastor, bishop or supervisor at work. But Israel was to have no king but the Lord and the church is to have no king but Jesus. **Do you agree? Do you believe that modern church leaders, in some cases, have taken too much upon themselves of both work and honor? Or do you believe that this is in keeping with the biblical directions for honoring the servants of God? What do you believe, do you know? And do you know why you believe it? Can you describe it in terms of things you see in the Bible?**

Day Six

26 "Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. 27 The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. 28 Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. 29 When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. 30 But God raised him from the dead, 31 and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

v. 26 – Paul identified with this audience, saying that the message was "for us." He saw himself as the carrier of this message, in the truest sense of the prophetic voice that had emerged from Israel throughout their history. Paul saw the truth and was proclaiming it to the children of Abraham *and* the God-fearing Gentiles.

v. 27 – Paul once again tied the events from Jesus life to the Scriptures, which those listeners heard every Sabbath. Later we find that Paul wasn't a great speaker in terms of technique, but he certainly had brilliant content and delivery. He came to conclusions that motivated the people and caused them to think and accept what he was saying. And of course, Paul was relying on the commission that Barnabas and he had received in Acts 13:2. All this added up to a life and ministry that changed the course of history, and he did it all through the spoken word. **Don't ever underestimate the power of one person to change history, whether for good or evil. Are you underestimating your own importance? Are you acting like your life doesn't matter? If that is your attitude,**

then it won't! But if you take your purpose seriously, then you don't know what God can do with you, once you are surrendered to your purpose without hesitation.

v. 28 – Paul was familiar with the events surrounding Jesus' condemnation. These things were a matter of public knowledge and historical record. And Paul was quite clear that the Jewish people and rulers were the ones who requested Jesus' execution. It seems like Paul assumed that his listeners were familiar with these facts.

v. 29 – Yet Paul was also clear that the people and rulers were carrying out the predictions that were made concerning Jesus' life. We have discussed this issue in the studies of previous books, where we have concluded that the leaders and people acted with free will yet carried out the preordained will of God. Men are not puppets in God's hands, yet He causes all things to work according to the counsel of His will. I can't fully explain that truth, but I have lived long enough to see that this is true.

v. 30 – Paul didn't preach long, but he certainly covered a lot of ground! I am always working on how to say what I need to say with as few words as possible, with mixed success. That is why I stopped speaking from an outline on Sunday mornings. I then felt compelled to complete my outline, whether the people had the stamina to finish or not. I try to keep in mind that it isn't about me delivering the Word, but the people receiving and understanding the Word that is important. So speaking without notes helps me be more concise, less rigid and more sensitive to the people to whom I am speaking.

Speaking is a skill that can be learned, although there are certainly some who are more gifted than others. **What are you doing to improve your speaking skills? You can join a local Toastmasters chapter to work on this, or you can actively seek to speak or teach in front of a group. Then solicit feedback, even if it means listening to a recording of your talk. You can evaluate yourself on how well you did, or didn't do. Then you have something to work on to make yourself better. Don't think you have to be gifted to be effective.** Paul wasn't gifted, but he was effective:

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

For some say, "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing" (2 Corinthians 10:9-11).

Day Seven

32 "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers 33 he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." 34 The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: "I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David." 35 So it is stated elsewhere: "You will not let your Holy One see decay."

vs. 32-35 – Paul told the people the good news—that Jesus was the fulfillment of what God had promised Abraham and his children of faith. I have preached many messages, but I wonder if I have ever really preached the good news. I have taught on many subjects, because I am a teacher. But I don't have a clear, concise message of the gospel that I have given enough times that it flows. This is obviously what Paul had developed and the Spirit wanted us to see this sermon so we could pattern ours after this, I would think. **Do you have a short, concise message of the good news? If not, why not work on one, even writing it out if need be?** Paul was a great communicator as a writer and speaker.

Paul was establishing Jesus' claim to David's throne, because God had promised that someone would sit on David's throne forever. Since Jesus was raised from the dead and is alive forevermore, then Jesus qualified as the promised Messiah and coming King. Jesus' claim wasn't only that He was God, but obviously these verses that Paul quoted established Jesus' humanity. Jesus was fully God and fully man. Someone once described it as pouring one glass of water and one glass of milk into the same size glass. Yet that glass contained the two glasses and there was no spillage. Another teacher I knew used to say that our flesh rules on the throne of heaven; Mary's boy is seated at the right hand of the Father. That is good news indeed! And critical to understand so that we know that Jesus is able to help us in all things:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:14-18).

During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:7-10).

Are you drawing all the help from Jesus that you can? Are you mindful that He is a man and understands your temptations and weaknesses? One of our own has made it to heaven and is interceding for you and me. Oh, what glorious news! Tell Him your troubles; seek His help in your difficulties; ask Him to forgive your sins. He understands and knows you, so why hold back? If you've sinned, that isn't the time to run from God but to run to God. Run to Jesus today and enjoy the effects of the good news: He is alive forever and is there to help you be all that God created you to be.