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Barnabas and Sha'ul Sent Out from Syrian Antioch

13: 1-12

44-45 AD

Barnabas and Sha'ul sent out from Syrian Antioch DIG: What was the scene when the Spirit spoke to the leaders at Antioch? How do you think He may have spoken? How could the Spirit speak in your worship times? Cyprus is a 150-mile sail from Seleucia, and was Barnabas' home (4:36). What might these two men be thinking and feeling as they go? Since Gentiles were already welcome in the Messianic Community (11:18), why would Paul and Barnabas go to a synagogue? Put yourself in Elymas' place. Why and how would you oppose these missionaries? If you were Sergius Paulus, what would be your response to the missionaries after the events of verses 9-12?

REFLECT: When you are not certain what direction God is leading you, how do you go about discerning His will? What have you learned about this process by experience? What are some methods that the Adversary uses to try keeping the clear message of God's Word from getting through to us? How do you challenge and overcome those obstacles? With what types of people do you feel most comfortable talking about the Lord? Why? When have people tried to turn you from your faith? What happened? How do you deal with such pressures? When is it right to strongly confront people who oppose the faith? How deeply does the call to reach the nations affect your praying, your heartbeat? How could this priority increase in intensity for you?



Barnabas and Paul eventually returned after delivering the financial gift for relief from the famine for the **kedoshim (brothers and sisters) living in Judea (11:29)**. But after a while, the church at Syrian Antioch sent out **Barnabas and Paul** on the **First Missionary Journey** (to see link click [Bm - Paul's First Missionary Journey](#)). That began the final phase of **Messiah's** commission: **And you will be My witnesses to the end of the earth**, which was an idiom of that day for the **Gentile** world (1:7-8).

Chapter 13 is a turning point in Acts. The first twelve chapters have focused on the ministry of Peter, while the remaining chapters focus on the ministry of Paul. Until now, the emphasis has been on the Messianic congregation in Jerusalem and Judea; however, Chapters 13-28 describe the spread of the Gentile Church throughout the Roman world. And it was from the dynamic, doctrinally sound, Spirit-filled church at Syrian Antioch that the flag of Gentile missions was unfurled. It had spiritual leaders, with a spiritual ministry, who went on a spiritual mission, faced spiritual opposition, and experienced spiritual victory.

Spiritual leaders: Effective, strong churches inevitably have strong godly leaders, and the church at Syrian Antioch was no exception. **ADONAI** has always put a premium on spiritual leadership (**Acts 6:3; First Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; Hosea 4:9; Matthew 9:36**). These five men were the heart of the ministry at Syrian Antioch. **There were prophets and teachers.** The double use of the Greek particle *te*, makes the first three names **prophets**, and the last two **teachers**. Not much is known about them except for **Barnabas** and **Paul**.

Prophets played a significant role in the early Church (**First Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 2:20, 3:5, 4:11**). Like the apostles, they were preachers of **God's word** and were responsible to instruct the local congregations. Sometimes they received new revelation from **God**, as in **Acts 11:28** and

21:10-11. Both of those incidents record that **the prophets**, in contrast to **the apostles**, received practical, not doctrinal revelation. **The prophets'** functioned as receivers of divine revelation ended with the cession of the temporary sign gifts. Even **their** office, like that of **the apostles**, was replaced by **pastor-teachers** and **evangelists (Ephesians 4:11-12)**, who were **the elders** and **overseers (First Timothy 3:1ff; Titus 1:5-9)**. **The prophets were so revered that the early Messianic community viewed them like their "high priests," even though they moved from place to place.**

Barnabas receives an official designation here for the first time even though **he** has already appeared several times in **Acts**. From **4:36** we learn **he** was a Levite from the island of Cyprus. **His** birth name was **Joseph**, but **the apostles** named **him Barnabas**, which means *son of encouragement* - a fitting description of this gentle, loving **man**.

Simeon (a Greek transliteration of *Shimon*, or in Hebrew meaning *God has heard*) was by far the most common male name in the first century Eretz (land of) Isra'el, as well as a constant favorite in the diaspora. Given the name's popularity, this **Simeon** is **called Niger** (which means *black*). **He** was probably an Ethiopian or North African.

Lucius is a common Latin name, and **he** was from **Cyrene** on the north African coast. There is nothing to link **him** with the Lucius whom **Paul** greets in **Romans 16:21** and certainly no evidence to identify **him** (as some have argued) as **Luke** the physician. The Greek **Luke** and the Latin **Lucius** are completely different names, **and the rabbis consider it to be a non-Jewish name**. Furthermore, there is no Church tradition that suggests that **Luke** was ultimately from northern Africa.

Teachers are critical in today's Church (**First Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11; James 3:1**). **Theirs** is the ministry of giving others a clear understanding of biblical truth. The distinctive aspect of the ministry of **teachers** is its emphasis of instruction rather than proclamation. That **they** are somewhat different from preachers seems obvious in the texts that discuss both, though the same gifted man can sometimes perform both functions, as **Acts 15:35** clearly shows.²⁷³ **Despite being highly respected as the "spiritual elite," the status of the teachers ranked below that of the prophets, the "leaders of the generation."**

Manaen is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew **Menachem**, meaning *God is my comforter*. While the name is somewhat rare both in the Eretz Israel and the diaspora, it is a fairly common Roman name. **He** was notable because **he** was **brought up since childhood** (Greek: *sunthropos* can be translated *foster-brother*) **with Herod Antipas the Tetrarch**. This was the same **Herod** who beheaded **John** (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ F1 - John the Baptist Beheaded](#)), and presided over one of **Yeshua's** trials (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Lp - When Herod Saw Jesus, He Was Greatly Pleased](#)). **He** had been raised in **Herod** the Great's household along with **Herod Antipas**. **He** was a possible source of **Luke's** information about **the Herods**.

And Sha'ul, who needs no introduction, who of course came from **Tarsus of Cilicia**. Through **his** tireless efforts **the gospel** spread throughout the **Gentile** world (**13:1**).

Spiritual ministry: The church at Syrian Antioch was the base of **Gentile** evangelism. **While** the whole **church was ministering to the Lord, they fasted (13:2a)**. The Greek word for **ministering** is from *leitourgei*, which originally meant to *discharge a public office*. In the Bible, however, *leitourgeo* means more than *public service*; it describes *priestly service*. The leaders of **the Syrian Antioch church** faithfully discharged the office that **ADONAI** called **them** to, and fulfilled **their** ministry. **Keep a clear mind in all things, withstand hardship, do the work of proclaiming the Good News, and fulfill your service (Second Timothy 4:5)**. In the Septuagint it describes the priests who *leitourgei* in the Tabernacle (**Exodus 28:41**). Serving in a leadership role in the Church must be viewed as an act of worship to **YHVH**. Such service consists of offering spiritual sacrifices to **Him** (see the commentary on [Hebrews Df - Believer's Behavior in Relation to God: service](#)), including prayer, oversight of the flock, studying, and preaching and teaching **the Word**.

Their ministering was not to the congregation, but **to the Lord**. It is vital to understand that **ADONAI** is primarily an audience of **One** for all spiritual ministry. Like the Macedonian believers, those in ministry must give **themselves** first to **the Lord** and only then to others (**Second Corinthians 8:5**). **They are to make every effort to present [themselves] before God (Second Timothy 2:15)**, not to humans. Every godly servant, **works heartily, as for the Lord, not for human masters** because it is **the Lord** whom we serve (**Colossians 3:23-24 NIV**). In the last analysis, we have an audience of **One**.

The Bible frequently connects **fasting** with time of fervent, passionate **prayer** (**Nehemiah 1:4; Psalm 35:13; Dani'el 9:3; Matthew 17:21; Luke 2:37, 5:33; Acts 14:23**). Believers may become so concerned with spiritual issues that they lose the desire to eat, or they set aside food to concentrate on intense intercession. Scripture nowhere commands believers to **fast**, but **Yeshua** assumed **His** followers would do so (**Matthew 6:17; Luke 5:33-35**). In sharp contrast to the showy, hypocritical fasting of the Pharisees, when believers fast, it is for **God's** eyes only (**Matthew 6:16-18**).²⁷⁴

Spiritual mission: It was abundantly clear that although the leaders of **the Syrian Antioch church** endorsed, prayed and **fasted** for these two **men** and **their** work, it was **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** who declared: **Set apart for me Barnabas and Sha'ul for the work to which I have called them**. Here, the order is **Barnabas** and then **Sha'ul**, but after **the First Missionary Journey** it will be **Sha'ul** and then **Barnabas** because **Paul** took the lead. Regarding **his** name, it would be odd for **the Spirit of God** to keep calling this man **Sha'ul** if **He** had changed **his** name to **Paul** four chapters earlier (see **Bc - Sha'ul Turns from Murder to Messiah**), which of course, **He** hadn't.²⁷⁵ The congregation responded in faith. **Then after fasting and praying** to confirm the call, **they laid hands on them, they sent them off** as an extension of **the church at Syrian Antioch (13:2b-3)**.

So, sent out by the Ruach ha-Kodesh, the journey began and **they went down to Seleucia**, the seaport sixteen miles to the west of Syrian **Antioch**, and **from there they sailed to Cyprus (13:4)**. There had already been some evangelism in **Cyprus (11:19)** and some members of **the church** in Syrian **Antioch** had family ties there, including **Barnabas himself (4:36)**. **Cyprus** was one hundred and thirty miles southwest of Syrian **Antioch**. It is a Greek **island** in the Mediterranean Sea and an important trade center. The Roman fleet for this region was stationed there, and one could obtain regular passage to many destinations from this port. It is one hundred and forty eight miles long and about twenty miles wide. **Cyprus** was close to Syrian **Antioch** (probably two days journey at the most), and it had a large **Jewish** population. All those reasons make it an ideal starting point for outreach to the **Gentile** world.

When they arrived at Salamis, the largest city and chief commercial center on **Cyprus**, **they began to proclaim the word of God in the Jewish synagogues (13:5a)**. Although **Paul** was called to be **Yeshua's** emissary to the **Gentiles**, he invariably made it **his** practice throughout **his** life to bring **the Good News** of **Yeshua Messiah** to **the Jews first**. This matches with **his** teaching (**Romans**

1:16ff) and **his** heart's longing for **all Isra'el to be saved (Romans 9:1-5, 10:1, 11:26)**. With both reason and practice **he** thus refutes the Two-Covenant theology, which states that **Jews** are **saved** through Moshe and **Gentiles** are **saved** through **Jesus**. Unfortunately, few **Gentile** Christians have seen fit to obey **Paul's** exhortation to **be imitators of him (First Corinthians 11:1)** in this area. Instead, if **they** evangelize at all, **they** reach out to everyone but **Jews**, who are often the last to have **the gospel** properly explained to **them**, so that **they** are left to rely on hearsay and half-truths, or, worse, are presented with error and evil in the name of **the gospel**.²⁷⁶

They also had John Mark (12:25), Barnabas' cousin (Colossians 4:10), as a helper (13:5b). Mark was a native of **Jerusalem (12:12)** and was **Barnabas' cousin (Colossians 4:10)**. When **Barnabas** and **Paul** returned to **Antioch** from **Jerusalem** after delivering relief aide, **Mark** came with **them (Acts 12:25)**. **He** had undoubtedly left **Antioch** along with **Barnabas** and **Paul**. Clearly, **Luke** has included **John Mark** here to explain the later reference to **his** departure from the group. **He** would soon **desert them** and return to **Jerusalem** (see [Bv - Disagreement between Paul and Barnabas](#)), for now, **he** was a member of the ministry team, **helping Barnabas** and **Paul** carry out **their** spiritual mission.

Spiritual Opposition: From **Salamis, the three** traveled the width of **the island**, arriving at **Paphos**, some ninety miles to the west, a center for the worship of Aphrodite (Venus). The greatest festival in **Cyprus** in honor of Aphrodite was the Aphrodisia, held for three days each spring. It was attended by great crowds, not only from **Cyprus**, but also from surrounding countries. It was **a city** where immorality and extensive religious prostitution was commonplace. At that time, **they found a man who was a magician - a Jewish false prophet, whose title was Bar-Yeshua**. Like **Simon** (see [Ba - Simon the Sorcerer](#)), **he** was a deceiver who put **his** knowledge to evil use. **He was with the proconsul (13:6-7a)**. All Roman provinces were divided into two classes, those that required troops and those who did not. The former were under the administration of the emperor, and the latter were administered by the Senate and ruled by **proconsuls**.²⁷⁷ Time and time again we find **Luke** giving the proper designations for the Roman officials that **he** mentions.

One should not be too surprised that a Roman official could be fooled by such a con artist. Romans put great stock in powers of divination and even had their own sacred oracles, especially the upper-class. Charlatans like **Bar-Jesus** were usually smooth and highly knowledgeable, practicing a sort of pseudoscience. And **his**

Jewish credentials did not hurt **him** either. **The Jews** had a reputation among the Romans for their depth and insight of religious understanding. **Josephus mentioned a number of such Jewish sorcerers who had great success among the Gentiles. There is even a reference to a Jewish sorcerer from Cyprus who aided the Roman governor Felix in seducing Drusilla away from her husband Azizus (Antiquities 20.236-237).**²⁷⁸

On **Bar-Yeshua's** part, the fact that **he** had attached **himself** to **the proconsul** was no accident. The kingdom of darkness is always eager to influence those who are in power. Much of the evil in this world can be traced to **the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12b; Dani'el 10:13-11:1)**. The Roman **proconsul** of **Cyprus** was **Sergius Paulus** (the same name as **Paul** but in Greek), whom **Luke** describes as **an intelligent man (13:7b)**. As such, **he** no doubt had a keen interest in new philosophies and religious beliefs. That **he** had in **his** entourage a **Jewish** teacher (albeit a false one), showed that **he** had some interest in **Judaism**. **Barnabas** and **Paul** appeared to **him** to be two more **Jewish** teachers from whom **he** could learn more about the **Jewish** faith. Moreover, **his** position as **proconsul** prompted **him** to investigate this new teaching that was sweeping across **Cyprus**.²⁷⁹

Accordingly, **Sergius Paulus summoned Barnabas and Paul and sought to hear the word of God from them. But,** alarmed at the prospect of being out of a job with the conversation of the Roman **proconsul, Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated)** constantly **opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith (13:7c-8)**. Like many **Jewish** people at the time, **Bar-Jesus** also had a Greek name, **Elymas**, by which **he** was known at the court of **Sergius Paulus**. Apparently, **Elymas** was the Greek transliteration of an Arabic word for **magician**. The battle for the soul of **Sergius Paulus** had reached its climax.

Spiritual victory: But Sha'ul, who is also Paul, had had enough of **the magician's** interference. Taking the lead in this challenge, and being **filled with the Ruach ha-Kodesh, Paul fixed his gaze on him (13:9)**. Here the one sent to **the Goyim** is called both **Sha'ul** and **Paul** (see **Bm - Paul's First Missionary Journey: Paul is Sha'ul and Sha'ul is Paul**). **The decisive shift from the name Sha'ul to Paul happens only after Paul sets off on his missionary journeys among the Gentiles.** From now on, **Luke** will call **him Sha'ul** only in regards to **his** past (**22:7, 26:14**). The name **Paul** appears 132 times in **Acts 13-28**.

Then, Paul said, “O you, full of all deceit (Greek: *dolos*, meaning a snare, a thing to lure someone into a trap) **and trickery** (Greek: *radiourgias*, meaning fraud), **son of the devil** (instead of being **Bar-Yeshua, the son of Jesus, he is the son of the devil**), **enemy of all righteousness - will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?”** Bar-Jesus had been deceiving the proconsul with all his false claims. This event is an illustration of the lesson that Yeshua taught in the parable in **Matthew’s gospel** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ev - The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds**), and His explanation (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Fa - The Parable of the Weeds Explained**). Wherever **ADONAI** sows His true children (the wheat), **the Adversary** comes along and sows a counterfeit (the weeds) **child of the devil**. Paul recognized that **Elymas was a child of the devil (John 8:44)**,²⁸⁰ and dealt with him accordingly.

Remembering his own blindness (see **Bc - Sha’ul Turns from Murder to Messiah**), Paul knew that by the darkening of the eyes, the mind’s darkness might be restored to light.²⁸¹ Thus, justice was tempered with mercy and Paul declared: **Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind and not see the sun for awhile.”** It was probably meant to be a warning and intended to act as a stimulus to conversion, although we do not know whether it achieved this result.²⁸² As so often happens, **ADONAI** used a miracle to confirm the authenticity of His messengers and the truth of His word. **Immediately, cloudiness and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, because he was astonished at the teaching about the Lord (13:10-12).** Significantly, it was **the teaching about the Lord**, not the stunning miracle he had just witnessed, that prompted **Sergius Paulus** to believe and be saved. This became a very important incident because from this point Paul very clearly takes the lead between he and **Barnabas**.

A Roman Gentile responds to the gospel, whereas a Jew, with supposed religious connections, rejects the same message. The contrast is intentional, and this would turn out to be the pattern of evangelism in the book of Acts.²⁸³

It is well to remember the lesson of these verses. Leading someone to **Messiah** is not merely an academic exercise, nor is it a matter of making a successful sales pitch. Rather, it involves all-out spiritual warfare against the forces of hell.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist when the times are evil, and after you have done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm then! Buckle the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness (Isaiah 11:5). Strap up your feet in readiness with the Good News of shalom (Isaiah 52:7; Psalm 9:17). Above all, take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one (Psalm 28:7, 76:3, 91:4-5). And take the helmet of salvation (Isaiah 59:17) and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Isaiah 49:2).

Lord, You say: Pay attention to Me, My people, give ear to Me, My nation. For Torah will go out from Me, My justice as a light to the peoples. My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone out, and My arms will judge the nations. The coastlands will wait for Me - for My arm they will wait expectantly (Isaiah 51:4-5). ADONAI, I want to be part of this great work in my day, in whatever way You desire: Speak, for Your servant is listening (First Samuel 3:10).