
Ministry of the Holy Spirit
Acts 13:6-12
Lesson 23 – The King Silences Counterfeits

Acts 13:6-12 (NIV)

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. 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.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Satan shifted from using persecution against the church (Acts 4–12) to using deception in Acts 13? What does this teach us about how spiritual warfare often operates today?

Key Scripture: Ephesians 6:12; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

2. Elymas positioned himself close to the proconsul, a man of influence. Why do you think the enemy often targets influential people, and how should Christians pray for leaders in government, education, media, business, and the church?

Cross Reference: 1 Timothy 2:1-4

3. The sermon noted that Satan doesn't create truth—he counterfeits it. What are some modern examples of counterfeit spirituality or counterfeit truth that believers should recognize?

Consider:

- Horoscopes
 - "Manifesting"
 - Prosperity without repentance
 - Moral relativism (morals are dictated by circumstance)
 - Spirituality without Christ
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4. Paul confronted Elymas because he was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:9). What is the difference between spiritual boldness and human confidence? How can believers cultivate Spirit-filled courage instead of relying on personality?

Cross Reference: Acts 4:31; Ephesians 5:18

5. Your sermon compared learning genuine currency to knowing Scripture. Why is knowing God's Word a greater protection against deception than simply studying false teaching?

Cross Reference: Psalm 119:105; John 10:27

6. The Gospel exposes hidden darkness before it heals it. Why do people often resist biblical truth when it reveals uncomfortable areas of their lives? Have you ever experienced God's conviction leading to freedom?

Cross Reference: John 3:19-21; Ephesians 5:11-13

7. Sergius Paulus wanted to hear the Word of God, and that's when Elymas became aggressive. Why does spiritual resistance often increase when someone is moving closer to Christ or taking a step of obedience?

Share a time when opposition increased just before God brought breakthrough.

8. Paul's temporary blindness in Acts 9 became part of his testimony, and Elymas also experienced temporary blindness. What does this teach us about God's discipline? Can God's judgment sometimes be an expression of His mercy?

Cross Reference: Hebrews 12:5-11

9. Which voices have the greatest influence over your thinking right now (social media, news, entertainers, podcasts, friends, family, culture, pastors, etc.)? Using Paul's example, how can you evaluate whether those voices are leading you toward Christ or away from Him?

Use the sermon's three questions:

- Does this voice exalt Christ or itself?
 - Does it produce obedience or merely inspiration?
 - Does it agree with Scripture or compete with Scripture?
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10. The miracle in Acts 13 amazed the governor, but Luke says he believed because of "the teaching about the Lord." Why is the message of the Gospel always greater than signs and miracles?

Cross Reference: Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:22-24

11. Where do you see "counterfeit promises" competing with God's truth in our culture today? Which biblical truths directly confront those counterfeits?

Examples:

- Success vs. surrender
- Self-expression vs. holiness
- Feelings vs. truth
- Happiness vs. joy
- Tolerance vs. biblical love

12. The sermon closes with the declaration, "The King has spoken!" What promise from God's Word do you need to stand on in this season of your life? How does trusting God's final Word change the way you face fear, temptation, discouragement, or uncertainty?

Cross Reference: Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 24:35; Philippians 1:6

Bonus Challenge for the Week

Read **Acts 13:6-12** each day this week and ask God to reveal:

- Any counterfeit voices you have been believing.
- Any hidden areas that need to be brought into His light.
- One promise from Scripture that the Holy Spirit wants you to stand on.
- One person in your life who needs to hear the true Gospel instead of a counterfeit message.

And close by praying that God would fill you with the same Holy Spirit boldness He gave Paul so you can stand for truth with both conviction and grace.

Share your major takeaways from the Lesson/Sermon this week.

Commentary

(13:5-6) Missions, Work of— Discipleship: there was the work of missions. The primary work of missions is clearly seen in these two verses.

1. The Lord's servants preached the Word

2. The Lord's servants made disciples. They took John Mark with them. The word "minister" (*hupēretēs* ^{PWS: 2599}) means attendant, assistant, helper. Mark was ministering under Barnabas and Paul, being disciplined by them—helping, serving, ministering right with them, learning all he could. Apparently he was somewhat younger. Note the word "also": this could be saying Mark was doing some preaching as well as helping in other areas.

Making disciples of young men was one of the major ministries of Paul. He was usually seen with at least several disciples accompanying him. Even on this mission, he seemed to have several whom he was discipling, although they were not named (cp. "his company," Acts 13:13).

Just how Paul went about making disciples of others can be seen in the words of the great commission: "Go ye...and teach [make disciples of] all nations...." (Matthew 28:19). The word "teach" (*metheteusate*) means to *make disciples*. Thus the verse accurately reads, "Go ye therefore and 'make disciples' of all nations...." The point to note is this: our Lord is not only telling us *to go and evangelize*; He is telling us *how* to go and *how* to evangelize. He is not only giving His ultimate *objective* and overriding purpose; He is giving *the method* to use in evangelizing the world.

Think about the word "*metheteusate*" (make disciples). What does our Lord mean by *make disciples*? Is He not telling us to do exactly as He did?

What *did* He do? Christ "came to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He sought the lost, those who were willing to commit their lives to Him. And when He found such a person, He saved that person. When Christ found a person who was willing to *commit* his life, Christ attached Himself to that person. Christ began to mold and make that person into His image. The word *attach* is the key word. It is probably the word that best describes discipleship. Christ made disciples of men by *attaching* Himself to them; and through this *personal attachment*, they were able to observe His life and conversation; and in seeing and hearing, they began to absorb and assimilate His very character and behavior. They began to follow Him and to serve Him more and more closely.

In simple terms this is what Paul did. This is the way he made disciples. This was his mission and his method, his obsession. There is another way to describe what Paul did. Paul envisioned something beyond himself, and beyond his day and time. He envisioned an *extension* of himself, an *extension* of his very being, and an *extension* of his mission and method. The way he chose to extend himself was discipling; he *attached himself* to committed persons, and through *attachment*, the persons absorbed and assimilated the Lord's very character and mission. Then they in turn *attached* themselves to others and disciplined them. They, too, expected their disciples to make disciples of others who were willing to commit their lives to Christ. It was by this method that the glorious message of Christ marched down through the centuries until it reached us. And it is by this method that the message of Christ is to march down to the generation that is to follow us (2 Tim. 2:2).

There is no question what our Lord's commission is: we are to go; but more than that, we are to make disciples, to attach ourselves to those persons who will follow our Lord until they in turn can make disciples (2 Tim. 2:2).

"Go ye therefore, and teach [make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:19-20).

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting [equipping] of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Ephes. 4:11-12).

"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

3. The Lord's servants reached out to new areas. Note the two men went through Cyprus, to the city of Paphos. The idea is that they evangelized and preached the Word from town to town, village to village as they moved about the island. They reached out to every area, carrying the glorious gospel to those who were even in the *back areas* of the island.

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

"For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard" (Acts 22:15).

4. The Lord's servants confronted a false prophet. If there were no false prophets, there would be no false teaching. False teaching exists because of false prophets. Therefore the servants of Christ will not only be confronting false teaching, they will be confronting the false prophet himself. This is important to note, for it is usually much more difficult to confront a person than just an idea. A person can stand toe to toe with a person, threatening and persecuting him. The false prophet and teacher is usually in rebellion and opposition against God; therefore some form of evil attack is almost sure to happen.

The point is this: the Lord's true servant will run across false prophets and teachers. Therefore, he must be walking in the Spirit, relying upon His leadership and care and His presence and power in order to stand against false teachers and their teaching.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

"Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30).

"For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:18).

DEEPER STUDY #3 (13:6) Paphos

3. (13:7) Word of God: there was the desire to hear the Word of God. Sergius Paulus was the governor, the "deputy" (*anthupatō*^{PWS: 964}), the Roman proconsul of the country. The Roman proconsuls were appointed and controlled by the Roman Senate. He was the highest ranking official, the man of power and influence on the island. Note what Scripture stresses about the man.

1. He was a prudent, intelligent man, that is, a man of understanding and reason. He was controlled more by his mind than by feelings and emotions.

2. He was a man seeking truth. Apparently he had been seeking the truth in philosophy, science, and religion. This explains why a man of his understanding had Elymas in his palace. As shall be seen, Elymas was an unusual breed, a unique mixture of truth and error that would appeal to a man who was seeking truth.

Note: Sergius Paulus sent for Barnabas and Saul. He had heard about the Word of God these preachers were proclaiming and he wanted to hear it for himself.

Thought 1. The Lord's servant will find some who are seeking the truth, some who desire to hear the Word of God. But note: Barnabas and Saul were proclaiming the Word. It was because they were faithful in their proclamation that Sergius Paulus heard about the Word of God. If believers are not out witnessing, the world will never hear the Word of God.

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:13-14).

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thes. 2:13).

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2).

4. (13:8-11) Judgment: there is the pronouncement of judgment. Most believers would never pronounce judgment upon another person, not like Paul did. But judgment is pronounced by the Word of God and judgment is to be declared upon all who reject and oppose God.

1. Elymas was the official title of a sorcerer. It probably means "wise man," His name was Bar-Jesus, which means son of Jesus or Joshua. Remember Jesus was a common name among certain nationalities. The sorcerer was a religious priest, a Jew who was teaching the truth of monotheism, that there is only one God. But he was mixing the truth with philosophy, science, astrology, and the magic of eastern religions.

2. The one thing that brought immediate judgment upon the man is clearly stated. He "withstood them," stood face to face *against* the preaching of God's Word. The idea is continuous and persistent opposition. He tried his best to keep the governor from turning to Christ.

Thought 1. There is enormous danger in trying to stop someone from accepting Christ. (Cp. Mark 9:42.)

3. The judgment is from the Holy Spirit, not from Paul. What Paul did was not of himself: not of his emotions, not of personal resentment. The judgment came from the Holy Spirit. God had tolerated enough of the man's sin, hostility, and destruction. His sins were great. There was...

- the sin of all subtlety (*pantos dolou* ^{PWS: 112}): full of all craftiness, guile, trickery, deceit, treachery, seeking to bait and catch, to enslave in error and untruth.

- the sin of all mischief (*hradiourgias* ^{PWS: 2606}): full of all wickedness, fraud, villainy, and sleight of hand; moving about with ease and working against good; doing all kinds and forms of evil.

- the sin of being a child of the devil: being possessed and controlled by the devil; doing and working the will and works of the devil (cp. John 8:44; 1 John 3:10).
- the enemy of all righteousness: opposing all that is right and honest and just; all that is pure and moral and clean.
- the perverter of "the right ways of the Lord": distorting, twisting, adding to and taking away from the character of God and His Word, the holy Scriptures. (Paul is quoting Hosea 14:9. Cp. Isaiah 40:4; Isaiah 42:16; Luke 3:5.) The man was taking the "right ways" of God and making them crooked.

Note the word "all." The false prophet was totally depraved, giving himself over to *all sin*.

4. The judgment upon the man was by "the hand of the Lord." It was God and His power that executed the judgment. And note: the judgment was judicial, a just judgment. It was blindness for blindness; darkness for darkness. The false prophet had blinded himself to the truth all his life, choosing to walk in darkness instead of the light. (He was a Jew, possessing the privilege of the Scriptures.) And not only this...

- he had deliberately chosen to become a prophet of false doctrine.
- he had now been confronted with the claims of Christ and had shut his eyes to the truth.

Being stricken blind and having to be led about by others would silence his claim to be a minister of light. It would also be a sign to him that he must repent or be condemned to an eternal hell of darkness without the presence of the living and true God.

Thought 1. The judgment is a picture of the blindness and darkness of all religions, philosophies, sciences, and sorceries *apart from Christ*. If God is not at the center of the system of thought, the system at best is peppered with erroneous teaching.

"But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23).

"And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:5).

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

DEEPER STUDY #4 (13:9) Paul—Saul

5. (13:12) Conversion: there is the conversion of the proconsul. Note why the proconsul believed: he was "astonished," stricken, quickened by the "doctrine of the Lord." It was not the judgment upon the false prophet that astonished him, although such judgment was bound to affect him, but it was the message of salvation in Christ.

Note: much is made over the fact that his being baptized was not mentioned as it was with Cornelius. The idea in the verse is that his belief was genuine and he did become a follower of Jesus. If not, what is the point of mentioning his belief? In fact, what is the point of sharing the event?

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

"But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32).

6. (13:13) John Mark: there was desertion. Why did John Mark leave Paul and Barnabas? Several reasons have been suggested. Perhaps he was jealous. Barnabas was Mark's uncle, and Barnabas was turning the leadership reins over to Paul. Mark could have been opposed to the mission to the Gentiles, or he could have been so overshadowed by Paul that it was unbearable. Perhaps he felt the original commission was intended only for the island of Cyprus. Or he could have simply been homesick.

However, Paul's attitude seemed to indicate that Mark just did not have the stamina. He could begin things but could not finish them (see Deeper Study #4—Acts 12:25). He feared and shrank from the dangerous and hard trip up the rocky mountain pass to Antioch of Pisidia. The pass was infested with thieves and the terrain was a barren, rocky, forsaken place subjected to flash floods. (See 2 Cor. 11:26 for some of the threats that probably refer to this journey. See note—Acts 12:25 for Mark redeeming himself.) The point is this: every servant of the Lord experiences some disciples deserting the ministry of the Lord. They are just unwilling to pay the price of discipleship (Luke 9:23).

"And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece" (Luke 9:3).

"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

DEEPER STUDY #1

(13:4) **Cyprus:** the island lay in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea. (See Maps of Paul's Journeys.) It was a stopping off place for the commercial fleets of that day. It was famous for its copper mines and shipbuilding industries. But most of all it was known as a resort area, being blessed with a warm, appealing climate. The population was primarily Greek and Phoenician, but there were a large number of Jews there as well. The capital, Paphos, was famous for its worship of Venus, the goddess of love or lustful immorality. The immorality and the superstitious nature of the people show the depth of degradation and evil that had gripped the people of the island. Note that it was the society from which Barnabas came. It was his home. And it was the first society Paul set out to penetrate with the gospel right after committing his life to world-wide missions. The island had been under Roman rule for about one hundred years when Paul arrived.

DEEPER STUDY #2

(13:5) **Salamis:** the largest city on the island of Cyprus. It lay on the southeast coast facing Syria. The city was the commercial center of Cyprus, boasting an excellent harbour. (See Deeper Study #1 Cyprus—Acts 13:4 for more discussion. Also see Maps of Paul's Journeys.)

DEEPER STUDY #3

(13:6) **Paphos**: the capital of Cyprus (see **Maps of Paul's Journeys**). It was a thriving city, the seat of Roman government on the island. It was also a pagan stronghold for the worship of Venus, the Roman goddess of love. Because of the excellent climate, the seashore, and the sensuous rites of the goddess Venus, pilgrims travelled from all over in order to share in the *fun and stimulations* of the flesh. Paphos burned with what might be called the *bright lights of beach and nightclub life* twenty-four hours a day.

DEEPER STUDY #4

(13:9) **Paul—Saul**: the name "Saul" was his Jewish name; the name "Paul" his Roman or Gentile name. Paul was born in Tarsus as a free man, a Roman citizen from birth. He was probably given both names as a baby. Why the switch of names now? Up to this time, Paul had been ministering primarily to the Jews, and while among them it was only natural to use his Jewish name, Saul. But *now* a significant thing happened. The Spirit of God moved upon Paul, not Barnabas, to rebuke Elymas, the false prophet. Paul's ministry to the Gentile world was being launched at this very moment. He was standing in the court of a Roman proconsul (governor), not in a Jewish synagogue, and the Spirit of God was leading him to proclaim the gospel to a Gentile who needed Christ. From this point on he would become known as Paul, the great minister of the Gentiles. Paul would henceforth be carrying the gospel to the Gentiles who so desperately needed Jesus Christ and His salvation.

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