

32a ACTS

This is Friday, the 27th of February, 2004. We're picking up our study in the book of Acts, chapter 13, tonight. Let's take a moment at the outset to clear our minds, prepare our hearts, recognize the ministry of God's Holy Spirit in our souls.

Shall we pray? Father, we are always thankful for your grace, your faithfulness, your long-suffering, the patience with which you deal with us and the wonderful ways that you provide for our needs and bless us even in our challenges, even in our tests. We know that for those who love you, everything works together for good. We pray that you will bless us as we study your word this evening.

We pray that we will find those truths that you have for us and that it will not just be words on a page or stories in a book, but that it will be life-changing, that it will be applicable, that we will find it a source of strength and of guidance as we meet the challenges of each day. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

As I said, we do pick up tonight in Acts, chapter 13. This is a transitional place. The book of Acts itself is a transitional book, taking us from the age of Israel to the age of the church and the age of the Gentiles, right? Within the book of Acts, when we first introduced this book, we talked about the outline of the book that is more or less given in Acts 1.8. At least a lot of people like to see it in Acts 1.8. It says Jerusalem and Judea, which is the first section, then Samaria, and then ultimately to the ends of the earth, as people like to think.

I was revisiting the translation that we have there of Acts 1.8. I just wanted to point out one other thing on that. Yes, I'm going back 13 chapters. Just quickly though, in case you should ever wonder, what are we basing our understanding of that verse on? Heos esketu is the phrase in question.

Jesus said, you shall be witnesses unto me. Who is he speaking to, by the way? How many people? Eleven guys. Later on, he'll commission the apostle Paul, and that will make twelve, replacing Judas, who dropped out.

But these twelve men, Jesus says, you will be witnesses to me, both in Jerusalem, Judea, and in Samaria. It's a both-and construction, until the end of the age. I can't tell you how important getting that translation right is, until the end of the age.

This same construction, by the way, is going to be coming up in our chapter tonight, when we get to verse 47. That's all I'm going to say for now. When we get to verse 47, if I blow by it, stop me, because I want to make this point.

The church that was in Antioch had these prophets and teachers. You have the first three are the prophets, the latter two are the teachers. They hear the Holy Spirit tell them,

commission to me who? Who gets commissioned to go out, not from Jerusalem, but from Antioch, from the church at Antioch? It's Barnabas and Saul.

Let me just ask one more time. Who got commissioned? Barnabas and Saul. Because, as we go forward, verse 4, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

I've been to Cyprus, interesting island, relatively small, fought over by the Greeks and the Turks. They were fighting over it in the early 80s when I was there. Let me tell you, there is a lot of hate and discontent on the island of Cyprus today.

There was an airfield at Larnaca, and to get in and out of Beirut in those days, you had to fly through Cyprus. Beautiful, mountainous place, has a beach. The fellows who were a part of my team really liked the beach in Cyprus because it was a topless beach like in France.

And so, although they were fully dressed, and we only had about four hours until our helicopter flight, we had to go see the beach. There was only one lady there walking around without her top, and I don't know, for some reason it was a sight to be seen. So, I doubt that there was any such beach in the days of Paul and Barnabas, but they did sail to Cyprus.

When they arrived in Solomus, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as their assistant. I guess the reason I'm mentioning Cyprus is, it's a gateway.

It's a launching point, whether you're going to and from the Greek area, the whole Hellenistic region there, or to Palestine. Cyprus sits kind of in between. It's an intermediary point.

It's a halfway mark. So, they got to Solomus, and they're preaching the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. What is the last thing that verse 5 tells us? They also had John as their assistant.

Now, who was it that the Holy Spirit commissioned and said, send? Barnabas and Saul. How many guys went? Barnabas, Saul, and John. Why would this John, who's also called Mark, John Mark, why would he go? Well, they say here that he is their assistant.

Their helper, just one who helps, assists. We know a little bit about John Mark beyond his association with Peter. We know from Colossians that he is a cousin of Barnabas.

He's Barnabas' cousin. We know that his mother's house is where we saw the episode with Peter coming and knocking and being left at the door and so on. So, it's possible that his mother was a widow, and he grew up, therefore, in Jerusalem in that home.

Paul and Barnabas had come from Antioch on the first visit to Jerusalem. Paul's first visit. He brings the aid to the famine-stricken church in Jerusalem.

And when they go back to Antioch, they take John Mark with them. So, he's lurking in the vicinity. He's with his cousin Barnabas.

So, then the Holy Spirit says, Saul and Barnabas, I want them to go out. And so, Barnabas says, hey, I've got my cousin here. I want him to go too.

He can carry the bags. They say, okay, fine. Seems to be no problem.

I will tell you, however, that this has sown the seed of a problem. Now, when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they saw the sorcerer. We looked at this a little bit last time.

The false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus. What does Bar-Jesus mean in Aramaic? Son of Jesus. Bar means in Aramaic the same thing that Ben means in Hebrew.

Ben, her, son of her. Bar-Jesus, son of Jesus. With the proconsul, Sergius Paulus.

The thing that's interesting about this man is, you know, in Rome, Roman citizens had two or three different names. You have your pronomen, you have your cognomen. The third of your three names is your cognomen.

And this man's cognomen is Paulus. Well, Saul here, his cognomen is also Paulus. That's his Roman name.

And we're going to see in the book of Acts that when, in fact, in this chapter, that Luke is going to switch over from calling Saul by his Hebrew name, Shaul, to his Roman name, Paul. Because he is now in the Roman context, and this is the name by which he goes. We're also going to see, if you watch for it, that there is going to be a turning of leadership in the team.

Barnabas, you remember, is the one that sent to Tarsus and got Saul, brought him back to Antioch. It says that Barnabas and Saul went down to Jerusalem. Every time up to this point, when you find the two mentioned, Barnabas gets mentioned first because he's the man, he's the leader.

However, watch what happens in the course of this chapter. You notice that the Holy Spirit said, separate to me Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas first.

He's the prophet. Saul is the teacher. And that's all they need.

They've got one of each to go forth on this team. But they add a relative. They add a family member in.

So they go. They run into Bar-Jesus. He tries to foul up the works.

The proconsul, Sergius Paulus, is an intelligent man. He calls. He wants to hear the word of God.

He's interested. Well, this Bar-Jesus guy tries to get in there and twist the message and make it something that it's not. He's also called Elimus, the sorcerer.

I didn't tell you last time what Elimus means, and one of the reasons is nobody's real sure. There is an Arabic cognate that means someone who leads or someone who brings something along, and it came to be used for a magician, the noun form in Aramaic. So they think that maybe this was an Aramaic form of the word magician.

So his name is translated Elimus, apparently meant sorcerer. There's an interesting theory, though, that this is a corruption of his name and that it's not Elimus, but it's Atomos, A-T-O-M-O-S. Atomos was a relatively famous sorcerer of these times who was mentioned by Josephus in his Antiquities.

2142 mentions this Atomos who was lurking about the area. So Atomos might be Elimus. It doesn't really matter here.

But he withstood them, seeking to turn the consul away from the faith. Saul, who is called Paul, this is the turning point now. From now on, Luke is going to call him Paul.

Because why? He's out in the Roman Empire now. Filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? This is a rhetorical question. Because he already knows that he won't stop perverting the straight ways of the Lord.

But he asks the question anyway. Will you not cease? He's basically saying you won't cease. So, now indeed the hand of the Lord is upon you.

You shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time. Well, this is quite interesting considering the last guy we saw stricken with blindness was who? The man speaking these words on the road to Damascus. So he knows a little bit about how thought-provoking being struck blind can be in showing you the error of your ways.

Now we know from the Word of God that the period of blindness imposed upon Saul was very beneficial and he took that opportunity to change his mind. Here is a guy who is equally an enemy of the faith, an enemy of the truth. Dragging people away from the faith and so on.

He gets stricken with blindness. He does not turn. He does not change his mind.

What does this tell us? Well, it tells us the same thing most of the Word of God tells us.

That it is not your circumstances that define you. It is your choices in those circumstances.

Lots of people can be struck blind. Some will respond and see the warning and change their ways and get with the truth. Others will not.

It's the same blindness. It's a temporary blindness. He says you will not see the sun for a time.

Some indeterminate period of time. We hear no more of Elymas the sorcerer after this. He is wandering around banging things with a stick waiting for his sight to come back.

But he does not stop and think. The power of this action does not impress on him the need to get right with God. However, it does bring things to a point for the proconsul.

Immediately a dark mist falls on Elymas. And he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Notice, where does he turn for his aid? He doesn't go back to Paul.

He doesn't go to God. He says, somebody, one of you guys around here, help me, lead me by the hand. He turns to the wrong source for help.

And that's the end of him. We hear no more of him. But the proconsul believed when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the blindness of Elymas.

Are you reading along with me? Is that what it says? What was the proconsul astonished at? What impressed him the most? Even with this miraculous blinding, what impressed the proconsul? The teaching of the Lord. That was what he asked for. And notice two things.

Elymas, the sorcerer here, bar Jesus. In English, this makes good sense. When you bar something, you block it.

But Elymas is in the business of twisting the truth. That's what this second word there that's translated perverting means. Perverting the straight ways of the Lord.

It has the idea of, in fact, it's a hypoxlegomena. It's not used anywhere else in the Bible, this particular word that Paul applies to him. Will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? The proconsul already expressed a desire, didn't he? He asked for Barnabas and Saul.

And when he hears the word of the Lord, the teaching of the Lord, he is impressed. He is astonished. And he sees that there is authority associated with that word.

In the early days, now this is an important point, because you're going to run into, we all run into, charisma, miraculous, this, that, and the other, signs and wonders, movement, and so forth. Your vineyard people, your holy laughter people, your several different

denominations are big into signs and wonders, powerful manifestations of the Spirit. Look at the association here in verse 12.

There is a powerful act by the Holy Spirit, and there is the teaching. They both go together. The man is astonished, not so much by the power as by the teaching.

The miracle here, the blinding, reinforces the authority of the one presenting the message. Now, why do we believe there is no signs and wonders movement in the modern day? You can argue the language of 1 Corinthians 13, and this, that, and the other, about where there are prophecies they will cease, and so on. These all will be done away.

But conceptually, here's the idea. Anytime a man has appeared on the scene, or a collection of men have appeared on the scene, with a fresh message from God, it requires authentication. How do I know this is from God, and you just didn't eat something that didn't agree with you, and come up with a bizarre idea? As Mohammed did.

God authenticates. God manifests the fact that this messenger has authority from God. Right? This is what Moses did in Egypt.

This is what the prophets did in Israel. Elijah, floating axe heads, and raising the dead, one thing and another. Why? Because his message was authenticated.

His authority to deliver the message was authenticated by those miraculous works. Same thing when Jesus came on the scene. How many miracles, here's a pop quiz for you, how many miracles are recorded in the Bible for John the Baptist? Zero.

You know why? His message and his authority to deliver it needed no authentication, because the entire corpus of Old Testament Scripture existed in John's day. John said nothing new. Everything John said was a recap, and a review, and a re-articulation of Old Testament truth.

John was the last great Old Testament prophet. He didn't need authentication. He had the Word backing him up.

And guess what? When the apostles come on the scene with fresh revelation from God for a new dispensation, their authority is signified and is manifested and backed up by God with these miraculous actions and activities. After they have been around a while, and after they have been authenticated, that power goes away. Paul leaves a companion behind sick during his travels.

And you say, well, wait a minute. Peter can walk by, a shadow hits someone, and they're healed. How come Paul can't just keep all of his staff healthy? Because that was a transient phase when his office as apostle needed authentication.

Once he's authenticated, once people say, well, he's definitely an apostle, he doesn't continue to do these miraculous things. So, why is there no signs and wonders today? Because just like John the Baptist, we have the corpus of the New Testament. That is the authority.

That is the authentication. We speak what the Word of God says. I don't need to do a miracle.

I can point you to God's Word. That's where the authority resides. John the Baptist got his authority from the Old Testament Scriptures.

Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. That's all Isaiah, that's Ezekiel, that's Old Testament, that's Malachi. Today, when we come to church and we study God's Word, I don't have to perform any sort of a sign, because I transmit to you what the Word of God says.

It carries its own authority. It doesn't need authentication. So, the proconsul believed he is astonished at the teaching of the Lord, which is confirmed, the authority and the source of this message is confirmed by the blinding of this enemy here.

Now, verse 13, when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia, and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. When they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, sat down, etc. Seems pretty blasé, pretty run-of-the-mill, but this is actually a pretty big deal here in verse 13.

John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. Didn't go back to Antioch, he went to Jerusalem, where his home is, where his mother lives. This is going to be a bone of contention.

This is going to split a missionary team down the road. John, Mark, should never have been on this trip. But he was, and they reach a certain point here, and then they decide, well, he's got to go.

Or he decides he's got to go, one way or another. Why does he go back? Well, there could be a number of possible reasons. It appears from Scripture that Paul developed an illness when they got to Pamphylia.

Malaria, could be. This was a region known for its malaria. Could have been that John Mark got spooked.

They may have had to go inland and go to higher altitudes to help Paul recover. This has been a speculation. It could have been for any one of a number of reasons.

The Scripture does not tell us, it just tells us that he left. But keep in mind now that we

have seen him mentioned twice. He was added to the team without any authority from the Holy Spirit, and now he has bugged out.

We'll see the consequence of this coming up later. So, they go to the different Antioch. This is not the old Antioch that they left from.

This is Antioch in Pisidia. They went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. What day is this? Saturday.

Sabbath day, right? This is the Jewish worship day. They go to the synagogue on the Sabbath, on Saturday, and they sat down. And after the reading of the Law and of the Prophets, this is the standard fare that you would get in the synagogue.

They would read not the entire thing, but they would take a selection out of the Pentateuch. Then they would take a selection out of the Prophets. Many times they would also take a selection out of the writings.

But we don't know how far back that custom goes. But here we know that they took a selection from Moses, a selection from the Prophets. Then the rulers of the synagogue sent to Barnabas and Paul and said, Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

Well, this is a rare opportunity. This isn't going to happen many times in the future. But this is the Jewish synagogue, and at this time, and in this city, they don't see a problem.

In fact, they're anxious. They invite Barnabas and Paul to come to the synagogue and speak. Now this would be unheard of back in Israel, certainly in Jerusalem.

But this is the Hellenized Jewish world. This is the world to which Paul and Barnabas originally go. So they start in the synagogue.

Now, they're in a strange town. We don't know that either one of them had ever been here before. So where do you start? Well, where do we start? You go to a town and you have to be there for a while.

Guys in the computer industry sometimes get sent to Milwaukee or somewhere and they have to stay there maybe three months working on some project. We say, boy, you know, I've got an old classmate or somebody in Milwaukee. I'll look them up.

And people typically, when they go into an unfamiliar environment, try to find something familiar, some known point of contact to establish a little bit of a base, a little bit of stability. So it would be natural for these Jewish men, even though they are Christians, to begin at the synagogue and start with something known, something familiar. People who come to the synagogue have at least an ostensible interest in the things of God, right? So it's a logical invitation to accept.

It's a logical place to start. And that's where they begin. So verse 16, Paul stood up, motioning with his hand, said, Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.

You notice the twofold address. All of you men of Israel need to pay attention and any of the rest of you all who fear God. Jews, God-fearing proselytes.

They're in the synagogue, right? So they're unlikely to be uncircumcised pagans in this crowd. But there are likely to be some proselytes, some converts. The Jews have been in these areas for a while.

There could be people that have intermarried and their status is sort of uncertain. My daddy is a Jew, my mother is a Greek or vice versa. So there's a mixed multitude here.

And these people are going to be more receptive to what Paul has to say about Christ than they ever were back in Israel. So, you who fear God, listen. The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt.

And with an uplifted arm, he brought them out of it. Now, for a time of about 40 years, he put up with their ways in the wilderness. When he destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he distributed their land to them by allotment.

After that, he gave them judges for about 450 years until Samuel the prophet. Afterward, they asked for a king, so God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin for 40 years. Now, when is the time of the Exodus? It's about 1445 BC, give or take.

When is the time of Samuel and Saul? Just before 1000 BC. So, 450 years, rounding off, is this span. And when he says that he gave them judges for 450 years until Samuel the prophet, he's basically talking about all the way, this 450 years includes the sojourn.

It includes the time of Joshua. Because, based on the advice of Reuel or Jethro, the father-in-law, Moses appointed judges, right? And they were the interpreters of the law. So, from the time of the beginning of the sojourn, all the way down, there's been people who have pointed this and said, oh, there's a mistake in scripture.

The book of Judges doesn't cover 450 years. Well, it's a difficult thing to talk about without sounding like you're making an excuse, but truly and honestly, Semitic thinking isn't as serialized and as scientific as ours is. A guy can be giving you a story in a sequence and he'll back up in Semitic storytelling.

You see this in the book of Genesis. You see it all the way through the Bible. They'll tell you what they're going to tell you, then they'll back up, and we say, well, that's a mistake.

Well, nobody in Israel, nobody in this audience, would have thought this was a mistake. They all know the timing, and they didn't consider it a mistake. It's only our Western ear and our Western eye that says, well, now, doesn't he say after that in verse 20, after that they had gotten the land by allotment, and doesn't that make it a mistake? Well, you just can't think of it that way.

I'm sorry. And there's lots of other examples, both in and outside the Bible, where it is not designed to be a chronology. He's not giving us a timeline.

He's backing up and saying, now, look, Israel had judges for 450 years. It started with Moses, and it went all the way to the time of Samuel until he anoints the first king. You have 450 years of judges in Israel.

That is a fact. The bulk of that time is after their entrance into the land. That's the judges that you see in the book of Judges, but the total time was 450 years, until Samuel the prophet.

Afterward, they asked for a king. God gave them Saul, the son of Kish, man of the tribe of Benjamin, for 40 years. When he removed him, he raised up for them David as king, to whom he also gave testimony.

He said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will do all my will. The man after God's own heart does God's will. That episode we just saw before this sermon, with Elymas and with Sergius Paulus, there's a lot of freight there.

You have someone who opposes the preaching of the Word, being blinded. And you have someone who is a Roman, who has the name of Paul, seeing. And this sums up in a way what's going on in Israel.

Israel, opposing the teaching of Christ, is blinded. Those who, like Paul, accept the teaching and the work of Christ, begin to see. And so, even with the names there, it's no accident that you have the name of Jesus, that you have the name of Paul, that you have a blindness, which Paul is going to talk about in Romans.

A blindness has happened in part to Israel. In part. A blindness has happened in part.

Israel was to be a people after God's own heart. Their first great king, David, from the tribe of Judah, precursor, father of the Lord Jesus, was a man after his own heart, who will do all my will. From this man's seed, according to the promise, God raised up for Israel a Savior, Jesus.

After John had first preached, before his coming, the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. They got the chance. The ground was plowed.

Get ready. Your Messiah is coming. And as John was finishing his course, he said, Who do

you think I am? I am not he.

But behold, there comes one after me, the sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to loose. You know, it's interesting when you look at Paul. Paulus, by the way, in Greek, means to lessen, to diminish.

Jesus' entrance at the first advent is heralded by a man who says, He must increase. I must decrease. And the great preaching of Christ to the world is given by a man who is also called Paul.

The lesser one, the one who diminishes. Many people have tried to attribute Christianity to Paul. You know, secular history says, well, Paul invented Christianity.

And that is just the opposite of his name. He is the one that gets out of the way and gives you the truth of Christ, just as John the Baptist tried to do for Israel. Men and brethren, verse 26, sons of the family of Abraham and those among you who fear God, he addresses them both again, to you the word of this deliverance, this salvation, has been sent.

He says, I am here. I am the Angelus. I am the Apostolos.

I am the one sent. I am the messenger to bring you this news, the word of this salvation. For those who dwell in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not know him, nor even the voices of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning him.

All of the hullabaloo over the passion of the Christ and Mel Gibson and oh, what an anti-Semite. Those who dwell in Jerusalem and their rulers have fulfilled the prophets in condemning him. This is what the word of God says.

So, I say to everybody else, get over it. That is what scripture says. The rulers, yes.

The people in Jerusalem, yes. And though they found no cause for death in him, they asked Pilate that he should be put to death. Now, when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

But God raised him from the dead. And if I had any criticism for this movie that I haven't seen yet, it's that it stops too soon. Because the great victory is on Sunday, the third day.

That's when the work is complete. That's when the victory is made manifest. Paul tells us over in Corinthians, if Jesus is not raised from the dead, then death on the cross is a waste of time.

And we are of all men most miserable if we only have hope in this life. If we don't have a hope of the afterlife, hang it up. Christianity is not worth the living.

God raised him from the dead. And I think it's great that they put this in its own verse. Verse 30 sits all by itself.

God raised him from the dead. There is nothing more hopeless than death. If you have watched someone go through the process of dying, if you have seen someone die, if you have seen the dead, it is very sobering.

It is very depressing in a way. And there is no greater victory than this. God raised him from the dead.

He was seen for many days by those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses to the people. And we declare to you glad tidings, that promise which was made to the fathers. This is the fulfillment of an Old Testament promise.

You have people that say there is no resurrection in the Old Testament. Paul is talking to a crowd who hears nothing but the Old Testament every time they come to synagogue. He says, you remember the promise? This is the fulfillment.

This is the fulfillment. They laid him in a tomb. God raised him from the dead.

He was seen by many who are his witnesses to the people. Notice, it doesn't say who were his witnesses to the people. These are living, breathing eyewitnesses of the resurrection.

We declare to you these glad tidings. God has fulfilled this for us, their children, in that he has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second psalm, you are my son, today I have begotten you.

And that he raised him from the dead, that no more to return to corruption he has spoken thus, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Everything that we are given in terms of God's sure mercies hinge upon, are based upon, and find their essence in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's Mel Gibson's next movie.

That's what he needs to make next. The resurrection of the Christ. That's the sequel.

You will not allow your Holy One to see corruption. We who are in Christ have the same promise. It's hard to believe.

We're very scientific. We're very used to the practical and the mundane. And we think, you know, resurrection from the dead, this is kind of hard to wrap our mind around.

Everything hinges on this. Your life is a waste of time if there is no resurrection. Well, this is a good place for us to stop and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to pick up in verse 36, and we're going to see the answer to the question, so what, as we go through chapter 13.

