

Acts 12:25-13:12

Undeniable Call, Exceptional Provision

Learning Objectives

- God is more powerful than those who oppose the Gospel.
- When God leads you to do something, He will equip you to do it and never abandon you.

Pray for your time together.

? What's the longest road trip you've ever taken? What got you through it?

Possible Answers: Favorite snack, caffeine, jamming to music, knowing the destination, the sights along the way, etc.

Optional Transition: In our study today, we're going to learn about a "road trip" that some of the early disciples took and the difficulties they encountered while on it.

Read Out Loud: Acts 12:25-13:12 (NIV)

²⁵ When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.

13 ¹ Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

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

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

Sorcery?!

Paul calls out Elymas as a "child of the devil." This suggests Elymas' "magic," is assisted by demonic forces. Magic in this time was practiced by pagans and Jews alike for physical benefits such as healing or material gain, and spiritual goals like cursing others or protection from curses. (ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2007.)

Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun.”

Definition: A *proconsul* was the highest-ranking official in a Roman province.

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.

Leaders' Note: This passage has a couple of potential "rabbit trails." The idea of sorcery may be one--please refer your group members to the appropriate sidebar. Also in this passage, Elymas goes miraculously blind. It is possible that this will lead to a discussion of miracles, and whether or not they can and do happen today. Try to keep your group on track and prevent arguments about the current possibilities by returning people's attention to the passage and the following questions. For more miracles done by people who were not Jesus, see Acts 3:1-16, Acts 8:6-7, and Acts 9:17-18. If you want to discuss this further and think the discussion would be beneficial and fruitful, invite your group to meet outside of study time to discuss, asking them to look up their own passages and sending them the ones mentioned prior.

? At the start of this passage, Barnabas, Saul, and John (Mark) returned from Jerusalem only to be sent off again in verse 3. What pattern does this show, and how do you see the Holy Spirit at work in it?

Possible Answers: Believers would be sent out to preach the Gospel in other areas, and return after a time. This was a regular, intentional pattern. After fasting and praying, they were sent off, and began their ministry. The Holy Spirit is the direct source of the call, and is with them on their mission to sustain and empower them. There is no question about whether this journey was starting under human power or God's power.



? This map shows the route taken by Barnabas and Paul on their journey. Our passage takes place on the island of Cyprus in Paphos. This was not a normal trip! Have you ever been called to do something unusual or exceptional? Did you answer the call? Why or why not?

Possible Answer: Answers will vary. People may share deeply personal experiences or struggles, or stick to more accessible calls like moving to a new place or a

call to leadership in a church or student group.

? In the passage, there is no indication that Paul and Barnabas expected to be summoned by the proconsul. How do you think they felt when they received the summons? How does this resemble or differ from the summons they received in Acts 4:1-22?

Possible Answers: They might have felt excited, or happy, or anxious, or surprised. The proconsul was a significant authority figure. A few chapters ago Paul and Barnabas were summoned by the Sanhedrin, also a high authority, in Jerusalem (Acts 4:1-22). This experience was similar in that they spoke the truth to the leader(s), and that some people wanted to oppose it. It was different in that the highest leader really wanted to understand, not just to block their message.

Optional Transition: The proconsul Sergius Paulus wanted to hear God's Word, so he summoned Paul and Barnabas.

? Have you ever had someone seek you out to talk about Jesus or Christianity? What was that conversation like?

Leaders' Note: You can also expand/reverse this question to help discussion along: Did any of you seek out Christians before you made a decision for Christ yourself? Why? What happened?

Possible Answer: Answers will vary. Some could have had good experiences with genuinely interested non-believers. Some could have had negative conversations. We want to avoid shame for those who haven't had this happen - it's not something everyone experiences!

? The false prophet Bar-Jesus (Elymas the sorcerer) tried to block the meeting between the proconsul and the disciples (vs. 8). Why do you think he interfered?

Possible Answers: Elymas was an attendant to the proconsul and probably had additional power and influence because of his connection to this person in power, besides his sorcerous or magical claims to fame. He could have had many reasons to block the disciples, but they could include a desire to keep influence over the proconsul (which he might lose if the disciples affected his mind or heart), personal spiritual darkness related to his magical activities, animosity toward the disciples personally, etc.

? Have you ever been blocked or opposed by someone when you were trying to share your faith? What happened? Why do you think they tried to stop you from sharing?

Possible Answers: Answers will vary.

Leaders' Note: if you have an experience to share, you may wish to take the lead in opening up the discussion here.

? Verse 9 says that Paul was “filled with the Holy Spirit.” How do you think this impacted what he said?

What is the significance of another mention of the Holy Spirit (also seen in verses 2 and 4)?

Possible Answers: It is clear from that mention that Paul wasn't just calling Elymas out because he was personally peeved at what was happening. The opposition there was directly spiritual in nature, and the Holy Spirit was leading Paul to say exactly what God wanted in that moment.

? Why do you think Elymas was temporarily blinded?

Possible Answers: This miracle was unmistakable and an immediate follow-up to Paul's words. Its spiritual origin would be undeniable, and would show those present and those that heard about it God's power in that situation and in others like it. It would also show that the disciples were true followers of God, not just saying things they wanted to say. Elymas was trying to block the light of God's truth from the proconsul, so God blocked his vision of light in the physical world.

Leaders' Note: This question may start a discussion about the character of God. Is He vindictive? Acts is full of miracles that lead the unbelieving to faith. This is one of them. God brings temporary blindness on a person who wanted to blind the proconsul to the truth in order to change a heart for His kingdom. God is jealous for His people and concerned with His glory, but He is not a child throwing a tantrum.

? The proconsul believed because of the miraculous blinding of Elymas. How do you think you would have responded if you had seen it happen in front of you?

Possible Answers: I would've believed too. I would've been terrified. I would've tried to help Elymas to his feet. I would've questioned God's goodness.

? What truths have you seen in this passage and others throughout Acts that you can apply when you're in the midst of life's long journeys?

Possible Answers: This week, we saw God actively sustain His people through what He called them to. We've seen the Holy Spirit come to believers as our guide and seal. We've also seen the Gospel working in community in Acts - God did not intend believers to journey alone.

For Discussion and Accountability

? In what circumstance or relationship can you rely more on the Holy Spirit for guidance, wisdom or words this week? What one practical step can you take in that relationship or circumstance?

? How will you respond the next time someone directly tries to oppose you sharing your faith or your life journey with Jesus? How can you prepare for that moment this week?