

Introduction:

1. Acts 13:9 reads like this: “Then Saul, who also is called Paul...”
 - a. Something happens in this verse that is never explained or clarified. Up to this point in the book of Acts the apostle is uniformly called Saul. From this point forward he is always known as Paul. No explanation is given as to why; the fact of it is just recorded and nothing more.
 - b. Yet, it is clear that the great apostle’s name was changed from a Hebrew name to a Roman name. Who changed it? We don’t know. Why was it changed? Maybe it was because he was sent to the Gentiles and having a Roman name would make him more accepted among them.
 - c. The change was not a big change; it was only one letter; but it was a different name, nonetheless. And, it is not uncommon for us to find Bible characters with more than one name. Daniel was also known as Belteshazzar; Peter was known as Cephas; Esther was called Hadassah.
2. Much more important than the name of the apostle in Acts 13:9 is what is happening in the text!
 - a. Saul is on an island in the Mediterranean called Cyprus. He is on his first extended preaching tour (First Missionary Journey), being sent out by the church at Antioch, Acts 13:1-4.
 - b. Leaving from Antioch and catching a ship at Seleucia, Saul, Barnabas and John Mark sailed to Cyprus. They preached first in the seaport city of Salamis, Acts 13:5. It was always Saul’s practice to go to the Jewish synagogue first when he entered a new city (Romans 1:16).
 - c. Leaving Salamis, they worked their way westward through the island of Cyprus until they came to Paphos, Acts 13:6. It was at Paphos that they encountered a sorcerer. We want to begin our study here as we see the Strange Story of Saul and the Sorcerer of Cyprus.

The Lesson:

I. Two men heard the word of God, Acts 13:6-8.

- A. This strange story well illustrates how that the word of God is received in different ways by different people. We sometimes think that everything rests upon the skill of the teacher. Yet, this case, with one teacher, shows two differing reactions.
 1. Sergius Paulus was a government official.
 - a. In fact, being the proconsul, he was the chief government officer on the island of Cyprus. Proconsul was a position appointed by the Roman Senate. He was an intelligent man, a man of good sense and understanding.
 - b. Yet, there was something wrong with this man—he was under the influence of a wicked sorcerer. Yet, there was also something right with this man—he wanted to hear the word of God.
 2. Bar-Jesus was a sorcerer who opposed the teaching of the word of God.
 - a. The name *Bar-Jesus* literally means “son of Jesus.” (*Bar* means “son of.”) This man had no connection with Jesus Christ in any way. *Jesus* was a common name among the Jews (Colossians 4:11). It is the equivalent of the Old Testament name *Joshua*.
 - b. Everything is wrong with this man! He is called a sorcerer—one who used drugs, spells and incantations to try to influence events in a supernatural way. He is called a false prophet—one who falsely claimed to be inspired. He is a deceiver and trickster. He opposed Saul and Barnabas and despised the gospel they preached.
 - c. He rejected the gospel, but claimed special wisdom. The name *Elymas* is not the translation of Bar-Jesus, but is the translation of sorcerer. The Greek word for sorcerer is *magos*. Rather than merely call himself “sorcerer,” Bar-Jesus had adopted another name unto himself, he took on the Arabian name “Elymas.” Though this word means sorcerer, he would not be regarded as an ordinary sorcerer. He was special!
 - d. He made it his mission to turn the proconsul away from the faith.
- B. It is easy to see the two differing reactions of these men. One wants to hear the word of God; the other, not only does not want to hear, he doesn’t want anyone else to hear it either!
 1. Reactions like these are common in the preaching of the gospel, Acts 19:9; 28:24.
 2. The difference in the case of Sergius Paulus and Bar-Jesus wasn’t a difference in teachers, for both men heard the same gospel from the same teacher. It was a difference in hearts.
 3. When we hear the gospel, we need to examine our hearts. Do we want to hear the truth?

II. One man made to see; one man made blind, Acts 13:9-11.

- A. While we might anticipate that the proconsul would believe, we would not anticipate what happened to Bar-Jesus. We know Bar-Jesus was *spiritually blind*, but who could imagine the story would take this turn? He was struck *literally blind* by the Apostle Saul!
1. This is a most unusual case—where one’s body is miraculously harmed. There are few like it in all of scripture. The case of Gehazi in 2 Kings 5:27 is one that comes to mind. We often think of miracles done on the body as miracles of healing. The case of Gehazi was not one of healing, but one of judgment from the Lord. So also is the case of Bar-Jesus.
 2. Lest anyone think Saul is out of order in what he does to the false teacher, look carefully at verse nine. Saul’s actions are under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
 3. The fact that Saul said Bar-Jesus was “full of deceit and fraud” implies that the man knew he was a crook. He wasn’t self-deceived as are many; he was knowingly out to cheat others. The Greek word for fraud means someone who used sleight of hand, a trickster.
 4. Saul has no trouble telling it like it is. Bar-Jesus was a child of the devil, an enemy of all that was right. This man was opposed to truth, justice and honesty. The language here reminds us of the language used by Jesus in John 8:44.
 5. Bar-Jesus “perverted the straight ways of the Lord.” He had likely misrepresented the doctrine taught by Saul and Barnabas. It is often the technique of the false teacher—when he cannot answer truth—to twist what the teacher of truth has said. Have you ever been charged with “rejecting the blood of Jesus and believing that water washes away sin”? If so, you understand what Saul means here. When false teachers accuse us of believing “water washes away sin” they are perverting and misrepresenting what we are teaching.
- B. And so, Saul had enough of this man’s deception. The hand of the Lord struck the false teacher blind. Yet, this blindness would not be perpetual. While this was a judgment upon this man, judgment was tempered with mercy—“for a season.” It would give him opportunity to repent!

III. Lessons to take home from this story.

- A. Faith on the part of the recipient was not always necessary for a miracle to be worked.
1. There is a myth that exists in religious circles that a person must have faith in the Lord in order for the Lord to work a miracle on them. Do you think Bar-Jesus had faith?
 2. This case and numerous others demonstrate that power from God resides in the worker of miracles—not in the recipient. Saul had miraculous power from God, 2 Corinthians 12:12.
- B. Four terms are used to describe the gospel in this account. They are synonymous terms in one sense, but each term tells us a little more about the nature of the gospel.
1. “The word of God,” Acts 13:7. This phrase emphasizes source. The gospel is from God.
 2. “The faith,” Acts 13:8. This speaks of the whole system given by God. Note that it is singular. God gave but one faith system—one means of salvation for all of mankind, Jude 3.
 3. “The straight ways of the Lord,” Acts 13:10. The emphasis here is that these ways came from God and that they are right. They must not be perverted or twisted.
 4. “The teaching of the Lord,” Acts 13:12. This not only emphasizes that the gospel came from the Lord, but that this is the teaching which is approved by God.
- C. Beware of deceivers and frauds.
1. Don’t believe everything that people claim about miracles today. Prudent investigation reveals that miraculous claims to healing and other miracles are just claims. However, sometimes the claims are accompanied by acts of fraud and deception. I recommend reading *The Faith Healers*, by James Randi, or *Healing: A Doctor In Search Of A Miracle*, by Dr. William Nolan. Both of these books show that the spirit of Bar-Jesus is alive today.
 2. There are so many deceptions in our world—religious and otherwise.
 - a. The Nigerian money scam (operating via email) is one that promises you millions if you will just give them your bank account number.
 - b. There are phone scams, bank scams, credit card scams, auto warranty scams. Be on guard and on the lookout. Bar-Jesus has lots of operatives in the world today!

Conclusion:

1. The conclusion: Acts 13:12. Sergius Paulus became a believer. The text says he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord—of Jesus’ death and resurrection (not merely at what was done).
2. That is the same teaching we hear every week. Have we lost our sense of astonishment?