

23 May 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“Missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas”

Acts 13:1-13

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Symeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Mana-en a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 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.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) withstood them, seeking to turn away the proconsul from the faith. But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. Now Paul and his company set sail from Paphos, and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem;

In the early Church there were prophets and teachers, and in today's passage they are mentioned by name. While they were worshipping the Lord, they received a revelation from the Holy Spirit to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work God wanted to do through them.

We are not told in detail how this instruction was given to them, whether they all understood it unanimously or whether one of them received it and passed it on to the

others. Was it an inner illumination or an allocution in which they heard the voice of the Holy Spirit? We do not know. But what we can see is that those first Christians clearly understood the Holy Spirit's instructions, without mistake, and put them into practice immediately. In this case, they laid their hands on the men chosen by the Holy Spirit, and they immediately set out on their first missionary journey from Antioch to Perga, passing through Cyprus and Paphos.

When they arrived in Paphos, they encountered opposition to their proclamation from a magician and false prophet named Elymas, who was part of the entourage of the proconsul Sergius Paulus. In a previous passage in the Acts of the Apostles, we had already encountered a magician named Simon (Acts 8:9-25). In the case of Elymas, it is added that he was also a false prophet. We encounter false prophets in various Old Testament narratives (cf. 1 Kgs 22; Jer 5:31, for example). They did not speak in God's name and were often in the service of kings — they were 'court prophets'. Consequently, some of them simply prophesied what the kings wanted to hear.

How can we identify false prophets or false prophecies today? For us Christians, it is clear that someone who speaks on behalf of God can never proclaim doctrines that contradict the teachings of the Lord. Since the Son of God revealed Himself to us as the Word made flesh, we can only identify as authentic prophecy what is announced in the name of the Lord, that is, what comes from the Holy Spirit. This is the decisive and sure criterion for examining everything that is presented to us as prophecy, both from outside and from within the Church.

It is clear that the devil tries to obstruct God's work and whisper false inspirations to men, using purely human motivations for his deceptions. Let us remember that even Peter was severely rebuked by Jesus when he tried to prevent Him from going up to Jerusalem: *“Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance[a] to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.”* (Mt 16:23).

We need this clear discernment of spirits, because false prophets will appear again and again. At the end of time, even the “False Prophet” will appear, who, together with the Antichrist, will confuse humanity for a time.

In today's passage, the false prophet and magician Elymas tried to prevent the proconsul, described as a prudent man, from embracing the faith. Then Paul confronted

him with the power of the Holy Spirit and addressed him with strong words: *'You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?'*

And the Lord did not limit Himself to these severe words spoken through Paul, but also performed a clear sign through him: the hand of the Lord fell upon Elymas, and he was struck blind, unable to see the light of the sun for a time. Fog and darkness surrounded him, reflecting his inner state in this outward sign.

The proconsul had seen and heard enough. He understood and believed. Paul, for his part, continued his missionary journey.

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-authority-of-the-church/>

Meditation on the day's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/friendship-with-jesus-2/>