



Walking Through the Scripture Together

June 22 - 28, 2008

Acts 13:1-13

## Launch

**Text** Acts 13:1-13 (TNIV)

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

### On Cyprus

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

<sup>6</sup> They traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos. There they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. <sup>9</sup> Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, <sup>10</sup> "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? <sup>11</sup> 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."

Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. <sup>12</sup> When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

### In Pisidian Antioch

<sup>13</sup> From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John left them to return to Jerusalem.

### Thought

Many Christians in the Western world today simply can't bear to think of confrontation. There really isn't such a thing as serious wickedness, so they think, or if there is, it's confined to a small number of truly evil people, while everyone else just gets on and should be accepted and affirmed where they stand. Christian mission then consists of helping people to do a little bit better where they already are, rather than the radical transformation of life that, as we have seen, was happening all around the place in the early chapters of Acts. And so, when we come to this great turning point in Luke's story, the start of the extraordinary triple journey that would take Paul right across Turkey and Greece and back again, and then again once more, and finally off to Rome itself, we would much prefer the story to be one of gentle persuasion rather than confrontation. We would have liked it better if Paul had gone about telling people the simple message of Jesus and finding that many people were happy to accept it and live by it.

But life is seldom that straightforward, and people who try to pretend it is often end up simply pulling the wool over their own eyes. It's a murky world out there, and though the choice of compromise is always available in every profession (not least the church), there is in fact no real choice. What's the point in trying to swim with one foot on the bottom of the pool? You're either up for the real thing or you might as well pack it all in. And Saul and Barnabas were up for the real thing.

They had to be, after that send-off. Luke introduces 'the church in Antioch' with something of a flourish of trumpets; Antioch was on the way to becoming a second major center of Christian faith after Jerusalem itself, and its leadership team was well known, with Barnabas and Saul among them. We get a fascinating glimpse of their regular devotional life: fasting and prayer surrounding the worship of the Lord, waiting for the Spirit to give fresh direction. Whether they had been expecting something like this, we don't know. But to be told, suddenly, that two of the main leaders were wanted elsewhere must have come as something of a blow. But there are times when you have been praying and waiting on God, when a new and unexpected word comes in such a way that you have no choice but to obey. And it's well that this is how things happen, because when you run into problems, and especially confrontation, it would all be too easy to think, 'Oh no, we shouldn't have come.' But the answer, again and again is, Yes, you should have come; and it is precisely because the gospel needs to make inroads into enemy territory that you need that constant support of fasting and prayer...when a new work of God is going ahead, you should expect opposition, difficulty, problems and confrontation. That is normal. How God will help you through (and how long he will take about it!) is another matter. That he will, if we continue in faith, love and trust, is a given.

**Acts for Everyone**

## Small Group Discussion Guide

### Lean In

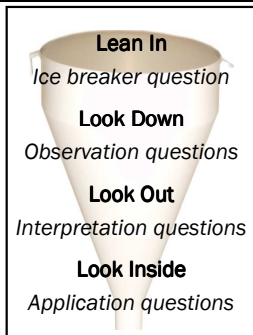
- What is the most uncomfortable confrontation you have ever had? Were you the one confronting or being confronted? What happened?

### Look Down / Look Out

- It's been at least ten years since Saul of Tarsus was first called. How do you think he felt to finally be sent out to actually do what he had been called to do all along? Was he nervous? Relieved? Chomping at the bit? Or what?
- How does Luke describe the Roman governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus? What kind of man was he? How did he respond to Barnabas and Saul? What did he want?
- Who was Bar-Jesus/Elymas? How was he trying to influence the governor? What do you think his motives were in doing this?
- How did Paul respond to the sorcerer? What did he say? What happened to Bar-Jesus? Why wasn't Paul more tolerant? Why the harsh words and actions? How might you have responded in this situation? How did this whole incident impact the Roman governor?
- What are some possible explanations for John Mark's leaving?

### Look Inside

- How well do you handle conflict and confrontation? Are there some situations where it's easier to handle than others? Why?
- How do you know when to speak up and when to keep quiet? When to reason with someone and when to simply "call a spade a spade"?



## Family Discussion Guide

### Day One Acts 13:1-3; Hebrews 13:15-16

What does worship mean to you? Why does God want us to "worship" him? What place does worship have in your life?

### Day Two Acts 13:4-5; Isaiah 6:6-8

Do you get nervous when you are going to a new school for the first time or doing something for the first time — or is it more of any adventure for you? How can we be ready to go to the new places God may send us or to do things for him we've never tried before?

### Day Three Acts 13:6-8; 2 Timothy 3:8-9

Who or what in your life has tried to keep you from really listening to and believing in God? Do you really want to read the Bible more and more, or is it hard for you to get into? Why?

### Day Four Acts 13:9-12

How hard is it for you to tell someone that what they are doing is wrong? What's the best way to do this? How can we know when we need to speak up and when we just need to be quiet?

### Day Five Acts 13:13; Luke 9:57-62

Why do you think John Mark might have left his team? Have you ever had someone disappoint you? How did you handle it? Has anyone ever felt you let them down? What happened?

# Bible Life and Times

## John Mark

John Mark is identified as a cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10); this would explain Barnabas' special attachment to the Mark of Acts over whom he disputed with Paul (Acts 15:37-40). Mark's mother was a prominent member of the earliest group of Christians in Jerusalem; it was to her house that Peter turned on his release from prison. The house was a meeting-place for the brethren, "many" of whom were praying there on the night Peter arrived from prison (Acts 12:12-17). Evidence for Mark's authorship of the Gospel that bears his name originates with the church father Papias (early second century).

A number of traditions have built up around Mark, though none can be verified from the New Testament. It is suggested that Mark was one of the servants at the wedding in Cana who poured out the water that Jesus turned to wine (John 2:1-11). Mark is also said to have been one of the seventy sent out by Christ (Luke 10); the servant who carried water to the house where the last supper took place (Mark 14:13); the young man who ran away naked when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:51-52); and the one who hosted the disciples in his house after the death of Jesus, and into whose house the resurrected Jesus Christ came (John 20).

John Mark is said to have performed many miracles in Egypt, and to have established a church there. It is said that when he returned to Alexandria in AD 68, the people there resented his efforts to turn them away from the worship of their traditional Egyptian gods. As the story goes, they tied him to several horses and dragged him through the streets until he was dead.



## details, details...

### Prophets in the church at Antioch

We know *Barnabas* was a Levite from Cyprus who resided in Jerusalem and became a leading figure in the Jerusalem church (4:36-37; 9:27; 11:22-30). He was, as Luke tells us, "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (11:24) and undoubtedly served as a channel for the truth of the Gospel direct from the Jerusalem congregation. *Simeon Niger* (meaning "black") may have come from Africa; he was possibly the Simon from Cyrene of Lk 23:26. As for *Lucius* and *Manaen*, we know nothing certain apart from this verse. Lucius of Cyrene was frequently identified in the postapostolic period with Luke the evangelist and author of Acts; but this is not likely, for Luke refrains from identifying himself with Paul's missionary journeys, except through the occasional use of the pronoun "we." *Manaen* is identified as one "who had been brought up with" (lit., a "foster brother" or "intimate friend") Herod the Tetrarch.

### Cyprus

Cyprus was an island of great importance from very early times, being situated on the shipping lanes between Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece. It's the third largest island in the Mediterranean. In 57 B.C. it was annexed by Rome from Egypt and in 55 B.C. incorporated into the province of Cilicia. In 27 B.C. it became a separate province governed on behalf of the emperor Augustus by an imperial legate. In 22 B.C. Augustus relinquished its control to the senate, and, like other senatorial provinces, it was administered by a proconsul.

### Bar-Jesus

As Acts now shifts from Peter to Paul, we will begin noticing some parallels in their respective stories. Here's the first — Peter had his encounter with Simon the Sorcerer on the Samaritan frontier, and now Paul encounters one (ironically named "son of Jesus") on the Gentile frontier in Cyprus. Peter and Paul were similarly direct in both cases.