

## Bi134 Acts

### Lesson Bi134-24 Spirit-empowered Ministry on Cyprus

“God told me to do it!” Have you ever been in a situation when someone has made that statement? Then, when they did what they said God wanted them to do, nothing turned out right. So, you wondered, “*Did God really speak to them?*” Some people do falsely claim that God is speaking to them when he really isn’t. We should never doubt, however, that God does speak to his children. In today’s story, God speaks to Paul and tells him what he is about to do.

Being sent out by the Holy Spirit, Barnabas and Saul left Syrian Antioch and headed for the coast. They took with them Barnabas’ nephew, John Mark. They came to the seaport city of Seleucia where they boarded a ship bound for Cyprus. Arriving at Salamis on the southwestern coast of Cyprus, they dropped anchor. As soon as they had disembarked, they went into the Jewish synagogue and proclaimed the word of God. (From this point in Acts, Saul is called by his Roman name, Paul. Also, instead of referring to the two missionaries as “Barnabas and Saul,” Luke starts referring to them as “Paul and Barnabas.”)

Soon, the two missionaries left Salamis and trekked westward nearly 160 kilometers (100 miles) along the island’s southern coastline. At every opportunity they told people about Jesus. They eventually arrived at Paphos, the capital city of Cyprus. This place was well known for its worship of the fertility goddess Aphrodite. It was also the birthplace and home of Barnabas.

At Paphos they encountered a Jewish false prophet and sorcerer named Bar-Jesus, also known as Elymas. This deceiver had been able to weasel his way into the good graces of the governor, Sergius Paulus. Nevertheless, Paulus was an intelligent man and wanted to hear the Word of God. So, he invited Barnabas and Saul to visit him. But Elymas opposed the missionaries and tried to convince the governor to disregard the things Paul was telling him.

Paul, however, was full of the Holy Spirit. So the Spirit was able to reveal to him what God was about to do. That’s when Paul looked Elymas in the eye and declared, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all that is good, you are truly filled with lies and evil. Why do you keep twisting the ways of the Lord? Look! The hand of the Lord is against you. You will be blinded and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately a dark mist came over the sorcerer’s eyes, and he was unable to see. He began groping around and begging for someone to take his hand and lead him (Acts 13:4-11).

Seeing what the Lord had done to Elymas, Sergius Paulus immediately believed. He was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. After this, the three missionaries left Paphos and sailed northward to the port town of Perga. It was located on the southern coast of Pamphylia. They then headed inland until they reached Antioch in Pisidia. John Mark, however, abandoned the work and returned to his home in Jerusalem.

In today’s lesson we see the apostle Paul moving in the power of the Holy Spirit. Throughout Acts, Luke presents Paul as a charismatic prophet and apostle. When we say that

Paul's ministry was *charismatic*, we mean that it was anointed and gifted by the Holy Spirit. Paul was following in the footsteps of Jesus, who carried out his ministry in the power of the Spirit.

The book of Acts teaches that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are to operate in the church when God's people have gathered for worship. Paul shows that they are also to be employed by the church when it is scattered in mission. In today's story, God reveals to Paul what he is about to do. This is likely an example of the gift of discerning of spirits.

Paul's clash with Elymas is also a classic example of a power encounter. A power encounter is an open demonstration that the power of God is greater than the power of Satan. It happens when a Spirit-filled disciple directly challenges demonic powers in the name of Jesus. We must never forget, however, that power ministry is not an end in itself. Its ultimate goal is to bring people to faith in Christ. Power encounter (a demonstration of God's power) must always be accompanied by a truth encounter (the proclamation of the gospel). Luke says, "When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord."

From this account of Paul and Barnabas' ministry on the island of Cyprus, we learn three more important ministry lessons.

First, we learn that, like Paul and Barnabas, we must clearly understand our God-given assignments. Paul and Barnabas understood theirs. God had called them to take the gospel to the Gentiles. They also understood what they needed to do to fulfill their calling. They needed to boldly proclaim Christ to the lost and to demonstrate the truth of the message through miraculous signs and wonders. We have been given the same task. Jesus has command us, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And ... signs will accompany those who believe" (Mark 16:15-17).

Secondly, from their ministry on Cyprus, we learn that we must at all times be prepared to challenge the forces of evil. Through the Spirit, Paul understood that the devil was working in Elymas the sorcerer. Paul called him a "son of the devil" and "an enemy of all that is good." Later, Paul would write, "We are not unaware of [Satan's] schemes" (2Cor 2:11). We can effectively defeat the devil if we will remain full of the Holy Spirit and submissive to the will of God.

Finally, from the ministry on Cyprus, we learn that we must be ever sensitive to the Spirit's voice. We must obey his directives. Luke says that, as Paul was challenging Elymas, he was "filled with the Holy Spirit." This phrase is not describing Paul's initial filling with the Holy Spirit. That had happened several years earlier when Ananias laid hands on him in Damascus. This experience of Paul's can more properly be termed a 'refilling' or an 'anointing' with the Holy Spirit. Like Peter in Acts 4:8, Paul was being anointed by the Spirit for charismatic ministry.

When we face opposition from Satan, we can be confident that the power of the Spirit is more powerful than that of the enemy. John testified that the one who is in us is greater than the

one who is in the world (1John 4:4). When involved in ministry, we must trust the Lord to anoint us. He will manifest his power through us in the release of spiritual gifts. And, we must trust him to empower us to boldly proclaim the gospel.

This lesson is **important** because in it we learn how God gives spiritual gifts to us in our evangelistic and missionary ministry.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is that we must faithfully carry out our God-given assignment of proclaiming Christ to the lost. We can be confident that the Holy Spirit will anoint and empower us for the task. He will further give us power to challenge demonic forces in the name of Jesus. He is faithful to manifest spiritual gifts when needed to advance his kingdom.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. What convinced Sergius Paulus to believe the message of Paul and Barnabas?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "Sergius Paulus was convinced to believe when he saw God's power demonstrated through Paul," you answered correctly.
2. What is a power encounter and what is its purpose?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that a power encounter is an open demonstration that God's power is greater than Satan's, and the purpose of power ministry is to bring people to faith in Christ, you are right.
3. What assignment has God given us all?
  - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "God has given us all the assignment of proclaiming Christ to the lost in the power of the Holy Spirit," you are correct.
4. What should we do when we are opposed by demonic forces?
  - A [PAUSE] If you answered that we should challenge them and defeat them in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit, you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this lesson 2 or 3 times until you can tell the story of Paul and Barnabas' ministry on the island of Cyprus to others. You should also be able to recite from memory the three ministry lessons learned from this story. Finally, you should begin asking God to manifest his power through you by means of spiritual gifts.