

Acts 13: 1-12 NIV

“Paul’s Mediterranean cruise”

“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 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. ¹² When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.”

With the development of steamship travel in the late 1800s, ocean voyages became popular.

Most of the steam powered vessels sailed from Liverpool, England across the Atlantic Ocean (about 3300 miles) to the eastern United States.

Likely, many of those who booked passage on those ocean-going ships ate and drank elegantly.

Now people from all backgrounds comfortably travel much of the globe.

Thousands of Americans now fly to cities like Barcelona, Spain, and Italy’s Rome and Venice to take Mediterranean cruises.

They enjoy numerous dining choices and sleep restfully.

Perhaps you’ve “been there and done that.”

In our text, three first century men took a Mediterranean cruise.

- **Why did they go "cruising"?**
- **What distance did they travel?**
- **Were their accommodations nice?**
- **How was their island experience?**

Our story begins in a city known as Antioch of Syria, 3rd largest city in Roman Empire.

As many as 500, 000 people called it home.

Compare that with the population of greater Des Moines, IA, now estimated to be 560,000.

Many Jews lived in Antioch and several of them accepted Jesus as the Christ.

God's Word worked powerfully through Antioch church worship leaders:

"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."

Most people associate prophecy with predicting.

Sometimes prophets make predictions.

But a prophet's main task is: declare God's will.

Predicting is only part of prophecy.

Knowing God's will was especially important then because there was no *New Testament*.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John hadn't yet written their gospels.

The Apostles had not yet written their letters, which became the New Testament Epistles.

People would show up at churches teaching ungodly doctrines and there was no way to verify or correct what they said about Jesus.

That's why the *Book of 1 John* told how to recognize false prophets and/or the antichrist:

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. "¹

Antichrist teachers said that Christ, God's anointed one, didn't come in a fleshly body, didn't really die, and didn't come back from the dead in the flesh.

"It's just all a spiritual idea," they claimed.

¹ 1 John 4: 1-3 NIV

God's prophets always tell the truth, strive to live pure lives, and do not yield to lust, boasting, hate or greed.²

They testify that Jesus Christ came in the flesh from God.

Other words in our text deserve attention.

The text says they worshiped God with fasting.

Few Christians fast now.

Many do lots of unfastening of tight clothes.

Jesus fasted 40 days.

If we started such a fast today, we wouldn't be eating on Thanksgiving Day; no leftovers on Black Friday, either.

We'd savor nothing till December 1.

A medical problem makes it tough for me to fast much longer than 10-12 hours.

I did fast for a day decades ago.

I did it as a form of penance.

In his *Life of Samuel Johnson*, James Boswell said: **"Depend on it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."**

So far, I've never been condemned to execution.

But the day I fasted, I never got my mind off why I went without food.

We don't know how long these prophets-teachers fasted, but they clearly fixed their minds on praising God and wanting to do God's will. Thus the Holy Spirit chose Barnabas and Saul to take their Mediterranean trip.

It's likely not fair to conclude that the expression "set apart," means that Saul and Barnabas exceeded the others in importance.

Set apart tells us that God's Holy Spirit deemed Saul and Barnabas the right men for this assignment.

As events proved, and we shall later see, church leadership in Antioch was also vital.

Cruise ships as we know them didn't exist then. Virtually only warships and merchant ships plied the ocean then.

First century merchant ships provided water, but no food or amenities for travelers.

You could pay to travel on a merchant ship, but you had to find a ship that was going to your destination.

Imagine needing to go to Dubuque and no cars, busses, trains, or planes exist.

Your only option is: go a truck stop and try to find a hauler, who is going to Dubuque and is willing to take you.

² See I John 2: 1-11, 15-17; 3:4-6

Because of the difficulty of traveling at night, and unfavorable wind conditions on the Mediterranean, many merchant ships went into port every night.

On the approx. 200 mile trip from Seleucia to Cypress, there was no place to stop for the night.

Those ships probably averaged about 3.5 mph; you think tractors on the road ahead of you are slow!

On arrival in Salamis, Cyprus, Barnabas and Saul didn't complain about the accommodations.

They went to Jewish synagogues telling worshipers God's Word—that He had sent his Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

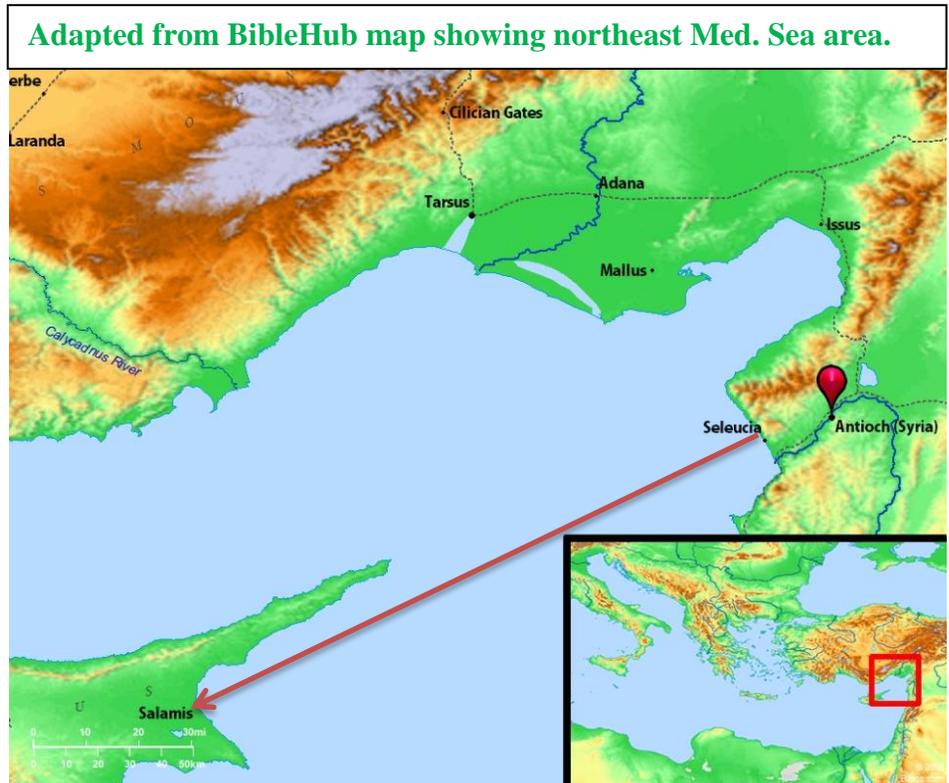
- They told how Jesus lived perfectly, died at the hands of hateful people to cover our sin.
- God powerfully raised Jesus from death, the only person to overcome sin and death.
- Jesus is the Messiah God promised Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and all the other prophets.

He will return to judge every person.

Assisted by John Mark, Barnabas and Saul went from Samalis to Paphos preaching God's Word.

Word about Jesus impressed even the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus.

He, as proconsul, was either a governor or the Roman military officer in charge of the area.





Model of grain ship in a Roman port.
Flickr photo from Clip Art

In Paphos “they met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, 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. But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.”³

How do we tell false prophets from true ones?
True prophets fully honor God through Christ.

³ Google search revealed: “**Servant, attendant, guardian.** Sergio—the Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese form of the Roman surname Sergius—is a suave, polished boy's name.” According to Cassell’s Latin Dictionary, though Paulus means small in Latin, it was also the name of a Patrician Roman family. *Sorcerer* here is Greek *magos* or magician.

As we saw, they teach that Jesus came in human form: “Being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.” Philippians 2:7, 8 NRSV
Regardless of the consequences, true prophets tell God’s word.

- **True prophets are not greedy.**

When Aram’s general Naaman wanted to pay Elisha the prophet for healing him, Elisha refused payment. (1 Kings 5)

No Christian preacher in the New Testament charged money or asked money for any service, especially of nonmembers.

That doesn’t mean that preachers should not be paid. As Galatians 6:6 (NIV) urges all believers: “Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.”

An old time preacher passed the hat at the close of services so those in attendance could contribute. One evening the hat came back empty. He said he was thankful that at least he got his hat back.

Elymas probably had a good thing going charging the proconsul for warding off evil spirits, pronouncing hexes on the proconsul’s enemies, and possibly reading horoscopes for the official.

Eugene Peterson freely translated verse 9-11a:

"But Saul (or Paul), full of the Holy Spirit and looking him straight in the eye, said, "You bag of wind, you parody of a devil—why, you stay up nights inventing schemes to cheat people out of God. But now you've come up against God himself, and your game is up. You're about to go blind—no sunlight for you for a good long stretch."

Our society, our government, many in education, science, and religion approve and promote policies hostile to God's word.

I don't know what's in store for anyone who denies God's truth, but it can't be good.

The Old Testament, which too few people now read, describes times such as ours.

God richly blessed Israel and gave them a great set of laws, but everyone forgot God.

"They worship objects they have made with their own hands," (Isaiah 2:8 TEV).⁴

See how accurately Isaiah the prophet described today's situation:

"Where will you be stricken again as you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint."(1:5 NASB)

Isaiah tells of Israel's daughters: "They walk with heads held high and seductive eyes, and go along with mincing steps. . ." He told of their "dangling earrings, bracelets, veils, headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, finger rings, nose rings, festal robes," etc. (Isaiah 3:18).

Isaiah 3:12 describes the haplessness of people who forget God: "Children are their oppressors and women rule over them," (RSV). Educators and government agents counsel children not to obey their parents.

There is hope.

We listen to God, not the "experts" on any news channel, chat show, group—whether political party, social planners, or religious conference.

We obey God, and we follow and model Jesus.

God created us and He redeemed us.

Only He has perfect knowledge;

He knows and controls the future.

I pray that you fully trust Him and honor Him, and not depend on imperfect human opinions.

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⁴ Today people idolize footballs, basketballs, baseballs, soccer balls, golf balls, iPhones, iPads, beer, boats, buildings, books, spaceships, etc.