

STUDY NOTES

The Acts of the Apostles

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH (Spring 2016)
WWW.NEWCITYPHX.COM/SERMONS - BRIAN KRUCKENBERG

The following content is based on the message “The Holy Spirit Makes Paths Straight” spoken on 05/15/16 by Brian Kruckenberg at New City Church in Phoenix, AZ. The following is not meant to be a full synopsis of the message but rather a brief look at the main ideas. To use this Study Guide effectively you must listen to the message found at <http://newcityphx.com/sermons/>.

Leaders using these Study Notes for group study and reflection should read the Biblical text thoroughly before beginning, using this resource as assistance and not relying solely on this material for insight. We encourage all leaders to pray and ask the Spirit for revelation as they lead their respective communities.

THE SCRIPTURE

Acts 13:1 Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. ⁴So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. ⁵When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them. ⁶When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus.

⁷He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. ⁸But Elymas the magician (for that is the meaning of his name) opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.

⁹But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him ¹⁰and 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? ¹¹And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will 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. ¹²Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF DIVERSITY

In this story we see the formation and work of the first “international missions board.” It is made up of Hebrew, Greek and African men. It is interesting to see this diversity so early in the movement of God. It teaches us that diversity is a natural by-product of the work of the Holy Spirit. If God is overall, in all and works through all, then certainly His church will be multi-colored.

- *Do you see the intrinsic value of being around people different than you? Talk about that.*
- *Why do you think it is difficult for us to have relationships with people not like us?*
- *What problems or issues might be solved if we had relationships with those not like us?*

GOD’S AT WORK WHERE HE SENDS YOU

Even a cursory reading of this passage clearly indicates who initiated and directed this first missionary journey. As these men worshipped, prayed and fasted the Holy Spirit told them who to send out and where to go. This was the work of the Holy Spirit; it wasn’t men getting together to plan a strategy as much as it was them surrounding to the will of God.

When God sends you, you can know that He is already working there.

When Saul, now going by his Roman cognomen “Paul,” arrive on the island of Cyprus and travel to the city of Paphos, they find that the pro-council is asking to hear from them. In fact God had been preparing the heart of this man to hear His Word.

- *Have you ever sought God through prayer, fasting and worship and “heard” Him direct your decisions? Describe that time.*
- *If we don’t hear from God as much as we would like, what could be the cause of that?*

THE OPPOSITION TO GOD’S WORK

Just because God sent these men to Paphos and was already at work there didn’t mean that there wasn’t going to be opposition to the work. To the contrary,

There is always opposition to the work of God because it is counter to the ways of the world.

When they arrive and begin to teach the procouncil, there is a false prophet and magician known as Bar-Jesus that is attempting to draw the pro council away from the faith. He is trying to deceive him and lead him away from the truth of the message of God.

The opposition will attempt to lure us away from the truth of Jesus by offering us a cheap imitation of the real thing. This is what the enemy does.

- Describe a time when you were trying to follow God but were “attacked” by the enemy?

CONFRONTING EVIL

When Paul sees this false prophet and detects his schemes, Paul wastes no time in calling him out. He looks directly at this man and calls him a “son of the devil,” which is ironic given that Bar-Jesus means “son of the Savior.” Today we might not have such a stark example as a false prophet trying to draw us away from the faith, but if we stop and think about it, there are all sorts of things that are doing this.

An entire generation of people have grown up being taught that truth is relative and that many paths lead to God, but the Bible says that isn’t the case. Further, our entertainment culture, educational and political systems, and the like most often have a message that is counter to the message of God. This doesn’t mean we should fear these things or even isolate ourselves from these things, but it does mean we should be aware of it and not fall prey to its schemes.

- What is trying to draw you away from the faith?
- How does this happen?
- Are you doing everything you can to avoid the “trap” that is being set for you?

THE JOB OF THE CHURCH

What we see in Paul and Barnabas here is early church leaders doing what they are called to do to protect the church. As prophet-teachers, they understand the word of God and are inspired by the Holy Spirit to call out anything or anybody who teaches a message counter to the Scripture. When Paul writes his letter to the Ephesians, he underscores this truth:

Ephesians 4:11 God gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, becoming mature, attaining to the whole measure of Christ. ¹⁴**Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.** ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Paul knows that if church leadership doesn’t take their roles seriously then the church will be misled and won’t grow up into Christ. That is what was at stake here. Either this pro council was going to hear the life-changing, resurrection message of Jesus or a fake alternative. This was a matter of life and death to Paul and that is why he takes it so seriously. Ultimately we see the false prophet blinded, which seems to be an effort to get him to wake up and come to faith in Jesus. After all, this is what happened to Paul in Acts 9.

Finally, we see the pro council come to faith because of what he saw and because he was **astonished by the teaching of the Lord!** Shouldn’t we all be? The most astonishing thing that happens here isn’t that a man goes blind, but it is the message of the gospel of grace: ***that while we were still sinners, Jesus came and died for us and that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.***

- Read Ephesians 4:1-15 and talk about the principles you find in that passage.
- While God is one and we all serve under one God, we are all given different gifts. Why?
- What does the bible say about the church that might be different from what we experience in the United States?
- Do you see the importance of the church in today’s culture?