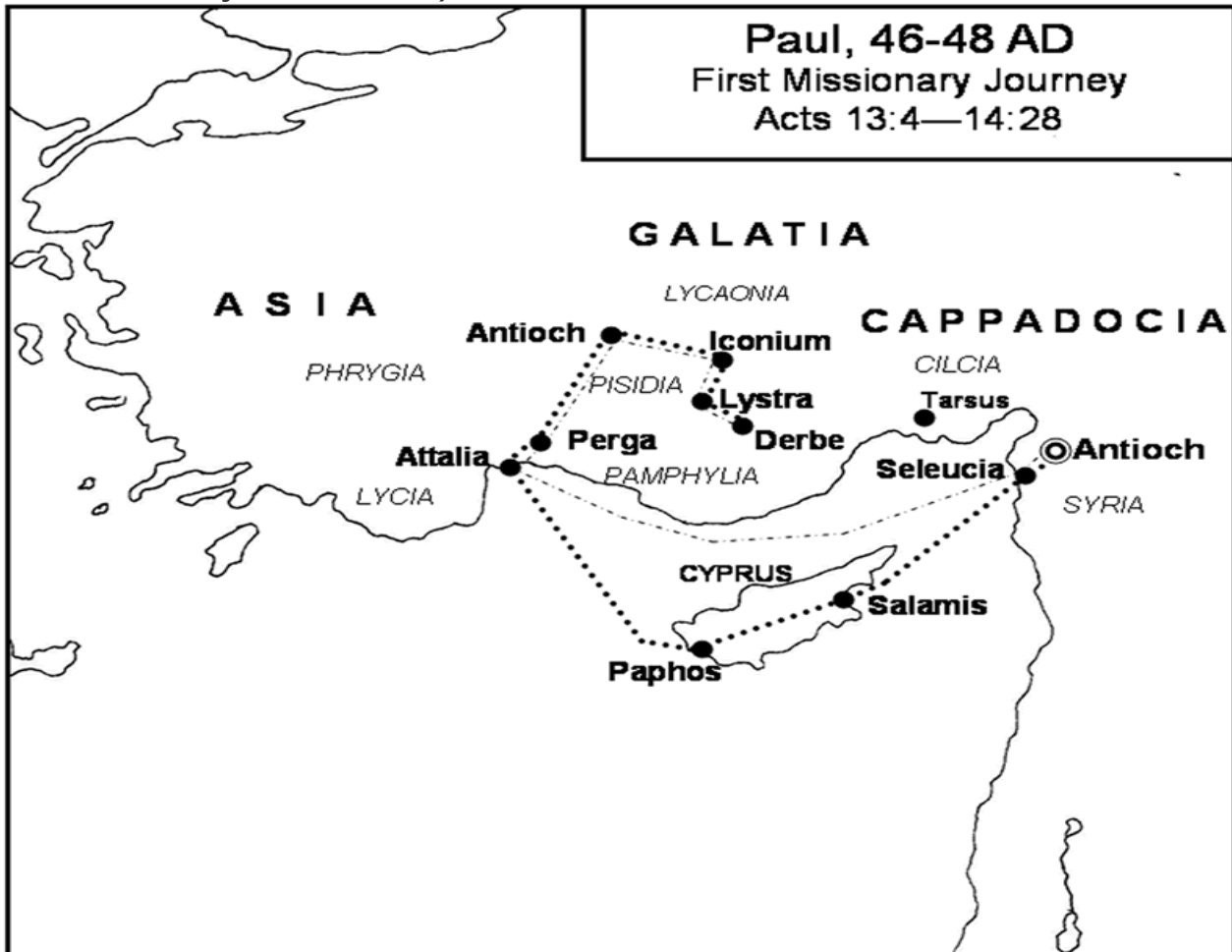


**STRAIGHT PATHS OF THE LORD!**  
**ACTS CH13:4-12**

**ILLUSTRATION**

An article in the Express Newspaper in 2016 showed that statistics show 36 per cent of British adults surveyed confess to reading their horoscope weekly, with 61 per cent reading them in newspapers or magazines and 24 per cent searching for them online. The survey found 23 per cent of the nation have made an important life decision based on what's written in the stars.

***Paul's first missionary journey – Acts Ch13:4-Ch14:26 (Approx A.D. 46-47 and lasted about a year and a half)***



**THE WORD OF GOD SENT OUT! V4-5**

The fasting, praying and laying on of hands, represents a setting apart, a separating and sending out. The action by the other leaders expressed both seeking a blessing from God (praying and laying on of hands) and an identification with others (sending out), as Barnabas and Saul leave the Church in Antioch Syria, to go overseas to spread the Good News!

Luke continues to record for Theo initially and for us now, and the powerful role of “The Holy Spirit” in directing the who, where and when, and how growth comes through Him! Paul and Barnabas head out around 16 miles from Antioch to the coastal port of Seleucia, before sailing 130 miles to Cyprus, and the port of Salamis.

According to David G. Peterson “Cyprus was a natural place to begin this missionary

campaign, though others had previously spread the word among Jews there (Ch11:19). It was homeland to Barnabas (Ch4:36), an important mining and trading centre, and a convenient stopover point for a sea journey to what is now called southern Turkey. Salamis, which was at the eastern end of Cyprus, had previously been the capital, but the Romans transferred that honour to Paphos" (Cited in David G. Peterson, The Acts of the Apostles, page 378).

Paul had a practice of preaching in the Jewish synagogues first (where there were ones) before preaching to the Gentiles – Ch13:14; Ch14:1; Ch17:1; Ch17:10; Ch17:17; Ch18:4; Ch18:19; + Ch19:8.

### **THE WORD OF GOD SUMMONED! V6-11**

v6 - The Jewish false prophet Bar-Jesus (son of Jesus or son of salvation) living in Cyprus and holding some kind of position within the Romans Proconsul Court, is a complete fraud! The words "Jewish" and "sorcerer" do not really belong together, as those involved in sorcery according to Scripture – Deut Ch18:10; 2 Kings Ch17:17; Jeremiah Ch27:9; Ezekiel Ch12:24 – were condemned!

V7 - The Roman Consular Governor of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, we are told is "a man of intelligence who summons Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God."

V8 - Elymas saw Paul and Barnabas as a threat to his position and livelihood!

V9-11 - Paul is filled by the Holy Spirit, indicating a special enabling of the Spirit for Paul and the ministry that he had been set apart for (Ch13:3). Paul is exposing the demonic evil power which lies behind the so called "magical power" used by Elymas. Paul confronts Elymas about the source of his power (the devil v10), the wickedness of his life (v10), and the manipulative nature of his actions (v10). John Stott says "God's judgement of him was fitting. For those who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (John Stott, Commentary on Acts). This period of limited darkness is meant to bring a person to repentance! Paul does not seem to be too polite with Elymas, are Christians sometimes too nice when faced with people who oppose the Gospel? Are we as Christians sometimes afraid to be as direct as Paul is here? How can we speak the truth in love to those who directly oppose the Gospel?

John Piper asks "What are the straight paths of the Lord? And how do you make them crooked? The answer is clear when you discover that the word for "turn away" in verse 8 and the word for "make crooked" in verse 10 is the same Greek word – ***diastrepho***. What is the making crooked of the straight paths of God? It's what Elymas was doing in verse 8 - he was seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith. "Turn aside" (in v. 8) corresponds with "make crooked" (in v. 10). And "from the faith" (in v. 8) corresponds with "the straight paths of the Lord" (in v. 10). So the way you make crooked the straight paths of the Lord is to get in the way of people coming to faith.

Elymas does not succeed in his attempt to make the straight path crooked. He would like to see the path of Paul and Barnabas go out the back door of the palace and dead end in the Mediterranean Sea. But it will not happen. Verse 11: "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." Verse 12: "Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord." God took the very effort of Elymas to make crooked the path of God and hinder the faith of Sergius Paulus, and he not only overcame it, he took it in his hand, laid it in the path and made Sergius Paulus step on it, and used it to bring the governor to faith" (Cited Desiring God, December 8<sup>th</sup> 1991).

### **THE WORD OF GOD SAVES! V12**

Sergius Paulus “believed” is the same word that Luke uses for believers in Ch14:1, Ch17:34 and Ch19:18. What the Roman Proconsul, Sergius Paulus, saw was an amazing work of God the Holy Spirit, which enabled him to believe, but it was Paul's teaching about Jesus which he was astonished about! The exposure and blinding of Elymas was used by God to remove an obstacle to belief through the teaching of Paul about Jesus!

Good teaching is so important! What is “good teaching” today? How can we increase our knowledge of books in the Bible and how can we increase our knowledge of Bible doctrines (beliefs)?

### **APPLICATION**

At the time of the 2021 Census 74, 000 people identified themselves as Pagan, who mainly gather in Ceredigion, Cornwall, and Somerset and almost 13,000 as Wicca. Wicca is sometimes described as a witchcraft tradition whose roots lie in pre-Christian religious traditions, folklore, folk witchcraft and ritual magic. Shamanism or samanism is a religious practice that involves a practitioner (**shaman or saman**) interacting with the spirit world. Shamanism is expanding faster than any other religion, with the number of people saying they practise it rising from 650 in 2011 to 8,000 in 2021 in England and Wales. The result might prove controversial, as the Shamanism UK website asserts “it is not a religion, more an authentic expression of mankind’s spirituality”.

The devil is at work today (v10), how can he be recognised and defeated?