

Faith to Discern

Key Verse: *“Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord.”*

—*Acts 13:12, New American Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
Acts 13:1-12

FAITH TO DISCERN IS THE focus of our Key Verse. Faith is not gullible acceptance of unsubstantiated claims. That is credulity. Faith is defined as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) The Bible supplies harmonious evidences of yet unseen things as well as the substance of all our hopes for both the present and the future. Together, these provide us solid faith to discern the truth.

Barnabas and Saul, whose name was changed to Paul, had been set apart by the Holy Spirit to do a great evangelistic work. They would begin an unprecedented missionary journey to carry the Gospel message westward. By ship they sailed from Seleucia, Antioch’s port, and soon arrived at the eastern shores of Cyprus. (Acts 13:2-4) They followed the arrangement that God put in place, going first to the synagogues of the Jews and preaching the Gospel. Paul acted in harmony with his statement, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”—Rom. 1:16, *NASB*

Paul and Barnabas’ ministry in Cyprus was unopposed until they came to Paphos. There they encountered Elymas, a Jewish false prophet and magician, who evidently relied

on the help of Sergius Paulus, the local proconsul, to gain business. The proconsul was an intelligent man, and had the makings of a discerning faith. If he accepted the message of Barnabas and Paul, Elymas' livelihood would be jeopardized. Thus, Elymas opposed the two missionaries and tried to dissuade Sergius Paulus from hearing and accepting the Gospel.—Acts 13:6-8

Discerning the evil in Elymas' character, Paul took a bold initiative. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he straightly looked at him, saying, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time. And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord."—vss. 10-12, *NASB*

Sergius Paulus' belief was enabled by the power of the Gospel that came to him from the Lord through Paul. Today, consecrated believers continue to be empowered by the strength received from their discerning faith in God's Word. Paul offers guidance to those who are weak in faith. He says, "Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil."—Heb. 5:12-14, *NASB*

Let us practice and apply the principles of Scripture daily, in all aspects of life, that we may attain spiritual strength and maturity. Our sensibilities will thus be guided by a God-given ability to discern between good and evil. We thank God for the gift of a discerning faith. ■