

WHO IS KEEPING YOU FROM BELIEVING?  
ACTS 13:1-12

Introduction:

1. This passage introduces to us the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, and a Roman official by the name of Sergius Paulus, and lets us know that he is an intelligent man, but also lets us know something of his secret feelings and his unrest of heart, by adding that he "sought to hear the Word of God." **v. 7** ... *who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.*
2. The unrest and anxiety in Sergius Paulus' heart is farther indicated in the fact that he had come under the power of Elymas the sorcerer, who evidently persuaded him that he could settle all his doubts by some other means than listening to what Paul and Barnabas had to say. **v. 8** *But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.*
3. The devil has, since the Garden of Eden, been trying to persuade mankind that they do not need to turn to Jesus for anything, and he has used people, sometimes even Christians, to get his message across.
4. Has someone been trying to persuade you not to believe in Jesus and be saved?

I. THERE IS A NATURAL DISPOSITION IN MAN TO SEEK FOR GOD.

- A. St. Augustine once said, "Man is made for God, and can find no rest till he finds rest in Him."
- B. A belief in some sort of spiritual afterlife is a primary necessity of the human mind and heart. **Ecclesiastes 3:11** *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.*
- C. Mankind can never dispense with this belief, no matter how long they may deny it.
- D. God has shown Himself to man in the Creation. **Romans 1:19-20** *...because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...*

II. MAN MAY LOOK TO OTHER THINGS TO SATISFY THIS SEEKING FOR GOD.

- A. Material and selfish interests may overlay and crush down the soul's great needs. **Matthew 16:26** *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*
- B. The teachings of a philosophy which attempts to put "thoughts" and "ideas" in the place of a living being. **Colossians 2:8** *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.*
- C. False religions which give unworthy views of God, but, by ceremonies, seek to satisfy the religious instinct. **Titus 1:15-16** *To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.*
- D. By these subtle forms, men are enticed from seeking after God.

III. THE UNREST WHICH SOONER OR LATER RETURNS.

- A. Man can only find permanent rest in that which is true. **Matthew 11:28** *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

- B. The false has no "staying power." It may seem to fit at one time, but life goes on, new needs arise, new thoughts stir within, and the false theories will no longer supply what is needed.
- C. We find ourselves looking out again, as anxiously as in the early days, and with the feeling that life is passing and the time for the truth and God will soon be over. **James 4:14** ...*whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.*
- D. Sooner or later a person must wake up from his sleep of delusion, feel the darkness all about him, and reach out his hand to God. **Acts 17:26-27** *And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us*
- E. The unrest that comes to men within the world's care and pleasure, with ungodly philosophies, and within mere ceremonial religion, is our constant plea for the preaching of the gospel and the revelation to men of the saving grace of Jesus.

#### IV. THE RESPONSE WHICH GOD MAKES WHEN A SOUL IS TURNED TO HIM.

- A. God stands at the door ready for the opening, wanting every human to be saved. **2 Peter 3:9** *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*
- B. God has a real need of souls, desires their love, finds His own joy in their trust, and so is sure to respond when men turn and seek Him. **Romans 10:13** *For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*
- C. Finding God and coming into a personal relationship with Him is the end of man's quest.
- D. Standing against God, everything in life is hard and dark and wrong.
- E. Standing apart from God, all life and relationships lie in rebellion and self-will.
- F. Standing with God, everything takes on its beauty and perfection.
- G. If we have God we have everything we need.

#### Conclusion:

1. This is the gospel message that Paul and Baranbas shared with Sergius Paulus, and when he heard it, he understood his need to have this personal relationship with Jesus. **v. 12** *Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.*
2. Elymas tried his best to persuade Sergius Paulus to not listen to the message.
3. The question for you is: Who is keeping you from believing?