

WEEKEND Edition 30/31 July 2022 "Deceiver Elymas" (Acts 13:6,7)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

We've begun an exciting journey together as we travel with Barnabas, Saul and their young helper John Mark, on what will be a dramatic adventure about 2000 years ago. *Unlike most adventure trips, these three have NOT left the great city of Antioch, Syria heading west seeking their fortune, no, these men are traveling on a journey described by the Holy Spirit of God only as 'the work to which I have called them'!* They do not know where this trip will take them, how long they'll be traveling, nor what they will encounter along the way. To my way of thinking, this is beyond an adventure, this is borderline lunacy, *UNLESS these are men with a deeply rooted great faith in God and they are willing to confidently trust God with their lives...every day, every hour of every day, of the rest of their lives!*

So, let's travel along with them. A log of sorts was kept on this adventure and is recorded for us in Acts 13. The record says: ***"They traveled through the whole island of Cyprus until they came to the town of Paphos. There 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."*** (Acts 13:6,7)

We remember Barnabas was from this Island of Cyprus, thus for him this first part of the journey was sort of a homecoming. As far as we know Saul had never been on Cyprus Island. I presume neither man had ever been to the city of Paphos or ever met this official Sergius Paulus, but it seems word had quickly spread across Cyprus about these two travelers and *the spiritual news they brought of what God was doing in Jerusalem, Samaria, Damascus, Caesarea and especially Antioch, Syria through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, and what we know as the "Gospel".*

As word came to Barnabas and Saul that the local government official, Segrius Paulus the proconsul, wanted an audience with them, I'm sure they were anxious. What could it mean? *Was it a trap?* Were they in for a reprimand or an interrogation or worse, detention and possible arrest, as had happened in Jerusalem to the apostles? It appears while Barnabas and Saul were preparing to go meet Sergius Paulus, word came to them in the form of a warning. Like all government officials Sergius Paulus had an assistant, someone he trusted, *but in fact this man should not be trusted.* His name was **"Bar-Jesus"**. It means 'son of Jesus'. The name Jesus, or its variant Joshua, means deliverer, rescuer, and was a fairly common Jewish man's name. We know nothing about this man's educational credentials or his training for being an attendant to the proconsul, but we do know that he was highly influential, and he was trusted by the proconsul.

How strange that his reputation was as a '**Jewish sorcerer and a false prophet**'!? Do you remember we encountered a similar man named Simon in Samaria when Philip went there to escape the persecution in Jerusalem? (Acts 8) *Both of these 'sorcerers' were evidently highly influential in their cities and they both attracted a following of people enamored by their occult related powers.*

But how could it be '**Bar-Jesus**', or as he is identified in vs. 8 "**Elymas the sorcerer**", is also known as being Jewish? It could mean he was Jewish by family heritage, born into a family able to trace their heritage back to one of the 12 great tribes of Israel. Or perhaps he was a man who practiced Judaism, the religion of the Hebrew people based on the writings of Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament. Whatever it meant for **Elymas / Bar-Jesus** to be known as '**Jewish**' *was contradicted by the fact that his reputation was rooted in sorcery and deception. "A false prophet"* meant much of what he predicted never came true and much of the '**wise counsel**' he offered was not rooted in truth but in distorted reality or a selfish agenda. God had warned His Jewish people about such men who perverted truth. They were to be ignored, but if found to be influential, in some cases they should be killed so as to not deceive the people of God. Deuteronomy 13 speaks to this.

*The word "**sorcerer**" means that this Elymas, like Simon of Samaria, was able, by the power of demonic forces, evil spirits, to know and do things that appeared supernatural.* For that reason, Sergius Paulus evidently thought it wiser to have Elymas as a confidant rather than an enemy. But it also means *this government official was regularly being given counsel directly from the dark spirit world through Elymas, his attendant.* Now pause for just a moment my "Walking with Jesus" friends all around the world and look at those people in your life either professional co-workers or simply influential friends. Are any of them like these men Elymas or Simon the sorcerer? *Is it possible your life is being influenced by the words or advice or even counsel of someone who is living under the strong influence of the evil, dark kingdom of Satan and his demons?*

I am greatly encouraged that Sergius Paulus the proconsul had a spiritual hunger to know God's truth, so much so that he sent for Barnabas and Saul. Now that is evidence for me that the Holy Spirit of God was working in this official even though he did not recognize the stirring in his heart was a work of Almighty, Holy God! Some years later Paul the apostle wrote to the Corinthian Christians about this miraculous spiritual battle raging in Sergius Paulus' heart without mentioning this Cypriote official by name.

Listen to Paul's declaration in 2 Corinthians 4 about the contrast between his preaching and that of people like Elymas... ***"We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And if our Gospel is being veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. For the God of this age [Satan] has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel that displays the glories of Christ, who is the image of God."***

Do you see the apostle Paul was strongly declaring that the Gospel he and Barnabas and other apostles of Jesus were all proclaiming as they traveled about, **was a Gospel rooted in and entirely the TRUTH, God's TRUTH!** They proclaimed the full truth about Jesus the Messiah, God the Son... His Identity, His life mission, and the achievements of Jesus Christ, through His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension back to heaven where He reigns over the Kingdom of God! *Distortion of truth, or alternate ideas put forth as some new truth or some outright rejection of God's truth is always a scheme of the dark kingdom. In fact, Jesus had boldly proclaimed lies are the language of Satan and those who speak lies may have a relationship with the devil!*

Jesus said it this way: ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life...If you hold to My teaching...you will know the truth and the truth will set you free... If the Son of God sets you free, you will be free indeed. But my language is not clear to you because you belong to your father the devil...He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he [Satan] lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies..."*** (John 8:12,31,32,36,44)

So, let's pause right here with Barnabas and Saul **preparing** to go meet with Sergius Palus the proconsul who has asked to hear the message of Jesus that they are proclaiming across Cyprus Island. And Elymas the sorcerer, who is **preparing** to do whatever he can to confuse or contradict whatever the proconsul hears from these two men. ***A spiritual battle is raging for the heart of a very influential man who had authority to imprison Barnabas and Saul or affirm them and open doors for them to proclaim Jesus without opposition all across Cyprus Island.*** I wonder if very similar spiritual battles are raging in your city, my friends, and how these truth battles might affect you, or your family or friends? Could I ask you to reflect on the spiritual battleground of your city right now? Does God have a role for you to play in this battle for truth in your city? And are you willing to join the battle in the name of Jesus?

Today's Scripture is Acts 13:6, 7.