

The Book Of Acts: Verse-By-Verse

Study Notes: Acts 13:8-12

- **Sergius Paulus:**

A proconsul and governor of Cyprus. In 1877, archeologists discovered a Greek inscription on the north coast near Silo that included the proconsul's name.

Sergius Paulus was open to spiritual things: 1. He hired Bar-Jesus, a known magus or "wise one" to be his primary advisor. 2. When he learned that Barnabas and Saul were preaching a new spiritual message, he called for them.

- **Elymas' Role At Paphos:**

Elymas/Bar-Jesus perceived Barnabas' and Saul's message was a threat to his role as the proconsul's advisor as well as his personal status at Paphos.

Elymas was not a common charlatan. There was something that both drew people to him, and on some level, frightened them.

Many modern commentators demonstrate a complete lack of the belief in the supernatural. Much of this stems from B.B. Warfield's 19th-century effort to eliminate the belief in the supernatural within evangelical churches. "... The possession of the charismata was confined to the Apostolic age." – B.B. Warfield

Bar-Jesus' supernatural powers were absolutely believed by his contemporaries, as well as Barnabas and Saul. One commentator noted, Paul's condemnation of Elymas "... has three clauses, which fall 'like the beats of a hammer. 'Sorcerer', 'false prophet', Jew,' [which] make a climax of wickedness."

- **A "Head-On" Collision: vv. 9-10**

"Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?"

An immediate intensity: "Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas."

Throughout the Book of Acts we encounter several senses of "filled with the Spirit".

Sometimes, it refers to a spontaneous act on the part of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it refers to a believer's spiritual character.

1. "Filled With The Spirit" as a Characteristic:

Acts 6:5 - "They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit..." Acts 11:24 - "Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith ..." Ephesians 5:18-20 - "Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts."

2. "Filled With The Spirit" as a 'Power Encounter':

When Luke says that Paul was "filled with the Holy Spirit", he uses the Greek verb, "pletho" or "pimlemi". This verb has the meanings "to fill to the maximum" or "to fill to one's individual capacity". The primary reference is to quantity – not quality.

Example of spontaneous Spirit infilling: Acts 2:4; Acts 4:8; Acts 4:31.

• **"Looking Straight At Elymas": v. 9**

"Then Paul ... looked straight at Elymas..." The root Greek word, "atenizontes", denotes an intentionality coupled with a very strong intensity. It was used by Aristotle in his scientific writings, as well as a technical word in 1st-century medical writings.

- Luke's list: Luke 4:20; Luke 22:56; Acts 1:10; Acts 3:4; Acts 3:12; Acts 6:15; Acts 7:55; Acts 10:4; Acts 11:6; Acts 13:9; Acts 14:9; Acts 23:1
- Paul uses "atenizontes" twice as he refers to the situation of Moses and the Jewish people in the Old Testament. See: 2 Corinthians 3:7, 12-13

• **You Son Of The Devil": v. 10-11**

"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?" Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun."

Elymas' "official name" was "Bar-Jesus" – meaning "Son of Salvation", but Paul calls him, "Son of the Devil": Bar-Jesus is not a supernatural agent of salvation: He is a slave of Satan.

- **Corollary:** See Jesus' argument with the Pharisees in John 8.

Paul's three-fold characterization of Bar-Jesus: 1. "Son of the devil". 2. "Enemy of all righteousness". 3. "Full of all deceit and villainy".

- **Making Straight Paths Crooked: v. 10**

- NIV: "Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?"

- ESV: "Will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?"

An inversion of Isaiah 40:3: "A voice of one crying out: Prepare the way of the LORD in the wilderness; make a straight highway for our God in the desert."

"But Elymas the sorcerer ... tried to turn the proconsul from the faith." (v.8) The Greek word for "turn away" in verse 8 and the word for "make crooked" in verse 10 is the same: "diastrepho".

Elymas attempts to dissuade Sergius Paulus from hearing and responding to Barnabas' and Saul's message of salvation was the equivalent of making the straight paths to God crooked.

A man who claimed to be the "son of salvation", was, in fact, a tool of Satan. He was trying to prevent the proconsul from becoming a child of God.

There are many people in this world who pretend to lead us to God – but are actually agents of Satan. See: Acts 20:29-30; I Peter 3:16; I John 4:1-3; Matthew 23:15

- **A Mist And Darkness: v. 12:**

"Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord."

The immediacy of the judgment points to the power of the Spirit at work in Saul and marks the genuineness of the miracle. Had Elymas slowly gone blind, it could have been attributed to natural causes.

Not all miracles in the Bible are miracles of healing. Old Testament: The miracles of judgment against Egypt - water turned to blood, frogs, lice, darkness, etc. New Testament: The immediate deaths of Ananias and Saphira for lying to the Holy Spirit about a donation.

John Stott: "God's judgment of him [Elymas] was fitting. For those who put darkness for light and light for darkness forfeit the light they originally had."

"Mist and Darkness" as medical terms:

- "A Mist": Greek word, "achlys" - common in such classics as Homer, meaning, "a darkness or obscurity of the air; a cloud". In medical terms, Hippocrates depicts it as "an extinction of sight by the drying up or disturbance of the tumors of the eye".

- "A Darkness" – Greek word "Skotos". It is used in numerous New Testament verses – referring to supernatural darkness. Example: "The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord." - Acts 2:20

• **Opposite Experiences: v. 12**

- "Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand."

- "When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord."

The NEB translation says the proconsul was "shaken to the core" when he saw the judgment of God on Elymas.

Luke says he was "amazed at the teaching of the Lord". John Stott: "What astonished him was the combination of word and sign, of the apostle's teaching and the sorcerer's defeat."

With this encounter, we are starting to see the rise of Saul of Tarsus in the Book of Acts.