

## Enemy Interference (Acts 12:25-13:12)<sup>a</sup>

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### Passage (Acts 12:25-13:12)

**[25]** And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled [their] ministry, and they also took with them John whose surname was Mark. **[1]** Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **[2]** As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." **[3]** Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent [them] away. **[4]** So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus. **[5]** And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. They also had John as [their] assistant. **[6]** Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name [was] Bar-Jesus, **[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. **[8]** But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. **[9]** Then Saul, who also [is called] Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him **[10]** and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, [you] son of the devil, [you] enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? **[11]** And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord [is] upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time." And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. **[12]** Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

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### The Priority of Jewish Evangelism (to the Jew first).

1. The first place the gospel was proclaimed when reaching Cyprus: the synagogue in Salamis.<sup>2</sup>
2. A pattern throughout Acts - to the Jew first.
  - A. Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14)
  - B. Iconium (Acts 14:1)
  - C. Thessalonica (Acts 17:1)
  - D. Berea (Acts 17:10)
  - E. Athens (Acts 17:17)
  - F. Corinth (Acts 18:4)
  - G. Ephesus (Acts 18:19; 19:8)

## H. Rome, with the “leaders of the Jews” (Acts 28:17)

- I. Upon their rejection of the gospel by the Jews or Rome (A.D. 57-58), Paul stated, “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” (Acts 28:28)
- II. This statement is intended to apply to the Gentiles *of Rome*, not to the idea that Jews are no longer to be a focus of evangelism in general.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. What was Paul’s purpose and message?

- A. “. . . I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23).
- B. His belief: Christianity was nothing more than “completed Judaism.” The Jews would naturally believe since Jesus was the One predicted by Moses and their Scriptures.

## John Mark

1. “They had John as their assistant” (Acts 13:5).
2. John “whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:12, 25).
3. Cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10).
4. Peter went to the house of John Mark’s mother after being rescued from prison by the angel in the previous chapter (Acts 12:12).
5. Peter calls him “my son,” probably on account of being his spiritual father (1Pe. 5:13).
6. Will depart from Paul and Barnabas in Perga (barely having arrived in Asia Minor)—which was apparently not the original plan.
  - A. Paul considered this to be a serious departure such that he refused to consider taking John Mark on the subsequent missionary journey.<sup>4</sup>
  - B. Paul’s feelings on this were apparently quite strong. Enough so that it led to Paul and Barnabus to separate for a time, with Paul taking Silas as he embarked on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:39-41).
7. Sometimes relationships among well-meaning Christians can be rocky and go astray.
  - A. It does not mean, however, that God won’t still work through those who disagree.

B. We eventually find John Mark with Paul during Paul's subsequent imprisonment at Rome (Col. 4:10; Philemon 1:24).

C. John Mark appears to have been the author of the gospel of Mark.

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## Spiritual Opposition to the Gospel

1. Traveled through Cyprus from east to west to arrive at Paphos on the west coast.

2. Here Saul, Barnabus, and John Mark come upon two interesting characters.

A. Sergius Paulus: a proconsul, basically a Roman governor.<sup>5</sup>

B. Bar-Jesus, also called Elymas: a Jewish magician and false prophet

I. The term for "sorcerer" is μάγῳν [magōn], the same word that is translated "magi" elsewhere—can denote "wise men" who may or may not have involvement in the occult.

II. Elymas is described as a ψευδοπροφήτην [pseudoprophētēn], a "pseudo-prophet", definitely involved in the occult.

### 3. Compare Sergius and Elymas

A. Both men were *intelligent*, but as we'll see, intelligence is not the determining factor in finding the truth. They are both intelligent, but have radically different destinies.

B. Both men were authority figures: one in the political realm, the other in the spiritual realm.

C. Different agendas

I. Sergius "called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God" (Acts 13:7).

a. Not only did he go out of his way to meet with Barnabas and Saul, but he "sought to hear the word of God"!

b. Sought is from ἐπιζητέω [epizēteō].

i. Describes the zealous desire of the Jewish crowds who swarmed after Jesus (Acts 4:42).

ii. Describes the intensity of Herod's search for Peter after his escape from prison (Acts 12:19).

iii. Here it describes an intellectual desire: more than mere interest or curiosity, but an interest fueled by desire, having some intensity.

iv. The Holy Spirit had already been at work on this man's heart.

## II. Elymas: “sought to turn the proconsul away from the faith” (Acts 13:8).

- a. Elymas had a spiritual specialty, a spiritual job to accomplish for his master.
- b. To pervert the straight ways of the Lord (Acts 13:10).
  - i. Pervert is from **διαστρέφω** [*diastrephō*].
    - Taking that which is straight and making it crooked.
    - “Bending” the truth.
    - To cause to turn away from belief (Luke 23:2).
- c. Elymas appears interested, even adept, in spiritual matters, but his M.O. is always to move people further from the truth.
- d. It can be packaged, represented in all sorts of manners, but this is the core goal!
- e. Most often, such individuals represent themselves as “open-minded” seekers of truth, but they are anything but neutral!

### D. Different reactions

- I. Proconsul, who was not personally struck, believed!
- II. Elymas, who had direct forceful experience of God’s power neither repented or believed!
  - a. “If you, oh God, would just give me evidence!”
- III. Two men, equivalent intelligence, equivalent evidence, but radically different responses.
  - a. The proconsul “saw what had been done” and responded in faith.
  - b. The sorcerer was blinded, did not respond.
  - c. Evidence is not enough - ultimately, *it is not the determinative element people make it out to be.*

## 4. Compare Paul vs. Elymas

### A. Filled with?

- I. Paul - the Holy Spirit (**πνεύματος ἁγίου** [*pneumatōs hagiou*]).
- II. Elymas - all deceit and all fraud (**παντός δόλου και πάσης ῥαδιουργίας** [*pantos dolou kai pasēs hradiourgias*]).

- a. Deceit (δόλου [dolou]) = deceit, slyness, trickery, cunning.
  - i. Opposite (ἄδολος [adolos] = unadulterated (nothing added or detracted).
- b. Fraud (ῥαδιουργίας [hradiourgias]) = trickery, related form describes a charlatan.
  - i. Purposeful misrepresentation of that which is true.

## B. Serving?

- I. Paul - a son of God.
- II. Elymas - a son of the devil.

## C. Promoting?

- I. Paul - teaching righteousness.
- II. Elymas - “enemy of all righteousness” (v. 10).

## D. Sight

- I. Paul, once spiritually blind, having been physically blinded by Jesus (on the road to Damascus), now could see both physically and spiritually.
- II. Elymas, who previously could “see” (physically, if not spiritually) became physically blind.
- III. Paul - when he had a power encounter with God and was blinded, came to faith. Not so Elymas!
  - a. It seems obvious that when Elymas received his physical sight, he remained spiritually blind.

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## Enemy Interference

### 1. Myth of Neutrality

- A. Ourselves
- B. The society/culture
- C. Those who believe they are intelligent and able to discern truth are actually living “under the influence”.
- D. Not the influence of alcohol or recreational drugs: the pervasive influence of “the ruler of this world”.

- I. How ironic that the modern age rejects the reality of a personal devil!
  - II. Jesus had much to say concerning Satan, and referred to him on several occasions as the “ruler of this world” (John [12:31](#); [14:30](#)).
    - a. ruler = [αρχων](#) [*archōn*], chief one, “first in rank or power.”
    - b. world = [κοσμος](#) [*kosmos*], which can mean the literal earth, but often denotes the “godless world system.”
      - i. The secular, atheistic worldview plus . . .
      - ii. The worldview of all false religions.
  - III. Paul tells us Satan is the “god of this age” ([ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος](#) [*ho theos tou aiōnos*], 2Cor. [4:4](#)) and that his chief activity is to blind people to spiritual truth by placing a veil over their minds.
    - a. Not just to confuse, but specifically designed to keep them from belief in God: “lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2Cor. [4:4](#)).
  - IV. In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul tells us he is the “prince of the power of the air” and the primary “spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. [2:2](#)).
- E. So much for neutrality!
- F. As a non-believer, your number one priority in eventually finding the truth is to realize *this*: you are not living in a neutral bubble.
- I. We are all immersed in a polluted stream which has the purposeful design of suppressing access to the truth.
  - II. As an unbeliever, your own mind is presently “under the influence” of both sin and this world system. Your mind is addled in its ability to function truly objectively.
  - III. Therefore, you are operating from a place of liability and weakness: you will not find the truth apart from crying out to God!

## 2. A need to actively interfere with the truth

- A. Notice the tactics of Elymas: he is not content to let the Proconsul do his thing while Elymas butts out or stays home!
- B. It is not acceptable to allow the truth to have an open playing field—the game must be rigged at all costs.
- C. Thus, the focus on interference, suppression, distortion, manipulation.

### 3. A few examples

#### A. Media

- I. Fathers as buffoons.
- II. Pastors, priests, monks, and nuns as wimps or sexual perverts.
- III. Even in the rare religious film, the gospel is almost always absent or completely distorted.
- IV. Religion is only highlighted in the mainstream media when it is a huge distortion (Roman Catholicism, Popish foolery, megachurch mischief, endorsing apostate practices) or falls on its face (child abuse scandals, kool-aid killings, people hitching rides on comets, and the like).
- V. Overall, the media is *not neutral*. Why? Because, as John wrote so long ago, “We know . . . the whole world lies [under the sway of] the wicked one” (1Jn. [5:19](#)).
- VI. Non-believers may deny it, but we know otherwise. The evidence is clear.

#### B. Intelligent design

- I. Deemed “non-science” and barred from the classroom.
- II. Can’t defeat it on its own merit, so keep it off the playing field.
- III. SETI, the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence, is deemed science.
- IV. ID, which uses the very same intelligence detecting technologies to find intelligence all around us is pseudo-science or worse, religion.
- V. Notice the dual standard - this is clear evidence of bias.
- VI. A bias which Paul wrote of many years ago.
  - a. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who [like Elymas in our passage] suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them (Romans [1:18-19](#)).

#### C. Creationism

- I. Creationism is non-science, based on unprovable myths.
- II. The big bang is objective, based on hard facts.
  - a. Inflation: an infinitesimal period of time early in the universe when information and matter traveled at enormous speeds—far in excess of the

speed of light.

- b. Singularity: an infinitesimal point in space, where all known laws of physics are suspended.
- c. Information: the “sea” of organization and complexity of information we are “swimming” in all came about from an undirected explosion billions of years ago.
- d. Dark matter: the largest portion of material in the universe can’t be seen and has yet to be detected.

III. Yes, we need to keep those crack-pot creationists out of our schools and stick to teaching our kids the hard facts!

IV. Again, an uneven playing field.

- a. Evolution and Big Bang cosmology are given free reign in the culture and schools.
- b. Creationism is suppressed and portrayed as lunacy. It is strictly off-limits for teachers shepherding our children, and for academics to discuss its relevance in nearly any setting can be the kiss of death (denial of tenure, loss of job, ruination of career).

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## Prayer

1. **We face an active enemy with vast resources and a large, willing, and energetic workforce.**
2. **But, like Paul, our resources are greater.**

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### Endnotes:

1. [NKJV, Acts 12:25-13:12](#)
2. “Tradition says that Barnabas preached in Alexandria and Rome, and was stoned to death at Salamis in about 61 CE. He is considered the founder of the Church of Cyprus. His bones are believed to be located in the nearby monastery named after him.” [WP, Salamis, Cyprus, Christianity<sup>d</sup>](#)
3. ““Although the Scriptures are very clear about this procedure, it is nevertheless denied by many. A major argument used to refute this

doctrine is based on Acts 28:25-28. Because of these concluding words and Paul's declaration that the gospel will now go to the Gentiles, the passage is taken to mean that the gospel is no longer to the Jew first and that God has now changed His program of evangelism, superseding Rom. 1:16, which was written before the Book of Acts. . . . The true meaning is to be found by comparing this passage with two other passages where these words had been spoken before: Acts 13:44-48 and Acts 18:5-6. The true interpretation of Acts 28:25-28 is to be seen in these two passages, which indicate a local change and not an overall change in the program of evangelism. . . . There is no shift in the procedure of presenting the gospel. Acts 28 is only a continuation of a procedure already in progress of presenting the gospel to the Jews first and then turning to the Gentiles." Ref-1217, 103-104

4. "Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work." NKJV, Acts 15:38
5. "The Roman proconsuls were officers invested with consular power over a district outside Rome, e.g., Gaul or Syria, usually for one year." Ref-0008, 3:978

#### Sources:

- NKJV** Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Ref-0008** Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979).
- Ref-1217** Christopher Cone, ed., *Practical Aspects of Pastoral Authority*, 1st ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2009). ISBN:978-0-9814791-5-6<sup>e</sup>.
- WP** Wikipedia <http://www.wikipedia.org>

#### Links Mentioned Above

- a - See [http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts\\_by\\_Tony\\_Garland/40\\_Acts\\_12\\_25-13\\_12/index.htm](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/40_Acts_12_25-13_12/index.htm).
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org>.
- d - See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salamis,\\_Cyprus#Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salamis,_Cyprus#Christianity).
- e - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/isbn.htm?978-0-9814791-5-6>.