

**"Acts of the Apostles: Acts 13 Pt 2:
Lesson 22" by Faber McMullen, Union
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"Knowing Your Enemy"



"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." (Acts 13:4-12, NKJV).



Background

Let's just take a minute to remember where we are and what we're looking at. The Christian faith started of course in Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. Then we read Dr. Luke's account as the gospel spread into Samaria and on up into Damascus, Syria and eventually Antioch in Syria. For those just joining us, it is important to remember that the person writing this

is Dr. Luke. He provides an accurate account that we would expect from a physician. The Book of Acts is written chronologically and geographically. That means Luke gives us the story of when the new church grew and where it grew. If we didn't have his account we would not know much about the first days of the Church. Remember last

week we learned that there were prophets and teachers in Antioch. Antioch is the first place that believers in Jesus were called "Christians."

We talked last week about how this group of believers probably gathered together after the saints scattered following the stoning of Stephen. We learned that this church was a diverse group that included Jews and Gentiles and people from all over the region. The text told us that they fasted and worshiped the Lord and that the Holy Spirit spoke to the group telling them to set aside Barnabas and Paul, and to send them out to spread the Gospel.



So in our story today, Paul and Barnabas have sailed from Antioch in Syria over to Cyprus. They then arrived in Salamis and they walked to Paphos. It is in Paphos that we are told they encounter a false prophet named Bar-Jesus. Interestingly, remember that in Hebrew his name means "Son of the Savior." When they got to Paphos they were invited by a man named Sergius Paulus, the main governor, who was anxious to hear the Word of God. Sergius was not a Jew, but he was no doubt interested in spiritual matters, and Jews were known to be people with spiritual knowledge. So he heard that these two Jews (Saul and Joe Levy aka Barnabas) were walking across the Island of Cyprus, and he sought an audience with them.



Now what's interesting about this story is that the governor Sergius already had a Jewish so-called magician that he had kept near him as an advisor. This is the guy in the story that is named "Bar-Jesus" or Elymas in the passage that we've just read for the day. Apparently, Sergius began to believe the good news message about Jesus the Messiah. Elymas couldn't stand to see his employer influenced by another, so the English Bible says, he "withstood" them. The Greek word *anthistemi* /anth·is·tay·mee/] is really much more powerful. It means **1** to set one's self against, to withstand, resist, oppose. **2** to set against.¹

Let me digress for just a moment. We should always remember that when we share the good news of Jesus with others we are in a spiritual battle. There will always be an Elymas (which is really a translation of the word sorcerer) opposing the good news of God. But, what is a sorcerer? If you do an entymological study of the word you will find that it means "a person who seeks to control and use magic powers; a wizard or magician."² So, wrap your head around that for a minute. This means that Bar-Jesus (aka Elymas) was all about control and use of his magical powers.

One overriding principle of God's interaction with mankind is that He seeks to liberate us and to empower us to be all that we were supposed to be as His creations. Remember

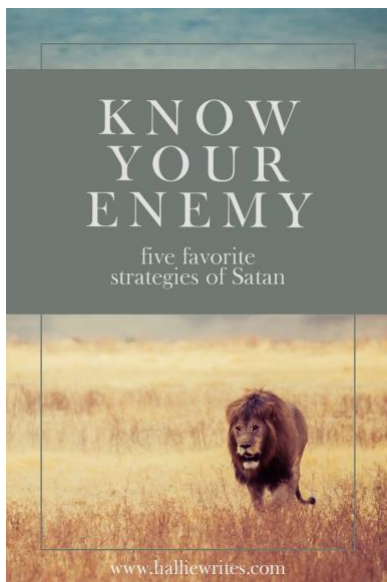
¹ Strong, J. (1995). *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*. Woodside Bible Fellowship.

² <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/sorcerer>

back when we studied the Torah together. Do you remember the meaning of Baal? It meant Lord on a superficial level, but it meant "possessor or dominator" on a deeper meaning of the name. One of the key indicators of an unhealthy relationship is when one party wishes to "possess" or "dominate" the other person.

A good partner in a relationship should do everything in their power to lift their partner up to become all that he or she should become in Christ. Saul, who we will now call Paul from this time forward, along with Barnabas and John-Mark who travelled with them, were in the business of setting anybody and everybody they met free. And here they were about to set Sergius free from the domination of Elymas. Evil doesn't give up easily so the text tells us that Elymas resisted, opposed, and set himself against them. But who were Paul and Barnabas really contending with?

The text tells us that Paul, now filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at Elymas and Paul spoke. Paul understood and would later write to the little church in Ephesus saying *"¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."* (Ephesians 6:12, NKJV). Paul recognized the enemy and the enemy wasn't Elymas. Paul calls him out for who he is. *"O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness,"* (Acts 13:10, NKJV).

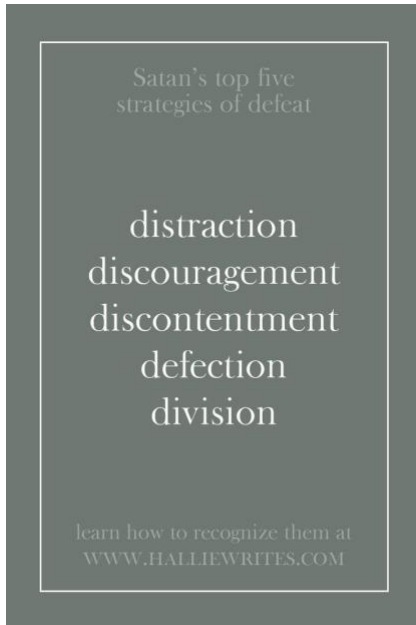


You know evil dresses itself up in all sorts of ways. Can you imagine a more powerful looking dress than dressing yourself up in the name of Jesus? But in fact, the sorcerer wasn't a son of the Savior at all, but Paul called him out as a "son of the devil." That's who he was! He clearly describes Elymas' mission. Paul says you are full of deceit and you are a fraud. What is deceit? Elymas was concealing and misrepresenting the truth. He was concealing the true God and he was presenting himself as a broker of God's power. He then called him a fraud which is an interesting term to me as a lawyer. What is a fraud exactly? A fraud is a deceiver that has an ulterior motive.

The dictionary describes a fraud as a "wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain, or as a person or thing intended to deceive others, typically by unjustifiably claiming or being credited with accomplishments or qualities."³ Paul calls Elymas out saying that he has no intention other than twisting the sincere wonderful truth of the gospel. While we're on the topic of knowing your enemy, I think it would be a good idea to review some of the more favorite tools of the enemy. Paul accused Elymas of "perverting the straight ways of the Lord." One of the meanings of "perverting" is leading (someone) away from what is considered right, natural, or acceptable. Did you know there are 5 predictable steps or ways when people lose their way on their journey with the Lord? So, how is it that we are "lead away from what is considered right?"

³ [https://www.google.com/search? \"Fraud\"](https://www.google.com/search?\)

1) Distraction - I think one of the great ways that Satan leads others away is with distraction. Think of it in the context of a church service. Satan will distract you by someone's hairstyle, their voice, or by perhaps a misspelled word in the bulletin. He can distract others by the clothing or appearance of another. He doesn't just use people to distract us, but he distracts us with things and ideas. It is easy during your prayer time to be distracted by the curiosity of what is being discussed on Facebook. Training your heart to be focused is a kind of fasting. Try fasting from these distractions by returning your focus to Jesus and what He wants from you. When your heart wanders from what is good and right and uplifting, call Satan out and get back to the business at hand.



2) Second, Satan always discourages and never encourages. Those distractions can easily discourage you if you let them. They end up causing you to convince yourself, "Well, this must not be the place for me." You become discouraged about others, the church, yourself, and the world as a whole. When you feel discouragement that means you "lose heart" and cease seeing the good in something. You cease to see God working through the imperfect. Paul tells us, "*7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*" (2 Corinthians 4:7, NIV). Don't lose heart! The prophet Jeremiah reminds us, "*Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness.*" "The Lord

is my portion," says my soul, 'Therefore I hope in Him!'" (Lamentations 3:22-24, NKJV).

3) Discontentment is the third major tool in Satan's toolbox. In a church, discontentment is toxic. Discontentment means "not being in a state of peaceful happiness." It can tear a work apart before God ever puts it together. People can be discontented because the coffee is too strong or discontented because it is too weak. If you don't like how the coffee tastes, then you can arrive early and make it. You can be discontented because you don't like the songs that are picked. There can be discontentment because too many hymns are sung or that too many praise songs are sung. Don't you see guys? Satan wants you to make it all about you and what you think a service should look like and be like. The question shouldn't be whether I like the hymns or the songs that are sung, but rather whether God is worshiped and glorified. And remember the distractions? They can make a person feel like they have nothing to be positive about. The apostle Paul gave us an antidote to discontentment. He said, "*8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on*

these things. " ¹¹Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:" (Philippians 4:8,11, NKJV). If God didn't know that we would be distracted by negative things this verse would not be in the Bible. Practice the words of Paul and there is a promise of contentment.

- 4) Defection is Satan's fourth primary tool. It is what happens when distraction, discouragement, and discontent take full root. That is when a person turns and walks away from a country or a cause and takes up with the opposing side. Can you imagine walking away from sweet fellowship and hearing the voice of God by being all rooted in and distracted by something that has little spiritual consequence? The person falls into Satan's snare and just gives up and leaves to go somewhere else to go through the same cycle of becoming spiritually neutralized. They let themselves get hurt so much (usually through focusing on themselves), that they just give up, withdraw, and go their own separate way. They are divided from the group.
- 5) This division is purposeful by the enemy. You see, division is the evil one's objective. Satan seeks to isolate so that he can assassinate. It begins with a distraction often leading to a bit of discouragement. The discouragement quickly leads to stronger discontentment. And having stolen a person's joy, Satan makes anything and everything unacceptable and makes it seem like a larger problem than it is. This ultimately causes a removal of one's heart from the group, which ultimately leads to one's physical separation from the group. For the believer, Satan can't have your soul, so he seeks to steal your joy! Don't let him.

In the text, Paul then strikes Elymas blind through the power of the Holy Spirit. A visible mist falls on him with the promise that it will be just for a time. Why is it "just for a time?" Because God is gracious and He always gives another and another chance. You see, His mercies never fail. Great is His faithfulness. Elymas had always been blind spiritually and the Holy Spirit made his blindness visible to all.

Sergius, to the contrary, had seen the light. He had the joy. The blindness was gone. He who had been a spiritual slave, was set free in Jesus.

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. ³⁵ And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.

³⁶ Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." (John 8:34-36, NKJV).

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