

There was a man who had heard about a new procedure which would enable him to get a new brain. So he went to the hospital where the surgery had been perfected and asked the hospital administration if he qualified for the procedure.

"Well, we can give you a new brain, but the cost is prohibitive," said an administrator.

After, showing the administrator that he indeed could afford a new brain, the man was escorted into the hospital's Brain Depository by the chief of administration. The chief administrator, pulled a brain off the shelf saying, "Here is an excellent engineer's brain--a finely honed, precise bit of gray matter. It will cost you \$500 an ounce."

"What else do you have?" the man wanted to know. So the chief administrator brought him deeper into the depository, "This," he told him, "Is a pastor's brain--a collection of contemplative, reflective little gray cells. It is \$1000 an ounce." "Is that all you have?" "Oh No," he said. "Here is a doctor's brain, packed full of anatomical knowledge. It goes for \$5000 an ounce."

"I'm not sure," the man said. "Don't you have anything else?"

The chief administrator held his breath and motioned for the man to step over to a covered container. "This," he said in hushed tones, "is a Congressman's brain. It costs \$250,000 an ounce."

"Wow!" exclaimed the man. "Why so expensive?" "Isn't it obvious?," said the chief administrator, "it is hardly used."

When we approach our Christian life are we fully using our brain?

When we apply our intellect to our Christian life, we do not rely only on our intellect, that would be foolish, instead, we use our intellect in combination with the power of the Holy Spirit. See, we are more than intellect and emotion, we are spiritual as well.

As we start this morning, we need to reflect for just a moment: You and I, we live in a material world, we are human after all; We live, see, hear, breath, think and touch this material world. We have been equipped by God in amazing ways to deal with the material world around us. However, though you and I are human, made of flesh and bone, we are also spiritual creatures, there is much more to us than what we see when

we look in the mirror. We are body, soul and spirit. You see me, Peter as flesh and bone, and you know me through my personality, but I also am more than a body and a personality, I am spirit too. You are the same.

We are created by God as spiritual beings and as such we seek spiritual things. We hunger for spiritual things, and need to be satisfied by spiritual things. You know this, you hunger and seek for these things yourself. However, let us not be naive, and imagine that there is only one kind of spiritual being. Let us not imagine that there is the person of God and us humans alone. We are spiritual beings, and we live in a spiritual world and we are not alone.

You know, many Americans will acknowledge that there is God...and they will not move beyond that reality. There is God, and then there is us humans they theorize, and so they believe that anything that they run into that is spiritual is of God. That is a big mistake, that is not thinking things thought very well. Just because something is spiritual in no way means it is of God.

There is good, and there is evil in this world, and this good and evil rises beyond social conventions, human interactions, and ideological ideals. There is a good, which is holy and there is an evil which is anything but holy and is it seriously detrimental to your spiritual life. This evil opposes the Gospel at every turn and has done so since the beginning. Scripture informs us that this evil is not a blind force, or human calculation, but that it is personified in the person of Satan and his fallen angels, otherwise known as demons. This evil is as real today as it was in the biblical world.

In our first story we see Herod, perhaps unintentionally, aligning himself with this evil and then in our second story, we see Paul directly confront spiritual evil that has blinded the people of Paphos for ages. These stories inform us about how to live our Christian life now and are not merely of historical interest. Let us work through these two stories and see what God is teaching us today through his word.

As our Scripture opens in chapter 12 we see Herod Agrippa traveling from Judea, more specifically Jerusalem, and down to [Caesarea](#). Herod Agrippa leaves Jerusalem right after the Apostle Peter escapes from Herod's heavily guarded prison. Jerusalem is an intensely political place and Herod needs some rest and relaxation after the escape of Peter so he heads to Caesarea.

Caesarea is right on the Mediterranean Sea. It was a beautiful Roman city with plenty of sun and great beaches. It had a fantastic amphitheater that faced the sea and a huge hippodrome (Greek for horse arena) where chariot races and horse competitions were held. If you visit Israel today you can tour these rebuilt sporting arenas and they are very impressive, even as ruins. It is quite likely that the events in our story today unfold at either of these attractions. The Jewish population in Caesarea was fairly light and so it was an intensely pagan city.

The cities of [Tyre and Sidon](#) depended upon Galilee for their grain and meat. This commerce was instigated in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 5:9-12). Now for some reason, not mentioned, these cities offended Herod and so Herod cut off their food supply. If they did not secure a supply of food quickly the cities would fall into chaos and the city administrators would lose their positions. So they paid a man named [Blastus](#), who was in the employ of Herod, to act as a lobbyist before Herod. Here in our text in the city of Caesarea the opportunity presented itself to present their plea for peace publicly before Herod Agrippa.

Josephus also writes an account of this event and adds some details we do not have here. Herod Agrippa publicly meets to reconcile with officials of the cities. On that day Herod Agrippa wore a robe that contained a large amount of silver threads woven into the fabric. It was considered an exceptionally beautiful robe. Since the gathering was outside, as Herod strode across a raised platform, his silver robe caught the sunlight and he shone like the sun. Those who were around him, who wanted to gain his favor, (perhaps the administrators from Tyre and Sidon were included), they cried out that Herod shone like the sun and that Herod Agrippa was a god. They called out that Herod was divine.

Now, Herod does not rebuff their cries and thus tacitly accepts that he is divine, he accepts that he is a god. Josephus' account tells us he immediately had intense pain in his bowels and died five days later. Many have speculated on what exactly it was that killed Herod, but, most likely it was some kind of a parasite. Upon his death, Herod's kingdom reverts back to Rome for administration.

Luke tells us that an angel struck Herod down and the description of immediate pain and being eaten by worms coincides with Josephus' account. Now, Luke clearly insinuates that Herod's death is retribution for the persecution he placed upon the church.

Hold on here, let's look at this a little closer. The people who are with Herod in Caesarea see Herod in intense pain and see him die five days later - that's all they see. Luke tells us that an Angel struck Herod down.

I just want to point out one thing here for you to consider: The people in Caesarea see purely material events, yet, they are experiencing a spiritual event. They see the event, they see the results and they see human and material interaction, yet it is a spiritual event. We are spiritual beings, made for spiritual things...perhaps we too interpret spiritual events around us with only our intellect. Now, hang onto that.

Then, we pick up with Barnabas, Saul and John Mark (Barnabas' cousin) heading back to Antioch. While they are in Antioch, prophets hear from the Holy Spirit to set aside Saul and Barnabas for missionary activity. Instead of staying in one location, they are to travel and spread the Gospel. This is a very impressive list of leaders who emerge from this Church. This shows this church was right on target in their spiritual growth.

As we talked about last week, Antioch is a city filled with people from all over the Roman Empire and here five leaders of the church are mentioned. They are mentioned in order of importance. Notice Saul, who is later known as Paul, is at the very end of the list. Amazingly Paul is considered the least of these men. We have many of Paul's writings in the NT and we can see that Paul is an amazing spiritual man, if he is the least of these, how amazing were the rest of these men? This church at Antioch is thriving spiritually to be able to produce five amazing leaders, with Paul being the least.

Three are of pagan origin, Simeon is from Africa, Lucius is also African, Manaen is of royal blood and was brought up with Herod Antipas in Rome. Remember a few weeks ago we talked about how Africa plays a pivotal role in the early church, and so, here we see Africans prominent once again. Now, two are of Jewish origin, Barnabas and Saul. Notice, that the gentile Christians now outnumber the Jewish Christians. Also notice how there are now prominent Romans joining the church.

They lay hands on Barnabas and Saul, recognizing that these men as delegates from Antioch, and they send them off. Mark is probably brought along as he is an eyewitness to events in the life of Jesus.

They head to [Seleucia Pieria](#) which was the port city of the city of Antioch. It was five miles north of the mouth of the Orontes River, there they set sail for [Cyprus](#), Cyprus is called Kittim in the OT. Cyprus principle export was copper, from which the name Cyprus is derived. It was annexed by Rome in 57 B.C. and at this time was administered by the Senate, so like other senatorial provinces it was governed by an appointed proconsul.

Even though they are out to bring the gospel to pagans, they start with Jews first at the Synagogues. Why is that? Paul is a highly educated Rabbi and so he would be invited to speak at a Synagogue when he arrived in a city. This is an easy place to start. There at the Synagogue would always be a number of gentiles who were practicing Judaism. These usually were the first people to convert to Christ. So, if they go to the Synagogue first they have a core group of believers very quickly after they enter the city. It was a quick way to start a church in a city.

The island of Cyprus is about 100 miles long. They start on the East end and work their way to the West, ending up at a city called New Paphos. (Thought the text says Paphos, its full name was New Paphos) The city was noted for the cult of the goddess known as [Paphian](#). This cult was of Syrian origin and identified with the Greek goddess Aphrodite. It had syncretize over the years into a localized cult identified with the city, even though its roots were of foreign origin. This cult had great influence on the city and the rest of the island. This cult is what holds the people to their pagan beliefs.

Let's stop here for a moment. The cult of the goddess Paphian isn't just a tourist site that brought money into the economy of Paphos. This is the epicenter of spiritual activity on the island. Is this activity of God? Apparently not, since we see Paul rebuke a man certainly attached to the cult. So, if the cult of Paphos is not of God, and it is of spiritual nature, than of what spiritual nature is it?

I'll let you figure that one out for yourself.

Here in Paphos, Saul and Barnabas meet a proconsul who has a sorcerer attached to his court. This would make sense since the city was not only pagan but was the seat of the occult on the island. The proconsul is [Sergius Paulus](#), he is connected with the Sergii Pauli who were a senatorial family of the first century. Sergius Paulus, was from Antioch, and his family owned large estates in the region.

We also know that Sergia Paulla, the proconsul's daughter, was a Christian, as was her son Gaius Caristianus Fronto, the first citizen of Pisidian Antioch to enter the Roman senate. We now see Christianity moving into places the disciples may have never thought possible.

Paulis wants to hear the Gospel so he asks Saul and Barnabas to his court. Bar-Jesus also known as Elymas, is attached to the court. This makes perfect sense for the proconsul to have a member of the local prominent cult in his entourage, if for nothing more than good relations with the population. It is evident that Bar-Jesus is somehow associated with the cult of Paphian since Paphos is the center of the cult, and as such this is where the proconsul would seek a spiritual advisor. Remember, Jesus was a very common name - it is a variation of the name Joshua. Bar means 'son of' so his name means son of Jesus. You may remember that Barabbas, who was released in place of Jesus Christ, his full name was [Barabbas Bar-Jesus](#). ([Additional Barabbas link here](#)) There were many people with the name Bar-Jesus.

Now, Bar-Jesus is described as a sorcerer, (verse 8) which is not a guy who pulls rabbits out of a hat and creates balloon animals. Plain and simple it is a man who deals with the occult. He is a witch, a person who attempts to manipulate spirits to do his will - but the reality is, that the spirits, in the end, advance their will. An example in our time would be when a group of people gather together to perform a seance. The leader of the seance attempts to manipulate spirits to speak to the group. Let me clue you in, these spirits are not of human origin, nor are they from God.

Bar-Jesus does his best to distract the proconsul from the Gospel as he would be aware that this meant the end of his employment. But, don't stop there, this is not simply about a man doing whatever he can to stay employed, this is about spiritual opposition to the Gospel. Human beings, social issues, and matters of ethnicity are not what have been attempting to stop the Gospel - no those are the effects that are seen in the material world from actions taken in the spiritual world. There is a spiritual push against the Gospel, and that spiritual push is not from God is it?

This is just another in a series of attacks upon the church. The death of Stephen with the persecution that followed was the first. Church still grew. Then James was killed, Peter imprisoned, but the church still grew. Even internal attacks with Ananias and Saphira trying to trick the church leaders about finance issues have a spiritual background. Still the church grows. Now here in Paphos another direct attack occurs from a man who has

direct connections to the occult. Paul, prompted by the Holy Spirit speaks against Bar-Jesus.

Note that this is the first time Saul is called Paul and this has nothing to do with Paul being in the presence of a powerful man named Paulus. As a Roman citizen Paul would have three names in addition to his Jewish name Saul. The names were known as the praenomen, nomen gentile and cognomen. Paul would be his cognomen name. Paul's praenomen and nomen gentile names are never mentioned and we have no record of what they were, we are only aware of the names Saul and Paul.

So, Paul, speaks against Bar-Jesus. He is a false prophet (verse 6) in the sense that he speaks not for God, but for the demonic spirit behind the local Paphian cult. Understand that since this cult is not of God, and it is occultic, there is a primary demonic spirit behind the cult. Ultimately, Bar-Jesus serves this demon, whether he is fully aware of it or not. Though the man is known as son of Jesus, he really is the son of the devil as Paul points out. He is working with the occult, of which the source is Satan.

When Paul speaks, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Bar-Jesus goes blind. First we see that there is now physical evidence of his spiritual blindness, just as Paul experienced earlier, his own blindness revealed his spiritual blindness. Second, we see Paul exercising what is known as a judgment miracle.

The function of judgment miracles is similar to the function of healing miracles. Each of them results in either fear or awe. The ancient equivalent of shock and awe. The result is that God immediately gains a higher status out of fear and awe, and more people submit to Him. The authenticity of Paul's teaching has been shown, the reality of who Jesus is has been shown, even though the process was a negative one.

Here we see the proconsul believe as a result of the judgment miracle and is the highest ranking Roman convert to Christianity in the NT.

The function of the judgment miracle of blindness used here, is to differentiate a miracle from magic. Ethnographically, magic indicates the attempt to manipulate the world through the use of spirits. This manipulation may take place through the use of a term of power or an incantation or other means at the disposal of the magician. Paul uses no such incantation, spell, nor enchantments, Paul simply speaks judgement upon Bar-Jesus.

Further, Jesus Christ has been shown to be more powerful than Paphian, in her own locality. In the ancient world spirits were thought to be territorial and have a range of jurisdiction where they exercise power. Whether this is true that spirits are [territorial](#) [\(additional link here\)](#) [\(here\)](#) [\(and here\)](#) or not is, up to great debate today by biblical scholars, still, for Jesus Christ to exercise power over an adherent to the cult of Paphian in the center of her power would completely shock the population into rethinking the power of this spirit they had been serving for so many years, for it would mean that Paphian has no power in the presence of Jesus Christ.

OK, now we have seen two events that are historically attested to, the death of Herod Agrippa and the conversion of Sergius Paulus. In both of these events, physical and material evidence is seen, but that is not where it ends, for our Scripture tells us that behind these events is the hand of God. These events appear to be only physical, but they are indeed both physical and spiritual.

Are all events we experience both physical and spiritual? I don't think we can find Scriptural evidence that all events are both physical and spiritual, however, there are events that are clearly physical with a spiritual dimension behind them.

Let me ask you this? If events that happened years ago were both physical and spiritual, why would we not have events today that are both physical and spiritual? What is it that would create a world of today that only has physical events?

So we have to come to one of two conclusions: Either the events as described in our Scripture are exaggerated nonsense, or, you and I have experienced and will experience events that are both physical and spiritual. One or the other. In addition, we need to be able to distinguish between spiritual things that are of God, and spiritual things that are not of God - we do this by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Listen, the fact is, we are spiritual beings, created by God for spiritual things. You and I, as Christians, we have had the Holy Spirit come upon us; You and I, as Christians, do not only operate by our human wiles, our human intellect, our human intuition; You and I, as Christians are to listen to and obey the Holy Spirit as we have been learning about in the past few weeks.

Let us not be naive, there are events that come against us as Christians that are more than social, or physical, they in fact have a spiritual reality behind them, that is not of God.

Blind Bar-Jesus

Acts 12:19-13:12

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We should not look in every nook and cranny for these kind of things, nor should we renege our responsibility and claim that some spirit is responsible for our acts - Still, still, we cannot deny that there is a spiritual evil in the world, and further yet, we cannot deny that this spiritual evil interacts with us on a level we do not fully understand. There is good in the world that is holy and there is evil in the world that is anything but holy.

We as Christians are in conflict with much more than social, societal, ideological and physical forces we are in conflict with spiritual forces as well. There is not better time than this to get understand the voice of the Holy Spirit than now, is there?

We will explore this further as we work through the book of Acts.