

Who was Bar-Jesus in the Bible?

We find the man named Bar-Jesus in the Bible in Acts 13:6-7: “They traveled through the whole island until they came to 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.”

The setting of the story of Bar-Jesus is Paul’s first missionary journey. Through prayer, fasting, and the Holy Spirit’s leading, the church in Antioch had selected Barnabas and Saul, who was also called Paul, to be sent out as missionaries. With them also was John Mark. On their journey, they traveled to Cyprus, Barnabas’s home island. When they arrived in Paphos, the western port and capital of the island, they were invited to meet with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, who was Roman governor of the region.

The Bible tells us that Sergius Paulus was an intelligent man who wanted to hear the Word of God. Among the governor’s attendants was Bar-Jesus, a man who made his living practicing magic. He also claimed to be a prophet of God.

The name Bar-Jesus means “son of Joshua” or “son of the Savior.” In Acts 13:8, the magician is called Elymas, which, according to Luke, means “magician” or “sorcerer.” It was not uncommon for Jews to have more than one name, and Luke thought it was important to include both in the account.

While Barnabas and Paul were visiting with Sergius Paulus, they encountered Bar-Jesus. The sorcerer, who most likely feared losing his job with the proconsul, began to openly

oppose the gospel message being shared by Barnabas and Paul. The Bible says Elymas tried to turn the governor from the faith (Acts 13:8).

Filled with the Holy Spirit's power, Paul looked intently at Bar-Jesus 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? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind for a time, not even able to see the light of the sun" (Acts 13:10-11).

Immediately, the magician was afflicted with temporary blindness and began groping around for someone to guide him by the hand. The magician's name Bar-Jesus meant "son of the Savior," but Paul called him "child of the devil," a wordplay that would not have been lost on Sergius Paulus.

Sometimes when the gospel is preached, Satan will plant stumbling blocks and detractors like Bar-Jesus in the path of those who are seeking to understand the truth (see Matthew 13:4, 19). But God is able to remove all obstacles.

Bar-Jesus showed no sign of repentance, but his blindness became a beacon of light for Sergius Paulus. When the governor saw what had happened to the sorcerer, he was astonished by the teaching he had just received from Barnabas and Paul, and he became a believer (Acts 13:12).