

46 AD – GOSPEL DECLARED TO ROMAN PROCONSUL IN CYPRUS

“And upon every high tower and upon every fenced wall.” (Isaiah 2 v 15)

EVENTS IN 46 AD

Saul and **Barnabus** sailed to **Cyprus** and proclaimed the Word of God in the Jewish synagogues. **Mark** was with them. Acts says ‘**they travelled through the whole island**’. **Cyprus** is the third largest island in the Mediterranean, 240 km long and 100 km wide. Since they were walking on foot this took time – the year of **46 AD**.

CONFRONTATION WITH THE SORCERER

Paphos was the Roman administrative center for the island. There they met a Jewish sorcerer named **Elymas** and a Jewish false prophet named **Bar-Jesus**, who was attached to the Roman proconsul **Sergius Paulus**. The proconsul sent for **Saul** and **Barnabus** to hear the word of God.

“But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy [Sergius Paulus] from the faith. Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said:

‘O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season.’

And immediately there fell on him a mist and darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” (Acts 13:8-12)

RESISTENCE TO THE GOSPEL

All through **Paul**’s three missionary journeys there is a pattern. **Paul** first preaches in the local synagogues. Some receive the message and others won’t receive the message. Then the Jews who won’t receive the message use their influence in high places to stir up the Roman authorities against **Paul**. Here in Cyprus we see the intimacy of Roman rulers with Jewish false prophets and sorcerers. Jews did not possess authority but they had access to power.

ACTIVITIES OF JEWS IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Judea was within the Roman Empire from the time of **Pompey's** conquest in 63 BC. Jewish advisors were useful to Roman emperors. Rome was filled with intrigue and political rivalries. Romans often did not trust other Romans. Roman emperors ruled an empire with vast domains: their eyes were constantly on the frontiers, looking for new areas to conquer or enemies to guard against. Romans needed assistance in all their complex affairs.

It wasn't just Romans who relied on Jewish counsellors and administrators. Witness the **Ethiopian eunuch** in Acts 8. He was a Jew in **Queen Candace's** court who was given trust of the administration of her treasury. There were Jews in the court of Babylon and Persia. It was an accepted practice since **Daniel** to keep Jewish prophets and advisors in the court.¹

Pompey transported 120,000 Jewish captives to Egypt. They became part of a large population of Jews in **Alexandria**, occupying two of the five districts of the city. Although initially captives they were granted freedom. This is the origin of the **Synagogue of Freedmen** in the account of Stephen in Acts 6. It was the outspoken Alexandrian branch of Judaism.

In **Alexandria** Jews were permitted religious freedoms and enjoyed separate Jewish districts. After riots in **Alexandria** between Greeks and Jews, Emperor **Claudius** in his 'Letter to the Alexandrians' affirmed the rights of Jews. Josephus says after this **Claudius** affirmed the rights of Jews throughout the empire.

Paul went on his missionary journey to Cyprus during the reign of **Claudius**, when Jews participated at high levels in Roman affairs through a variety of administrative roles.

THE SHOWDOWN BETWEEN PAUL AND THE JEWISH SORCERER

Jews did not proselytize Roman citizens. They gained their position of influence by keeping their religion private and honoring and respecting Roman hegemony. What they gained from this bargain was Roman recognition of the Herodian dynasty. Herodian kings permitted Jews to continue their Temple worship and indeed, were patrons of the Temple.

Paul was preaching the way of salvation directly to a person of Roman nobility, the proconsul of Cyprus, and breaking every convention of Jewish dealings with the Romans.

¹ The administration of Egypt by Joseph is the earliest example. But it did not become a widely accepted practice until later.

PROPHECY OF ISAIAH 2 V 15

“And upon every high tower and upon every fenced wall.” (Isaiah 2 v 15)

This verse is the continuation of the prophecy of Isaiah which started in verse 12: **“The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted. They will be humbled.”**

“upon every high tower”

Rome was entering the period of its greatest glory, the Pax Romana, when there were no more civil wars among the generals, the empire was unchallenged from any serious external threat for two hundred years, and there was civil peace: roughly from **27 AD** to **180 AD**.

By opening his mouth to utter the gospel of **Jesus Christ** to the Roman proconsul of Cyprus **Paul** was declaring God would not permit the Roman civilization, which was built on worship in pagan temples, to survive and to thrive.

The Tower of Babylon achieved a momentary central control of world affairs and was on its way to imposing its star worship religion on mankind forever. God threw that Tower down. The same fate would befall Rome, albeit the fall took centuries.

“and upon every fenced wall”

In the Bible a ‘wall’ is symbolic of a prophet. A ‘fenced wall’ can be understood to be a prophet who is protected by the ruler in power. **Bar-Jesus** was the false prophet attached to the proconsul. He was protected by Rome and his advice was offered to make Rome great.

Like every true prophet of God since **Daniel**, **Paul** spoke on behalf of the Kingdom of God, predicting the kingdoms of this world, even Rome, would only be of short duration.

Paul had in mind the eternal salvation of **Sergius Paulus**. **Elymas**, like all sorcerers, had in mind to control worldly affairs to their preference or advantage.

Paul showed forth his courage and his fidelity to his LORD and publically condemned **Elymas** as a son of the Devil – not working for the glory of God, but working for the god of this world.

SPIRITUAL NUMBER ANALYSIS

For a mind that has wisdom please read on. See truth from another perspective.

PART ONE

Chapter **2** of Isaiah is the **2nd** chapter of The Prophets.

The spiritual number **2** means 'Division' or 'Discern'

The Kingdom of God was now on the offensive. All the towers of the kingdoms of men were going to fall if necessary for the gospel of **Jesus Christ** to spread. The Jews attempted an armed revolt against Rome in 66 AD. If they had only acknowledged Jesus, they would have known his kingdom advances by faith not by swords and chariots; until he returns in glory.

PART TWO

Isaiah **2 v 15** is the **17,701st** verse in the whole Bible starting at Gen **1 v 1**.

The number **17,701 = 31 x 571**

The spiritual meaning of **31** is 'Family of One God'

The spiritual meaning of **571** is 'Eternal Throne'

Roman Emperors were mortals. Their thrones were occupied by only a few generations of men then were supplanted by new dynasties and swept away into the dustbin of history. The throne of **Jesus Christ** is an eternal throne and his servants receive everlasting rewards.

PART THREE

Isaiah **2 v 15** is the **46th** verse of The Prophets starting at Isaiah **1 v 1**.

The spiritual meaning of **46** is 'Resurrection Life'

Elymas wanted to save the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem. Therefore he was not interested in **Sergius Paulus** except to use him to advance his worldly agenda. The heart of the message of the gospel is resurrection from the dead. Our days on this earth are fleeting. Faith in **Jesus** grants the believer everlasting life, worth much more than this life. This was the burden of **Paul** as he stood to testify before **Sergius Paulus**: to save his eternal soul.