

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Lecture 5

Miracles and Evangelism

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 5, Miracles and Evangelism.

One of my brothers-in-law, the one seated to my right, as far as if you're looking at the front of the picture, one of my brothers-in-law is a professor of New Testament at a seminary in Cameroon.

And he, as well as the dean of the seminary, who's also pastor of a big church there in Yaounde, Cameroon, they both introduced me to this man, Pastor Andre Mamadze, and both attested for his credibility. And he gave me a number of accounts of healings. They told me that God had blessed him in this way.

One of the accounts was an account of a girl named Olive, who was six years old. And she had been pronounced dead in the hospital. And the parents had been desperate for something to happen.

They tried to get a second opinion, but the doctors agreed she was dead. There was nothing that could be done. So the parents brought the child to the church brought her into the pastor's office and laid her on a table there.

And the assistant pastor, because they were just getting ready to start a prayer meeting, it was now evening, it was maybe roughly eight hours after the child had died. She died in the morning. Now it's 6 p.m. They laid her on the table.

They were saying, please, can you pray? And the assistant pastor was saying, this is not a morgue. This is not a hospital. This is a church.

Please, we're very sorry for this, but please take the body out. And Pastor Andre said, no, let me pray. I just feel like the Lord wants me to pray.

You go out and start the prayer meeting. So, his assistant went out to start the prayer meeting and he prayed for Olive. Well, a little while later during the prayer meeting, the pastor, the parents, and Olive walked into the prayer meeting, shocking the assistant pastor.

At the end of Pastor Andre recounting this to me, and by the way, he was recounting this to me five years later. The girl was still well. After he recounted this to me, my translator turned to me and they were talking in French.

I understand a little bit of French. I'm not as good in French as I should be considering that my wife is Francophone. But in any case, I did have a translator, but he turned to me and he said, actually, I heard this story once before.

I heard it from the assistant pastor. So, she remains well. But also, I visited Congo Brazzaville, where my wife is from, and she gave me, she put me in touch with a number of people there.

These were all people from Eglise Evangélique de Congo. That's the mainline Protestant denomination there in Congo, the largest Protestant denomination in Congo Brazzaville. Congo Brazzaville is a fairly small country.

It was about three million people at the time, and Catholics were much larger than Protestants there. So, this denomination, I forget how many people it had, but it's less than a million people. All of these examples are from this denomination, not because they're the only ones who have such testimonies, but because these are the people that my wife knew and that we were able to talk with.

One was in a previous picture, Pastor Swami, the president of the denomination, had an account about his own son being raised. My wife knows him. These others were very close friends of the family.

One is Jeanne Mabilia. She's a deacon in the Evangelical Church of Congo. She gave me three eyewitness accounts.

I count her as one witness, but in some of these, there were other witnesses available who were there, including someone named Emmanuel, and in one of the cases, one of my brothers-in-law, also named Emmanuel. But one of the accounts she gave me was of a child that was stillborn. Jeanne Mabilia was a midwife during the war in Congo.

She'd been trained by the World Health Organization, and she helped deliver this child. The child was born with the umbilical cord wrapped around her neck, and she wasn't breathing. She was already gray.

It was pretty clear she already had died inside the mother's womb. The father just went out and started building the coffin. But Mama Jeanne, as she's locally called, and two other people, the mother and another woman who was there, banded together and prayed.

And when the father came back in from building the coffin, he learned that he'd done all that work for nothing because the child was alive. And they named her Milgrace, a thousandfold grace. She's now in school.

Another example, and this is an example, in a sense, even closer within the family, because this is an example from Papa Albert Bissouessoui and his wife, Juliane Bissouessoui. And here are myself and my wife. Papa Bissouessoui, many years ago, was a school inspector in Etoumbé in the north of Congo.

And one day he was coming back from his office, and he found a crowd gathered around a dead girl. This girl, this one I don't have to say about quite as ambiguously because this one, he gave the time frame, is about eight hours. And she had died in the morning.

They had taken her to various traditional healers who had sacrificed different animals. Herbs are one thing, but this time they were sacrificing the spirits, trying to revive her. They'd smeared the blood in her mouth, nose, eyes, and ears.

And now her body was there lying in front of Albert Bissouessoui's home. And Papa Bissouessoui said, why have you brought this dead body here? And they said, well, we tried all these other things. So, we're trying to see if the Christian God can do anything.

And he responded, why did you bring her here last? You should turn from all these other spirits and turn to the true and the living God. He took her aside. He prayed for about half an hour, and then he presented her back to them alive.

Well, this made quite an impression in this village. So much so that the next time that a child died, they came looking for him again, but he was out of town inspecting school somewhere else. They got his wife, Julienne, and they asked her to come pray.

And she did. And she said, the Lord just gave her the strength to do it because after she did it, she was like, how in the world did I do this? But she prayed to the Lord who raised Lazarus. Again, mentioning that account.

And the child came back to life. So, I asked them, have you ever prayed for any children who didn't come back to life or anybody else who didn't come back to life? And they said, no, we've never prayed for anybody else to come back to life. It was just, this is what God chose to do, and it can be.

It's not like this is something normal in our lives. This was years ago, but everybody knew it locally. This next account from Antoinette Malombe is one that it's not maybe as dramatic as some of the other accounts, but it had more of an impact on me personally.

I'd heard this account already, but I wanted to be able to talk with the eyewitness. And so, Antoinette Malombe told the story. When her daughter, Therese, was about two years old, she cried out that she was bitten by a snake.

Her mother got to her and found her not breathing. There was no medical help available in the village. And I don't want any of you to think that these miracle stories are meant to be a panacea for health education providing health resources and so on.

You may have more accounts of miracles in some parts of the world because people desperately need them, but you still have a lot more women dying in childbirth there and a lot of other things. So, if we can make medical technology available, these miracles show us the kind of things God cares about. He cares about people and we should care about the same thing.

So, it's not like we're just counting on miracles to accomplish this. That's not the purpose of miracles. But in any case, Antoinette Malombe found her not breathing, no medical help available in the village, but she knew that the family friend, evangelist Coco N'Gomo Moise, was doing ministry in a nearby village.

So, she strapped the child to her back and ran to a nearby village. And after she got there, Coco Moise prayed for the child. The child started breathing again.

The next day she was fine and the child had no brain damage. Now she's an adult. She's about my age.

She finished a master's degree in Cameroon and is now doing ministry back in Congo. Well, as it turns out, Therese is my wife's sister. Antoinette Malombe is my wife's mother.

And not to question one's mother-in-law, but we did consult with Coco Moise and he also confirmed the story as the other eyewitness. And there were other accounts from Congo as well. Sarah Spear, a Canadian nurse there that we know very well, also reports a baby being raised through prayer 20 minutes after the medical team had given up on him.

They had to give up on him because they were trying to provide for the mother. They'd had to burst the uterus to get the baby out. But the mother survived and the baby miraculously survived.

The mother survived through medical intervention. The baby survived through prayer. Well, whatever we think about these other cases, nature miracles are certainly not psychosomatic.

We have a number of these throughout history, an account from 17th century Sri Lanka, for example. But I'm going to focus on 20th-century accounts. A number of accounts in Indonesia, and these had happened during other Indonesian revivals.

You had some miracle reports in Indonesia in the 1860s, as well as in the early 20th century with the Nias revival and so on. But particularly now I'm talking about the revival in the 1960s in West Timor. There were massive reports of miracles taking place.

There was a Western researcher. He did believe that sometimes God could do a miracle, but he didn't believe any kind of miracles like the ones he was hearing about were taking place. He went to research it.

Now, some other people went later on and they didn't see anything. They went after the revival had died down. But he went there in the midst of the revival and he personally saw blind eyes opened and water turned to wine.

And he laid his reputation on the line to talk about it. And there have been other accounts from Indonesia, from Petrus Octavianus and others. But I'm going to give an account from Papua New Guinea.

This one was reported to me by Donna Urukuya. And she was telling me about a ministry team she was on working with a leader named Kandiwa. It was during the worst drought in memory in Papua New Guinea.

They came to a village and the well was nearly dry. Not surprisingly, because of this drought, there was just mud at the bottom of the well. And the people were desperate and the team needed water as well.

So, Kandiwa prayed and then they went to bed. And in the morning when they got up, they were awakened by a woman who was screaming at the well. She had gone to the well trying to just take a little bit of the mud from the bottom so that she could get at least a little bit of water to give to her baby.

The well was now full and the water was completely clear, the way it normally was after a lot of rain. But it hadn't rained in months. This next example is from China.

There are actually a number of examples that could be given from China. In terms of healings, far more of them were associated with John Sung, who comes from the same period as Watchman Nee. But Watchman Nee also gives this particular report.

So, I'm citing him on this. Watchman Nee, in his younger days, he was out with a team doing evangelism in a village. And some of the village people were saying to the

members of the team, well, you want us to believe in your God, but our God is so powerful.

Why would we need your God? Our God is so powerful that for over 200 years, I think it was something like 276 years, it's never rained on the day that the priests scheduled the festival. I don't know what the rainy season and dry season were like in their region. But in any case, they said, you know, it never rains on the festival of our God.

And why would we believe in your God? So, one of the Christians, who at this time was by himself and not with the rest of the group, said, well, this year it's going to rain on that day. And the people laughed at him. And he went back and told Watchman and the others, and they said, you should not have done that because now if it doesn't rain on that day, no one is going to listen to us.

But nobody was listening to them anyway. So, they went and began to pray. And on the scheduled day, at first, the sun was out, but they just felt led.

We've already prayed. This is in God's hands. And then they begin to hear the rain on the roof.

And pretty soon there was a torrential downpour, the largest downpour that they had witnessed in years in this village. The priest said we made a mistake. We need to reschedule the festival.

The day for which they rescheduled the festival, however, this time the Christians said, no, it's going to rain on that day, too. In fact, the rain poured down so much on that day that the priests were swept off their feet as the water rushed through the streets. The statue of their deity was broken.

And many people in that village became Christians as a result of this. Well, I have a very close friend, one of my closest friends, Dr. Emanuel E. Topson. He was a pastor in the Evangelical Church of West Africa in Nigeria.

He also has a PhD in Hebrew Bible from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Well, he grew up in the household of an Evangelical Church of West Africa church planter who was planting churches in various villages that were unchurched. Around the year 1975, he and his family were there in a village that they had just moved to.

And he was trying to quickly get a roof on this home that he was putting up. And some skeptics were mocking him and saying, this was the rainy season. Everything you have is going to be ruined.

It's going to be destroyed. You said your God sent you here, but ha, ha, ha, everything you have. And he got angry.

He said it's not going to rain one drop of rain in this village until I have a roof on my house. Well, that was going to take four more days. And so they laughed at him and walked out.

And he fell on his face before God and said, Oh God, what have I just done? But for the next four days, it rained all around the village, and yet not a single drop of rain fell in the village. And at the end of those four days, those people who knew what the rainy season looked like in their area, only one person in that village had not become a Christian. And to this day, that village still talks about this as the precipitating event that brought about this becoming a Christian village.

Now, I have eyewitness accounts of this from people from the West as well. But just all this to say, scholars who claim that eyewitnesses could not report experiences such as these simply reveal their own very limited exposure to the world. Just because it may not be your experience doesn't mean it's nobody else's experience.

Well, some will grant that such things happen, but they'll deny that they're really divine acts. They'll say, well, true miracles cannot happen. And usually, they're simply assuming as their starting point, a non-theistic or atheistic starting point, or sometimes a deistic starting point.

Well, yes, there was a God that originally set things up, but that God doesn't care about the world, doesn't intervene in the world, doesn't act in the world today. Many people who state that as a presupposition don't even know historically where that assumption comes from. But normally it's traced back to David Hume.

David Hume argued that miracles were not part of human experience. There were other people in his day who were considered more persuasive on this point, but Hume's stature as a philosopher is what caused it to be widely accepted in succeeding generations. David Hume regarded miracles as violations of natural law.

This was kind of a dramatic way of putting it. Nobody had ever put it that way normally in history, because it was as if saying God would be breaking a law to do them. That's against the way earlier thinkers defined miracles.

In fact, most early Enlightenment scientists were Christians. So this is a philosophic issue, not a scientific issue. But the way he argued was this.

Miracles violate natural law. This is the first half of his essay. Miracles violate natural law.

Natural law cannot be violated. Therefore, miracles don't happen. Well, who says that God cannot act upon, change, or if you want to use the language, violate natural law, if he wills?

Hume simply presupposes this without admitting that that's a presupposition. He's just stating his opinion, not giving an argument. It's a circular kind of argument.

Much of Hume's argument about miracles violating natural law depends on the definition of natural law. Modern physics has undermined Hume's prescriptive approach to natural law. It's usually treated descriptively today.

His argument is supposedly inductive, but as scholars often note, it's actually circular. He says that experience shows that there are no miracles. Therefore, if you have well-supported eyewitness claims for miracles, we can reject those because you can't depend on those because human experience, uniform human experience shows us that we can't expect miracles.

Well, that's a circular argument because you're saying that human experience is uniform and then explaining away all the examples that don't fit your paradigm rather than taking them into account. It's a circular argument, and this is especially in the second half of his essay. And we can see this in particular when he cites examples even that were known to him.

He cites the example of Pascal's niece who had a running eyesore. You've probably heard of David Hume if you studied philosophy. You've even more likely heard of Blaise Pascal, who was a brilliant mathematician as well as a philosopher.

Pascal was a firm believer in Christ. Well, Pascal's niece had an organic running eyesore. It emitted a foul odor.

It was known to everyone around her. She was instantly and publicly healed. In this case, it was when she was touched with a holy thorn from Jesus' crown of thorns on the cross.

Now, personally, I don't believe it really was a holy thorn from Jesus' crown. I don't think it would have survived that long. I don't think it would have been preserved to begin with.

And I think that Martin Luther was probably right about the immense number of relics circulating in his day. One of his remarks was that there are enough nails from the holy cross of Jesus circulating today to shoe every horse in Saxony. People were just very much into relics, but it was a contact point for her faith.

She was instantly and publicly healed. The Queen Mother of France sent her own physician to check this out. He verified that she was truly miraculously healed.

Now, Pascal's response to this was, well, this was medically documented. This healing was publicly attested. It was attested by very credible witnesses.

The very kinds of things he says, if you give me a case like that, I'll believe it. He said, we have all these things and we know this isn't true. So, why would we believe any other? And then he could move on.

Well, how could he get away with that? Because this monastery where she was healed was associated with the Jansenists who were too Augustinian for the Jesuits of that period. And they were too Catholic for the Protestants. So, nobody liked them.

And Hume's contemporaries weren't about to try to defend that because of its Jansenist associations. But it was a healing done through faith in Jesus. Hume simply presupposes atheism or deism, not to say that necessarily what his exact views were on those subjects, but that's what he presupposes to make his argument work without stating it.

He explicitly framed his argument against contemporary Christian science and apologetics. People like Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle, the father of chemistry, actually used science in a way that they believed comported with natural revelation, believing that God had done these things. But Hume's argument is so circular that there have been a number of major recent philosophic challenges to Hume on miracles, published by Cambridge, Cornell, Oxford, and so on.

So, in the live world of academic philosophy, Hume has been challenged quite a bit. Now, the book published by Oxford was titled Hume's Abject Failure. And one critical reviewer said, now, this author just doesn't like Hume's argument about miracles because this author is a Christian.

To which the author responded, I'm really not a Christian in any traditional orthodox sense of the word. I just thought it was a bad argument. Part of Hume's argument against accepting witnesses, never mind the Jansenists, is that only ignorant and barbarous nations affirm miracles.

If somebody said that today, we would call that person an ethnocentric cultural bigot. And in Hume's case, it was true. Hume was known for his antisemitism.

He was certainly known for advocating slavery. In fact, Christian abolitionists had argued against Hume. And because of his stature as a philosopher more generally, his arguments in favor of slavery carried a lot of weight.

But Hume doubted exceptional persons of color. He said, you know, all great civilizations, all inventions, all great masterpieces of art, music, literature, all of those have come from white civilizations. All of those have come from white, well, mainly white European civilizations, but white civilizations.

He seemed ignorant of the great empires of China, India, Africa, Southern America, and Central America. But in any case, Hume went so far as to say, you know, we've had slaves here in the British Empire for generations and never a single one of them has achieved any great status of education. Well, if you don't let people get an education, how are they supposed to get it? He said, you know, there is this one Jamaican of whom it's said that he can recite poetry, but any parrot can repeat what it hears.

This is David Hume saying this. And the Jamaican to whom he referred was Francis Williams, who actually composed his own poetry in English and in Latin.

So, Hume was coming from a very ethnocentric starting point. He defines the circle very narrowly and says, well, nobody in my circle has had these experiences and therefore it's not rational for me to believe that these experiences happened. Some of his critics responded, that just because it hasn't happened in your circle doesn't mean it hasn't happened in anybody's circle. Look, we do have eyewitness reports of things that are not familiar to your circle.

He says, well, I'm not going to believe them because they're not in my circle. It's not rational for me to believe them. Rudolf Bultmann in the mid-20th century, Bultmann was not, we have no reason to believe from anything I know that Bultmann was ethnocentric in anything like the way Hume was.

But Bultmann said that mature modern people do not believe in miracles. It's impossible to use the electric light and the wireless, I think he meant the telegraph machine, and to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles. Bultmann said that the modern world denies miracles and thereby excluded from the modern world all traditional Jews, Christians, Muslims, traditional tribal religionists, spiritists, and basically everybody except his mid-20th century Western academic elite and those who were shaped by them.

But many people have responded to this. Justo Gonzalez, citing Latino churches, points out that what Bultmann declares to be impossible is not just possible, but even frequent. Hua Yung, the recently retired Methodist bishop of Malaysia, argues that Bultmann's problem is a Western problem.

It's not something, here in Asia we don't really have problems believing in spirits and things like that. Philip Jenkins, in his books published by Oxford, notes that

Christianity in the global South tends to be quite interested in the immediate workings of the supernatural. Well, these are people groups excluded by Hume, but not necessarily by Bultmann.

Bultmann probably simply wasn't aware of these things. But how widespread are healing claims today? Hume wouldn't have had knowledge of this, but today we have this information available and happening. How widespread are healing claims today? Well, if we start with some churches known for that emphasis, with Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, there have been major academic studies produced on this, for instance by Oxford.

And there was a 2006 Pew Forum survey. Pew Forum is a very respected survey institute for surveying religion and so forth. And they surveyed Pentecostals and Charismatics in just 10 countries, and these 10 countries alone, one from each of the continents except for Australia and Antarctica.

And so from these 10 countries alone, and for Pentecostals and Protestant Charismatics in these 10 countries alone, the estimated total of people claiming to have witnessed divine healings comes out to somewhere around 200 million people. Now, what may be even more surprising is that the survey also, for reasons of comparison, surveyed other Christians who were not Pentecostal or Charismatic or didn't define themselves that way. And somewhere around 39% of the other Christians in these countries claim to have witnessed divine healings.

Now, if that's anywhere close to representative, we might have perhaps more than one-third of Christians worldwide who don't identify themselves as Pentecostal or Charismatic claiming to have witnessed divine healings. Whatever the case, we're probably talking about hundreds of millions of people who claim to have witnessed divine healings. This is true even in Westernized countries such as the United States, where 34% of Americans claim to have witnessed or experienced divine or supernatural healing.

Now, that's not just Christians. That includes Hindus here, although there are quite a larger number of Christians here than Hindus in the United States. The point is not what proportion of these claims involve divine activity or miracles.

There's really nobody who would say every single claim among these is really a miracle. Nobody would claim that everybody was telling the truth and nobody would claim that everybody who was telling the truth and thought it was a miracle, that that's the only way to explain it or sometimes even the best way to explain it. And God can work through other causes as well.

So, there are a lot of cases where we don't have a way to say, okay, it's only this or only that. But in any case, the point is not what proportion of these involve divine

activity or miracles. The point is whether someone like Hume can legitimately start from the premise that uniform human experience excludes miracles.

How can you say it's uniform when you have hundreds of millions of counterclaims? You are at least obligated to go start researching some of those counterclaims, especially some of the more dramatic ones, especially some of the better-attested among them. And this is not only among Christians but millions of non-Christians have been convinced to the extent that they changed centuries of ancestral beliefs because of these extraordinary healings. China was not among the 10 countries surveyed above.

It was more difficult to survey for some reasons. But one source from within the China Christian Council affiliated with the Free Self Church estimated that roughly half of all new conversions in the previous 20 years, this source comes from around the year 2000, so from the 1980s, 1990s, roughly half of all those new conversions were due to what they called faith healing experiences. Within the rural house churches, some have claimed figures closer to 90%.

It probably depends on the house church network, probably depending on the region of China. But in any case, I can't verify whether it's 50%, or 90%. I can't verify the percentage in any case.

But we are probably talking about millions of people, people who did not start with Christian premises, but who recognize something so out of the ordinary, something different than just the way people normally get better, something different from what they had expected in normal religious or other ritual practices, that they were willing to change centuries of tradition on certain points to become followers of Jesus. A 1981 study was done in Chennai, and again, surveys are not always precise, but at least according to this study, 10% of the non-Christians in Chennai, then called Madras, reported being healed when someone prayed for them in Jesus' name. So, some people became Christians when they were healed.

Some people didn't become Christians when they were healed, but they still acknowledged that they had been healed when someone prayed for them in the name of Jesus. Just to give one example of that, one of my past students that I taught in a seminary, comes from India, through prayer for the sick, his Baptist church grew from a handful of people to about 600, mostly Hindu converts. I found out about this sort of by accident.

I wasn't really asking about this initially, but in the room where this picture was taken of Pastor Israel, I had just come in from outside and I had a splitting headache. He said, oh brother, let me pray for you. I said, okay, you can pray.

He prayed and nothing happened. I said, I'm sorry, nothing happened. I think it's because I don't have any faith.

He said, oh no, brother, it doesn't work here. Everybody I pray for in India gets healed because these precious people, most of them, don't know very much about Jesus and God is lavishing his love on them to give them a chance to know how much he loves them. Not to say he doesn't love people elsewhere.

And that's when he began telling me about it. He said, Brother, if you come to India, you start praying for people to be healed. I said, are you serious? He said, God just wants these people so much to know his love.

Well, my headache did eventually go away, obviously, but that's when he began to tell me his story. J.P. Moreland, a well-known evangelical scholar, points out that of the rapid evangelical growth around the world in the past three decades, up to 70% of it is intimately connected with signs and wonders. Even three decades before that, already someone who wrote a thesis at Fuller Seminary, surveying over 350 other theses and dissertations representing most of the world, interviewing many other missionaries, discovered more accounts of signs and wonders in the growth of the church around the world than he could possibly use.

Just people reading the Bible, people praying and God dramatically answering, not all intentional, deliberate for this, but not exclusively, but most often it happened in groundbreaking areas where new ground was being broken as people were hearing the gospel for the first time. These situations are very similar to what we see in the book of Acts. God may answer prayer anywhere and sometimes does dramatic things elsewhere.

But, you know, healing like the kind James chapter five talks about, you know, you can pray for the sick, the sick can be healed gradually, the sick can be healed through medical means. It's still an answer to prayer. But these dramatic kinds of signs are meant to get somebody's attention.

If they're willing to believe, it's meant to get their attention so that they can hear the message so that they can believe. Sometimes people respond in dramatically negative ways, persecuting. We see that in the book of Acts, but signs are things that get your attention.

So, we see these special kinds of signs most often during evangelism and largely unevangelized regions as people are hearing the gospel for the first time. That was also true in the past. Many church fathers claimed to be eyewitnesses of healings and exorcisms that were converting many polytheists.

And Ramsey McMullin, Yale historian, didn't seem to be entirely happy with what he discovered, but he discovered through his research that this was the leading cause of conversion to Christianity in the third and fourth centuries, healings and exorcisms. It was also prominent at many other times in history. Just to give an example from the 20th century, it was a prominent feature of the Korean revival around 1907, mainly among Presbyterians, again, to show you how widespread it was.

Interestingly enough, many of the Western missionaries who were working among the Korean Christians at this point had been trained to believe that miracles didn't happen anymore and that demons or spirits were just psychological things, that they didn't really exist. And so they took it with a grain of salt when the Korean Christians were saying this and they commissioned a study. But the study came back saying, indeed, miracles have taken place.

And the Korean Christians converted some of the missionaries to believe that these things were taking place. Now, at this point, I want to go beyond the credibility of miracles, which we've been talking about, and talk some about the unity of Luke-Acts, and how the work fits together. And I'm just going to give you samples.

So, you can see Luke's literary sophistication. It's just beautiful when you see how he weaves together narratives. Look already in the first chapter of Luke, the angel Gabriel is sent to Zechariah.

And then later on, the angel Gabriel is sent to Mary. In both cases, the recipient of the angelic vision is troubled. In both cases, the angel says, don't fear.

In both cases, the reason is given for the coming miracle. The child's name is given in both cases, John and Jesus. The child will be great, Gabriel says, in both cases.

The child will be filled with the spirit from his mother's womb, in the case of John, and will be conceived through the Holy Spirit, in the case of Jesus. Then Gabriel announces the mission of each. And then in each case, there's a question.

In Zechariah's case, the question seems to be a bit more of an objection than in Mary's case. Then a proof or an explanation is given. Zechariah is muted for his unbelief, and Mary is praised for her faith.

Again, comparing and contrasting characters was a common feature of ancient rhetoric and ancient narrative. And Mary, this humble, very young girl from this village of Nazareth, comes out looking greater in the sight of God. Then Zechariah, who's also viewed positively, you could have comparisons between something good and something better, who's this aged priest serving in the great temple in Jerusalem at this point.

And then at the end of each narrative, the child grows. John the Baptist grows in 180, in 240 in 52, Jesus grows. We have a number of parallels between Luke and Acts, and actually within a couple of different sections of Acts.

The Holy Spirit comes on Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes in the Jerusalem church. We see the Holy Spirit continuing to be poured out.

The inaugural mission speech of Jesus in Luke chapter four, you have that for Peter in Acts 2. You have it for Paul in Acts 13. Healing power with many being unexpected, healing power unexpectedly going forth from Jesus with touching his garment.

In Acts chapter five, Peter's shadow. In Acts chapter 19, clothes or work aprons are taken from Paul. The healing of a paralyzed person in all of these, and some very similar parallel language in each case.

Opposition from Jewish leaders in each case. The raising of the dead in each case. You also have a God-fearing centurion in each case.

You have a widow's son being raised in two of the cases. In Paul's case, it's a youth raised. I mean, you have to go with what information you have, but where he was able to make parallels, he did.

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Some of the language is very close to Paul's journey to Rome. You have Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem.

You have Paul being received in a triumphal way when he goes to Rome. The entering of the temple before trouble arises. You have hostile Sadducees rejecting the resurrection.

You end up actually having both Jesus and Paul arraigned before the Sanhedrin. In the case of the Sanhedrin with Jesus, there's a provocative announcement of the son of man at God's right hand. And then Stephen also makes a provocative announcement of the son of man at God's right hand.

Jesus commits his spirit, and prays for his persecutors, just like Stephen does, as we mentioned earlier. The centurion recognizes God's attestation of Jesus' innocence. I'm trying to talk quickly, so I'm tangling out my tongue, but I'm trying to get through as much as I can.

The centurion recognizes God's attestation of Paul's innocence. Jesus' four hearings, and Paul's four hearings, declared innocent in both cases. And also, by the way, with the Sanhedrin, with Peter, I'm sorry, with, well, yeah, Peter is arraigned before the Sanhedrin too, but with Paul and with Jesus when they're taken before the Sanhedrin.

In the case of Jesus, you've got Joseph of Arimathea. He's a member of the Sanhedrin, but he's positive. In the case of Peter and the other disciples, when you get to Acts chapter five for that Sanhedrin account, there's a Pharisee who sticks up for him.

This Pharisee isn't a disciple, but he sticks up for the believers, Gamaliel the first. And then when you get to Acts chapter 23, the Sanhedrin is divided. The Sadducees want Paul to be executed.

He's not fit for such a man to live, but the Pharisees stick up for him. So, you have that parallel. Also, you have a number of Peter-Paul parallels, and you could go into a great deal of detail among these, the appointing of leaders through the laying on of hands and so forth.

So, both confront false prophets. Paul has to do it more than once. And both reject worship. Herod Agrippa I wants worship. In Acts chapter 12, he receives worship and he's struck dead by the angel of the Lord. But the same angel of the Lord early in the chapter releases Peter from prison where Herod Agrippa I had put him.

Peter rejects worship. Somebody wants to bow down before Peter. He says, no, I'm just a human being.

Somebody bows down before, well, not just bows down, they're calling Barnabas and Saul, Zeus and Hermes, Paul and Barnabas, Hermes and Zeus. And in 1415, they say, no, we're just human beings like you, and they tear their clothes. Also in chapter 28, Paul is thought to be a god, but he rejects, well, actually he doesn't even seem to be aware of that.

Luke apparently hears about it afterward. So, you have a number of parallels. Both Peter and Paul are imprisoned at a Jewish festival, and both are miraculously released from prison.

Although there are differences in detail in the stories, the point is you can see that Luke designed his work in a very cohesive way. It's a literary masterpiece. And so, we'll keep that in mind as we're going through the accounts in the book of Acts.

We'll see some of these sorts of examples. Now, another issue that's very big in Luke-Acts is the issue of evangelism and church planting. And so, I'm just going to look at that as a sample theme.

I have some interest in that myself because of my past own experiences. But there's something very significant that's related to this, and that is what we mentioned

before the importance of prayer in the book of Acts. Well, prayer often comes before the outpouring of the Spirit.

It's a frequent theme in Luke-Acts. The Spirit comes on Jesus when he's praying in Luke 3. In Acts chapter 1, of course, they're praying. And then in Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, they filled with the Spirit.

Acts 4, they're praying together, and they pray, God, please stretch out your hand that people may continue to be healed through the holy name of your servant Jesus. And then in 4.31, they're filled with boldness as they prayed for, and they're filled with the Holy Spirit. And also, Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Spirit, and then they received the Spirit.

Paul is praying in Acts chapter 9 and verse 11, and then in verse 17, he's filled with the Spirit. Cornelius is praying, he says, in 10:30, and he's filled with the Spirit. Well, if we're talking about evangelism and church planting, and again, there are a whole lot of different themes we could approach through Acts, but this is an important one.

Paul is the same whether he's on a ship and in Malta as he is when he's preaching to massive numbers of people in Ephesus. He's a servant, he's serving people. And we learn a lot about Paul's character.

He says in 20:24, calling matters more than life itself. 20.31, he says, I was going about warning each person with tears. And verses 33 through 35 in that chapter, he says, I wasn't covetous.

I wasn't in this for the money. I was actually working to support the mission. Very similar to what you see with Peter and John in Acts 3.6, where they say, silver and gold have we none.

This was important to emphasize in a milieu where there were many charlatans. Clearly, these people were not doing it for money. They were not doing it for greed.

They were not charlatans. They were doing it to serve the Lord. So, we see Paul's character.

We also learn about how to evangelize. And I'll spend a bit more time providing details here. Evangelism and church planting are not exactly the same thing.

Philip was great at doing evangelism. He got things going in various places, but he didn't stick around to grow the church afterward. There were other people who could do that.

There are different gifts. Ideally, the best way to make things grow is with long-range multiplication. Robert Coleman in his work on evangelism points out that multiplication eventually gives you more people than just addition does.

That's why in the book of Acts, we see that part of their agenda was to establish disciples who could carry on the mission, not just converts. That's why in Acts 14:22, when Paul and Barnabas go back among the churches that they've briefly planted, they go back there and they establish elders, establish leaders. And they warn them in Acts 14.22, through much tribulation, we must enter the kingdom of God.

You have to be ready for those things. There has to be follow-up with sound teaching. There has to be like in 15.41, warning against false teaching.

So, let's say we're not just adding, but we're multiplying. Well, in the first year, this is purely hypothetical, but if you could keep the camera on this for a while. The first year, if you go out and you win a disciple, well, then you've got two disciples.

Well, sorry, you win two disciples. You win one and then you win another. You have two people that you've won to the Lord.

The next year, I know, I think I was right the first time. Anyway, the next year you have the original two, you have you and the person you won to the Lord, but each of you wins two people to the Lord. So that's each of you wins four to the Lord.

And then it's four plus the original two. So, you've got six. If you're just adding up so far, it wouldn't be that much, but pretty soon it's going to change.

In the third year, you've got 20. In the fourth year, you've got 62. In the fifth year, you've got 188.

Look at year 15. You've got over 11 million. Now that's more than if you just won two people to Christ a year each year.

That would be great. You'd want 30 people to Christ. But if each of them can also win people to Christ if you disciple them so that they can carry on the mission.

And by year 22, you've got something like 16 billion people. Well, in 2015, the world's population was only 7 billion. I say only, but compared to this, in 21 years, it may be between eight and nine billion.

But this is like reaching more than the total number of people in the world. Now, of course, that's not completely realistic. That is an ideal situation.

Acts shows us that there are obstacles. There's persecution, there's internal strife, more persecution, more divisions, and so on. But on the other hand, who says we can win and disciple just two people to Christ a year? Why stop with that? So, if we multiply, if we're not just winning people to Christ and then abandoning them, but we are winning them to Christ and teaching them how to do the same and helping them to be grounded in the faith, then things are going to grow all the more.

Well, how to evangelize? The content is very important, the gospel message. And we see that the content, even though the content hasn't changed, the gospel hasn't changed, it's contextualized.

So, Paul preaches one way to synagogues. He's quoting scripture. Another way to farmers.

What he says is scriptural, but it even has a quote from scripture, but they wouldn't know it. He doesn't identify it as such. Paul preaches to farmers about the God who gives us rain and fruitful seasons.

He speaks to philosophers and philosophically educated city leaders in Acts chapter 17 in ways that would be intelligible in their context. But the central message remains throughout the book of Acts. Jesus died and rose again.

And when you're talking to non-monotheists, you also talk about the one true God. Now, how do we get people's attention? We need to think creatively and especially strategically. We need to think about our culture's openings.

We need to contextualize. We need to allow for local culture. And that's something that Paul did in Acts 15.20. Jesuits did that when they were sharing the gospel first in China, but then it got shut down by the Vatican of that period because some other people were complaining about the Jesuits.

There was a bit of politics going on back home. And that shut down the witness of the Jesuits in China for many generations because of that. Paul rarely missed an opportunity to speak of Christ.

He would try to give it in contextually relevant ways, but he rarely missed an opportunity to speak of Christ. He introduced the gospel only briefly where he was driven out quickly. Sometimes that happened, for example, with China Inland Mission, but he stayed longer where he could.

18 months in Corinth, and two and a half years in Ephesus. He got to know the people. He got to know the culture.

Studies have shown, at least in the United States, that a church really flourishes when a pastor is part of the community for at least a couple of years, especially five years or more because the pastor knows the community, the community knows the pastor, and so on. Now, Paul often was raising up leaders within local congregations, so they already knew the community. But having some time in the community allows for more stability where that's possible.

Again, there are different gifts and different callings. Synagogues. Already there was belief in one God, so it was strategic in a way that they already had a connection with people in the synagogues.

Synagogues also used scripture. If you want to reach Gentiles, well, the Gentiles who believed in the one true God were most likely to be hanging out in synagogues, or even sometimes the one greatest God, if they believed that that was the God of Israel, they would hang out in synagogues. There were also public discussion forums.

For example, on the street, Acts 14:9, Paul appears to be preaching on the street. That was permitted back then. It was understood as something you could do back then, so that was one cultural forum that was available for this.

Educated Christians tended to use that method more. You see that both educated and uneducated sometimes signs and wonders would draw attention to the gospel. You have that with Peter, who's a fisherman, who may have had some education, but certainly not the level of Paul.

And you see it with Paul. Apollos is educated. You don't have any signs and wonders recorded with him, just like you don't with John the Baptist.

But nevertheless, Apollos is well-trained intellectually. So he, Stephen, and Paul emerge in these public debate settings where they can get people's attention that way. There were certain forums that were available for communication.

Paul does that with philosophers. He's reasoning with philosophers who like to stand around and talk with each other about new concepts. So Paul's doing that in Acts 17:18. Then they bring him before the Areopagus, the city council, maybe about a hundred people, and he has an opportunity to present his case there.

Acts 19.9, Paul sets up a place for lectures in the school of Tyrannus. Apparently it looks something like a philosophic school. In Paul's day, when outsiders would look at Christianity, they wouldn't think of it usually as a religion because it didn't have a cult.

Excuse me. It didn't have sacrifices. What they had instead was that they would have lectures, they would have dialogue, and so on.

Well, Paul says, okay, people on the outside, would view this as a philosophic school. Some people viewed the synagogue the same way. Paul says, okay, that's how they view us.

We can use that to our advantage. And so, he teaches that way. He also uses relational networks to get the gospel out, and others use relational networks to get the gospel out.

And we'll talk more about that in the next session.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 5, Miracles and Evangelism.