

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Lecture 14, Acts 12-14

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 14, Acts 12 and 13.

Luke is brilliant in the way he arranges his material.

He's been talking about Peter and the Jerusalem church. He's going to be focusing on Paul in the later part of Acts. And now in between, he's cutting back and forth between Peter and Paul.

And this last time of transition, he's through speaking of what was happening in Antioch. Now, the church in Antioch sends Saul and Barnabas with the famine relief for Jerusalem in chapter 11 and verse 30. Well, Luke is going to pick up again with Barnabas and Saul after they've delivered this famine relief in chapter 12 and verse 25.

In the meantime, is his last focus on Peter and the Jerusalem church, although some of this takes place in Caesarea. In chapter 12 verses 1 through 17, we learn about Peter's deliverance. Now the persecution is becoming really serious.

Herod Agrippa I is the first Jewish king since Herod the Great. Because he was friends with the emperor in Rome, he was allowed to be king. And this is from 41 to 44, when he's allowed to be king in Judea.

He was the brother of Herodias. If you remember reading in Mark chapter six about Herod there, that was Herod Antipas, the Tetrarch of Galilee. He married his brother's wife, Herodias.

Well, Herodias' full brother was Herod Agrippa I. He was party buddies with Gaius Caligula before Caligula became emperor. And he became the first official Jewish king since his grandfather, Herod the Great. His grandmother, Mariamne, was a Hasmonean princess.

And that made him look good to the people because Herod the Great was Idumean ethnically. So, his people were happy. This is the first Jewish king with the blood of the Hasmoneans, the Maccabees, in his veins as well.

He was very popular with the people. He was also very eager to please, which sometimes got him in trouble in Rome. He threw his money around trying to please everybody there and ended up in some serious debt.

Well, he did the same thing in Judea. He was very eager to please, as in fact, the text here says he wanted to please the Judeans and apparently particularly the most conservative religious Judeans. So, he was emphasizing his Judean identity, just as he emphasized his Roman identity when he was in Rome.

You know, when in Rome, do what the Romans do. Well, when in Judea, do what the Judeans do. He wanted to please people.

He was very pro-Pharisaic and frequent at the temple. We know this from Josephus. Well, he arrests James, the brother of John.

Jacob is really what it says, but in the New Testament, for some reason, Jacob has always translated James. And he beheads him, just like John the Baptist was beheaded back in Luke 9.9. In this period, usually, the sword was used rather than the axe. Beheading was considered more merciful.

It was especially necessary for Roman citizens. But as a king, he held the power of the use, gladius, the power of the sword, the power of life and death. The Sanhedrin didn't have that.

They had to have the governor's approval, but there was no governor of Judea during this brief period. It was just his own reign. This actually sparked a period of growing Judean nationalism, as they say, oh, we can have our own king.

What do we do when tragedy strikes us? James has been beheaded. Now Peter is arrested. Well, that's two of the leading apostles.

What can the church do? Chapter 12 and verse 3. This was during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The person who reads Luke and Acts together will recall from Luke's first volume, that was the time of Jesus' execution in Luke 22.7. Agrippa sometimes executed people for public entertainment. It was part of his way of pleasing people.

We know that from Josephus. It was public entertainment. Doing it at the festival served as a warning, but it also had the largest number of people, not just as a warning, but also the largest number of people there who would appreciate entertainment.

We know that Herod Agrippa I gave generously to Gentiles outside of Judea, but his policies were more popular with his Jewish subjects. He catered to the majority's whims. His soldiers in Caesarea, his Gentile soldiers in Caesarea, who had to answer to him, even though they were soldiers of Rome, they hated him.

We also see that from Josephus, but Jewish Judeans loved him. Chapter 12:4, the location. Agrippa I resided in Jerusalem.

This was presumably the place of Peter's imprisonment once Peter was taken into custody. It may have been in the fortress Antonia, which was near the upper city. That was the place where you had the most soldiers.

In fact, you had a Roman cohort there. Some scholars have argued that he would have used just Jewish soldiers during this period. Maybe not the Levite temple guard, but his own Jewish soldiers.

That's not what we read in Josephus. What we read in Josephus is that he used the Roman army, the Roman cohorts that were already stationed in Judea. But there would be four soldiers each on four shifts.

So, at any given time, there would be four soldiers guarding Peter. In 12:6, each chain tied Peter to one soldier, and then you had two guards standing watch outside. That should be pretty secure.

You would expect it to be pretty secure. In 12:8-11, the angel of the Lord appears and tells Peter to put on his sandals and his outer garment. Prisons didn't normally supply clothes.

So, whatever you were arrested in, that's what you had, unless somebody brought you something else in addition, and they could get it past the guards who often required bribes. But in any case, the outer cloak could be used as a blanket, but now he's going to need it as a cloak. And he's told to put these on, and he puts them on.

His chains drop off. The doors open automatically, the Greek says, by themselves. That language is used in many other ancient works.

Euripides, remember he talked about Dionysus freeing his followers. He made the chains drop off and he made locked doors open. But this language of doors opening by themselves, you have it from Homer to Josephus.

It's all over the place in ancient literature. But again, it reminds us of what we saw earlier in Acts chapter five, that you can't fight against God. James died.

Peter survived. We don't always understand why God intervenes in one case and God doesn't intervene in another case. But there was still work for Peter to do.

And as we see in the book of Acts, part of that work, the place where he's mentioned, he's going to be mentioned again as in Acts 15 for helping with this transition in support of the Gentile mission. But Agrippum wielded more direct

power than the Sanhedrin. His guards were more efficient than the guards that you read about in Acts chapter five.

So, it looks like Peter's going to die. He's asleep, but people are praying for him. Undoubtedly, they'd prayed for James too, but they're praying for him.

Now, where is Peter? Probably he's somewhere in the upper city. That suggests maybe the fortress Antonia, which was on the Temple Mount, where the Roman cohort was. But from the Antonia fortress, it was a straight route to the upper city.

You could take one main road, if that's the road that you took, and just cross over an arch and you would already be in the upper city. How do we know that he went to the upper city? Well, the home to which he goes is John Mark's mother's house. It has an outer gate.

It has a servant who's functioning as a porter. Probably not very wealthy because the servant seems to not just be a porter. She has to go to the door.

She's not waiting at the door, but still a home of some means in any case. From outside of the book of Acts, we have a good indication from Colossians 4:10 that Mark and Barnabas were relatives. We also know that Barnabas had some means from Acts chapter four, verses 36 and 37.

So, all of this supports the idea that this is a fairly well-to-do home, certainly better off than average. Also from 4.36, we know that Barnabas was a Levite. So, this may be a Levite family.

They may even have some ties with the priestly aristocracy, if not on an elite level, at least some sort of connection. Because there were a lot of well-to-do priests who lived in the upper city of Jerusalem, as well as some living in Jericho. Now, here there's a prayer meeting going on in this home.

The larger the home, the more people you can get in it. So, this was a natural place to have a prayer meeting. The church used homes rather than special buildings for the first three centuries of the church's existence.

We read about that in Romans 16.5 and all over the place in the New Testament. Some poor synagogues had to do that as well before they had synagogue buildings. The Jerusalem megachurch could meet in the temple, which was considered a public space.

But in this period, when persecution is severe, the church is underground and homes are much better for that than meeting in a public space. What else do we know

about this home? Well, Mary is John Mark's mother. Mark was a Latin name; hence this comes from a family probably more favorable to Rome.

It doesn't necessarily indicate Roman citizenship, that they were members of the synagogue of the Libertines we talked about before, but it at least doesn't indicate typical Judean nationalism. So, they're probably again tied to more well-to-do Jerusalemites. Mary was the most common women's name in Judea and Galilee.

That's why you have it all over the place in the Gospels and the first half of Acts. Again, the names that we find in Acts are suitable for the locations. These aren't names that the later church would have made up and projected back onto Judea or Jerusalem.

The servant's name is Rhoda. Rhoda means rose, which is often a name in many circles today as well. It was a common name for servants back then.

Now, household servants actually were better off often than free people who worked in the fields. They were often better off economically and socially, had more social mobility, more likely to become free and achieve some sort of higher status in society than did peasants who worked the land. However, that was not always true for the women.

Women slaves, and sometimes boys in the Gentile world, experienced sexual harassment. And even in Jewish circles, it was forbidden to sexually harass servants. But the very fact that it had to be forbidden suggests that that temptation existed for some slaveholding men, and some of them did that.

However, it's significant here. This is John Mark's mother's house. This is Mary.

So, Rhoda is not likely experiencing that. And what we can see from the narrative, she knows Peter. She's part of the Christian community there.

She's part of the household. And this is not condoning slavery, but saying this was part of the culture. Rhoda was not in a particularly bad situation compared to probably the majority of people in the ancient Mediterranean world, 70 to 90 percent of whom were rural farmers who were subsistence farmers or who worked on other people's estates.

12, 14 through 16, learning faith by God's grace. Sometimes he answers our prayers anyway, even when we didn't have as much faith as we ought to have had. James had been executed, possibly in spite of their prayers.

But notice the purpose for their prayer meeting. In chapter 12 and verse 5, the church is praying for Peter. They're praying for his release.

So, what happens when God releases him? They weren't really expecting it. They are surprised. Rhoda comes to the door.

Peter's knocking. She comes to the door. She sees it's Peter.

And she's so excited, she runs back and tells the others while Peter is still at the door. And they disbelieve her, just like the disciples disbelieve the women at the tomb in Luke chapter 24. It's his ghost, they say.

I mean, first, they say, you're crazy, which they also kind of said for the women at the tomb. It's his ghost, they say. It's his angel.

Just like they thought that Jesus was a ghost in Luke chapter 24. Well, there were some popular traditions in which the righteous became like angels after death. But ironically, an angel had just delivered Peter.

And this was the real Peter. But it wasn't that the narrative is condemning their faith, although it may be laughing at their lack of faith. Because Peter himself initially didn't think he was being released by the angel.

He thought he was seeing a vision until he got out in the cold night air and got down one street and realized, oh, this is really happening. So, Peter himself hadn't believed it, even though he was going through it at the time. Maybe it took him a while to wake up.

But in any case, meanwhile, Peter is pounding on the gate. Now, keep in mind that there were other porters probably in the neighborhood. In the upper city of Jerusalem, many people had guards at their gates.

So, somebody else could look out and see who's knocking at their door. This is kind of a dangerous situation, right? But the Lord takes care of it. Well, Peter recounts to them what happens when they finally let him in.

Rhoda is the only one who really believes it initially, just like the women of the tomb were the only ones who believed it initially. Chapter 12 and verse 17. James, literally Jacob.

It was a very common Jewish name. It's not the same James who was beheaded in chapter 12 and verse 2. Would have been nice if his head grew back, but no, that's not the same James. This is the James who appears later on in Acts in chapter 15 and verse 13.

And it seems to be taken for granted that Luke's ideal audience has already heard of James. That's why he doesn't have to be introduced in some special way. First Corinthians 15.7 and Galatians 2.9. This was Jesus's younger brother.

He was highly reputed for devoutness. Later on, when he was martyred, the people of Jerusalem protested. And especially those who were most devout in the law, probably Pharisees, protested James' execution.

What does that mean? Well, Peter, there might be people who are upset with Peter. He's gone and eaten with uncircumcised Gentiles. The word probably got around, but James is probably safe with Agrippa.

People are probably not going to be wanting James to be executed. And it will help the church because James was somebody who was already identifying with a very conservative Jerusalem culture. And it was probably part of his upbringing as well.

Chapter 12 verses 18 and 19. Agrippa is so arrogant that he's willing to condemn others to death, but he accepts worship and is damned. He examines the guards for information, perhaps under torture.

I was thinking of slaves because slaves were under Roman law and Greek practice as well, often examined under torture. So, he examines them and then he executes them because he doesn't find anybody else that he can blame except these four guards. They must've been negligent.

This was a capital case. In capital cases, Roman soldiers who were guards could be executed for negligence if they let the prisoner escape. And in fact, you must assume it's collusion.

All the guards must've cooperated because two of them were chained to Peter and the chains were undone. And then these other two were outside and there's no way Peter could have gotten past without them seeing him unless God arranged it that way and made it so that they didn't see him. And that's not an explanation that he's going to go for.

Well, when it says he executed the guards, it doesn't mean the entire squad of 16. It would just mean the four who were on duty at that time. But you see his arrogance.

He's condemning others to death. And now before this narrative is over, God is going to condemn him to death. Chapter 16 and verse 27, you remember when the Philippian jailer is ready to fall on his sword.

In chapter 27, verse 42, where the soldiers want to kill the prisoners lest they escape because it's risky for them. Now in both of those cases, they might not have been

executed, but it was still a risk. In this case, though, Herod Agrippa is not a very nice person.

He salvages some of his own honor by being able to blame these guards whom he assumes must be guilty and executes them. In verse 20, well, he is approached by an embassy from Tyre and Sidon. They depended on imports for food in Tyre and Sidon.

There was some of Tyre on the mainland, but much of it was still an island state that had been rebuilt on the island. And then there was still a ramp between them that had been built by Alexander the Great earlier. But they didn't raise enough food for themselves.

They depended partly on Judea for their food. And Agrippa had been holding back some of it. And so now they needed to come and speak very flatteringly to him and so forth.

Josephus tells us that this actually took place in the theater in Caesarea. So, he's gone back to Caesarea at this point where the Roman capital of Judea was, even though he normally lived in Jerusalem. Agrippa liked to flaunt his power as he does in verse 21.

Luke mentions his royal robes. They're also mentioned by Josephus who emphasizes their splendor. Agrippa's self-display on another occasion led to anti-Jewish riots in Alexandria.

Josephus portrays this particular scene in the theater of Caesarea. That theater was built by his grandfather, Herod the Great. And the foundations of this theater still remain today.

And this was a special occasion where they were gathered. It was probably the emperor's birthday if we understand the texts correctly. Josephus says that Agrippa was flaunting his power and that his flatterers praised him as a god which was common in the Greek East.

Well, he was a friend of Gaius Caligula who was, Gaius Caligula was now dead. Claudius was the emperor, but Gaius Caligula was the one who, the emperor who tried to set up his own image in the temple in Jerusalem and demand worship as a god. And Agrippa had discouraged that, we're told.

But at this point, Agrippa, apparently his power has gone to his head. He's happy to be adored or flattered as if he's a god himself. Remember, he likes to please people and these are Gentiles.

But even Germanicus, who was a famous general when he was in Alexandria and people hailed him as a god, deflected such praise. Everybody except the emperor was supposed to deflect such praise. In fact, the emperor would not like somebody accepting such praise.

He didn't deflect the honor in this case. And Josephus says that he immediately collapsed, died at the age of 84, sorry, at the age of 54 after five days of stomach pains. Death from bowel diseases and worms was considered particularly horrible.

It was considered an appropriate death for tyrants. And we have some other stories of tyrants who died this way. But both Josephus and Luke speak of Agrippa's horrible death.

Luke says he was eaten by worms and died. So, Agrippa, who exercised the power of life and death, and wanted to kill Peter, Peter ends up surviving, and Agrippa ends up dying. The one who really holds the power of life and death is the one who knows every hair on our heads.

We don't have to be afraid. When, you know, if we do die in the service of the gospel, we can trust we're in God's hands. He's with us and he'll be with us through that time.

And if he delivers us, he delivers us and we rejoice in that too. Either way, we know that he's in charge. Chapter 12, verse 25 through chapter 13 in verse 3, Antioch sends out missionaries.

This was not a common practice in Judaism. Travelers would take the message of their Jewish faith with them. They would be happy to spread it, many of them, but they didn't actually send out missionaries.

But remember, Saul of Tarsus has this calling that God has given to him. Barnabas knows about it. And in this case, at this time, it's time for them to be sent out by the church.

Despite chapter 1 in verse 8, the Judean apostles were still in Jerusalem at this point. We still hear about them there in chapter 15 in verse 6. They're expecting it to work. The gospel will spread from Jerusalem and the Gentiles will come to Jerusalem to receive the law of God, or at least hear about it from Jerusalem.

But Antioch had been particularly successful in the Gentile mission. Chapter 11, verses 19 through 26. They had a special vision for this.

They could affirm this. Chapter 12, verse 25. The journey back to Antioch from Jerusalem for Barnabas and Saul who delivered something to Jerusalem.

And of course, that left some suspense because maybe they were even there when Agrippa was executing people. But the journey back to Antioch for them was roughly 400 miles. That was a significant journey.

It was customary for ancient teachers to take disciples with them. And Barnabas takes Mark, a young man, with them. Maybe he was a teenager at this point.

Again, around 13, they didn't have bar mitzvah yet in this period, but somewhere around 13 or perhaps soon after when a boy entered puberty, he was considered a young man in Jewish circles and in much of the Mediterranean world. In Rome, it might be 15, 16, or something like that. But in any case, Mark may have been a teenager at this point, somewhere around there.

It was safer to travel in groups. So, there were several of them going. What were they talking about in a way we don't know? But at least rabbis who were very pious considered that it was good to talk about the Torah when you were traveling.

And they probably did have a lot of conversations about the Bible as they were traveling and about the mighty works of God in their own lives and the accounts of Jesus. Probably Luke got some of his stories about Jesus also from things that Paul told him, maybe some of the parables about grace and so on. But in any case, in chapter 13 and verse 1, they're back in Antioch, and Barnabas and Saul are among the leaders in the church, the overseers.

The overseers here are prophets and teachers. So, it wasn't just prophets from Jerusalem coming to Antioch, but you had some prophets and teachers in Antioch, at least at this point. Maybe some of the earlier prophets stayed.

And these were people who spoke the word of the Lord prophetically or by teaching or by both. Scholars have debated whether all of these were all of them or some of them were stronger in one, some of them were stronger in another. Simeon and Menaen.

Menaen is a Greek form of Menachem. It's a Jewish name. Simeon and Menaen are both Jewish names, but Simeon's surname is Niger.

That was a respectable Roman name. He may have been a Roman citizen. But in this case, it's not just Simeon Niger, it's Simeon called Niger.

So, it's a nickname. And when it was used as a nickname in Latin, Niger meant black. So probably it's like Simeon the Dark.

He may be a North African proselyte, descended from North African proselytes. In any case, he's Jewish. Well, given the name Simeon, he was presumably born Jewish, but possibly to proselytes from further south.

He's of dark complexion. Lukias. Sarin had a large Jewish population.

Maybe one-quarter of Sarin was Jewish. So Lukias of Sarin could have been Jewish. Lukias was typically a Gentile name, but diaspora Jews use that name.

So, it doesn't really tell us what Lukias' ethnicity was, but we do see at least geographic diversity, which was helpful for cosmopolitan Antioch. You had a leadership team that reflects some of the diversity of the population. The leadership team is largely Jewish ethnically, even if they're from different regions, even if they may have had different backgrounds before their ancestors converted to Judaism.

But that's natural because who would be the people who would know the Torah the best, who would be able to teach scripture the best? Well, Manan is very interesting because he was brought up with Herod. What does it mean he was brought up with Herod? It could mean that they shared the same wet nurse. Slaves who grew up with the heir, especially slaves who were children of the heir's wet nurse, were often later freed.

They remained powerful even as slaves because of their relationship to the slaveholder. I mean, if you were a slave of Caesar, there were slaves of Caesar and especially freed persons of Caesar who sometimes wielded more power than Roman senators. So, a very different system than when you think about slavery in the Americas and many other kinds of slavery in many other parts of the world.

But he may have been a freed slave, but he may not have been. Other boys also could be brought up with princes at the royal court and they also attained prominence. Antipas had fallen a decade before this narrative.

So, Herod Antipas, actually what happened to him was that his wife Herodias, when her brother Herod Agrippa I became king, she said to her husband, Herod, now that's not fair. My brother just came here and he comes as a king, but you have been the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea for an entire generation. So, you should petition the emperor to be king.

And he said that's not really a good idea. That's not the way things work in the Roman Empire. But she insisted.

And finally, he did petition the emperor and the emperor said, nobody talks about being king unless I initiate it. And he banished Herod Antipas and Herodias went with him. So, they had lost their position of power by this point.

So Menaen doesn't have any strong political connections per se. However, he comes from a very respected and probably educated background and he may be Luke's source for the material about Herod Antipas. We get some special material about Herod Antipas in Luke-Acts, especially the Gospel of Luke that doesn't appear in some of the other Gospels.

Interestingly also, he may have been, we also have the wife of Hosea, Joanna, the wife of Hosea, Herod's steward. So, there were a couple of in-house connections with Herod Antipas. Now, Luke may have learned of these things just from Paul having learned these things from other people.

But in any case, Luke has some apparently inside information on this. Luke chapter 13, verses 2 and 3. The leaders are fasting together. Fasting was typically used for mourning or repentance.

Some Jewish people used it to try to seek revelations. Here, they're seeking God in prayer. During one time in my life, for an extended period of several years, I wanted to fast a day each week, not over a particular issue because I had too many issues.

I would never have been able to eat, but just to seek God and to show my devotion sacrificially to God. He was hearing the different prayers because I wasn't worried about, you know, I have to fast with this prayer. It's just I have a relationship with my Father.

He hears me when I pray and I'm demonstrating my devotion. But in any case, they're fasting in conjunction with prayer and the Holy Spirit speaks. Now, remember, the Holy Spirit was most often associated with prophetic speech or prophets.

So here, the spirit functions of the spirit of prophecy. Remember, the leaders were prophets and teachers. So probably one of them prophesied is probably how the Holy Spirit spoke.

And the spirit said, set apart Barnabas and Saul for the ministry to which I have called them. They'd already heard from the Lord. So, this was a confirmation of what they'd already heard.

It wasn't like, I just got this idea, you're supposed to do that. Well, sometimes then you're going to have to wait for your own confirmation in some other way. But this was something the Lord had already been speaking to them.

And it's wonderful when the Lord confirms things to us that we felt the Lord has spoken to us. Others sometimes feel the same thing. This was particularly important in this case.

I mean, they were leaders. They had an active ministry here in an existing, growing cosmopolitan church. But now they're being sent out to begin the work in other places, directly sent.

Sending probably means that their fare was paid, probably one way as they were going on their initial mission, in this case to Cyprus. Chapter 13 verses 4 through 12, the proconsul of Cyprus believes, it was customary for messengers or heralds to travel by twos. And as we said before, it's also safer if you have somebody with you.

Students of the Torah preferred having companions so they could study with them as they traveled or talk about the Torah with them when they traveled. You know, it could get kind of boring if all you're doing is walking and you don't have anybody to talk with. But Roman roads were usually good and they were generally safe, provided you were traveling during the day.

I remember in one place in Nigeria, we heard that there were robbers at night and unfortunately, the car broke down at night. And so, my Nigerian friend who was driving the car said, okay, I'm going to change the tire, but you go out and make sure that nobody hits us from the back because we don't have any lights on the back of the vehicle as it's shut down. So, we found out that a Baturi, a white person, was good for something in these circumstances because my light skin, reflected the headlights of the car.

And so, it was nice that it was useful for something and we made it in. But we were concerned, you know, we weren't quite to the city yet and it was already dark. But during the day it was normally safe to travel.

Travel was easier than ever before in this part of the world or ever again until close to the modern period in this part of the world. In 13:4, they traveled from Antioch to Seleucia, which was the port city on the coast. Seleucia was about 15 miles or 24 kilometers to the west.

There was also the River Orontes going out to the coast, but they could take the road. Seleucia itself as a port, was also a wealthy merchant city. It had strong fortifications.

It would be really hard to take because of the cliffs in front of it and so on. Cyprus was a natural place for them to go. Barnabas knew Cyprus.

Remember Barnabas is a Cypriot, Acts 4:36. And it was 60 miles, 95 kilometers by sea from Seleucia. Well, in 13:5, they come to Salamis, which is natural. It would be the first place they'd come to when they came to Cyprus.

Salamis was a very large city, with probably over 100,000 people living there. It had a large Jewish community, probably several synagogues. So, they come and speak in these synagogues.

Visiting teachers skilled in the Torah would naturally be asked to speak in local synagogues. I mean, normally you've just got yourselves, but when you have visitors, and in Salamis, you might have a number of visitors, when you have visitors if they were skilled in the Torah, I mean, here was Paul. He was from Jerusalem and he'd studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem.

If they hadn't heard of Gamaliel, at least they would respect that he'd studied under a skilled teacher in Jerusalem. So, some people, a minority of scholars, have said, well, we can't believe in the book of Acts where it says that Paul actually spoke in synagogues because Paul said that his mission was to the Gentiles. Well, look, in Romans chapter 11, we see that he also had a vision for reaching the Jewish people.

Romans 9, he said he even would be willing to be accursed from Christ for their sake, just like Moses was willing to lay down his life for his people. Blot out my name from the book, Moses said. Of course, God wouldn't allow that.

But even more directly, in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, Paul speaks of multiple times being beaten with 39 stripes. Well, that was the kind of beating you got in a synagogue. So, Paul, during his ministry, obviously did spend time in synagogues.

He could have repudiated the synagogue community and said, well, I'm a Roman citizen. I don't have to go through this. And Roman law would have protected him, but he also would have been excluded from the Jewish community.

The fact that he gets beaten this way five times shows us that he keeps going back to the synagogues. Didn't get beaten in all of them, of course, but he kept going back to the synagogues. So, Paul's own eyewitness letters confirm that he did, in fact, speak in the synagogues.

And Barnabas seems to be the leader of the team at this point still. There's still being called Barnabas and Saul. And so probably they both spoke, although Paul seems to have spoken maybe more eloquently.

We'll see that in chapter 14. In the early second century, the Cypriot Jewish community attacked Salamis and in retaliation, the Jewish community was obliterated. But in the first century, there was a large Jewish community there.

In 13.6, it says that they traveled. They were traveling from the eastern part of Cyprus to the western part. They probably took the newer southern road.

It was shorter than the older northern road. And some of the cities en route where they probably preached in synagogues or ministered in some way. Luke is just giving us this quick summary.

He's only going to have one volume for the whole mission of the early church. And this isn't a place where he was with them. The cities en route include Sidium, Amethyst, and Curiam.

I'm not actually pronouncing these the way they would have been pronounced in Greek. And some other things I'm not pronouncing the way they would have been pronounced. But in any case, New Paphos.

Paphos was the provincial capital of Cyprus. It was a Greek harbor town on the north and west of Cyprus. And it maintained some trade relations with Judea.

Now, there was a famous shrine of Aphrodite. That wasn't in New Paphos. That was in Old Paphos, about seven miles or 11 kilometers to the southeast.

But again, this is a predominantly pagan area. But they were brought in before the governor. And interestingly, there's a palace that's been excavated in what was New Paphos in Cyprus.

The palace is thought to be that of the governor. So we may actually know something of what the room looked like where Paul and Barnabas were brought in. There was an apse where there was apparently a very important chair, probably where the governor sat to make his decrees and judgments, and so on.

Very large room. There were murals on the wall of various mythological scenes about Achilles and so on. So, the environment is very pagan.

But that doesn't stop the gospel. Nor does the fact that there was a Jewish magician there. Jewish magicians were often thought to be the best in the Roman Empire.

Of course, they're forbidden in scripture and they were mistrusted among pious Jews. But because Jews were thought to have the hidden name of God, they were often respected by others in the realm of magic. Roman aristocrats were often, they often attached philosophers to their courts.

Sometimes they took in philosophers. Sometimes they took in astrologers. Later, Felix, whom we'll meet later on in the Book of Acts, a Roman governor of Judea, befriended a Jewish magician from Cyprus.

So, we know that there were Jewish magicians from Cyprus even some decades after this or even a decade after this. Sergius Paulus was a Roman citizen, but he was the first generation of Roman citizens who actually lived in the East, who were also members of the senatorial class. Sergius Paulus' family lived in the interior of Asia Minor.

So, he grew up, yes, as a Roman citizen, but also attracted to some of the ideas from the East. And here he's got somebody who's a Jewish magician. It would be kind of like having an Egyptian or Persian in your court, a Persian magus, an Indian wise person.

These people were particularly reputed for some ancient wisdom and some ancient mysteries, and they were considered exotic sometimes by some other people, especially in the Western part of the Roman Empire. So, he has this Jewish magician in his court, 13:7 and 13:8. Sergius Paulus was apparently pro-consul of Cyprus from the years 45, certainly in the years 45 and 46.

As always, Luke has corrected the specific local title of the official. In Cyprus, it would have been the pro-consul in this period. Sergius Paulus, we don't have his name attested as pro-consul of Cyprus in this period because we have the names of only about one-fifth of the pro-consuls of Cyprus.

Most of them have been lost to us. So, we only had a 20% chance, one chance in five of knowing what his name was. And we don't know the names of the pro-consuls here, but we do know that it fits the career of Sergius Paulus.

And it makes sense that he would have been pro-consul in nearby Cyprus, his family being from the interior of Asia Minor. It fits the other things we know about his career and the other things we know about his family being a senatorial family. 13.9, Saul, who is also called Paul.

Well, why introduce his name here? For first-time hearers of the book of Acts, it may have held some suspense. Oh, because by now they're figuring out, oh, this must be Paul. But early on, they may not have figured it out.

Although his conversion story was so widely known, they may have figured it out anyway. But there's another reason why it's first mentioned here. Roman citizens had three names, the tria nomina, and the Roman cognomen, which is what Paul would be.

It was normally a cognomen. Paulus was Latin for small. That identifies him probably as a Roman citizen.

Almost everybody we know of who had the name Paul was a Roman citizen. Usually, Jewish parents wouldn't want to give them, well, sometimes they gave their kids Roman names anyway, but we don't know of Paulus being used that way. Normally, it wouldn't go over well in Jerusalem or a place like that to have that name.

And even though Saul was originally from Tarsus, a Roman cognomen normally would mean, the Roman cognomen Paul normally would mean that he was a citizen. His Roman name sounded similar to his Jewish name. That was common to have them sound similar or sometimes to mean the same thing, but in this case, a similar sound.

Sha'ul in Aramaic, Saulus in Greek, and Paulus in Latin. By the way, Saulus would probably not have been invented for him because even though it was a great name for a Benjamite, which we know from Paul's own letters that he was, it wasn't the best name in the Greco-Roman world where Saulus meant something very negative. So, it makes more sense for him to go by the name Paul, especially when he's in a Roman environment.

So, now that he's in a Roman environment, it transitions to his Roman name and it makes a good connection because Paulus is speaking to Sergius Paulus. In chapter 13, verses 10 and 11, the Jewish magician, Elmas Bargesis, is speaking against the message of Barnabas and Saul, well now, Paul and Barnabas. Paul takes the lead in this encounter and after this, it's normally Paul and Barnabas.

And he's struck blind and Paul pronounces judgment. He says you'll be blind for a season. Well, Paul knows how that works because it happened to him as well.

And also, this man had been the blind, leaving the blind like Paul had been earlier. The play on figurative or spiritual blindness and physical blindness, you have it in the Old Testament prophets, you have it in Greek dramatists, and so on. So, that's not unusual, but he says, you'll be struck blind for a season.

And he calls him the son of the devil. Well, that also is ironic because this was Barjesus, meaning the son of Jesus. Jesus was a somewhat common name.

It's the name Joshua in the Old Testament. In Greek, it comes over as Jesus. So, he's not really a son of Jesus.

He's really a son of the devil. And he's going to be blind for a season to learn his lesson. Here's what we call a power encounter.

This magician claimed to have supernatural power, but the real power, God's power is so much greater. And I'm just going to make a few comments here about power encounters. My brother-in-law, Emmanuel Musunga, is a professor of chemistry at the University of Brazzaville.

He has a Ph.D. in chemistry from a French university, just like my wife has a Ph.D. in history from a French university. And Emmanuel is a great guy. And I very much trust him.

And he's a scientist. He's published scientific articles. He's a very smart man.

Emmanuel also teaches Sunday school in his church, in Evangelical Church of Congo. He recounted to me something that happened with some of his students. There were these three boys who always stuck together.

And at one point, one of them got very sick. And after a couple of months, he died. And then the next one fell very sick.

And after about a month, he died. And immediately, the third one fell sick. And at this point, the third one came to the Sunday school teachers and said, I need you to pray for me.

The three of us had agreed among ourselves and the person who told us that we would receive supernatural power, had told us that we were not supposed to tell anybody outside our group. Otherwise, we would lose the power. The spell wouldn't work.

But we met this man in the street, and he wanted to take some of our blood. He said if you just could take a little bit of our blood, each of us would get supernatural power. We'd become government ministers or whatever.

And the oldest one fell sick after he had a nightmare that the same man came and stabbed him with the same knife. He fell sick, and after a couple of months, he died. The night that he died, the second one had the same nightmare, and he fell sick.

And the night that he died, the third one had the same nightmare and said, this is not working the way it was supposed to, and came and asked the Sunday school teachers to pray. So, my brother-in-law and the other Sunday school teachers banded together, and they prayed and fasted during the day for nine days. And then they went and prayed for him to be delivered from this, and he was.

And last I talked with Emmanuel, the boy, now a young man, is still well. My family and I had our own unexpected encounter where a tree broke off at the roots in the context of us being cursed right where we'd just been standing. I couldn't understand

for years, how that could happen, until one day I was reading Job chapter 1 and said, oh, Satan does have the power to blow down homes and things like that.

But God protected us. I don't really like telling my own stories about this because they aren't pleasant, so I'm going to mainly focus on telling other people's stories. But Dr. Rodney Ragwan, an Indian Baptist from South Africa, a good friend of mine, a colleague in the seminary where I taught before, told me a story from his grandfather.

He'd heard it from his father, and when I was working on the book on miracles and doing an appendix on this sort of thing, Rodney contacted his father for me so we could get the story directly from one of the people who was there, one of the eyewitnesses. His grandfather was an Indian Baptist in Durban and met somebody at the market who said, well, I'm going to show you that my spirit is very powerful. My spirit is going to come to visit you tonight around midnight, and you'll see my spirit is more powerful than anything you have.

That night, the family was praying and fasting until about 11:45, and for about 20 minutes they heard massive steps around the house. Rodney's father remembered this in great detail. This is the kind of thing that would stick in your memory, right? But then nothing happened, and the next day in the market, the man admitted to Rodney's grandfather that his spirits couldn't get in.

The Lord protected his people. Many spirit practitioners have been converted through power encounters. That's common in Indonesia.

It's common in the Philippines. I've lectured in both places. In southern Africa, it's common.

Tandi Randa in Indonesia, whom I mentioned before, was unharmed by witchcraft attacks that had been used to kill others. Everyone expected him to die, but he experienced no harm. The witchcraft worker repented and accepted Christ.

Here's a scene where they're burning witchcraft items. And by the way, this is not, you know, sometimes people call traditional herbalists or something witches. That's not necessarily always correct.

But these are people who claim to be witches, who claim to use curses to kill people. So, 12 years later, he remains well. Nothing's happened to him.

Here in 20:11 is a picture where they're baptizing witch doctors who've converted during his revival meetings in a mountain area in Indonesia. Chapter 13, verses 13 through 41, Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch. And I'm going to start with the background on that.

Chapter 13, verses 13 through 14:26, Paul and Barnabas visited a number of cities. All of them are along the Via Augusta. You could call it Augustus Highway.

In Greek, it was the Via Sebast, the Augustus Highway. It was built about half a century before this, partly because Rome wanted to make sure its armies could move swiftly in the interior of Asia. Chapter 13 and verse 13, as they sail directly or pretty close to directly north from Paphos to the southern coast of Asia Minor, they probably landed at Atalia, which was the main harbor for Perga.

And then they probably traveled by road. Probably the river was navigable somewhat, but you'd still have to travel by road from the river. So, it made sense if there were more than one of them, it made sense for them to travel by road.

They traveled by road from Perga, 10 miles or 16 kilometers north. Perga was five miles from even possibly navigable water from this river. This is Perga in Pamphylia, the text says.

Pamphylia was part of the district of Pamphylia Lysia in this period. So Luke correctly describes the territory. This was part of Pamphylia Lysia from the years 43 to somewhere around 68, definitely during this time period.

Perga was a very significant city on the coast. It may have had over 100,000 people. Well, then they start, then they probably traveled northeast along the Via Sebast, Augustus Highway.

There were a couple of other routes they could have taken, but that was the best one. And that's the likeliest one for where they were traveling. Now, why would they travel to the interior? Here, Perga has probably over 100,000 people, but Luke is recounting stories of what happened with Antioch near Pisidia in 1314.

Antioch near Pisidia, not to be confused with the earlier Syrian Antioch near the Orontes that we talked about, wasn't nearly as large as Perga or other cities along the coast. It was a Roman colony because, again, Rome had wanted to station veterans along the way when they were establishing colonies because this was a way of keeping the interior of Asia Minor secure at a time in an earlier generation when it wasn't very secure. There were 5,000 colonists, descendants of the veterans who lived there, plus other people besides the colonists.

But still, that's not a very large population compared to some of the coastal areas. They were known particularly for their worship of the god Mene. The biggest temple, however, locally, was the recently built temple in honor of the emperor, in honor of Caesar.

It was much smaller than the coastal cities. However, we know from archaeology that the family of the Sergii Poli lived in this region, especially to the northeast of here. And if he had supplied them letters of recommendation, which naturally and normally he would do if he became a believer, whether his faith was permanent or not, we have some reason to believe if he later became a senator and served in Rome in a later generation, he may have done some things that honored Caesar in some ways that Christians normally wouldn't have considered appropriate.

Although we can remember Naaman, who was allowed to go into a pagan temple in 2 Kings, Chapter 5, but he didn't actually worship the god. He just let the king lean on him as the king worshiped the god. But in any case, Sergius Paulus was at least a believer at this time, and it would be natural that he supplied letters of recommendation.

That would be one reason they would go to the interior. Now, they could also speak on the Sabbath at the synagogue there. That's the only time that Jewish public gatherings normally happened, the Sabbath and festival days.

Sometimes people would have schools if the Jewish community was large enough and people could go study at the synagogue. That's attested more often in a later period. But in any case, in Chapter 13, verse 15, the readings of scripture that were used, Paul is probably going to start with the normal scripture readings that they give.

There's a reading, especially from the Torah. We don't know if the readings were fixed yet in this period. They may have been.

Later, there's a triennial cycle. You have readings from the Torah and the prophets. In this period, some people think people may have been able to choose their own readings, especially in the diaspora outside of Judea and Galilee.

A synagogue sermon would normally be a homily on a text read. Paul actually preaches starting from the beginning and runs up through the prophets by the end of the next sermon. The rulers of the synagogue invite him to speak.

Again, this would be natural. Here's somebody who's actually from Judea visiting. He's trained as a speaker of scripture.

Of course, they're going to ask him. Rulers of the synagogue was often an honorary office, but often also it could refer to the highest officials of the synagogues. Inscriptions show that.

People were often given this office who were particularly of honorable, respectable class in terms of the class divisions that were thought of in that time. These were

often donors to the synagogue as well. Well, in 1316, in the diaspora, as opposed to what we see about Jesus like in Matthew 5.1, in the diaspora, a speaker would stand normally to speak.

Jesus reads and then sits to expound in Luke 4, but in the diaspora outside of Judea and Galilee, a speaker would normally stand. So, Paul stands. Then we have a scripture-laced exposition in chapter 13, verses 16 through 43, quite different from the way Paul preaches to Gentiles.

Paul adapted to different audiences in his speeches just as he adapted to different audiences in his letters, which was considered a good rhetorical principle in antiquity. Well, next time what we're going to pick up with is actually the content of Paul's message at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch. And as we're going to see, some people really like what Paul has to say, but some people really dislike what Paul is going to say.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 14, Acts 12 and 13.