

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Lecture 23, Acts 27-28

© 2024 Craig Keener and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 23, Acts chapters 27 through 28.

Paul has been eager to get to Rome for a long time.

We can read that in Paul's own writings in Romans chapter 15, where he says, I need to go to Jerusalem first. There may be trouble there. Please pray for me.

But after that, I hope to visit you in Rome. Well, also in Acts chapter 19, a language very reminiscent of Jesus, Acts 19:21, very reminiscent of Luke 9:51, where Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. He was going to go towards Jerusalem.

That was his plan. He sends out disciples ahead of him. Well, in Acts 19, Paul made plans that after he went to Jerusalem, he was going to go to Rome.

And he also sent out disciples who were working with him. So, in Acts chapter 27, finally, he's going to get to Rome, probably not the way he expected in Roman custody. But Paul's the same person, whether he's in custody or out of custody.

But, you know, for somebody who likes to be out preaching all that time in custody was probably very difficult for him. And yet, at least in Rome, we know he's going to be ministering to people who are coming to visit him because he's under house arrest. And he was preaching to the governor periodically back in Acts chapter 24.

So, in Acts 27, he's going to be sent by sea. Sea travels were known to be dangerous. That was true both in novels and in works of history.

In fact, it was so dangerous that when you have ancient oracles, you had a lot of people asking, well, will there be danger during my sea journey? And about one-fifth of the time they said, yeah, because danger was very often encountered at sea. And that's why a lot of people don't like sea travel. Paul himself had already been shipwrecked a number of times, we see from 2 Corinthians, although Acts saves all that for this big one where Luke himself is present to witness it.

Aristarchus goes with Paul and Luke goes with Paul. Now, they didn't always let people travel with somebody who was a prisoner. Sometimes they would let servants travel with the person, sometimes not.

But apparently, Julius knows that his orders are this guy. We just need to get him out of here for political reasons. He's probably not really a threat to Rome.

And so, Luke, especially if it's Luke, the physician from Colossians 4.14, may be allowed to go with him. He might be helpful to some other people around there as well. So, the centurion would sometimes be sent with a small detail of people for something like this.

So, it's not like he's got 80 troops with him at this point, probably just a fairly small number of troops. Because remember, they have to provide food for everybody on the way. He's going to have to requisition that and say, OK, you there, hand over some food or whatever.

They take a ship from Caesarea, which wouldn't be too hard. And naturally, they sail north. And eventually, they come to a harbor where they are able to catch an Alexandrian grain ship.

There were a lot of ships sailing north from Alexandria. And they'd come up the coast of Syria, up to the southern coast of Asia Minor. And then they would cut across in something like the voyage that we're about to hear about, except that they normally didn't, from Crete, they normally didn't encounter a storm that would blow them so far to the southwest.

Alexandrian grain ships could be very large. Lucan in the second century speaks of one called the Isis, which had, it's named after the figurehead. So, in Acts 28, you have a ship that's the Castor and the Pollux or the twin brothers, the Dioscurae.

But there was a ship called the Isis that held 600 people. Well, Paul's going to end up in a grain ship, not at the beginning of this narrative, but the final one that they catch, which will hold 276 people. It's almost half as many as the Isis.

So, it's a fairly large grain ship, although there were many others that were that large as well. And this includes the crew, 276 altogether. But there were risks associated with sailing, and those risks were especially true during winter.

That's why 2 Timothy chapter 4, Paul says, make haste to come to me before winter, because after winter, it's going to be really hard to get to me, and I might not still be alive in the spring. That's why Matthew 24, verse 20, pray that your flight from Jerusalem not be during the winter. Winter was a difficult time for travel, even on land in many places, but it was very difficult on the sea.

And some people did travel during the winter because there were some great rewards for it. Emperor Claudius, having been so eager to get grain to Rome from Alexandria, had even given special bonuses to those who would travel during the

more difficult times. So, it was so profitable that some owners risked it, especially owners who had multiple ships and weren't traveling with the ships themselves, because they had very expensive insurance.

I mean, it cost a lot for the insurance, because you never knew when a ship would go down. Many of the sailors on many of these ships were slaves from Egypt or were people who just had to risk it because they had no other means of income. So, people would travel.

It's not winter yet. Presumably, Festus arrived in July at some point, July 1st, presumably, he would officially begin office, and probably arrived before that. But Paul's hearing was probably settled during the summer.

But at some point, now, during the fall, they're sailing. And at a certain point in the fall, it became more dangerous to sail, and the more so as the season went on. But it could vary from one year to the next.

I mean, you couldn't always, well, you couldn't predict always, you couldn't predict what the weather would be like. And so, Luke wants to mention that it was after the fast, after the Day of Atonement. So, this is getting later in the sailing season than would have been necessary if they'd set sail earlier.

If the owner had enough ships, it was worth the risk of pushing them to sail quickly. And so, they reached the southern coast of Asia Minor to Lycia and other places, and they're coasting along, and finally, they take a ship towards Crete. But the winds have not been cooperative, so they sail into the south of Crete so that they won't be, they won't have as much trouble with the winds.

And they come to a harbor named Fair Havens, which turns out to be kind of ironic. But they want to stay there near Lycia. They want to stay there because, well, they stop there because it's a place that's safe, but it's not really suitable for wintering.

It's a small harbor. The sailors aren't very happy. It's a small community.

You know, in a small community, fathers aren't going to want to lend out their daughters for temporary employment for sailors having girlfriends. They probably don't have enough prostitutes to go around or anything like that. The people aboard say this is not a good place to stay.

It's too small a community. We are too big in number. And so, they went to winter somewhere larger than this fishing village.

So, they want to make their way to Phoenix, which is further up the coast in the west of Crete. And so they're going to just take a short, because of the way the coast

worked, you could take a short sailing across the bay, just a few hours from this harbor to another point in land rather than hugging the coast along there. And that would have been nice because the sky looked like it was very, very nice.

But most of these people probably were not familiar with the southern coast of Crete and didn't know about the sudden gusts of wind that could come being blown between the mountains, that there was a specific meteorological or weather issue there where gusts could come suddenly from behind the mountains. You wouldn't see them. And they would blow between the mountains with even greater force.

And it just so happens that it happens when they're going to be sailing across this bay and it's going to blow them out to sea far away from Crete and away from land in general. Now, the passengers are probably on the deck. Underneath the deck is where you would keep the grain or other things.

But there's an Alexandrian ship at this time of year. It's presumably, especially grain. And passengers would have to bring their own food.

They would sleep on deck and so on. Maybe later in the narrative, you have them staying under during the worst times of the storm. You could crowd a lot of people in if you really had to.

But in any case, it's interesting that the places and number of days all throughout this storm narrative during Mediterranean storms fit precisely what we know of voyages in the Mediterranean under these kinds of conditions. There was a book by a 19th-century Mediterranean mariner by the name of James Smith who established this and is always cited today. And it can be supplemented today by some other material we know from naval institutes and so on.

And also, a number of people have done marine archaeology and have supplied us with a whole lot of new information based on the ships. We don't know, some things we don't know as much about the ships because in the shipwrecks that are found underwater, usually, it's just the bottom of the ship that remains and the cargo, some of the cargo. But in any case, Paul warns them, I think there's going to be trouble.

Paul has sailed a lot, but why are they going to listen to a prisoner? I mean, he may be there just because he's chained to Julius the Centurion. People say, well, Paul wouldn't be there anyway. Why would Paul be there when the captain of the ship, the navigator and the Centurion are making their decision? The Centurion didn't run the ship, but they would want his advice.

He's a Roman military officer. So why would they, why would, why would Paul even be there? Well, there's no indication that it's necessarily done in private. There may be other people standing around.

And again, if Paul is chained to Julius, he's going to be there. Paul also has a lot of travel experience. He's a Roman citizen.

He's the leader of a movement. So, in any case, Paul gives his opinion, but they don't believe him. Why would the Centurion believe him over the captain of the ship and the navigator? And as far as you can tell by looking at the sky, everything should be fine.

But Paul had a different source of information than by looking at the sky. In ancient literature, sometimes, well, often you'd have people praying and sacrificing to gods before they would sail. They wanted to have the favor of the gods, and they would sometimes seek divination to make sure that the trip would be all right.

But nobody yet believes Paul on that level. The Centurion's happy because in places that they've stopped, Paul has received free hospitality from friends. But Julius is not ready to hear him as a spokesperson for a deity.

Well, the ship is blown to the southwest. They get near the island of Kauda, and they're just barely able to bring the ship's boat aboard. There was a skiff that would be dragged along sometimes behind the ship.

Well, it can get broken off during the storm, or during the storm, it can be smashed against the hull. So, they do everything they can to bring it aboard the ship, which they're able to do because as they pass by Cauda, the Uruquillo, this very strong wind that's blowing them from the northeast, they're sheltered partly by the island from that. So not to keep them from being blown, but at least they can bring this skiff aboard.

And that actually is very important, as we'll see later on in the narrative. This small boat, lifeboat, so to speak, becomes a matter of life and death. So, they continue to be blown to the southwest.

And this is very dangerous for them because if they continue on the course that they think they might be on, they can end up near the shallows of Sirtis. The shallows of Sirtis on the Libyan coast, there was Sirtis Minor, Sirtis Major. The shallows of the Sirtis had long been feared by sailors.

In fact, they had destroyed one of the first Roman fleets ever that was sailing against the Carthaginians. They got stranded in the shallows. They got stuck there.

And then when the waters came back in, the ships were submerged. And that particular Roman navy was destroyed. So, it was a very fearful thing.

There were many tales about this. And they definitely didn't want to be blown as far as the Sirtis. So, they keep tacking, trying to move north to get away from that.

But it was really hard to tack with the kind of ships that they had, the kind of sails that they had back then. There were certain things they hadn't discovered about navigation. And so, they're not sure.

They don't seem to be able to make very much headway. They, with regard to the wind, finally are just blown along by it. They want to take down the sails.

The sails definitely aren't helping them. And they have to throw some things into the sea. They throw some of the wheat overboard.

They need other wheat for ballast. But you're not going to get all the wheat overboard in any case. In fact, we find them discarding wheat two times in the narrative.

They probably function like a bucket brigade, given what we know of the way the ships worked. But they couldn't empty it all. The largest kind of ships, like the Isis I mentioned earlier, could take an entire month to unload in the harbors in Italy.

So, they are emptying some of it. They have some more space in the hold, but they can't empty all of it. And having to throw things overboard, Luke sometimes apparently helped them.

He says we threw these things overboard with our own hands. Luke is apparently with them when they take soundings. Paul has said, we are all going to be saved.

All 276 onboard are going to be saved. But we are going to be saved, but we're first going to run aground on an island. So, the ship is going to be lost, but no lives will be lost.

Well, it's good they had insurance for the contents of the ship. But anyway, this would be quite a miracle for the ship to be lost and none of the 276 people to be lost. And some of the passengers were probably sick.

They hadn't eaten many of them for, well, they hadn't eaten for many days. Luke is keeping track of all this. Just because there's a storm doesn't mean you never can tell the difference between day and night.

Although sometimes they can't. They can't see the stars, so they can't see their location. And Luke is with them when they take soundings.

They can hear something different. Even though they're coming in in the dark, they can hear something different. And you would hear the breakers on some rocks that were fairly far from Malta, but you were heading towards Malta.

So, they heard some land nearby. They heard the waters breaking, and they began to take soundings. And the soundings are, in fact, exactly the depths that we know today would have been the soundings if they were coming into Malta, past these rocks, toward what is today called St. Paul's Bay, or at least somewhere near St. Paul's Bay.

And as they're taking the soundings, the way they did it, they would let down something very heavy. It would go all the way down to the bottom. But it would have something in it where you could actually get some... It would let you know when it reached the bottom, and you might even get some samples from the bottom.

And then you'd pull it up, and you could tell how far down it was. So, Paul speaks to them. And people sometimes say, well, how could Paul have spoken in the midst of the storm? Well, first of all, the storm wasn't equally loud at all times.

And secondly, one possibility that's been suggested by some is that Paul was actually speaking in the hold. If they'd discarded enough of the grain, you could cram a lot of people just below deck. But on the other hand, he could be on deck during a lull.

We have a lot of accounts like this from antiquity that are harder for us to imagine in our world today where we have sound amplification systems. People were sometimes able to do things that we couldn't have imagined them doing. Generals would speak to armies.

It's all over the place in ancient literature. You can say, well, all those are fictitious. But even if all of the accounts were fictitious, how would people have come up with this fiction if it never happened? Generals apparently could speak at least to some armies.

We do read that sometimes some people in the back couldn't hear everything they were saying. But generals spoke to armies. We have other accounts of people speaking at sea.

And it's been tested more recently in recent times. For instance, George Whitefield, who was an evangelist in the 1700s, Benjamin Franklin said it was reputed that Whitefield could be heard a mile away and even further. So, Benjamin Franklin decided to test it.

And he went and stood that far away. And sure enough, he could hear George Whitefield. He said this is an amazing man.

I want to get to know this man. And he became friends with Whitefield, even though Whitefield was an evangelical Christian and Ben Franklin was a deist. But they became really good friends.

Well, how did they get to shore? It says that some were strong enough to swim. Some came on planks. These may be planks from the cargo hold that were used for separating the cargo.

The wheat could be in sacks. If it was in sacks, the sacks would kind of flow in shape as the ship moved from side to side. And it could be very damaging.

So, they had planks to separate these and so on. Now, as far as being able to come ashore, the tide would help them. And that's true with the planks, too.

The planks would just be, you know, you could just hold on to them like a life vest. And you would be pushed into shore by the tide. Tide may not be the best way to speak of the Mediterranean Sea, but the waves blowing you in.

I consulted a friend about this. Her PhD is in history, but she also is a surfer. And so, she actually checked the surf around Malta.

And she said, yes, this is what would happen. The waves would bring you in. Now, I'd mentioned earlier about the boat.

You know, it would make sense that during daylight, after they've anchored, during daylight they could just use the lifeboat and make multiple trips to ferry everybody to shore. But something had to happen to that boat the night before. And that's why they couldn't use the boat.

Some of the sailors decided that they were going to, they wanted to let down the boat. And they said that was going to help them to arrange the anchors. And that was what would normally be considered a good idea.

I mean, you needed the anchors. You didn't want to try to drive the ship in too close to the shore without being able to see what you were doing. Because you'd be run aground on the rocks.

And you might be run aground on the rocks too far away. So, you had to put out anchors that would, be shallow enough that the anchors could hold on something. So, they put out four anchors.

And then they hoped and prayed for dawn. But the sailors had wanted to do that with the boat. Well, Paul apparently knew supernaturally that there was something else going on.

They were going to try to escape in the boat. Because it was going to be hard to maneuver the ship. But the, you know, this little boat doesn't have to be, they don't have to worry about being run aground.

They're going to be able to make it all the way to the shore, they think. And if they wait until morning and there's going to be competition for the boat, or before morning if there's going to be competition for the boat, who's going to get the boat? Well, the soldiers were the ones with the swords. So, the sailors decide that they're going to make good their escape while they can.

And Paul says, except these remain on board, nobody can be saved. Now, here's where we have the prophecy already everybody's going to be saved. But it's a conditional prophecy.

That is, everybody's going to be saved. But it's going to be because you're going to obey me and not let them do this. So, they, the soldiers, by this time they believe Paul.

He's been right about everything so far. He's hearing from God so far. So, they cut the ropes and let the boat fall into the sea.

And now nobody can use the boat. Well, the sailors can't escape with it in this case. Now, that means that the sailors are going to be on board the ship, which is important because the sailors' expertise is going to be needed once there is enough light to drive the ship close to the island.

And they're not going to be able to bring it completely to shore, but they're going to be able to get it a lot closer to shore than they could have done in the dark, and a lot closer to shore than the other people on board could have even possibly done without the sailors' expertise. So, this way everybody's going to be saved. So, the tide is going to help carry people to shore.

The ship does run aground before it reaches shore and is broken up on the rocks. Now, some people say, well, if Luke had all these notes with him, how are the notes preserved? If it was papyrus, Luke's papyrus would be damaged, especially the kind of papyrus that was dominant in this period. It wasn't waterproof, so the ink would be washed off.

Well, the ink wasn't waterproof, so it would be washed off. That's why, well, yeah, that and papyrus and the papyrus ink on papyrus have both survived only in dry climates like in Egypt or in the Dead Sea Scrolls in an area like that. Luke may have also written on vellum, which is different from papyrus, but Luke may have also had a container.

There were plenty of amphorisks that were waterproof, that was sealable with cork or other things on board these ships. And if Luke knew that he was going sailing, it would have been smart for him to have brought one anyway. So, Luke could have had this on top of his plank or whatever as they were going ashore.

Luke would have probably also had a backup in Caesarea. Normally, if you had a major writing project, you'd have, you know, if he knows he's going to leave, he's had time to copy it out or maybe somebody could have helped him copy it out. But Luke's notes along the voyage probably were all right, too, because the details are so precise.

Of course, it may have been recent enough, Luke can just remember, but it seems fairly likely that Luke was keeping a journal and made it with him onto the shore. It's not for certain, but the majority of scholars think, and the topography seems to fit it, insofar as we can tell, the topography has changed some since that period, but seems to fit St. Paul's Bay, which is near Valletta, the current capital of the island of Malta. There have been some other theories that he means a different Malta or a different Molite, but the evidence overall very strongly favors this Malta.

Well, showing hospitality to the shipwrecked was a very important thing. That was one of the most necessary kinds of hospitality. We read about it in other ancient literature.

Deo Chrysostom talks about it and so forth. Malta was actually on the trade route. For the Alexandrian trade, they'd sail north and then west, trying to get to Italy, Malta was on the trade route between Crete and you could go to Malta or to Sicily and then go north to Italy.

Now, on the way back, you could go on in a more direct route to Egypt at certain times of the year. But in any case, they end up finding out that the island is Malta, which is a place they could have known of, but none of them would have ever come in from this angle before, under these weather conditions. It's cold and there's a fire and Paul himself is helping with the fire, gathering sticks for the fire.

Probably light rain is going on. And Luke speaks of the local people as barbarians but emphasizes their kindness and uses a word that philosophers used for the love of humanity. Barbarian was sometimes an insult, but it wasn't always an insult.

It was used by Greeks to look down on people who were inferior to them, but it also was used simply for people who didn't speak the Greek language. These people probably spoke the local Punic language on the island of Malta which had once been colonized by Carthaginians so that it was now under Rome. You can contrast the reception of these barbarians with the reception that Paul received among sophisticated Athenians and especially the reception that he received among his own people in Jerusalem.

Paul is gathering these sticks and a viper comes out and fastens on his hand. Some people say, well, there are no poisonous snakes on Malta now. There are just maybe some snakes that look poisonous, but there aren't any that are really poisonous.

Maybe Luke just didn't know it wasn't really poisonous. Well, you can always entertain that possibility. Snake bites were a very big thing and physicians were – that was one of the things they were supposed to be trained to deal with.

But we also need to take into account that human habitation there is much greater now. A lot of the forest cover has disappeared in Malta. This has been 2,000 years.

I know places where there were many snakes a generation ago and the snakes are now extinct because the people just systematically killed them. So that could happen in a generation. Certainly, it could happen over the course of a couple thousand years.

I see no reason to question Luke on those grounds. St. Paul's Bay is heavily inhabited today. But something else some people see here is a power encounter.

Sometimes spiritual encounters have been associated with snakes, for instance in Egypt in Exodus chapter 7. So, this may be another case of a power encounter in Acts. Whether there was something spiritual behind it or whether it was just a snake that was cold and stiff and revived by the heat and fastened onto Paul's hand, whatever the case is, God protected him. Chapter 28, verse 4. People wonder, if maybe Paul was guilty of something.

Look, he survived the sea and now justice has not suffered him to live. A viper is fastened onto his hand. It was commonly believed that shipwrecks could be used to punish impious people.

And if you survived the shipwreck, something else could be used to punish you. Well, Paul must be a very guilty person. And that sometimes was even used in court.

If all these disasters happened to you, maybe the gods wanted to make sure you got punished. But something that might stand in good stead for him in court is that none of these disasters really harmed Paul. He shakes the viper off into the fire.

Justice was considered a god, personified as a god. That was true in Punic circles. It was also a Greek and Roman deity, Dike, the Greek goddess for justice and vengeance.

And there was a temple to justice in Rome. So, they see justice has not allowed him to live. But then when they see he's not harmed, they change their mind and they say he must be a deity.

Now, where my wife is from, all snakes are assumed to be poisonous. They may not all be poisonous, but the assumption anyway is that they're poisonous. And that's the assumption here.

This was a poisonous snake, but it didn't harm him. Now, this is ironic. They go from saying he must be a criminal to deciding for themselves he must be a god.

Well, you were supposed to show great hospitality to deities. And you have this irony in Acts chapter 14 where they're trying to show him hospitality, they think he's a deity. When they find out he's not, they stone him.

But here, the hospitality is very positive. We have Luke's humor again. Chapter 12, Rhoda was the only one who really understood.

In chapter 17 and verse 18, the Stoics and the Epicureans misunderstand. And here, these local people misunderstand. But they misunderstand them at least as something positive rather than something negative.

Why doesn't Paul correct them? Paul probably doesn't know. I mean, if they're speaking a local Punic dialect, maybe Luke and Paul hear about this after the fact. But in any case, the Centurion and those who are with him, including Paul, receive hospitality from Publius, the chief person of the island.

Publius would have been a Roman citizen and a Latin speaker. He may have been educated enough, probably was educated enough to speak Greek as well. He's said to be the first man of the island.

Sometimes that just means prominent. I mentioned earlier that Philippi was the first city, which is a prominent city. Sometimes we read in Strabo and elsewhere of a city being the first city, just meaning it was a prominent one.

Sometimes elsewhere in Acts, we read about the first people in Greek, the first people of a city. It just means very prominent ones. But in Malta, sometimes this expression was used for the very highest office.

So, he may be the governor of Malta. Well, his father is very sick with a recurrent fever and dysentery. This may be from a form of malaria.

It was very common then. They didn't speak in those terms back then. If you read the Hippocratic literature, regimen and diseases, acute diseases, and so on, or other ancient medical literature, they often just talk about these things as fevers, and they often accompany dysenteries.

Recurrent fever, one that comes and goes. We still know of some of those things today. But he had been in very serious shape.

He was an older man, and he was not doing very well, especially with the dysentery. And so, Paul goes, prays for the man, lays hands on him, and Publius' father is healed. As soon as that happens, other people on the island start coming and bringing people to be healed.

And Julius the centurion is watching all this. His respect for Paul is going higher and higher. So, he's going to have a good report to give to the court when he gets to Rome.

Now, this narrative very closely echoes that of Luke chapter 4, where Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, and then they start bringing people to Jesus for healing. Some people think that healings decline later on in Acts. Well, they don't.

It's right here in chapter 28. Paul wasn't probably out praying for the sick too much during his years in Roman custody in Caesarea. We have a whole lot of chapters covering Caesarea, and his custody from chapters 22 through 26.

But as soon as he gets here in Acts chapter 28, he's laying hands on people, they're being healed. Finally, they are able to board another ship very early in the spring. It's three months, so this is very early in the sailing season.

But this time it's going to work out much better. And they don't have as far to go this time. They're sailing north to Syracuse in Sicily, which was a major site, a major city.

It had been founded by Greeks earlier and had long been under Rome by this point. From there, they go to Rhegium, which is on the southern tip of Italy. You wouldn't have too far to sail from Sicily to Rhegium.

And then they go up the coast of Italy to Puteoli. And from there they're going to take a land route to get to Rome. They could have gone further.

At this point, Augustus had built a new harbor at Ostia. But in any case, they're going to take the land route. Some of it's a bit swampy, but they get there fine.

And on the way there, they're going to be greeted by a number of people in two groups of Christians. They'll find Christians they can stay with, and they're greeted by a couple of groups of Christians from Rome. So, word has gotten ahead from the places they've stayed and accepted hospitality.

Paul is probably not in a hurry to get to Rome, but he doesn't mind getting to Rome. But Julius is probably not in a hurry to get Paul to Rome, knowing that he's going to be a prisoner. The other prisoners are probably not in a hurry to get to Rome because unless they're like Paul, Roman citizens who've appealed to Caesar, they're probably being sent to Rome to be executed in the public games.

That's one reason why when the soldiers were... people were going to swim to shore, go on planks, the soldiers are ready to kill the prisoners because, well, they're going to die anyway. And we need to not let any of them escape or we can be held liable. These were the kinds of conditions under which they might not have been held liable, but politics being what it was, if somebody were looking for a scapegoat, they could have been executed.

So, it made more sense to kill them because they couldn't swim in the chains. The chains would be too heavy. They had to let them out of their chains.

And the centurion recognizes, okay, well, we can't spare Paul and kill them. We're going to have to answer for that. That's inconsistent.

But he wants to spare Paul so all the prisoners get saved because of him. And so all 276 make it to the shore. But now as they're going to Rome, you've got the centurion, you've got the soldiers who are with him, you've got Paul who's now kind of a hero among them, Paul's companions, and then the other prisoners.

So, places showed him hospitality. And also, as he gets to Rome, people come out to greet him. Well, Paul had earlier written his letter to the Romans from Corinth or technically probably from Cancri.

He sent it from Cancri where Phoebe was diakonos of the church. Diakonos is translated in different ways. So, I'm just going to leave it diakonos for now.

But she was a diakonos of the church, and she was traveling to Rome possibly on business, and she carries the letter to Rome. So, the church in Rome knew of Paul. He had many friends who had gone there before him.

We see that from Romans 16. In the year 54, when Claudius died, Nero became the emperor. You had a lot of people who had been Jewish believers who had to leave

Italy or Jewish people who weren't believers yet who became believers in Corinth who had to leave Italy, now could go back to Italy.

So, they're already there. They've been there for a few years by the time Paul is coming. And people know about Paul.

They know who he is. He's got ties there. And he's going to write more letters from Rome.

Most likely he wrote Philippians and some of the other letters there. Rome's population, some have estimated based on water supplies, is as low as a quarter million. I think it's more likely that it was a million based on the census, the census figures from antiquity.

It would be 250,000 citizens plus families and servants and so on, slaves, and so on. Probably Rome had about a million people. That's the usual estimate.

The living conditions in Rome had a lot of tenements, and a lot of apartment buildings with the rich living on the bottom. And the higher you went, the poorer the people were, the lower the rent was. It still took up a lot of money.

Sometimes the lowest floors you had shops with mezzanine apartments where people lived. But the lowest floor was the only one that had running water. And the higher floors were rickety.

Sometimes these buildings collapsed and so on. In some of the house churches or apartment churches in Rome, there were long hallways that connected the different rooms in which people slept. And so, you could get a number of people into the long hallways, but you couldn't normally get people into these higher-level apartments.

There was just enough room for the residents themselves to sleep in these rooms. But house churches could meet in the long hallway or they could meet in some of the ground floor apartments. Jewish residents, it's estimated that they made up perhaps 5% of Rome.

It's been estimated as low as 20,000, more often estimated around 40,000 to 50,000. So perhaps 5%, perhaps less than that. Rome's Jewish community.

We talked about this somewhat when we were looking at the expulsion in Acts 18:2. But most of the Jews probably lived in the trans-Tiberinum. Today in Rome that's called the Trastevere area. Again, pardon me if your language is Italian and I messed up the pronunciation.

It's across the Tiber River from the city's center. Most of the Jewish community was poor. Many of them probably worked in the docks of the Tiber River.

There were a number of synagogues and several of them are known by name. One of them seems to have been the Olive Tree, which is interesting for Romans 11, although we don't know from what period that synagogue existed. But there were several synagogues.

Unlike Alexandria, the Jewish community here was not united. Rome would not allow it. They didn't want any group united within their city except for the Praetorian Guard or the local police force.

Rome wouldn't allow it. So, you had a lot of synagogues, different leaders for different synagogues, and no centralized Jewish authority. You had a lot of Greek-speaking immigrants here, resident aliens from many parts of the diaspora, many parts of the diaspora, including many Jewish people, most of whom were Greek-speaking, although you did have some Latin-speaking ones too.

Over half of the residents who are Jewish have Latin names, but the Jewish community seems to have been predominantly Greek-speaking. We know that there were many citizens there, many Jewish Roman citizens. Philo mentions that there was a whole community of Jewish Roman citizens there.

Well, most of them probably were Roman citizens because they were descended from slaves, enslaved by Pompeii, and then they were freed. We've talked again about them earlier. But Rome had a lot of xenophobia.

There were some Romans who really liked Jewish practices and adopted them, but Romans, especially elite Romans, detested particularly Sabbaths, circumcision, and food practices. No wonder Paul has to deal with those in his letter to the Romans. And also, the question, the Jewish community had faced banishment on at least a couple of occasions.

I mentioned earlier that sometimes astrologers and others got banished. Well, under Tiberius, the Jewish community was banished. Under Claudius, the Jewish community had been banished, at least officially, although they probably didn't all go.

And so just a few comments about Roman history and what the church there had been experiencing since its founding, probably going back at least to Jewish believers who migrated there, who were from Rome originally, in Acts chapter 2. Claudius expelled Jewish Christian leaders in the year 49, and this expulsion was repealed automatically on Claudius' death in the year 54. So, for five years you've got what's

been almost completely a Gentile church. Again, probably not everybody left, but probably most of the Jewish Christians did.

64, ten years after the Jewish believers returned, Nero began massacring hundreds or thousands of Jesus' followers in Rome, feeding them to wild animals, and using them as torches to light his imperial gardens at night. And yet the church was still strong afterward so we get the impression that the Roman church was strong at the time that 1 Clement is written, from Rome to Corinth. This suggests a massive growth of the church in just 15 years.

It was mostly Gentile by this point because of the expulsion, but it had a Jewish base. By the time Paul writes the letter, Jewish believers have just returned. That's why Aquilla and Priscilla are back in Rome.

At this point they've been with him in Ephesus, they're back in Rome. At this point in the year 54, later on, it seems like they go back to Ephesus again. So, Paul writes the letter to the Romans sometime after this.

It's right in between one trial of an expulsion of the Jewish Christians and another trial when Nero is going to start burning Christians alive. But at the time that Paul appealed to the emperor, nobody knew how Nero was going to turn out. As long as he was under the mentorship of Seneca the Younger, who was a stoic philosopher, very much emphasized self-control, and Burrus, who was the head of the Praetorian Guard, Nero seemed to behave all right.

He was very young when he became emperor. I may mention that the way that he became emperor, at least according to Tacitus, was that his mother Agrippina saw to it that the emperor Claudius died. He got some poison, it didn't finish him off, the poison mushrooms, so she bribed the physician and he stuck some poison on a feather and inserted it in his rectum, claiming to do something to heal him, and that poison finished him off.

Well, there was another potential contender for the throne, and that was Britannicus, who was the son of Claudius and his former wife, Messalina. So Britannicus actually choked on his ice water. They had servants to test all the food and the water, and the water wasn't poisoned, but the water was a bit warm, so they added some cold water to it.

That was poisoned, and that got Britannicus out of the way. Nero was married to Octavia, who was the daughter of Messalina and Claudius, and so that helped guarantee his reign once he was in power. He charged her with adultery and had the poor woman executed.

Nero did get out of hand after a while. Burrus disappeared. Seneca actually didn't get executed until he was complicit in a plot seeking to assassinate Nero because he got so out of hand.

But Nero's new mentor, instead of being Seneca and Burrus, Nero's new mentor became Tigellinus, and Tigellinus was his older boyfriend. They did a lot of things together sexually. They did a lot of other things, riotous-type things.

Some of the things we hear about Nero may not have been true because the historians give us every bit of dirt from the previous generation that people circulated about Nero, but some of it at least was true, and there's a reason why all the historians agreed on this. Anyway, one of the things was Nero took his friend Otho's wife, Papaea Sabina, and took her as his own mistress and his own wife, kicked her to death when she was pregnant, and just a lot of bad things about Nero. Anyway, Nero wasn't out of control yet, and I'm going to suggest that Paul probably was released before Nero was out of control, but later on Paul and Peter, according to a very strong tradition of the church in Rome, were executed in Rome under Nero, and under Nero after he really got out of control.

But in any case, Paul's triumphal entry to Rome. Generals would enter Rome triumphantly. Ultimately in this period, it was especially the emperor who was allowed to enter triumphantly, but you have earlier people being received as if it's a triumphal entry.

Cicero, when he comes back to Rome, everybody's cheering him and so on. Remember Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem. It looks like a triumphal entry.

It might be compared by some with a triumphal entry. Well, Paul now enters Rome, and people are coming out to meet him and escort him on his way back to the city. That's what the Greek term for meet here means.

It's normally when you meet somebody and you escort them on their way back to a place. It's like he's got embassies coming to meet him from the church in Rome. So, Luke is going to end on a very positive note.

He's not going to go on to Paul's execution, but Paul here is in light custody. He's got his own rented quarters, and he's still chained to a guard, but these are members of the Praetorian Guard, the elite guard of Rome. He's a Roman citizen.

That's not going to stand him as much good as it did in the East. Most people in Rome, well, a lot of people in Rome were Roman citizens, but we also know that he was guarded by the Praetorian Guard from what we see in Philippians chapters 1 and 4, or at least that's the usual interpretation, which I also think is correct. Well, in chapter 28, verse 17, Paul does the same thing he does in other cities.

Sometimes people will look at Acts 13 and look at Acts 18, where Paul says, from now on I'm going to the Gentiles, but he still goes to the Jewish community first in each city. And so, it's not like Paul is rejecting the Jewish people altogether, but in any given place he'll go on to the Gentiles, saying that the Jewish community has refused it. So, in Acts chapter 28, it's not a rejection of Israel finally at the end of the book.

It's just repeating what's happened before. But Paul asks to meet again with the leaders of the Jewish community. There's no centralized authority for Rome's synagogues.

There were a lot of different synagogues, so there were a number of different leaders who came there. And some have problems because the Jewish community says to – the Jewish leaders say to Paul, well, we really want to hear from you about this movement because we've heard bad things about it, but we don't know much about it firsthand. Well, what does that mean, they don't know much about it firsthand. I mean, just already back in 49, apparently clashes about the identity of the Messiah caused the expulsion of at least some members of the Jewish community.

Luke omitted the cause for that in chapter 18, verse 2, and he's not going to go into it here either. But I think it's not so much that they wouldn't have heard of the movement. From what we know from Tacitus, and from how many Christians were there, it's very unlikely that they hadn't heard of the movement.

In fact, they say they've heard of it, they just haven't heard good things, but that they're not in touch with it. After the expulsion, the church in Rome was largely Gentile. They were no longer attending the synagogues and so on.

And even with the others who've come back, well, they're dealing with the church that's there, and they're not necessarily building relations with the synagogue. And also, I think these leaders would prefer to hear about it from a peer. Paul is a person of status.

He's a leader in the movement. He's a leader acknowledged in the movement already by the churches in Rome, where Aquila and Priscilla have come back and others. He's also from Jerusalem.

So, there are reasons why they would want to hear about the movement more directly from Paul. But the response is divided. It doesn't speak of wholesale rejection, but it does not speak of a turning of Israel to faith in the Messiah yet.

It speaks only of a divided response. Some accepted what he said, and some rejected what he said, which had been the case before. And so, Luke climaxes, almost

climaxes, on Paul's citation from Isaiah 6, where Isaiah had a calling very similar to Paul's own calling in Acts 9, where he experiences a theophany.

But then he says, go to these people, their ears are going to be made dull, they're not going to see, and so on. That's a text that's also quoted in Mark 4 and Matthew 13. Luke 8, he quotes it briefly when Jesus is speaking in the Parable of the Sower and the Soils, but he saves it especially for here.

It's something also that plays a role in the Gospel of John. One objection that people could raise is, if Jesus is really the Messiah, why didn't his own people embrace him, or all of his own people embrace him? And the response is, well, sometimes God allowed his people to be hardened, and the speaking of the word even would harden the people more. As Paul says in Romans 11, this gives the opportunity to go to the Gentiles.

I think Luke is making a similar point here, that Paul is able to keep going to the Gentiles. Peter said, repent, and times are refreshing will come from the Lord. If all of Israel had turned, or Israel as a whole had turned, the Lord would have returned.

History wouldn't have gone on. But we see here that history did go on to give more of a chance for more of the Gentiles to hear. And in this past century, we've seen a massive turning.

From one period to another, different parts of the world have held and treasured the Gospel. In the first century, of course, it originates in the Middle East, in Western Asia, in Judea and Galilee, and then it spreads throughout Syria, Egypt, and Turkey. Well, some of these are not the greatest strongholds for the Gospel now, although there are still many Christians in Egypt and elsewhere.

But the Gospel in Syria and the Gospel spread in these regions. Eventually, it spread to East Africa, in Aksum. It spreads in Southern Europe.

It spreads further in Western Asia. It goes on to India. In certain periods, it's going to China.

And there were kind of trade connections. There were ways for things to travel. I mean, in the second century, we know of Roman traders who went as far southeast as Vietnam and were taken by people there to the royal court in China, which at that point controlled Vietnam.

Later on, the Gospel is spreading in Northern Europe, Russia, and so on. So, the Gospel keeps spreading in different places. In the past century, the Gospel has multiplied so much in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and many parts of Asia.

There are many places where it still has to go and to spread more. But we see it spreading in different places at different times. But there's still the hope in the New Testament also of the Jewish people as a whole turning to faith in the Messiah.

So, the good news is ultimately for all peoples. And we see that even in the way that Acts concludes with Paul reiterating the importance of this mission to the Gentiles. And then it says that Paul continued to preach and teach about the kingdom of God.

And there's this inclusio, because he's talking about the kingdom of God, the beginning of the passage, talking at the end, also talking about it early on in the book of Acts. Well, here he's still preaching the same message that Jesus preached, the kingdom, and that the Jerusalem church preached, continuity of the message. And it says he remained there in his own rented quarters for two years.

Well, what happened after the two years? Luke doesn't tell us. But if nobody showed up within two years to prosecute the case, chances are it was because they knew they couldn't prosecute the case. They couldn't beat him under Festus.

They don't stand a chance trying to prosecute him in Rome without any better evidence. Luke is showing us that the charge against Paul is baseless. I believe that Paul was eventually executed.

I believe that the information we have in the pastorals and other early church tradition is correct, that Paul was released in this case and then was later rearrested. And that's when he was a prisoner in the so-called death cell in the Mamertine prison in Rome and was executed, became a martyr by beheading since he was a Roman citizen. The tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down.

But since Luke ends on a happy note, let me end on a happy note, that Luke's message is from heritage to mission. We need to hold on to our heritage, and not forget where we come from. We come from the heritage of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets.

We come from the heritage of the ministry of Jesus. We come from the heritage of the Jerusalem church. But we're also given a mission to reach all the nations with the good news of Jesus Christ because he is the rightful king of humanity.

He's the only savior of the world. People need him. And the book of Acts has an open ending.

It ends with this good note of continuing to preach the good news because the mission continues. The power for the mission is the same as it was in the beginning too. He promised us the power of the spirit to carry out the mission.

That's the power that we still need. And if we feel lacking in that power, remember again the model that's given for us, that Jesus taught and that the church in Acts often exemplified. If you ask for the Holy Spirit, Luke 11:13, your father will give that to you.

Let us pray that God will pour out his spirit upon us and raise up labors for the harvest so that the whole world can be reached with the good news of our Lord for his glory and for the salvation of the ends of the earth.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 23, Acts chapters 27 through 28.