

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 14

Acts 12-13

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Keener, Acts, Session 14, Acts 12-13, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts 12-14 analyzes Luke's narrative structure, highlighting the interwoven stories of Peter and Paul. **The lecture examines** Herod Agrippa I's persecution of the early church, focusing on the arrest and miraculous escape of Peter, and Agrippa's subsequent death. **Keener also discusses** the missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, beginning with their sending from Antioch and **exploring** their preaching in synagogues across Cyprus and Asia Minor, culminating in Paul's sermon at Pisidian Antioch. The lecture uses historical and archaeological evidence to enrich the biblical account.

**2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Keener, Acts, Session 14 – Double click icon to play in
Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL]
Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament →
Gospels – Acts → Acts).**



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n14.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts chapters 12-14:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on Acts 12-14

Overall Theme: This lecture focuses on the transition from the Jerusalem-centric focus of the early church to the beginnings of Paul's missionary journeys, highlighting the interplay of divine intervention, human politics, and the spread of the gospel. Luke's literary skill in weaving these narratives is also noted.

I. Acts 12: Persecution and Divine Deliverance

- **Context:** This chapter marks a shift in focus, moving between Peter in Jerusalem and the beginnings of Paul's ministry. It highlights the growing seriousness of persecution against the church.
- **Herod Agrippa I:** He is the first Jewish king since Herod the Great and is portrayed as politically motivated and eager to please, particularly the conservative Jewish population. "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."
- He executes James, the brother of John, and imprisons Peter, demonstrating his power and desire to maintain popular support.
- His actions spark Judean nationalism, a desire for self-rule.
- He's described as pro-Pharisaic and a frequent temple attendee.
- He utilizes Roman soldiers, not just Jewish soldiers, for imprisonment.
- **Peter's Imprisonment and Deliverance:** Peter is imprisoned during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, drawing a parallel to the time of Jesus's execution. Agrippa's public executions are noted, with some done for public entertainment.
- Peter is heavily guarded, with four soldiers on duty at any given time, chained to two of them.
- An angel miraculously frees Peter, demonstrating God's power. "His chains drop off. The doors open automatically, the Greek says, by themselves."

- This miracle is reminiscent of other ancient stories and of earlier miraculous releases in Acts, indicating divine sovereignty. "But again, it reminds us of what we saw earlier in Acts chapter five, that you can't fight against God."
- The early church was praying fervently for Peter's release, but were surprised when their prayers are answered. "They weren't really expecting it. They are surprised."
- **The Prayer Meeting at Mary's House:** Peter goes to the home of John Mark's mother, Mary, a place where a prayer meeting was occurring. This house, owned by a relative of Barnabas, seems to be of higher means.
- The church meets in homes rather than special buildings at this time. "The church used homes rather than special buildings for the first three centuries of the church's existence."
- The home's servant, Rhoda, initially disbelieves Peter's appearance, running to tell others. "And she's so excited, she runs back and tells the others while Peter is still at the door. And they disbelieve her." This parallels the disbelief of the women at Jesus's tomb.
- The name of the servant is "Rhoda" which was a typical name for servants and also is a name that means rose.
- The household is likely more Roman influenced, with a Latin name "Mark" indicating openness to Roman culture, but this does not necessarily mean they were Roman citizens.
- **Peter's Actions after Release:**
 - He shares his story with the people praying, then leaves and goes "to another place".
- **Herod Agrippa's Downfall:** Agrippa, out of arrogance, has the guards executed who were responsible for watching Peter.
- He later accepts worship as a god in Caesarea, contradicting a previous incident where he had discouraged the emperor from doing the same in Jerusalem.
- He is punished by God and dies a horrible death. "Luke says he was eaten by worms and died."

- The lesson is that God is the one who holds the ultimate power of life and death. "The one who really holds the power of life and death is the one who knows every hair on our heads."

II. Acts 12:25-13:3: The Sending Out of Barnabas and Saul

- **Transition:** The focus shifts from Peter to Barnabas and Saul, highlighting the growth of the church in Antioch and the beginning of missionary outreach.
- **Antioch's Role:** Antioch is presented as a center for the Gentile mission, in contrast to Jerusalem's focus on the Law. "Antioch had been particularly successful in the Gentile mission."
- **Missionaries:** The church in Antioch sends out Barnabas and Saul. "And in this case, at this time, it's time for them to be sent out by the church." This was a departure from typical Jewish practice.
- **Leadership:** The leaders of the church in Antioch were "prophets and teachers".
- There is geographical and cultural diversity in the leadership, but still largely Jewish, as "who would know the Torah best?".
- Menaen, who was "brought up with Herod", may be a source for some of Luke's special information on Herod.
- **Mission Preparation:** The leaders fast and pray, and the Holy Spirit directs them to send out Barnabas and Saul. "They're fasting in conjunction with prayer and the Holy Spirit speaks." The Holy Spirit's voice is seen as a confirmation of what the leaders already knew.
- **Traveling Companions:** Barnabas and Saul take a young man, Mark, with them. It was customary for ancient teachers to travel with disciples.

III. Acts 13:4-20: The Ministry on Cyprus and the Beginning of Paul's Preaching

- **Journey to Cyprus:** They travel to Seleucia, then to Cyprus, Barnabas's home island. It is a natural and important place to visit first given Barnabas's background.
- **Salamis:** They preach in synagogues in Salamis, a large city with a Jewish population. "Visiting teachers skilled in the Torah would naturally be asked to speak in local synagogues."

- **Paul's Synagogue Preaching:** Paul's actions in speaking at the synagogues despite his gentile mission, are supported by his other letters, despite some scholarly claims, who thought he did not preach at synagogues.
- **Travel Across Cyprus:** They travel across the island of Cyprus.
- **Paphos:** They arrive in Paphos, the provincial capital where they meet the proconsul, Sergius Paulus.
- The existence of the governor's palace is confirmed by archaeology.
- They encounter a Jewish magician, Bar-Jesus/Elymas, who opposes them. "Jewish magicians were often thought to be the best in the Roman Empire."
- **Paul and Elymas:**
 - Paul, also called "Saul" up to this point, is now called "Paul". "Saul, who is also called Paul." This shift reflects his Roman context and citizenship, as "Paul" is the Roman cognomen.
 - His Roman name, "Paulus" meant "small", which was a common name for Romans. "Paulus was Latin for small."
 - He takes the lead in this encounter, demonstrating a shift in leadership from Barnabas to Paul. "And after this, it's normally Paul and Barnabas."
 - Paul strikes Elymas blind for a time, displaying the power of God and the battle of spiritual forces. "Paul pronounces judgment. He says you'll be blind for a season."
 - The magician was called "Bar-Jesus" meaning "son of Jesus" which is ironic considering his opposition to the true Jesus.
- **Sergius Paulus' Conversion:** The proconsul is amazed by what happens and believes in the message of the gospel.
- **Power Encounters** The lecturer also included multiple stories about power encounters with spiritual powers, including stories from a professor of chemistry in the Congo, a professor from South Africa, and others.
- **Travel Inland to Pisidian Antioch:** Paul and Barnabas then travel to Perga, and then inland along the Via Augusta to Pisidian Antioch. Pisidian Antioch was not large, but was a Roman colony which would be a natural point of contact for the missionaries.

- **Paul's Sermon in Pisidian Antioch** The lecture ends as it transitions into Paul's sermon at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch.
- The sermon is adapted to the Jewish context, demonstrating Paul's adaptability to different audiences. "Paul adapted to different audiences in his speeches."
- The leaders of the synagogue invite him to speak because he is a skilled speaker from Judea.

Key Themes and Ideas:

- **Divine Sovereignty:** God's power and plans are sovereign, demonstrated through miracles, protection, and judgment.
- **Transition and Expansion:** The narrative moves from Jerusalem to Antioch, marking a geographical and cultural shift in the spread of the gospel.
- **Leadership and Mission:** The sending of Barnabas and Paul as missionaries is a critical turning point in the book of Acts.
- **Adaptability and Context:** Paul demonstrates the importance of adapting his message and methods to different audiences.
- **Spiritual Warfare:** The encounters with earthly and spiritual powers highlights the spiritual nature of the Christian mission.
- **Luke's Literary Skill:** Luke's storytelling is praised in its ability to show themes and weave them together in a cohesive narrative.
- **The early church meets in homes:** Houses were critical gathering places for the early church, rather than a formal church building.
- **Power Encounters are a Reality:** Stories are included to show spiritual power struggles.

This briefing document should provide a comprehensive overview of the key points from Dr. Keener's lecture on Acts 12-14.

4. Acts Study Guide: Session 14, Acts 12-13

Acts 12-13 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. Why was Herod Agrippa I eager to please the Judeans, and how did this manifest in his actions?
2. Describe the security measures taken to imprison Peter, as described in Acts 12.
3. What role does the story of Rhoda play in the narrative of Peter's escape and what is significant about her position in the household?
4. What is the significance of James, the brother of Jesus, in the context of the Jerusalem church and why is he not targeted by Agrippa?
5. What was the cause of Agrippa's death, and how is it presented in both Luke and Josephus?
6. How did the church in Antioch differ in its approach to spreading the Gospel compared to the church in Jerusalem?
7. Why was it significant that Barnabas and Saul were sent out from the church in Antioch and what was this journey like?
8. How does the text describe the leadership team in Antioch, and what significance does this have?
9. Explain the circumstances that led to Paul's change of name from Saul and what the significance of it is.
10. Describe the "power encounter" that took place between Paul and Elymas Bar-Jesus and what is meant by this term in this context.

Quiz Answer Key

1. Herod Agrippa I was eager to please the Judeans, particularly the conservative religious ones, to solidify his rule and popularity since he was the first Jewish king with Hasmonean blood since Herod the Great. This led him to persecute Christians, arresting James and Peter, as part of his political strategy.

2. Peter was heavily guarded in prison with four soldiers on four shifts, with each chain binding him to a soldier, and two more guards standing watch outside. This level of security demonstrates the authorities' intent to prevent any escape attempts.
3. Rhoda's role is to be the messenger of Peter's return, but her excitement leads the others to disbelief which mirrors the disciples' disbelief of the women who discovered the empty tomb. Her presence in the home shows she is known to both Peter and the Christian community and her position as a servant did not isolate her.
4. James was Jesus's younger brother and highly respected for his devoutness within the Jerusalem community. This respect and his alignment with conservative Jewish culture likely shielded him from Agrippa's persecution and made him a stabilizing force for the church.
5. Agrippa died after experiencing stomach pains for five days, described by Luke as being "eaten by worms." Both Luke and Josephus record his horrible death, emphasizing the just nature of his punishment following his arrogance and cruelty.
6. The church in Jerusalem largely expected the Gentiles to come to them while Antioch was actively sending out missionaries to spread the gospel in Gentile areas. Antioch's focus on Gentile mission was a significant departure from the Jerusalem church's focus on the law and Jewish traditions.
7. It marked a significant shift from the Judean to the Gentile missions. They traveled approximately 400 miles from Jerusalem to Antioch and Barnabas took Mark with them.
8. The leadership team included prophets and teachers of Jewish ethnicity from different regions, reflecting the diversity of the cosmopolitan city and showing the church was welcoming to a broad group of people. This indicates the diverse and inclusive nature of the church.
9. Paul's name change occurred at the beginning of his time in a Roman environment, marking a transition from his Jewish identity to a more universal one for his missionary work. He then uses his Roman cognomen 'Paulus', likely due to his Roman citizenship and its similarity to his Jewish name of Saul.

10. The power encounter was a direct confrontation between Paul and Elymas, a Jewish magician, where Paul, through the power of God, struck Elymas with temporary blindness. The term signifies a demonstration of God's superior power over that of dark spiritual forces and demonstrates the clash between supernatural forces.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the political motivations behind Herod Agrippa I's actions and their impact on the early church, using examples from both Acts 12 and the historical context provided by Keener.
2. Compare and contrast the perspectives of the Jerusalem church and the Antioch church, particularly in their respective missions to Jewish and Gentile communities, referencing specific events and figures in Acts 12-13.
3. Discuss the role of faith and doubt in Acts 12, focusing on the reactions of the characters to Peter's miraculous escape and the broader implications for understanding divine intervention.
4. Examine the shift in leadership from Barnabas to Paul, as depicted in Acts 13, and analyze the factors contributing to this transition and its significance for the spread of Christianity.
5. Evaluate the significance of the "power encounters" presented in Acts 13, considering the cultural and spiritual context of the time, and how these events served to authenticate the message of the early apostles.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Herod Agrippa I:** Jewish king from 41-44 CE, grandson of Herod the Great, known for his persecution of early Christians and efforts to please his Judean subjects.
- **Hasmoneans:** A Jewish dynasty of Maccabean descent that ruled Judea before Roman rule. Agrippa I's Hasmonean lineage made him more appealing to the Jewish population.
- **Sanhedrin:** The Jewish high court or ruling council in Jerusalem. They had limited power and required the Roman governor's approval to enact capital punishment.
- **Feast of Unleavened Bread:** A Jewish festival often coinciding with Passover. It was the time of Jesus's execution and Agrippa's persecution of the Church.

- **Fortress Antonia:** A Roman fortress in Jerusalem, located near the Temple Mount and used as a place of imprisonment. Peter was likely imprisoned here before his escape.
- **Rhoda:** A servant in the house of Mary, John Mark's mother, who recognized Peter after his miraculous escape but was initially disbelieved by the others in the house.
- **James (Brother of Jesus):** A highly respected leader of the Jerusalem church and Jesus's younger brother, known for his devoutness and conservative stance on Jewish law.
- **Tyre and Sidon:** Phoenician cities that relied on Judea for food imports and who sought Agrippa's favor to secure their provisions.
- **Antioch:** A major city in Syria and a significant hub for the early church, noted for its successful Gentile mission and for sending out missionaries.
- **Seleucia:** A port city near Antioch, from which Barnabas and Saul sailed to Cyprus.
- **Salamis:** A major city in Cyprus with a large Jewish community, where Barnabas and Saul began their ministry.
- **Paphos:** The provincial capital of Cyprus, where Barnabas and Saul encountered Sergius Paulus, the proconsul.
- **Sergius Paulus:** A Roman proconsul of Cyprus who became a believer after witnessing Paul's power over Elymas Bar-Jesus.
- **Elymas Bar-Jesus:** A Jewish magician in the court of Sergius Paulus who opposed the teachings of Barnabas and Saul and was temporarily blinded.
- **Tria Nomina:** The three names given to a Roman citizen. Paul's tria nomina was Saul, Saulus, and Paulus.
- **Via Augusta (Via Sebast):** A major Roman road that facilitated travel through Asia Minor and was used by Paul and Barnabas in their missionary journeys.
- **Pisidian Antioch:** A Roman colony in Asia Minor where Paul and Barnabas preached in the synagogue and where they encountered strong opposition.
- **Power Encounter:** A spiritual confrontation where a display of God's power demonstrates the superiority of the Gospel over other spiritual forces.

5. FAQs on Keener, Acts, Session 14, Acts 12-13

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FAQ: Key Themes and Events in Acts 12-13

- **What was the political context surrounding Herod Agrippa I's actions against the early church?** Herod Agrippa I, the first Jewish king since Herod the Great, ruled Judea from 41 to 44 AD. He gained popularity by catering to the conservative religious Judeans and was very eager to please them. He wielded more direct power than the Sanhedrin, and had the authority to execute people without a Roman governor's approval, marking a period of growing Jewish nationalism. This is what spurred him to persecute the church, ultimately resulting in the beheading of James and the imprisonment of Peter. His desire to please his constituents was a major motivation for his actions.
- **How did Peter escape from prison, and what does this event highlight about God's intervention?** Peter was imprisoned under heavy guard but was miraculously freed by an angel of the Lord. Chains fell off, and doors opened by themselves. This divine intervention shows that God is ultimately in control and can override human authority and security measures. It also reminds the reader of earlier events in Acts where divine intervention occurs, emphasizing the theme that one cannot fight against God. The fact that this occurred after the execution of James highlights that God's will is not always understandable to humans, and that sometimes God chooses to intervene and sometimes he doesn't. It reinforces that God intervenes when there is still work for them to do.
- **What does the narrative of Peter's escape reveal about the early church's practices and the social context of the time?** The early church met in homes like that of John Mark's mother, Mary, especially during times of persecution. These homes had servants and showed varying degrees of wealth; Mary's home was likely a more well-off home than the average house in Jerusalem. The church engaged in prayer meetings for their leaders. The fact that their prayer was answered miraculously surprised them, even though they were praying for Peter's release. The servant, Rhoda, also illustrates that those who were slaves in households had different levels of mobility and security than those who were outside the house.

- How was Herod Agrippa I's demise depicted, and what is the significance of it?** Herod Agrippa I, after accepting praise as if he were a god, suffered a gruesome death. Both Luke and the historian Josephus portray this event as a divine judgment, indicating that his arrogance and willingness to condemn others eventually led to his own end. This contrasts sharply with Peter's release and emphasizes the theme of God's ultimate power over earthly authorities.
- What was the role of Antioch in the early church, and how did it differ from Jerusalem?** The church in Antioch, known for its success in reaching Gentiles, became a significant center for missionary activity, sending out Barnabas and Saul. This marked a shift from Jerusalem's initial focus, where the apostles expected the gospel to spread from Jerusalem. The Antioch church had a vision for reaching the Gentiles, and they directly sent missionaries, a practice uncommon in Judaism at the time. The leaders of the Antioch church reflected a cosmopolitan mix of backgrounds, including leaders with Greek and Roman names.
- Why is Saul also called Paul, and what is the significance of this change in name?** Saul, also called Paul, began to use his Roman name, "Paulus", when engaging more directly with Roman audiences, especially when he encounters Sergius Paulus in Cyprus. This transition underscores his Roman citizenship and aligns with the Roman context. The name Paul (Paulus) meaning "small" was a common Roman cognomen. Paul having this name further reinforces the evidence that he was a Roman citizen. It also marked a change in leadership, and from this point forward in the book of Acts, Luke refers to them as "Paul and Barnabas", rather than "Barnabas and Saul".
- What is significant about Paul and Barnabas's mission to Cyprus, and what does it highlight about the nature of spiritual power?** Paul and Barnabas's mission to Cyprus includes an encounter with a Jewish magician, Bar-Jesus/Elymas, who opposes them. Paul confronts the magician, striking him blind, showcasing the superior power of God. This confrontation illustrates that true spiritual power surpasses that of magic and superstition. The blindness mirrors Paul's experience and demonstrates God's judgement for those who oppose the Gospel. This "power encounter" theme is further explored in the provided examples of modern-day Christian experiences. The interaction with Sergius Paulus also highlights how even those with high status and ties to other religions may come to believe in the gospel.

- **What does Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch reveal about his approach to evangelism and his audience?** Paul's sermon in Pisidian Antioch shows that he adapted his message to suit his audience, using a scripture-laced exposition tailored for a Jewish synagogue. This sermon starts from the beginning of the Old Testament, and is different than what he does when he's speaking directly to gentiles. It demonstrates Paul's knowledge of and engagement with Jewish scripture while preparing a path to present Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecies and the Messiah. The sermon also shows that Paul's mission is not exclusively to the gentiles, but also to his fellow Jews. This was evident also in other places he went to, even though he got beaten frequently in synagogues for sharing his message.