

Sergius Paulus

The Gospel and letter of Acts, both written by Luke, contain many lessons. They also leave many questions unanswered. At the beginning of the first preaching journey to the Gentiles, we read of a Roman identified by Luke as Sergius Paulus. In his writings, many people are named by Luke to supply the dates of the occurrences and provide verifiable facts to prove the narrative's truthfulness. *"The days of Herod, king of Judea"* (Luke 1:5) and *"the Decree from Caesar Augustus"* in Luke 2:1 are just two examples. Why then, is Sergius Paulus used to identify a point-in-time?

To follow this man through the Roman inscriptions and records requires an understanding of how Roman names are made. There are three parts: an informal first name, a clan name, and a family name. Luke uses only the clan and family name in Acts 13:7 to identify Cyprus's proconsul when Barnabas and Saul meet him. That marks a date between 44 to 47 A. D. By tracing his career through various records; we find all three of his names. History knows him as Lucius Sergius Paulus. The descriptions of his accomplishments say, the same as Luke, that he was *"a man of intelligence"* (Acts 13:7). The word used is *Συνετός* - *sunetos*, meaning intelligent, having understanding, wise, learned. Luke uses the term to say that Sergius Paulus observed and listened to the facts and drew the correct conclusions. By listening to Barnabas and Saul and watching what happened to Elymas, he apparently became a Christian.

Some believe the name Sergius that appears in the inscriptions around Pisidian Antioch indicates that the Sergius Paulus of Cyprus was a member of that clan. Luke does not give details of his family to confirm that belief. People point out that Paul and Barnabas hurried past places where they would typically stop to preach, to get to Antioch. *"Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem. But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down"* (Acts 13:13-14). The made-up-story is that Paul was encouraged to go first to the proconsul's home to tell his family of the Gospel and the savior. It makes a nice story, but there is no basis for it in the Gospel. What we can do is read of the effect of Paul's preaching to Gentiles there. *"For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed you as a light for the gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth.' When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed"* (Acts 13:47-48).

There is, however, a striking contrast between Sergius Paulus and another man in this chapter. The proconsul wanted to hear more of the Gospel (Acts 13:8), and the magician Elymas tried to stop the Gospel. *"But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith"* (Acts 13:8). The two different attitudes are similar to the Gospel's reception throughout the apostles' journeys. In every town, city, and synagogue, some wanted more as others tried to destroy the teaching.

As the preaching in Antioch of Pisidia brought salvation to the Gentiles, the Jews' jealousy caused persecution to begin in the Roman world. *"The Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district"* (Acts 13:50). Jesus told the disciples when He first sent them out two-by-two, *"Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them"* (Mark 6:11). Paul does just that as he and Barnabas leave the city. *"But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium"* (Acts 13:51).

Paul later warned that even from within the church and the eldership, the opposition would come. *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them"* (Acts 20:28-30). Even today, some want to change the truth of the Gospel to the lies of men.

Peter reminds us to *"Always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence"* (1 Peter 3:15). Can we say "For this reason" and give a scripture? Many tell heartrending stories to justify their opinion on how God will judge our actions. Do the stories come from scripture or the desires of self? Let us continue to listen to and respect the scriptures as Sergius Paulus did.