

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Lecture 15

Acts 13-15

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This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 15, Acts chapters 13 through 15.

In the last session, we introduced Paul's sermon, and his speech in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch in Acts chapter 13.

Now, we're actually going to look at some features of the speech, just very briefly introducing some of them. As in the case of Stephen's speech, this is going to be a scripture exposition showing how the entire history of Israel fulfills and points towards the coming of Jesus. That's going to be significant.

Remember, in Luke chapter 24, Jesus is telling Cleopas and the other person on the road to Emmaus from the scriptures, expounding about his own mission. Later on in Luke chapter 24, he is explaining to all of his disciples about his mission, how the scriptures talk about his death and resurrection, and their mission to proclaim the good news to all peoples. And you say, well, I wish I'd been there.

What scriptures was he talking about? Well, I think Luke doesn't have to tell us in Luke chapter 24, because it's fleshed out for us in some of these speeches in Acts, what some of the samples were and what some of the approaches were that enable us to see Jesus in the Old Testament. In chapter 13, verses 17 through 19, he speaks of 450 years. That's if one adds up all the numbers without allowing for overlapping.

Historically, there may have been overlapping, but he's just going with the text. He's speaking with textual people who don't know the archeology and all that, which he wouldn't have known either. Chapter 13, verses 27 through 29, those who condemned Jesus were fulfilling the scriptures in doing so.

Here again, we have something that we often see as a theme in Luke-Acts. You see it already back in chapter two in verse 23, where they executed Jesus. They used the hands of ungodly people, these Gentiles, but it was fulfilling God's plan that was predetermined.

So, God is so sovereign, that he can work even through human disobedience to achieve his purposes and his plan. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. And sometimes he'll do that in our lives.

People will mean things for evil, but God has a purpose where he can work things for good. It's not like God told them to do something evil, but God has his ways of

working things for our eternal good, and often even during our lives, works things for good, even though we don't always see it at the time, but he's trustworthy. So, they fulfilled the scriptures in condemning him, especially Luke may be thinking of Isaiah chapter 53, which is quoted back in Acts chapter eight.

Also Psalms of the righteous sufferer, like Psalm 22 and Psalm 69. These Psalms, are quoted in the gospels and in Acts. In 13:33, he cites Psalm two and verse seven, which may be alluded to already in the voice from heaven in Luke chapter three.

Psalm two seven says that this is God's son. You are my son today. I have begotten you.

It was an enthronement Psalm. You have sometimes decrees like that in the ancient Near East as a way of hailing a divine King. Well, Jewish people didn't hail their King as divine, but they did recognize that their King had been installed by God.

The Dead Sea Scrolls applied this Psalm to the enthronement of the Messiah, the ultimate King to whom the nations would submit, which is the fullest expression of what we have in Psalm two. David's eternal dynasty was ultimately fulfilled, especially in the ministry of Jesus. In 13:34, he quotes Isaiah 55:3, which you can link together because the one is a Psalm about the son of David.

This one also has to do with the promise to David. Isaiah's future hope in Isaiah 55.3 is bound up with the promise to David. He doesn't go on to quote verse four, but verse four of Isaiah 55, which undoubtedly Paul would have known, and probably Luke would have known, and probably some of Luke's audience would have recalled as well.

Isaiah 55:4 goes on to talk about hope for the Gentiles, who will in fact hope soon in this chapter. He goes on in verses 35 to 37. Speaking of holy in Isaiah 55:3 leads him to cite Psalm 16:10, according to the Jewish hermeneutical principle of *Bezera Shavuah*, where you could link together texts based on a common key term.

His audience would appreciate that in a synagogue homily. Psalm 16 has already been cited in Acts chapter two with reference to Jesus' resurrection. So, we see a kind of continuity in the apostolic message based on scripture.

Psalm 16 guarantees that the object of David's promise would never rot. Well, you look back in chapter two, verses 25 through 28, Peter explains, well, we know that David not only died, but he also decomposed. His tomb is with us to this day.

There were a few tombs in Jerusalem that were at least thought to be the right tombs that were known in the first century that Josephus talks about.

Archaeologically, we have some tombs, but in any case, his tomb is with us to this day. Everybody knew David died.

So, he's saying this isn't referring to David literally himself, but this is referring to a descendant of David, the Davidic Messiah. You know, Ezekiel can talk about David reigning in the future, but in the language of Isaiah, this is a son of David, a descendant of David. And moving on in 13:41, here he quotes from Habakkuk 1:5 and gives a warning.

Don't be like those who don't pay attention to this message. And Habakkuk 1:5 in context is talking about impending judgment under the Chaldeans in 1:6. He says in context it's impending judgment. So, if you fail to pay attention to this, you'll be under God's judgment.

Interestingly, Habakkuk goes on to talk about how only a righteous remnant will endure and will survive by faith, Habakkuk 2:4. Here the principle was applied to the judgment of the end. He doesn't quote Habakkuk 2:4 here, but we know from Paul's own letters that he liked to quote Habakkuk 2:4. So, we're getting just a summary of his message here. But when Paul is speaking of Habakkuk 1.5 here, he probably has in mind the larger context.

And on that occasion, he may have expounded more of that context as well. In verses 42 and 43, we see that the Gentile God-fearers hear him gladly because, well, Paul is proclaiming to them good news and it's good news that is good news for them as well. Many Gentiles ascended synagogues with great interest.

That was going on even as late as the fourth century. John Chrysostom complains about it. You can do what some people were doing, which was attending synagogues and also attending church, but he was complaining because some people were being influenced by some teaching that was contrary to the Christian teaching.

In any case, in 13:44, well, you've got a lot of people coming. And next week, speaking with some hyperbole, because they wouldn't have all fit in one synagogue or even all just in front of the synagogue, but Luke with some hyperbole says that basically, the whole town shows up. Well, when famous speakers, for instance, Dio Chrysostom in the late first, early second century, when they would come to town, much of the town would come out to hear the person.

And Paul has proclaimed a really great message. Word would spread quickly about the new speaker at the synagogue. He would be billed in Gentile terms as a great rhetorician and orator or a great philosopher because he's bringing the kind of message philosophers cared about.

Sometimes they talked about cosmological issues, but they also talked about ethical issues and so on. Religion didn't primarily deal with ethics. It dealt with ritual in the Greco-Roman world.

But anyway, they come out to hear Paul. And Paul in 13:47 cites Isaiah 49:6. Well, the servant in the context of Isaiah, the servant was Israel in 49:3 and 4. It explicitly says that but then in 49:5 through 7, it's one who carries out the servant's mission and suffers for Israel as in Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12, like we saw back in Acts chapter 8.

But here, Paul isn't applying it to Jesus. He's applying it to himself. That makes sense in light of the larger mission of the servant.

The servant was Israel. It was God's people. Isaiah 42 verses 18 and 19, Israel didn't fulfill that mission.

So, there's one within Israel that fulfills the mission, but it's still the appropriate mission for God's people and the appropriate mission for the righteous remnant within Israel. And so, as a follower of Jesus, Paul does this. And this text was actually alluded to back in Acts 1:8, where the good news will go to the ends of the earth.

So, Paul can quote this about being, we have been sent as a light to the ends of the earth. That is also the mission of believers today, of all who follow Jesus, the rightful King of Israel and the King of the nations. 13:48 and 49, Jewish people were predestined for salvation by virtue of descent from Abraham.

That was a common Jewish belief. But here, many Gentiles are ordained to life. This would be shocking to some of his Jewish hearers.

It was already implied in Isaiah 49:6 with this light to the nations. But now we have some of Paul's Jewish hearers are getting more upset with him at this point. In 13:50, many prominent women were interested in Judaism.

Sometimes this helped for the spreading of the gospel, like in Acts 16. And sometimes it hurt if the local Jewish community was against the apostles. Well, here, these prominent women, belong to the aristocracy.

Local aristocracies had most of the political power in a community. From them came the decurions. These were the people in the local councils who would control the city.

So, the opposition of members of the local aristocracy could drive somebody out of town. Their authority was purely local. You went to the next town, there was nothing they could do against you, the people in the previous town.

You just would have to escape the range of their jurisdiction, which is what Paul and Barnabas have to do. In 13:51 and 52, they go on to Iconium. Now, would Luke have heard any of these stories from Paul? Well, we know that Paul did talk about Barnabas in his churches and presumably in his travels.

He speaks of Barnabas both in Galatians 2 and 1 Corinthians 9 as if his hearers in these local churches should know who Barnabas was. So apparently, Paul has told these stories to people before, and Luke would have surely heard them as long as he stayed with Paul. In 13:51 and 52, Iconium was about 85 miles or 135 kilometers east on the same road, the Via Sebast from Pisidian Antioch.

The terrain was rugged. There was no other route that you could take except this road. So, we know Paul took this road at this point.

It was about a four-day walk and they shake the dust off their feet when they leave Pisidian Antioch. When Jewish people would return to the Holy Land, or sometimes when they would come into the temple, they could shake the profane dust off their feet. That's why you have in Luke 10 verses 10 through 12, Jesus says, when you go to Galilean towns, towns of God's own people, and you preach the good news of the kingdom and they don't listen, shake the dust off your feet.

Treat it as if profane. Treat them the same way you would Gentiles, because they're rejecting the covenant. And then he says, it'll be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah on that day than it is for these Galilean towns.

So, whether the people are Jewish or Gentiles, you shake the dust off your feet when you leave saying this is profane territory. Showing your heel to a person was also an insult in the ancient Middle East. And that may also play a role in this.

So, they walk for four days, they get to Iconium, and guess what? They're going to have opposition in Iconium also. Now we read about their ministry in Iconium, 14:1 through 4. They spoke a Phrygian dialect. Well, again, if I pronounce it the way they did back then, it was Phrygia, but we say Phrygia.

Phrygian dialect, but they also spoke Greek. That would have been their second language. Paul could have used interpreters when needed.

We get that impression from 14:11 and 14. Sometimes you're better off with interpreters than others. I know when my interpreter in French would make mistakes, I could usually catch them.

When my interpreter in Hausa would make mistakes, the reason I knew that they made a mistake was people were staring at me in horror. And I would turn to my

interpreter and say, what did you say I said? And somebody in the front row who also knew English, would talk with the interpreter. They'd go back and forth and they'd say, oh, it's this word, which was always a word that either in English or in Hausa, it was a word that sounded like the other one.

And then everybody would laugh. So, they used interpreters when needed. That's not a problem.

They would understand if people spoke in Greek, but the local Phrygian dialect, they probably, well, they wouldn't understand. In Iconium, they worshiped, again, the same range of local deities as most places, but they worshiped especially the emperor and the Phrygian mother goddess, who was known throughout the world as, you know, this mother goddess was especially associated with Phrygia, although not exclusively. Later, Iconium became a major center of Christianity in Asia Minor, but that doesn't mean that they had it easy the first time they were preaching the gospel in Iconium.

In chapter 14 and verse 5, city magistrates could do whatever was necessary to quell disturbances. That meant banning them, not killing them. They couldn't, the city magistrates couldn't stone them.

That would be a mob action. But they realized some people are, well, the opposition gets too harsh. Jesus said, Matthew 10.23, although Luke doesn't record that saying, but it's in a context where Luke does record some of the material, so Luke may well know of it.

Jesus said, they persecute you in one city, flee to another one. So, they're preaching in the cities of Lycaonia, 14.6 and 7. The cities of Lycaonia. Iconium was culturally in Phrygia, but ancient writers sometimes included it in Lycaonia.

Lycaonia contained Lystra and Derbe. So different writers classified the boundaries in different ways. They fled.

Discretion is sometimes the better part of valor or to put it differently, we need to value our life above our honor so we can continue our ministry if possible. Paul didn't want to do that in Jerusalem. He had to have friends who urged him to do it.

In some other places, he has friends who urge him to do it, but here there's just no point. They go on. And so, he preaches in Lystra in chapter 14, verse eight through the first part of chapter 20.

Lystra had been a Roman colony now for already half a century. They emphasized local culture and because it was prestigious, also Roman-ness. And they were a sister

city to Pisidian Antioch, even though they were like a hundred miles apart, they had a special relationship between them.

They were both Roman colonies and so they saw themselves as related, as distinct from the Greek cities of the region, cities that saw themselves as more Greek, which was the dominant culture, urban culture of the eastern Mediterranean. Open preaching, wasn't the only way that they communicated the gospel, but here they didn't seem to have too many other local connections, so they just started preaching. But this was something that was available to them.

Elite philosophers often served wealthy patrons or lectured in halls, but others who weren't so elite, just preached in markets. So, people sometimes expect people to speak in marketplaces. The Diochris system, in fact, criticized philosophers who reserved their lectures for the classroom.

Paul's letters show that he shared some of this type of philosophic ideal. He sometimes used philosophic arguments and so on that were familiar to the Greco-Roman culture. So, it wouldn't be surprising if he would say, okay, well, people can preach in this market.

We're going to do it. But there was some controversy, but controversy stirred by opponents may have added attention. Some people have said that all publicity is good publicity.

If somebody's criticizing you, at least it draws attention to your work and more people will know of your work. I'm not sure that all publicity is good publicity, but we make the best of what we get. So, in 14 verses 9 through 11, Paul perceives that somebody has faith to be healed.

He says, commands him to be healed in the name of Jesus. And the man leaps up and is healed. He's able to walk.

Some of the language Luke uses here is very closely related to some of the language that Luke uses in Acts chapter 3 for the disabled man there. In both cases, God is working through one of his representatives. We have a lot of parallels between what God does through Peter and the Jerusalem church and what God does through Paul and involvement in the Gentile mission.

And it also corresponds with the healing of a disabled man back in chapter 8, is it, of Luke's gospel, 8 or 9. And we have also the language probably evoking Isaiah chapter 35, whereas in the gospels it's a foretaste of the future in Luke chapter 7. But in Isaiah 35, it talks about how the disabled will leap for joy and other kinds of healing will take place at the time of the eschatological restoration. So here again, God's

power that will be manifested in its ultimate way in the future is already breaking into history. It's already at work.

Well, the Phrygians take it a little bit differently. They don't take this as an eschatological sign breaking into history from God's promised kingdom to his people. They view it in terms of local Phrygian legend.

Zeus and Hermes had come to their region in Phrygia, and they had been rejected. People had not shown them hospitality except for one couple, Baucus and Philemon. And therefore, the rest of Phrygia was destroyed in a flood, except for Baucus and Philemon.

Well, these Lycaeanians, who are partly Lycaean, but partly Phrygian culture, they know the Phrygian culture. They're not about to make the same mistake. And miracle workers in antiquity were sometimes understood as gods.

And you better show hospitality to gods, because there were plenty of stories about not showing hospitality to gods where you got in trouble besides just this flood. There were other cases. Demeter wasn't shown hospitality by some people.

She punished them. And of course, we know from the Old Testament, in the words of Hebrews, some people entertained angels unaware, whether it was Lot, whether it was Abraham. You also have the Jewish apocryphal story of Tobit and so on.

But these receive him as gods. In Galatians, Paul actually speaks of people receiving him as an angel of God. Well, they want to worship him.

Now, some people have disputed this allusion to Baucus and Philemon and Zeus and Hermes in Phrygian tradition, saying, well, this is just Ovid, the Roman author. But Ovid specifically links it with Phrygia. Ovid was writing back in the time of Augustus well before this.

Actually, when I was reading Acts for the first time as a young Christian, I knew Greek mythology because of my background. I knew it a lot better than I knew the Bible. My first time through the book of Acts, I caught the allusion to Baucus and Philemon.

I think it's pretty clear. So that's what the locals thought. But they still valued Zeus and Hermes very much in this region.

And they worshipped them together in this region. Hermes was considered the messenger of the Olympians. They also had Iris or Eris.

But Hermes was the messenger of the Olympians. He was the one who would do the speaking for the more dignified Zeus. In other stories, Zeus was a lot less dignified.

He was out chasing women or boys. But we could say all sorts of bad things about Greek mythology. Philosophers actually tried to get around that sometimes by allegorizing those stories and making Zeus a symbol of something.

But in any case, Hermes was the divine messenger. So, Paul is speaking. They identify him with Hermes.

And so, they take Barnabas as being Zeus. Sacrificial animals were often decorated with garlands before being offered. And one of the priests of the temple outside the city gates brings a bull with garlands on it.

And the bull was really expensive. So, this is going to be a big sacrifice. Lystra's citizens spoke Latin.

This was a Roman colony now. But it was also a market town for the whole region. So, there was a local language.

The people would have understood Greek, but they would have spoken with one another in a local language. It's like when my wife and I are in a French-speaking country in Africa, she will naturally speak French with people. If it's her own region where they speak some of the local languages, she'll be speaking with them in those languages.

And I don't know very many of the words. But then she'll turn to me and speak to me in English or sometimes in French if it's not too complicated French. Chapter 14, verses 15 and 16.

Paul clearly rejects worship. Paul and Barnabas reject worship. Just like Peter said, why do you think it's by our own power or holiness? Acts chapter 3 and verse 12.

In Acts chapter 28, they also thought Paul was a god. There's no indication from Acts that he knew about it at that time. Peter rejects veneration in Acts chapter 10 when Cornelius bows before him.

This all contrasts with Simon who claimed to be the great power of God in Acts chapter 8. It contrasts particularly with Agrippa I in Acts 12, 22, and 23 when he's hailed as a god and he accepts the divine worship and is struck dead. Well, Paul responds in language that is actually biblical. That's where presumably he gets his theology, right? But he responds in terms that Anatolian farmers could understand.

He speaks about the God who rules nature. Jewish apologists used philosophers' teachings about a supreme God which Jews felt contradicted the pagan worship of idols. The philosophers didn't always agree.

Many of the philosophers felt that the use of statues to focus your veneration on a deity was acceptable. And that's often how they understood those statues. Jewish people did not agree and Paul did not agree.

But Jewish apologists used local teachings or the teachings of a pagan culture. The best in those would use them to try to communicate their point. And Jewish people said that God had lower moral standards for Gentiles.

But even for Gentiles, idolatry was not permitted and Paul does not permit it. Phrygia makes sense that this is still in a general Phrygian context, even in Lycaonia, the Phrygian culture spilled over. So, this region was fertile.

They worshipped especially the mother goddess who provided fertility. And also, Stoic philosophers said that nature itself testifies to the character of the supreme God. It wasn't just Stoics who said that and Cicero said that and others, but especially Stoics were associated with this and they were the most popular philosophic school of this period.

So, a lot of people knew that Stoics said that. People would hear them speak in the marketplaces and so on. Luke's audience will appreciate Paul's wisdom and his versatility in communication in this brief speech summary that we have in 14:15-17.

Well, even though they are preaching monotheism and even though the crowds like them, often we read in ancient historical works that mobs changed their opinions very quickly. Actually, that sometimes happens today too. In fact, in Acts chapter 19, says that most of the people who were gathered there in the mob didn't even know what the issue was about, and didn't even know it had anything to do with Paul.

We read that some other times about mobs in antiquity. Denying the gods was considered impious, hence they would appear as magicians. If they weren't gods and they were saying, well, there are no gods and they're saying that to clarify, don't worship us, they would appear instead maybe as sorcerers or as magicians.

But what really stirs up the trouble is some Jewish people come from Antioch, again, Sister City. That's nearly a hundred miles, 160 kilometers away. But Lystra and Antioch were sister cities.

They come and they stir up the crowd and Paul gets stoned. That was the most common form of urban mob violence. It happened often in antiquity.

We read about it again often in ancient sources. Stones, tiles, and cobbles were readily available in ancient streets and were often used for this. Tiles could be torn off a roof to throw at people.

That was a suitable punishment for blasphemy. But as we mentioned earlier in the case of Stephen, it also was often threatened against the leaders of God's people by God's own people. And the irony here is that Paul is preaching monotheism and is being denounced by fellow Jews.

Consolidating the work, chapter 14, verse 20B through verse 28. They go on to Derbe. Now Derbe was not on this Via Sebast or the Augustus Highway.

Derbe was off the beaten path, we might say. It was about 60 miles or 95 kilometers southeast, maybe even on an unpaved road. It was about a three-day journey.

Greek language, it had Greek language and perhaps Greek culture, but it wasn't even considered a Greek polis or a Greek city at this point. They're getting really far away. It wasn't probably yet a Roman colony, Claudio Derbe, which it became.

But they're just getting as far away as they can because, you know, the mob followed them, or some people from the mob had followed them a hundred miles to come after them. In 14:22, though, as they were going back through the towns that they've evangelized, they evangelize in Derbe, they go back to Lystra, they go back to Iconium. That's a courageous thing to do in a place where you've been stoned.

But the mobs are not, you know, mob violence can be stirred up in a moment and people don't know what's going on. They're going back after some tempers have cooled and they're probably not preaching in the synagogue in the city of Antioch next time through. But they go back through and this is the summary of their message to the new believers, something that the new believers had already witnessed, exemplified in the lives of those who brought them the gospel.

The summary of their preaching is, that through much tribulation, we must enter the kingdom of God. In other words, Jesus is worth suffering for and you better be ready to do it, just like Paul and Barnabas have been suffering. Jewish people expected a period of intense suffering before the coming of the kingdom.

And Paul sometimes speaks of that in a general way, not necessarily a final intensification of it. There may be that in 2 Thessalonians 2. But like in Romans 8.22, he speaks of how in the present the creation is groaning and travailing with birth pangs. Jewish people spoke of that final period as the birth pangs of the Messiah and the Messianic era, the birth pangs, Paul says, of a new creation.

So sometimes there's suffering before there's relief and joy. Although in the book of Acts, ideally, there were people who were willing to rejoice even in their sufferings. Tertullian, actually some other early Christians preserve a saying like this from Jesus, from oral tradition.

But they also appoint elders in the local churches. Elders governed and judged in towns and villages. Elders also could have a place in synagogues, although generally they filled a religious office there rather than the kind of office they would have in villages.

There would probably be several elders normally for synagogues and they could act as councils rather than as individuals. The title generally called for respect. If anybody was an elder, just from being an older person, they would be respected.

If you were not an older person and you were in a position of leadership, like in 1 Timothy 4, Timothy is exhorted to let nobody despise his youth, but to remember when the elders laid hands on him and he was appointed a leader. But normally the position went to older people or people who were definitely prodigies. In the Greek East, there was much influence given to the gerousia.

These were clubs made up of elders. And in fact, in Alexandria, the Jewish community was ruled by elders. So, they appoint them, even though this is fairly recent that these people have come to faith in Jesus, they have to have somebody, they have to have some sort of structure to keep the thing working and keep the thing alive.

1424 and 1425, Atalia, where they go after Perga. Atalia was Pamphylia's main port on the mouth of the Cataractes. And that's probably where they came in.

It's explicitly the place from which they sail. In 14:26 through 14:28, remember Diaspora Judaism promoted Judaism. They were apologetic, they wanted people to have a positive image of Judaism.

They welcomed converts, but they didn't have a concerted mission movement. So, this was a special thing that Paul and Barnabas were doing. But synagogue communities kept in contact through travelers who reported the news.

In this case, they come back and they report to their own home base. They're going to do that more than once. So, Antioch is clearly their home base.

It's a base that's more sympathetic to the Gentile mission than Jerusalem would have been. And it's also closer to the Aegean region where they're going to be ministering than that. In chapter 15, however, we encounter a controversy because some people come to Antioch and these people say to those in Antioch that you have to be circumcised to be saved.

Now that's even more radical than what we find people are saying in Galatia. In Galatia, basically, it seems to be in Paul's letter to the Galatians, probably referring to

South Galatia, probably the region where Paul ministered in Acts 13, well, yeah, most of Acts 13 and Acts 14. Well, Acts 14.

They normally would, in Galatia, what they seem to have been saying was you have to be circumcised to be fully righteous, to be part of the people of God, to be part of the covenant, to be children of Abraham. Most Jewish people believed that you needed to be just a righteous Gentile. If you were a righteous Gentile, you'd be saved.

If you just kept the basic kind of commandments that God gave to Noah, don't eat food with blood in it, don't commit sexual immorality, don't kill people, and don't commit idolatry. If you do some basic things like that, you'll be saved. But there were stricter, more conservative Jews who said you had to be a convert to Judaism.

And these particular Jewish Christians seem to be articulating this more conservative view, at least at this point. Nobody, however, in the Jewish community believed that Gentiles would become part of Israel, part of the covenant people, without being circumcised. Well, this is going to be an issue because remember they've been reaching Gentiles in Antioch for a long time, but they haven't been circumcising them.

They've just been welcoming them the way a synagogue would, but they've been treating them as their fellow believers in Jesus. Well, now there's an issue. Do these fellow believers in Jesus suddenly need to be circumcised? And that's going to be an issue.

Paul doesn't mention, sorry, Luke doesn't mention Titus, who's mentioned often in Paul's letters. He mentioned that Paul took Titus with him to Jerusalem when they were trying to resolve this dispute. Titus may have been from Antioch, but Titus also may have been from the mission in Galatia because the Galatians seem to know who he is already.

Either that or he may have accompanied Paul from Antioch. In any case, he's somebody known to them. And some people in Jerusalem are going to even want to circumcise Titus.

That's going to become a big issue. And we're going to look at that in more detail in Acts chapter 15. So, you know, Paul is a very articulate leader.

He and Barnabas have had great experience among the Gentiles. They've seen signs and wonders. So, Barnabas and Paul are sent as representatives of the Antioch church.

Titus goes with them and maybe some others. Well, yeah, some others go with them as well. And they're on their way to Jerusalem.

They're stopping in other places and they're talking about the mighty works that God has done among the Gentiles. And everybody's rejoicing. Everybody's celebrating God's work.

But now they're coming to Jerusalem where the center of the most conservative part of the Christian movement lies. And sometimes we have this today, you know, those who are sent out to other peoples see that God works in a lot of different ways. But sometimes those who only know their own local cultural expression of the Christian movement evaluate everything through their own local expression.

Now, sometimes your own local expression may be more right than somebody else's. But sometimes there are just different ways of doing things. The kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, Paul says in Romans 14, 17.

It's about righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. One person regards one day above another, and another regards every day alike. But there are certain things that are central and that's what makes us brothers and sisters.

And we can respect one another on the other issues. We may differ on some of the secondary issues. It's all right.

We can work together. But here, apostles and elders, chapter 15 and verse 2, churches like synagogues were ruled by local elders. Apostles, therefore, would work together with them because the apostles had a more trans-local role.

The Jerusalem church was the center for them, but the Jerusalem church itself had elders. Synagogues respected messengers from the temple authorities and their homeland. Judean believers in Jesus also held a special status.

People elsewhere wanted to hear what the Jerusalem church would say. That was important for keeping the unity of the church, but also that was kind of if there was a headquarters, that was it. Antioch may have been the center of the Gentile mission, but Jerusalem was the center of the church until 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed.

So, 15 verses 3 and 4. Some of the Pharisees were speaking up. They speak up in verse 5, but in verses 3 and 4, what's relevant is Paul and Barnabas are talking about all these miracles among the Gentiles, but many strict Pharisees believed that signs were insufficient if they contradicted traditional interpretation. Traditional interpretation and the traditions of the Pharisees took precedence.

Now, Christian Pharisees may have been more open to signs. I mean, they already know the Spirit's being poured out. God is doing miracles, but it's going to become an issue.

And the Pharisees raised their complaint in verse 5. And it's understandable that this would have come up. They're fulfilling kind of the role of the Pharisees in the gospel of Luke now, but it's kind of understandable that it would come up. Remember Agrippa I, he died in Acts chapter 12.

He was in Judea only from 41 to 44. He wasn't there that long, but having a Jewish king who was partly descended from the Hasmonean dynasty, from the Maccabees, had aroused nationalism. And you can see it in Josephus as well.

You also see it by the time you get to Acts 21. It was also caused by Roman misadministration afterwards, which posed a stark contrast to Agrippa I's rule which was very pro-Judean, and pro-Jewish. So conservative nationalism has been on the rise.

We often see things like this in our cultures today. We often see people being reactionary, moving in one direction or another, or being polarized because of certain kinds of cultural issues. And often the church is influenced by that.

You'll have Christians in culturally very conservative circles who will be adamant that this is the right way to do it. Christians in culturally less conservative circles who'll be adamant this is the way to do it. And sometimes that brings clashes, especially when we're bringing Christians from one culture into dialogue with Christians in another culture.

We really have to listen to one another. And that's what happened with this council. But people spoke their minds.

They asked what was going on. So, among the Pharisees, there were two schools of thought. There were the Shammites and the Hillelites.

Now the Hillelites were more generous towards Gentiles, but they became dominant, especially after 70. Before 70, the Shammites were more dominant. And probably among the Pharisees, there were more people who, I mean, if you keep the law, that's good.

They could respect James. But if they think that you're undermining the law, and in terms of fellowship with Gentiles, they wouldn't have liked that. Now that course was kind of discredited in terms of really being against Gentiles for those who spoke up for war against Rome.

That was kind of discredited after what happened with the failure of the war against Rome. But Pharisees were respected for their piety, for the knowledge of the Torah, and they probably held a high status in the Jerusalem church, which we know from chapter 21. Most of the people there did observe the law.

This was part of their culture. This was a good witness within their culture because even people who didn't keep the law as well respected the people who did. Peter's response to the objections in chapter 15, verses 6 through 11.

This helps us with some models for conflict resolution too. We know that Paul pleaded his case, especially before the apostles, Galatians chapter 2, but he didn't probably take the lead in this public activity in Acts chapter 15, because that would have been, he wasn't the one who was trusted. So, he talks about the signs and the wonders, but Peter, who is known in the local community, speaks up.

Other Jewish groups also had a general session where you have all the people together and then also a council of leaders separates from that. Qumran, you had priests, elders, and the people. The apostles didn't rule without the elders.

So, you have the apostles and the elders together. They engaged in vigorous debate, just like Jewish teachers did in their schools, but they sought to achieve a consensus. Among Jewish rabbis, majority opinion always carried the day.

So, the rabbis even told a story, leader rabbis even told a story. Probably this would not have gone over too well in the Jerusalem church, and probably would have changed some minds, but the leader rabbis told this story of two rabbis who were debating and one rabbi convinced the majority of rabbis, that was the majority opinion of rabbis. And then there's a voice from heaven that says the other rabbi is correct.

And the sages ruled, well, no, even a voice from heaven cannot overrule the majority opinion of the rabbis. So, achieving a majority opinion was very important in Jewish circles, at least among Pharisaic circles, and they would then have to abide by the majority opinion. If in another generation, the majority opinion happened to be different though, then you might have to change.

But in verse 22, they were seeking to achieve consensus. In between this, James's response, 15:12 through 21, James was highly respected locally. And James speaks up in verses 13 through 16.

We know also from Paul's letter to the Galatians that James was respected among the very conservative community. So, he's the one who can be a bridge. In ancient rhetoric, in fact, appealing to the person who would be most respected by the other side was considered a good rhetorical strategy.

So, it's not surprising Luke spends time on this. But in 15 verses 13 through 16, James speaks of God calling from the nations of people for his name. Well, in the Old Testament, normally that title is applied to Israel.

James applies it here to Gentile Christians as well. And he bases his argument on the book of Amos, which he cites in verse 17. He speaks of the Tabernacle of David from Amos 9 and verse 11.

There are various opinions of that, what the Tabernacle of David is. One tradition of interpretation is that this refers to the restoration of the ideal form of the temple, where there would be worship the way there was in the temple in David's day, 1 Chronicles 25, prophetically inspired, spirit-inspired worship. Well, I certainly believe in spirit-inspired worship.

I'm all for that. But I think probably the meaning in this text is more general than that because he doesn't speak of a restoration of the temple of David. He speaks of the restoration of the tabernacle of David.

And probably in Amos 9, I think that this refers to the house of David, which had fallen into such disrepair. It's just like Isaiah in the same generation speaks of the stump from Jesse's root. The Davidic house had been cut off from ruling, but it would be restored.

The house of David would be restored. So, I think what it's just talking about is the rebuilding is talking about the raising up of a Messiah after David's line had been cut off. This is applied messianically also in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Well, whatever view you take on that, clearly the restoration is associated with Jesus' kingdom, with what Jesus is doing. Chapter 15, verses 17 and 18, Amos 9, and verse 12 talk about the remnant of Edom. But by slightly changing the spelling, what you have in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it goes from the remnant of Edom to the remnant of Adam.

And so, James, there are Greeks present, Hellenists present, and also this is involving Greeks. So, James is probably using this Septuagint, but even if he weren't using the Septuagint, Luke just uses the Greek version because that's what's available to Luke and that's what his audience would understand. In context, in parallelism, we see that the remnant of Edom is also linked with the nations so Edom is just an example of the nations.

And so here we have these nations, a remnant of humanity, a remnant of Edom, who are called by his name. Language that could be applied to becoming part of God's people. Now you see something like that more explicitly in Isaiah chapter 19.

You also see something like that in Zephaniah and Zechariah, but especially in Isaiah 19, where Assyria and Egypt will also become part of the people of God. And I think what it's talking about is what we see in the New Testament, where you could have Gentiles as well grafted into the people of God, grafted into the covenant through faith and following the Jewish king, Jesus the Messiah. So, what he suggests is, look, we don't believe in table fellowship with Gentiles who aren't pure, but we don't need to require them to tithe their food.

Not everybody does that. But let's just require of them the basics that most Jewish people require of righteous Gentiles. They don't have to be circumcised.

They don't have to become proselytes for us to have table fellowship with them. To become part of the people of God, well, that issue is not going to be solved on that day, but they are able to come to a consensus on something else. Paul would say they become part of the people of God.

We see that in his letters. Probably some of the Pharisees present in Jerusalem would not agree with that. But there's a consensus they can come to that deals with the orthopraxy of the church, of how they live together.

Idolatry, immorality, blood, and meat, were the kinds of things that the Gentiles had to abstain from. These were parts of the Noachide laws. These are things that in Leviticus 17 and 18 are required for a stranger in the land.

Well, in Antioch, they're not in the land, but they're sojourning among God's people. So, the lenient Jewish position was any righteous Gentiles have a share in the world to come. Here what they could solve is the issue of table fellowship.

And even stricter Pharisees had to get along with the majority of people who were more lenient. And they didn't try to invalidate the majority views. So, the church in Jerusalem comes to a consensus.

It may not be unanimity, but it's a consensus. And so, they issue a decree, 15:22 to 35. In 15:22, later rabbinic academies, the majority view prevailed.

Well, here a partial compromise commanded consensus. And this compromise is in favor of the church in Antioch. They don't have to circumcise their Gentiles, which is really good because they shrunk their church quite a bit, probably, especially the male members.

But in any case, 15:23, they send a letter with the content of the letter. Notice how they started out. This letter is some of the best Greek in the New Testament.

James would have had some of the best Hellenist Jews there working for him to construct the thing that would have most appealed to, and shown the greatest respect for the Gentile Christians by using the best Greek possible. They start out by calling ethnic Gentiles who are believers in Jesus, brothers and sisters. That's significant.

The greetings that they give, are the standard greeting that was used in most ancient letters, as opposed to grace and peace that Paul uses. I would go into more detail if I were talking about Paul's letters, but it's a more explicit blessing, blending together some Jewish elements. But greetings were standard, and then it's a circular letter.

It's to be copied and circulated by its messengers, the messengers of the Jerusalem church to these different regions, to the regions of Syria and Cilicia, which, again, was a common province. This would become widely known. Luke may have been able to cite this from people's memories without having to have even a copy of the letter.

15:28, they conclude the letter by saying, it seemed good to us. Well, it could also be translated, or it often meant in ancient decrees, Greek decrees, be it resolved. In Greek decrees, this was used often after votes in citizen assemblies.

So, this is really good news for the church in Antioch, and its good news for the Gentile mission. But immediately after this masterpiece of God orchestrating a consensus in the Jerusalem church, after this unity, which probably didn't actually hold too long, but it's good enough for Luke to make the point, this is what the church concluded on this occasion. We'll see in Acts 21, that James and some of the leaders, still agreed with it, but not everybody in the Jerusalem church did as the church became more and more conservative.

But right after we see this unity, we're going to see division. And the division is going to strike right at the very heart of the ministry partnership in Acts chapter 15, verses 36 to 41, which we will discuss next time.

This is Dr. Craig Keener in his teaching on the book of Acts. This is session 15, Acts chapters 13 through 15.