

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 1

Authorship, Date, Genre

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Keener, Acts, Session 1, Authorship, Date, Genre, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener examines the authorship, date, and genre of the Book of Acts. **Keener argues persuasively for Luke as the author**, based on both internal and external evidence, including the "we" passages. He addresses differing scholarly opinions on the authorship, focusing on the significance of Luke's perspective as a potential traveling companion of Paul. **The dating of Acts is debated**, with Keener presenting arguments for a date in the 70s CE, considering the context of Paul's legacy and the events surrounding the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Finally, **Keener defends the historical monograph genre**, acknowledging the biographic elements but emphasizing its function as a historical account of the early church's mission.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Acts, Session 1 – 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).



Keener_Acts_Session
n01.mp3

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes, ideas, and facts from Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on the Book of Acts:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on Acts, Lecture 1

Subject: Authorship, Date, and Genre of the Book of Acts

Overview:

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener provides an in-depth analysis of the Book of Acts, focusing on its authorship, the likely time of its writing, and its literary genre. Keener argues strongly for the traditional view that Luke, a companion of Paul and a physician, authored both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. He also favors a date in the 70s AD for the writing of Acts and asserts that the work is best classified as a historical monograph with biographical elements.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Purpose of Acts:

- The Book of Acts narrates the mission of the early church, continuing the work of Jesus after his ascension. Keener states, "The gospel of Luke is all that Jesus began to do and teach. And the book of Acts shows how Jesus continued to work through his followers."
- It provides context for Paul's letters, although this was not the primary intention.
- The book emphasizes the positive legal precedents established through the early church's activities.

1. Authorship and the "We" Narratives:

- **The "We" sections:** Keener strongly supports the view that the "we" sections in Acts indicate the author's presence during those events and that these narratives are more detailed. He notes, "There are more details on the few weeks spent in Philippi than the lengthy stays in Corinth, 18 months and over two years in Ephesus. Also, where the we begin and where the we leaves off."
- **Rejection of Fictitious "We":** Keener dismisses the idea that the "we" is fictitious, stating, "We do not have fictitious we's or fictitious I's normally in historical works, which the majority of scholars agree that the book of Acts is." He cites the work of classical scholar Sir Arthur Darby Nock on this point.

- **Travel Journal:** While a travel journal source is possible, Keener proposes, "if it was a travel journal, including we, it would have been Luke's travel journal".
- **Luke as Author:** Keener argues that both internal and external evidence point to Luke as the author, quoting the unanimous view of the early church that Luke wrote both the Gospel of Luke and Acts. He emphasizes the lack of a more prominent figure associated with the authorship and explains that the tradition is strong for Luke, quoting early sources such as the anti-Marcionite prologue, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Tertullian.
- He also notes that the audience to whom Luke wrote would have known the author and therefore didn't need the author to state their name.
- **Luke's Background:** He examines the possibility that Luke was a physician, noting some medical terms in Luke-Acts and also the fact that physicians were close companions of their patients. He adds that the style of writing is educated, but not highly rhetorical, showing a more popular level style of writing.

1. **Dating of Acts:**

- **Early Date (Before 70 AD):** Some propose that Acts was written before 70 AD, largely because it doesn't narrate Paul's death. Keener dismisses this, stating that Acts is not a biography and therefore doesn't need to end with Paul's death and further suggests that Luke prefers to end on positive notes.
- **Majority View (70-90 AD):** Keener identifies the majority scholarly view as placing the writing between 70 and 90 AD, based on how Luke treats certain events, particularly the destruction of Jerusalem.
- **Luke 21 as Evidence:** Keener says, "Luke chapter 21 looks like it was written after 70. It adjusts the language."
- **Echoes of 70 AD:** He says, "there seems to be in the plot development some echoes of what happened in 70," with the inclusion of events surrounding Paul's trial and Jerusalem's turn from peace.
- **Use of Mark:** Given that Luke uses Mark as a source, and scholars generally date Mark between 64-75, a later date for Luke is more likely.

- **Later Dates (90s AD and 2nd Century):** He rejects the idea of a very late date, especially in the second century, since Luke-Acts should be read together and these late dates do not fit well with the evidence. He also finds the arguments based on Josephus weak, saying "If Josephus is not simply making up those events that he narrates, then these were events that were already known and other people besides Josephus could know about them."
- **Keener's Preference (70s AD):** He argues for the 70s based on his understanding that Acts was written when Paul's legacy was still being contested and that a key theme is Paul's innocence of inciting riots. He says, "If that's the case, probably this is written at a time when Paul's legacy was still contested...probably in the 70s or possibly 80s. So, I would argue for a date in the 70s." He also states, "I believe that this would be most relevant in a time when the charges against Paul were still fresh."

1. **Genre of Acts:**

- **Historical Monograph:** Keener asserts that Acts is a historical monograph, stating, "the majority agree that Acts is a historical monograph. And it's a work of ancient historiography." He also states that history had to be "substantially accurate".
- **Not a Novel:** Keener notes that unlike novels, historical monographs are based on factual information.
- **Rejection of Pure Biography:** While acknowledging biographical elements, he does not consider it a pure biography, because the book does not solely focus on one person and does not end with the death of a key character, instead focusing on mission. He states, "Acts isn't a biography per se. Acts is focused on mission...it's talking about the early Christian mission, and therefore it doesn't have to end with Paul's death". He also notes that biographies often focus on single characters, while Acts has a biographic focus on Peter in the first half, then Paul in the second half. He also explains that multi-volume histories sometimes contain volumes with a single character focus, so the elements are not mutually exclusive.

1. **Target Audience:**

- **Educated and Well-to-Do:** Luke presupposes a fairly educated, well-to-do audience, but not elite.
- **Knowledge of the Aegean Region:** His audience also seemed to be familiar with geographical details, especially within the Aegean region.

- **Knowledge of Scripture:** His audience likely had a strong understanding of the Septuagint.
- **Possibly Gentile Converts:** Keener suggests the audience is likely comprised of Gentile converts to Christianity from the Hellenistic diaspora, but they would have been familiar with the Jewish scriptures.

Quotes:

- "The theme of the book is the mission of the early church, and how they carried on Jesus' mission and followed his great commission."
- "The gospel of Luke is all that Jesus began to do and teach. And the book of Acts shows how Jesus continued to work through his followers."
- "There are more details on the few weeks spent in Philippi than the lengthy stays in Corinth, 18 months and over two years in Ephesus."
- "We do not have fictitious we's or fictitious I's normally in historical works, which the majority of scholars agree that the book of Acts is."
- "if it was a travel journal, including we, it would have been Luke's travel journal."
- "the unanimous view of the early church was that Luke was the author of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts."
- "Luke chapter 21 looks like it was written after 70. It adjusts the language."
- "there seems to be in the plot development some echoes of what happened in 70."
- "If Josephus is not simply making up those events that he narrates, then these were events that were already known and other people besides Josephus could know about them."
- "Acts isn't a biography per se. Acts is focused on mission...it's talking about the early Christian mission, and therefore it doesn't have to end with Paul's death."
- "I believe that this would be most relevant in a time when the charges against Paul were still fresh...probably in the 70s or possibly 80s. So, I would argue for a date in the 70s."

Conclusion:

Dr. Keener's lecture provides a comprehensive overview of the key issues surrounding the Book of Acts, making a strong case for Luke's authorship, a date in the 70s, and classifying the work as a historical monograph with biographical elements. The lecture highlights the importance of understanding the historical and literary context of Acts to better understand the early church's mission and the legacy of Paul.

4. Acts Study Guide: Session 1, Authorship, Date, Genre

Acts: Authorship, Date, and Genre Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the central theme of the Book of Acts, according to Dr. Keener?
2. What are "we narratives," and why are they significant in the context of the Book of Acts?
3. What is the primary argument against the "we" sections being literal, and how does Keener respond to it?
4. According to Dr. Keener, why is it unlikely the "we" sections are from a travel journal incorporated by Luke?
5. Who are some of the potential candidates for the companion of Paul in the "we" narratives besides Luke, and why are they less likely?
6. What evidence does Dr. Keener present to support the traditional view that Luke authored both the Gospel of Luke and Acts?
7. What is the significance of Luke's style, and how does it relate to his possible background?
8. What is the range of scholarly opinion regarding the date of the Book of Acts, and what is Dr. Keener's view?
9. What evidence does Keener present for the position that Acts was written sometime in the 70s?
10. According to Dr. Keener, why is the genre of Acts best categorized as a "historical monograph" rather than solely a biography?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The central theme of Acts is the mission of the early church and how they carried on Jesus' mission, following his great commission. The book narrates the life of the early church and how Jesus continued to work through his followers.

2. "We narratives" are sections of Acts where the author uses the first-person plural ("we"), indicating the author was present with Paul during those travels. They are significant because they suggest the author was a companion of Paul, adding an eyewitness perspective to certain events.
3. Some scholars argue that the "we" is fictitious, claiming Luke's portrayal of Paul's theology differs from Paul's own letters. Keener argues that this argument is based on a tendentious reading of Paul's letters and ignores the potential for differences in emphasis or perspective, not contradiction, between authors.
4. Keener believes it is unlikely that the "we" narratives came from a separate travel journal because Luke only preserves this first-person form in those places, making him an inept editor if not his own journal, and it would be improbable he would begin and then end these sections in the obscure locations they are.
5. Aristarchus, Epaphras, and Demas are other potential candidates, but Aristarchus is distinguished from the "we," there is no interest in Epaphras' home, and Demas abandoned Paul. Titus was a potential candidate, but he is not listed as a companion of Paul in Rome.
6. Dr. Keener points to the unanimous early church tradition, the fact that Luke was not a prominent figure, and that it is unlikely that someone would make up such an author. He also notes consistency with his style and medical terminology, though he admits they are found in other literature as well.
7. Luke's style is educated but not elite; it's popular yet sophisticated, which suggests he was an educated person, possibly a physician who had exposure to different people groups including skilled women. This fits well with how women are portrayed in the book.
8. Scholarly opinions range from the 60s to the second century, with the majority view being between 70 and 90 AD. Keener argues for a date in the 70s based on how Luke addresses the destruction of the temple, the way the plot seems to mirror the situation of 70 AD, and how a fairly early date would be consistent with the freshness of the charges against Paul at the time.
9. He argues that Luke's language in chapter 21 about Jerusalem's destruction seems to be written after the event, and the author's apparent concern about the accusations against Paul for instigating riots are relevant and fresh in a post-execution timeframe when Paul's legacy is being questioned. Also the reliance on Mark as a source also makes a post-70 date sensible.

10. Acts is a historical monograph because it focuses on the mission of the early church and the progression of the gospel, not solely on the life of an individual person. The book does contain biographical elements, but they serve the purpose of the larger narrative of the church's expansion.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the "we" narratives in the Book of Acts. How does Dr. Keener argue for their literal interpretation and why is this relevant to the larger conversation about the author of the work?
2. Explore the various arguments for and against Luke being the author of the Book of Acts. Which arguments do you find most persuasive and why?
3. Analyze the different proposed dating ranges for the Book of Acts, and present arguments for and against these positions. What are the historical implications of these different date ranges?
4. Discuss how Dr. Keener employs the categories of "genre" to illuminate the Book of Acts. What does his analysis suggest about the way the book should be interpreted and what is gained by this approach?
5. How does Dr. Keener's reading of Acts as a legal argument help to explain the book's content and themes?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **We Narratives:** Sections in the Book of Acts where the author uses the first-person plural pronoun "we," indicating that the author was present with Paul during those events.
- **Historical Monograph:** A detailed, scholarly study of a single subject within history. Unlike a general history, it focuses on a specific area or event.
- **Ancient Historiography:** The study of how history was written in ancient times, with emphasis on the methods and purposes of ancient historians.
- **Theophilus:** The dedicatee of both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, likely a patron of some status.
- **Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Old Testament, widely used in the Hellenistic world.
- **Koine:** The common dialect of Greek that was spoken throughout the Mediterranean region during the time of the New Testament.
- **God-fearer:** A Gentile who was attracted to Judaism but did not fully convert, often attending synagogues and adhering to some Jewish practices.
- **Diaspora:** The dispersion of Jews outside of their homeland, particularly throughout the Roman Empire.
- **Apologetic Agenda:** Writing or speaking with the aim of defending or justifying a particular belief or viewpoint.
- **Sedition:** Conduct or speech inciting people to rebel against the authority of a state.
- **Biographic Succession Narratives:** A narrative structure in which the story of a central figure is followed by the stories of their successors.

5. FAQs on Keener, Acts, Session 1, Authorship, Date, Genre, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Book of Acts

1. **Who is traditionally considered the author of the Book of Acts, and what evidence supports this claim?** The traditional author of the Book of Acts is Luke, who is also believed to be the author of the Gospel of Luke. This is supported by both external and internal evidence. Externally, the early church unanimously attributed both books to Luke. There's no evidence against this view. Also, it would have made more sense for a forger to claim a prominent figure as author. Internally, both Luke and Acts share a similar writing style and they are addressed to Theophilus, which suggests that they are part of a larger single work by the same author. Additionally, the "we" sections in Acts, where the author includes himself as a companion of Paul, align with the idea that Luke, a physician, traveled with Paul, as mentioned in Colossians 4:14.
2. **What are the "we" sections in Acts, and why are they significant in determining authorship?** The "we" sections are passages within the Book of Acts where the author shifts from third-person narration to using "we," indicating the author's presence with the group being described, most notably when Paul is traveling. These sections are significant because they suggest an eyewitness account of certain events. They appear in detail during the author's time in Philippi and with Paul in Rome. This is unlike other sections, like the ones describing Jesus' ministry that the author wouldn't have been there for. The inclusion of "we" is a literary device in ancient historiography, used by authors to indicate they were present at the events. The nature of where the we appears and disappears, coupled with their lack of exaggeration, is taken as evidence of genuine reporting of the author's presence rather than a fictional or literary construction.

3. **When is the Book of Acts believed to have been written, and what factors influence this dating?** The majority of scholars date the Book of Acts to the 70s or 80s AD, although there is some debate. Factors influencing this dating include: The book's apparent use of the Gospel of Mark as a source. The mention of the destruction of Jerusalem in a way that seems to reflect a post-70 AD perspective in Luke 21; the fact that Acts does not end with Paul's death may indicate a post-martyrdom writing context. Also, the focus on the trial and legal defense of Paul in the latter sections, possibly serving as a defense of Paul's legacy following his execution, may suggest a date shortly after his death. Earlier dates are also debated because Acts does not directly mention Paul's death. This suggests it may have been written closer to the time he was on trial. Some argue for the 90s or later because of perceived dependencies on Josephus, which are not widely accepted.
4. **What is the genre of the Book of Acts, and how does this genre inform our understanding of the text?** The majority view is that the Book of Acts is a historical monograph, a kind of ancient historical writing that focuses on a particular topic rather than all history. This means that it intends to present factual events, though it may not include every single detail. The book's focus on the mission of the early church suggests that it is more concerned with the progress of the gospel message rather than a complete biography of its figures. While Acts employs a biographic approach in focusing on key figures like Peter and Paul, it is not solely a biography because it doesn't end with the deaths of these characters. Understanding Acts as a historical monograph helps us approach the text expecting historical accuracy and an intentional narrative purpose rather than a modern, detailed history.
5. **How does the Book of Acts connect to the Gospel of Luke, and what does this relationship suggest about their purpose?** The Book of Acts is often referred to as "Luke part two" due to their shared authorship and the way they are designed to form a single literary work. The Gospel of Luke is presented as an account of what Jesus *began* to do and teach, while Acts shows what Jesus *continued* to do and teach through the early church. Acts uses a similar style and is addressed to the same person, Theophilus, who was likely an interested patron and not the primary audience. They are presented as a single work with the intent to demonstrate Jesus' impact and the continuation of his ministry through the Holy Spirit and the early church. This is further suggested by Acts 1:1, where the author refers to his "first book", implying a single, longer work.

6. **What is the significance of the geographic focus in the Book of Acts, and what does it tell us about the author's background and intended audience?** The Book of Acts focuses geographically on urban centers, particularly in the Aegean region, coastal Palestine, and eventually Rome. This emphasis on these locations reflects the author's own geographic knowledge as well as the likely core audience. It suggests the author was well-acquainted with the Aegean region. The author's familiarity with the Septuagint and the inclusion of Gentiles, suggests a Gentile or diaspora Jewish background, someone familiar with the Greek-speaking world and both Jewish scripture and traditions, while being less informed on the particular customs of Judea and Galilee. This geographic focus implies that the intended audience was primarily located in these areas and interested in the spread of the gospel within the Roman Empire.
7. **What evidence suggests that the author of Acts was familiar with the medical field, and what does this suggest about his personal life?** While not conclusively proving the author was a doctor, there are reasons to believe that it is at least consistent with that conclusion. The medical vocabulary found in Acts, while common, is not inconsistent with someone with medical training. The mention of Luke as a physician in Colossians 4:14 and the lack of a better candidate who traveled with Paul further points to Luke as the author. If he was a doctor, that suggests an education, possible status in society, and probably exposure to both men and women in his work, which is reflected in the book's positive representation of women. Doctors in that time period, like many professionals, were often slaves, or at least of Greek heritage. This may be reflected in the writing being educated, but not elitist.

8. **What is the primary purpose or agenda of the Book of Acts, and how does this influence its narrative?** The Book of Acts is focused on the expansion of the early Christian mission and demonstrating the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church. A key purpose of the book seems to be to defend Paul and the early Christian movement from accusations of sedition and social unrest. The extensive portrayal of Paul's trials and defenses, the emphasis that Paul did not instigate riots, and showing the legal and political innocence of Jesus suggests that the author had an apologetic agenda. This also explains his extensive descriptions of Paul's time in custody in the latter part of the book. This is designed to defend Paul's legacy as a leader of the Gentile mission. It shows that both Jesus and Paul, despite being accused of rebellion, were innocent. This suggests the purpose is to encourage believers by emphasizing the integrity of their faith and the innocence of their key figures.