

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 3

Luke's Historiography

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Keener, Acts, Session 3, Luke's Historiography, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Craig Keener's course on Acts examines Luke's historical methods in writing Acts. **Keener argues for the accuracy of Luke's account**, citing the strong oral tradition within early Christianity, **the exceptional memory skills common in ancient societies**, and **Luke's access to eyewitnesses and his own thorough investigation**. He also addresses criticisms of Luke's accuracy, especially concerning the speeches, by comparing Luke's approach to that of other ancient historians, concluding that **Luke's work demonstrates a high degree of historical reliability within its genre**. The lecture further explores the corroboration between Acts and Paul's letters, supporting Luke's accuracy.

2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Acts, Session 3 – 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
n03.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided lecture excerpts by Dr. Craig Keener on Luke's historiography in the Book of Acts:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on Luke's Historiography in Acts

Source: Excerpts from "Keener_Acts_EN_Lecture03.pdf"

Overview: This lecture focuses on the historical reliability of Luke's writings, specifically in the Book of Acts. Dr. Keener argues that Luke's work should be understood within the context of ancient historiography, and that Luke demonstrates careful use of sources, a commitment to accuracy, and a clear purpose of confirming already-known events.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Luke's Sources:

- **Multiple Sources:** Luke acknowledges that "many have undertaken to draw up an account" (Luke 1:1), indicating the existence of multiple written and oral sources.
- **Written Sources:** Keener acknowledges that Luke used sources such as the Gospel of Mark.
- **Oral Tradition:** Luke emphasizes the importance of oral tradition passed down by "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (Luke 1:2). Keener stresses that the term "handed down" ("paradidomy") was a technical term for very careful oral tradition where students would pass on information from their teachers.
- **Personal Investigation:** Luke claims to have conducted his own investigations to gain "thorough knowledge" (Luke 1:3).

1. Reliability of Oral Tradition:

- **Memory in Antiquity:** Keener highlights the culture of memorization in antiquity, noting examples of storytellers, disciples, and professional orators with incredible memory capabilities. Even illiterate bards could memorize and recite long poems like the Iliad and Odyssey. "One of the five basic tasks of oratory...was *memoria*, memorizing the speech in advance."

- **Discipleship:** The primary responsibility of disciples of teachers (philosophers, rabbis) was to remember and accurately pass on their teachers' teachings. "The primary responsibility of disciples of teachers was to remember what their teacher taught, and insofar as they remained part of that school of thought, they were to pass on accurately what their teacher taught them." Keener gives an example of the Pythagoreans who were not allowed to get out of bed without repeating everything they heard the day before.
- **Real World Examples:** Keener shares anecdotes of his 96-year-old neighbor recalling stories accurately from the 1700s and his wife from Africa confirming the power of oral history passed through generations.
- **Notes:** Keener says that while memorization was paramount, notes were sometimes taken by disciples and orators. He highlights the example of Quintilian's students publishing his lectures from their notes.
- **Aramaic Influence:** The presence of Aramaic rhythms and idioms in Jesus' sayings in the Gospels indicates a close link to the original context of those teachings. "In Jesus' speech, we often read about the Son of the Man... Really, that's a Semitism...we have a number of cases where we can reconstruct the Aramaic rhythm, and what that suggests to us is that, yeah, a lot of things were carefully preserved."

1. Eyewitness Prominence

- Eyewitnesses like Peter, John, and James (the brother of the Lord) were central leaders in the early church and were respected throughout the diaspora. People understood that "if you want to get the best information, you go to the eyewitnesses."

1. Luke's Investigation and Knowledge:

- **We Passages:** The "We" passages in Acts (16-28) suggest Luke was an eyewitness to some of the events he describes, particularly Paul's missionary journeys, and had an extended period in Judea to research. Keener notes that "the We narrative includes up to two years spent with Paul in Judea."
- **Access to Information:** Luke spent a significant amount of time with Paul (and others), had access to local disciples, and could gather information directly from witnesses.

- **Common Knowledge:** Luke appeals to the common knowledge of his audience, indicating his intention to confirm, rather than create, historical facts. "Luke sees his job as confirming something that was already known."

1. **Historical Accuracy:**

- **Correspondence with External History:** Acts has numerous correspondences with external history (geographical details, political titles, customs), suggesting accuracy and attention to detail. Keener provides a long list of such correspondences, including:
 - The family of Sergius Paulus
 - Ethnic details of Iconium and Lystra.
 - The pairing of Zeus and Hermes in local inscriptions.
 - The geographical route from the south.
 - The title of "Polytarch" in Thessalonica.
 - Claudius' expulsion of Jews.
 - The title of "Gromatus" in Ephesus.
 - The presence of the goddess Artemis in Ephesus.
 - Custom of Roman governor holding courts in Asia.
 - Topography of the temple.
 - Details of Paul's Roman citizenship.
 - The names and timing of high priests and governors such as Felix and Festus.
 - Paul's voyage to Rome including the weather and actions of the sailors.
- **Paul's Letters Confirm Acts:** Keener argues that the writings of Paul corroborate many of the people, places, and events in Acts.
- **Chronological Sequence:** Luke maintains a consistent chronological sequence in his narrative, which aligns with what is known from Paul's letters.
- **Absence of Later Debates:** The absence of major debates within the church (such as the circumcision issue) in Luke's gospel supports its early dating.

- **Women's Testimony:** Luke includes the testimony of women in the resurrection accounts, despite the fact that it was not typically valued in Jewish and Roman law. Josephus said that "the testimony of a woman should not be accepted because of the levity and temerity of their gender."

1. **Luke's Historiography and the Speeches in Acts:**

- **Ancient Historiography:** Keener emphasizes that ancient historians used speeches to summarize key ideas, communicate different points of view, and to reflect the character of the speaker (prosopopoeia).
- **Speech Summaries:** Luke's speeches in Acts are often short summaries, not elaborate recreations, which goes against the tendency of other ancient historians, like Josephus, to show off their rhetorical skills. He uses the example that "in chapter 2 and verse 40, Luke says, and with many other words, Peter exhorted them. So, it's a speech summary."
- **Access to Speech Content:** Luke likely had access to the substance of many of the speeches he includes, especially those where he was present or recorded events he personally knew about.
- **Not Always Verbatim:** Ancient historians did not focus on getting exact wording, but focused on conveying the gist of the speech. Paraphrase was standard practice.
- **Luke's Aim:** Luke's aim was to convey the historical events accurately and not to create new ideas or rhetoric. "Luke isn't out to show off his rhetoric. Luke is out to give you what he has." He edits material to bring out consistent themes, but those themes had a good chance of being authentic apostolic teachings.

1. **Challenges to Luke's Accuracy:**

- Keener addresses some challenges to the accuracy of Luke's writings, such as:
- Speeches that take place behind closed doors, such as in Acts 5:36-37.
- The idea that Luke's theology is non-Pauline. Keener argues that this is a misreading of the epistles and says that "students' emphasis can vary from their teachers' emphasis." Keener cites E.P. Sanders and others who have brought that out. He also notes that Paul himself accommodated Jewish customs in a way that aligns with what is portrayed in Acts.

- The natural theology in Acts 17 is not actually that different from the natural theology presented in Romans 1.
- He notes, "The challenges to Luke's accuracy come up among scholars where we would most expect them...But he's most accurate where we can test him..."

Conclusion:

Dr. Keener argues that Luke's writings in Acts demonstrate a high degree of historical reliability when understood within the context of ancient historiography. Luke used multiple sources, had direct access to eyewitnesses and information, and presented his material to confirm already known truths. He was not aiming to create a novel, but to record and preserve the early history of Christianity.

Quote:

"So, 2,000 years later, we can't go back and interview Luke. We certainly can't interview the people that Luke interviewed. We can only be grateful that Luke interviewed them, giving this material for my witnesses. But what we can be grateful for is that Luke appealed to Theophilus' knowledge of this."

This briefing document summarizes the core arguments and key points presented in the provided lecture excerpts. It highlights Dr. Keener's emphasis on the reliability of Luke's work when read through the lens of ancient historiography, and it emphasizes Luke's commitment to accuracy, his use of sources, and the overall authenticity of his narrative.

4. Acts Study Guide: Session 3, Luke's Historiography

Luke's Historiography: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Keener, what types of sources did Luke use when compiling his Gospel and the Book of Acts?
2. What does the term *paradidomy* suggest about how information was passed down in the early church?
3. How does Keener describe the memory skills of people in antiquity, and what evidence does he provide?
4. What was the primary responsibility of disciples of teachers in antiquity?
5. What does Keener suggest about the practice of note-taking in the time of Jesus and the early church?
6. How does Keener argue for the preservation of Aramaic speech patterns in the Greek New Testament?
7. What does Keener say about the prominence of eyewitnesses in the early church and how that relates to the recording of historical information?
8. How does Keener explain Luke's thorough knowledge in relation to the "We" passages in Acts?
9. What evidence does Keener provide that Luke's work is historically accurate based on external sources?
10. According to Keener, what is the nature of the speeches recorded in Acts, and how reliable are they?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Luke used both written and oral sources, and he conducted his own investigations to gain thorough knowledge, all while working with material that was already widely known in the early church.
2. *Paradidomy*, in the context of oral tradition, was a technical term that normally referred to the very careful handing down of information from teachers to students, similar to the way that Anna Gulick learned stories from her family.

3. Memory skills were highly developed in antiquity, demonstrated by illiterate bards who could recite the Iliad and Odyssey, and orators who could memorize hours-long speeches; this is because memory was culturally valued.
4. The primary responsibility of disciples was to accurately remember and pass on their teacher's teachings, and they were also expected to learn from their teachers' actions, which could serve as precedents.
5. While Jewish tradition primarily emphasized oral memorization, note-taking was practiced, especially in Hellenistic culture, and some, like the tax collector Matthew, likely took notes to aid recall of Jesus' teachings and actions.
6. The presence of Aramaic figures of speech, such as "Son of Man," and the ability to reconstruct the Aramaic rhythm of some sayings suggest that Jesus' teachings were carefully preserved from their original language into Greek.
7. Eyewitnesses, such as Peter, John, and James, were prominent leaders in the early church and were considered major sources of reliable information about Jesus; because they were often respected even in churches outside of Jerusalem, Luke had credible sources for the events described in the New Testament.
8. The "We" passages in Acts suggest that Luke, as an eyewitness and travel companion of Paul, had extensive time in Judea to gather first-hand information and hear Paul's stories, which contributed to his thorough understanding.
9. Luke's accuracy is demonstrated by his detailed descriptions of political and geographic realities that are confirmed by external historical records, archaeological findings, and the writings of Josephus; details like the titles of government officials and common practices of the time can be verified.
10. The speeches in Acts are mostly speech summaries, not verbatim transcripts. Historians often summarized speech events, using the known content, the speaker's style, and the historical context to approximate what was said.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Write a detailed essay that addresses the following questions.

1. Analyze the implications of Luke's use of oral tradition as a primary source, considering both its strengths and weaknesses, as highlighted in Keener's lecture.
2. Evaluate the claim that Luke's historical accuracy, as evidenced by external historical corroboration, supports the overall reliability of the Gospels and Acts.

3. Compare and contrast the practices of ancient historiography with modern historiography, using Luke's work as an example of the former, and discuss the implications for interpreting the New Testament.
4. Discuss the significance of Luke's use of "we" passages in the Book of Acts for his credibility as an eyewitness and historian. How does this influence our understanding of the book's reliability?
5. Considering Keener's points about note-taking and Aramaic rhythms, evaluate how these details contribute to the authenticity of the sayings and events recorded in the Gospels. How do these details support or challenge the notion that the Gospel writers were not just making up stories?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Historiography:** The study of how history is written and how it has been represented over time; this includes the sources, methods, and interpretations used by historians.
- **Paradidomy:** A Greek term meaning "to hand down" or "to pass on," used in the context of oral tradition to describe the careful and deliberate transmission of teachings.
- **Memoria:** In classical rhetoric, one of the five canons of oratory that refers to the art of memorizing a speech in advance of its delivery; often practiced by orators and students of rhetoric.
- **Synoptic Gospels:** The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, which are similar in content, style, and sequence and are thus often studied together.
- **Aramaic Rhythm:** The presence of Aramaic linguistic features, such as figures of speech, in the Greek texts, suggesting that certain passages were translated from Aramaic, the common language of Jesus.
- **Prosopopoeia:** A rhetorical device where a speaker or writer creates a speech or conversation in the voice of another character, real or imagined.
- **Verisimilitude:** The appearance of being true or real; in historiography, the effort to make accounts of the past appear historically plausible.
- **Homiletics:** The art of preaching or writing sermons.
- **Canonical:** In the context of religious texts, referring to those writings that are considered authoritative and are part of the official scripture.

- **Mnemonic Skills:** Techniques used to improve or assist memory, like using patterns or associations to aid recall.
- **Diaspora:** Refers to the dispersion of the Jewish people outside of their ancestral homeland.
- **Gromatus:** The title for the chief officer in Ephesus, a city clerk who also managed local documents.
- **Polytarchs:** Officials in Macedonia, a Greek region mentioned in Acts.
- **We Narrative:** Sections in Acts where the narrator uses the pronoun "we," indicating first-hand participation in the events being described.
- **Semitism:** A linguistic or cultural trait characteristic of Semitic languages or peoples, such as the use of certain phrases.

5. FAQs on Keener, Acts, Session 3, Luke's Historiography, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Luke's Historiography in Acts

1. **What sources did Luke use when writing the book of Acts?**
2. Luke utilized both written and oral sources. He acknowledges that many had already undertaken to write accounts of the events. He also relied on the oral tradition passed down by eyewitnesses and servants of the word, carefully transmitted, often in a structured, memorable format by those who had firsthand experience. Luke mentions his own investigation which would have given him a thorough knowledge of the events. He also appeals to the common knowledge of the church when presenting the material.
3. **How accurate was oral tradition in the ancient world, and how does it apply to the stories in Acts?**
4. Oral tradition in the ancient world was often highly accurate due to the emphasis on memorization and the passing down of stories through generations. People in antiquity had incredible memory skills, with some able to recite entire epic poems or lengthy speeches. Disciples of teachers were responsible for accurately memorizing and passing on their teachings. This context suggests that the oral sources Luke used could have been quite reliable, especially considering the importance of accuracy within teaching circles and for remembering important events.
5. **What role did memorization play in ancient education and the transmission of information, and how does it relate to the reliability of the material in Acts?**
6. Memorization was a core element of education in antiquity, ranging from elementary learning to advanced discipleship. Students were trained to memorize sayings, speeches, and even historical narratives. This emphasis on memory, both within Jewish and Greek settings, suggests that the teachings and deeds of Jesus would have been accurately preserved by his disciples, who were trained in such methods. In addition, professional orators spent hours memorizing speeches which is evidence that memory was highly valued in antiquity. These memorization practices provide a framework for understanding how the material in Acts could have been faithfully transmitted before being written down.

7. Did people in the ancient world take notes? How might notes contribute to the accuracy of the book of Acts?

8. While oral transmission was primary, note-taking also occurred, especially in Hellenistic circles. Disciples of teachers, particularly in Greek oratorical and philosophical schools, would often take notes on lectures. These notes would sometimes be compiled and published. Given Luke's context, it is likely that he, and potentially others involved in the events of Acts, took notes, such as Matthew as a tax collector, possibly using them to complement the oral traditions. In addition, Luke may have kept some kind of a travel log during his travels with Paul that would have assisted him when writing the book of Acts. This use of notes, alongside oral tradition, further enhances the potential for the accuracy of the events reported in Acts.

9. How does Luke's use of Aramaic rhythm in some of Jesus' sayings suggest that they were faithfully preserved?

10. Many of Jesus' sayings reflect Aramaic figures of speech and rhythms, indicating that these sayings were translated into Greek relatively early and were not simply made up later. The preservation of these Aramaic idioms suggests a close link to the original sources. This also indicates that a lot of the tradition was carefully passed along and not just the Greek tradition, which would have erased this linguistic link back to Jesus' life. This linguistic evidence points to a tradition that was carefully maintained from its original Aramaic form.

11. How do external historical and geographical details support the reliability of the book of Acts?

Acts contains a remarkable number of details that align with known historical and geographical facts. Luke's account of political figures, local customs, geographical locations, and travel routes is often remarkably accurate. These details, corroborated by external sources like inscriptions and other historical records, strengthen the argument that Luke was a careful and accurate historian who recorded the events of Acts faithfully, and not a story teller who embellished facts. The external evidence provides important credibility to Luke's historical account.

7. How do Paul's letters corroborate information found in the book of Acts?

Paul's letters frequently corroborate the events and circumstances described in Acts. There is a strong alignment between the chronology of events, the figures involved, the theological teachings, and many other details, showing a consistency between these sources. The parallels between Paul's letters and the account in Acts, provide important evidence that the account in Acts was not a fabrication but that it lined up with what was happening at that time, which further demonstrates the historical accuracy of the book of Acts. These corroborations also suggest that the book of Acts was written by an author who was well-informed about the historical events and figures being described in the text.

1. **What can be said about the speeches in Acts, and how should they be understood?**
2. While Luke likely used his own wording, historians, both ancient and modern, think Luke also summarized the actual speeches, rather than writing them from whole cloth. The speeches in Acts were considered by ancient historians to be historical events and therefore were given importance as part of the broader narrative. In some cases Luke may have even had verbatim transcripts but he also used *prosopopoeia*, a practice in ancient historiography where writers would create speeches that reflected the characters of those speaking and the given context of the situation. Luke often condenses the speeches which is evident by phrases such as "with many other words." Given that the book was already well-known in the church it would have been much more difficult to fabricate those given how many people knew those specific events. Therefore, understanding that ancient historians operated differently than modern historians, the speeches should be viewed as summaries and reconstructions of what were, in fact, spoken by the people in Acts.