

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 4

Credibility of Miracles

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Keener, Acts, Session 4, Credibility of Miracles, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt from Craig Keener's teaching on the Book of Acts focuses on the credibility of miracles described within its pages. Keener examines literary parallels between Luke's Gospel and Acts, arguing for a unified authorship and purpose. He then explores the book's potential legal and apologetic aims, emphasizing its consistent portrayal of early Christians as innocent before Roman courts. Finally, the lecture presents extensive modern-day accounts of miraculous healings and resurrections from various reliable sources to support the historical plausibility of miracles in Acts and the Gospels. These accounts include documented medical cases and eyewitness testimonies, aiming to counter Western skepticism towards miracle reports.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Acts, Session 4 – 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
n04.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided excerpt of Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts, focusing on the credibility of miracles:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on the Credibility of Miracles in Acts

I. Introduction

- Dr. Craig Keener's lecture focuses on the credibility of miracles in the book of Acts, building upon previous sessions examining the historical aspects of Luke-Acts.
- Keener emphasizes that while historical methods have limitations, the texts themselves (like Acts) are a form of evidence.
- As a historian, Keener views Luke as a very good historian, while as a Christian, Luke's writings are seen as part of the canon through which God speaks.
- Keener highlights Luke's use of literary parallels between Jesus' ministry in the Gospels and the early church in Acts, drawing on the traditions of parallel biographies in the ancient world (e.g., Plutarch).

II. Literary Parallels in Luke-Acts

- Luke's two-volume work (Gospel and Acts) is structured with deliberate parallels to emphasize continuity between Jesus and the Church.
- **Examples:** Anointing: Jesus is anointed (Luke 4, Isaiah 61), as is the Church (Acts 10:38).
- Empowerment by the Spirit: Joel 2 is quoted in Acts 2, similar to the programmatic statement for Jesus from Isaiah 61.
- Signs and Wonders: Miracles of healing and exorcism are performed by Jesus (Gospels) and by Peter and Paul (Acts).
- Trials: Three trials of Jesus in Luke, mirrored by three trials of Paul in Acts.
- Martyrdom: Jesus' last words ("Father, into your hands I commit my spirit") parallel Stephen's final words ("Lord, receive my spirit").

- Keener notes that while some might dismiss these parallels as fabrication, there is historical context to support some of them. For example, the phrase "into your hands I commit my spirit" was a common prayer at that time.
- Luke seems to highlight connections in the narrative, emphasizing that the early church followed the example of Jesus.

III. Length, Publication, and Purpose of Acts

- Luke-Acts is of similar length to Matthew's Gospel, suggesting a standardized length for scrolls at that time (32-35 feet). Mark is half this length and John two thirds.
- Ancient works were often published after being read aloud in group settings, allowing for revisions. The early church would have read scripture (Old Testament and apostolic memoirs) at banquets or Lord's Supper gatherings.
- One purpose for the book of Acts might be legal, not just for Paul's trial, but to establish legal precedents for the protection of Christians.
- Every Roman court case reported in Luke-Acts finds the Christians "not guilty".
- Acts might be a kind of court brief like Josephus' work for Judaism, arguing that Christianity should be legal.

IV. Apologetic Purposes of Acts

- Acts has apologetic purposes for different audiences: Roman courts, Greek philosophers, rural Asian farmers, and Jewish objectors.
- It argues that the followers of Jesus are consistent with their ancient tradition, in contrast with those persecuting them.
- A key theme is that nothing can stop the spread of the gospel, emphasizing the unhindered nature of the early church's evangelism.
- The relationship to Judaism was important to establish the legitimacy of Christianity, showing that it was a fulfillment of the Old Testament.
- Luke highlights themes of prayer, the Holy Spirit, evangelism, and the marginalized (Gentiles).

V. Miracles in Acts and the Question of Credibility

- Miracles and exorcisms constitute a substantial portion of Acts (about one-fifth of the book), along with the speeches (one-fourth).
- Keener's research on miracles was initially meant to be a footnote to his Acts commentary but expanded to a two-volume book.
- Keener posits that, as ancient historical documents, the Gospels and Acts are reliable and careful with their sources.
- Western scholars often doubt miracle accounts because they have the idea that eyewitnesses would not report such events. Keener argues that this is a specifically Western problem, and many other cultures would find this notion absurd.

VI. Countering Arguments Against Miracles

- Keener challenges the idea that miracles are legendary accretions that developed over generations without eyewitness testimony.
- He references the case of David Friedrich Strauss' friend, Morica, who was healed after being diagnosed with a spinal problem, and how Strauss still attributed it to psychosomatic causes despite the clear medical history.
- He provides modern, documented medical cases of dramatic healings as evidence of credible miracles:
- Healing of a girl's deafness from auditory nerve damage, confirmed by an audiologist.
- Healings in Mozambique, documented in medical studies.
- Healing of Lisa Larios's degenerative bone disease and bone regeneration.
- Bruce Vanatta's small intestine growing to more than twice its length, documented.
- Healing of a broken back, deep gash wounds, broken ankles, and vertical heterophoria.
- These examples are drawn from medical reports where testing was done both before and after.

VII. Eyewitness Testimony and the Logic of Miracles

- Eyewitness testimony is important in many fields like sociology, anthropology, journalism, historiography and law; therefore it should be considered as evidence for miracles.
- Miracles are unique events in history and cannot be replicated, which makes eyewitnesses even more important.
- He posits that a smaller number of eyewitnesses should carry more weight than a greater number of skeptical non-witnesses.
- Keener admits that not everyone who is prayed for gets healed, but that God sometimes does work in dramatic ways.

VIII. Eyewitness Accounts of Healing and Resuscitation

- Keener provides several eyewitness accounts from his own contacts who have seen healings such as:
- The disappearance of a large goiter in an instant.
- The healing of a woman in the Philippines with an unbendable implant in her leg.
- The healing of a baby from severe scalding.
- A woman named Barbara, who was healed and able to walk.
- Healing of Blindness, with examples such as a man in India with clouded eyes, a woman in Congo and a man with macular degeneration.
- Keener discusses several accounts of raisings from the dead:
- He and his wife know at least 10 people who have witnessed or experienced such resuscitations.
- He references Church Fathers, John Wesley, and Dr. Chauncey Crandall, a cardiologist, who prayed for a man who was flatlined for 40 minutes and he was restored to life without brain damage.
- He also mentions Dr. Sean George, and also other instances that have been reported by people that he knows such as from Nigeria, India, and Philippines.
- Keener emphasizes that these resurrections seem to cluster in circles where people are praying.

- He concludes by emphasizing that these are not coincidences. There are circles in which God is working for the Gospel's sake or through the spirit's direction. He also emphasizes that these types of resuscitations do not happen in every single case.

IX. Conclusion

- Dr. Keener argues for the credibility of miracles in Acts, based on the historical context of the text, parallels in Luke-Acts, medical evidence, and numerous eyewitness accounts of dramatic healings and raisings from the dead.
- He is challenging the Western bias that miracles are impossible and encouraging a more open-minded approach to the evidence.

This briefing document captures the core arguments and evidence that Dr. Keener presents in his lecture excerpt. It can serve as a good summary of the main ideas and facts for those interested in the topic of miracles in the book of Acts.

4. Acts Study Guide: Session 4, Credibility of Miracles

Acts, Lecture 4: Credibility of Miracles Study Guide

Quiz

1. How does Dr. Keener describe Luke's skill as a historian, and what is a key challenge in assessing historical texts like Acts?
2. Dr. Keener characterizes Luke as a very good historian, noting that while the book of Acts is a historical monograph, there's often a challenge in finding corroborating evidence for all historical claims, which can limit historical verification of events. Historians also must consider that texts are themselves a form of evidence.
3. What literary technique does Luke employ in his two-volume work, and what are some examples of this?
4. Luke uses a technique of parallel lives or events in Luke and Acts, similar to the parallel biographies in Greek tradition. Examples include Jesus and the church being anointed by the Spirit, similar sign and wonders, and the trials of Jesus and Paul before governors.
5. How does the length of Luke-Acts compare to other New Testament books, and what does this suggest about their production?
6. Luke-Acts, like Matthew, is roughly the same length as each of the others, while Mark is half the length and John two-thirds, suggesting that these texts were likely produced using standardized scroll lengths, likely due to the cost of materials.
7. What are some of the purposes for which the book of Acts may have been written?
8. Besides a historical account, Acts may have been written to record legal precedents favorable to early Christians, act as legal ammunition in defending them against persecution, and to argue for the legality of Christianity and demonstrate its continuity with Old Testament traditions.
9. What are some major themes that Dr. Keener highlights in Luke-Acts?

10. Dr. Keener points to prayer, signs and wonders, the Holy Spirit, evangelism, the marginalized, and cross-cultural communication as major themes, with a particular emphasis on the role of the Spirit in evangelism across cultural boundaries.
11. How does Dr. Keener address the Western scholarly critique of miracles in the Bible?
12. Dr. Keener argues that Western scholars' skepticism towards miracles arises from a culturally specific bias, and he contrasts that with the experience of many people worldwide who claim to have witnessed such events, noting it is not a universal view.
13. How does the story of Strauss's friend, Morica, challenge Strauss's own arguments against miracles?
14. Strauss's friend, Morica, was cured of a debilitating spinal condition through prayer, demonstrating the very type of miraculous healing that Strauss dismissed as legend, yet Strauss rejected it as psychosomatic, showing his bias.
15. What does Dr. Keener say about the reliability of eyewitness testimony, and how does he apply it to miracle claims?
16. Dr. Keener argues that eyewitness testimony is a crucial form of evidence in various fields, including history, law, and journalism, and it should also be seriously considered in miracle accounts. He believes that fewer reliable eyewitnesses should count more than a large number of skeptical non-witnesses.
17. What evidence does Keener provide to support the reality of contemporary miracles?
18. Dr. Keener cites various accounts of healings and resuscitations including medical documentation, testimonies from doctors and other credible individuals, and examples from around the world, noting that these events often occur in circles where people regularly pray.
19. Why does Dr. Keener stress that these miraculous events often happen within communities that pray, and why is this significant?

Dr. Keener stresses that many accounts of miraculous events cluster in circles of people who pray regularly, which suggests that these events are not random. He argues that it is "probably more than coincidence" and that there is a correlation between faith and the experience of miraculous events.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the literary parallels between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. How do these parallels contribute to Luke's overall theological and historical objectives, and why are these connections significant for the reader?
2. Discuss the significance of the theme of "the marginalized" in Luke-Acts. How does Luke portray the marginalized, and what does this reveal about the character of the early Christian movement? How do these themes connect with our contemporary understanding of social justice?
3. Evaluate the legal and apologetic purposes of the book of Acts. How does Luke present Christianity to the Roman world? What is the role of miracle accounts in this apologetic strategy?
4. How does Dr. Keener's perspective on miracles differ from a typical Western scholarly approach? What are the implications of these differences for understanding biblical narratives? How do these differing perspectives challenge our assumptions about history and the supernatural?
5. Critically assess the use of eyewitness testimony as evidence for miracles. What are the strengths and limitations of relying on eyewitness accounts, and how should we evaluate these claims? What role should faith play in interpreting these events?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Historical Monograph:** A detailed scholarly study of a single topic in history, often using primary sources and adhering to established historical methods, such as the book of Acts.
- **Parallel Lives:** A literary technique of pairing two figures with similar characteristics or experiences to highlight similarities and differences, often used in ancient biographies. Luke employs this in his two-volume work.
- **A Priori Bias:** A preconceived notion or prejudice held before examining evidence, which can influence the interpretation of that evidence, which Dr. Keener notes might affect the way one views miracle accounts.
- **Psychosomatic:** A physical illness or other condition that is caused or aggravated by a mental factor such as internal conflict or stress. It is a contested explanation for supposed miracles.
- **Accretions:** The process of growth or enlargement by gradual buildup or addition; often used to describe how a story might be embellished over time through retelling. Strauss claims that miracles grew this way.
- **Heterophoria:** A condition of the eyes that can cause double vision or other visual disturbances, such as vertical heterophoria. This condition was said to have been healed dramatically by prayer.
- **Macular Degeneration:** A medical condition that results in a loss of vision in the center of the visual field (the macula) due to damage to the retina. This condition, often irreversible, is cited in a testimony for miraculous healing.
- **Cyanosis:** A bluish discoloration of the skin resulting from poor circulation or inadequate oxygenation of the blood. This is cited as part of the evidence of the death of a man before being miraculously resuscitated.
- **Resuscitation:** The act of reviving someone from unconsciousness or apparent death, especially after a cardiac arrest. Keener uses a number of accounts to indicate that such events occur in a seemingly miraculous fashion.

5. FAQs on Keener, Acts, Session 4, Credibility of Miracles, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Exploring the Book of Acts and the Credibility of Miracles

- **Why is it important to consider the historical context of the Book of Acts?**
- The Book of Acts is a historical monograph written by Luke, who, by historical standards, is considered a very good historian. Understanding the historical context, including its literary parallels with other works of the time, like Plutarch's parallel biographies, helps us interpret the text accurately. However, it is also part of the Christian canon, which means Christians believe that God speaks to us through this book as well.
- **How does Luke use parallels between Jesus and the apostles in his two-volume work of Luke-Acts?**
- Luke deliberately uses literary parallels to draw connections between Jesus' ministry in his Gospel and the ministry of the apostles, particularly Peter and Paul, in Acts. These include similarities in programmatic statements (Isaiah 61 for Jesus and Joel 2 for the Church), signs and wonders (healing of the paralyzed), trials, responses to persecution (forgiveness), and commitment to God before death. These parallels help to highlight the continuation of God's work from Jesus through the early church.
- **What evidence suggests the books of Luke and Acts were carefully crafted and not simply random narratives?**
- The lengths of the scrolls of Luke and Acts, as well as Matthew, are roughly equal, and close to the maximum lengths of normal scrolls of their time, suggesting careful planning and intentionality. Standardized scroll lengths were likely used to keep the price down, suggesting both Luke and the early church were careful and intentional in the literary endeavor that became Luke-Acts. Additionally, the practice of public readings within the early church likely led to revisions and different editions, pointing to a deliberate publication process.

- **What are some of the major themes Luke emphasizes in the Book of Acts?**
- Key themes in Acts include the power of prayer, the significance of signs and wonders, the work of the Holy Spirit, the importance of evangelism and witnessing, the inclusion of marginalized groups (particularly Gentiles), cross-cultural communication, and the unstoppable spread of the gospel. These themes are often presented with the underlying motif of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
- **What are some of the arguments presented for the reliability of miracles in Acts and today?**
- The text highlights a challenge to Western skepticism of miracles, pointing to the fact that reports of miracles are common in other parts of the world. It presents several medical cases as evidence, including healings of deafness, degenerative bone disease, and an incredible growth of a missing section of the small intestine. Eyewitness accounts are also noted as a valid form of evidence, similar to how they are used in other fields like law, sociology, and journalism.
- **How does the text address the claim that miracle stories develop over generations like myths?**
- The idea that miracle stories arise from "legendary accretions" is challenged by citing the case of David Friedrich Strauss' friend who was healed of a debilitating spinal problem. The argument notes that this happened in front of Strauss, who still refused to believe it was a miracle. This shows that immediate, witnessed healings are a possibility. It also points out that people in the West often treat the gospels with skepticism from the outset because of the miracle stories they contain.
- **Does the text suggest that all prayer for healing is always answered with physical healing?**
- No, the text explicitly states that not everyone who is prayed for is healed, and that this includes people who have faith. The author notes his own experiences with male pattern baldness, needing glasses, and having experienced miscarriages despite prayer and faith. The claim is not that prayer always results in a healing, but that sometimes God chooses to heal in dramatic ways, showing that these healings, rather than always being answered, often cluster in Christian circles where they frequently pray for such things, with direct leading from the spirit or for the cause of the gospel.

- **What specific examples of extraordinary miracles are highlighted to support the claims made by the speaker?**
- The text provides numerous examples, including the instant healing of deafness, bone regeneration, the growth of an adult's small intestine to a functional length, instant healing of broken bones, the disappearance of a large goiter, the healing of blindness with both clouding of eyes and macular degeneration, the instant repair of severe burns, and numerous documented cases of individuals being resuscitated from death (often verified by medical professionals), even after extended periods of no pulse or heartbeat. These are all meant to suggest that miracles are possible and that they do happen.