

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 13

Acts 10-11

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Keener, Acts, Session 13, Acts 10-11, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Craig Keener **explains** Acts chapters 10 and 11, **focusing** on the story of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. The lecture **details** Cornelius's conversion and the subsequent debate within the early church about the inclusion of Gentiles. Keener **highlights** the role of visions, the Holy Spirit, and the breaking down of cultural and religious barriers. He **connects** these events to broader themes in Luke-Acts, **emphasizing** the importance of cross-cultural mission and the unity of the church.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Acts, Session 13 – 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
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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 Acts chapters 10 and 11:

Briefing Document: Acts Chapters 10-11 - Dr. Craig Keener Lecture 13

I. Introduction

This document summarizes Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts 10-11, focusing on key themes, characters, and events within these chapters. The lecture explores the pivotal shift in the early church's understanding of its mission, moving from a primarily Jewish focus to embracing Gentiles. It also highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in leading this transition.

II. Acts 10: The Conversion of Cornelius

- **Cornelius, the God-Fearer:** Cornelius is introduced as a Roman centurion stationed in Caesarea. He was not a full proselyte to Judaism, but rather a "God-fearer," a Gentile who honored the Jewish God.
- He was admired by Jewish people due to his almsgiving, "He was appreciated by the Jewish people who knew him because of his almsgiving." This demonstrates his devotion to God and his humble embrace of Jewish customs.
- Keener highlights God's interest in seekers like Cornelius, even those not part of the covenant. "And there's a sense in which none of us seeks after God, but there's also a sense in which God has moved our hearts to seek after him."
- **The Centurion's Background:** Centurions were often interested in religion due to their demanding lifestyle. Roman law restricted soldiers' official marriages during service (20+ years), allowing informal relationships with concubines.
- Cornelius likely had influence, evidenced by his ability to send a soldier and servants. He may have been a Roman citizen or had ties to the area.
- **Divine Visions:** Both Cornelius and Peter receive separate but divinely coordinated visions, showing God's initiative in this encounter. Cornelius' vision leads him to send for Peter.

- Peter's vision on the rooftop includes a sheet containing a mix of clean and unclean animals, challenging his deeply held Jewish dietary laws. "In chapter 10 in verse 12, the animals that are let down in the sheet include clean animals, that is those they were allowed to eat according to Leviticus 11, and also unclean animals."
- The vision symbolizes that what God has cleansed, Peter should not call unclean, alluding to the inclusion of Gentiles. "But God is the one who declared the things unclean to begin with, and God can declare anything clean, including, as we see later on is the lesson of this in 10:28 and 15:9, including Gentiles."
- **Peter's Journey and Reception:** Cornelius' messengers find Peter through directions related to Simon the tanner. "Well, tanners would normally be near water, and they would be in the tanning district, because that was the district that stank, one of the districts that stank most."
- Peter, prompted by the Holy Spirit, receives the messengers, and they lodge overnight. "While he's trying to think about what this vision could mean, the Holy Spirit says, there are some men that I've sent to you, go with them."
- Peter brings six companions for witness and safety. "Well, he wants to have witnesses for whatever happens that they didn't do anything wrong."
- **Cornelius' Homage and Peter's Response** Cornelius initially offers homage to Peter as if he were divine, which Peter refuses. Peter explains that Jews do not enter the homes of those considered unclean or eat with them. Peter refutes this old idea of uncleanness and is open to connecting with the Gentiles.
- **Peter's Sermon and the Holy Spirit** Peter preaches about Jesus as a benefactor and the one anointed by God, referencing Luke 4 and Isaiah 61. He proclaims Jesus as Lord of all and the supreme judge.
- The sermon is interrupted by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles present. "In this case, it's not a person interrupting the speaker, though. It's the Holy Spirit."
- This outpouring is seen as confirmation of God's acceptance of the Gentiles as part of his covenant people. It is a shocking development to the Jewish believers.
- **Baptism of Gentiles:** Peter and his companions witness the Gentiles speaking in tongues. This is similar to the events of Pentecost, further confirming the work of the Spirit.

- Peter orders them to be baptized, recognizing that God had already accepted them through the outpouring of the Spirit, and therefore there is no need for circumcision. "Because they recognize that if God has already accepted these people as members of the covenant community...Well, if they've already received the greater baptism in the Spirit, how much more ought they to receive merely the water baptism that pointed to the baptism of the Spirit?"
- The believers lodge with the Gentiles, further breaking down social and religious barriers.

III. Acts 11: Peter Defends His Actions

- **Confrontation in Jerusalem:** Upon returning to Jerusalem, Peter is questioned by the apostles and elders regarding his interaction with Gentiles, particularly the act of eating with them.
- "Now in chapter 11, verses 1 through 18, Peter gets called on the carpet. Yes, he was the chief apostle, but still, he was part of the leadership team. He wasn't the only one."
- This highlights the existing tension about the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts.
- **Peter's Defense:** Peter recounts his vision and the pouring out of the Spirit upon the Gentiles. "Peter says, look, God told me to go. And also, God baptized them in the Holy Spirit, the same way as he did with us."
- He emphasizes God's initiative and his own obedience to the Spirit.
- Peter's account shows that divine necessity was behind his actions: "And one of the strongest arguments from necessity, where it was, I had to do this, I had no other choice, was divine necessity. God told me to do it."
- **Acceptance in Jerusalem:** The leaders in Jerusalem, though surprised, acknowledge that God has granted eternal life to the Gentiles. "Wow, even the Gentiles, God is giving them eternal life."
- This marks a significant shift in the church's theology and mission.

IV. The Church in Antioch

- **Transition to Antioch:** Luke transitions to the ministry in Antioch, highlighting the church's movement from rural Galilee to urban Jerusalem and now to the cosmopolitan city of Antioch.

- The church in Antioch was a blend of Jewish and Gentile believers, and marked an increasing openness toward Gentiles.
- **Missionary Activity:** Jewish believers from the diaspora, particularly Cyprus and Cyrene, were instrumental in reaching Hellenists (Greeks and Hellenized Syrians). "These believers are spread abroad and particularly the ones from Cyprus and Cyrene begin speaking also to Hellenists...So, in this case, it doesn't mean Hellenistic Jews, but it means Greeks or Hellenized Syrians who had adopted Greek culture."
- Antioch, a major urban center, was religiously diverse and tolerant of cultural adaptations.
- **Barnabas and Saul (Paul):** Barnabas, recognizing the growth of the church in Antioch, brings Saul (Paul) from Tarsus to help with the ministry. "Barnabas is good at connecting people like he connected Paul with Peter and James."
- This is a key moment in church history as Saul will become a major figure in the mission to the Gentiles.
- **First Called "Christians":** The disciples in Antioch are first called "Christians," a nickname that later became a badge of honor. "The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." It is derived from the naming of political parties and is initially used as a form of ridicule.
- **Prophets and Famine Relief:** Prophets from Jerusalem arrive and prophesy about a coming famine in the time of Claudius. The series of famines was devastating, particularly in Judea.
- The church in Antioch, despite its own challenges, takes up a collection for believers in Judea, demonstrating cross-cultural and sacrificial giving. "So even though they had more resources, this was an act of sacrifice."
- This highlights the unity of the church across cultures and regions, and also highlights the prophetic preparation for crisis, similar to that in Genesis 41 with Joseph.

V. Key Themes

- **The Holy Spirit's Leading:** The Holy Spirit is the primary agent in guiding the church's mission and breaking down cultural and religious barriers.
- **Inclusion of Gentiles:** The narrative of Acts 10 and 11 showcases the shift from a primarily Jewish focus to a church that includes Gentiles as full members of God's people.
- **Overcoming Prejudice:** The lecture emphasizes the importance of overcoming personal and cultural biases to embrace God's wider plan for humanity.
- **Cultural Adaptation:** The church learns the need for flexibility and adaptability in diverse cultural settings in order to spread the gospel.
- **Unity of Believers:** The emphasis on mutual aid and support across different church communities emphasizes the unity of believers as one body in Christ.

VI. Conclusion

Dr. Keener's lecture underscores the critical importance of Acts 10 and 11 as the turning point for the church's expansion and the inclusion of Gentiles. The Spirit's work, alongside the courageous decisions of early leaders like Peter and Barnabas, led to a more inclusive and globally-minded understanding of the church's mission. This lecture calls for an ongoing willingness to be led by the Spirit to break down boundaries and engage diverse people groups.

4. Acts Study Guide: Session 13, Acts 10-11

Acts Chapters 10-11 Study Guide

Quiz

1. How does the text describe Cornelius's religious standing before his conversion? Cornelius was a God-fearer, meaning he recognized the Jewish God as the true God, but he was not a full proselyte because he was not circumcised and had not become part of the covenant people. He was a righteous Gentile.
2. What was the significance of Peter's rooftop vision involving animals? Peter's vision of the animals, both clean and unclean, challenged his deeply held Jewish dietary laws. This vision was a divine message preparing him to accept Gentiles into the Christian community, which was previously considered "unclean" by his traditions.
3. Why did the messengers from Cornelius call out at the outer gate of Simon the tanner's house instead of entering? They called out because they, being Gentiles, were considered ritually unclean and therefore were not permitted to enter the home of a Jew. This practice is further evidence of strict Jewish customs concerning purity and separation.
4. How did the Holy Spirit guide Peter in his encounter with Cornelius's messengers? While Peter was contemplating the meaning of his vision, the Holy Spirit spoke to him directly, telling him that men had been sent by God, and that he was to go with them without hesitation. The Spirit provided immediate direction and assurance.
5. Why did Peter take six companions with him when he went to see Cornelius? Peter took six men with him to serve as witnesses to the events that would transpire. This fulfilled the legal requirement for two or three witnesses, and Peter doubled that number for further confirmation that he was not doing anything wrong.
6. What was unusual about Cornelius's behavior toward Peter when he arrived? Cornelius bowed down before Peter as if Peter were divine or a king. This was an act of homage that was commonly offered to deities and rulers at the time, and it was not appropriate for a human being.
7. How did Peter explain his presence in a Gentile home to Cornelius? Peter explained that, traditionally, a Jew would not enter the home of a Gentile.

However, God had shown him a vision that changed his perspective on these social norms and boundaries, demonstrating that God can declare anyone clean and welcomed in His community.

8. What did the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles at Cornelius's house signify to the Jewish believers who were present? The outpouring of the Spirit, evidenced by the Gentiles speaking in tongues, indicated that God was accepting the Gentiles as members of His covenant people. It was the same sign that they had experienced at Pentecost, which signified that these Gentiles would be partners in the ministry.
9. Why was Peter called to Jerusalem after returning from Caesarea? After his experience with Cornelius and his household, Peter was called to Jerusalem to account for his actions. The leaders there had heard about his time with Gentiles, which was considered a serious offense by the more conservative believers.
10. What was the main issue of concern that the Jerusalem leaders had about Peter's actions in Caesarea? The main issue was that Peter had been eating and staying with Gentiles, which violated Jewish laws about avoiding contact with those considered ritually unclean. The implication was that he was compromising his Jewish identity and the covenant.

Answer Key

1. Cornelius was a God-fearer, meaning he recognized the Jewish God as the true God, but he was not a full proselyte because he was not circumcised and had not become part of the covenant people. He was a righteous Gentile.
2. Peter's vision of the animals, both clean and unclean, challenged his deeply held Jewish dietary laws. This vision was a divine message preparing him to accept Gentiles into the Christian community, which was previously considered "unclean" by his traditions.
3. They called out because they, being Gentiles, were considered ritually unclean and therefore were not permitted to enter the home of a Jew. This practice is further evidence of strict Jewish customs concerning purity and separation.
4. While Peter was contemplating the meaning of his vision, the Holy Spirit spoke to him directly, telling him that men had been sent by God, and that he was to go with them without hesitation. The Spirit provided immediate direction and assurance.

5. Peter took six men with him to serve as witnesses to the events that would transpire. This fulfilled the legal requirement for two or three witnesses, and Peter doubled that number for further confirmation that he was not doing anything wrong.
6. Cornelius bowed down before Peter as if Peter were divine or a king. This was an act of homage that was commonly offered to deities and rulers at the time, and it was not appropriate for a human being.
7. Peter explained that, traditionally, a Jew would not enter the home of a Gentile. However, God had shown him a vision that changed his perspective on these social norms and boundaries, demonstrating that God can declare anyone clean and welcomed in His community.
8. The outpouring of the Spirit, evidenced by the Gentiles speaking in tongues, indicated that God was accepting the Gentiles as members of His covenant people. It was the same sign that they had experienced at Pentecost, which signified that these Gentiles would be partners in the ministry.
9. After his experience with Cornelius and his household, Peter was called to Jerusalem to account for his actions. The leaders there had heard about his time with Gentiles, which was considered a serious offense by the more conservative believers.
10. The main issue was that Peter had been eating and staying with Gentiles, which violated Jewish laws about avoiding contact with those considered ritually unclean. The implication was that he was compromising his Jewish identity and the covenant.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the Cornelius narrative in Acts 10-11, focusing on how it challenges traditional Jewish views and expands the scope of the early Christian community.
2. Analyze the role of the Holy Spirit in the events of Acts 10-11, illustrating how the Spirit's guidance impacts Peter's actions and the inclusion of Gentiles into the Christian faith.
3. Compare and contrast the cultural and religious contexts of Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Antioch, and explain how these contexts influenced the spread of Christianity in Acts 10-11.
4. Explore the themes of cultural adaptation and flexibility demonstrated by the early church in Acts 10-11, and discuss the relevance of these themes for contemporary mission efforts.
5. Assess the importance of the famine relief sent from Antioch to Jerusalem in Acts 11, and how this action demonstrates the unity of the church and the application of Christian ethics across cultural and geographical boundaries.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **God-fearer:** A Gentile who was sympathetic to Judaism, believed in the Jewish God, but had not fully converted to Judaism, especially by being circumcised.
- **Proselyte:** A Gentile who had fully converted to Judaism, including being circumcised and observing Jewish laws.
- **Centurion:** A Roman military officer in charge of a century (100 soldiers), often a man of some wealth and status.
- **Hellenist:** A person who adopted Greek culture, language, and customs. In the context of Acts, it usually refers to a Greek-speaking Jew or a Gentile who had been influenced by Greek culture.
- **Diaspora:** The dispersion of Jews outside of Israel, often referring to Jewish communities living throughout the Roman Empire.
- **Eschatological:** Related to the end times or the fulfillment of God's plan for history, including the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

- **Table fellowship:** The act of sharing a meal together, which in the ancient world often implied a bond or relationship, particularly in the context of a covenant relationship.
- **Prophetic movement:** A group of individuals who believe they are inspired by God to deliver divine messages, often including predictions of future events.
- **Cultural Flexibility:** The ability to adapt to new cultural settings by learning the ways of the people in that culture to better minister to them.
- **Unclean (Ritually):** A state of being that, according to Jewish law, prevents a person from participating in certain religious rituals or entering sacred spaces, often associated with contact with Gentiles, certain foods, or other sources of impurity.
- **Benefactor:** One who does good to others; a patron or sponsor. This term was often used by rulers or deities as a title of honor.
- **Anointing:** The act of pouring oil on a person's head, symbolizing divine favor or the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. It can represent a special calling or commission.
- **Covenant People:** A group of people who are bound together under a covenant with God, in this case, the people of Israel or, through inclusion, the Church.
- **Circumcision:** The surgical removal of the foreskin of the penis, which was a sign of the covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham.
- **Holy Spirit:** The third person of the Trinity, the divine agent of the empowerment and guidance of the church.

5. FAQs on Keener, Acts, Session 13, Acts 10-11

Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Acts 10-11

- What was unique about Cornelius, and why is his story significant in Acts 10?**
 Cornelius was a Roman centurion, a "God-fearer" who was devout, gave alms generously, and prayed to the Jewish God. He was not a full convert to Judaism, as he was not circumcised. His story is significant because he was the first Gentile convert to Christianity and it demonstrated that God's salvation was for all people, not just the Jewish people. This was a major turning point in the early church.
- How did Peter's vision of unclean animals prepare him to encounter Cornelius?**
 Peter's vision involved a sheet filled with all kinds of animals, including those considered "unclean" under Jewish law. God commanded him to eat these animals, and when Peter refused, God declared that what he had cleansed could not be considered unclean. This vision challenged Peter's understanding of purity and prepared him to accept the Gentiles, as well as their homes and food, whom he had previously considered ritually unclean.
- Why was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles at Cornelius's house so significant?**
 The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles at Cornelius's house was shocking to the Jewish believers because they had always believed the Spirit was primarily for Israel. The Gentiles received the same spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues, as the Jewish believers had received on the day of Pentecost, indicating their equal inclusion in God's covenant. This event proved that God was accepting Gentiles as full members of the Christian community without requiring them to become Jewish first.
- What was the controversy in Jerusalem regarding Peter's actions with Cornelius?**
 Upon Peter's return to Jerusalem, the apostles and elders confronted him for entering the homes and eating with the uncircumcised Gentiles. This action was considered a serious breach of Jewish purity laws and traditional practice. They believed that Gentiles needed to become Jewish, including circumcision, before being accepted into the community. This led to a strong disagreement, as it was a challenge to the existing structure of the church.

- **How did Peter defend his actions before the church in Jerusalem?** Peter defended his actions by explaining the visions both he and Cornelius had experienced. More importantly, Peter emphasized that God had clearly demonstrated his acceptance of the Gentiles by pouring out the Holy Spirit on them. He reasoned that if God had already accepted them, then how could he deny them the symbolic baptism in water that was much less impactful than the baptism of the Spirit. This divine necessity, supported by the witness of his companions, convinced the church that God was leading them to a new understanding of the gospel's reach.
- **What is the significance of the church in Antioch in the expansion of the Gospel?** Antioch, a cosmopolitan city, was the first place where Jewish believers in Jesus began to openly preach the gospel to non-Jewish people, and the first place where believers were called "Christians." It became the launching pad for mission work to the Gentiles and was a more multicultural environment than Jerusalem. The church in Antioch also demonstrated a new model of how believers could reach people of different backgrounds and integrate them into the church.
- **How did the church in Antioch respond to the prophecy of a coming famine?** The church in Antioch, prompted by a prophecy delivered by visiting prophets from Jerusalem, chose to proactively gather resources to help believers in Judea, where the famine was expected to be especially severe. This demonstrated not only that the church was united across cultural divides but also that they understood the calling to share their resources with those in need, even across great distances. It was an important step in showing that the church's mission was not only focused locally.
- **What does the story of Acts 10-11 tell us about the nature of God's mission and the inclusion of different people groups?** The narrative in Acts 10-11 highlights a significant shift in the early church's understanding of God's mission. It shows God's deliberate action to include Gentiles as full members of the covenant people through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. It challenges traditional cultural barriers, including ritual purity laws, and shows that God cares for all peoples regardless of their ethnicity. This reveals a God who is not bound by human traditions, but is actively moving the church toward inclusivity, demonstrating that salvation is for all who believe.