

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 15

Acts 13-15

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Keener, Acts, Session 15, Acts 13-15, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Craig Keener's lecture analyzes Paul's sermons in Acts 13-15, focusing on **how Paul uses scripture** to connect Jesus to Jewish history and demonstrate God's sovereignty. The lecture also **examines Paul's interactions with various audiences**, noting how he adapted his message and faced opposition, particularly concerning the circumcision of Gentile converts. **Keener explores the cultural and historical context** of Paul's ministry, referencing other ancient sources and highlighting the theological debates surrounding the inclusion of Gentiles in the early church. The lecture concludes by **describing the Jerusalem Council's decision** regarding Gentile inclusion and its immediate aftermath.

2. 19 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Acts, Session 15 – 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
n15.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts chapters 13-15:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on Acts 13-15

Overall Theme: This lecture focuses on the expansion of the Christian mission beyond Jewish circles to include Gentiles, examining Paul's sermons, missionary journeys, and the crucial conflict that arose regarding the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts. Keener highlights the interplay of scripture, culture, and the work of the Holy Spirit in this critical period of early church history.

Key Concepts and Ideas:

1. Paul's Sermon in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13):

- **Scriptural Exposition:** Like Stephen's speech, Paul's sermon is a scripture-based argument showing how the entire history of Israel points towards the coming of Jesus. This approach reflects Jesus' own teaching in Luke 24 where he expounds the scriptures to reveal his mission.
- **Fulfillment of Prophecy:** Paul argues that even the actions of those who condemned Jesus fulfilled scripture, highlighting God's sovereignty in using even evil actions for his good purposes.
- **Quote:** "So, God is so sovereign, that he can work even through human disobedience to achieve his purposes and his plan. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."
- **Messianic Psalms and Prophecies:** Paul cites numerous Old Testament passages, including Psalms 2, 16, and 22, and Isaiah 55, connecting them to Jesus as the Davidic Messiah and demonstrating his resurrection. He also uses Habakkuk 1:5 to warn against rejecting the message. He uses Psalm 16 as a way to discuss Davidic messiah and links it to the resurrection.
- **Gentile Inclusion:** Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6, applying it to himself and the mission to the Gentiles. This move to open up the message to the Gentiles was radical for many Jewish hearers.
- **Quote:** "The servant was Israel. It was God's people... So, as a follower of Jesus, Paul does this."

- **Predestination:** While Jewish people thought they were predestined by lineage, Paul implies that Gentiles are also ordained for salvation (13:48).

1. **Opposition and Departure:**

- **Aristocratic Opposition:** Prominent women and local aristocrats, often with political influence, opposed Paul and Barnabas, leading to their expulsion from Pisidian Antioch.
- **Symbolic Act:** Shaking dust off their feet signifies leaving the area as if it were profane, an act with parallels to how Jewish people would leave pagan lands.
- **Ministry Continues:** Despite opposition, Paul and Barnabas moved on to Iconium.

1. **Ministry in Iconium and Lystra (Acts 14):**

- **Language and Communication:** They spoke in Greek and used interpreters when needed for the local Phrygian dialect.
- **Local Culture:** They encountered Phrygian religious practices, including worship of the Phrygian mother goddess and the emperor.
- **Healing and Misinterpretation:** The healing of a disabled man leads the locals to misinterpret Paul and Barnabas as gods (Zeus and Hermes), referencing a local legend of Baucus and Philemon.
- **Quote:** "Well, the Phrygians take it a little bit differently. They don't take this as an eschatological sign breaking into history from God's promised kingdom to his people. They view it in terms of local Phrygian legend."
- **Rejection of Worship:** Paul and Barnabas reject this worship, using language related to the one true God, the creator of nature, in terms that would resonate with local Anatolian farmers while also drawing on Jewish apologetics.
- **Mob Violence:** Jewish opposition from Antioch stirred up a crowd which turned violent, stoning Paul. Mobs are presented as quick to change opinions, not knowing what they are mad about.

1. **Consolidation and Return:**

- **Derbe:** They continued to Derbe where they preach the gospel, getting farther off the established roadways.
- **Courageous Return:** Paul and Barnabas bravely return to the cities they had evangelized, despite the danger.

- **Emphasis on Tribulation:** Their message to new believers includes the reality of suffering as a necessary part of entering the kingdom.
- **Quote:** "The summary of their preaching is, that through much tribulation, we must enter the kingdom of God."
- **Appointment of Elders:** They appoint elders in local churches as a structure for the community and growth of faith. This also creates local leadership even for new congregations of believers.
- **Quote:** "So, they appoint them, even though this is fairly recent that these people have come to faith in Jesus, they have to have somebody, they have to have some sort of structure to keep the thing working and keep the thing alive."
- **Reporting to Antioch:** Paul and Barnabas return to their home base of Antioch, which is described as more supportive of their Gentile mission.

1. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15):

- **Controversy Over Circumcision:** A major conflict arose due to some believers from Judea insisting that Gentile converts needed to be circumcised to be saved.
- **Differing Views:** Jewish Christians held varying views; most believed that Gentiles could be righteous and saved without circumcision. However, the more conservative side thought that Gentiles would need to become a proselyte.
- **Paul's Delegation:** Paul and Barnabas, along with Titus and others, were sent to Jerusalem as representatives of the Antioch church to resolve this.
- **Jerusalem Church as Center:** Jerusalem is considered the center of the church, and people looked to it for guidance.
- **Pharisees and Nationalism:** The Pharisees and a rise of conservative nationalism created tension. They valued tradition and traditional interpretations of scripture more than seeing signs and wonders.
- **Peter's Testimony:** Peter speaks in the council, referencing the signs and wonders God did for gentiles. Peter's voice as a known member of the Jerusalem community was important and carries more weight than Paul's would have in this situation.
- **Quote:** "Peter, who is known in the local community, speaks up."

- **James's Role:** James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, plays a crucial role in bridging the divide and creating a consensus, drawing on scriptures from Amos.
- **Quote:** "James was highly respected locally. And James speaks up in verses 13 through 16... So, he's the one who can be a bridge."
- **Scriptural Argument:** James bases his argument on Amos 9, noting how in the Greek translation, the "remnant of Edom" becomes "remnant of Adam", including a focus on the nations as a part of God's people.
- **Compromise and Decree:** The council agreed that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised, but should abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, blood, and meat, in line with basic Noachide laws. This helped resolve the issue of table fellowship with Gentiles who weren't considered pure.
- **Circular Letter:** A letter, written in excellent Greek by Hellenistic Jewish scribes, outlining this decision is sent to churches in Syria and Cilicia. The letter emphasizes the inclusion of Gentile believers as "brothers and sisters."
- **Unity and Division:** While this resolution brought a temporary unity, Keener notes that it did not entirely last. The lecture ends with a foreshadowing of the division between Paul and Barnabas.

Key Takeaways:

- **God's Sovereignty:** God works through human actions, even evil ones, to fulfill his plans.
- **Scriptural Foundation:** The early church's understanding of Jesus and its mission was rooted in scripture, particularly the Old Testament.
- **Inclusivity of Gentiles:** The gospel message was intended for all people, not just Jews.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Missionaries had to navigate diverse cultural contexts, communicating the gospel in ways that were relevant to their audiences.
- **Importance of Leadership:** The role of respected leaders in conflict resolution.
- **Constant Struggle:** The early church faced opposition, internal conflicts, and differing interpretations of doctrine.
- **The Church as a Global Entity:** The Jerusalem church had an influence on all the other churches of the time.

4. Acts Study Guide: Session 15, Acts 13-15

Acts Chapters 13-15 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. How did Paul use the Old Testament scriptures in his sermon at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13)?
2. What is the significance of the phrase "shaking the dust off your feet" when Paul and Barnabas left Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13)?
3. Describe the misunderstanding the Lycaonians had when Paul healed a lame man in Lystra (Acts 14)?
4. What was the common view of the role of elders within Jewish communities during the time of the early church?
5. Why was the church in Antioch considered a more suitable "home base" for Paul's ministry than Jerusalem (Acts 14)?
6. What theological issue did some Jewish Christians raise in Antioch that caused controversy (Acts 15)?
7. What role did Titus play in the discussions regarding the Gentile converts and circumcision (Acts 15)?
8. Who was James, and why was his participation in the Jerusalem council so important (Acts 15)?
9. What were the main points of agreement between the apostles, elders, and the Pharisees, regarding the obligations of Gentile converts (Acts 15)?
10. How did the Jerusalem church communicate their decision to other churches (Acts 15)?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Paul presented the history of Israel as a continuous narrative pointing towards Jesus, showing how the scriptures were fulfilled in his life, death, and resurrection. He used specific passages to demonstrate that Jesus was the promised Messiah, a descendant of David, and that God's plan had been realized through his arrival.

2. "Shaking the dust off their feet" was a symbolic act, treating the town as profane territory for rejecting their message, similar to how Jewish people would treat Gentile lands or would treat towns from their own people who rejected their message. This action showed that they were turning their backs on those who had rejected God's message and their ministry.
3. The Lycaonians, influenced by local Phrygian legends, mistook Paul and Barnabas for the gods Zeus and Hermes, seeing the miraculous healing not as a demonstration of God's power but as the return of these gods to their region, following a local myth. They were prepared to worship them.
4. Elders were highly respected and they served as leaders in villages, towns, and synagogues. They provided oversight for their communities and could function as a council.
5. Antioch had a more open and accepting attitude towards Gentile converts and their inclusion in the church compared to Jerusalem, which had a more conservative view about the law and what it meant to be part of God's people. Also, Antioch was geographically closer to the areas Paul ministered.
6. Some Jewish Christians argued that Gentile converts needed to be circumcised to be saved. They also believed that they needed to keep the law of Moses to be considered full members of the covenant community, a position that was not shared by all.
7. Luke does not mention Titus, but it can be inferred from Paul's writings, that Titus was a trusted companion and may have been a representative of the Gentile mission. The discussions in Jerusalem involved a proposal that Titus, a Gentile, should be circumcised, but it did not come to pass.
8. James was a respected leader in the Jerusalem church. He was also a brother of Jesus. His participation was critical to bridging the gap between the more conservative Jewish Christians and the more progressive factions of the church and he was generally respected as a fair and pious leader.
9. They agreed that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised to be saved and that they needed only to adhere to a basic set of rules like abstaining from idolatry, sexual immorality, consuming blood, and meat that had been strangled. They agreed to the more lenient view of table fellowship, while the status of their inclusion in God's people was not resolved.

10. The Jerusalem church drafted a letter in the most eloquent Greek to be circulated to the various churches through messengers. The content of the letter addressed the conclusions of the council, expressing that it had reached a consensus with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the role of the Old Testament scriptures in Paul's speech in Pisidian Antioch, paying special attention to how he interprets and applies key passages.
2. Discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by the cultural and religious diversity encountered by Paul and Barnabas in their missionary journeys in Acts 13-14.
3. Examine the significance of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, including the various perspectives present and the implications of the council's decision for the early church.
4. Compare and contrast the different responses to the gospel message in the cities visited by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13-14, and consider why those responses may have differed in such ways.
5. Explore the themes of unity and diversity within the early church as reflected in Acts chapters 13-15. How do these themes inform the challenges and opportunities that face the contemporary church today?

Glossary

- **Bezera Shavuah:** A Jewish hermeneutical principle where texts are linked based on a common key term or theme.
- **Decurions:** Members of local councils in Roman colonies, who held political power.
- **Diaspora Judaism:** Jewish communities living outside of the land of Israel, who promoted Judaism and welcomed converts.
- **Eschatological:** Pertaining to the end times or final events in history.
- **Gerousia:** Clubs made up of elders in the Greek East, who wielded influence in the communities.
- **Hillelites:** A more lenient school of thought among the Pharisees, especially in regard to Gentiles.
- **Hyperbole:** Exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally.
- **Lycaonia:** A region in Asia Minor that includes cities like Lystra and Derbe.
- **Monotheism:** The belief in one God.
- **Noachide Laws:** A set of basic commandments that Jewish tradition holds that God gave to Noah for all humanity.
- **Orthopraxy:** Correct conduct or practice, specifically in religious life.
- **Phrygia:** A region in Asia Minor, known for its unique culture and its connection to the worship of the Phrygian mother goddess.
- **Polis:** A Greek city-state.
- **Proselytes:** Converts to a new faith.
- **Septuagint:** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible.
- **Shammites:** A stricter school of thought among the Pharisees, especially in regard to Gentiles.
- **Via Sebast (Augustus Highway):** A major Roman road in Asia Minor.

5. FAQs on Keener, Acts, Session 15, Acts 13-15 Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ on Acts 13-15 Based on Dr. Craig Keener's Lecture

1. How does Paul's speech in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13) connect to Jesus' teachings and the Old Testament?

Paul's speech, similar to Stephen's earlier speech, is a scripture exposition that shows how the entire history of Israel points to the coming of Jesus. This approach mirrors Jesus' own explanations in Luke 24, where He expounds on how the scriptures foretold His mission, death, and resurrection, as well as the mission of His followers. Paul demonstrates how specific Old Testament texts, such as those about David's lineage, prophecies of the Messiah, and even events of suffering, are fulfilled in Jesus. By doing this, Paul contextualizes Jesus' life and mission within the long history of God's plan.

2. What is the significance of the claim that those who condemned Jesus were fulfilling scripture?

This highlights God's sovereignty. Even when people act in disobedience and with evil intent, God can work through those actions to achieve his predetermined plan. This theme of God using human disobedience for good is a recurring idea within Luke-Acts, showing a God who is ultimately in control and can turn evil into good for His purposes. This concept is also applicable to individual believer's lives where God can bring good out of difficult or evil circumstances.

3. How does Paul use Old Testament passages in his message about Jesus?

Paul strategically uses various Old Testament texts to present his case for Jesus as the Messiah. He cites Psalms, such as Psalm 2 and 16, to demonstrate Jesus' divine sonship and resurrection. He also uses Isaiah passages to show that Jesus fulfills the promise to David and is the light to the Gentiles. Additionally, Paul employs the hermeneutical principle of "Bezera Shavuah," linking texts based on shared key terms, to build a cohesive argument. By quoting Habakkuk, he emphasizes the need to pay attention to the message of salvation or face judgment. These passages tie Jesus to Jewish hopes for a Messiah and demonstrate that Jesus' life and ministry fulfill scripture.

4. Why were Gentiles so interested in Paul's message, and how did this lead to conflict?

Many Gentiles, particularly "God-fearers" who were attracted to Judaism, were drawn to Paul's message as it offered them good news and salvation. However, the concept that Gentiles were also included in God's plan and could receive salvation without first becoming Jews (through circumcision) was revolutionary and shocking to some Jewish hearers. This inclusion of Gentiles and their equal status caused an uproar and led to conflict with some of Paul's Jewish contemporaries.

5. What was the significance of Paul and Barnabas shaking the dust off their feet?

The act of shaking dust off one's feet when leaving a place was a symbolic gesture in Jewish culture, signifying that the place was considered profane, much like Gentile territory. By performing this act, Paul and Barnabas were indicating that those who rejected their message, whether Jewish or Gentile, had rejected the covenant and were treating God's message as profane. This shows a seriousness of rejecting the gospel message and highlights that it was important to consider the impact of the rejection as a rejection of God.

6. Why did the people of Lystra mistake Paul and Barnabas for gods?

The Lycaonians, influenced by their Phrygian culture and mythology, believed Paul and Barnabas to be the gods Zeus and Hermes after witnessing Paul heal a disabled man. This interpretation arose from a local legend where Zeus and Hermes had been rejected in their area, except by one couple. The people's reaction was a mixture of trying to avoid repeating this rejection and a recognition of the power these men had. They viewed these men not as God's representatives, but as gods.

7. How did Paul respond to the attempt to worship him as a god?

Paul and Barnabas vehemently rejected the attempts to worship them. Paul countered by pointing to the true God, the creator and ruler of nature, using arguments that would resonate with the Anatolian farmers of the region. He highlighted the folly of idolatry, emphasizing that he was simply a messenger of the one true God and was attempting to align their understanding with the truth rather than accepting the misinterpretations about their identities and roles.

8. What was the central issue addressed at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and what was the outcome?

The central issue at the Jerusalem Council was whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised and follow Jewish law to be saved and have fellowship. After vigorous debate and a process of careful consideration, a consensus was reached. It was decided that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to be part of the church. However, they were expected to abstain from idolatry, immorality, and the consumption of blood. This compromise, which was a victory for the Gentile mission, established a foundation for table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians while addressing the core concerns of the more conservative members of the Jerusalem Church.