

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 16

Acts 15-16

Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Keener, Acts, Session 16, Acts 15-16, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Craig Keener's lecture on Acts 15-16 discusses the **Jerusalem Council**, debating whether it corresponds to Galatians 2 or a different event. He presents various scholarly viewpoints and argues for the **identification of the Jerusalem Council with Galatians 2:1-10**. The lecture then **explains Paul's subsequent missionary journeys**, focusing on his split with Barnabas, partnership with Silas and Timothy, and the events in Philippi, **including an exorcism and its implications**. Finally, Keener addresses the **reality of spiritual encounters**, citing anthropological and personal evidence to support the plausibility of the events described in Acts.

2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Keener, Acts, Session 16 – 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
n16.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 15-16:

Briefing Document: Dr. Craig Keener on Acts 15-16

I. Introduction

- Dr. Keener begins by addressing the complex scholarly debate surrounding the relationship between the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15 and the events recounted in Galatians 2. He frames his lecture with this crucial discussion.
- He emphasizes the value of learning from the text, irrespective of the debates within, stating, "Just the nature of this course is just to take what you find useful and use it."
- The lecture moves from the historical debate, through the actions taken by the apostles, to the impact and effects of those actions.

II. The Jerusalem Council: Acts 15 and its Connection to Galatians 2

- **The Central Debate:** The core question is whether the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 is the same event as the visit described in Galatians 2:1-10. Some scholars argue that Galatians 2 refers to the earlier famine visit described in Acts 11:30 and 12:25.
- **Arguments for Galatians 2 = Acts 11 (Famine Visit):** Paul would not have omitted the famine visit in Galatians, focusing on his independence.
- The decree was limited to Syria and Cilicia, not Galatia, suggesting a pre-Galatian issue.
- The famine visit is not mentioned at all in Galatians 2.
- **Arguments Against Galatians 2 = Acts 11:** No reason to mention the famine visit in Galatians given that it was to establish independence.
- The decree's limited range indicates the issue hadn't reached Galatia yet.
- Discrepancies are greater if equated to the famine visit, as very little overlaps other than Paul and Barnabas' presence.
- It would be odd to ask them to remember the poor during a famine relief visit when they were already doing so.

- The revelation in Galatians 2:2 refers to the gospel revealed to Paul and not the prophecy of Acts 11:28-30.
- Identifying it with the famine visit does not necessarily lead to an earlier date of Galatians.
- **Arguments for Galatians 2 = Acts 15 (Jerusalem Council):** Titus is mentioned in Galatians 2:1-3, and he was likely a Galatian. The famine visit was before Titus was probably converted.
- Both councils (Acts 15 & Galatians 2) have the same object: the inclusion of Gentiles and the need for circumcision.
- Both councils have the same basic outcome: the recognition of Paul's mission and the agreement that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised to be saved.
- Prominent figures (Peter, James, Paul, and Barnabas) are involved in both.
- While there are omissions, these are not problematic. As Fitzmeyer points out, "...none of the differences is significant enough to undermine the substantial agreement of the two reports."
- This provides multiple accounts for the Jerusalem Council rather than it being a "Luke's fiction."
- **Keener's Position:** Dr. Keener aligns with the view that Galatians 2 and Acts 15 describe the same event, i.e., the Jerusalem Council, but with different emphases. He notes that while it may not be the majority opinion, "it's a reasonable position." He supports this with the common themes and players between the two passages.

III. The Split Between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41)

- **Human Fallibility:** God uses fallible people. The conflict between Paul and Barnabas is an example of how strengths, when not carefully managed, can become weaknesses.
- **Clash of Gifts:** Paul's focus on commitment and new areas clashed with Barnabas' desire to give Mark a second chance. This was "a rather severe split," but not necessarily an enmity.
- **God's Providence:** Despite the split, God blessed both new teams (Paul and Silas, and Barnabas and Mark), showing God's ability to work through human disagreements.

- **Silas's Citizenship:** Silas is likely a Roman citizen, which will prove helpful later in Philippi.
- **Unplanned Split:** This split is contrasted with the previous consensus and council meeting. It is not shown to be good, "it wasn't a planned split for strategic reasons."

IV. Paul's Second Missionary Journey and Timothy (Acts 16:1-5)

- **New Team:** Paul takes Silas and Timothy.
- **Return to Established Churches:** He begins by returning to places previously evangelized, reinforcing existing congregations, which is "a very important thing to do."
- **Timothy's Background:** He was raised with knowledge of the Torah by his Jewish mother but was not circumcised because of his Gentile father.
- Paul has Timothy circumcised, not as a requirement for salvation (as emphasized in Galatians 2), but for the sake of mission and cultural contextualization and integration.
- **Contextualization:** Paul's willingness to have Timothy circumcised is not a contradiction of his stance in Galatians 2. It's a pragmatic decision to help the mission and to standardize the young man's status within the community. There is a clear distinction between salvation and mission, stating, "We can't add requirements to salvation other than being in Christ."

V. Guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:6-10)

- **Negative Guidance:** Paul and his team receive negative guidance from the Holy Spirit, being forbidden to go to Asia and Bithynia. Sometimes, God's "no" is temporary.
- **Troas and the Macedonian Vision:** Paul has a vision of a man of Macedonia asking for help, which leads them to go to Europe. This represents the spread of the Christian faith from Asia to Europe.
- **Interpreting the Vision:** The team discerns together, interpreting that the dream means they are to go to Macedonia.
- **God's Timing:** The timing of the vision is important, illustrating the importance of both calling and divine timing.

- **Importance of Guidance:** As they are about to face difficulties, the guidance they received allowed them to know "the Lord wanted me to be here, so it's all right."

VI. Arrival in Philippi (Acts 16:11-15)

- **Favorable Voyage:** They sail to Philippi with favorable winds.
- **Philippi's Identity:** Philippi was a Roman colony, emphasizing Latin, Roman culture, and identification. Its citizens held honorary Roman citizenship.
- **Looking for a Place of Prayer:** Because they had no synagogue, they looked for a place of prayer near water, as was the custom for ritual washings.
- **Women by the River:** They find a group of women, not enough to make up a synagogue. They were located outside the city gate, by the river.
- **Lydia's Conversion:** Lydia, a seller of purple from Thyatira, was present and her heart was opened by God for the gospel.
- Lydia was possibly a freed woman. Her occupation is indicative of prosperity and likely status.
- Lydia provides hospitality and functions as a patron or benefactor.
- Hospitality in the ancient world was a major value, especially for "men and women of God."

VII. Exorcism and Economics (Acts 16:16-24)

- **The Slave Girl:** A slave girl, possessed by a spirit of divination (a Pythoness), follows Paul and the team and proclaims them servants of the Most High God.
- **Demonic Testimony:** While technically true, the demonic testimony is inappropriate, similar to the demons' testimonies in the Gospels. Paul does not want the demon's testimony of who he is and who he serves, "you don't want a demon testifying for you."
- **Exorcism:** Paul exorcises the spirit from the girl. This spiritual liberation contrasts with her continuing physical slavery.
- **Economic Loss:** The slave girl's masters are angry because her ability to bring income through divination is gone. This leads to their persecution of Paul and Silas.

- **Spirit Possession:** The phenomenon of spirit possession is explored using an anthropological view, with the observation that, "seventy-four percent of societies have spirit possession beliefs." The anthropological understanding of it typically views it as an "altered state of consciousness indigenously or locally interpreted in terms of the influence of an alien spirit."
- **Reality of Spirits:** Dr. Keener discusses the reality of spirits and exorcism and provides various pieces of evidence to show the widespread belief in spirits, possession, and exorcism, even among those outside of the Christian faith.
- **Examples of Possession:** Examples are given from the lecture that include: a traditional African exorcist's personal experience with possession, Christian leaders who encountered possessions, and an anthropologist who saw a physical manifestation of the ejection of an evil spirit.

VIII. Conclusion:

- The lecture highlights the interplay of historical debates, missionary strategy, spiritual encounters, and the human element in the spread of the Gospel as described in Acts.
- The importance of understanding the cultural context of the time, both Roman and Jewish, is emphasized throughout.
- Dr. Keener prepares the listeners for the next session, noting that the persecution following the exorcism was something that was also described by Paul in his letters.

This briefing document provides a thorough overview of the significant themes, arguments, and facts from Dr. Keener's lecture on Acts 15-16. It will allow you to engage with the content and its complexities in a more informed way.

4. Acts Study Guide: Session 16, Acts 15-16

Acts Chapters 15-16 Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the central debate surrounding the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, as discussed by Dr. Keener?
2. According to Keener, what is the simplest explanation regarding the relationship between Galatians 2 and Acts 15?
3. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy but not Titus, as explained in the lecture?
4. Why does Dr. Keener argue that Paul ministered in South Galatia, not North Galatia?
5. What was the significance of Troas in the narrative of Acts, and how does the lecture interpret its location geographically?
6. What is the significance of the dream Paul has at Troas and how does it influence his missionary journey?
7. What does the lecture suggest about why Paul and Silas initially sought out a place of prayer near water in Philippi?
8. What does the lecture suggest about Lydia's role in the early church community in Philippi, and what was her occupation?
9. What is the significance of the "spirit of divination" that possessed the slave girl in Philippi?
10. According to the lecture, why did Paul ultimately decide to cast out the spirit from the slave girl, despite its seemingly truthful testimony?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The central debate is whether the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 is the same event as the visit described in Galatians 2, or if it is a separate event entirely, possibly conflated with the famine visit of Acts 11. Some scholars even consider that the account in Galatians is not related to Acts at all.

2. The simplest explanation, according to Keener, is that Galatians 2 and Acts 15 describe the same visit, as they address the same topic and have a number of common features in spite of some omissions.
3. Paul circumcised Timothy for the sake of mission and cultural contextualization since Timothy's mother was Jewish and his father was not; by contrast, Paul did not circumcise Titus as a matter of principle. Adding that requirement to the gospel was seen as counter to salvation by faith alone.
4. Keener argues that Paul ministered in South Galatia, as opposed to North Galatia, because the text of Acts uses the names of provinces and Paul addresses the province of Galatia, including the more populated and developed southern part of the region.
5. Troas was a significant Roman colony with a large population, and it served as a launching point for the gospel to spread into Europe, particularly Macedonia, making it a turning point in Paul's mission. From a geographical perspective, its location between Asia and Europe made its role unique.
6. The dream Paul has at Troas, in which he sees a man of Macedonia asking for help, serves as guidance for his missionary journey, prompting the team to cross into Europe and expand their outreach. It was the positive direction he was seeking after being directed to avoid other regions.
7. Paul and Silas initially sought out a place of prayer near water because they assumed that if any Jewish people were in Philippi, they would likely gather near a water source for ceremonial washings, as a synagogue was not present.
8. Lydia, a seller of purple dye from Thyatira, is depicted as a benefactress and patron of Paul's mission. She opened her home, demonstrating hospitality and support for the early church in Philippi.
9. The "spirit of divination" was a mantic spirit, similar to the Pythoness of the Delphic Oracle, which could provide truthful information but was from an unclean source.
10. Paul ultimately cast out the spirit because he didn't want a demon testifying for him. Just like Jesus did not want demonic testimony in Luke 4, its association with the spirit world undermined the integrity of their message, and further, its testimony risked relativizing the God they preached.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the differing views on the relationship between Acts 15 and Galatians 2, considering the arguments presented by Dr. Keener.
2. Analyze the significance of the shift in Paul's ministry team from Barnabas and Mark to Silas and Timothy, and the potential implications of that change for the missionary journey detailed in Acts 16.
3. Discuss the significance of cultural contextualization in Paul's ministry, using the circumcision of Timothy and the case of Lydia as examples.
4. Using the example of the possessed slave girl in Philippi, discuss the complexity of demonic activity and its interaction with the spread of the gospel in the ancient world, as well as the role of exorcism.
5. Explore the significance of Paul's journey to Macedonia and the establishment of the church in Philippi, considering the cultural and geographical implications of that move, as well as its importance for the story of Acts.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Jerusalem Council:** A gathering of apostles and elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15) to discuss the issue of whether Gentile converts to Christianity needed to be circumcised.
- **Galatians 2:** A passage in the Epistle to the Galatians where Paul recounts his visit to Jerusalem; scholars debate whether this describes the same visit as Acts 15.
- **Ockham's Razor:** A principle of problem-solving that states the simplest explanation is usually the best, applied by Keener in the discussion of the relationship between Galatians 2 and Acts 15.
- **South Galatia/North Galatia:** Regions within the Roman province of Galatia; Keener argues that Paul's missionary work primarily focused on the southern, more populated part of the province.
- **Troas:** A significant Roman colony in northwest Mysia, important as a launch point for Paul's ministry into Europe following a vision.
- **Macedonia:** A region in ancient Greece where Paul first expanded his mission into Europe; Philippi was one of the chief cities.

- **Philippi:** A Roman colony in Macedonia where Paul established one of the earliest churches in Europe and where he encountered Lydia and the possessed slave girl.
- **Lydia:** A businesswoman from Thyatira, described as a seller of purple dye, who converted to Christianity in Philippi and became a major supporter of Paul's ministry.
- **Pythoness:** The term for the priestess of the Delphic Oracle of Apollo, used to describe the spirit possessing the slave girl in Philippi, who had a spirit of divination or prophecy.
- **Sheliach:** Hebrew for “agent” or “representative,” used in the lecture to explain Paul's authority to act on behalf of Jesus in performing exorcisms.
- **Exorcism:** The act of casting out evil spirits, as demonstrated by Paul in his interaction with the possessed slave girl in Philippi.
- **Contextualization:** Adapting the expression of the gospel to be relevant to a specific cultural context, seen in Paul's decision to circumcise Timothy, though not Titus.
- **Patron/Benefactor:** One who provides support, hospitality, and resources to others, like Lydia, as it was understood in its general use at the time.

5. FAQs on Keener, Acts, Session 16, Acts 15-16

Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

FAQ: Dr. Craig Keener on Acts 15-16

1. **What is the main scholarly debate surrounding the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and what is Dr. Keener's position on it?** The central debate revolves around whether the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15 is the same event as Paul's visit to Jerusalem recounted in Galatians 2. Some scholars argue they are different events, perhaps confusing the Council with an earlier famine visit mentioned in Acts 11. Dr. Keener argues that the simplest explanation, following Ockham's Razor, is that Galatians 2 and Acts 15 refer to the same event. He points to their common focus on Gentile inclusion, the issue of circumcision, the presence of prominent figures, and the basic outcomes of each account as evidence. While acknowledging it might not be the majority opinion, he considers it a "reasonable position".
2. **Why did Paul circumcise Timothy but not Titus, and what does this reveal about Paul's approach to cultural context?** Paul circumcised Timothy, whose mother was Jewish and father was Greek, to avoid causing offense among Jewish believers in the communities they would visit and to facilitate his integration into the ministry team. In contrast, Paul did not circumcise Titus, who was also a Gentile believer. This was a matter of principle, as adding circumcision as a requirement for salvation was seen as undermining the core message of salvation by faith in Christ alone. This shows that Paul practiced cultural contextualization—adapting his approach to the culture he was working in—but without compromising on fundamental theological truths.
3. **What was the significance of Troas in Paul's missionary journey, and how did the Holy Spirit guide him there?** Troas was a pivotal location in Paul's missionary journey, representing the transition of the gospel from Asia to Europe. It was a significant Roman colony strategically located on the border between the two continents. The Holy Spirit guided Paul to Troas through a series of negative directions, preventing him from going to Asia and Bithynia. At Troas, Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading for help, leading him to interpret this as a call to expand his ministry to Europe.

4. **Why did Paul and Silas initially seek out a place of prayer by the river in Philippi?** In Philippi, Paul and Silas looked for a place of prayer near a river because they knew that Jewish communities that did not have synagogues often gathered by water for ritual washings and prayer. This was in the absence of a designated place of worship, as it was assumed that if there were Jewish people in the Roman colony of Philippi they would likely be found there. This approach was based on existing customs and patterns within Judaism.
5. **Who was Lydia, and how did she contribute to the early church in Philippi?** Lydia was a businesswoman from Thyatira, known as a seller of purple dye, a valuable commodity. She was among the first converts to Christianity in Philippi and became a significant benefactor and patron to Paul's missionary team. She opened her home as a place of hospitality and worship, playing an instrumental role in establishing and supporting the early church in Philippi. Her occupation and actions indicate her wealth, social standing, and generosity.
6. **What was the nature of the "spirit of divination" that possessed the slave girl in Philippi, and why did Paul eventually exorcise it?** The "spirit of divination" that possessed the slave girl in Philippi was a mantic spirit, akin to the Pythoness of the Delphic Oracle, which gave her the ability to foretell the future. While her testimony about Paul and his companions being "servants of the Most High God" was technically true, Paul ultimately cast the spirit out of her because he did not want the witness of a demon vouching for his and his companions' spiritual message. He also viewed this as an inappropriate and corrupt source of testimony that undermined the validity of the gospel. Furthermore, he would not want to normalize demons as messengers of God, thereby relativizing the God they preached.
7. **What does Dr. Keener suggest about the reality of spirit possession based on the passage in Acts and anthropological evidence?** Dr. Keener explores the reality of spirit possession using an anthropological perspective, noting that a large percentage of societies (seventy-four percent) throughout history have held beliefs in spirit possession. He observes that anthropologists typically view spirit possession as an altered state of consciousness interpreted locally as the influence of an alien spirit. Keener also presents historical and contemporary accounts, both from Christian and non-Christian traditions, to support the idea that spirit possession is a genuine phenomenon rather than just a psychological or cultural construct.

8. **How does the split between Paul and Barnabas illustrate human fallibility and God's providence?** The split between Paul and Barnabas demonstrates that even God's servants are not immune to human weaknesses and disagreements. The conflict arose over whether to include John Mark on their missionary journey, showcasing a clash between Paul's focus on commitment and new mission fields and Barnabas' desire to give Mark a second chance. Despite this "severe" split, God used both teams—Paul with Silas and Timothy, and Barnabas with Mark—to further the spread of the Gospel. This shows God's ability to work even through human conflicts and fallibility, as He brought about the mission even without those initial relationships, as well as the separate missions.