

Dr. Robert Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 14, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 1 Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 14, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture, "The Church in Acts, Part 1," examines Luke's two-part work, Luke-Acts, as a unified narrative. Peterson highlights the interconnectedness of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts through their prologues, shared references to Jesus' ascension, and the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy regarding the Holy Spirit. The lecture outlines key aspects of the early church in Acts, including the Holy Spirit's empowerment of the apostles, the message they preached focusing on Jesus' death and resurrection, and the communal activities of the believers. These activities encompassed devotion to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread (likely including the Lord's Supper), and prayer. Peterson emphasizes that the Book of Acts demonstrates how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth through the Spirit-filled witness of the early church. Ultimately, the lecture introduces the foundational elements of the New Testament people of God as presented in the initial chapters of Acts.

**2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 14 – 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 → Luke).**



**Peterson_Theo_LkA
cts_Session14.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 14, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 1

Briefing Document: The Church in Acts, Part 1

Overview:

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented in Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture on "The Church in Acts, Part 1," the fourteenth session of his series on "The Theology of Luke-Acts." Peterson emphasizes the interconnectedness of Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts as a single, two-part narrative. He then outlines key aspects of the early church as depicted in the initial chapters of Acts, focusing on the equipping of the apostles by the Holy Spirit, the core message preached, and the characteristic activities of the believers.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. Luke-Acts as a Unified Narrative:

- Peterson strongly argues that Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts should be viewed as one grand story in two volumes.
- **Evidence for unity: Prologues:** Both prologues address Theophilus and indicate Luke's intention. Howard Marshall is quoted stating that the Gospel's prologue "is probably meant to refer to both parts of the two-volume work."
- **Ascension:** The Gospel ends and Acts begins with references to Jesus' ascension, highlighting the continuation of Jesus' work. Acts 1:1-3 refers back to "all that Jesus began to do and to teach."
- **Fulfillment of Prophecy:** The beginning of Acts fulfills Jesus' promise at the end of Luke's Gospel regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4).

"Luke wrote one grand story in two books, his gospel, and Acts. This is true for a number of reasons, but three stand out."

- Studying Luke-Acts together provides a more complete understanding of Luke's theological intentions.

2. The Holy Spirit Equipping the Apostles for Witness (Acts 1):

- Acts opens with Jesus instructing his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the "promise of the Father," which is identified as the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5, Luke 24:49).

- This event fulfills John the Baptist's prophecy that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit, a prophecy found in all four Gospels and repeated in Acts.
- The disciples' initial question about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is gently rebuked by Jesus, who redirects their focus to world evangelism empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:6-8).
- **Acts 1:8 is crucial:** William Larkin calls it "a command and a promise," linking the Spirit's power with the task of being Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This verse also provides a geographical outline for the Book of Acts.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8, ESV)

- Jesus' ascension, witnessed by the disciples and announced by angels, signifies his departure and the commencement of the disciples' mission. The angels' reminder implies the need to actively engage in the "great commission" rather than passively waiting.
- The New Testament people of God are characterized as those equipped and commissioned for mission by the Holy Spirit and who also long for Christ's second coming – a "missional and eschatological people."

3. The Message of the Early Church (Acts 2:32-41):

- Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter, now empowered, delivers a significant sermon.
- Peter explains the miraculous speaking in tongues as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy about the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days (Acts 2:17, citing Joel 2:28-32).
- The core message of the early church, as exemplified by Peter's sermon, centers on Jesus Christ:
- His earthly ministry, including miracles.
- His crucifixion by the hands of the people.
- His resurrection by God, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (Psalm 16). The apostles are witnesses of this resurrection (Acts 2:32).

- His exaltation to the right hand of God, receiving and pouring out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33, Psalm 110:1).
- God has made this Jesus, whom they crucified, both Lord and Christ (Messiah) (Acts 2:36).

"Let all the house of Israel, therefore, know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36, ESV)

- Peter's sermon has a powerful impact, leading the hearers to ask, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).
- Peter's response emphasizes **repentance** and **baptism** in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, promising the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
- Peterson addresses potential theological questions arising from this passage, including the relationship between repentance and faith, and the concept of baptismal regeneration. He clarifies that repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin, and that baptism is not a guarantee of salvation apart from genuine repentance and faith.
- The promise of the Holy Spirit is for "you and for your children and for all who are far off," foreshadowing the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan.
- The sermon results in the conversion and baptism of about three thousand people, marking the early church's significant growth.
- The New Testament people of God are defined by their repentance and belief in Jesus as the crucified and resurrected Lord and Messiah, their forgiveness of sins through him, their submission to Christian baptism, and their reception of the Holy Spirit for regeneration, indwelling, and empowerment for evangelism.

4. Activities of the Early Church (Acts 2:42-47):

- Luke highlights key activities that characterized the early church:
- **Devotion to the apostles' teaching:** They diligently learned and adhered to the doctrine taught by the apostles, which included both Old Testament Scripture and the apostles' authoritative interpretations and pronouncements.
- "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42, ESV)

- **Fellowship (koinonia):** This went beyond mere social interaction, encompassing a deep sharing of life in Christ and partnership in God's salvation with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, leading to fellowship with other believers. This sometimes manifested in the voluntary sharing of possessions.
- "What we have seen and heard, we also declare to you, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3, ESV, cited to explain koinonia)
- **Breaking of bread:** While there is scholarly debate, Peterson leans towards the view that this likely refers to the Lord's Supper, often observed within the context of a fellowship meal, especially in passages like Acts 20:7.
- "On the first day of the week, we assembled to break bread." (Acts 20:7, ESV)
- **Prayer:** Corporate prayer was an integral aspect of the early church's life, serving as a vital link between Jesus and his people as they carried out his kingdom work.

Conclusion:

Peterson's lecture provides a foundational understanding of the early church as portrayed in the initial chapters of the Book of Acts. He underscores the continuity between Jesus' earthly ministry and the work of the Spirit-empowered apostles, emphasizing the importance of the Holy Spirit in equipping believers for witness. The core message of the early church centered on the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus as Lord and Messiah, calling for repentance and faith. Finally, the early believers were characterized by their commitment to apostolic teaching, deep fellowship, the breaking of bread (likely the Lord's Supper), and prayer, demonstrating a vibrant and unified community centered on Christ. The lecture sets the stage for further exploration of the New Testament people of God as the narrative in Acts unfolds.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 14, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 1

Study Guide: The Church in Acts, Part 1

Key Concepts and Themes

- **Luke-Acts as a Unified Work:** Understand the reasons why Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts should be viewed as two parts of a single narrative. Pay attention to the prologues and the connections between the endings and beginnings of both books.
- **The Promise of the Holy Spirit:** Explore the significance of John the Baptist's prophecy and Jesus' reiteration of the Father's promise. Analyze the fulfillment of this promise at Pentecost and its impact on the early church.
- **Witness and Evangelism:** Examine Jesus' command in Acts 1:8 and its implications for the mission of the church. Understand how the Holy Spirit empowers believers to be witnesses.
- **The Message of the Early Church:** Identify the core elements of Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:32-41). Understand the emphasis on Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation as Lord and Christ.
- **Repentance and Baptism:** Analyze Peter's call to repentance and baptism and their significance for joining the New Testament people of God. Consider the relationship between repentance and faith, and the meaning of baptism.
- **The Gift of the Holy Spirit:** Understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, including regeneration, indwelling, and empowerment for evangelism. Note the different accounts of the Spirit's arrival in relation to baptism.
- **Activities of the Early Church:** Identify and describe the four key activities of the early church in Acts 2:42: devotion to the apostles' teaching, fellowship (koinonia), the breaking of bread, and prayer.
- **Apostolic Authority:** Understand the significance of the apostles' teaching as authoritative, akin to scripture, for the early believers.
- **Fellowship (Koinonia):** Explore the deeper meaning of fellowship in the New Testament, encompassing partnership with God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and with fellow believers.

- **The Breaking of Bread:** Examine the different interpretations of "the breaking of bread," particularly in relation to common meals and the Lord's Supper.
- **Prayer in the Early Church:** Recognize the importance of corporate prayer as an integral part of the church's life and its connection to their mission.

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 complete sentences each.

1. What are the three main reasons Dr. Peterson gives for considering Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts as one grand story in two parts?
2. How does the beginning of Acts fulfill Jesus' prophecy at the end of Luke's Gospel, and what is the central theme of Acts that arises from this fulfillment?
3. Explain the significance of Acts 1:8, according to Dr. Peterson, and how it relates to the structure of the Book of Acts.
4. According to Peter's sermon in Acts 2, what are the key events in Jesus' life and ministry that form the core of the early church's message?
5. What is Peter's response to the crowd's question, "Brothers, what shall we do?" in Acts 2, and what are the key elements of his instruction?
6. Briefly explain the relationship between repentance and faith in the context of salvation, as discussed in the lecture.
7. According to the lecture, what are some of the ways the Holy Spirit works in the lives of God's New Testament people?
8. What are the four primary activities that characterized the early church in Acts 2:42, and what does each of these activities entail?
9. Explain why the apostles' teaching was considered authoritative for the early believers, drawing on the example of Peter's Pentecost sermon.
10. Briefly describe the New Testament understanding of "fellowship" (koinonia) as presented in the lecture, highlighting its different dimensions.

Answer Key

1. Dr. Peterson states that Luke-Acts is one unit because the prologues to both books indicate Luke's intention, the gospel ends and Acts begins with references to Jesus' ascension, and the beginning of Acts fulfills Jesus' prophecy about the

Holy Spirit at the end of Luke. These connections demonstrate Luke's overarching narrative purpose.

2. The beginning of Acts fulfills Jesus' promise at the end of Luke to send the Holy Spirit, empowering the disciples. Acts then becomes the story of the Spirit-empowered apostles witnessing to the risen Christ, spreading the gospel.
3. Acts 1:8 is both a command to be witnesses and a promise of the Holy Spirit's power to enable that witness. It also provides a geographical outline for the Book of Acts, showing the gospel's progress from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.
4. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 emphasizes Jesus of Nazareth, attested by God through miracles, his crucifixion by the people, his resurrection by God, and his exaltation to the right hand of God as Lord and Christ, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies.
5. Peter tells them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This call emphasizes a turning from their sin and a public identification with Jesus.
6. While rarely mentioned together, repentance (turning from sin) and faith (turning to Christ) are best understood as two sides of the same coin in salvation. One implies the other, representing a complete turning of the individual towards God.
7. The Holy Spirit regenerates and indwells God's New Testament people, empowers them for evangelism to share the good news, and was promised by the Father as foretold by John the Baptist and Jesus.
8. The four activities are: devotion to the apostles' teaching (learning God's truth), fellowship (sharing their lives in Christ), the breaking of bread (possibly including the Lord's Supper), and prayers (corporate prayer life). These activities demonstrate their commitment to God and one another.
9. The believing Jews accepted Peter's apostolic sermon as the very word of God because he was speaking as an apostle, divinely appointed to proclaim God's truth. His words, like Scripture, were considered authoritative for theology and ethics, representing divine revelation.
10. New Testament fellowship (koinonia) is a deep sharing that begins with God sharing salvation with believers, creating a partnership with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Derivative from this, believers also share a rich partnership and life together with one another in Christ.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the significance of viewing Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts as a unified two-volume work for understanding the theology and mission of the early church.
2. Analyze the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 and its transformative impact on the apostles and the early church.
3. Explore the relationship between the command to be witnesses in Acts 1:8 and the subsequent narrative of the Book of Acts, highlighting key examples of this witness in action.
4. Examine the core elements of the early church's message as presented in Peter's Pentecost sermon and discuss their enduring relevance for Christian proclamation today.
5. Describe the key characteristics and activities of the early church in Acts 2:42-47 and discuss how these practices reflect their identity as the New Testament people of God.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Prologue:** An introductory section of a literary work, often setting the stage for the narrative and indicating the author's purpose.
- **Ascension:** The bodily rising of Jesus into heaven, recorded at the end of Luke's Gospel and the beginning of Acts.
- **The Promise of the Father:** A reference to the Holy Spirit, as promised by God and reiterated by Jesus.
- **Baptism with the Holy Spirit:** A transformative experience, distinct from water baptism, where believers are filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- **Evangelism:** The act of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others.
- **Gentiles:** Non-Jewish people.
- **Dispersion:** The scattering of the Jewish people outside of Judea and Israel.
- **Pentecost:** A Jewish festival celebrated fifty days after Passover; the occasion when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the early church in Acts 2.
- **Prophecy:** A message from God, often foretelling future events but also including words of exhortation and instruction.
- **Repentance:** A turning away from sin and towards God, often accompanied by a sense of sorrow and a change in behavior.
- **Regeneration:** The spiritual rebirth or renewal of a person by the Holy Spirit, leading to a new life in Christ.
- **Indwelling:** The presence of the Holy Spirit living within a believer.
- **Apostolic Doctrine:** The teachings of the apostles, who were Christ's chosen representatives and foundational to the early church.
- **Fellowship (Koinonia):** A Greek word signifying a close association, participation, and sharing in something; in the New Testament, it refers to the shared life and communion believers have with God and with one another.
- **Corporate Prayer:** Prayer offered by a group of believers together.
- **Eschatological:** Relating to the end times or the final destiny of humanity and the world.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 14, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 1, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on the Early Church in Acts

1. Why are the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts considered a unified work?

Luke himself indicates the unity of his writings through the prologues of both books. The prologue of Luke likely refers to the entire two-volume work, and the prologue of Acts explicitly mentions the Gospel as "the first narrative." Furthermore, the Gospel ends and Acts begins with references to Jesus' ascension, creating a direct link. Lastly, the beginning of Acts fulfills Jesus' promise at the end of Luke regarding the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would empower the disciples for witness. Therefore, Luke-Acts should be studied both individually and as a cohesive whole.

2. What is the significance of Acts 1:8 for understanding the Book of Acts and the mission of the church?

Acts 1:8 is a pivotal verse that serves as both a command and a promise. Jesus tells his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This verse highlights the crucial role of the Holy Spirit in empowering believers for evangelism. Additionally, it provides a geographical outline for the rest of the Book of Acts, detailing the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and ultimately to the Gentile world. This verse underscores the church's fundamental calling to be both missionary in its direction and eschatological in its focus, eagerly awaiting Christ's return.

3. What was the central message preached by the early church, as exemplified by Peter's sermon on Pentecost?

The core message of the early church centered on Jesus Christ. Peter's sermon in Acts 2 proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth was attested by God through miracles, wonders, and signs. Despite being crucified by the people, God raised Jesus from the dead, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies (Psalm 16). Peter declared that this resurrected Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God, receiving the Holy Spirit from the Father and pouring it out upon them (fulfilling Joel 2). The sermon concluded with the powerful declaration that God had made this same Jesus, whom they crucified, both Lord and Christ, urging

the hearers to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

4. How did individuals become part of the New Testament people of God, according to the early chapters of Acts?

People became part of the New Testament people of God by responding to the apostles' message about Jesus with repentance and faith. As seen on the day of Pentecost, those who "received his word" (Acts 2:41) about Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation, and who repented and were baptized in his name for the forgiveness of their sins, were added to the church. This belief in Jesus as Lord and Messiah, coupled with repentance and baptism, marked their inclusion into God's new covenant community and resulted in the reception of the Holy Spirit.

5. What were the key activities that characterized the early church in Jerusalem?

The early believers in Jerusalem devoted themselves to four primary activities: the apostles' teaching, fellowship (*koinonia*), the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42). They diligently learned from the apostles, shared their lives in Christ with one another, participated in common meals (likely including the Lord's Supper), and engaged in corporate prayer. This togetherness and shared commitment to spiritual disciplines were defining characteristics of the early church.

6. What was the significance of "the apostles' teaching" in the early church?

The apostles' teaching held immense authority in the early church. It was considered a vital source of theological and ethical guidance, on par with Old Testament scripture. The believers committed themselves to understanding and applying this teaching, which included both direct quotations from scripture and the apostles' inspired interpretations and exhortations about Jesus Christ and the new covenant. This dedication to apostolic doctrine formed the foundation of their faith and practice.

7. What did "fellowship" (*koinonia*) signify in the context of the early church?

The New Testament concept of fellowship, or *koinonia*, goes far beyond casual social interaction. It signifies a deep spiritual partnership rooted in God's sharing of salvation with believers. This fellowship encompasses a shared relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Consequently, it extends to a profound sharing of life, resources (sometimes even possessions voluntarily), and mutual support among believers. It represents a participation in the blessings of salvation and a unity in Christ.

8. What are the different understandings of "the breaking of bread" in the Book of Acts?

Luke mentions "the breaking of bread" in several passages in Acts, and its precise meaning is debated among scholars. While some interpretations suggest it primarily refers to common meals shared by believers, others argue that it often, if not always (especially in contexts like Acts 20:7), indicates the observance of the Lord's Supper, the Christian practice commemorating Jesus' last meal with his disciples. It's likely that at times it referred to fellowship meals that also included the Eucharist, highlighting the communal and sacred aspects of their life together.