

Dr. Robert Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 15, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 2 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 15, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert A. Peterson's session on the theology of Luke-Acts, specifically focusing on the church in Acts Part 2, explores the characteristics and experiences of the early Christian community. The lecture examines key passages illustrating their shared life, including communal activities, voluntary sharing, and the resolution of internal issues like the Hellenist widows' complaint. **Peterson highlights the inclusion of Gentiles into God's people, emphasizing the pivotal conversion of Cornelius and the theological significance of this event alongside Pentecost and Paul's conversion.** The session further analyzes a missionary journey, noting the spread of the gospel among Gentiles despite Jewish opposition and persecution. **Ultimately, Peterson outlines the identity of the New Testament people of God as those chosen by God, believing in the apostolic message of the Messiah, receiving forgiveness and justification through Jesus, and experiencing both joy and persecution.**

2. 17 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Peterson, Theology of Luke-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 → Luke).



**Peterson_Theo_LkA
cts_Session15.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 15, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 2

Briefing Document: The People of God in Luke-Acts

Overview: This document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 15 of his teaching on "The Theology of Luke-Acts," specifically focusing on the nature and characteristics of the church as depicted in the Book of Acts. Peterson examines several key passages to illustrate the early Christian community's life, their response to internal challenges, and the pivotal inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. The Shared Life and Growth of the Early Church (Acts 2:42-47):

- The earliest Christians lived a communal life centered on core spiritual practices: "They committed themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship in Christ, to common meals and the Lord's Supper, and to pray for one another and for outreach."
- Voluntary sharing of resources was a significant aspect, ensuring that "no one suffered from need." Peterson emphasizes the voluntary nature of this sharing, citing the example of Ananias and Sapphira whose sin was lying, not their failure to give (Acts 5:3-4).
- The early believers maintained unity ("the result was great unity"), regularly met in the temple and homes, and were characterized by "joyful and sincere hearts."
- God's grace was evident in their lives and outreach, leading to continuous growth: "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).
- They experienced awe at God's work, including "signs and wonders" performed by the apostles.

2. Addressing Internal Conflict and Diversity (Acts 6:1-7):

- Luke honestly portrays the challenges faced by the early church, including a dispute between Hellenists (Greek-speaking Christians) and Hebraists (Aramaic/Hebrew-speaking Jewish Christians).

- The Hellenists complained that their widows were being overlooked in the "daily distribution of material goods."
- The apostles demonstrated leadership by involving the whole church in finding a solution. They recommended choosing seven men "of good reputation, full of the spirit and wisdom" to oversee this practical ministry.
- The apostles prioritized "prayer and the ministry of the word," recognizing their limitations.
- Significantly, the church chose men with Greek names (likely Hellenists) for this task, suggesting a desire to avoid any appearance of favoritism. Witherington notes, "the list in verse 5 includes only men with Greek names, which is surely no accident...to avoid even the appearance of favoritism, names mostly, if not exclusively, Greek-speaking Jewish Christians to administer the food distribution."
- The apostles commissioned these seven through prayer and the laying on of hands.
- The resolution of this conflict led to further growth: "the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem," including "a large group of priests."
- David Peterson connects the godly resolution of the conflict to church growth: "the satisfactory solution of the conflict in the Jerusalem church made it possible for this ministry of the gospel to flourish and for church growth to take place even more rapidly...Church growth continued because the word of God had free course among the believers, and outsiders were able to witness its practical effect in a loving, united community as well as hear its challenge from the lips of the apostles."
- This passage highlights the ethnic diversity within the early church and the importance of working together for the common good.

3. God's Sovereign Inclusion of the Gentiles (Acts 10):

- The story of Cornelius is presented as a pivotal moment demonstrating God's plan to include Gentiles in His people. Peterson emphasizes that "Nowhere in Acts is the plan of God more prominent and His presence and purpose more evident than in the story of Cornelius."
- God used supernatural means (a vision to Cornelius and a trance to Peter) to overcome Peter's "cultural prejudice" against associating with Gentiles.

- Cornelius, a Roman centurion and "God-fearer," was devout and known for his prayers and philanthropy.
- Peter's initial reluctance is highlighted by his response to the vision: "No, Lord. Yikes." Peterson calls this an "oxymoron."
- God explicitly declared through the vision, "What God has made clean, do not call impure," symbolizing the inclusion of the Gentiles.
- Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his household emphasizes God's impartiality: "Truly, I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."
- Peterson clarifies that this doesn't mean Cornelius was saved before meeting Peter, but that "non-Jews are...acceptable or welcome to come to Christ on the same basis as Jews."
- The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Cornelius and his Gentile companions while Peter was still speaking was a crucial sign, astonishing the Jewish believers who were present. "While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word."
- Peter recognized this as God's validation and commanded their baptism: "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"
- The conversion of Cornelius is presented as a major event, alongside Pentecost and Paul's conversion, due to its significant impact on the identity of God's people. These three events are repeated for emphasis in Acts.
- Peterson highlights the Old Testament roots of Gentile inclusion in the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:3, 22:18) and the prophecies of Isaiah (49:7) and Amos (9:10-12).
- Luke also foreshadows Gentile inclusion at the beginning (Simeon's prophecy in Luke 2:32) and end of his Gospel (Jesus' command in Luke 24:47) and in Acts 1:8.
- Bock emphasizes that "here Gentile inclusion is the direct work of God...As part of his plan to bring together Jews and Gentiles into one community."
- As a result, the New Testament people of God include "believing Jews and Gentiles" of any ethnicity or national origin because "God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34).

- They are reconciled to God and one another through Jesus Christ, who "is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), and believe in him for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43).
- The reception of the Holy Spirit by the Gentiles is described as the "Pentecost of the Gentile world," signifying their inclusion in the new era of life and covenant.
- God's people love to worship him, as seen in Cornelius and his companions "praising God" (Acts 10:46). Larkin states, "the experience of salvation always invokes praise to the giver of salvation."

4. God's Sovereign Work Among Gentiles Amidst Persecution (Acts 13:44-52):

- This passage illustrates God's work among the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch, even in the face of Jewish opposition fueled by jealousy.
- Paul and Barnabas boldly declared their shift in focus to the Gentiles after being rejected by the Jews: "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life. Behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" (citing Isaiah 49:6).
- The Gentiles responded with joy and glorified the word of the Lord: "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord."
- Luke highlights God's sovereign election: "And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed."
- Barrett affirms this as "an unqualified statement of absolute predestination...Those believed who are appointed, the passive implies by God, to do so." Peterson emphasizes that faith is the result of God's sovereign choice, not the other way around.
- Despite the positive response from the Gentiles, the Jewish leaders stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, leading to their expulsion.
- The missionaries responded by shaking off the dust from their feet, but the disciples who believed were "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit."
- This passage reveals several characteristics of the New Testament people of God:
- They are Jews and Gentiles chosen by God for salvation.
- God sends the message of salvation, which originates from His grace.

- They believe in the apostles' message about the Messiah and his exaltation.
- They believe in Jesus for forgiveness and justification.
- They are willing to suffer persecution for Jesus.
- They can be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit even amidst persecution.

Conclusion:

Dr. Peterson's analysis of these key passages in Acts reveals that the New Testament people of God are a diverse community, encompassing both Jews and Gentiles, united by their belief in Jesus Christ. This community is characterized by shared life, commitment to apostolic teaching, fellowship, prayer, and a willingness to share resources. They face internal challenges but, guided by the apostles, work together to find solutions. The sovereign inclusion of the Gentiles, orchestrated by God, is a pivotal development, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies and highlighting God's impartiality. Even amidst persecution, believers experience joy and the power of the Holy Spirit, demonstrating God's continued work in and through His people.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 15, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 2

Study Guide: The Church in Acts, Part 2 (Peterson)

Key Themes:

- The daily life and practices of the early Christian community (Acts 2:42-47)
- The emergence of challenges and their resolution within the early church (Acts 6:1-7)
- God's sovereign inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God (Acts 10)
- God's work among both Jews and Gentiles amidst persecution (Acts 13:44-52)
- Key characteristics of the New Testament people of God

Quiz:

1. Describe two key activities that characterized the daily life of the earliest Christians according to Acts 2:42-47. What was the result of their voluntary sharing of resources?
2. What problem arose in the early church involving Hellenist and Hebraist widows, and how did the apostles propose to resolve it? What was the significance of the men chosen for this task?
3. Summarize the initial interaction between God and Cornelius, highlighting the role of divine intervention. What was Cornelius' background and how did it relate to his standing within Judaism?
4. Explain the significance of Peter's vision in Acts 10. How did God use this vision to challenge Peter's preconceived notions, and what was the broader implication of this revelation?
5. What happened when Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius and his household? How did the Jewish believers who accompanied Peter react, and what was the significance of their reaction?
6. According to Peterson, why is the conversion of Cornelius considered a pivotal event in the book of Acts, comparable in importance to Pentecost and Paul's conversion? What Old Testament support is there for Gentile inclusion?

7. Describe the events that unfolded when Paul and Barnabas preached in Pisidian Antioch. What were the initial reactions of both the Jews and the Gentiles to their message?
8. According to Acts 13:48, what factor determined who believed the message preached by Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch? How does Peterson interpret this verse in relation to God's sovereignty?
9. What are two characteristics of the New Testament people of God as highlighted in the discussion of Acts 13:44-52? Provide scriptural references for each characteristic.
10. How does the passage emphasize that God's work among his people, both in the early church and in its expansion to the Gentiles, was not without challenges? Give a specific example from the text.

Answer Key:

1. The earliest Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, common meals (including the Lord's Supper), and prayer. Their voluntary sharing of resources resulted in no one among them being in need and fostered great unity within the community.
2. A problem arose because Hellenist widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of material goods. The apostles proposed that the church choose seven reputable men, full of the Spirit and wisdom, to oversee this task, allowing the apostles to focus on prayer and the ministry of the word. The selection of men with Greek names suggests an intentional effort to ensure fairness and avoid the appearance of favoritism towards Hebraist widows.
3. God sent an angel in a vision to Cornelius, instructing him to send for Peter. Cornelius was a Roman centurion and a God-fearer, meaning he was drawn to Judaism's monotheism and ethics but had not undergone circumcision, which typically excluded Gentiles from full participation in Jewish communal life.
4. Peter's vision involved a sheet lowered from heaven containing various unclean animals, and a voice commanded him to kill and eat. This vision challenged Peter's deeply ingrained Jewish dietary laws and symbolized God's broader message that he had made the Gentiles clean and acceptable to receive the gospel.

5. While Peter was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and those gathered with him, and they began speaking in tongues and praising God. The Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter were astonished because they witnessed the gift of the Holy Spirit being poured out on uncircumcised Gentiles just as it had been on them at Pentecost, signifying God's acceptance of the Gentiles.
6. The conversion of Cornelius is considered pivotal because it represents a significant step in God's plan to include Gentiles into the people of God, demonstrating that salvation is not limited to the Jewish nation. Old Testament support for Gentile inclusion is found in the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:3, 22:18) and the prophecies of Isaiah (49:6) and Simeon's words in Luke 2:32.
7. When Paul and Barnabas preached in Pisidian Antioch, many Gentiles rejoiced and glorified the word of the Lord, and many who were appointed to eternal life believed. However, the Jews became jealous, contradicted Paul's message, and hurled insults at them, eventually inciting persecution and driving them out of the region.
8. According to Acts 13:48, those who were "appointed to eternal life believed." Peterson interprets this as an "unqualified statement of absolute predestination," indicating that God's sovereign choice precedes and enables faith, rather than God choosing based on foreseen faith.
9. Two characteristics of the New Testament people of God from Acts 13:44-52 are that they are Jews and Gentiles chosen by God for salvation (Acts 13:26-48, Ephesians 1:4, 2 Timothy 1:9, Acts 13:48), and they believe in Jesus for forgiveness and justification (Acts 13:38-39).
10. The passage highlights challenges through the complaint of the Hellenist widows (Acts 6:1), Peter's initial reluctance to go to the Gentiles (Acts 10), and the persecution faced by Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50). These examples show that the growth and expansion of the early church were not without conflict and opposition.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the significance of the communal life described in Acts 2:42-47 for understanding the nature and mission of the early church. How does this passage inform our understanding of Christian fellowship, worship, and outreach?

2. Discuss the problem and resolution presented in Acts 6:1-7. What principles of leadership and conflict resolution can be derived from this passage that are relevant to the church today?
3. Evaluate the theological implications of God's inclusion of the Gentiles in Acts 10. How did this event challenge existing Jewish perspectives, and how did it shape the future trajectory of the early Christian movement?
4. Examine the interplay between God's sovereignty and human response in the conversion of the Gentiles as depicted in Acts 13:44-52. How does Peterson's interpretation of Acts 13:48 contribute to this discussion?
5. Based on the passages discussed (Acts 2:42-47, 6:1-7, 10, 13:44-52), synthesize the key characteristics of the New Testament people of God according to Luke's account in the book of Acts.

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Hellenists:** Greek-speaking Jews or Christians.
- **Hebraists:** Aramaic or Hebrew-speaking Jewish Christians.
- **God-fearer:** A Gentile who was attracted to Judaism's monotheism and ethics but had not converted fully (e.g., by undergoing circumcision).
- **Signs and Wonders:** Supernatural acts performed by the apostles that demonstrated God's power and confirmed their message.
- **Fellowship (koinonia):** A close association and sharing among believers, encompassing spiritual, material, and relational aspects.
- **Lord's Supper:** A communal meal practiced by Christians in remembrance of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection.
- **Pentecost:** The event described in Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples, marking the birth of the church.
- **Justification:** The act by which God declares a sinner righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works of the law.
- **Atonement:** The work Christ did in his life and death to reconcile humanity to God, typically through his sacrifice on the cross.
- **Predestination/Election:** The doctrine that God, in his sovereignty, has chosen certain individuals for salvation before the foundation of the world.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 15, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 2, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Early Church in Acts

1. What were the defining characteristics of the daily life of the earliest Christians as described in Acts 2:42-47? The earliest Christians shared a common life centered around commitment to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, shared meals (including the Lord's Supper), and prayer. They also voluntarily shared their possessions to ensure no one was in need. This communal life was marked by sincerity of faith, joy, and praise to God, leading to favor with non-believers and the Lord adding to their numbers daily.

2. How did the early church in Acts address internal problems, as illustrated by the dispute in Acts 6:1-7? When a complaint arose between the Hellenist and Hebraist Jewish Christians regarding the distribution of resources to widows, the apostles addressed it by involving the whole church. They recommended the selection of seven reputable, Spirit-filled, and wise men to oversee this specific need, allowing the apostles to focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word. This demonstrates a model of leadership that was responsive to the community's needs, inclusive (with Hellenists chosen to serve Hellenist widows), and ultimately led to the further growth of the church.

3. What pivotal event demonstrated God's plan to include Gentiles in the New Testament people of God, and how was this revealed? The conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion and God-fearer, as recorded in Acts 10, was a pivotal event. God used supernatural means, including a vision to Peter and an angelic visitation to Cornelius, to overcome Peter's cultural prejudices and reveal that God shows no partiality. The Holy Spirit falling upon Cornelius and his Gentile household while Peter was preaching, evidenced by them speaking in tongues and praising God, confirmed their inclusion and led to their baptism.

4. Why is the conversion of Cornelius considered a significantly important event in the book of Acts, comparable to Pentecost and Paul's conversion? The conversion of Cornelius is highlighted as a major turning point because it demonstrated God's pre-ordained plan, evident from the Abrahamic covenant and the prophets, to include Gentiles in his people. This event, like Pentecost (the coming of the Spirit upon Jewish believers) and Paul's conversion (the transformation of a key persecutor into an apostle

to the Gentiles), was a direct and significant work of God, breaking down barriers and establishing a new reality for the early church – a community of both Jews and Gentiles united in Christ.

5. How did the inclusion of Gentiles challenge existing Jewish Christian perspectives, and what theological understanding did this necessitate? The inclusion of Gentiles challenged the prevailing Jewish Christian understanding that salvation was primarily through adherence to Jewish law and customs. God's direct intervention in the case of Cornelius, demonstrated by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on uncircumcised Gentiles, necessitated a theological shift. It revealed that acceptance by God is based on faith in Jesus Christ and not on ethnic or legalistic distinctions, emphasizing God's impartiality and the universality of the gospel.

6. How did the early apostles respond to rejection of the gospel by some Jewish communities, as seen in Acts 13:44-52? When the gospel message preached by Paul and Barnabas was met with jealousy and rejection by some in the Jewish community of Pisidian Antioch, the apostles boldly declared their intention to turn to the Gentiles, citing the prophetic mandate of Isaiah 49:6 to be a light to the nations. This action signifies a strategic shift in their outreach, prioritizing those who were receptive to the message while acknowledging the initial priority given to the Jewish people.

7. What does Acts 13:48 reveal about the nature of salvation and God's role in it? Acts 13:48 states, "And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." This verse suggests that God has a sovereign role in salvation, and that belief is a consequence of His prior appointment to eternal life. While the message of salvation is proclaimed to all, it is those whom God has chosen who will ultimately believe. This highlights the doctrine of God's election in the salvation of individuals.

8. What were some key characteristics of the New Testament people of God highlighted in the provided excerpts from the book of Acts? The New Testament people of God, as portrayed in these excerpts, were characterized by their commitment to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, communal sharing, prayer, and worship. They experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, faced both internal challenges and external persecution, and embraced the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles based on faith in Jesus Christ. Their unity and love for one another, even amidst diversity, served as a powerful witness to the transformative power of the gospel, leading to church growth and the spread of the Word of God.