

Dr. Robert Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 16, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 3, Acts 20 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 16, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 3, Acts 20, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert A. Peterson's session on the theology of Luke-Acts focuses on two key episodes in the book of Acts. The lecture first examines the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, highlighting the pivotal decision that Gentile converts did not need to adhere to Jewish customs like circumcision for salvation. **Peterson emphasizes the theological significance of this council in establishing the inclusive nature of the early church through grace by faith.** The session then shifts to Acts 20, analyzing Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus. **This section explores Paul's model of ministry, his warnings about future challenges, and his reliance on God's grace and the Scriptures.** Ultimately, the session illuminates crucial aspects of the early church's development and the responsibilities of its leaders.

**2. 9 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Peterson, Theology of Luke-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 → Luke).**



**Peterson_Theo_LkA
cts_Session16.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 16, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 3, Acts 20

Briefing Document: Key Themes and Ideas in Peterson's "Theology of Luke-Acts," Session 16

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented in Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture on "The Church in Acts, Part 3, and Paul's Example of Ministry, Acts 20:18-32," which constitutes Session 16 of his series on the Theology of Luke-Acts. The lecture focuses on two key passages in Acts: the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.

Part 1: Grace and Unity in the Church - The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)

Peterson highlights the Jerusalem Council as a pivotal moment in the early church, addressing the fundamental question of whether Gentile converts needed to adhere to Jewish Law, specifically circumcision, for salvation.

Main Themes and Ideas:

- **The Controversy:** The lecture begins by outlining the conflict that arose when "some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). This sparked significant "dissension and debate" (Acts 15:2) between Paul and Barnabas and these Judean believers.
- **The Journey to Jerusalem:** The church in Antioch appointed Paul, Barnabas, and others to go to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and elders. Their journey through Phoenicia and Samaria, where they described the conversion of the Gentiles, brought "great joy to all the brothers" (Acts 15:3).
- **The Welcome and Initial Arguments:** Upon arriving in Jerusalem, they were welcomed and reported what God had done through them. However, "some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said it is necessary to circumcise them in order and to order them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5).
- **Peter's Testimony:** After much debate, Peter addressed the council, reminding them that God had chosen him "that by my mouth, the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe" (Acts 15:7). He emphasized that God "made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith" (Acts

15:9), and that the giving of the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles was evidence of God's acceptance.

- **Quote:** "And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. And he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith." (Acts 15:8-9)
- Peter questioned why they would "put God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:10).
- **Quote:** "But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." (Acts 15:11) This statement, according to Peterson, levels the playing field, asserting that Jewish believers are saved by grace through faith in Jesus in the same way as Gentiles.
- **Barnabas and Paul's Report:** The assembly listened to Barnabas and Paul as they recounted the "signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:12).
- **James' Decision:** James offered his judgment, grounding it in prophecy (Amos 9:11-12), stating that they "should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God" (Acts 15:19). He proposed a letter asking them to abstain from things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, what has been strangled, and blood.
- **The Significance of the Council's Decision:** Peterson, quoting Howard Marshall, emphasizes the fundamental importance of the decision: "In principle, the need for Gentile Christians to accept the Jewish law was firmly rejected. The principle was of basic significance for the future of the early church, and it remains basic for all time. No national, racial, or social requirements can ever be made conditions for salvation and membership of the church alongside the single and sole requirement of faith in Jesus Christ, through whom the grace of God is brought to sinners."
- The council's decision solidified that salvation is through grace by faith in Jesus Christ alone, regardless of ethnic background. "God makes no distinction between human beings based on race" (Acts 15:9).

Part 2: Paul's Example of Ministry (Acts 20:18-32)

The second part of the lecture focuses on Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, highlighting his philosophy and example of ministry.

Main Themes and Ideas:

- **Paul's Past Ministry:** Paul reminded the elders of his conduct among them from the beginning, emphasizing his dedication: "you yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews" (Acts 20:18-19).
- **Faithful Proclamation:** He declared that he "did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20-21). He emphasized declaring "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).
- **Facing the Future:** Paul spoke of his impending journey to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, and aware of the "imprisonment and afflictions" awaiting him (Acts 20:22-23). However, his priority was to "finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).
- **Warning to the Elders:** Paul warned the elders to "pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). He predicted that "fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30).
- **The Church Purchased by Christ's Blood:** Peterson highlights the significance of Acts 20:28, noting it as a key passage teaching the doctrine of the atonement in Acts. "The church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." The word "obtained" can also be translated as "purchased," signifying redemption through Christ's atoning sacrifice.
- **Quote:** "Jesus' atoning work in Luke 22 and Acts 20 is not simply the basis for the proclamation of forgiveness but also for the forming and maintaining of the eschatological people of God because it is a purchase. God buys people."
- **Exhortation to Vigilance and Reliance on God's Word:** Paul urged the elders to "be alert" (Acts 20:31), remembering his three years of admonishment. He then commended them "to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build

you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

- Peterson quotes Marshall: "Paul and Luke know nothing of the idea that church leaders stand over the word committed to them...On the contrary, they stand under the word."
- **Paul's Example of Selflessness:** Paul reminded them of his lack of covetousness and his commitment to working to support himself and others, quoting the saying: "it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).
- **Lessons on Church Leadership:** Peterson summarizes several lessons on church leadership from this passage:
 - The Holy Spirit appoints overseers.
 - Leaders should imitate Paul's faithfulness, diligence, humility, and lack of avarice.
 - They are to teach God's people and be involved in their lives.
 - They must be vigilant against false teachers.
 - They must hold firm to sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it (referencing Titus 1:9 and 1 Timothy 4:16).
- **Lessons for New Testament Believers:** Peterson also outlines lessons for all believers:
 - They belong to the church of God, purchased by Christ's blood.
 - They are redeemed from slavery to sin and enjoy Christian freedom.
 - They need encouragement and should testify to the gospel of grace.
 - Their assurance is in God and His Word.
 - They must be willing to suffer for the gospel, following the example of Christ and the apostles.

Conclusion:

Session 16 of Peterson's "Theology of Luke-Acts" provides valuable insights into the foundational principles of the early church through the lens of Acts 15 and 20. The Jerusalem Council established the inclusive nature of salvation through grace by faith, regardless of ethnicity. Paul's farewell address serves as a powerful model for Christian ministry and leadership, emphasizing faithfulness, vigilance, the centrality of God's Word, and the profound truth of the church being purchased by the blood of Christ.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 16, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 3, Acts 20

Study Guide: The Theology of Luke-Acts (Acts 15 & 20)

Quiz:

1. What was the central issue debated at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and who were the primary groups involved in this debate?
2. Summarize Peter's argument at the Jerusalem Council regarding the salvation of the Gentiles. What key event in his ministry did he reference?
3. What was James' proposed solution to the controversy at the Jerusalem Council, and what Old Testament prophecy did he cite to support his view?
4. According to the Jerusalem Council's decision, what were the few specific requirements asked of Gentile converts to Christianity? Why were these particular requirements chosen?
5. In Acts 20:18-27, what aspects of his past ministry in Ephesus does Paul highlight when addressing the Ephesian elders?
6. What warnings does Paul give to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 concerning the future of the church after his departure? What metaphors does he use to illustrate these dangers?
7. According to Acts 20:28, how does Luke describe the nature of the church and how was it "obtained"? What theological concept does this verse highlight?
8. What does Paul say in Acts 20:32 that provides assurance and hope for the Ephesian elders and the church in his absence?
9. What specific example of his own character and financial integrity does Paul present to the Ephesian elders as a model for their own leadership? What saying of Jesus does he quote?
10. According to the lecture, what are some of the key lessons on suffering for Christians derived from Paul's example in Acts 20?

Answer Key:

1. The central issue was whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised and adhere to the Mosaic Law to be saved. The primary groups involved were Hebrew

Christians from Judea (some of whom were Pharisees) who insisted on these requirements, and Paul and Barnabas, who argued against them on behalf of the Gentile converts.

2. Peter argued that God had already demonstrated his acceptance of the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he had done to Jewish believers at Pentecost, signifying that their hearts were cleansed by faith without circumcision. He referenced his experience at Cornelius's house as the initial evidence of God's will to save Gentiles through faith.
3. James proposed that they should not trouble the Gentile converts with circumcision and the full Mosaic Law, but instead write to them asking them to abstain from things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, what has been strangled, and from blood. He cited Amos 9:11-12, which speaks of God rebuilding David's fallen tent so that the remnant of mankind and all the Gentiles called by his name may seek the Lord.
4. The few requirements were to abstain from things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, what has been strangled, and from blood. These were likely chosen as they were practices particularly offensive to Jewish sensibilities and would promote unity and fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers in the early church.
5. Paul highlights his humility in serving the Lord, his tears and trials due to Jewish plots, his unwavering commitment to declare everything profitable and to teach publicly and from house to house, and his testimony to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.
6. Paul warns that after his departure, "fierce wolves" will come from the outside, not sparing the flock, and that even from among their own selves, men will arise speaking twisted things to draw away disciples. These metaphors of wolves and internal betrayal illustrate the dangers of false teaching and division.
7. Luke describes the church as the "church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (or purchased with his own blood). This verse highlights the theological concept of redemption through Christ's atoning sacrifice, where God bought sinners out of slavery to sin.
8. Paul commends them to God and to the word of his grace, stating that it is able to build them up and give them the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

This emphasizes that their perseverance and growth depend on God's power through his word.

9. Paul reminds them that he coveted no one's silver, gold, or apparel and that his own hands ministered to his necessities and those with him, demonstrating a lack of greed and a willingness to work hard. He quotes Jesus' saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."
10. The lessons include: Christians may face avoidable suffering due to their commitment to the gospel; the suffering of leaders can motivate others to suffer for the gospel; and leaders not only suffer for the gospel but also for those they lead.

Essay Format Questions:

1. Analyze the significance of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 for the development and expansion of the early Christian church. Discuss the theological implications of its decision regarding Gentile inclusion.
2. Compare and contrast Peter's and James' arguments at the Jerusalem Council. How did their respective backgrounds and experiences contribute to their perspectives on the issue of Gentile salvation?
3. Discuss the key characteristics of Paul's ministry as revealed in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:18-32. How does his example serve as a model for church leaders today?
4. Examine Paul's warnings to the Ephesian elders concerning future threats to the church in Acts 20:29-31. What does this passage teach about the importance of vigilance and sound doctrine within the church?
5. Explore the theological significance of Acts 20:28, specifically the statement that God "obtained the church with his own blood." How does this verse contribute to Luke's overall theological message in Acts?

Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Circumcision:** A religious rite practiced in Judaism, often seen as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. It was a central point of contention regarding the inclusion of Gentiles in the early church.
- **Gentiles:** Non-Jewish people. In the context of Acts, this term refers to those who were not part of the Jewish covenant community.

- **Mosaic Law:** The body of laws given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, encompassing moral, civil, and ceremonial regulations. Adherence to the Mosaic Law was a key aspect of Jewish identity.
- **Jerusalem Council:** A significant meeting in the early church, recorded in Acts 15, where apostles and elders gathered to discuss and resolve the issue of whether Gentile converts needed to follow Jewish customs, particularly circumcision, for salvation.
- **Grace:** God's unmerited favor and love extended to humanity. In the context of salvation, grace signifies that salvation is a gift from God, not earned through human effort or adherence to the law.
- **Unity:** The state of being one or undivided. In the church, unity refers to the harmonious fellowship and agreement among believers, despite their diverse backgrounds.
- **Atonement:** The work of Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection, by which he reconciled humanity to God and provided forgiveness for sins. Acts 20:28 speaks of the church being obtained with Christ's own blood, highlighting the atoning nature of his sacrifice.
- **Overseers (Episkopoi):** Leaders or supervisors in the early church, often considered synonymous with elders or pastors in this context. They were responsible for the spiritual care and guidance of the church.
- **Elders (Presbyteroi):** Mature and respected leaders within the early church, responsible for teaching, guiding, and shepherding the flock. Paul's address in Acts 20 is specifically directed to the elders of the church in Ephesus.
- **Whole Counsel of God:** The entirety of God's plan and purposes as revealed in Scripture. Paul states that he did not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God to the Ephesians (Acts 20:27).
- **Redemption:** The act of buying back or rescuing someone or something. In theology, it refers to God's act of delivering sinners from the bondage of sin and its consequences through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
- **Sanctified:** Set apart for a holy purpose; made holy. In Acts 20:32, it refers to believers who are being progressively transformed into the likeness of Christ.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 16, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 3, Acts 20, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on the Theology of Luke-Acts (Based on Peterson's Session 16)

1. What was the central issue addressed at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and why was it so significant?

The central issue at the Jerusalem Council was whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised and adhere to the Mosaic Law to be saved. This was a critical question for the early church because it directly impacted the scope of the gospel and the basis of salvation. The council's decision to reject this requirement was fundamentally significant for the future of the church, establishing that salvation is through grace by faith in Jesus Christ alone, regardless of ethnic or religious background. This opened the door for the widespread evangelization of the Gentiles and defined the inclusive nature of the New Testament people of God.

2. According to Peter's argument at the Jerusalem Council, how does God demonstrate that Gentiles are saved in the same way as Jews?

Peter argued that God himself testified to the faith of the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he had done to the Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost. This demonstrated that God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles regarding salvation, cleansing their hearts by faith. Peter concluded that both Jews and Gentiles are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, leveling the playing field and emphasizing the universality of God's saving grace.

3. How did James contribute to the resolution of the debate at the Jerusalem Council?

James affirmed Peter's testimony by referencing Old Testament prophecy from Amos 9:11-12, which spoke of God rebuilding David's fallen tent so that the remnant of mankind and all the Gentiles called by His name might seek the Lord. Based on this, James proposed that they should not trouble the Gentile converts with unnecessary requirements of the Mosaic Law but should instruct them to abstain from things polluted by idols, sexual immorality, things strangled, and blood. James' judgment proved decisive for the council, formalizing the principle that Gentiles are saved by believing in Jesus without first becoming Jews.

4. What does Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 reveal about his philosophy of ministry?

Paul's address reveals a ministry characterized by humility, tears, endurance through trials, and a commitment to declaring the whole counsel of God, both publicly and from house to house. His primary message was repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's focus was on completing the ministry entrusted to him by Jesus, which was to testify to the gospel of the grace of God, even in the face of impending suffering and imprisonment. He prioritized the spiritual well-being of those he served above his own life.

5. What warnings did Paul give to the Ephesian elders regarding the future of the church in Ephesus?

Paul warned the Ephesian elders that after his departure, "fierce wolves" would come in among them, not sparing the flock. More alarmingly, he predicted that from among their own selves would arise men speaking twisted things to draw away disciples after them. This underscored the critical need for the elders to be vigilant, to pay careful attention to themselves and the flock, and to be alert against false teaching.

6. What does Paul's teaching in Acts 20:28 reveal about the nature of the church and how it was obtained?

In Acts 20:28, Paul reminds the Ephesian elders to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood, or purchased with his own blood. This verse powerfully teaches the doctrine of redemption and atonement, highlighting that the church belongs to God and was secured through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It underscores the immense value and cost of the church.

7. What responsibilities and characteristics of church leaders can be gleaned from Paul's example and his instructions to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20?

Paul's example and instructions emphasize that church leaders, appointed by the Holy Spirit as overseers and shepherds, must be faithful to God, diligent and wise in ministry, and humble. They should not be motivated by greed but be willing to work hard and support others. Leaders are responsible for teaching God's people sound doctrine, refuting error, and being involved in their lives. They must be vigilant against false teachers and prioritize the spiritual well-being of the flock, following the trustworthy word of God.

8. According to the passage, what is the ultimate assurance for fruitful ministry and the inheritance of believers?

The ultimate assurance for fruitful ministry does not reside in the abilities or faithfulness of church leaders alone but in God and the word of his grace. God uses the scriptures to build up and sanctify believers, giving them the promised inheritance among all those who are sanctified. This inheritance includes eternal life in resurrected bodies on the new earth. Believers are encouraged to testify to the gospel of grace, follow the Spirit's leading, and find their assurance in God's power and promises revealed in his word.