

Dr. Craig Keener, Acts, Session 1

Podcast Audio Overview

Authorship, Date, Genre

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Have you ever wished you could kind of get like a behind-the-scenes peek at how, like, one of the most important books in early Christianity, you know, how it came to be? Well, today we're going to be diving deep into the book of Acts. We're talking about who wrote it, when they wrote it, and why, and get this: our source is a lecture by Dr. Craig Keener. Okay. Now he is a leading scholar who has got some really interesting insights into the book. You ready to unlock some mysteries with me? Absolutely. Okay, so I'm speaking of unlocking secrets, right? Keener starts by talking about these fascinating sections in Acts. Okay, and they're called the we narratives. We narratives. Yeah, and there are these moments in the text where the writer suddenly shifts to first-person plural. Oh, like saying we sailed to, or we stayed with. Interesting.

It's almost like you're suddenly like right there with Paul on his journeys. Right, yeah. And these we sections are really crucial because they strongly suggest that the author was actually like a traveling companion of Paul. Yeah, it's kind of like finding like a travel journal tucked into the back of a history book, isn't it? It is. It's really cool. And while some people argue that this could be just like a literary device, right? Keener points out that in ancient historical writing, using we was like a stamp of authenticity. Oh, think of it as the author saying Hey, I'm not making this up. Yeah, I was there.

I saw these things firsthand. So it's not just a storytelling trick. No, it's like a personal guarantee of the story's truth. Exactly. Wow, and Keener takes this a step further. Okay, making a really compelling argument for the author being Luke the physician who traveled with Paul. Oh, wow, the timing of those "we" sections lines up perfectly with the moments we know Luke was with Paul from his letters. Yeah, so everything just clicks into place. But wouldn't that make Luke a pretty important figure in early Christianity? Yeah, I mean we don't really hear that much about him.

Otherwise, well, that's the thing, and that kind of adds to the credibility of Luke's authorship. The early church unanimously attributed Luke-Acts to Luke, right? If they were going to make up an author, yeah, wouldn't they choose a more prominent apostle? That's true. Like, inventing someone like Luke who wasn't this big name just doesn't make sense. Okay, so let's picture Luke for a second. Okay, who was this guy? Well, Keener paints a picture of a well-educated man. Likely not Jewish originally.

Okay, you might even have been called a God-fearer, a God-fearer. So a Gentile who? Was drawn to Judaism, but hadn't fully converted yet. Interesting. It shows that he might have had this unique perspective, this foot in both worlds, which is fascinating when you think about his role in early Christianity. Yeah, it's like he was bridging two different worlds, which would make him a perfect person to document this new movement, right? Okay, and here's another detail that adds to his character. Okay, Keener points out that Luke's writing shows

a lot of respect for women. Okay, possibly influenced by his profession as a physician interested in ancient medicine, women were also doctors. Oh, so Luke would have worked alongside skilled and intelligent women. That makes a lot of sense, right? You know, it's incredible how we often read the Bible. Without really thinking about the people behind it, right? You know, Luke wasn't just like this detached scholar.

Yeah, he was a doctor who saw suffering and healing firsthand, and that must have shaped his perspective in such powerful ways. Yeah, and perhaps explains why he seems to portray women with more respect than some other writers of his time. Interesting. Yeah, it's pretty cool. It is.

Yeah. Yeah, it really is fascinating to think about how Luke's background and experiences shaped his writing, you know, and speaking of how things fit together, this detail about his respect for women also kind of ties into the debate about when he wrote Acts. Oh, right. We need to tackle the date.

Yes, okay. So Keener walks us through all the different arguments for the date of Acts, right? Ranging from the 60s AD all the way to the 2nd century, right? But he ultimately builds a really strong case for the 70s. He does and one of the biggest pieces of evidence is actually in Luke's gospel. Oh, really where he describes the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. Okay in a way that suggests he was writing after that event which happened in 70 AD. Okay, but if he's writing after 70 AD wouldn't he have explicitly mentioned the destruction of the temple and Acts? Wow. Seems like a pretty big deal to leave out. That's a great question, and Keener addresses it head-on. Okay, he suggests that Luke didn't need to explicitly narrate the destruction because it was already a known event for his audience. Okay, imagine Luke like dropping these hints about this major event that everyone already knew about, right? He's saying, remember what happened. That's a key part of the story.

I'm telling you, right? It's almost like a shared understanding. Yeah, collective memory that Luke's tapping into. Exactly, instead of explicitly stating it. He uses prophecy and foreshadowing to evoke its significance without disrupting the flow of his narrative. It's a subtle but powerful way of connecting the dots- yeah, between past prophecies, recent events, and the message of hope he's sharing about this new faith. Okay, that's a really interesting point.

Yeah, and Keener also brings up another compelling argument for the 70s AD dating, right? He points out that the last part of Acts reads almost like a legal defense of Paul, okay, which would have been most relevant shortly after his death around 64 AD, so it's like Luke is trying to protect Paul's legacy, yes, and safeguard his teachings in a time when Christianity was facing opposition from both the Jewish authorities and the Roman authorities, right? But wouldn't that be kind of a risky move? It would, I mean, defending someone accused of sedition could really backfire, right? Absolutely. Christians were often viewed with suspicion by Roman authorities, but Keener argues that this defense of Paul was crucial, okay, because it presented him as innocent of sedition and worthy of leading the Christian movement. So Luke is really trying to present Christianity as a legitimate and non-threatening religion to the Roman authorities. That's really clever. It shows how Luke is thinking strategically, not just recounting history, right? He's shaping a narrative that could have had real-world implications for early Christians. Wow, so Luke isn't just writing like a

history. No, he's crafting a message that can have real-world impact. Exactly, and that brings us to the question of what kind of writing acts are okay.

Is it strictly history? Is it a biography, or is it something else entirely? Okay, so we've got the who and the when kind of figured out, right? Now it's time to tackle the what, right, and this is where Keener's expertise in ancient literature really comes in handy. Okay, he argues that Acts is best understood as a work of ancient historiography. That sounds pretty academic. What exactly does that mean? Well, think of it like a really well-researched historical drama. It has to be accurate and grounded in real events, but also be engaging and captivating for the audience. So it's history but with a bit of flair, exactly, and just as important as entertainment was accuracy. Okay, ancient historians, they might have taken some creative liberties in their presentation, right? But they were still expected to base their work on real events. There was a strong expectation of truthfulness, even if it was presented through a particular lens or perspective. So Luke is a historian, but he's also a storyteller, right? But isn't there also a strong? Biographical element to acts with its focus on figures like Peter and Paul You're absolutely right acts is this fascinating blend of historical narrative and biography Okay, Luke uses the lives and experiences of key figures like Peter and Paul to tell the larger story of the early church Hmm, he's saying look These are real people who lived breathed and faced the challenges of spreading this new faith through their stories We can understand how Christianity came to be. Yeah, it makes it all so much more real and relatable, right? And speaking of relating to the story, Keener suggests that Luke might have had a specific audience in mind when he was writing. Okay, he believes that Luke's core audience might have been located in the Aegean region, where Paul had spent much of his ministry, right, and Many early Christian communities had taken root. Yes, and remember we were just talking about how Luke might have been a Gentile himself, right? Now, imagine you're a Gentile in the Roman Empire, hearing this radical message about a Jewish Messiah for the first time. Okay, Luke's account directly speaks to your experience, yeah, showing how Gentiles like you can also be a part of this new movement.

It's like Lucas saying Hey, this isn't just for the Jewish people. This is for everyone. Exactly. It's a message of inclusion, a vision of a faith that transcends cultural boundaries. Exactly, and that message would have been incredibly powerful and perhaps even controversial in Luke's time. He's challenging the status quo, advocating for a more expansive vision of God's kingdom. It's a theme that runs throughout Acts: the spread of the Christian message to the Gentiles, right? But why would Luke, a Gentile, be so focused on this theme? Well, remember those debates about whether Gentiles could become followers of Jesus without first converting to Judaism Luke having experienced that tension firsthand might have been particularly passionate about Demonstrating how the Holy Spirit moved powerfully among Gentiles Okay, drawing them to faith and incorporating them into the growing Christian community So it's like he's saying hey I'm living proof that God's love and grace extend beyond the boundaries of Jewish tradition You got it and that message of radical inclusion and the power of the Holy Spirit working in unexpected places Right would have been truly revolutionary in Luke's time It's amazing to think about how Luke's personal experiences shaped his writing Yeah, and how his work in turn shaped the course of Christian history, but if Luke is writing for a specific audience Wouldn't he tailor his style and language to them as well? Absolutely. Keener points out that Luke seems to be writing for a relatively well-educated audience, people familiar with Greek literary styles and the Septuagint, which was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. So not just the average person on the street,

right? But someone with a bit of intellectual curiosity and maybe some background in Jewish thought precisely he's not dumbing things down He's engaging his audience on their level right using language and imagery that would have resonated with their education and background And that makes sense when you consider that Luke dedicates his work to Theophilus Right who Keener describes as a most excellent figure that suggests somewhat of high social standing Yeah, perhaps even someone connected to the Roman authorities exactly and that dedication to a prominent individual Hints at Luke's ambition for his work.

He's not just writing for a small circle of believers He's aiming for a wider audience potentially hoping to influence those in positions of power So Luke is really trying to present a sophisticated and compelling argument for Christianity He is he's trying to show that this new faith is not a threat to Roman society But a force for good right quite a brilliant strategy It really is and it shows just how carefully Luke crafted his narrative Yeah, taking into account his audience the political climate and his own personal experiences. Okay, so we've talked about Luke's background, his audience, and the political context of his writing. Uh-huh.

But what about the man himself? Yeah, can we get a sense of Luke the person from his work? That's a great question, and Keener encourages us to consider the personal dimension of Acts. Okay, remember Luke was a traveling companion of Paul, someone who witnessed firsthand the highs and lows of spreading the Christian message, right? He experienced shipwreck, imprisonment, and persecution. Yet his writing is infused with hope and a deep faith in God's Providence. So it's not just a detached academic exercise for him. He's writing from the heart sharing his own journey of faith Exactly, and that personal touch makes acts all the more compelling We're not just reading a dry history We're encountering the heart and mind of a man who deeply believed in the message He was proclaiming and who despite facing incredible challenges Never lost sight of the power of the gospel to transform lives Precisely and that unwavering faith shines through in every page of acts Yeah It really is inspiring to see how Luke's faith kind of shines through even in the face of you know Adversity and all the challenges. Yeah, speaking of challenges, though, I think it's time we kind of address the elephant in the room here.

Okay, the question of historical accuracy, right? Some of the events described in Acts, like the miraculous healings and the speaking in tongues. They might seem pretty unbelievable to a modern audience. That's a fair point, and it's a question that scholars have debated for centuries, right? But I appreciate that Keener doesn't shy away from these difficult questions. He acknowledges the challenges but encourages us to approach the text with an open mind. So he's not saying we have to, like, take everything literally exactly. Keener reminds us that ancient writers often used symbolism, metaphors, and even exaggeration to convey deeper truths. Okay, it's not necessarily about whether every event happened exactly as described, but about the message behind those events.

Yeah, you know, what is Luke trying to tell us that makes sense? And even if we approach Acts as a historical document, we have to acknowledge that history is always written from a certain point of view, right? Luke has an agenda to present a compelling and persuasive account of early Christianity, right? And that's where Keener's insights are so valuable. Yeah, he helps us appreciate not just the history but the artistry and the purpose behind Luke's writing. So we need to be aware of how Luke is shaping the narrative- yes, to emphasize key

themes and make his case for this new faith precisely and that makes reading Acts even more interesting. Yeah, definitely. We're not just passively absorbing information, right? We're actively engaging with the text, looking for clues to understand the author's intentions. It becomes like a detective story. But speaking of uncovering clues, one thing that really struck me was Keener's point about Luke's portrayal of women, right? We talked earlier about how his experience as a physician possibly working alongside female doctors might have influenced his view. Yes, and it's fascinating because women are often sidelined or stereotyped in ancient texts, right? But in Acts we see them taking on much more prominent roles: their leaders, prophets, patrons, and even travel companions with Paul.

It's like Luke is intentionally pushing back against those cultural norms. Yeah, showing that women are active and vital members of the early church. Absolutely He's presenting a vision of a more inclusive community where women's contributions are valued and celebrated. Okay, and that message resonates deeply with us even today as we continue to strive for gender equality. It's a great reminder that even ancient texts can challenge our assumptions and inspire us to work toward a more just and equitable world. Yeah, but before we wrap up this deep dive, okay I want to go back to Keener's emphasis on the practical implications of Luke's writing, right? It's not just about theology or history. Uh-huh.

It's about how faith should be lived out. That's a crucial point: Acts isn't just a book to be studied, right? It's a book to be embodied. It's a call to action, an invitation to live out the values we see modeled in the lives of those early Christians: love, compassion, justice, and radical hospitality. So it's not enough to just believe the right things. No, we also have to put those beliefs into action, exactly, and that's the real challenge, isn't it? It's easy to get caught up in theological debates. But the true measure of our faith is how we treat others, how we care for the vulnerable, how we work for peace and justice, so it's not just about reading Acts. It's about living it beautifully, said, and that's a challenge that can truly change the world. It really is amazing to think about how much we've uncovered in this deep dive into Acts. We've explored like the authorship, the date, the genre, the audience, the cultural context. Uh-huh, and even like the personal experiences that shaped this incredible book. Yeah, it really highlights how a single text can be so multifaceted, offering insights into history, theology, literature, and the human experience. Right, and it reminds us that there's always more to discover, more to ponder, and more to learn. It's like opening a door to a whole new world of understanding. So if you're listening and you're feeling inspired to explore the book of Acts further, I encourage you to dive in with an open mind and a curious heart. Yes, you might be amazed at what you find, and remember, keep those insights from Dr. Keener in mind. Yeah, pay attention to the wean narratives, the subtle clues about the date and the way Luke crafts his story. You'll find yourself engaging with the text on a whole new level, and maybe just maybe you'll discover that Acts is more than just an ancient text; it's a living, breathing story.

They can speak to us across the centuries, challenging us, inspiring us, and calling us to live out our faith in bold and compassionate ways. What a wonderful thought to leave our listeners with until next time, keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep diving deep.