

Title: Acts 15-16

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Session 16

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Abstract

This lecture examines the historical and theological alignment between the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 and Paul's account in Galatians 2, arguing for their identity as the same event. Dr. Craig Keener then tracks the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey, focusing on his partnerships with Silas and Timothy, the standardization of Timothy's circumcision status for mission, and the providential guidance that led the team through Troas and into Europe. Finally, the lecture analyzes the early mission in Philippi, exploring the conversion of the wealthy businesswoman Lydia and the spiritual and sociological dimensions of the exorcism of a slave girl possessed by a Pythian spirit.

Outline

I. Introduction to Acts 15 and 16

- A. Recapitulation of previous themes and physical transition.
- B. Transition from the Jerusalem Decree to the Jerusalem Council.

II. Historical Debate: Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) vs. Paul's Visits in Galatians

- A. Different Views on the Concordance:
 - 1. Galatians 2:1-10 is Acts 11:30 (Famine Visit) / Acts 12:25 (Ramsey).
 - 2. Galatians 2:1-10 is Acts 15 (Lightfoot, Keener, and many modern scholars).
 - 3. Galatians 2:1-10 and Acts 15 are two different sources of the same event.
 - 4. Disregarding Acts altogether (secular/skeptical views).
 - 5. Acts 15 with added elements from Acts 11.
- B. Arguments for the Famine Visit Identification (Acts 11:30) and Rebuttals:
 - 1. Argument: Paul would not omit the famine visit in Galatians.
 - Rebuttal: Paul is establishing his independence from the Jerusalem apostles; if they were in hiding or the relief was delivered directly to elders, he had no reason to mention it.
 - 2. Argument: No mention of the Jerusalem Decree in Galatians.

Rebuttal: The decree is also omitted in Romans and 1 Corinthians (which surely post-date the Council). The decree was localized specifically to Syria and Cilicia, not Galatia.

3. Argument: Too many discrepancies between Galatians 2 and Acts 15.

Rebuttal: Identifying Galatians 2 with the famine visit creates even more discrepancies; Luke's famine report is too brief for substantial comparison.

4. Argument: 'Remembering the poor' (Gal 2:10) during a famine visit.

Rebuttal: It is logically circular to ask Paul to 'remember the poor' if he was already in Jerusalem specifically to deliver famine relief.

5. Argument: The 'revelation' of Galatians 2:2 identified with Agabus's prophecy (Acts 11:28).

Rebuttal: In Galatians 1:12-16, 'revelation' consistently refers to Paul's personal encounter with Christ and his gospel, not an external prophetic prediction.

6. Argument: Date-based arguments trying to date Galatians early.

Rebuttal: Galatians sounds more like the theological period of Romans than 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

C. Arguments Supporting Acts 15 as Galatians 2:1-10:

1. Mention of Titus (Gal 2:1-3): Titus was likely converted during the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14), meaning he would not have been a Christian/companion during the earlier famine visit of Acts 11.
2. Commonalities of target, outcome, and participants (Gentiles exempt from circumcision; leadership of Peter and James; involvement of Barnabas and Paul).
3. Joseph Fitzmeyer's consensus: Differences are minor and do not undermine substantial historical agreement between both reports.

III. Division and New Teams: Paul and Barnabas Split (Acts 15:36-41)

A. Real, fallible heroes in scripture (Old Testament Judges and Greco-Roman biographies).

B. The Conflict over John Mark:

1. Paul refuses to take Mark because of his past desertion.
2. Barnabas desires to give his cousin a second chance.
3. Severe, sharp disagreement (paroxysmos) leading to separation.

C. Providential outcomes:

1. Two teams instead of one (Barnabas/Mark to Cyprus; Paul/Silas to Asia Minor).
2. Silas's qualification: A respected Jerusalem leader and, crucially, a Roman citizen (valuable in Roman colonies like Philippi).

IV. Crossing the Taurus Mountains and Timothy's Circumcision (Acts 16:1-3)

A. Paul travels north through the Cilician gates (mountain pass) during the non-winter traveling season.

B. Meeting Timothy in Lystra:

1. Son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father.

2. Father prohibited Timothy's circumcision (regarded as uncivilized by Greeks/Romans).
3. Legal and social status of Timothy: Jews viewed him as a Gentile (uncircumcised); Gentiles viewed him as too Jewish.

C. The Circumcision of Timothy:

1. Distinct from Titus (Galatians 2), who was fully Gentile.
2. A matter of contextualization and mission strategy rather than a prerequisite for salvation.
3. Sacrifice made to remove obstacles for entering synagogues and spreading the gospel.

V. Geographical Navigation and the Macedonian Call (Acts 16:4-10)

A. Seeking Positive Guidance:

1. Travelling through Phrygia/Galatia (South Galatia vs. North Galatia debate).
Anatolian archaeologists (Stephen Mitchell and Barbara Levick) confirm the South Galatian route, matching Paul's standard provincial titling.
2. Holy Spirit forbidding travel to the province of Asia or north to Bithynia.

B. Northwest Voyage to Troas:

1. Troas (Alexandria Troas) as a massive, high-status Roman colony (population ~100,000) near the legendary site of Old Troy.
2. Geographic and historical boundaries between Europe (West) and Asia (East) in the Greco-Roman worldview.

C. The Night Vision:

1. Paul sees a Macedonian man pleading, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'
2. The team interprets the vision together, recognizing it as positive divine guidance.
3. Psychological comfort of divine guidance before facing severe trials in Europe.

VI. The Arrival in Macedonia and the Port of Neapolis (Acts 16:11-12)

A. Rapid two-day sea voyage passing the mountainous island of Samothrace.

B. Landing at Neapolis, the port serving Philippi.

C. Entering Philippi:

1. A proud Roman colony using Latin, highly devoted to Diana (Artemis) and Roman customs.
2. Citizens possessed honorary citizenship of Rome (Ius Italicum), providing the context for Paul's letter ('citizenship in heaven').
3. Noted as an agricultural center and chief city of the district.

VII. The Conversion of Lydia (Acts 16:13-15)

A. Searching for a Place of Prayer:

1. No physical synagogue building due to the lack of a quorum (10 Jewish men).
2. Meeting outside the city gate near the Gengites River for ceremonial washings.

B. The Status of Women in Macedonia:

1. Macedonian women historically possessed greater social and religious freedom than women in Athens/Attica.
2. High female participation in religious cults (e.g., Diana/Artemis).

C. Lydia of Thyatira:

1. Thyatira was located in ancient Lydia, famous for its dyers' guilds and textile trade.
2. A seller of luxurious purple dye (derived from the Murex shellfish of Tyre or cheaper imitation dyes).
3. Social status: Likely a prosperous freedwoman (former slave acting as a business manager).

D. Opening of Her Heart and Offering Hospitality:

1. She and her entire household are baptized.
2. Persuades the mission team to stay in her home, functioning as their financial benefactress and patroness.

VIII. The Exorcism of the Slave Girl with a Pythian Spirit (Acts 16:16-18)

A. The Slave Girl (Paidiske):

1. A young girl exploited by her masters for economic gain.
2. Contrast and parallels with other young female figures in Luke-Acts.

B. The Pythian Spirit (Pythoness):

1. 'Spirit of a Pythoness' was named after Pythian Apollo, slayer of the dragon Python at the Delphic Oracle.
2. Delphi was the most famous prophetic oracle of Greco-Roman antiquity.
3. The girl possessed a highly powerful, frenzied demon of divination.

C. The Message of the Spirit:

1. Shouting: 'These men are servants of the Most High God, proclaiming the way of salvation.'
2. Ambiguity of terminology: 'Most High God' could refer to Zeus; 'salvation' had diverse pagan meanings.
3. Paul's reluctance to have a demon testify for the gospel (mirroring Jesus in Luke 4).

D. The Exorcism:

1. Paul commands the spirit to leave in the name of Jesus Christ.
2. Spiritual liberation of the slave girl resulting in her immediate economic worthlessness to her owners.

IX. Interdisciplinary and Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Spirit Possession

A. Anthropological Documentation:

1. Denial of spirit possession trance is regarded as an anthropological flat-earther equivalent.
2. 74% of studied global societies have documented spirit possession beliefs.
3. Psychophysiological substrate: altered states of consciousness characterized by hyperarousal and distinct EEG readings.

4. Drastic personality, vocal, and behavioral shifts.

B. Global Christian Witness and Accounts:

1. Yoram Mugari (Africa): witnessed physically impossible movements (possessed persons climbing walls like snakes).
2. 74% of Ethiopian Christians report witnessing exorcisms.
3. Modern cases of physical healings (muteness, heart/kidney failure) occurring immediately upon the casting out of demons.

C. Western Academic and Professional Openness:

1. Paul Hebert (missionary anthropologist): identifying the 'excluded middle' ignored by Western worldview.
2. Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck and Professor William Wilson (Duke): documenting clinical cases of real demonic possession requiring spiritual intervention.
3. David Instone Brewer (Cambridge): personal encounter with a demonic response during silent prayer in a psychiatric ward.