

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 12, Gospel Themes and Introduction to Acts

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson's New Testament History and Literature course, lecture 12, Summary of the Gospel Themes and Introduction to Acts.

Now, the material on Acts is not included in the first exam. It will appear on the second exam sometime later. So, the material that I'm going to talk about the Gospels, in concluding the Gospels today, is fair game for the exam, but the Acts material isn't.

But it would be a good idea if we finish the Gospels early enough, we can at least get started on Acts. Then I'm planning on stopping around a quarter till, ten till, maybe even a little, yeah, around there, and devoting the rest of the time to a review session. I'll talk about what that's going to look like.

I'm going to talk more about the exam. I'll tell you what it's going to look like and how to study for it. And I will open it up for questions.

So, the length of the review session will depend on you. If you want to get out and enjoy the weather, everyone can just be quiet and I'll know that you don't want to talk about the exam and you'd rather go outside and we can end early. But I do want to make the time available for you to ask any questions as far as, you know, what we talked about or what to expect in the exam, or if you have gaps in your notes or something you didn't understand or want to ask about, I'll give you an opportunity to do that.

So that'll be the last 20 minutes or so of the class. And again, I mainly want to open it up to questions, so it's kind of up to you as to how long we go. So that's kind of what is on tap for today.

So, let's open with prayer and then I want to wrap up our discussion of the Gospels and just, again, just get started on the book of Acts. All right.

Father, thank you for the beautiful day and warmer weather. And I pray that we'll find opportunities to get outside and enjoy it while it's here. Father, I pray now that you'll help us to focus on just a very small portion of the New Testament and your overall revelation to us in the Old New Testament. I pray that we'll be challenged and encouraged to read the Gospels in a new light and to understand the perspective and the various portraits that they paint of Jesus and what it means to know him and respond in obedience to him. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. All right.

We have been looking at the Gospels primarily from the standpoint not so much to just grasp their content. Hopefully, you picked that up through your reading. But I've tried to emphasize what seems to be the distinct emphasis of each of the Gospels.

I'm assuming that there is because, as we'll see in just a moment, the Church has allowed four Gospels to stand in the New Testament instead of just one or instead of just combining them all together into one large Gospel or life of Christ, the Church has allowed four Gospels to stand in our canonical Scripture. So what I've tried to do is as we move through the Gospels, I've simply tried to give you kind of a taste for what is unique about each of the Gospels. What do they have that the others don't? Or what do they emphasize, perhaps, to the extent that the others don't? Or at least just what seems to be the main themes and main emphases of any of the Gospels as compared to the other ones so that you get a picture of what is the distinct way that each of the Gospel writers, and I would argue in a complimentary way, not contradictory, but in a complimentary way, what is the unique perspective that each of the authors conveys about the person of Jesus Christ.

Now, when I was in college, the first Gospels-type class I had was a class called The Life of Christ, and it's actually been very traditional in university and college, especially Bible college and Christian liberal arts college settings, to have a course on the life of Christ, where basically what you do is drawing on all four Gospels, you put them together into a rather coherent description of who Christ was and what he did, and it usually results in somewhat of a specific timeline in which things happened, and you end up with a grand narrative or picture of who Jesus was and what he did and what he taught. And that is fine and that is necessary to some degree to be able to harmonize the Gospels, to come up with a portrait of who Christ was, but again, if we were to follow the lead of the New Testament, it's interesting that, as I said, the New Testament did not do that. The New Testament left us with four separate accounts of the life of Christ.

So, one of the dangers of putting them together into a grand life of Christ, or a class on the life of Christ or the teaching of Christ, as helpful and necessary as that is, one of the dangers is we may risk blunting the unique individual voices of the four Gospels. And so perhaps before we ever bring all the Gospels together into a grand life of Christ or teaching of Christ, it's necessary to get a sense of what the unique voice or the unique perspective on Jesus that each of the Gospels provides. And that's what we've tried to do in this class, instead of just giving you a life of Christ, is focus on what are the unique themes and perspectives of the four Gospels.

Again, in church history, there was an individual around in the second century named Tatian, and we've talked about this before. Tatian attempted to write a work called the Diatessaron. Again, you don't need to know that for a test or anything, or what the Diatessaron was.

The Diatessaron was simply the name of this book that he wrote, and it was an attempt to combine all four Gospels into one. And he started with John's Gospel, which is kind of interesting, as we said. Even some scholars who think Matthew, Mark, and Luke are fairly reliable question John, because, as we said, one of the ways John has been characterized is as one of the more theological and kind of one of the more spiritual Gospels.

And so, a lot of scholars today would not rely on John for historical information about Jesus. They think it's more theological and reflects the teaching of the Church, etc. But Tatian started with John and wove all four Gospels into one grand narrative of the life of Christ.

But interestingly, that never caught on. The Church never adopted that, nor Tatian's approach. Again, instead, they allowed the four Gospels to stand, and their distinct and unique contributions to a full and complex understanding of who Jesus was.

So, for example, when we look at Matthew's Gospel, we find that Matthew portrays Jesus in a number of ways, such as the new Moses, the one who, like Moses, now comes to rescue his people. Jesus is portrayed as a teacher. Jesus is portrayed as the Son of God.

He's portrayed as the ancestor of David, the descendant of David, who has the right to sit on David's throne and rule as king. But not only for Jews but for Gentiles as well. There's a distinct emphasis in Matthew's Gospel on the inclusion of Gentiles.

Jesus is portrayed as the one who is the climax and the fulfillment of the entirety of Old Testament Scripture. Mark portrays Jesus as a balance between his humanity and his deity. He portrays Jesus as the suffering servant who comes to suffer and die on behalf of his people.

Luke portrays Jesus as the Savior. That's one of the characteristic terms for Luke, to describe Jesus as Savior, or what Jesus does to save his people or bring salvation. Luke also portrays Jesus as the Son of David, as Matthew does in fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Jesus is also portrayed in Luke as one having compassion for the outcasts of society. Those who are the undesirables or untouchables that everyone else rejects, Jesus accepts. And then John comes along and portrays Jesus in a number of ways.

John is the only one of the Gospels to portray Jesus as the Passover Lamb. He is the Lamb of God in fulfillment of the Old Testament Passover Lamb. Now Jesus fulfills that.

Jesus is the Word, or logos, the very revelation of God. Jesus is portrayed clearly, although I think all four Gospels do this, but John specifically and overtly portrays Jesus as the Son of God, as God himself. Without denying his humanity, Jesus is clearly portrayed as a divine figure, as God himself.

So, you can see that the Gospels have unique ways of presenting Jesus and portraying him, that we would be impoverished if we lacked any of the four. You can see why the church left those four alone. We would be slightly impoverished, and our understanding of Jesus would be lacking if we did not have these four different perspectives and the different emphases and themes of who Jesus was.

So, again, it's just a reminder, that before we're too quick to combine all the Gospels together into a life of Christ, their distinct voices need to be heard as far as what they're trying to say uniquely about Jesus, who he is, what he does, and what he says. However, when we do combine the Gospels and put them together when you look at the four together, what are some of the unique features that seem to emerge from all four? If adding all four up, if I were to paint a portrait of Jesus, what might I emphasize that seems to emerge from the Gospels? And again, there are a lot of things, we could put all this together into one grand picture, but is there anything that emerges, I'm especially thinking of things that we might be tempted to overlook. Are there themes that the Gospel writers emerge that we might overlook? Now, one of the themes that obviously emerges in a couple of them is Jesus' deity, but most of us, I don't think, would question that.

I think most of us have a little bit more difficulty envisioning Jesus' humanity. So that's a starting point. If I were to paint a portrait of Jesus, the first thing I would emphasize is Jesus' humanity, and that is avoiding a docetic Jesus.

Now, the word docetic is, this word actually comes from a Greek word, dokeo, which means to seem, to think, or to seem. This word docetic was used to describe a very early heresy or false teaching regarding Christ that said, actually, denied Jesus' full humanity. It said that Jesus only appeared to be human.

Hence the word docetic. Again, the Greek word means to seem, and Docetism, or docetic view of Jesus, means Jesus only appeared or seemed to be a human being. So very early on, and this is very interesting, a lot of the early church fathers, when they started to think about Jesus and formulate what they thought, very, very few people denied Jesus' deity.

Most of them, a lot of them, some of them would have denied his humanity, such as Gnostic-type thinking, and Platonic-type thinking that emphasizes the spiritual over the physical. But again, Docetism was the name of an early heresy that said Jesus only seemed or appeared to be human, but he really wasn't. So, it agreed that Jesus was deity, he was God, but it denied his humanity.

But it's in the Gospels that we find the full humanity of Jesus disclosed. Again, you don't have to read very far into Luke chapters 1, 2, and 3 to read and see Jesus and confront him in his full humanity. Luke, as we said, Luke is the only writer who says anything about Jesus' childhood.

And he has that interesting phrase in there, and Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and human beings. I mean, how can Luke say that about Jesus? If Jesus is God, how does he need to grow? Yet Luke reminds us and discloses Jesus in his full humanity, that Jesus did have to grow in wisdom and understanding. So on the one hand, Jesus is the omniscient God who knows all things, yet at the same time, he's an ignorant human being who doesn't know everything and has to learn things.

So, he has to grow in wisdom and stature and favor with God and human beings. Later on, there are times in the Gospels, when there's one interesting phrase that especially I think Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have, where Jesus says, Not even the Son of Man, not even I know the hour when the Son of Man will return. In reference to the not yet, the time when Jesus would return to set up his kingdom, Jesus says, I don't even know what time that is.

Only the Father knows the hour, the day, and the hour when that will take place. We saw that the Gospel of Mark portrays Jesus as suffering on behalf of his people and dying. And there's another interesting thing in Luke.

Towards the very end of the Gospel, in the Garden of Gethsemane, you remember right before Jesus is arrested, you find the Gospels portraying Jesus as praying with his disciples in the Garden, not Garden of Eden, but Garden of Gethsemane, outside of Jerusalem. And while he's praying, it's not long after that when the guards come and they arrest Jesus, take him off to his trial and he dies. In the Garden, he's portrayed as praying.

And interestingly, Luke portrays Jesus as praying something that goes like this. He says, Father, please let this cup pass from me. And what that means is the cup is a metaphor for Jesus' suffering and death that he's about to take.

So interestingly, Jesus seems to be saying, Father, if there's any other way this can be done except through my death, you have my vote. In other words, Jesus is responding in horror at the face of what's going to come, his death. It's a very human reaction.

Yet, of course, Jesus' next words are, yet not my will, that is what I would like to happen, but your will, praying to the Father, and then Jesus goes off to the cross. But

in that moment, Luke portrays Jesus as undergoing a very human response and emotion in the face of death. So, the Gospels portray Jesus in his full humanity.

They don't shrink back from Jesus' deity, yet they don't diminish his humanity and portray him in fully human terms. That's why later on in the book of Hebrews that we'll talk about later on in the semester, the author, probably reflecting on the Gospels, says, the reason Jesus can function as our high priest is because he's been tempted in every way we have, yet he has not sinned. In other words, the requirement for a high priest was the ability to understand and sympathize with the people he represented.

And Jesus could not be our high priest if he were only God. He can only be our high priest because he's God, yet at the same time, he is fully human. He's experienced the full range of human temptation.

For example, when you think about it, was Jesus tempted sexually? He probably was, yet he never crossed that line in thought or action between being tempted and actually sinning. So, Jesus would have experienced the full range of human temptation. So, the entire New Testament, but especially the Gospels, don't shrink back from portraying Jesus in his full humanity as a human being, while at the same time still portraying him as the son of God and his full deity.

So, again, today we're more prone to emphasize Jesus' deity because that is probably the aspect of Jesus that many people tend to reject and see him as just a human being. But in the first century, it probably would have been the opposite. There would have been more of a tendency to deny Jesus' humanity.

Hence the biblical authors stress Jesus' humanity, his full humanity, along with his deity as well. So, the first part of or aspect of a portrait of Jesus would be his humanity, avoiding a docetic Jesus. Before we go on, another example I like to use, just to show how even Docetism has unwittingly crept into some of our language and even some of the songs we sing in church settings.

I always think, I always cringe when I sing this at Christmas time. Away in the manger, you come to that part, no crying he makes. Who said Jesus didn't cry? He was a human being.

Like any other human baby, he would have cried. That's a very docetic view of Jesus, that he wouldn't have cried. Or when we paint our pictures of Jesus where he's glowing and has a halo over his head, that certainly captures the significance of Jesus' birth, but it tends to obscure the fact that he was just a normal human being.

And it would have been just a normal, very humbling human birth that Jesus experienced. So, avoiding a docetic Jesus. The second aspect of the portrait of Jesus I might emphasize is Jesus' compassion for outcasts.

Avoiding a popular Jesus. That is, as we saw, especially with Luke, but the other Gospels give hints of it as well, Jesus is not one to curry favor with the religious establishment and elite. Jesus is not one to simply follow the lead of the populace.

But Jesus was willing to boldly cross lines socially and economically and reach out and have physical contact with and relationships with those who were social outcasts, those on the fringes of society. Jesus demonstrated over and over his compassion, especially for the outcasts of society. When that was not popular, the religious elite and establishment would have nothing to do with that.

And again, we saw with Luke, that's what often got Jesus in trouble. Particularly when it brought him into conflict with the Old Testament law. He certainly was not supposed to associate with these people who disregarded the law of Moses.

Or, to touch them physically or to get too close to them would bring about some kind of ceremonial violation. But Jesus was quite willing to do that. So, avoiding a popular Jesus.

Emphasizing a Jesus that reaches out to not the religious and social elite and popular, but to those who are the outcasts and the undesirables. A third emphasis I would point is Jesus' concern for stewardship. Avoiding a wealthy Jesus.

Again, there's nothing, especially in Luke, but there's nothing in the Gospels that suggests Jesus said that wealth was sinful or wrong. But certainly, in the Gospels, Jesus reminds us of the danger of placing our trust in material possessions and wealth in a way that eclipses, obscures, or takes away true trust in the person of Jesus Christ. What Jesus is really against is the hoarding of wealth, and trust in wealth.

That's why Jesus says things in the Sermon on the Mount such as, don't store up treasure on earth where moth and rust corrode. Again, he's not saying money's wrong. He's saying the only problem is it's temporary.

It can be destroyed. The only proper object of your trust is in the person of Jesus Christ. And so, Jesus reminds us that wealth is a very crummy object of your trust and reliance.

And to hoard wealth or to place our trust in it in exchange for trust in Jesus Christ is simply to miss what Jesus was doing. And I wonder, especially in our North American context, if we don't need to hear this message again. A lot of Christians don't need to

go back and hear Jesus and what he says about our attitude toward wealth and material possessions.

Finally, concern for community. We saw in all the Gospels Jesus gathers around himself a community of disciples. And that's not because Jesus was into small groups and things like that.

What Jesus is doing is preparing a nucleus that will result in a community that revolves around obedience and worship of Jesus Christ. And a community that will continue to spread and expand and eventually embrace the entire earth. So, Jesus in all his Gospels makes provision for a community of followers that will carry on the work that Jesus began to do.

And a community that will identify itself by obedience to the person of Jesus Christ. So, avoiding an individualistic Jesus. By the way, we said too, again, the reason Jesus did choose a smaller group of disciples and the reason he chose 12 of them, I think we raised this before, is for what reason? Why did Jesus choose 12 disciples? I mean, why not, I mean, 8 would have been a nice small group or maybe 15 would have been a little better.

Why 12? Yeah, 12 tribes of Israel. In other words, this is the new people of God, the new Israel. Founded on Jesus Christ and his apostles, not on the 12 tribes of Israel and the law.

So now what Jesus is doing by choosing 12 apostles is forming a new people, a new community that will be marked out by faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to him. And will continue the work that Jesus himself began. So, again, at least in the Gospels, and I think I could demonstrate the rest of the New Testament, the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament knows of no such thing as a Christian who is outside of the community.

Or a Christian who individualistically thinks that they can make a go of it on their own. It didn't exist. It was unthinkable that you would be one of Jesus' followers and a Christian and not belong to a community.

That is Jesus' church, the people of God. So, once again, in our society where we tend to value individualism and our aspirations perhaps, again, we need to hear Jesus' message that is counter-cultural at times. Reminding us of how much we need a community of God's people.

And how much God's intention is that we don't live lives as individual Christians, but we live lives in a community, this new people of God that Jesus has established and created that revolves around response to him in faith. Remember we said in the Old Testament, most Jews would have defined the people of God according to what?

What would have been the distinct marker or markers that you belong to the people of God, to the community of God's people? What would have kind of been the identity markers that show that you truly belong to this community, the people of God, the Old Testament people of God? What would they have focused on? Yep? How they worshiped. Okay, and how did they worship especially? Under the Old Testament, what would that have looked like? Temple sacrifices.

Temple sacrifices, obedience to the law. So that would have been the primary marker, that you obeyed the Mosaic law, offering up temple sacrifices, that even further than that, ethnically, that you were a Jew. Again, one of the big issues is, who are the true, in the New Testament, who are the true children of Abraham? Are they those who are physically descended from Abraham, or can Gentiles be sons of Abraham as well? That's where, again, that's where Jesus comes in, and he redefines the community of God's people, the church.

And by the way, the word church, we've kind of made a technical term out of that, but the word church, the Greek word, was actually used in the Greek Old Testament to refer to the nation of Israel, the assembly of God's people. So, by using the word church, Matthew and Paul, they're not using a new term, they're using a term that they borrowed from the Old Testament to refer to Israel. And again, what Jesus is doing is saying, now the true church, the true assembly, the true people of God is no longer focused on obedience to the law and temple sacrifices and being ethnically a Jew, but now it's determined solely by one's response to Jesus Christ.

And that's why Gentiles can be included as well. If the determining factor is not obedience to the law and becoming a Jew ethnically, then Gentiles can equally become God's people on the same basis that Israel does, by simply responding in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. So concern for community in the Gospels, avoiding an individualistic Jesus.

Again, Jesus, in all the Gospels, makes preparation for a group of followers that in the community will, in a sense, be his representatives and continue his mission, and who will respond in faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. All right, there are probably other things that you could think of. One person in one of my classes a couple of years ago suggested a concern for grace, avoiding a legalistic Jesus.

That is, Jesus didn't just come to teach a new law. While he did come to the demand of his followers, he also provided the means of fulfilling his demands. Jesus is portrayed as graciously entering into a relationship and graciously providing what he requires of his people.

Remember the Sermon on the Mount? Those who are poor in spirit, who recognize their bankruptcy, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, will be filled. God will

fill them with that righteousness. So that could be a fifth one, which is a concern or emphasis on God's grace, avoiding a legalistic Jesus.

Jesus didn't just come to give a new law or a means of earning one's way to salvation, but graciously offered salvation and graciously made provision for his people to follow him in obedience. All right, any questions about any of these four? You can probably think of others. What? Which one? The one I just quoted.

I'm trying to think. That was Matthew chapter 5. Yeah, Matthew chapter 5, and I think it was verse 12 in the Beatitudes. Yeah.

All right. Well, let me just introduce you to the next book. And now, in a sense, we move to a new section of the New Testament, which in a sense, in some respects, stands on its own.

It's a lot like the Gospels in that it's narrative, but it's unlike the Gospels in that it doesn't focus on any one person. It focuses on a number of persons and it's not focused on the exploits of one person in a limited geographical location. But again, its geographical distribution is much more broadly.

It eventually encompasses the entire Greco-Roman world. So Acts is a little bit different in that regard. But the story of the early church, the book of Acts.

The first question to ask is, what is Acts doing here? How do we understand its location in the New Testament? And we've talked about the fact before that the New Testament is not arranged according to chronology, but it's more logical and thematically. So, the book of Acts actually has a very natural location in the New Testament. It naturally follows the Gospels and it naturally and logically prepares for the epistles, the rest of the New Testament, especially Paul's epistles.

And the reason why is this. The book of Acts naturally follows the Gospels because it records what Jesus began to do in the Gospels, and how that work now continues through his followers. So, we talked a moment ago about Jesus gathering a group around him of disciples that would form a nucleus for this transcultural people of God we call a church.

So, the Gospels prepare for that. But what Acts does is show how the work of Jesus began on earth now gets continued through this group of followers that now, in Jesus' absence after his death and resurrection and ascension to heaven, it shows how that work began through Jesus continued through his followers, his disciples. Then Acts provides a bridge to the rest of the New Testament because some of these followers become main characters, again Acts does not center around one main figure, Jesus Christ, it centers around a number of key figures, but the letters in the

rest of the New Testament are letters that come from the pen of some of these key figures.

So, we have the letters from 1 and 2 Peter, we have letters from John, and interestingly the dominant character in Acts, the person that kind of a lot of times, especially in the second half of the book, takes center stage, is an individual named the Apostle Paul. And so, it's natural then that right after Acts, the largest group of writings in the rest of the New Testament come from Paul's pen because he's one of the dominant figures in the book of Acts. So again, Acts provides a perfect bridge between the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament in picking up where the Gospels left off, in showing how Jesus' ministry gets continued through his followers, but then providing a bridge to the rest of the New Testament by introducing those persons that end up being the authors of many of the letters that form the rest of the New Testament.

What is Acts' relationship to Luke? We've already talked about that when we discussed Luke. Acts was the second part of a two-volume work, Luke-Acts, but again for the reasons we just described, when the New Testament was formed into a canon, the books of Luke and Acts were split apart. Luke went with the other books that it resembled, the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and John, and then Acts was separate because it provided a handy transition between the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament.

Acts actually has a fairly easy, in a sense, plan as far as the way it develops. There may be several ways to outline or break up the book of Acts, but one easy way that seems to be in line with what the author intends is found in the very first chapter and verse 8. Now, in the first few verses of Acts, Jesus has not... Again, at the very end of Luke, Jesus dies, he's raised from the dead, and he appears to his followers. In Acts chapter 1, Jesus has not yet ascended to heaven.

He's still instructing his disciples at the very beginning of Acts. So, you can see Acts and Luke, as I said, that's because they were originally a two-volume work. So, with the book of Acts, Jesus is still on earth instructing his disciples, and it won't be too long before he will ascend into heaven, and then it will be up to his followers to continue the work that Jesus had begun.

But part of Jesus' instructions to his followers, his disciples, before he departs, is found in Acts chapter 1 and verse 8. And in a sense, this verse provides kind of, in summary form, an outline of where the book of Acts is headed. So, Jesus tells his disciples, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Now before we look at how that fits, the most important thing to realize is this is not just a nice missionary strategy.

If you notice, it moves in concentric circles. It starts in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, which is just to the north, and then the ends of the earth, the outermost parts of the earth. This isn't just Jesus being a good missionary strategist, that you need to start with your home base and then move outwards, though that may be true.

But what you need to know about this verse is, that I think the reason it's put together is because it is a direct reflection of the prophet Isaiah's program for how God would restore his people. And interestingly, if you go back to the book of Isaiah, it envisions the good news spreading from Jerusalem and ending up at the ends of the earth. So, this isn't just Jesus again saying, hey, I've got a nice strategy for spreading the gospel.

But instead, what Jesus is doing is saying, with you spreading the gospel, Isaiah's promise of fulfillment, or Isaiah's promise of restoration and salvation is now beginning to be fulfilled. So again, Acts reaches all the way back to the Old Testament to show that Jesus and now his followers are fulfilling all these Old Testament prophecies promises, and expectations. So, for example, if you look in your notes, mine's on page 23 at the very top, I've isolated those phrases in Acts 1:8. So, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and then you will be my witnesses until the ends of the earth.

Those phrases come right out of the book of Isaiah. For example, this is in chapter 32 and verse 15, where Acts says, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. Again, chapter 32 refers to a day when God returns and restores his people, brings them back to Jerusalem, they're in exile now, brings them back to Jerusalem, and now verse 15 says until the Spirit from on high is poured out on us.

And the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed as a forest. Notice that phrase, this is from Isaiah 32.15 until the Spirit from on high is poured out upon us. And now Luke says when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

Now notice this next phrase, you will be my witnesses. Again, in Isaiah chapter 43, this is Isaiah the prophet talking about a day when God will return to restore his people. Chapter 43 and 10 and 12, listen to this, you are my witnesses, he's speaking to Israel, you are my witnesses, says the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen.

Verse 12, I declared and saved and proclaimed when there was no strange God among you, and you are my witnesses, says the Lord. Again, God is addressing Israel, and now Jesus addresses this new Israel, this new people of God, starting with his disciples, and tells them that you are my witnesses, in fulfillment of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah's promise of restoration, a day when God will restore his people, bring a new creation, and bring them salvation through a Messiah, acts as saying that is now taking place.

But not in the physical nation of Israel, but in this new people that Jesus has now established. So they are, the Holy Spirit will come upon them in fulfillment of Isaiah 32, they will be his witnesses in fulfillment of Isaiah 43, and then one more. Notice the order, the order in Acts is even the same order throughout the book of Isaiah.

Chapter 49, when Jesus tells the disciples, you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth, Isaiah chapter 49 and verse 6, now listen to this. Again, this is God speaking through Isaiah the prophet to Israel, as they're in exile, he promises that one day they will return from exile, and God will restore them as his people, bring them salvation, and here's what he says. He says it is too light a thing that you should be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel.

I will give you as a light to the nations, so Israel is to be a light to the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. That's the exact same phrase that you find in Acts chapter 1 verse 8. So again, what is Jesus doing? He's basically telling his disciples, that they are to fulfill the program of restoration that was anticipated and prophesied in the book of Isaiah. What Israel was to do in that the Holy Spirit was to be poured out on Israel, they were to be his people, they were to be his witnesses, they were to spread salvation to the ends of the earth, now it's as if Jesus is saying, now that mantle gets passed on to Jesus' disciples, to this new Israel, this new church, this new community of God's people, that is in nucleus form in the disciples, and that's exactly what is going to take place in the rest of the book of Acts.

So again, it's so crucial that we learn to read the Old New Testament with one ear tuned into the Old Testament. Again, as I said, this isn't just a nice missionary strategy that Jesus thought up, that he thought would work, he's showing that what's going on in Acts 2 is nothing less than the fulfillment of what Isaiah promised back in the Old Testament. And now that's taking place, not in the nation of Israel, but now in this new community, this new assembly, this new people of God, that now revolves and centers around Jesus.

All right, I think we'll stop there. And next week we'll continue talking about Acts, but let's talk a little bit about the exam. And I'll say a couple things.

I just want to talk a little bit about what it's going to look like and then say something about how to study for it and then give you a chance to ask questions. The exam is all multiple choice. I hate multiple choice exams, but for a class this big, if I gave you an essay test, I would be up until next Christmas trying to grade them.

So a class this size unfortunately constrains me to some degree to give a multiple-choice type test. So that's the nature of the test. Everyone should be able to finish it within the hour.

Some of you may be done in 20 minutes. Some of you may take the whole section. That's fine.

Whatever you need to do. Again, the exam will cover only the background material and the gospel materials. Everything I've said about Acts today will not be in the exam.

You're not responsible for that. That information will appear on the next exam. So, all the background material from day one all the way through the gospels, that is the information that will be in the exam.

One of the things that I try to do in the exam is I try to get you to compare and contrast the gospels. I'll ask you questions that are an attempt to get you to compare and contrast the gospels as far as what's unique about what. So, I'll ask you questions about what is, I might ask you which gospel portrays Jesus as a new Moses and hopefully, you would answer Matthew.

Some of you are going to get it right. Things like that where I'm simply trying to get you to compare. There are a lot of questions related to the main emphases and themes throughout the gospels.

Again, I don't ask you for specific verses or anything like that. I'm more interested in focusing on the gospels as a whole. But you do need to be aware of the main emphases, the main themes, the main texts.

Whenever we talk about certain passages in relationship to the gospels, in John we touch on a number of passages like the farewell discourse or the woman at the well and just know the content of those passages and anything we said about those passages. We talked a little bit about the endings of Mark. That Mark, did it end at verse 8 or did it have a longer ending on it? So anytime we talk about any of the distinct passages, just be able to tell me what is in those passages.

One thing you might do, I had someone do this one year and they showed it to me and they did it for all four exams. Is they put together a chart and on a big poster board down one side of the chart on the left-hand column, they had the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And then they had a series of columns going across the top.

One column said author, one said structure, one said key passages, main passages. Another column said the main view of Jesus and another one said the main emphases. For each gospel, she summarized in each of those squares, took information out of your notes, and put it in those squares.

At one glance, she could look at all four gospels and compare and contrast how they differed. And again, she actually did that for every exam. So, you might think of doing that, getting the information out of the notes and constructing some kind of chart where you can visually see all the gospels at once and see how they compare and contrast, what themes they emphasize, and things like that.

Again, with the history, the section on the history is, again, be aware of the main persons, the main events as far as politically, religiously, and some of the main cultural trends. We talked about two or three of them. Now, I do have, in case you're trying to write all this down, I have on Blackboard a study key, a study guide for exam number one.

So, if you go to the same place where the syllabus is and the notes for this class on content, if you go there, you'll find a study guide for exam number one. And I think I touch on everything. If you can answer all those, everyone should get 100 on it if you can answer all those questions.

Because, again, the exam is not from your textbook reading. It solely reflects our classroom discussion and the notebook that you're to take. But, again, there's a study guide.

You might want to look at that. If you have other questions, please feel free to e-mail me if you have questions about something on the exam or something in the study guide. But any questions about the exam generally or any specific things in your notes, anything related to the background or the gospels that you wonder about? Yeah.

You said on that chart. And then key themes. There are a number of key themes that weren't necessarily most focused only on who Jesus was.

But I think in most of the gospels we talked about main emphases, that is, how Jesus was portrayed, but other unique or key themes of the gospels. Yep. Also, for history, you said persons, events, cultural events.

Yeah, persons, events, religious movements. Remember we talked about both Greco-Roman and Jewish religious movements, like the Jewish movements, the Essenes, and the Pharisees. Be able to tell me what they thought or what they emphasized and how they responded, especially to Roman rule.

We talked a little bit about the Qumran community and the Dead Sea Scrolls. And we talked a little bit about canon, what were the criteria for a book to be considered to get into the New Testament canon, those kinds of things. Again, that's all spelled out on Blackboard on the study guide.

So, I'd encourage you to download the study guide. All right. Sure.

Are you going to ask for dates for the different historical events? No, I'm not going to ask for dates. Probably because I couldn't be really precise myself right now. Yeah, I'm not going to ask for any specific dates.

I guess I could. At least for me, those are the kinds of things I forget first. I'd rather you get the main meaning and idea behind those events.

As long as you have kind of a sense that this happened before Christ or during his birth or something like that, that's the main thing. There are a few dates that you will be required to know later on, so it's not as if I'll never ask you about dates. But for the purpose of this exam, there are really no dates you need to know.

What about the dates of the Gospels? Dates of the Gospels? No, I don't even think I talked about that. I think I asked you that question on some of your quizzes because it was in your textbook, but I'm not going to ask you specific dates. You probably need to know the order in which most scholars think they were written, but I won't ask you exactly what date.

Some people are hesitant to give a precise date. Sometimes they give about a 10-year, 60 to 70 A.D. or 70 to 80 A.D. So I won't ask you for any specific dates. As long as you know everything that happened in the first century so far, that's probably close enough.

So, should we get the reading for next week done by Wednesday? Yeah, the reading for next week, you can do that for Wednesday. That's a good question. So, the textbook reading, that's fine.

You can do that by Wednesday because on Monday, as soon as you're done with your exam, you're free to go. We won't talk about Acts at all.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson's New Testament History and Literature course, lecture 12, Summary of the Gospel Themes and Introduction to Acts.