

# Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Lecture 13, Acts

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson's New Testament History and Literature, Lecture 13, the book of Acts.

All right, let's go ahead and get started.

What we're going to plan to do is continue to work today to work through the book of Acts. We just got started on it, so we'll review just a little bit about what we said regarding the kind of the overall makeup and structure of the book. And then we'll, similar to how we even handled the Gospels, we'll focus on the main themes and some of the main texts that I want you to pay attention to in the book.

And then end by looking at an example of one of the issues that is usually we have to confront when we read the book of Acts. And we'll kind of use the passage as a test case for how we go about interpreting the book, or at least some of the questions that we need to raise and deal with.

So, let's open with prayer, and then we'll look at more detail in the book of Acts. Father, again I thank you for the opportunity to stop and analyze your Word in light of its original setting and context, but also in doing so, realizing that that very contextually situated set of documents continues to speak to us as your Word today. And I pray that we would be mindful of that and that we would recognize that we are dealing with nothing less than your Word. So, it requires all the energy and discipline and all our mental and spiritual faculties and abilities. It requires bringing that all to the text to try to understand it as clearly and as accurately as possible. In Jesus' name, we pray, amen.

All right, in the last class period we looked at, we began to look at Acts as far as its structure and relationship to the Old Testament.

I suggested to you that the key text for understanding the book of Acts is chapter 1, verse 8. Where Jesus, at the very beginning of the book, as He's addressing His disciples, His followers, whom we read more about in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as Jesus now addresses His followers after His death and His resurrection, Jesus now reminds them or leaves them with their commission. And that is that they are to, Jesus says, to wait for Him, wait, and that He would, in verse 8, they would receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Now what is important about that is I suggested that that is not primarily a strategy for how to do missions, but that that comes right out of the Old Testament book of Isaiah.

So all those texts, the reference to power or the Holy Spirit coming upon them from on high, the reference to being witnesses, and the references to going to the ends of the earth, all of that comes right out of the book of Isaiah so that what Jesus is basically saying is now what Isaiah anticipated, Isaiah's promise of restoration of God's people and the spread of God's kingdom and His glory to the ends of the earth, now is being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ and His followers who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, will fulfill Isaiah's prophecy and his vision for restoration and spreading God's kingdom and His glory throughout the ends of the earth. So again, Acts 1:8 is not, again, primarily about how to do missions, it's primarily about how Jesus and His followers fulfill the program of restoration as found in the book of Isaiah. So, you'll notice that a second section in your notes, under the references I've given you to Isaiah 32, 43, and 49, on the other hand, chapter 1 verse 8 also provides kind of a rough outline for how the rest of the book will proceed and how it will develop in fulfillment of Isaiah's vision for restoration.

So, for example, the first part, that you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, basically corresponds to the first six chapters or the early part of chapter 6 of Acts, and then the fact that the gospel is to spread to Judea and Samaria is reflected in the next several chapters of Acts, Acts chapter 6 through chapter 9, and then chapters 12-28 would correspond to the ends of the earth, where the apostle Paul ends up in Rome preaching this good news, again, in fulfillment of Isaiah's promise of restoration. So, for that reason, Acts 1:8 is very important because it links it back to the book of Isaiah and the Old Testament, but also provides then the rough outline for how the rest of Acts will develop, kind of in broadening concentric circles, embracing territory that moves far beyond just Jerusalem. So, in view of this, we can say the purpose of the book of Acts primarily is to demonstrate how this gospel has its roots in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, especially Luke, because remember Acts is part of a two-volume work, along with Luke, but this gospel that now Jesus brings concerning the kingdom and fulfillment of the Old Testament, now Acts demonstrates how that gospel spreads to embrace lesser and lesser Jewish territories, again, in fulfillment of the Old Testament, and especially the book of Isaiah.

How the gospel moves from Jerusalem, moves out from there to address and to embrace lesser and lesser Jewish territories, ending up in Rome and the ends of the earth. So, we'll come back to that and ask how that's important for the way that we understand the gospel in a moment, but recognize that as the primary purpose of Acts. It narrates how the gospel that Jesus proclaims and fulfills and brings to fulfillment in the gospels, how that now spreads out to places that are less and less Jewish.

It begins to cross cultural barriers and boundaries. Now before we go on, just to go back to the very first verse of Acts to demonstrate the connection, we said Acts and

Luke both belong to a two-volume work. Acts and Luke, before they were included in the New Testament, would have comprised a two-volume book.

Notice how verse one of chapter one begins, in the first book, Theophilus, Theophilus is the person that is addressed in Luke chapter one, and so the first book that is referred to in Acts 1:1 is referring to the book of Luke. So, in the first book, that is the gospel of Luke, that we call Luke, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning, until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles that he had chosen. So now Acts will be a continuation of that story that was begun in the gospel of Luke.

Now before we move on and look at some important text in Acts, one interesting thing, in light of the parallels to Isaiah, again we said the book of Isaiah, especially the latter half of it, but the entire book lays out a program of restoration that begins with salvation in Jerusalem. That is, God's people, Israel, must be restored to Jerusalem. God will bring his people back.

Remember, when Isaiah was written, God's people were in exile, or ready to go into exile because of their sin and idolatry, and so Isaiah anticipates a time when God's people will be brought back from exile to Jerusalem and restored, but that is simply preparation for the restoration of the kingdoms. Remember as well, that at this time, the time when Isaiah was written, Israel was divided into two kingdoms. Do you remember your Old Testament survey with Professor Wilson, Hildebrandt, or Professor Phillips?

The divided kingdom, the kingdom of Israel had been divided into Israel and Judah. So, it looks, like Isaiah looks at it for a time when the two kingdoms will be restored. There will be one people of God.

Salvation will come to Jerusalem. They will be witnesses so that salvation will ultimately go to the ends of the earth. We said too, then, that Acts follows this same scheme.

It begins with salvation in Jerusalem and the restored kingdoms. Interestingly, what happens after the gospel moves out of Jerusalem? One of the first places that the apostles began to go to was Samaria, which was the northern kingdom of Israel. And so that's one of the reasons why Acts mentions Samaria, Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, because that was part of Isaiah's promise of restoration, that the two kingdoms that were split would be restored as the one people of God.

And then they are to be his witnesses so that salvation ultimately goes to the ends of the earth. Acts 28 ends with the gospel going to Rome via the apostle Paul, one of Jesus' disciples. Now one thing interesting, this helps us, I think this helps us to understand an interesting passage that's always perplexed me a little bit.

And that is, right after Acts 1:8, you read this, Jesus appears to his disciples and tells them, you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth when I've poured my spirit out on you, again in fulfillment of Isaiah. And then Acts chapter 1 ends with this interesting story, starting at verse 15, I'm still in chapter 1, this is right at the beginning of the book. In those days, Peter stood up among the Christians, the believers, and said, friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus.

Now this takes you back to the gospels. Everyone remembers that right before Jesus was crucified and put to death, one of his twelve disciples, Judas, betrayed Jesus and basically is no longer one of the twelve. So, the problem is, you're now left with eleven disciples.

And so, Acts chapter 1 ends with the people choosing one more disciple. For example, it says that they actually threw cast lots and the lots landed on a certain person named Matthias and he was disciple number twelve. So, verse 26 of chapter 1 ends, and they cast lots for them and the lot fell on Matthias and he was added to the eleven apostles.

So now you have twelve again. Now what's the significance of that story? Why did they need to have, I mean, first of all, you could ask, well, why isn't eleven enough? I mean, certainly, especially since Judas was a bad guy, so Jesus could have accomplished his purpose with eleven. Why was another one necessary? Why did Luke need to record that? What's going on in Luke emphasizing the fact that the twelfth apostle was added? Again, Jesus chose twelve apostles in the Gospels, one of them, Judas, defected.

So, you end up with eleven at the beginning of Acts. There are only eleven apostles, and now Acts, the author of Acts, makes a point to emphasize that that twelfth apostle was added. What do you think the reason for that is? That's the ideal small group size, or what's going on? Again, what was the significance of the number twelve? Why did Jesus choose twelve apostles in the first place? Yeah, the twelve apostles represented the twelve tribes of Israel.

By gathering twelve apostles, what Jesus was doing was saying, that this is the new people of God. The new people of God no longer revolve around the nation of Israel and the twelve tribes, but the new people of God, including Israel, are now based on Jesus and his apostles. That's why he chooses twelve, to show this is the new people of God, that will bring the fulfillment of God's true intention for Israel.

So why in Acts do you have a twelfth apostle? No, I don't think, I think, in fact, Paul does. We'll see later on, Paul does think that he, he does seem to think that he's kind

of an addition to the twelve, but I take it that Matthias here is, was an original, one of the original twelve apostles. He was supposed to be, yes.

That's a very good question. So yeah, that's a good point. This is not a mistake that, oh whoops, we got the wrong guy, let's try again, and then they got Paul.

Paul himself in his letters seems to think that he's an addition to the twelve. So, I take it that this is legitimate, and this was supposed to happen. But notice, that part of Isaiah's promise of restoration is the restoration of God's people.

So, by choosing the twelfth apostle, it's as if the author of Acts wants to make clear that now Israel is being restored. The people of God are being restored by choosing the twelfth apostle. And remember, the apostles represent the twelve tribes of Israel.

So, it's necessary for Acts, for the author of Acts to include this story because, again, he's demonstrating the prophecy that Isaiah made is coming to fulfillment by the nations are being restored, the nation of Israel is being restored through the choice of the twelfth apostle. So there had to be twelve because the twelve apostles correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel. So again, what's going on in Acts is saying the promise, Isaiah's promise of restoration that starts with the tribes of Israel being restored is now being fulfilled, but not through national Israel, but now through this new people of God founded on not the twelve restored tribes, but the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ.

So, you see, a new people of God is being formed that crosses national boundaries. A new people of God is being formed that does not depend on Jewish identity or obedience to the law, but depends solely on faith in the person of Jesus Christ. And, again, the author of Acts demonstrates that by having the church choose the twelfth apostle.

So now the twelve tribes, the restored kingdoms from Isaiah are now taking place by a twelfth apostle being chosen as, again, the foundation of this new people of God that now will accomplish the purpose that God intended for his people Israel. But again, a people of God that includes Israel, but is not limited to Israel, includes Gentiles because now the defining factor is no longer national identity or keeping the law. The defining factor is faith in Jesus Christ.

And if that's the case, then Gentiles as well as Jews can be part of this new people of God that is founded on the twelve apostles, not the twelve tribes of Israel. All right, just a number of key texts. I want to focus only on three of them, although we'll look at a couple of other elements as well that are unique to Acts.

But the first one is Acts chapter 2, which records the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon God's people who are gathered in Jerusalem. But the key here is that this event is clearly linked, again, to the Old Testament. In other words, this is not, however much it may have been unexpected, it was not a unique unprecedented event.

It was anticipated in the Old Testament. Because when Peter has to stand up and defend what's going on, it says some of the onlookers thought that they were drunk because the people had been filled with the Holy Spirit and now they were speaking in tongues, and onlookers thought that they were drunk. So, Peter has to get up and explain what's happening, and he explains it by linking it back to the Old Testament.

One of the prophets, Joel, demonstrates that what is happening is nothing less than what the Old Testament prophesied and anticipated. That is, again, that the Old Testament anticipated, as the book of Isaiah did, and Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and most of the other prophets, that one day God would restore His people and pour out His Spirit and establish a new covenant with them. Now Peter is making it clear, and the author of Acts, that this is taking place with the Holy Spirit being poured out on Jesus' followers in Jerusalem.

So, the idea of the Holy Spirit coming upon God's people is not a unique church thing. This is not something that just belongs to the church, or that the author of Acts, is new to him, but it's clearly a fulfillment of what was anticipated in the Old Testament. So, this, the Holy Spirit being poured out on God's people in Acts 2, is simply part of the fulfillment of the new covenant.

Remember the prophets anticipated a day when God would make a new covenant with His people. The old covenant failed because Israel disobeyed and didn't keep it. So, God would establish a new covenant, and part of that new covenant would be that God would pour out His Spirit on His people.

That now takes place in Acts chapter 2. So, Acts 2 is a very important text because it's the fulfillment, not only of what Jesus promised, remember back in chapter 1 verse 8, is they will receive the Holy Spirit or power from on high when they receive the Spirit. So, it's not only a fulfillment of Jesus' words, but it's also a fulfillment of the Old Testament. So, because of that, Acts 2 is very important.

This is the beginning of the restoration and the salvation that was promised in the Old Testament prophets. Another important text is Acts chapter 10, and we're jumping ahead several chapters, but Acts chapter 10. This is, I'll start reading the story, I won't read the whole thing, but this is a story of a centurion who was a Roman military person, and therefore a Gentile, not a Jew, and his name was Cornelius.

And so, it says, in Caesarea, there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God. There was a category of people in the first century, along with Jews and Gentiles, known as God-fearers.

And so, here's one of those God-fearers. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household. He gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God.

One afternoon at about three o'clock, he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, Cornelius. He stared at him in terror and said, What is it, Lord? The angel answered, Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon, who is called Peter, is lodging with Simon Peter, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside.

When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa. So that's where Peter's supposed to be. About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof of his house to pray.

He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while it was being prepared, his food was being prepared, he fell into a trance. Now what I take this to mean, the trance is probably a visionary-type experience, much like the author of Revelation had. The author of Revelation is in the Spirit and actually ascends to heaven and sees this vision.

We'll talk more about Revelation, obviously, but that's the kind of trance that's going on here. He saw heaven open and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In this sheet were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air.

Then he heard a voice saying, Get up, Peter, kill these and eat. But Peter said, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean. The voice said to him again a second time, What God has made clean, you must not make profane or unclean.

This happened three times, and then the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven. Now what is going on here? The vision Peter has is of the sheet that contains all these animals that were pronounced unclean according to the Old Testament law. And now, in a vision, Peter sees this and hears a voice from heaven, probably God's or a divine voice, saying that now these animals that under the Old Testament law were pronounced unclean are now clean.

That is, you're free to eat them. What is the purpose of this? What is going on here? Again, you have two different things going on. On the one hand, you have Cornelius, who is a Gentile centurion, and he sends men to Joppa where Peter is.

And then you have this story about Peter having this vision, and a vision of these animals that under the Old Testament law, the Mosaic Covenant, were declared unclean, and now they are declared clean. What is going on here? Is this really about just, you know, satisfying Peter's hunger? How do these two stories connect? Again, the story of this Gentile centurion, and then a story of Peter, one of Jesus' apostles, who has this vision of food that now God declares clean. Yep? Okay, so this, yeah, you're right in mentioning the Gentiles because what's going on here is not just a pronouncement on animals, but also on Gentiles as well.

So, Peter is being shown that the law, the Old Testament law that distinguished you in Gentile can no longer play that role. Now the gospel can go out to Gentiles as well as Jews. So, by having this vision then, saying all food is now clean, it's as if God is also saying now Gentiles are clean too, and they can now be accepted as equal members of the people of God.

That is demonstrated by showing Peter that the Old Testament law no longer divides between Jew and Gentile. It has, in a sense, been rescinded, and it's been brought to fulfillment in Christ. Again, you think about it, the food laws, the food laws in the Old Testament that forbade Jews from eating certain kinds of food or certain kinds of meat, one of the functions of those was it functioned as an identity marker to distinguish Jews from other nations, Jews from the other nations.

Furthermore, think about it, in the early church, the early church where the distinction between Jew and Gentile would often become most apparent, again, think about it, the church is going to start spreading from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. In other words, the church is going to start becoming increasingly Gentile. Now, as the church does that, one of the places and one of the times where the distinction between Jew and Gentile would be most acute is when they sat down and ate a meal, because Jews would have been forbidden from eating certain kinds of food and meat, according to Old Testament law, where Gentiles had no such scruples.

So again, what this vision is doing is demonstrating to Peter that now, with the coming of Christ and all these events that have taken place with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and with the coming of Christ, now Gentiles are pronounced clean, and now Gentiles can become God's people at an equal footing with Jews. And therefore, the food laws no longer apply, they no longer draw these distinctions between Jew and Gentile. And Peter can feel free to eat, he can sit down and eat

with them, he can welcome them, he can preach to them and welcome them as the true people of God.

So, chapter 10 plays a very crucial role in the development of the book of Acts. Again, the purpose of Acts is to demonstrate how the gospel begins to, that God at the start, in a rather narrowed Jewish confines, begins to spread out and embrace peoples of lesser and lesser Jewish heritage, that is, more Gentile until it gets to the ends of the earth. As that happens, again, you're going to confront problems like this.

Remember the question that most Jews were asking, who are the true people of God? What does it mean to be God's people? Well, it means that I live life as a Jew, I embrace the law of Moses, for males that meant being circumcised, for everyone that meant observing the food laws, observing the Sabbath, etc. And so, the question is, as the church becomes more and more Gentile, that is, people that have not, do not observe the law, what is required of them? Must they keep the law in order to be God's people? And so, this vision is a reminder to people, to Peter, no, the law no longer plays a role in defining who the people of God are. The well-known Jewish identity markers, such as circumcision, eating certain meats, and keeping the Sabbath, no longer play a role in defining who the people of God are.

And that's the purpose of this vision that Peter has. In declaring all foods clean, the law no longer plays a role in determining who God's people are. But now Gentiles are clean as well and can be accepted as God's true people.

The next important text in Acts is the well-known Jerusalem Council. In fact, this may be one of the most, it may be the most crucial text in the book of Acts. And I do want you to know this date, AD 70, I'm sorry, I got the wrong date in there.

That was something else. You do need to know AD 70, because that's when the temple was destroyed. I'm not sure how I got that in there.

But anyway, the Jerusalem Council is able to connect that with Acts chapter 15. Now what's important about the Jerusalem Council, again, is this question about what is required to become the true people of God. Who are the true people of God? Is the law of Moses, in observance of the law of Moses, and living life as a Jew necessary for becoming God's people? And again, especially for males, that would have meant circumcision as the sign of the covenant that God gave all the way back to Abraham and Moses, the sign of belonging to God's covenant people.

So that's the issue that, again, the same issue that was being addressed in chapter 10, but now it kind of comes to a head so that the early church calls kind of the first council where they are going to discuss this and, in a sense, render a decision. That is, who are the true people of God? What is required to belong to God's people? And the problem is, when you start reading Acts chapter 15, here's how it begins. Then

certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching other Christians, that unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

So that was kind of the issue, is circumcision. And again, the issue was not just circumcision for males. That was simply a sign that you adopted the entire Mosaic law and that you were going to obey the law of Moses.

So, the question is, is obedience to the law of Moses necessary to belong to God's people and to be saved? After Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and elders. So, they went on their way by the church, I'm sorry, and they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles and brought great joy to all the believers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, it is necessary for them to be circumcised in order to keep the law of Moses. So again, they hear these reports of all the Gentiles, such as Cornelius, coming to Christ and responding to the gospel, again, from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the gospel that the apostles were preaching. And the Pharisees were saying, well, that's not enough.

They must also, according to the Old Testament law, they must also submit to the law of Moses. Again, for males undergoing circumcision, for everybody, the Sabbath, food laws, and the other laws clearly marked one out as a Jew as belonging to God's people. And for that reason, the Council of Jerusalem, which is what is called the Council of Jerusalem, meets together and basically renders a decision on this.

Although, again, the church did not wake up on the next day and everything was fine. It still took a while for this to be worked out. And later on, in the book of Galatians, one of Paul's letters to the Galatians, we're even going to see that Peter didn't carry through all the time, that Peter even acted inconsistently with the decision of the Jerusalem Council.

But the answer to the question, do people, especially Gentiles, must Gentiles submit to the law of Moses in order to become God's people, in order to be saved, the agreed upon answer was, no, they do not. That faith in Jesus Christ was enough to render one a true member of God's people and for that person to be saved. So that was the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council.

Again, the church didn't wake up the next morning and everything was fine and everybody adopted that and everything went smoothly from then on. Again, there

was still opposition, misunderstanding, and some debate, but it seems that the decision of the Jerusalem Council won the day. And therefore, in the book of Acts, the author spends quite a bit of time describing it.

And as I said, it's probably the most crucial event in the book of Acts. So the result should be that this event that took place in Acts 2, with the pouring out of the Spirit, began to happen in subsequent places, Gentile territory. And so, the conclusion, the result of this should be, well, those were genuine experiences.

That is, Gentiles then should be received and welcomed and accepted as the true people of God, even though they do not submit to the law of Moses, such as being circumcised, observing food laws, etc. Yeah, that's a really good question. I don't want to pass, I don't want to ignore that question, but I want to spend more time talking about that when we get to Galatians, because of the same issue.

But that's a very good question. Are there certain portions of the law? I mean, did Jesus intend for the entire law to be set aside? Were there certain portions of it that people still obeyed? Some Christians have distinguished between moral and ceremonial law. Law that was ceremonial, dealing with sacrifices and circumcision, food laws, etc., were set aside.

Moral law, like don't kill, don't murder, etc., that is still binding. I want to return to that issue when we get to the book of Galatians because I think it speaks very clearly to the role of the law in the life of God's people. That's a very good question.

Remember, too, to go back to Matthew, if you remember when we talked about the Sermon on the Mount, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 begins with the statement of Jesus. He says, I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. And what Jesus meant, remember is not that he came to obey it perfectly, although I agree he did that, but Jesus is basically saying that I am what the law pointed to.

My life, ministry, and teaching are what the law really pointed to. And that does raise a question that, again, I think Galatians will help answer as well, which probably upset a lot of Jews as well. Well, if Gentiles don't have to submit to the law of Moses, then what constitutes their moral guidance? Or what is the standard of obedience, if they don't have the law of Moses to guide them? And the book of Galatians will answer that as well.

So, I do want to bring that question up, is what part of the law, of the Old Testament law, if any, are we supposed to obey? Is there any of it that's still in force or binding? Or are parts of it still binding and other parts aren't? And if so, how do we decide that? That's a very good question. I'm going to argue when we get there that, according to Paul, I think the entire Mosaic law is no longer binding on Christians. I think he's fairly clear.

But he also is clear that that doesn't mean that we can do whatever we want and that we're not subject to any commands, and it doesn't mean that we have no moral guidance whatsoever, and Paul will address that issue as well. Very good question. All right, those are the three main... I want to look at a couple of other unique things about Acts, but any questions on any of these texts? The other thing I want to mention is, what happens in Acts chapter 2 actually happens, that is, the Holy Spirit being poured out, people speaking in tongues, et cetera, this gets repeated numerous times throughout Acts.

Again, as if the author wants to say, that what happened in Jerusalem to Jesus' apostles and other followers now gets replicated, but as the gospel moves outside of Jewish territory into lesser and lesser Jewish territories, into more Gentile territories. So, what happened to the Jews in Acts 2 gets repeated with the Gentiles several more times throughout the book of Acts. Often you have the idea that the only conclusion is then that Gentiles must be God's true people because the same thing happening to them is what happened in Acts 2 to Jesus' apostles and immediate followers.

So, the Gentiles must be God's people too, because the same thing is happening to them. All right, two features of the book of Acts that I want to focus on are what are often called the missionary travels or journeys of Paul that occupy a large segment of the book of Acts, and I expect you to copy this whole map. No, I don't.

I'm just kidding. I just want to show you, I just want to demonstrate how the book of Acts, even Paul's missionary journeys, fit this kind of concentric structure of Acts. So here you have Jerusalem, kind of the starting point, and this red dotted line, which you can't see very well, is Paul's first missionary journey, and you can see it's not really extensive, but it clearly goes into Gentile territory.

So, here's the land of Palestine and Jerusalem, and so Paul's first missionary journey takes him well into Gentile territory. This purple line, then, represents the second missionary journey of Paul, so there are three of them in Acts. The second missionary journey, as you can see, takes him over into Greece and even further removed from Jerusalem, and then the third missionary journey in this kind of green, with this green line, also takes him to some of the same territories, but clearly this fits the pattern of Acts where the gospel is now spreading far beyond Jerusalem to embrace peoples that are not Jewish at all.

And then finally, this orange line ends with Paul in Rome, which is where the book of Acts ends. And there's been a lot of questions in relationship to this. Some have wondered why Acts ends with Paul in Rome.

Probably because that's all that Acts needs to do. It just needs to show that Paul got to Rome to demonstrate that the fulfillment of Isaiah, that the gospel would reach the ends of the earth, has taken place with Paul reaching Rome. Now that that happens, Acts ends its narrative right there.

So, this just shows you just kind of the extent of Paul's travels and much of the book of Acts. Much of the book of Acts, I think chapter 9 starts Paul's conversion. Much of the rest of the book of Acts focuses on Paul and his journeys.

Let me say two things about them. Number one is that in a sense, these are probably not the labeled journeys are not entirely accurate because the picture is not so much of Paul just taking a trip and he ends up back home, although that's part of it. But when you read Acts carefully, you'll note that he actually took up residence in a number of these cities for up to a year and a half or two years.

So, he would actually buy a home and take up residence, even set up a business and stay for some time in some of these cities. At other times, other cities he was in were much shorter. One of the cities that we'll talk about later in connection with one of Paul's letters is he was driven out by a lynch mob because they were upset with him.

But basically, Paul's philosophy was to go to one of these cities and he would stay as long as was necessary to establish a new community, a church, and then he would move on to another one. So, they're probably not best-labeled journeys, but there's probably not a better word, so that's the one we'll use. The second thing to note about these travels is most of these cities that Paul visits on these journeys are cities that Paul will write letters to that we find in the rest of the New Testament.

As we said, the book of Acts provides a wonderful bridge between the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. So, we have Paul visiting cities like Ephesus and we have him visiting cities like Corinth and a number of other cities. In Thessalonica, we have Paul visiting cities that end up being referred to in the letters of Paul later on in the New Testament.

So again, Acts provides kind of an introduction to the rest of the New Testament in some respects. As we said, it also introduces the other key features like Peter, we have letters of Peter, so other key figures you find in the rest of the New Testament as well. One other key theme is the role of the Holy Spirit in Acts.

Much like Luke, we said one of the key themes in Luke was the Holy Spirit, and that gets picked up in Acts as well, except now with Acts, there are two things to recognize. First of all, the Holy Spirit in Acts plays a role in orchestrating a number of the events throughout the book of Acts, arranging and bringing people to certain places. So, the Holy Spirit plays a very active role in what goes on in the book, to the

extent that some suggest that the better term for the book is not Acts of the Apostle, but Acts of the Holy Spirit.

There may be some truth to that. But second, as we've already said, the mention of the Holy Spirit throughout Acts is always to be understood as the presence of the new covenant Holy Spirit that was promised in the Old Testament. So, remember, the presence of the Holy Spirit in Acts is not something brand new or something that is Christian, but instead, it's something, the presence of the Holy Spirit that was promised and prophesied in the Old Testament in relationship to the coming new covenant that God would one day restore or enact with His people.

Now with the presence of the Holy Spirit in Acts, the new covenant has already been fulfilled. One more thing to say about Acts, that is Acts raises a number of questions regarding how we read it. That is its importance.

So, what's so important about the book of Acts? And how are we supposed to read it? And particularly, how do we apply it? And what I have in mind is, how do we, as we move through the book of Acts, what do we do with these passages that portray miraculous signs and wonders taking place? For example, in Acts chapter 2, it seems like everyone present speaks in tongues. And the question is, are these, when you read through Acts and read things like this, how are we to read this and apply this? Are we to take these as normative? For our experience today? Or in some other way? And as an example, as an example of that, I want to read Acts chapter 8. And again, as the gospel is beginning to spread out beyond Jerusalem, in chapter 8, here's what we read. Now, when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria, so here's the gospel going into Samaria.

When the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. Now, keep that in mind. It's interesting, why did they choose Peter and John? The two of them went down and prayed for them, for the Samaritans, who had accepted the gospel, prayed that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

For as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them, they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And I'll stop there.

There's more to the story and some other interesting things going on in chapter 8, but I want to stop there. So, again, as the gospel spreads throughout Acts, you find, for example, starting with Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit's poured out, and the people speak in tongues as a demonstration that they have received the Holy Spirit, as a demonstration in fulfillment of the Old Testament, that the new covenant salvation has now come to them, and the Spirit has now been poured out, and they speak in tongues, and sometimes all these interesting things, these signs and

wonders occur. And the question then becomes, what are we supposed to make of that? I mean, when we read the book of Acts, are we to read it in a way that we see it as describing a rather normative experience, so that we should read the book of Acts expecting that that's how it's going to happen to us, and that's how it should happen? First of all, let me say something about this phrase, signs and wonders.

First of all, as I already said, the signs and wonders, such as tongues and healings and miraculous events, seem to function to testify to the presence of the Holy Spirit and this new covenant salvation. So as the Holy Spirit is poured out upon people when they respond to the gospel, and as that spreads to various territories, less and less Jewish, these signs and wonders accompany that, perhaps as a demonstration that the same thing that happened in Acts 2 to the Jews is now happening to Gentiles as well. So, these signs and wonders accompany the spread of the gospel as it moves out to territories where it has not been.

It's demonstrated, the presence of the gospel and the Holy Spirit is demonstrated by these signs and wonders. The other thing, too, though, is I'm also convinced that the signs and wonders probably, again, go back to the Old Testament. It recalls the Israelites wandering in the wilderness and the signs and wonders, the miraculous things, such as crossing the Red Sea and the miraculous provision of manna, etc., etc.

All those things accompanied God's people as they went through the wilderness. So, I also think signs and wonders has an Old Testament background to it as well. But the question is, are these signs and wonders, when we read through the book of Acts, how are we to treat these events? Again, Acts is full of examples as we find in Acts chapter 8. The problem is, when you read through Acts, there doesn't seem to be consistency all the time.

Sometimes people receive the Holy Spirit immediately when they respond to the gospel. Sometimes that's accompanied by speaking in tongues and other miraculous signs. Sometimes it's not.

In Acts chapter 8, the people respond to the gospel, but they don't receive the Holy Spirit right away. So, the problem is that there doesn't seem to be a lot of consistency throughout Acts. In other words, it doesn't happen the same way all the time.

So how do we answer this question? Is Acts normative or descriptive? That is, is Acts establishing a pattern that must be true or that always happens? That would be normative. Is Acts describing the norm that whenever the gospel spreads or someone responds in faith to Jesus Christ, that this must happen? Or is it descriptive? Is Acts more interested not in saying this is how it has to happen, but just saying this is the way it happened? It simply describes how the gospel spread to lesser and lesser Jewish territories. And it's simply, here's what happened.

It's not trying to give us a model or pattern for the way it has to be. In my opinion, I wonder if part of the answer is not both. I admit sometimes I like to straddle the fence so I don't have to make a decision, but sometimes I think that's legitimate, and here's an instance.

In other words, I think the book of Acts does call on God's people to expect God to work in miraculous ways as his gospel spreads to different people. Yet at the same time, Acts doesn't necessarily tell us what that has to look like. And I think that's natural from reading Acts.

Again, the fact that it doesn't happen the same way every time, I think Acts is primarily simply describing here's how the gospel spread to lesser and lesser Jewish territories. And so, the normative part is, I think that yes, God does and can work in miraculous ways that accompany the spread of his gospel, but the descriptive part is, Acts is not telling us what that has to look like or how that has to happen every time. That's why, again, sometimes when people respond to the gospel, they speak in tongues, and other times they don't.

In Acts 8, the people respond to the gospel, yet they don't receive the Spirit right away, whereas in other places, people receive the Spirit right away. Sometimes they lay hands on them, sometimes they don't. So again, Acts is descriptive in that sense.

It's not trying to tell us exactly how God's Spirit has to work and move as the new covenant salvation spreads to be embraced by different people. Now, in light of that, let's look at Acts again. What can we explain? As we read Acts, can we explain why it happened the way it did? In other words, again, the order in comparison to Acts 2, the order is rather unique.

The people have responded to the gospel, they've even been baptized, yet they have not received the Spirit. And Peter and John have to go to the people and lay their hands on them so that they'll receive the Spirit. Now again, if this is not giving us a norm and saying this is how it has to happen because again, read some of the other texts.

Sometimes the Spirit comes on people when their hands aren't laid on them. Sometimes they speak in tongues, sometimes it doesn't say they speak in tongues. But can we explain what's going on in this text? Why do you think, two things, why do you think the Spirit did not come upon these Christians in Acts 8 until two apostles got there? And why do you think it was Peter and John and they had to lay their hands on them? In other words, why do you think it happened the way it did here in Acts 8? Okay? Okay, that's very interesting.

So here are two apostles touching something that was formerly unclean, namely the Samaritans. Don't miss that. They go down to Samaria.

They go to Samaria, to Samaritans who have presumably responded to the Gospel. And now they physically touch them and lay hands on them demonstrating now they're physically touching persons that would have been considered unclean by most Jews. Because again, we talked about the relationship between Jews and Samaritans was not a good one.

They would have been, according to the Gospel of Luke, they were social outcasts. So why do you think it's important that the coming of the Spirit was delayed until Peter and John got there and could lay hands on them? Think about it. These are Samaritans.

Why didn't they receive the Spirit immediately until Peter and John, two of the most important, remember the role Peter has played in the Gospels and now in Acts, he's the spokesperson that got up in Acts 2 and explained what was going on. Why, remember these are Samaritans, why don't they receive the Holy Spirit until Peter and John, two of the most well-known apostles from Jerusalem, get there and lay their hands on them? I mean, so what? Again, how is that significant from the standpoint that these are Samaritans? The fact that they're Samaritans, why was this necessary? What would have happened if the Samaritans would have received the Holy Spirit as soon as they believed? And then the word spreads out, oh, the Samaritans, these Samaritans have received the Holy Spirit too. What would have been the response of most of the people, most of the Jewish Christians? Yeah, no way, that's not legit.

These are these disgusting Samaritans. So, by delaying the coming of the Spirit until Peter and John could get there and lay hands on them, now there is indisputable proof. No one can argue with Peter and John who laid hands on them and witnessed this that the Samaritans too have received the Holy Spirit.

So, again, you see different things happening as the gospel begins to cross racial and cultural barriers and spread to lesser Jewish territories. In this case, it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to be withheld until Peter and John could get there so that there could be no dispute that these disgusting Samaritans also were truly God's people and had received the Holy Spirit in the same way that the Jewish Christians did in Acts chapter 2.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson's New Testament History and Literature, Lecture 13, the book of Acts.