

Dr. Dave Mathewson, New Testament Literature, Session 13, Acts Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 13, Acts, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Mathewson's New Testament Literature lecture focuses on the book of Acts. The lecture begins by outlining the structure and key themes of Acts, emphasizing Acts 1:8 as a crucial verse linking the narrative to Old Testament prophecy, particularly Isaiah's vision of restoration and the spread of God's kingdom. **The lecture highlights the fulfillment of this prophecy through the Holy Spirit empowering Jesus' followers to be witnesses, starting in Jerusalem and expanding to Judea, Samaria, and ultimately the ends of the earth.** Key texts like Acts 2 (the pouring out of the Holy Spirit), Acts 10 (the inclusion of Gentiles), and Acts 15 (the Jerusalem Council addressing the necessity of Mosaic Law for salvation) are discussed as pivotal moments demonstrating the gospel's expansion beyond Jewish confines. **Finally, the lecture examines the nature of miraculous signs and wonders in Acts and raises questions about whether these events are normative or descriptive for contemporary believers.**

2. 28 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 13 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Major Prophets → Daniel).



Mathewson_NTLit_Session 13.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 13, Acts

Briefing Document: Analysis of Dr. Mathewson's Lecture on the Book of Acts

Date: October 26, 2023 (Based on the lecture title mentioning 2024, but analyzed in the present) **Source:** Excerpts from "Mathewson_NTLit_EN_Lecture13.pdf" by Dr. Dave Mathewson and Ted Hildebrandt **Subject:** Main Themes and Important Ideas in the Book of Acts

This briefing document summarizes the key themes, important ideas, and facts presented by Dr. Dave Mathewson in his lecture on the Book of Acts. The lecture emphasizes the structure of Acts, its connection to the Old Testament (specifically Isaiah), key narrative texts, and an example of interpretative challenges within the book.

1. Overall Makeup and Structure of Acts:

- The lecture aims to review the overall structure of Acts and then focus on main themes and key texts. It concludes by examining an interpretative issue within the book.
- Acts is presented as a continuation of the Gospel of Luke, forming a two-volume work addressed to Theophilus. Dr. Mathewson quotes Acts 1:1, "In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning, until the day he was taken up to heaven..." highlighting this direct connection.

2. Key Text: Acts 1:8 and its Significance:

- Dr. Mathewson identifies Acts 1:8 as the "key text for understanding the book of Acts." Jesus' commission to his followers to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth after receiving the Holy Spirit is central.
- He argues that this verse is not primarily a mission strategy but a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, particularly from the book of Isaiah. He states, "what Jesus is basically saying is now what Isaiah anticipated...now is being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ and His followers..."
- Acts 1:8 also provides a "rough outline" for the rest of the book:
- Witnesses in Jerusalem: Acts 1-early 6
- Spread to Judea and Samaria: Acts 6-9
- To the ends of the earth: Acts 12-28 (culminating with Paul in Rome)

- The primary purpose of Acts is to "demonstrate how this gospel has its roots in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John...how that gospel spreads to embrace lesser and lesser Jewish territories...ending up in Rome and the ends of the earth."

3. Connection to the Old Testament and Isaiah:

- Dr. Mathewson emphasizes the theme of restoration found in Isaiah, which includes the restoration of God's people to Jerusalem, the reunification of the divided kingdom (Israel and Judah), and the spread of salvation to the ends of the earth.
- He notes that Acts mirrors this scheme, beginning in Jerusalem, moving to Samaria (representing the northern kingdom), and ultimately reaching Rome.
- The inclusion of the story of choosing Matthias as the twelfth apostle in Acts 1 is significant in this context. Mathewson explains that the twelve apostles represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and by restoring the number to twelve, "'it's as if the author of Acts wants to make clear that now Israel is being restored.'" However, this restoration is not through national Israel but through the "new people of God founded on...the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ." This new people transcends national boundaries and is based on faith in Christ, including both Jews and Gentiles.

4. Key Texts and Themes:

- **Acts 2: The Pouring Out of the Holy Spirit:** This event is not unprecedented but a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, particularly Joel's prophecy of God pouring out His Spirit. Mathewson states, "'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.'" This marks the beginning of the new covenant.
- **Acts 10: The Conversion of Cornelius and Peter's Vision:** This chapter is crucial as it demonstrates the inclusion of Gentiles in God's people. Peter's vision of unclean animals being declared clean signifies that the Old Testament law no longer creates a barrier between Jew and Gentile. Dr. Mathewson explains, "'Peter is being shown that the law...that distinguished you in Gentile can no longer play that role. Now the gospel can go out to Gentiles as well as Jews.'" The food laws, which served as Jewish identity markers, are no longer definitive.
- **Acts 15: The Jerusalem Council:** This is considered potentially "the most crucial text in the book of Acts." The central question is whether Gentile believers needed to adhere to the Law of Moses, including circumcision, to be saved and

considered part of God's people. The decision reached was that "faith in Jesus Christ was enough to render one a true member of God's people and for that person to be saved." While this decision faced some initial resistance, it ultimately prevailed and allowed the gospel to spread freely among the Gentiles.

5. Other Unique Features of Acts:

- **Repetition of the Holy Spirit's Outpouring:** The events of Acts 2 (Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues) are repeated in other parts of Acts as the gospel reaches new territories, reinforcing the idea that Gentiles are also recipients of God's saving grace.
- **Missionary Journeys of Paul:** These journeys, occupying a significant portion of Acts, illustrate the geographical spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Gentile lands, ultimately reaching Rome. Dr. Mathewson notes that Paul often took up residence in these cities to establish churches. Furthermore, these journeys provide the historical context for many of Paul's letters in the New Testament.
- **Role of the Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit plays an active role in guiding and orchestrating events in Acts. Some even suggest the title "Acts of the Holy Spirit" might be more appropriate. The presence of the Holy Spirit is understood as the fulfillment of the new covenant promised in the Old Testament.

6. Interpreting Miraculous Signs and Wonders:

- Dr. Mathewson raises the question of how to interpret the miraculous signs and wonders (speaking in tongues, healings) in Acts and whether they should be considered normative for today's Christian experience.
- He suggests that these signs and wonders functioned to "testify to the presence of the Holy Spirit and this new covenant salvation," particularly as the gospel spread to non-Jewish territories, demonstrating that Gentiles were receiving the same divine validation as Jewish believers in Acts 2. He also links this concept to the signs and wonders during Israel's wilderness wanderings.
- However, he points out the inconsistency in how the Holy Spirit is received in Acts (sometimes immediately, sometimes after the laying on of hands, sometimes with tongues, sometimes without). This leads to the question of whether Acts is normative (establishing a pattern) or descriptive (simply recounting events).

- Dr. Mathewson proposes that the answer might be "both." He believes Acts calls believers to expect God to work miraculously, but it doesn't dictate a specific form or timing for these miracles.
- The example of Acts 8, where the Samaritans believe and are baptized but do not receive the Holy Spirit until Peter and John arrive and lay hands on them, is used as a case study. Dr. Mathewson suggests this delay and the involvement of prominent apostles served as "indisputable proof" to the Jewish Christians that the Samaritans had also received the Holy Spirit, overcoming potential skepticism due to the historical animosity between Jews and Samaritans.

Conclusion:

Dr. Mathewson's lecture provides a comprehensive overview of the Book of Acts, emphasizing its structural relationship with Luke and the Old Testament, particularly Isaiah's prophecies of restoration. Key events like the outpouring of the Spirit, the conversion of Cornelius, and the Jerusalem Council are highlighted as pivotal moments demonstrating the expansion of God's people beyond Jewish boundaries through faith in Jesus Christ. The lecture also raises important questions about interpreting the miraculous events in Acts and their relevance for contemporary Christian life, suggesting a nuanced approach that acknowledges both descriptive and potentially normative aspects of the narrative.

4. Study Guide: Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 13, Acts

Acts: Study Guide

Key Themes and Concepts

- **Acts 1:8 as a Foundational Verse:** Understand its connection to Isaiah and how it provides an outline for the rest of the book. Recognize it as a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy regarding restoration and the spread of God's kingdom, not primarily a missions strategy.
- **The Two-Volume Work:** Recognize Acts as the second volume of a work that begins with the Gospel of Luke and its address to Theophilus. Understand the continuation of Jesus' story from his earthly ministry to the spread of the gospel.
- **Restoration of Israel:** Grasp the significance of the selection of Matthias as the twelfth apostle in relation to the restoration of the twelve tribes of Israel and the formation of a new people of God.
- **The Coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2):** Understand this event as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Joel) and Jesus' promise. Recognize it as the inauguration of the new covenant and the empowering of God's people.
- **The Inclusion of Gentiles (Acts 10):** Analyze the vision of Peter and its significance in breaking down the distinctions between Jew and Gentile. Understand how this event paves the way for the gospel to reach non-Jewish people.
- **The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15):** Comprehend the central issue debated (the necessity of Mosaic Law observance, particularly circumcision, for Gentile believers). Understand the council's decision and its implications for the identity of God's people.
- **The Role of the Holy Spirit:** Recognize the active role of the Holy Spirit in guiding events and empowering believers throughout Acts. Understand the Holy Spirit's presence as the promised Spirit of the new covenant.
- **Paul's Missionary Travels:** Understand the general scope and direction of Paul's journeys as depicted in Acts and how they illustrate the outward spread of the gospel. Recognize the connection between these journeys and Paul's letters in the New Testament.
- **Interpreting Miraculous Events:** Consider the debate surrounding the normative vs. descriptive nature of the miracles (signs and wonders) in Acts. Understand the

potential functions of these events in demonstrating the presence of the Holy Spirit and the inclusion of new groups into God's people.

Quiz

1. Explain the significance of Acts 1:8 in relation to the Old Testament book of Isaiah and the structure of the book of Acts.
2. How does the author of Acts demonstrate the connection between his book and the Gospel of Luke in the opening verses of Acts?
3. Discuss the reasoning behind the early church's decision to choose Matthias as the twelfth apostle, connecting it to Old Testament themes.
4. Describe the events of Pentecost in Acts 2 and explain why this event is considered a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
5. Explain the significance of Peter's vision in Acts 10 and how it impacted the early church's understanding of Gentile inclusion.
6. What was the central issue addressed at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and what was the council's decision?
7. Describe two ways in which the Holy Spirit is portrayed as active in the book of Acts.
8. How do Paul's missionary journeys, as recorded in Acts, relate to the overall purpose of the book?
9. Explain the difference between interpreting the miraculous events in Acts as "normative" versus "descriptive."
10. Provide an example from Acts (other than Acts 2) where the reception of the Holy Spirit is accompanied by a notable sign or wonder, and discuss its potential significance in the context of the narrative.

Answer Key

1. Acts 1:8 echoes Isaiah's prophecies of restoration and the spread of God's glory to the ends of the earth. It also provides a structural outline for Acts, with the gospel spreading from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth (represented by Rome).
2. Acts 1:1 begins by referring to "the first book, Theophilus," directly referencing the Gospel of Luke, which is also addressed to Theophilus (Luke 1:3). This

establishes Acts as a continuation of the narrative begun in Luke, forming a two-volume work.

3. The twelve apostles chosen by Jesus symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel, representing the new people of God. Replacing Judas with Matthias signifies the restoration of this symbolic representation, highlighting the author's theme of Israel's restoration in this new people of God.
4. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus' followers, resulting in them speaking in other tongues. Peter explains this by quoting the prophet Joel, indicating that this outpouring of the Spirit is the fulfillment of Old Testament promises associated with the new covenant.
5. In Acts 10, Peter has a vision of unclean animals being declared clean by God. This vision teaches Peter that the Old Testament food laws, which distinguished Jews from Gentiles, are no longer in effect, signaling that Gentiles are now also clean and can be included in God's people on equal footing with Jews.
6. The central issue at the Jerusalem Council was whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised and observe the Mosaic Law in order to be saved. The council decided that faith in Jesus Christ was sufficient for salvation and that Gentile believers did not need to adhere to the Mosaic Law.
7. First, the Holy Spirit actively directs individuals and events, such as guiding Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) or directing Paul and his companions on their missionary journeys (Acts 16). Second, the Holy Spirit empowers believers, enabling them to speak boldly, perform miracles, and bear witness to the gospel.
8. Paul's missionary journeys demonstrate the geographical expansion of the gospel, moving outward from Jerusalem to increasingly Gentile territories, culminating in Rome. This outward movement aligns with the outline provided in Acts 1:8 and illustrates the fulfillment of the prophecy that the gospel would reach the ends of the earth.
9. Interpreting the miracles in Acts as "normative" suggests that these types of miraculous events should be expected whenever the gospel is preached and people believe today. Interpreting them as "descriptive" suggests that Acts is primarily recording historical events of how the gospel initially spread, without necessarily establishing a consistent pattern for all times.
10. In Acts 8, after the Samaritans believed Philip's preaching and were baptized, Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit, likely

accompanied by visible signs (though not explicitly stated). This event was significant in demonstrating to the Jewish apostles that the Samaritans, who were historically considered impure, were also recipients of the Holy Spirit, validating their inclusion in the early church.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the relationship between Acts 1:8 and the subsequent narrative of the book of Acts. How does this verse function as a key to understanding Luke's purpose in writing this second volume?
2. Discuss the significance of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the early church as depicted in the book of Acts. How do events in Acts 10 and Acts 15 mark crucial turning points in this development, and what theological implications do they hold?
3. Explore the role and significance of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. How does the portrayal of the Spirit's activity contribute to the overarching message of the book?
4. Compare and contrast the arguments for viewing the miraculous events in Acts as either normative or descriptive for the contemporary church. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective, and how might a balanced understanding be achieved?
5. Examine how the book of Acts serves as a bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles in the New Testament. Provide specific examples of how Acts connects the life and teachings of Jesus with the subsequent ministry and teachings of the apostles, particularly Paul.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Ascension:** The event, recorded in Acts 1, where the resurrected Jesus was taken up into heaven in the presence of his disciples.
- **Apostle:** In the New Testament, generally refers to the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus, as well as Paul and Barnabas, who were commissioned to spread the gospel.
- **Pentecost:** A Jewish festival celebrated fifty days after Passover. In Acts 2, it marks the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' followers, often considered the birth of the Christian church.
- **Gentile:** A person who is not Jewish. In the context of Acts, it refers to non-Jewish individuals who embrace the Christian faith.
- **Sanhedrin:** The Jewish high court in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus and the early apostles.
- **Proselyte:** A Gentile who has converted to Judaism.
- **God-fearer:** A Gentile who was sympathetic to Judaism and often attended synagogues but did not fully convert (e.g., by undergoing circumcision). Cornelius in Acts 10 is an example.
- **Circumcision:** A religious rite practiced in Judaism, typically performed on male infants. It became a central point of contention regarding the inclusion of Gentiles in the early church.
- **Mosaic Law:** The body of laws and commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, as recorded in the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch).
- **New Covenant:** The agreement between God and humanity mediated by Jesus Christ, established through his death and resurrection, as prophesied in the Old Testament (e.g., Jeremiah 31).

5. FAQs on Mathewson, NT Literature, Session 13, Acts, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Book of Acts

1. What is the primary purpose of the book of Acts? The primary purpose of Acts is to demonstrate how the gospel of Jesus Christ, which has its roots and fulfillment in the Old Testament (especially the book of Isaiah), spreads from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and ultimately to the ends of the earth, embracing people of increasingly Gentile backgrounds. It narrates the expansion of God's people beyond traditional Jewish confines, crossing cultural and national boundaries. Acts shows how the restoration promised in the Old Testament begins to unfold through Jesus and his followers, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

2. How does Acts 1:8 serve as a key to understanding the book's structure and themes? Acts 1:8, where Jesus commissions his disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth after receiving the Holy Spirit, is crucial for two main reasons. First, it echoes the Old Testament prophecies in Isaiah regarding the restoration of God's people and the spread of God's kingdom and glory worldwide. Jesus is presented as fulfilling this program of restoration. Second, Acts 1:8 provides a rough outline for the narrative progression of the book. The initial chapters focus on the gospel in Jerusalem, followed by its spread into Judea and Samaria, and then culminating with Paul's ministry reaching "the ends of the earth," exemplified by his arrival in Rome.

3. What is the significance of the re-establishment of the twelve apostles in Acts chapter 1? The restoration of the twelve apostles after Judas's betrayal is significant because the twelve apostles represent the twelve tribes of Israel. By ensuring there are again twelve, the author of Acts emphasizes the restoration of God's people, not in the form of national Israel bound by the Mosaic Law, but as a new people of God founded on Jesus Christ and his apostles. This new people transcends national identity and is based on faith in Jesus, allowing both Jews and Gentiles to be included.

4. What is the importance of the Holy Spirit's coming in Acts chapter 2? The pouring out of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 is a pivotal event, marking the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (such as Joel's prophecy) concerning the restoration of God's people and the establishment of a new covenant where God's Spirit would be poured out upon them. This event is not seen as something entirely new but as the anticipated presence of the new covenant Holy Spirit. It signifies the beginning of the promised restoration and salvation, empowering Jesus' followers to be his witnesses as foretold.

5. Why is the story of Cornelius in Acts chapter 10 so crucial for the development of the narrative? The story of Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, and Peter's subsequent vision of unclean animals being declared clean is a turning point in Acts. This narrative demonstrates that the Old Testament law, particularly the food laws which served as identity markers distinguishing Jews from Gentiles, no longer defines who are God's people. God's pronouncement of all foods as clean symbolizes that Gentiles are now also considered clean and can be accepted as equal members of God's people based on faith, without needing to adhere to Jewish Law. This event paves the way for the gospel to spread more freely among the Gentiles.

6. What was the central issue addressed at the Jerusalem Council in Acts chapter 15, and what was the council's decision? The central issue addressed at the Jerusalem Council was whether Gentile converts needed to be circumcised and observe the Law of Moses in order to be considered part of God's people and be saved. Certain individuals were teaching that adherence to Mosaic Law was necessary for salvation. After much debate, the council, led by the apostles and elders, concluded that faith in Jesus Christ was sufficient for salvation and that Gentile believers were not required to submit to the Law of Moses. This decision was crucial in affirming that the new people of God were not defined by Jewish Law but by faith in Christ.

7. What are the key characteristics of Paul's missionary journeys as depicted in Acts? Paul's missionary "journeys," which occupy a significant portion of Acts, illustrate the geographical expansion of the gospel beyond its Jewish origins into Gentile territories. While described as journeys, Paul often took up residence in cities for extended periods, establishing new church communities. These journeys demonstrate the fulfillment of Acts 1:8 as the gospel reaches further and further from Jerusalem. Furthermore, many of the cities Paul visited during these journeys are the recipients of the letters he wrote, which form a significant part of the New Testament, highlighting Acts' role as a bridge between the Gospels and the epistles.

8. How does the book of Acts portray the role and significance of miraculous signs and wonders, particularly the Holy Spirit's manifestations? Acts portrays miraculous signs and wonders, such as speaking in tongues and healings, as accompanying the spread of the gospel and testifying to the presence of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant salvation. These events often occur as the gospel reaches new territories, including Gentile areas, mirroring what happened at Pentecost. While these occurrences are significant, Acts does not consistently depict them happening in the same way each time someone believes. This suggests that while God can and does work miraculously, Acts primarily describes how the gospel spread, rather than establishing a rigid norm for how the Spirit must always manifest. The delay in the Samaritans receiving the Spirit until Peter and John arrived, for example, served to provide undeniable apostolic confirmation of their inclusion in God's people.