

## **Dr. Robert Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 13, Dennis Johnson: Guidelines for Reading, Signposts Resources from NotebookLM**

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

### **1. Abstract of Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 13, Dennis Johnson: Guidelines for Reading, Signposts Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

This text presents **Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture on Dennis Johnson's guidelines for reading the Book of Acts**, specifically focusing on **structural signposts within the narrative**. Peterson explains that understanding Acts requires considering **its connection to Luke's Gospel, the Old Testament, and the New Testament letters**. He highlights **four key structural signals** identified by Johnson: the programmatic statements in Acts 1:8 and 9:15, summary statements describing the church's growth, repeated accounts of pivotal events like Pentecost and Paul's conversion, and the significant role of preaching. Ultimately, the lecture emphasizes that **recognizing these literary devices is crucial for grasping the overarching message of Acts** concerning the spread of the gospel.

**2. 23 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, 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 (New Testament → Gospels → Luke).**



**Peterson\_Theo\_LkA  
cts\_Session13.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 13, Dennis Johnson: Guidelines for Reading, Signposts

#### Briefing Document: Understanding the Structure of Acts (Dr. Robert A. Peterson on Dennis Johnson)

**Overview:** This briefing document summarizes the key insights from Dr. Robert A. Peterson's lecture (Session 13 of his Theology of Luke-Acts series) focusing on Dennis Johnson's guidelines for reading the Book of Acts, specifically the structural signposts Luke employs to convey his message. The lecture emphasizes the importance of reading Acts in light of Luke's purpose, the New Testament letters, the Old Testament, and Luke's Gospel. The core of the session delves into four structural signals identified by Johnson that help readers navigate and understand the flow and themes of Acts.

#### Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

##### 1. The Interconnectedness of Luke-Acts:

- The prologue of Acts (1:1-3) explicitly links it to Luke's Gospel, summarizing the first volume's focus on "all that Jesus began to do and teach" and setting the stage for the continuation of this work through the apostles empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- **Quote:** "The brief prologue of Acts 1:1 to 3, draws together Luke's two volumes. Of course, we have to read this. In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up..."
- The ending of Luke's Gospel (Luke 24:46-49) anticipates the events of Acts, particularly the command to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem, and the promise of the Father (the Holy Spirit).
- **Quote:** "Likewise, the gospel closes with Jesus' prophetic interpretation of the scriptures, a statement that anticipates the drama that unfolds in Acts, back to Luke 24."
- **Quote:** "Thus, it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things and behold, I am sending the promise of my father upon you but stay in the city until you're clothed with power from on high."

- Numerous parallels exist between Luke's Gospel and Acts, such as Jesus receiving the Spirit at his baptism and the church receiving the Spirit at Pentecost, highlighting the continuity of God's work.
- **Quote:** "Parallels between Luke's gospel and Acts abound. In the gospel, Jesus receives the Spirit when anointed in his baptism to proclaim good news. In Acts, the church receives the Spirit from the glorified Jesus and declares the wonders of God."
- Themes like the centrality of the word, the welcoming of the Gentiles, and the arrival of salvation bind the two volumes together, necessitating their combined study.
- **Quote:** "The centrality of the word, the welcoming of the Gentiles, the arrival of salvation, and many other themes bind Acts closely to Luke's gospel, demanding that we explore both volumes together in order to understand either."

## 2. The Importance of Structural Signposts in Acts:

- Luke, being a skilled writer, carefully structured Acts to convey God's message effectively. Understanding this structure is crucial for proper interpretation.
- **Quote:** "Luke writes Greek well. He's at home with the written word, and his skill in the use of language is evident. In order to get his message, God's message through him, that is, we must pay attention to the way in which the craftsman has put his books together."
- Dennis Johnson identifies four key structural signposts:
  1. **Acts 1:8 and 9:15:** These verses provide a programmatic outline for the spread of the gospel.
  2. **Summary Statements:** Scattered throughout Acts, these statements offer snapshots of the church's growth and the ongoing work of the Spirit.
  3. **Repeated Accounts:** The repetition of significant events (Pentecost, Cornelius' conversion, Saul's conversion) emphasizes their importance.
  4. **Prominence of Preaching:** A substantial portion of Acts consists of apostolic preaching, highlighting its central role in the expansion of the gospel.
- **Quote:** "We do well to note four structural signals by which Luke points our way through the account. Structural signposts in the narrative of Acts."

### 3. Acts 1:8 and 9:15 as Programmatic Outlines:

- **Acts 1:8:** Jesus' command to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth provides a geographical and thematic framework for the entire book.
- **Quote:** "It is often observed that Acts 1:8, containing Jesus' promise of the Spirit and the Apostle's role as his witnesses, provides a preview of the phases of the gospel's proclamation."
- **Quote:** "Acts 1.8, but you'll receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
- This structure unfolds geographically: Jerusalem (chs. 1-7), Judea and Samaria (chs. 8-12), and the ends of the earth (chs. 13-28), signifying not just geographical expansion but also the crossing of religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries.
- **Acts 9:15:** Jesus' commission of Saul (Paul) to be his chosen instrument to carry his name before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel outlines the focus of the later chapters (13-28).
- **Quote:** "In Acts 9:15, another statement of Jesus complements the promise of Acts 1:8, suggesting in more detail the contents of the third major section of the book, that is, the apostolic witness to the ends of the earth."
- Paul's ministry reflects these three spheres: Gentiles (chs. 13-20), kings and rulers (chs. 24-26), and the sons of Israel (chs. 22, 28).
- Paul's final words in Acts (28:25-29), including a quotation from Isaiah about the hardening of Israel's hearts and the turning of salvation to the Gentiles, echoes Stephen's earlier prophetic message (Acts 7) and underscores this shift.
- **Quote:** "Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles." "They will listen."

### 4. Summary Statements as Indicators of Growth:

- Luke uses summary statements to provide "snapshots or vignettes of the development of the church's life and witness" between the more detailed narrative accounts.
- **Quote:** "Within the larger sections, Luke's method is to give us snapshots or vignettes of the development of the church's life and witness."

- These statements highlight the ongoing results of events and set the scene for what follows, consistently emphasizing the Spirit's presence and activity.
- Examples include statements about the growth of the word, the multiplication of disciples, and the permeation of the Lord's message throughout regions (e.g., Acts 6:7, 12:24, 13:49, 19:20).
- **Quote:** "As Luke's narrative expands to embrace Judea and Samaria, 'the word of God was growing and being multiplied.'"

## 5. Repeated Accounts Emphasizing Pivotal Events:

- Luke, similar to Old Testament narrators, repeats key stories with slight variations to underscore their significance.
- **Quote:** "Although modern readers have little patience for what seems to us to be needless duplication, biblical narrators prefer to underscore an event's importance by repeating the story with slight variations..."
- The three pivotal events repeated are:
- **The Outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2, 11, 15):** Emphasizes that the reception of the Spirit is the touchstone of the Christian experience.
- **Quote:** "Through these references, Luke reminds us that the reception of the Spirit is the touchstone of the Christian experience."
- **The Conversion of Cornelius and the Gentiles (Acts 10, 11, 15):** Highlights God's welcome of the Gentiles and the breaking down of barriers to salvation.
- **Quote:** "Because the pouring out of the Spirit, God's gift of welcome on the Gentiles in Peter's presence makes them the witness who can testify that God's salvation has burst the boundaries of Israel's cultic and cultural distinctiveness."
- **The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9, 22, 26):** Underscores the world-changing significance of Paul's call as the apostle to the Gentiles.
- **Quote:** "He will not let us forget the world-changing significance of the call of the apostle to the Gentiles. He will have us listen to that call again and again."

## 6. The Prominence of Preaching:

- A significant portion (at least 30%) of Acts comprises apostolic preaching, either in full or in summary.
- **Quote:** "At least 30% of the text of Acts consists of apostolic preaching either in fairly full form or in summary."
- Miracles often serve as pretexts for preaching, which then interprets the miracle's true significance.
- **Quote:** "Many miracles recorded in Acts are pretexts for preaching. Introduce sermons that interpret the miracle's true significance."
- Luke strategically includes samples of how the gospel was addressed to diverse audiences throughout the narrative's geographical expansion.
- The book concludes with Paul's preaching, leaving the reader with the sound of the gospel message.
- **Quote:** "At the close of Acts, Luke leaves us, in a sense, with Paul's preaching ringing in our ears."
- Paying careful attention to these sermons is essential for understanding Acts and its message for the church today, as they are "divinely given apostolic commentaries" on the events.

### Conclusion:

Dr. Peterson, following Dennis Johnson, emphasizes that understanding the structural signposts in Acts is crucial for grasping Luke's theological intentions. Acts 1:8 and 9:15 provide an overarching framework, summary statements highlight the progress of the gospel, repeated accounts underscore key events, and the prominence of preaching reveals the central role of the word in the expansion of the early church. By recognizing these structural elements, readers can gain a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of Luke-Acts and the powerful work of the Holy Spirit in bringing salvation to both Jews and Gentiles. The next lecture will focus on the "people of God in Acts," the church.

## 4. Study Guide: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 13, Dennis Johnson: Guidelines for Reading, Signposts

### Luke-Acts: Structural Signposts

#### Quiz

1. According to the prologue of Acts (1:1-3), what is the focus of Luke's first book, and what does the second book, Acts, primarily address?
2. What are the three geographical phases of the gospel's spread as outlined in Acts 1:8, and which chapters of Acts roughly correspond to each phase according to the lecture?
3. Beyond geographical expansion, what other types of distances did the spread of the gospel overcome as it moved from Jerusalem to Rome, according to the lecture? Provide at least two examples.
4. What were the key characteristics of Gentile proselytes and Gentile God-fearers mentioned in the lecture, and how did they differ from each other and from Jews?
5. The lecture highlights summary statements in Acts as structural signposts. What purpose do these summary statements serve within Luke's narrative? Provide an example of a theme often highlighted in these summaries.
6. What are the three pivotal events in Acts that Luke emphasizes through repetition, and why does the lecture suggest Luke uses this literary device for these particular events?
7. How does Peter's recounting of the Spirit's outpouring on Cornelius relate back to the events of Pentecost and the words of Jesus in Acts 1:5, as explained in the lecture?
8. The conversion of Saul is recounted three times in Acts. Besides the narrator's account, where else does this event appear, and what is the significance of this repetition according to the lecture?
9. Approximately what percentage of the text of Acts is estimated to consist of apostolic preaching, and what is often the relationship between miracles and preaching in the book?

10. How does the lecture connect the sermons recorded in Acts to the overall purpose of the book and its message for the church today?

### **Answer Key**

1. Luke's first book (the Gospel of Luke) deals with all that Jesus began to do and teach until his ascension. The second book, Acts, turns our vision toward what is to come, chronicling the spread of the gospel and the actions of the apostles after Jesus' departure.
2. The three geographical phases are Jerusalem (chapters 1-7), Judea and Samaria (chapters 8-12), and to the ends of the earth (chapters 13-28).
3. Beyond spatial distance, the gospel overcame religious (from Jewish monotheism centered in the Temple to Gentile polytheism), ethnic (from Jews to Samaritans and various Gentile groups), and cultural distances (reaching the center of Gentile world power in Rome).
4. Gentile proselytes were Gentiles attracted to Jewish monotheism and ethics who underwent circumcision and committed to the Law of Moses, essentially becoming Jews. Gentile God-fearers were also attracted to Jewish monotheism and ethics but did not submit to circumcision. Both differed from Jews who were born into the covenant.
5. Summary statements in Acts show the ongoing results of events and set the scene for subsequent events. They consistently highlight the theme of the Holy Spirit's presence and activity in the church, often emphasizing the growth and multiplication of the word of God.
6. The three pivotal events are the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the conversion of Cornelius and his associates, and the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Luke uses repetition to underscore the importance of these events for understanding the work of the Holy Spirit, the inclusion of the Gentiles, and the calling of the apostle to the Gentiles.
7. Peter's recounting of the Spirit falling on Cornelius reminds the Jerusalem church of Jesus' promise that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5), which was initially fulfilled at Pentecost. This connection confirms that the Gentile experience was equivalent to the initial outpouring on the Jewish believers.
8. The conversion of Saul also appears in Paul's own speeches in Acts 22 and 26. This repetition emphasizes the world-changing significance of Paul's call to be the



apostle to the Gentiles, highlighting God's grace in transforming a persecutor into a propagator of the gospel.

9. Approximately 30% of Acts consists of apostolic preaching. Miracles often serve as pretexts or introductions to sermons, which then interpret the true significance of the miraculous events.
10. The sermons in Acts are presented as divinely inspired apostolic commentaries on the events unfolding. They reveal the theological meaning of these events and provide crucial insights into how the early church understood and proclaimed the gospel, offering a model for the church today to understand its mission and message.

## Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze how Luke uses the structural signposts of Acts 1:8 and 9:15 to provide an overarching framework for the narrative of the book. Discuss the geographical, ethnic, and social implications of this structure for the spread of the early Christian message.
2. Discuss the significance of the summary statements scattered throughout the book of Acts. How do these summaries contribute to Luke's theological purposes and our understanding of the early church's growth and the work of the Holy Spirit? Provide specific examples from the text.
3. Evaluate Luke's use of repeated accounts in Acts, focusing on Pentecost, the conversion of Cornelius, and the conversion of Saul. Why does Luke choose to recount these events multiple times, and what does this repetition emphasize about the development of the early church and its mission?
4. Examine the prominence of preaching in the book of Acts. What role do the sermons play in Luke's narrative, and how do they contribute to our understanding of the central themes and the diverse audiences of the early Christian proclamation? Support your answer with examples of different types of speeches and their contexts.
5. Considering the structural signposts discussed in the lecture, how do these literary devices help modern readers better understand the message and theological significance of Luke-Acts as a unified two-volume work?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Prologue:** An introductory section of a literary work. In the context of Acts, it refers to Acts 1:1-3, which links Luke's two volumes.
- **Theophilus:** The individual to whom both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are addressed. The identity of Theophilus is debated, but he likely represented a patron or a wider audience.
- **Acts 1:8:** A pivotal verse in Acts where Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to his apostles and outlines their role as witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
- **Acts 9:15:** A statement by Jesus to Ananias concerning Saul (later Paul), designating him as a chosen instrument to carry the name of Jesus before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.
- **Summary Statements:** Brief overviews or snapshots provided by Luke throughout Acts that describe the growth, development, and impact of the early church and the spread of the gospel.
- **Pentecost:** The event recorded in Acts 2 where the Holy Spirit was poured out on Jesus' followers, marking the birth of the church and empowering them for witness.
- **Conversion of Cornelius:** The story in Acts 10 where the apostle Peter is led by God to bring the gospel to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and his household, signifying the opening of salvation to the Gentiles.
- **Conversion of Saul (Paul):** The dramatic encounter on the road to Damascus (Acts 9, 22, 26) where Saul, a persecutor of Christians, is confronted by the risen Christ and called to be an apostle to the Gentiles.
- **Gentile Proselytes:** Non-Jews who converted to Judaism, undergoing circumcision and adhering to Jewish law.
- **Gentile God-fearers:** Gentiles who were attracted to Jewish monotheism and ethics but did not fully convert to Judaism, typically not undergoing circumcision.
- **Christophany:** A visible manifestation or appearance of Christ, especially after his resurrection, such as Paul's encounter on the road to Damascus.

## 5. FAQs on Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 13, Dennis Johnson: Guidelines for Reading, Signposts, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions on the Structure and Themes of Acts

**1. What is the overarching purpose of Luke's two-volume work (Luke-Acts)?** Luke's purpose in writing Luke-Acts was to provide an orderly account of the life of Jesus and the subsequent spread of the Christian message. Acts 1:1-3 explicitly links the two volumes, with the Gospel focusing on what Jesus *began* to do and teach, and Acts detailing the continuation of that work through the apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit. This two-part narrative demonstrates God's redemptive plan unfolding from Jesus' earthly ministry to the expansion of the church to all nations.

**2. How does Acts 1:8 function as a structural signpost in the book of Acts?** Acts 1:8, where Jesus tells his disciples they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them and will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, serves as a programmatic outline for the entire book. The narrative progression of Acts directly follows this geographical and missiological expansion: chapters 1-7 focus on the gospel's spread in Jerusalem, chapters 8-12 in Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13-28 detail the mission to the "ends of the earth," primarily through the ministry of Paul.

**3. In what way does Acts 9:15 act as another key structural signpost within Acts?** Acts 9:15, where Jesus tells Ananias that Paul (formerly Saul) is a chosen instrument to carry his name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel, provides a more specific outline for the latter part of the book (chapters 13-28). This verse highlights the primary targets of Paul's ministry as recorded by Luke: his extensive work among the Gentiles (chapters 13-20), his appearances and defenses before various rulers and kings (chapters 24-26), and his continued witness to his own people, the Jews (chapters 22 and 28).

**4. What is the significance of the summary statements scattered throughout the book of Acts?** Luke strategically includes summary statements that offer snapshots of the church's growth, the ongoing manifestation of the Holy Spirit's power, and the impact of the gospel. These summaries, though brief, are crucial for showing the results of specific events, setting the scene for subsequent narratives, and consistently underscoring the theme of the word of the Lord growing and multiplying. They provide a sense of continuity and the overall progress of God's work through the early church.

**5. Why does Luke include repeated accounts of significant events like Pentecost, the conversion of Cornelius, and the conversion of Saul?** Luke employs the literary device of repetition to emphasize the importance of these pivotal events. Just as Old Testament narrators repeated key stories to highlight God's guidance and provision, Luke recounts these transformative moments multiple times (often with slight variations) to underscore their foundational significance for the early church and the expansion of the gospel. The repetition draws the reader's attention to the outpouring of the Spirit as the touchstone of Christian experience, the inclusion of Gentiles into God's covenant, and the world-changing call of Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles.

**6. What role does preaching play in the book of Acts, and why is it given such prominence?** Preaching is a central activity in the book of Acts, with a substantial portion of the text dedicated to recording apostolic sermons and summaries of their messages. Luke strategically includes these speeches to illustrate how the early Christians proclaimed and explained the gospel to various audiences, connecting the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection with Old Testament prophecies and demonstrating the significance of the Spirit's work. The prominence given to preaching highlights its crucial role in interpreting miracles and conveying the meaning of salvation in Jesus Christ.

**7. How does Luke connect the book of Acts to his Gospel and the Old Testament?** Luke consciously creates bridges between Acts and his Gospel, as seen in the prologues and Jesus' final instructions. He also connects the events of Acts to the Old Testament by showing how the coming of the Spirit, the suffering and resurrection of Christ, and the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness to all nations fulfill Old Testament prophecies and God's promises. This intertextuality demonstrates the continuity of God's redemptive plan throughout Scripture.

**8. What are some of the key themes that bind Luke's Gospel and Acts together?** Several key themes run throughout both Luke and Acts, demonstrating their interconnectedness. These include the centrality of the word of God, the welcoming of the Gentiles into God's people, the arrival of salvation through Jesus Christ, the power and work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus as the Lord, and the concept of the church as the servant witness. Understanding these shared themes reinforces the idea that Luke-Acts should be read as a unified account of God's saving work in history.