

Dr. Robert Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 17, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 4, Mission & Message 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 17, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 4, Mission & Message, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert Peterson's lecture, drawing on I. Howard Marshall's work, examines the theology presented in the biblical book of Acts. The session specifically focuses on Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28) and how even under confinement, the **gospel message continued to spread without hindrance**. Peterson highlights key themes such as **God's overarching plan in history and the relentless mission and message of the early church**. The discussion emphasizes that **despite obstacles, the core message of Jesus as the Messiah and the kingdom of God persevered and reached even the center of the Roman Empire**.

**2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 17 – 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_Session17.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 17, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 4, Mission & Message

Briefing Document: Key Themes and Ideas in Peterson's "The Theology of Luke-Acts" Session 17

Overview: This session focuses on the concluding chapters of the Book of Acts, particularly Acts 28 and Paul's imprisonment in Rome. It explores the enduring nature of the gospel despite obstacles, the fulfillment of God's purpose in history, the central themes of mission and message in Acts, and the significance of the kingdom of God. The session draws heavily on the insights of I. Howard Marshall's commentary on Acts.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. Paul in Prison, but the Gospel is Not Bound (Acts 28):

- Despite being under house arrest in Rome, Paul actively evangelized. Luke emphasizes that the gospel's progress was not hindered by Paul's imprisonment. As Paul himself stated in 2 Timothy (quoted by Peterson), *"remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...according to my gospel, for which I suffered to the point of being bound like a criminal, but the word of God is not bound."*
- Paul's initial action upon arriving in Rome was to call together the local Jewish leaders, demonstrating his continued commitment to sharing the gospel with them first. He explained his situation and the reason for his appeal to Caesar: *"For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain."*
- Paul spent significant time expounding on the kingdom of God and trying to convince the Jewish leaders about Jesus from the Law of Moses and the Prophets. *"From morning till evening, he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets."*
- The response to Paul's message was divided, mirroring a pattern seen throughout Acts. Some believed, while others disbelieved. This led Paul to quote Isaiah's prophecy about the hardening of hearts: *"The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go to this people and say, you will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull...'"* (Isaiah 6:9-10).

- Following the rejection by some of the Jewish leaders, Paul declared that salvation had been sent to the Gentiles, who would listen: *"Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."* This highlights the shift and expansion of the gospel's reach.
- Luke concludes Acts by emphasizing Paul's continued ministry in Rome for two years, *"welcoming all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance."* This open-ended conclusion invites readers to embrace the ongoing mission of the gospel.

2. God's Purpose in History (as highlighted by I. Howard Marshall):

- Acts is seen as a continuation of God's saving work in history, building upon the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus. This is often referred to as *"salvation history."*
- Marshall argues against the idea of an *"existentialist view"* of faith that is independent of historical facts. He asserts that *"there never was an existential message independent of history, but rather the kind of presentation of salvation history offered by Luke was the original understanding of Christianity."*
- The historical facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection demand a response of commitment and obedience. *"Apart from these historical facts, there can be no basis of faith."* This point is underscored by 1 Corinthians 15:17: *"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."*
- The events in Acts are understood to be brought about by God's will and purpose, fulfilling Scripture and directed by the Holy Spirit, angels, prophets, and even the Lord himself.
- God's power is evident in the signs and wonders performed in Jesus' name, indicating that the Christian mission is ultimately carried out by God.

3. Mission and Message (as highlighted by I. Howard Marshall):

- Acts 1:8 serves as a summary of the book's content, emphasizing the mission to be witnesses to Jesus from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.
- The message proclaimed in Acts centers on Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and Lord, raised from the dead by God, and the source of salvation through the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit.

- While Acts doesn't explicitly detail the atonement through Jesus' death as much as Paul's letters, it emphasizes that Jesus' resurrection and exaltation give him the authority to bestow salvation.
- The spread of the gospel is the main storyline of Acts, beginning in Jerusalem and expanding to Judea, Samaria, and ultimately to the Gentile world, with Paul playing a central role in the mission from Antioch.
- The inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God becomes established policy as the gospel reaches beyond Jewish communities.

4. The Kingdom of God as a Central Theme:

- The concept of the *"kingdom of God"* is a unifying theme in Acts 28, appearing at the beginning (verse 23: *"testifying to the kingdom of God"*) and the end (verse 31: *"proclaiming the kingdom of God"*).
- Larkin's perspective is highlighted, stating that the kingdom of God was *"the eschatological highway into the heart of the pious Jew"* and that the good news was that *"God's reign was in their midst in the victorious life, death, and resurrection exaltation of Messiah Jesus and his salvation blessings."*
- The kingdom of God is not merely a shorthand for the gospel message but represents God's spiritual rule.
- Believers in light of these themes are subjects of God's kingdom, believers in the gospel, and lovers of Jesus.

5. Importance of Evangelism:

- Acts, from beginning to end, underscores the crucial importance of evangelism, as seen in Acts 1:8 and Paul's persistent efforts in Acts 28.
- Luke's open-ended conclusion invites all readers to believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved (referencing Acts 16:31).

6. The Need for the Whole Church's Perspective:

- The session emphasizes the importance of understanding Scripture through the lens of the global church, as different cultures and contexts offer unique insights into God's Word.

7. Sovereignty and Suffering in Evangelism:

- Drawing on Ajith Fernando's insights, the session highlights that *"evangelism thrives under the shadow of sovereignty."*
- Paul's experience demonstrates that deprivation and suffering can be occasions for God to express his glory.

8. The Unstoppable Word of God:

- Ben Witherington III's summary emphasizes that Luke's main concern is to remind readers of the *"unstoppable word of God which no obstacle...could hinder from reaching the heart of the empire and the hearts of those who dwelled there."*
- This message continues to galvanize the church today, calling believers to bold and free proclamation of the gospel.

Conclusion:

Session 17 of Dr. Peterson's lectures on the Theology of Luke-Acts, drawing on Howard Marshall's work, provides a compelling analysis of the concluding chapters of Acts. It highlights the resilience and unstoppable nature of the gospel, rooted in God's historical acts of salvation through Jesus Christ. The themes of the kingdom of God, the imperative of mission, and the significance of both historical truth and personal response are central to understanding Luke's theological purpose in recording the early church's story.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 17, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 4, Mission & Message

Study Guide: Theology of Luke-Acts (Session 17)

Key Themes:

- Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28) and the unhindered spread of the gospel.
- The significance of Acts 28 as the conclusion of Luke's narrative.
- The central themes of the kingdom of God, the gospel, and Jesus Christ in Acts.
- The importance of evangelism for the New Testament people of God.
- The understanding of God's purpose in history as the foundation of Luke-Acts.
- The mission and message of the early church as depicted in Acts.

Key Figures Mentioned:

- **Dr. Robert Peterson:** Presenter of the lecture.
- **I. Howard Marshall:** Author of commentaries on Luke and Acts, whose theological insights are discussed.
- **Luke:** Author of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.
- **Paul:** Central figure in the latter half of Acts, an apostle and evangelist.
- **Isaiah:** Old Testament prophet whose words are quoted by Paul in Acts 28.
- **Bach:** Author of "A Theology of Luke and Acts."
- **David Peterson:** Author of "Acts of the Apostles."
- **Larkin:** Author of a commentary on Acts.
- **Ajith Fernando:** Sri Lankan evangelical evangelist whose perspective on suffering and evangelism is cited.
- **Nelson Jennings:** Missiologist who influenced Robert Peterson's understanding of the global church.
- **Ben Witherington III:** Author of "Acts of the Apostles."
- **Hans Conzelmann:** Author of a book on the theology of Acts.

- **Carl Henry:** Theologian who emphasized God's acts and words in revelation.

Review Questions:

1. What is the significance of Acts 28, particularly Paul's imprisonment in Rome, for the overall message of Luke-Acts?
2. According to the lecture, what three overlapping ideas define the church in Acts?
3. How does Paul's interaction with the Jewish leaders in Rome illustrate the pattern of his missionary work?
4. What does the inclusion of the "kingdom of God" in Acts 28:23 and 31 signify?
5. Explain Howard Marshall's concept of "salvation history" in relation to Luke-Acts.
6. Why does Marshall argue against an "existentialist" interpretation of the early Christian message?
7. What four points does Marshall underscore regarding the inseparability of history and theology in Acts?
8. According to the lecture, what was the primary message proclaimed by the early church in Acts?
9. How did the persecution in Jerusalem contribute to the spread of the gospel as described in Acts?
10. What does Ben Witherington III consider to be Luke's main concern in the Book of Acts?

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each, based on the provided source material.

1. What was Paul's primary defense to the Jewish leaders in Rome, and what was the underlying reason for his appeal to Caesar?
2. How did the Jewish leaders in Rome react to Paul's presence and message before hearing his full explanation?
3. What Old Testament prophecy did Paul quote to the disagreeing Jewish listeners in Rome, and what was the implication of this quotation?

4. According to the lecture, what is more than just a "shorthand way of referring to the gospel message" in the context of pious Jews?
5. What responsibility and privilege do disciples of Jesus have, according to the connection made to Luke 5:10?
6. According to Ajith Fernando, what thrives "under the shadow of sovereignty," and how did Paul's ministry exemplify this?
7. What did Paul state in 2 Timothy 2:8-9 that highlights the contrast between his circumstances and the gospel's impact?
8. According to Howard Marshall, what is the overarching idea that undergirds the Book of Acts?
9. What are the two blessings associated with salvation that are frequently mentioned in the preaching in Acts?
10. Briefly describe the geographical progression of the gospel's spread as outlined in the Book of Acts.

Answer Key for Quiz

1. Paul defended himself by stating that he had done nothing against the Jewish people or their customs and that he was imprisoned due to the Jews' objections, forcing him to appeal to Caesar, even though he had no accusation against his nation. The underlying reason for his appeal was the "hope of Israel," for which he was in chains.
2. The Jewish leaders in Rome stated that they had received no negative reports about Paul from Judea and expressed a desire to hear his views regarding the "sect" of Christianity, which they knew was widely spoken against.
3. Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9-10, a prophecy about the people hearing without understanding and seeing without perceiving due to their hardened hearts. The implication was that just as their ancestors had rejected God's message, so too were some of Paul's Jewish listeners rejecting the gospel.
4. According to the lecture, the "kingdom of God" was more than just a shorthand for the gospel message; it was the "eschatological highway into the heart of the pious Jew," representing God's reign being present in Jesus.

5. Disciples of Jesus, like the original twelve, have the responsibility and privilege of being "fishers of men," meaning they are called to share the gospel with those who do not yet know the Lord.
6. According to Ajith Fernando, "evangelism thrives under the shadow of sovereignty." Paul's ministry exemplified this through his submission to God's will despite his suffering and imprisonment, allowing God to express His glory through his deprivation.
7. Paul stated that he was bound like a criminal for the sake of the gospel, but "the word of God is not bound," highlighting that despite his physical limitations, the message of salvation continued to spread unhindered.
8. According to Howard Marshall, the overarching idea that undergirds the Book of Acts is "God's purpose in history," seeing the events recorded as a continuation of God's mighty acts from the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus.
9. The two blessings associated with salvation frequently mentioned in the preaching in Acts are the "forgiveness of sins" and the "gift of the Spirit," which was often manifested in joy and spiritual power.
10. The Book of Acts begins with the gospel being proclaimed in Jerusalem, then spreading to Judea and Samaria, and eventually, through the missionary journeys of Paul and others, reaching the Gentiles in Asia Minor, Greece, and finally Rome, signifying its spread to the ends of the earth.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the significance of Paul's final ministry in Rome, as depicted in Acts 28, in relation to the overarching themes of the Book of Acts. Consider the audiences he addressed, the message he proclaimed, and the ultimate outcome.
2. Discuss the interconnectedness of the "kingdom of God," the "gospel," and "Jesus Christ" as central motifs in the Book of Acts, drawing evidence from the lecture's discussion of Acts 28 and other relevant passages mentioned.
3. Evaluate Howard Marshall's concept of "salvation history" as it applies to the Book of Acts. How does Luke present the events of the early church as a continuation of God's redemptive plan revealed in the Old Testament and the life of Jesus?

4. Explore the role of opposition and suffering in the spread of the gospel as portrayed in the Book of Acts, with specific reference to Paul's experiences in Acts 28 and the insights of figures like Ajith Fernando.
5. Considering the open-ended nature of Acts, discuss the implications of Paul's unhindered proclamation of the gospel in Rome for Luke's original readers and for the church today, as suggested by the lecture.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Eschatology:** The part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the final destiny of the soul and of humankind. In the context of the lecture, it relates to the ultimate realization of God's kingdom.
- **Christology:** The branch of theology concerned with the person, nature, and role of Jesus Christ. The lecture emphasizes the centrality of Jesus as the Messiah in the message of Acts.
- **Salvation History (Heilsgeschichte):** A theological concept that interprets history as the arena in which God's saving activity unfolds, particularly seen in the history of Israel and culminating in Jesus Christ.
- **Messiah:** The promised deliverer of the Jewish nation prophesied in the Hebrew Bible. The lecture emphasizes Paul's efforts to convince his Jewish listeners that Jesus is the Messiah.
- **Kingdom of God:** The reign or rule of God, both present and future. In Acts, it is presented as a central theme of Jesus' teaching and the message proclaimed by the apostles.
- **Gentiles:** In biblical usage, non-Jewish people. The inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God is a significant development in the Book of Acts.
- **Apostolic Band:** A term referring to the group of apostles and their companions who were central to the early spread of Christianity.
- **House Arrest:** The state of being confined to one's own residence as an alternative to imprisonment. Paul experienced this in Rome, yet continued his ministry.
- **Inclusion:** A literary device where similar or identical elements (like words or themes) appear at the beginning and end of a passage, framing and emphasizing a central idea. The "kingdom of God" in Acts 28:23 and 31 is given as an example.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 17, Peterson: The Church in Acts, Part 4, Mission & Message, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions on the Theology of Luke-Acts Based on Dr. Peterson and Howard Marshall

1. What is the overarching theological perspective that undergirds the Book of Acts, according to the sources?

The overarching theological perspective in Acts is the continuation of God's purpose in history, often referred to as salvation history. Luke presents the events in Acts as standing in direct continuity with God's mighty acts in the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus. This history reveals God's active involvement in the world, particularly in the life of Jesus and the early church, and demands a response of faith and obedience. The historical reality of these events is foundational to Christian faith.

2. How does the narrative in Acts emphasize God's sovereignty and purpose in the unfolding of events?

Acts consistently portrays God as being in control and actively directing the course of events. The death and resurrection of Jesus are presented as being according to God's definite plan and foreknowledge. Similarly, events in the life of the church, including opposition, the outpouring of the Spirit, the mission to the Gentiles, and even the direction of missionaries through the Spirit, angels, and prophets, are seen as being brought about by God's will and purpose, fulfilling Old Testament scriptures.

3. What is the central message or content of the gospel as proclaimed in the Book of Acts?

The central message proclaimed in Acts revolves around Jesus, who was raised from the dead by God after being crucified. He is declared to be the Jewish Messiah and Lord, and through him, forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are offered. The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus are at the heart of this preaching, as it is through his risen and glorified state that he bestows salvation and works powerfully in the church.

4. What role does the concept of the "Kingdom of God" play in Luke-Acts, particularly in the concluding chapter of Acts?

The "Kingdom of God" is a significant theme throughout Luke-Acts, and it serves as more than just a shorthand for the gospel message. It represents God's spiritual rule and was understood by pious Jews as the eschatological hope. The good news was that God's reign had become present through the victorious life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus the Messiah. The inclusion of the "Kingdom of God" in the opening and closing verses of the passage about Paul in Rome (Acts 28:23, 31) unifies this section and highlights the enduring importance of this theme.

5. How does the Book of Acts illustrate the mission and expansion of the early church?

Acts is fundamentally a book about mission, summarized in Acts 1:8: being witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The narrative traces the spread of the gospel from a small group in Jerusalem, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to the wider Jewish diaspora and then decisively to the Gentiles. This expansion is depicted as a deliberate and organized effort, with key figures like Peter initially and then Paul leading the way in taking the message to new territories, resulting in the establishment of churches throughout the Eastern Mediterranean.

6. What does Paul's imprisonment in Rome signify in the context of the overall message of Acts?

Paul's imprisonment in Rome, as depicted in the final chapters of Acts, does not hinder the progress of the gospel. Despite being bound, Paul continues to proclaim the Kingdom of God and teach about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. His appeal to the Jewish leaders in Rome and his subsequent ministry to them, as well as to all who came to him, demonstrate that even under confinement, the "word of God is not bound." This underscores the unstoppable nature of the gospel.

7. What is Luke's approach to history in the Book of Acts, and how does it relate to theology?

Luke is presented as both a historian and a theologian. As a historian, he aimed for accuracy in his account of the beginnings of Christianity, similar to other reputable ancient historians. However, he also emphasizes particular aspects of this history to communicate Christian theology. Luke sees theological significance in the historical events he records, highlighting God's active role in history, the fulfillment of Scripture, and the direction of the church. Thus, for Luke, history and theology are inseparable.

8. What are some key takeaways or implications for believers today from the study of the Book of Acts, according to the sources?

Several key implications emerge from the study of Acts. First, believers are subjects of God's Kingdom, believers in the gospel, and lovers of Jesus. Second, the importance of evangelism is consistently emphasized throughout Acts. Third, believers in the West can learn from the experiences of Christians in diverse cultural contexts. Finally, Acts reminds us that despite obstacles and suffering, the word of God cannot be hindered, and we are called to boldly and freely share the gospel, trusting in God's power to overcome any external challenges.