

Title: Evangelism and Introduction to Acts

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Session 6

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Abstract

This lecture explores the theme of evangelism in the book of Acts, demonstrating how early believers utilized relational networks, public forums, and divine guidance to share the gospel. Dr. Craig Keener emphasizes that God continues to empower the entire body of Christ with signs and wonders as foretastes of future glory to draw attention to the gospel. Additionally, the lecture outlines the logistical strategies of the early church, such as house meetings, team ministry, and local leadership structures, while preparing for the detailed study of Acts chapter 1. Finally, Keener provides historical and cultural background on key events in Acts 1, including the replacement of Judas through the casting of lots.

Outline

I. Introduction to Evangelism in Acts

A. Contextualization and Diverse Gifts

- Consistent core gospel message throughout Acts is contextualized for relevant settings.
- Diversity of spiritual gifts and ministries allows God to work through people in different ways.

B. Gaining Attention for the Gospel

- Early believers utilized cultural structures like synagogues and public debate forums.
- Relational networks were vital as believers naturally shared the message during their travels.
- Rejection of clergy-only ministry: the necessity of equipping the whole body of Christ for service (Ephesians 4).

II. Relational Networks and Household Structures

A. Household Witnessing (Acts 20:20)

- Paul taught both publicly and 'house to house' in intimate organic settings.
- Composition of ancient households: relatives, servants, workers, and social clients.
- Examples: Lydia's household in Philippi and Cornelius' gathered relatives in Acts 10.

B. Patron-Client Dynamics

- Highly relevant in Roman colonies like Corinth and Philippi.
- High-status patrons hosted and supported socially dependent clients, receiving social honor in return.

C. Contemporary Applications

- Adapting ancient household and relational networks to modern equivalents.
- 'Target groups' or support groups based on shared life interests or common pain (e.g., grief comfort support groups).
- Sharing faith organically through established personal and family connections.

III. Vocational and Cultural Integration

A. Paul's Leatherworking/Tentmaking (Acts 18:3)

- Working a trade provided natural, peer-level opportunities for conversational evangelism.
- Paul became a fully integrated participant in the culture rather than an outside speaker preaching 'at' it.
- Paul selectively accepted financial support (gifts from Philippi/Macedonia) but maintained self-support when necessary.

B. Diverse Conversional Contexts

- Reaching women in Philippi through a mutual interest in monotheism.
- Reaching the Roman jailer in Philippi through an earthquake and the offer of salvation.

IV. Signs, Wonders, and "Power Evangelism"

A. Theological Framework of Signs

- Miracles act as temporary 'samples' or 'foretastes' of future resurrection glory.
- Assurance of God's ultimate promise to restore creation and wipe away tears, despite human mortality (apostles and subsequent saints die).

B. Drawing Attention through Miracles

- Signs and wonders serve as the primary method for gathering crowds and gaining a hearing in Acts.
- Examples: tongues on Pentecost (Acts 2) and the healing of the paralyzed man (Acts 3-4).
- Believers prayed for signs and boldness (Acts 4:29-30) and God confirmed His message through them (Acts 14:3).

C. Personal Witness Accounts

- Craig Keener's experiences as a young Christian praying for Mabel Cooper's knee and subsequent healing from coughing blood/cancer.

- Healing prayer is an opportunity for all believers, not just official ministers.

D. Defining "Power" (Dynamis) in Luke-Acts

- Luke associates 'power' heavily with casting out demons and physical healing (Luke 4:36, 5:17, 6:19, 8:46, 9:1, Acts 3:12, 10:38).
- Stephen was full of grace and power, doing wonders and signs (Acts 6:8).
- Spiritual power is closely tied to Jewish concepts of prophetic empowerment.

E. Paul's Progression in Miraculous Ministry

- Paul grew in signs (from blinding Elymas in Acts 13 and healings in Acts 14 to widespread signs in Ephesus in Acts 19).
- Recognition that the glory and credit for healings belong to the name of Jesus, not the human instrument.

V. Providential Setup and Community Life as Witness

A. Divine Setups

- Parallel visions (Peter and Cornelius) causing unexpected cross-cultural encounters.
- Philip directed by the Spirit to the Ethiopian official reading Isaiah 53.
- Craig Keener's personal narrative of the picnic 'setup'.

B. Communal Witness and Lifestyle (Acts 2:41-47)

- Converts (3000 on Pentecost) added through dramatic signs and preaching.
- The daily lifestyle of the early church: shared meals, worship, prayer, and radical sharing of possessions.
- Favor with the general public and daily conversions based on observing the loving community (Acts 2:47).
- Jesus' command to love (John 13:34-35) and prayer for unity (John 17:23) as primary signs of discipleship.

VI. Spiritual Guidance and Geographical Navigation

A. Positive and Negative Guidance of the Spirit

- Positive directions: Spirit sending Philip (Acts 8:29) and Peter (Acts 10:19).
- Negative guidance: Spirit forbidding entry into Bithynia and Asia (Acts 16:6-7).
- Night vision at Troas: Macedonian man pleading for help (Acts 16:9).

B. Persevering through Hardship

- Spirit's guidance does not guarantee a lack of suffering; severe persecution followed in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea).
- Prophetic warnings of imprisonment in Jerusalem (Acts 21) and Paul's willingness to suffer and die.
- God uses hardships and imprisonment to open elite venues (Praetorian Guard, Nero's court).

VII. Geographical Strategy and Venues

A. Reaching Out from Existing Connections

- The Twelve starting where they were (Jerusalem).
- Diaspora bicultural Jewish Christians reaching Greeks in Antioch.
- Barnabas and Paul starting in Cyprus (Barnabas' home) and Cilicia (Paul's home area).
- Selecting Pisidian Antioch due to known estates of Sergius Paulus' family (Sergii Polliae).

B. Urban Strategy and Roman Citizenship

- Focus on urban areas where Paul's education and Roman citizenship gave him distinct inroads and legal protection (Corinth, Philippi).

C. Centers of Influence and Communication Hubs

- Paul spent 18 months in Corinth and over 2 years in Ephesus (the hub of the province of Roman Asia).
- Rome as the ultimate geographic goal: a communication center where all roads lead.
- Modern equivalent: using the internet for dissemination, stressing the need for love and accurate intellectual preparation.

VIII. Logistical Strategies and Structures

A. Home-based Gatherings

- Meeting in homes for the first three centuries as an economically viable, intimate, and secure option.

B. Team Ministry

- Sent out in teams (Barnabas and Paul with Mark; Paul and Silas recruiting Timothy and Luke).

C. Leadership Delegation

- Local leadership structures (Elders/Overseers) adapted from Jewish elders and Greek administrative titles.
- Appointing elders in newly founded churches to ensure stability (Acts 14:23).
- Willingness to delegate responsibilities (the twelve delegating to the seven in Acts 6, echoing Moses' 70 elders).

D. Support of Economic and Teaching Resources

- Utilizing wealthy patrons/women (Luke 8:3) and financial gifts (Acts 18:7).
- Welcoming distinct teaching resources (Crispus, Apollos' eloquent knowledge of Torah).

E. Support and Apologetics

- Importance of reporting back to the home base and prayer supporters.
- Use of public and legal apologetics (Acts 24-26) to defend against false rumors (slander of incest, cannibalism).
- Realism: remaining prepared for inevitable problems, persecution, and internal divisions.

IX. Introductory Background to Acts Chapter 1

A. Recapitulation of Luke 24

- Summarizing the end of volume one at the beginning of volume two, according to ancient historical conventions.

B. Dedication to Theophilus

- Dedicating the work to a high-status sponsor ('most excellent') who likely supported copying and distribution.

C. Physical Evidence of Resurrection

- Acts 1:2-3 emphasizes Jesus presenting physical evidence of his resurrection.
- Eating together (Acts 1:4) directly refutes ancient ideas that angels/spirits could not eat physical food.

D. Setting of the Prayer Meeting (Acts 1:12-14)

- Approximately 10 days of prayer between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost.
- Mount Olivet: located half a mile east of temple, expected messianic coming site (Zechariah 14:4), a 'Sabbath day's journey'.
- The Upper Room: located in the wealthier Upper City of Jerusalem, spacious enough for large gatherings.

E. The Twelve and Naming Variations

- Symbolizing the restoration of the 12 tribes of Israel (matching DSS parallel of 12 special leaders).
- Naming variations explained by common Jewish practices of having multiple names to distinguish people with very common names (like Simon, Judas, Mary).
- Prominent and equal participation of women in the prayer meeting (v. 14).

F. Replacing Judas (Acts 1:15-26)

- Gathering of 120 people (reconstructive remnant, echoing Ezra's 120 elders).
- Peter's use of 'kol vomer' (how much more) interpretive technique to apply Psalm 69 and 109 to Jesus.
- Casting of lots: a standard method for choosing special duties in Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts (e.g., Zechariah offering incense in Luke, Old Testament duties).