

Book of Acts

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Dave Mathewson explores the theological structure and central themes of the Book of Acts. Emphasizing Acts 1:8 as a structural blueprint rooted in Isaiah's prophecy of restoration, the source demonstrates how the gospel expands in concentric circles from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Key narrative events—including the restoration of the twelve apostles, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter's vision in Acts 10, and the decision of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15—illustrate that faith in Christ, rather than adherence to the Mosaic law or national identity, defines the new covenant people of God. Finally, the lecture addresses whether the signs and wonders throughout Acts serve a normative or descriptive purpose for contemporary believers.

Outline

I. Introduction and Overview

- A. Continuation of the study of the Book of Acts
- B. Review of structure and relationship to Old Testament foundations
- C. Core focus on main themes, key narrative texts, and interpretive issues

II. The Structural Blueprint and Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy (Acts 1:8)

- A. Acts 1:8 as the key structural and theological text
 - 1. Promise of divine power through the Holy Spirit
 - 2. Commission to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth
- B. Rooted in the restoration program of Isaiah (Isaiah 32, 43, 49)
 - 1. Not primarily a modern methodology for missions strategy
 - 2. Fulfillment of Isaiah's promise of restoration and global expansion of God's kingdom
- C. Geographical progression in broadening concentric circles
 - 1. Jerusalem (Acts 1–6)
 - 2. Judea and Samaria (Acts 6–9)
 - 3. Ends of the earth / Rome (Acts 12–28)

D. Primary purpose of Acts: Demonstrating gospel expansion across cultural and geographical barriers to non-Jewish territories

III. The Relationship Between Luke and Acts

- A. Two-volume narrative work originally addressed to Theophilus
- B. Acts as the direct continuation of Jesus' ministry, actions, and teaching begun in the Gospel of Luke

IV. Restoration of the Twelve Apostles (Acts 1:15–26)

- A. The necessity of filling the vacancy left by Judas' betrayal
- B. Selection of Matthias as the twelfth apostle by casting lots
- C. Theological significance of the number twelve
 - 1. Parallels and corresponds to the twelve tribes of Israel
 - 2. Reconstitution of the true people of God centered on Jesus and His apostles
 - 3. Formation of a new covenant identity transcending national and legal boundaries

V. Key Narrative Texts and Central Themes

- A. Outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2)
 - 1. Peter's defense linking Spirit manifestation to the prophet Joel
 - 2. Fulfillment of Old Testament promises regarding the inauguration of the new covenant
- B. Peter's Vision and Cornelius the Centurion (Acts 10)
 - 1. Vision of clean and unclean animals repeated three times
 - 2. Symbolism of declaring unclean foods clean applied to Gentile inclusion
 - 3. Removal of Mosaic law identity markers (circumcision, dietary laws, Sabbath) as requirements for God's people
- C. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)
 - 1. Debate over Pharisaic demands for Gentile circumcision and Mosaic law observance
 - 2. Official decision: Faith in Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for salvation and covenant membership
 - 3. Setting aside of Mosaic legal obligation while affirming moral transformation through Christ

VI. The Missionary Travels of Paul and the Role of the Holy Spirit

- A. Concentric movement of Paul's journeys ending with imprisonment and preaching in Rome (Acts 28)
- B. Nature of Paul's labors: Establishing church communities and extended residence in key urban centers
- C. Active role of the Holy Spirit
 - 1. Directing, orchestrating events, and guiding mission movement
 - 2. Presence of the new covenant Holy Spirit promised in Old Testament prophecy

VII. Interpretive Case Study: Normative vs. Descriptive Approaches (Acts 8)

- A. Delayed reception of the Holy Spirit in Samaria (Acts 8:14–17)
- B. Theological explanation for the apostolic delay
 - 1. Overcoming centuries of deep-seated Jewish-Samaritan hostility and prejudice
 - 2. Indisputable apostolic verification by Peter and John regarding Samaritan inclusion in God's kingdom
- C. Hermeneutical resolution: Acts as both normative and descriptive
 - 1. Normative dimension: Expectation that God operates miraculously as the gospel reaches new frontiers
 - 2. Descriptive dimension: Recognition of specific historical circumstances without dictating fixed mechanical patterns