

Dr. David Mathewson, New Testament Literature,

Session 13 - Acts

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Hey everyone, welcome to another deep dive. You know, we always like to go deep on these books, and Today we're going to be looking at the book of Acts, and we have an awesome guest today. Yeah, Dr. Dave Mathewson. He's a, oh, yeah, he's a New Testament scholar.

He's a, and he's going to help us unpack this book. He knows his stuff. Yeah, so Acts is really interesting. It's often seen as like this bridge between the Gospels and like all the rest of the New Testament Romans and Galatians. Yeah, like, how did it go from how did we get Jesus to Paul and the church, the church from Jesus? Yeah, and yeah, Mathewson starts off his lecture, okay, by saying that Acts 1:8. Okay, it's like the DNA of the entire book and I think that's so interesting Yeah, because um, you know That's that verse where Jesus tells his followers that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my Witnesses in Jerusalem. Okay, and in all Judea and Samaria, right to the ends of the earth, to the ends of the earth. That's the roadmap right there.

Yeah, it's like the whole book in one verse, but you know, Mathewson takes this step further. He points out this geographical progression. Okay, Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and then out to the whole world. Yeah, it's not just a mission strategy. It's actually like a deliberate echo of the prophecies of Isaiah about the restoration of God's people, so it's showing us how that restoration is actually happening. It's happening through Jesus.

Yeah, through Jesus and the spread of the gospel. Yeah, it's powerful. It's a really powerful connection, and it really highlights how Acts is deeply rooted in the Old Testament, right? It's not just a new chapter.

It's the continuation of a much larger story Yeah that God's been weaving throughout history. Yeah, it's all connected. Yeah, it's all connected.

That makes me think about something else. Okay, the Mathewson mentions, and it's kind of a small detail, but it's about choosing Matthias to replace Judas Right as the 12th Apostle. Yeah, what's the big deal about getting back to 12? Yes, the 12th Apostle mystery. Yeah, right. Mathewson's insight here is brilliant. Okay, he explains that the 12 Apostles weren't just a random group.

Yeah, they were intentionally chosen to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. It's like a symbolic gesture. It's more than just a symbol. It's a powerful statement about who the new people of God are. Okay, unpack that for me. Yeah, think about it.

The 12 tribes of Israel were bound together by ethnicity, okay, my bloodlines, by strict adherence to the Mosaic law. Yeah, this new People of God that's forming around Jesus. It's not limited by those things anymore.

It's about faith in Jesus Christ So it transcends those old boundaries transcends those old boundaries. So that raises a question for me then: Okay, if you're no longer defined by ethnicity or by following all the Jewish laws, right? What does it actually mean to be a part of God's people now? That is a question that the early church wrestled with, and it comes to a head later in Acts, with that Jerusalem Council, right? But before we get there, let's talk about that other earth-shaking event: yeah, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2, right, Pentecost. Everybody's gathered in Jerusalem, right, for Pentecost, and suddenly the Holy Spirit descends on the followers of Jesus, right, but Matthew warns against seeing this as just an isolated event. Okay, he emphasizes that this isn't some brand-new phenomenon.

That's only for the church. Okay, this is the fulfillment of centuries of prophecy. Oh, wow, you remember Joel's prophecy about God pouring out his spirit on all people? Yeah, it's like the fast-forward button on that prophecy. Yeah, that's crazy. And it's interesting because this outpouring empowers the disciples to do all sorts of incredible things, right, like miracles and stuff, including performing miracles. Yeah, yeah, but Matthew is careful to point out.

Okay, that we shouldn't necessarily view those miracles as the norm for every believer raises a whole other set of questions about how we interpret those miraculous events throughout Acts. Yeah, we'll definitely have to circle back to that. Yeah, we'll circle back to that, but first I want to talk about the story that really caught my attention. Okay, the story of Cornelius. Okay, the Roman centurion, the Roman centurion. Yeah, he has this divine encounter that leads him to Peter.

Yeah, but at the same time, right, Peter's having this vision about food. Yes, what's going on there? This is one of those moments where you realize that the author of Acts is a Master storyteller. Okay. He's weaving the seemingly Disparate threads together to make a profound theological point.

So what is the connection between Cornelius? Yeah, what's the connection? There's a weird vision. Well, in the vision, Peter sees all sorts of animals that were considered unclean under Jewish law, right? And he hears a voice saying What God has made clean, do not call common Okay, Matthew sin brilliantly connects this to the arrival of Cornelius a Gentile He argues that this vision isn't just about dietary restrictions It's a radical declaration that the old distinctions between Jew and Gentile are being abolished in Christ Wow, so it's like God's redrawing the boundaries of his people. God is redrawing the boundaries of his people. It's a pivotal moment because it shows how the gospel is starting to break down Barriers that had existed for centuries. Yeah, that's huge. But as you can imagine, this raises all sorts of questions for the early church, right? Like are the laws still in effect like if Gentiles don't have to follow all the Jewish laws What does it even mean to be a follower of Jesus? Right, and that's the question at the heart of the Jerusalem Council, which Matthew Singh considers the most crucial event in the entire book of Acts. Okay, so set the stage for us. What's happening at this Jerusalem Council? Well, the early church is experiencing some growing pains as more and more Gentiles are coming to faith. Okay, there's a lot of debate about whether they need to be circumcised, right? Keep the Sabbath, right? All dietary laws I'll follow the dietary laws.

Yeah, all those things that were central to Jewish identity. Yeah, it sounds like a recipe for some serious conflict. Yeah, some tension there. Oh, there's definitely tension.

So, how do they resolve it? Well, they call it the Council in Jerusalem, and it's a who's who of early church leadership. Okay, Peter, James, Paul, Barnabas- they're all there. Wow. And after much debate, they reach a decision that will have profound implications for the future of Christianity. What's the verdict? They decide that faith in Jesus Christ is sufficient for salvation. Okay, Gentiles don't have to adopt all the Jewish customs to be considered true followers of Jesus. That's huge. It's huge; it's a radical affirmation of grace over legalism.

Yeah, and this decision has reverberated throughout Christian history, shaping our understanding of what it means to be a part of God's family. Wow, it's a reminder that God's grace is bigger than any cultural boundary. Yeah, or religious tradition. It's a truly Universal message of hope and redemption. So we've got this Jerusalem Council settling this big question about the Gentiles and the law, right? And it seems like the stage is set Yes for the gospel to just explode outward and that's where Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles takes center stage Okay, Mathewson shows us a map of Paul's missionary journeys.

Okay, and it's pretty mind-blowing. He travels all over the Roman Empire Wow planting churches facing persecution Spreading the message of Jesus to anyone who will listen. This is not a casual stroll around the Mediterranean. This is not a casual stroll. He was often gone for years at a time, right, facing all sorts of dangers and hardships along the way: shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments, the whole nine yards, the whole nine yards. Yeah, it makes you realize that these are really Christians.

They weren't messing around. They weren't messing around They were incredibly courageous and dedicated Yeah, and what's fascinating is how those journeys shape the letters that Paul writes Okay when you read those letters alongside the narrative of acts You get a much richer understanding of the challenges and opportunities that he faced as he planted churches and spread the gospel It's like having a front-row seat to the birth of Christianity It is and speaking of those letters. Okay, one of the things that strikes me is how often Paul connects his message back to the Old Testament. He's constantly showing how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to his people. Mm-hmm.

He's not trying to create a brand new religion, right? He's revealing the continuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. So he's not trying to erase the past, no, or create a brand new religion, exactly. He's building on what's already there He's building on the foundation that was laid by Jesus and the prophets of the Old Testament. Yeah, it's all connected. It's all connected; that makes me wonder about all those miracles that we see happening throughout Acts, right? We've got healings, yet prophetic utterances, people being raised from the dead.

It's almost like a supernatural highlight reel. It's definitely attention-grabbing. What does Mathewson say about that? And Mathewson doesn't shy away from discussing the role of miracles in Acts. Okay, he actually makes a really helpful distinction between a normative and a descriptive approach to interpreting those miracles. Okay, remind me. What's the difference? A normative approach would see those miracles as setting a pattern for how things should happen, okay, for all believers in all times and places. So if God healed people

instantly back then, right, we should expect the same thing today. He should be doing the same thing today.

Okay, but Mathewson doesn't seem to go that route. No, he favors a descriptive approach, which simply means that he sees acts as telling us what happened in the early church, okay, without necessarily prescribing that those exact experiences should be the norm for every believer today. So God might work in different ways and different contexts exactly and he's not saying that miracles don't happen today, right? He's simply cautioning against imposing our expectations onto the text. I appreciate that because it acknowledges the historical context without diminishing the power of God in our lives today, exactly, and Mathewson then uses that example of the Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit to illustrate this point, right? He suggests that the delay in their receiving the Holy Spirit wasn't an accident or an oversight. Yeah, it was a deliberate strategy to emphasize the legitimacy of their faith. So the timing was important; the timing was very important. That makes me wonder if there are other instances and acts where the timing or the manner in which miracles occur might be more about conveying a theological point, yeah, than setting a rigid pattern for how things should always happen. That's a great question, and it's one that Mathewson encourages us to keep in mind as we read Acts. Okay, he reminds us that Luke is a master storyteller. Uh-huh, and he's using these miracles to do more than just entertain us, right? He's using them to shape our understanding of God, the gospel, and the mission of the church. So it's not just about the wow factor of the miracles themselves. It's about the message that they're conveying. It's about the message that those miracles are conveying. Exactly and Matthew points out that one of the key messages that emerges from these miracle stories. Yeah, is the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Okay, it's the Holy Spirit who empowers the disciples to speak boldly. Perform miracles and spread the gospel with such courage and conviction. It makes you wonder if the Holy Spirit was so active and powerful in the lives of those early Christians. Yeah, shouldn't we expect the same kind of power and presence in our lives today? That's a question that Mathewson definitely wants us to wrestle with; he's not saying that we should all be running around performing miracles, right? But he's reminding us that the same Holy Spirit who empowered the early church is still alive and active today. So, how do we tap into that power? Well, Matthew emphasizes the importance of prayer. Okay, of being filled with the Holy Spirit and of being obedient to God's leading in our lives. Okay, He reminds us that the early Christians were constantly seeking God's guidance and relying on the Holy Spirit to empower them for their mission. So it's less about trying to replicate the exact experiences of the early church right and more about cultivating that same kind of intimacy with God and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

That's a great way to put it. It's about fostering that same spirit of surrender, faith, and obedience that we see in the lives of those early believers and that makes me think about another aspect of the early church that Mathewson highlights: their radical commitment to community. Right, the early Christians weren't just lone rangers going off on their own spiritual adventures. Yeah, they were deeply connected to one another, sharing their lives, their resources in their faith. It's like they understood that the mission of spreading the gospel, right, wasn't something they could accomplish individually, right? It required this collective effort. It required a unified body of believers working together. It's a really important point, yeah, because it challenges our individualistic tendencies.

Yeah, we often think of faith as a private matter something that happens between us and God but Acts shows us that faith is meant to be lived out in community in a context where we can support, encourage and challenge one another so it's not just about what we believe individually, right? It's about how we live out those beliefs together, exactly as a community of faith, and Mathewson points out that this sense of community was a key factor in the early church's ability to withstand persecution. Yeah, and spread the gospel so effectively they had each other's backs. They were unified in purpose, right, and they were willing to sacrifice for the sake of the mission. That's a powerful image, and it makes me wonder if the early Christians were able to build such strong and resilient communities. Yeah, in the face of such adversity, what's stopping us from doing the same today? That's a great question. And it's one that we'll explore further in part two of our deep dive. Okay, we'll delve into the implications of Acts for our lives today, considering how we can embody that same spirit of courage, commitment, and community as we seek to live out our faith in the 21st century. I can't wait to see you.

Awesome. Well, we'll see you next time. Yeah, see you then for part two of our deep dive into the Book of Acts.

Bye. Bye. Welcome back to our deep dive into the Book of Acts in part one. We uncovered some pretty cool insights from Dr. Dave Mathewson about the key themes and events that shape this really pivotal book. Yeah, we saw how Acts is deeply rooted in the Old Testament, how the selection of the twelve apostles was a deliberate echo of the twelve tribes of Israel, right, and how the Jerusalem Council made this groundbreaking decision about the inclusion of Gentiles in the early church. Yeah, and I'm still thinking about that point.

He made about the Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit. Yeah, how the timing of that event was so strategic in solidifying their acceptance within the larger Christian community. It's a great example of how Luke, the author of Acts, is carefully crafting his narrative to show how the Gospels are breaking down barriers and expanding outward to include people from all walks of life. So speaking of expanding outward, let's talk about those incredible missionary journeys that Paul undertakes. Oh, yeah, Mathewson showed us a map of those journeys, and it's pretty impressive to see how far and wide the gospel spread in such a short amount of time. Yeah, it's mind-boggling when you consider the logistical challenges of travel back then, right? Paul's journeys weren't just quick trips. He was often gone for years at a time, facing all sorts of dangers and hardships along the way: shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments- he went through it all.

Yeah, the whole nine yards. It makes you realize that these early Christians weren't just armchair theologians. No, they weren't; they were willing to put their lives on the line, yeah, absolutely, to share the message of Jesus. They were incredibly courageous and dedicated. Yeah, and what's fascinating is how those journeys shape the letters that Paul writes when you read those letters alongside the narrative of Acts. Yeah, you get a much richer understanding of the challenges and opportunities that he faced as he planted churches and spread the gospel. It's like having a front-row seat to the birth of Christianity and speaking of those letters, okay.

One of the things that strikes me is how often Paul connects his message back to the Old Testament. He's constantly showing how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to his

people. He's not trying to create a brand new religion, right? He's revealing the continuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Yeah, so he's not trying to erase the past or create a brand new religion, right? He's building on what's already there. Yeah, he's building on the foundation that was laid by Jesus and the prophets of the Old Testament. It's all connected. It's all connected. That makes me wonder about all those miracles that we see happening throughout Acts. We've got healings, prophetic utterances, people being raised from the dead.

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Okay, remind me again. What's the difference a normative approach would see those miracles as Setting a pattern for how things should happen for all believers in all times and places Oh is the idea that if God healed people instantly back then he should be doing the same thing today But Mathewson doesn't seem to go that route does he know he favors a descriptive approach Which simply means that he sees acts as telling us what happened in the early church Okay without necessarily prescribing that those exact experiences should be the norm for every believer today So God might work in different ways in different contexts exactly and he's not saying that miracles don't happen today, right? He's simply cautioning against imposing our expectations onto the text. Yeah, I appreciate that because it acknowledges the historical context of Acts, right, without diminishing the power or presence of God in our lives today, right? And Mathewson uses that example of the Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit, right, to illustrate this point. He suggests that the delay in receiving the Holy Spirit wasn't an accident or an oversight; it was a deliberate strategy to emphasize the legitimacy of their faith. That makes me wonder if there are other instances in Acts where the timing or the manner in which miracles occur might be more about conveying a theological point than setting a rigid pattern, right, for how things should always happen. That's a great question. And it's one that Mathewson encourages us to keep in mind as we read acts Okay, he reminds us that Luke is a master storyteller and he's using these miracles to do more than just entertain us Yeah, he's using them to shape our understanding of God the gospel and the mission of the church So it's not just about the Wow factor of the miracles themselves It's about the message that those miracles are conveying exactly and Mathewson points out that one of the key Messages that emerges from these miracle stories is the power and presence of the Holy Spirit Oh, it's the Holy Spirit who empowers the disciples to speak boldly perform miracles and spread the gospel with such courage and conviction It makes you wonder if the Holy Spirit was so active and powerful in the lives of those early Christians Shouldn't we expect the same kind of power and presence in our lives today? That's a question that Mathewson definitely wants us to wrestle with; he's not saying that we should all be running around performing miracles, right? But he's reminding us that the same Holy Spirit who empowered the early church is still alive and active today. So, how do we tap into that power? Well, Mathewson emphasizes the importance of prayer of being filled with the Holy Spirit and of being obedient to God's leading in our lives Okay He reminds us that the early Christians were constantly seeking God's guidance and relying on the Holy Spirit to empower them for their mission It sounds like it's less about trying to replicate the exact experiences of the early church and more about Cultivating the same kind of intimacy with God right and

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Yeah, it required a unified body of believers working together. That's a really important point because it challenges our individualistic tendencies, right? We often think of faith as a private matter something that happens between us and God But Acts shows us that faith is meant to be lived out in community Yeah in a context where we can support encourage and challenge one another so it's not just about what we believe individually It's about how we live out those beliefs together Exactly as a community as a community of faith and Mathewson points out that this sense of community Was a key factor in the early church's ability to withstand persecution and spread the gospel So effectively they had each other's backs They were unified in purpose and they were willing to sacrifice for the sake of the mission That's a powerful image and it makes me wonder if the early Christians were able to build such strong and resilient communities in the face of such adversity What's stopping us from doing the same today? That's a great question. Yeah, and it's one that we'll explore further in part three of our deep dive. Okay, we'll delve into the implications of Acts for our lives today, considering how we can embody that same spirit of courage, commitment, and community as we seek to live out our faith in the 21st century. All right, so we're back for the final part of our deep dive into the book of Acts. We've been on this incredible journey with Dr. Dave Mathewson, you know, just kind of exploring the historical context, the theological nuances, and just the audacity really of the early church from the echoes of Isaiah and Acts 1:8 to the Jerusalem Council. It's amazing to unpack how this book lays the groundwork for everything that we know as Christianity today. Yeah, and I'm really struck by how Mathewson highlights the role of the Holy Spirit throughout Acts, like it's not just a history book, right? It's this dynamic story of God moving and empowering and sometimes in really unexpected ways you really see that in the miracle stories and as we were talking about before Mathewson encourages us to take a Descriptive approach to those miracles He doesn't say that they can't happen today But he pushes back against the idea that there's this rigid pattern that it has to follow every single time It's like God doesn't fit in a box Exactly.

The Holy Spirit moves and defies our attempts to understand it or control it. Yeah, and that really connects to what Mathewson calls us to in this last part of his lecture. He challenges us to think about the implications of Acts for our lives today. So if those early Christians were so empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel, what does that mean for us in the 21st century? It can be a little daunting right because they were facing persecution and imprisonment even death for their faith and sometimes You know our everyday struggles seem a little bit small in comparison I agree their context was completely different from ours But Mathewson's point isn't that we should try to become martyrs or recreate those exact same experiences It's more about capturing that same spirit of boldness that willingness to step out in faith And trust that God is working through us even when we can't see the full picture So, how do we do that? What does that kind of Holy Spirit boldness look

like for us? Well, he says it starts with cultivating that intimacy with God that we see in the book of Acts. The early believers were constantly praying; they were seeking guidance. They were relying on the Holy Spirit to empower them. It wasn't just going through the motions. Their faith was a lived reality a daily conversation with God Yeah, it's easy to get busy and kind of let our spiritual lives become routine or even neglected But maybe that's where we need to start You know rediscovering that sense of wonder and that dependence on God that really fueled the early church You're exactly right and that leads into another point that Mathewson emphasizes and that's the importance of community Yeah, we talked about that a little bit We did but it bears repeating the early church wasn't just a bunch of individuals going off on their own They were a tight-knit community They share their lives they share their resources they share their faith They knew that they needed each other to stay strong and to encourage each other and to keep each other accountable Yeah, I think we often compartmentalize our faith, you know, we go to church on Sunday But then the rest of the week it's kind of back to business as usual We try to deal with our doubts and our fears on our own and we miss out on that strength and support that comes from Being part of a vibrant community of faith.

Mm-hmm acts reminds us that we weren't meant to go it alone. We need each other. We need that network of brothers and sisters to walk alongside us. Yeah, so it's not just about what we believe as individuals. It's about how we live out those beliefs together exactly, and Matthew sent us and points out that that communal aspect is also essential for effective witness: the unity and love that the early church had for one another.

There's a powerful testimony. It made people stop and take notice and ask what is different about these people. Yeah, it's like that saying: people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care Well, that's good If we want our words to have any weight, our actions have to match and that starts with how we treat each other within The church I love that and it makes me think about another aspect of the early church that Mathewson touches on and that's their commitment to justice and compassion They didn't just talk about loving their neighbor. They actually did it. They cared for the poor, the widows, the orphans; they spoke out against injustice. They embodied that radical inclusivity of the gospel. So our faith should impact the world around us, especially in terms of caring for those who are most vulnerable. Absolutely, and that's one of the most challenging and inspiring things about Acts. It shows us that faith isn't just about believing the right things It's about living the right way letting our beliefs affect our actions and our priorities in our relationships It's about being the hands and feet of Jesus in the world, yes Beautifully said and Mathewson wraps up his lecture with this question If the early Christians were willing to risk so much to share the gospel What are we willing to risk today? It's a tough question because it's easy to get comfortable.

You know, we settle into our routines. We don't want to make waves, but acts remind us that the gospel is a revolutionary message. It's a call to radical Transformation it's a challenge to live differently it's a call to step out of our comfort zones to challenge the status quo to speak truth to power and to love our neighbors in Extravagant and sacrificial ways to be the change that we want to see in the world. Yes, and that's the legacy of acts It's not just an old book about something that happened a long time ago It's a testament to the power of the gospel to change lives and transform communities and make a real difference in the world Wow, this deep dive has been incredible I feel like I've learned so

much and I have this whole new appreciation for the book of Acts me too And I hope that when you go back and read it again You'll be inspired and challenged by the stories of those ordinary men and women who did extraordinary things Because of the Holy Spirit.

Well, thank you so much for joining us on this deep dive into the book of Acts. It's been a pleasure. We'll see you next time. See you then