

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Storyline of the Bible,

Session 5, Acts and Pauline Epistles

6-minute Video Overview

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Let's talk about the Bible. For a lot of people, it's this massive, kind of intimidating book, right? But what if I told you that underneath all those different laws and poems and histories, there's a single unified story, a hidden storyline that connects every single page? Well, that's exactly what we're going to uncover. And, you know, it's a totally fair question.

How could a collection of books written by dozens of different people over like a thousand-plus years possibly tell one single story with a clear beginning, middle, and end? Because, let's be honest, that's what it feels like most of the time. You're reading along, and you jump from ancient history to these really complex legal documents, and then suddenly you're in a book of beautiful poetry or these wild cryptic prophecies. It can feel like you're just wandering through a giant library with no map.

But here's the fascinating part. The biblical authors themselves didn't see it that way at all. They really believed they were contributing to one single epic story.

They were constantly picking up the narrative threads left by the writers who came before them and weaving them into their own work, creating this grand tapestry and leaving all these clues for us to follow. This huge narrative is really built on five core ideas. Think of them like the main pillars that hold the whole story up.

And you can trace them from the first page of Genesis all the way to the end of Revelation. You've got the people of God, this chosen family, the covenant, which is all about God's unbreakable promises, kingship, the idea of humanity ruling with God, the temple, the special place where heaven and earth meet, and finally, creation and land, God's big plan for the physical world. Okay, so to see how this all actually works, let's just jump into the book of Acts.

The author Luke is super deliberate in how he frames the story of the early church. He wants to show that it's the direct continuation of Israel's ancient story, picking up on these exact same themes. Remember how the story of God's people Israel gets started? It's with a family, the 12 sons of Jacob, who become the 12 tribes.

And that number 12 becomes this incredibly important symbol for the whole nation's identity. But then disaster strikes. That national identity was just shattered.

Through war and conquest, the people were forced into exile, scattered across the ancient world. The 12 tribes were broken apart. So it is absolutely no accident that one of the very first things the early church does in the book of Acts is replace Judas to get the number of apostles back to 12.

This wasn't just some boring administrative task. It was a huge symbolic statement. It was their way of saying that God was restoring his people, putting the family back together again.

And look at this. This is so cool. It shows you exactly how the New Testament authors were thinking.

Jesus's final command here in Acts isn't some brand new mission. He's directly quoting and fulfilling the ancient prophecies from Isaiah, the promise of the Spirit, the call to be a witness, the mission to the whole world. It was all there hundreds of years earlier.

It's the same story, just entering a new chapter. All right, now let's turn to the apostle Paul. He's one of the most important writers in the New Testament.

And what he does is take these same five ancient themes and show how they are all redefined and fulfilled in a revolutionary new way through Jesus. So first up, the people of God. Paul completely redefines this.

He says, hey, being part of God's family isn't about your ethnic background or your family tree anymore. No, it's about faith in Jesus. And that faith breaks down all the old dividing walls, uniting people from every nation, Jews and non-Jews alike, into what he calls one new humanity.

Second, the covenant. The Old Testament prophets were always looking forward to a day when God would make a new covenant with his people. Paul steps onto the scene and declares, it's here.

And the proof, the tangible sign that this new promise is active, is the incredible gift of God's own Spirit living inside his people. For that third theme, kingship, Paul does something brilliant. He draws this powerful comparison between two figures, the first Adam from Genesis and Jesus, whom he calls the new Adam.

Where the first Adam failed in his calling to rule creation with God, leading to sin and death, Jesus, the new Adam, totally succeeds, restoring humanity's original royal purpose. Okay, now watch what Paul does with the fourth theme, the temple. For centuries, this was a specific physical building in Jerusalem where God's special presence was said to live.

But then, Paul turns around and asks this absolutely shocking, mind-blowing question to a pretty messy little church in a town called Corinth. The implications of that question are just revolutionary. God's holy presence isn't confined to a building of stone and gold anymore.

For Paul, the new dwelling place of God, the new temple on earth, is the community of his people, filled with his spirit. And finally, we get to that fifth theme, the promise of the land. Paul transforms this idea too.

He sees the promise fulfilled, not in a patch of dirt, but in the reality of a whole new creation. People of faith are now the heirs of this new world, and they start to experience the life of this new creation, things like love, joy, and peace, right here, right now. So where does this all leave us? The main characters are in place.

All these ancient themes are coming to a climax. Is the story over? Well, not quite. Paul explains this tension with a concept that theologians like to call the already-but-not-yet.

Here's the idea. The decisive moment, the climax of the whole story, has already happened in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But the full, world-renewing effects of that victory have not yet been rolled out everywhere.

It's kind of like we've seen the epic movie trailer, and it's absolutely amazing, but we're still living in that time before the full film gets released. So the grand finale of this whole epic storyline is the complete fulfillment of God's original intention. It's a vision where everything, all of reality, in heaven and on earth, is finally brought back into harmony under the peaceful, life-giving rule of Jesus.

And this leaves us with a pretty provocative thought to end on. If the biblical story isn't just a closed book about things that happened a long time ago, but a narrative that is still unfolding toward that grand conclusion, well, that kind of makes you wonder: what part are we supposed to be playing in it today?