

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Storyline of the Bible, Session 5 - Acts and Pauline Epistles, Podcast Audio Overview

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All right, let's jump right in. Today we're going to be doing a deep dive into the book of Acts and Paul's letters. Exciting stuff.

It is. And we've got some really fascinating material from a biblical scholar. Oh, yeah.

This material is great. It really helps to kind of tie together all those big overarching themes that run through the whole Bible. Right.

You know, people of God. Yeah. Covenant.

Land creation. Land creation. Temple.

Temple. Temple. Al.

And kingship. Kingship. Yep.

Those big ones. Those are the big ones. Yeah.

I remember learning about those themes, but sometimes they felt kind of abstract. Yeah. So I'm curious to see how they actually play out, you know, in Acts and Paul's letters.

Yeah. Well, the key to understanding how these themes play out in Acts and Paul is this idea of already, but not yet. Right? So these themes, they're both a present reality and a future hope.

They were inaugurated through Christ and his followers. So they're already happening. Right.

They're already in motion, but they're also waiting for their ultimate completion in the future. Okay. So in this deep dive, are we focusing mainly on the already part? That's right.

Yeah. Okay. Particularly how these themes are expressed in the life of the early church.

Okay. Awesome. So let's start with Acts.

Yeah. It picks up right where the gospels leave off. It does.

Kind of showing us how the story continues after Jesus ascends. Yeah. It's like the sequel.

The story just keeps unfolding. So it's more than just a history book of the early church. Exactly.

It's not just, you know, dates and names and places. It's about how the story of God continues to unfold through the church. I like that.

Yeah. And a good example of this is in Acts 1.8. You remember that verse, right? Right. Where Jesus tells his disciples, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

Now you know- it's easy to see that as just missionary strategy. Yeah. Just like, okay guys, here's the plan.

Go out and make disciples. But there's a deeper layer to it. Okay.

So what's the deeper layer? Well, it's actually an echo of Isaiah's promise of restoration. Remember Isaiah talks about God's people being scattered, but then regathered from the ends of the earth? Okay. Yeah.

Well, Acts 1.8 suggests that the spread of the gospel is part of that larger plan of redemption. That God's bringing his people back together. And it's really interesting that Samaria is mentioned alongside Jerusalem.

Because Samaria represents the Northern Kingdom. Exactly. Which had been separate from the Southern Kingdom.

For centuries. Yeah. They hadn't been together in a long time.

And here they're being mentioned side by side. It's like, boom, the divided kingdom is coming back together. You know, it's a big deal.

So Acts is showing us how God is fulfilling that promise of bringing his people back together. He is. It's powerful stuff.

And there's another really interesting detail in Acts. Remember all those references to the church growing and increasing in number? Like constantly. They keep talking about how the church is expanding.

Yeah. It's multiplying. Yeah.

Well, that's not just a random detail. It's actually a deliberate echo of God's original command back in Genesis. To be fruitful and multiply.

Exactly. Be fruitful and multiply. So the growth of the church isn't just about, you know, adding more names to the list.

It's about reflecting God's creative, expansive nature. It's about expanding God's kingdom. That's it.

And this narrative in Acts, this expansion, it kind of reaches a climax. At least for now. Right.

At least for the book of Acts. In Acts 28, where the gospel finally reaches Rome. Like boom, we made it to Rome.

Right. It's this huge moment. Like the stage is set for worldwide impact.

It's really exciting. It's setting the stage for Paul. Exactly.

And there's a perfect segue to Paul, because a big part of what makes Paul so interesting is how he connects the early church back to the promises made to Israel. Especially when it comes to the new covenant. Especially the new covenant.

That's huge for Paul. He's constantly showing how the church is participating in those promises that were originally made to Israel. So, like, he's saying, hey, you guys are part of this story too.

Yeah, exactly. You're not excluded. You're grafted in.

And a really clear example of this is in Ephesians 2.11-22. Oh yeah, Ephesians. This is a classic passage. Paul is talking about how Jews and Gentiles have been brought together into this one new humanity in Christ.

Yeah. One new man, he calls it. Yes.

One new man. And he uses all this language from Isaiah. Words like near and far, peace, one new humanity.

It's all straight from Isaiah's vision of restoration. So he's taking those Old Testament promises and applying them to this new multi-ethnic community. Exactly.

He's saying that in Christ, the old divisions are broken down and God is creating something new. That's pretty radical. It is.

It was radical then, and it's still radical today. And he doesn't stop there. Paul also applies the Exodus story to the church.

Okay. The Exodus. Yeah.

Think about it. The Exodus was this foundational story for Israel. Right? God rescuing them from slavery in Egypt.

Yeah. With Moses and the Red Sea and all that. Exactly.

And Paul takes those images of rescue, redemption, sonship, and he uses them to describe what Christ has done for us. Like in passages like 1 Corinthians 5.7, Colossians 1.13-14, and Galatians 4.1-7. And he's saying that, just like God delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt. He's now delivered us from slavery to sin.

Through Christ. Through Christ. The Exodus becomes this powerful metaphor for our salvation, for our liberation.

So the Exodus is not just a past event. It's a picture of what Christ has done for us. Exactly.

And it's a beautiful picture of continuity. Yeah. God's actions in the Old Testament are connected to what he's doing now through Christ.

And this idea of continuity also comes up in how Paul connects the new covenant to the Holy Spirit. Okay. Now that's interesting.

What's the connection there? Well, think about it. Every time Paul talks about the Holy Spirit, whether it's being filled with the Spirit, being sealed by the Spirit, being baptized in the Spirit, he's pointing back to the new covenant promises. Right.

Remember Jeremiah 31. God promises to put his law within us, to write it on our hearts. Yeah.

And to give us a new heart. A new heart. Well, Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit is the one who makes that happen.

The Holy Spirit is the guarantee, the seal of the new covenant. So the Holy Spirit is the evidence that God is at work in us. Exactly.

It's the tangible experience of the new covenant. And remember, those core new covenant promises- forgiveness of sins, cleansing, a new heart- those aren't just random spiritual gifts. They flow directly from that covenant relationship with God.

It's all connected. It is. It all hangs together.

Our source highlights 7 Corinthians 3 as a key passage where Paul gets super explicit about the new covenant. Yeah. 2 Corinthians 3. It's a great chapter.

Paul contrasts the old covenant written on stone tablets with the new covenant written on our hearts by the Spirit. He's emphasizing that it's not about external rules, but about an internal transformation. So it's not just about following the letter of the law.

It's about the Spirit giving life. Yeah. It's about a change of heart.

That's it. And this whole new way of relating to God is possible because of Christ. And as Paul repeatedly reminds us, Christ is the fulfillment of those Old Testament promises about a Davidic king.

Right. Kingship. That's another one of those big themes.

It is a huge theme. And Paul is very intentional about connecting Jesus back to that Davidic lineage. Yeah.

He makes it clear that Jesus is the descendant of David. Absolutely. Like in Romans 1.3, he just straight up says it.

But then he goes even further in Ephesians 1.20-23. Oh, what does he say there? He uses this powerful language from Psalm 110 and Psalm 8 to describe Jesus' exaltation and authority. These psalms paint this picture of dominion and power. They portray Jesus as the ultimate king.

The king of kings. Not just a king, but the king over all things. And when you connect those psalms back to Genesis 1, it becomes clear that Jesus isn't simply fulfilling the Davidic kingship.

It's like he's reclaiming humanity's original role as ruler over creation. That's it. He's restoring what was lost in the fall.

And it gets even more fascinating when you consider how Paul compares Adam and Jesus in Romans 5.1-19. Right. Okay. Break that down for me.

Well, Paul presents Jesus as the new Adam, the one who reverses the damage of sin and fulfills God's original purpose for humanity. So it's like a cosmic reset. Exactly.

Jesus sets things right. He puts humanity back on the path God intended. And in Colossians 1.1-15-17, Paul takes it even further, calling Jesus the image of the invisible God.

He's like, Jesus is the perfect representation of who God is. So Jesus is not just a good example. He's the ultimate blueprint for humanity.

Exactly. He shows us what it means to be truly human. Yeah.

Now this brings us to another major theme, which is the temple. Ah, yes. The temple.

This is where Paul gets really radical, right? He does. Paul completely reimagines this whole concept of the temple, the dwelling place of God. Right.

He takes it in a whole new direction. Okay. How so? Well, he shifts the focus from a physical building to the people themselves.

Whoa. Yeah. He says that we are now the temple of God.

So, like, we're all walking, talking temples. In a way, yes. He's saying that God's presence isn't confined to a building anymore.

He dwells within us, within the church. And he spells this out beautifully in Ephesians 2.19-22. Yeah, where he talks about the church being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone. Exactly.

We're all living stones being built together into this incredible spiritual structure. And then there's that famous line of 1 Corinthians 3.16. You are God's temple, and God's Spirit dwells in you. Boom.

It's a powerful reminder that God lives within us. And it completely changes how we view ourselves. It does.

And it makes those passages about purity in 1 Corinthians take on a whole new meaning. Yeah. If we are the temple.

Then purity matters. Yeah. Big time.

It's about honoring God with our bodies and our lives. It's about keeping the temple holy. Exactly.

And finally, we have to talk about land creation. This one can sometimes feel a bit more abstract. Yeah.

It's not always as obvious as the other themes. Right. But Paul still manages to connect it to the present reality of believers.

He suggests that the promise of land, which was so central to Israel's identity, finds its initial fulfillment in the blessings we receive through Christ. So it's not about a physical piece of land anymore. Not just about that.

No. It's about our spiritual inheritance. Like in Galatians 3.29 and 4.1, where Paul talks about being heirs according to the promise.

So it's like an inheritance of blessing. Exactly. It's about belonging to God and sharing in all the blessings that come with that relationship.

But there's also another layer here. Our source pointed out how Paul's language of fruitfulness in Galatians 5.22-23, it might be hinting at something even bigger. Okay.

I'm intrigued. What's the bigger picture? Well, think about the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, all those good things.

What if those aren't just individual character traits, but the very qualities that mark the new creation? The restored world that God is bringing about. Oh, okay. So maybe we're not just bearing fruit in our own lives.

Maybe we're actually participating in the renewal of all creation. That's a pretty awesome thought. It is.

And Paul doesn't shy away from talking about the new creation directly. In 2 Corinthians 5.17, he quotes Isaiah 65, saying, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. So it's not just a future hope.

It's a present reality. It's already breaking into our world. Exactly.

And he reinforces this idea in Ephesians 2.10, where he says, For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. It's like he's saying that we've been remade, repurposed for a new way of living. A new way of being in the world.

That's it. Wow. We've covered a lot of ground.

We have. Exploring these five major themes. People of God, covenant, land, creation, temple, and kingship.

We've seen how they're already being expressed in the church today in the already reality. And I know there's more to the story, right? What about the not-yet aspect? What about

the ultimate future that God has in store? That's a great question. And that's exactly where we'll pick up in part two of our deep dive.

Welcome back. So in the first part, you know, we spent some time looking at those five big themes from the Bible. Right.

People of God, covenant, land, creation, temple, kingship. Yeah. All the big ones.

We talked about how those are already being expressed, you know, in the here and now, especially within the church. Yeah, already. Yeah, exactly.

The already part. But I'm really curious to dig into that not-yet aspect. What does Paul have to say about the future, you know, and how those themes find their complete fulfillment? Well, Paul is always pointing us towards a greater horizon, you know, even when he's talking about the present reality.

And one of the clearest glimpses we get is in Ephesians 1.10, where he describes God's ultimate plan as to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. Wow. That's a big statement.

It is a huge statement. Yeah. All things summed up in Christ.

It's mind-blowing, really. So what does that even mean? Like, for all things to be summed up in Christ, what does that look like? Well, that's the million-dollar question, isn't it? It's a bit of a mystery, something we can only really grasp, you know, in part right now. Yeah.

But Paul does give us some clues, I think. If we think back to what we were talking about earlier with Jesus being the true image of God, the new Adam. Right.

It's like Paul is saying that in Jesus, humanity's original purpose is restored. That God-given mandate to rule over creation, to reflect God's image. Right.

To be fruitful and multiply and all that. Exactly. So when Paul talks about all things being summed up in Christ, he's pointing towards the completion of that restoration, like a cosmic reunion.

Everything finds its rightful place, its harmony within God's design. So it's not just about individual salvation. It's about everything.

The whole universe being brought back into alignment with God. That's the scope of Paul's vision. It's huge.

But what's even more fascinating is that this future, this ultimate future, it's not entirely detached from the present. Okay, wait. I thought we were talking about the future.

How can it be happening now? Well, that's the beauty of that already-but-not-yet tension. Right. Right.

The future consummation is grounded in what's happening right now. Okay. Like, look at the early church as described in Acts.

You've got Jews and Gentiles being reconciled, Christ reigning over his people, the new covenant established, God dwelling within his people, the new creation breaking in. It's all happening. Right.

It's not just a bunch of isolated events. It's like we're seeing signs, glimpses of that ultimate unity that Paul talks about. So it's like a preview.

It is a preview, a sneak peek of what's to come. And the amazing thing is we get to participate in it. Now this is making me think of all those incredible passages in the prophets, you know, about the new heavens and the new earth.

That totally renewed and transformed world. Yeah, absolutely. Those prophetic visions are pointing towards the same ultimate consummation that Paul is talking about.

And what Paul helps us to see is that it's not just some far-off event. It's a reality that's already being set in motion. Okay.

So how does all of this tie back to those five core themes that we've been talking about? How do they play into this future consummation? Well, imagine this. Okay. The people of God, fully unified, a global multi-ethnic community that reflects the full beauty of God's creation in the covenant, fully realized, its promise is completely fulfilled.

No more brokenness, no more separation. We experienced the fullness of God's presence and blessing. It's like everything is made whole.

It is. And land creation, completely restored, healed, and renewed, reflecting God's original design the way it was always meant to be. And the temple, no longer confined to a building, God's presence permeates all creation.

And the kingship of Christ, universally acknowledged, his reign of peace and justice extending over all the earth. It's like a beautiful tapestry, all woven together. It's like everything finally clicks into place.

Each beam finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Amazing. But let's bring it back down to earth for a second.

What does this mean for us, for how we live our lives today? Are we just supposed to sit around and wait for this future to happen? That's where things get really interesting. Because Paul doesn't just give us these abstract theological ideas. He calls us to action.

He shows us that we're not passive bystanders in this whole cosmic drama. We're active participants. So we're not just waiting for the future.

We're working towards it, bringing it about in the present. Wow. Okay.

So what does that look like practically? Well, Paul tells us to live out those five themes in our everyday lives, to embody the future now. We're called to be agents of reconciliation. Breaking down barriers.

Yeah, building bridges of unity within the church and beyond. We're called to embody God's presence, let his love and grace flow through us to touch the world around us. We're called to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit, to bring healing and renewal to our relationships, to our communities.

We're called to partner with Christ in his reign, to work for justice and righteousness in every area of life. We're little microcosms of that ultimate unity and restoration. That's a great way to put it.

We're living out the future now in anticipation of its full arrival. Wow. This is both humbling and empowering.

It is. It gives us hope for the future, but it also challenges us to live differently right now. It makes you wonder what the world would look like if we all took this seriously.

If we really lived as people who are already being summed up in Christ, already experiencing the first fruits of that future consummation. That's a great question. It challenges us to imagine the possibilities.

How can we embody these themes more fully in our own lives? How can we be more active participants in God's story of redemption and renewal? Those are questions that deserve a deep dive of their own. They do. And that's exactly where we'll pick up in part three.

We'll explore how Paul's teachings have been interpreted and applied throughout history. Okay. We'll wrestle with what they mean for our own lives today.

Okay. So we're back for the final part of our deep dive into Acts and Paul's letters. It's been quite a journey.

It has. We've been looking at these five big themes: people of God, covenant, land, creation, temple, and kingship, and we've seen how they're both a present reality and a future hope—an "already-but-not-yet" idea. And it's really fascinating to see how those themes have resonated throughout history, you know, like how they've shaped the way Christians have understood themselves and their mission in the world.

Yeah. So it's not just ancient history. No, not at all.

It's a living story. It's still unfolding. I like that.

It's a living story. So give me some examples. How have these themes actually played out in history? Well, take Paul's radical idea of the church as the people of God.

That idea has fueled so many movements, you know, movements for social justice, ecumenical dialogues, missionary endeavors, you name it. It's like he planted a seed. He did.

And that seed has grown into this massive tree with branches all over the world. I love that image. And what about his emphasis on the New Covenant? How's that impacted Christian thought? Oh, the New Covenant has sparked centuries of debate, you know, about law and grace, the role of sacraments, what it even means to be saved.

It's huge. Yeah, it's a big deal. It is.

And every generation kind of wrestles with those ideas in their own way, you know, in their own context. Right. It's the beauty of engaging with these ancient texts.

They never get old; there's always something new to discover. And then there's the whole land creation theme. That one has led to so many different perspectives on everything from environmental stewardship to social responsibility.

To how we relate to the physical world. Exactly. It's not just about escaping to heaven, you know.

Right. It's about transforming the world we live in. And then, of course, you can't forget about Paul's radical reinterpretation of the temple.

Right. Where he shifts the focus from a building to the people. Yeah.

He says, "We are the temple of God. And that's had a huge impact on everything from church architecture to our understanding of the church's role in society. It's like he flips the whole concept on its head.

He does. And finally, there's kingship. That theme has fueled so many ongoing discussions about politics, ethics, you know, how the church relates to those in power.

It's a big one. It is. It touches everything.

It's amazing how Paul's writings are so relevant even after all these centuries. Right. They're still speaking to us today.

So all this is super fascinating, but let's get practical for a minute. What does this mean for us, you know, for how we live our lives in the 21st century? How do we take these ancient themes and actually apply them today? Yeah. That's the million-dollar question, right? Like, how do we live this out? Well, there's no easy answer, obviously.

But I think Paul's writings give us a framework, a set of lenses through which we can view our lives, our purpose, you know, our responsibility in the world. Okay. I like that.

A set of lenses. So give me an example. Let's start with that idea of the church as the people of God.

How does that play out in our lives today? Well, it challenges us to think bigger, you know, to move beyond our own limited perspectives and embrace a wider, more inclusive vision of community. A community that includes everyone. Yes.

People from all backgrounds, cultures, walks of life. It's about reflecting the radical inclusivity of God's kingdom, recognizing that everyone is created in his image. Everyone deserves dignity and respect.

Okay. And when we grasp that vision, it changes everything. It transforms how we interact with our neighbors, how we engage in social issues, how we reach out to people who are different from us.

Powerful stuff. Now, what about the new covenant? How does that impact our lives today? Well, it's a constant reminder that our relationship with God is based on grace, not works. It's a gift.

Grace, not something we earn. Exactly. It frees us from that burden of legalism.

You know, it empowers us to live a life of gratitude and generosity. It's about receiving God's love. Yes.

And then letting that love overflow into our relationships with others. It frees us to extend grace to others, to forgive, to break free from those cycles of judgment and condemnation that can be so toxic. It's like a ripple effect.

It is a ripple effect of grace. Okay. How about land creation? How do we live that out in our modern world? Yeah.

That one feels especially relevant these days. It does. Well, it calls us to be responsible stewards of the earth, you know, recognizing that we're part of something much bigger than ourselves.

To care for creation. To care for it, to protect it, to advocate for its well-being. It's about recognizing that our actions have consequences for the planet, for future generations.

So it's not just about recycling. No, it's bigger than that. It's a whole way of life.

A way of being in the world. Exactly. Okay.

Now, what about temple? How does that translate into action? Yeah. What does it mean to be a temple in the 21st century? Well, it's a reminder that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, that we're called to honor God with our lives, with our choices, how we treat ourselves, how we treat others. And it's also a reminder that the church isn't just a building; it's a community.

It's a body of believers who are called to extend God's love and grace into the world. So it's about personal holiness and corporate responsibility. Both hands.

It's about being transformed from the inside out and then letting that transformation spill over into everything we do. Okay. Last but not least, let's talk kingship.

That one feels tricky. It is tricky, especially in our modern secular world. Right.

But it's so important. Paul's writings remind us that Christ is the ultimate authority in every area of life: our personal lives, our work, our relationships, even politics. So it's about aligning our lives with God's kingdom values.

Yes. Even when those values clash with the culture around us, it's not about forcing our beliefs on others or creating some kind of theocracy, but it's about living out our faith authentically in a way that attracts people to Christ. Like we're ambassadors of a different kind of kingdom.

That's it. A kingdom that's not of this world, but that has the power to change this world. It's a powerful idea.

It is. And as we wrap up our deep dive, I think the biggest takeaway is this: Paul's letters aren't just dusty old books. They're alive.

They're full of the Spirit. And they have the power to transform our lives, our communities, our world, if we let them. It's been an amazing journey.

And I feel like we've only just scratched the surface. Right. There's so much more to explore.

So much more to ponder. So much more to apply. That's the beauty of scripture.

It never runs dry. Well, to all our listeners out there, thanks for joining us on this adventure. We'll see you next time for another deep dive.

Just something fascinating and thought-provoking. Absolutely. Until then, keep exploring, keep questioning, and keep the conversation going.