

GOSPELS AND ACTS: SESSIONS FIVE AND SIX

Session Five:
Kingdom of God and Ethics in the
Gospels/Acts

INTRODUCTION

◉ Jesus' message in essence is:

“The opportune time (*kairos*) stands fulfilled; God's kingdom (*basileia*) stands near; start repenting (*metanoete*) and putting confidence (*pisteuete*) in this good news.” (Mark 1:15)

- the opportune time (*kairos*) stands fulfilled
- God's kingdom (*basileia*) stands near
- start repenting (*metanoete*)
- start...putting confidence (*pisteuete*) in this good news

INTRODUCTION

- ◉ Jesus' message in essence is:
 - “Kingdom of God” // “Kingdom of Heaven”
 - Infrequent term in the Epistles - why?
 - Infrequent term in John's Gospel - why?
- ◉ Defining the concept of “Kingdom” in Jesus' teaching:
 - Why does Jesus use this expression and what is its origins? Does Jesus invent this phrase or does it have some history in Jewish literature?
 - Very infrequent occurrence in Second Temple Jewish literature.
 - Roots found in the OT concept of Yahweh as King (Psalms), Israel as Yahweh's subjects (Theocracy), and Yahweh's power to rule. The expression of this power as “the Day of Yahweh.” (In the Greek translation of Deuteronomy - the term “King” is reserved for Yahweh.)
 - Yahweh's rule is universal - the whole earth belongs to him - but it is also specific in its application to Israel because of covenant relationships.

KINGDOM OF GOD

God's rule - redemptive action

God's space

God's will/sovereignty - mission/purpose

God's Spirit

God's power

God's people

“King of Kings and Lord of Lords”

KINGDOM OF GOD

- Inaugurated in Jesus' ministry.
- Currently expressed in this age primarily in and through the people of God, empowered by God's Spirit, in their faith communities.
 - The presence of the Spirit is an eschatological sign of the kingdom's reality in God's people.
 - Jesus is Lord and all powers are subject to him (1 Peter 3:21).
- In the future God's rule will be demonstrated in the "new heaven and new earth."

KINGDOM OF GOD

God's mission coming to expression in Jesus

- Jesus as God's agent in the Gospels
 - Son of God
 - Son of Man
 - Messiah - the coming one
 - Lord
- The Holy Spirit as God's agent in Acts
 - John's prophecy - "he will baptize/immerse you in the sphere of the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8; 1 Cor. 12:13)
 - "Another *paraklētos*"
 - The empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8 and Luke 1:35)
- Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are kingdom agents in the NT, with Jesus the primary kingdom agent in the Gospels and the Holy Spirit the primary kingdom agent in Acts and the Epistles.
- Carried out in and through his human subjects - those who both enter the kingdom and become kingdom agents.

KINGDOM OF GOD

God's mission coming to expression in Jesus

- God's campaign against Satan - an expression of his rule/kingship. God's intention to bring his covenant promises to completion.
- Jesus' triumph in his temptation - declaration of his power against Satan.
- Jesus' exorcisms, control of creation, and ability to raise the dead define his capacity to exercise divine rule in opposition to Satan.
- Blasphemy against the Spirit - defines a person under subjection to Satan (Mark 3).
- The plundering of Satan's house = God's aggressive campaign in Jesus to capture people for his kingdom.
- Jesus' death in one sense is Satan's final attempt to co-opt God's plan and destroy it. Jesus' resurrection declares the failure of Satan's attempt.
- The Messiah's assembly (Matthew 16:18) attacks the "gates of Hades" the realm of death where Satan holds sway.

KINGDOM OF GOD & PEOPLE OF GOD

- OT - God is king of Israel - Exodus 19:5-6; 1 Samuel 8:6-9.
 - Jesus urges people to “enter the kingdom” (Mark 19:17-31).
 - Not all who claim that Jesus is their sovereign in fact are in the kingdom (Matthew 7:15-23). It is a matter of hearing *and* doing Jesus’ word.
 - No one enters the Kingdom except by submitting to Jesus as Saviour and Lord (Matthew 11:25-30; John 14:1-6).
 - People in the Kingdom are termed “disciples,” those who are learning from Jesus (Matthew 13:51-52; 28:19-20). Learning happens when people “follow,” i.e. hear and do, what Jesus has commanded. Issue of obedience/ethics.
 - Kingdom entrance is marked by the rite of baptism/immersion. To be in the kingdom is to be in God’s family, i.e. to be part of the Messiah’s assembly, a member of his body. (cf. 1 Peter 2:1-10)

KINGDOM OF GOD & PEOPLE OF GOD

- ◉ Kingdom people live as Jesus' disciples
 - Jesus defines discipleship in Mark 8:31- 9:1 and Matthew 5-7, 10, 18.
 - Jesus expresses principles of the Kingdom primarily in parables. These include growth, submission to Jesus, forgiveness, compassion, producing fruit, serving one another, vigilant for the second advent, loving the lost.
 - Discipleship is allegiance to Jesus, expressed by obedience to his new covenant (Matthew 6:25-7:14).

KINGDOM OF GOD & PEOPLE OF GOD

◉ Kingdom people and the nations

- Great Commandment - Matthew 28:19-20
- Jesus includes non-Israelites in his kingdom
 - Syro-Phoenician woman, Centurion.
 - He performs miracles in non-Jewish territory - Decapolis, Tyre and Sidon.
- Jesus acknowledges the mission to the nations in his teaching
 - Mark 13:10-12; Mark 14:8-9

◉ Kingdom people and Israel

- Those included in the Messiah's assembly now fulfill the mission that God originally had created Israel to accomplish - to be a light to the nations.
- When the leaders of Israel reject Jesus and urge the Roman leaders to crucify him as a heretic, ethnic Israel (as in the 6th century B.C.) comes under God's judgment. In one sense this is "the abomination that causes desolation." Matthew 23:35-39
- Mark 13 speaks to this judgment in terms of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem (as in the 6th century B.C.). Jeremiah 7 references.
- People of Israel now must become part of the Messiah's assembly to receive the Messiah's salvation, as any other person.

DIVINE EXPECTATIONS IN THE KINGDOM

- ◉ The position of Jesus in the Kingdom needs clarification. How do the Gospels situate him in terms of Kingdom leadership? What does the title “Messiah” or “Son of God” or “Son of Man” tell us about this (Daniel 7)?
- ◉ Matthew 11:23-25 and 28:19-20 are also important.
- ◉ How and what does Jesus command in the Gospels (e.g., demons, death, creation)? Is this god-like action and authority?
- ◉ What prerogatives does Jesus assume with respect to divine action (e.g. forgiveness of sins, changing of divine laws, etc.)?

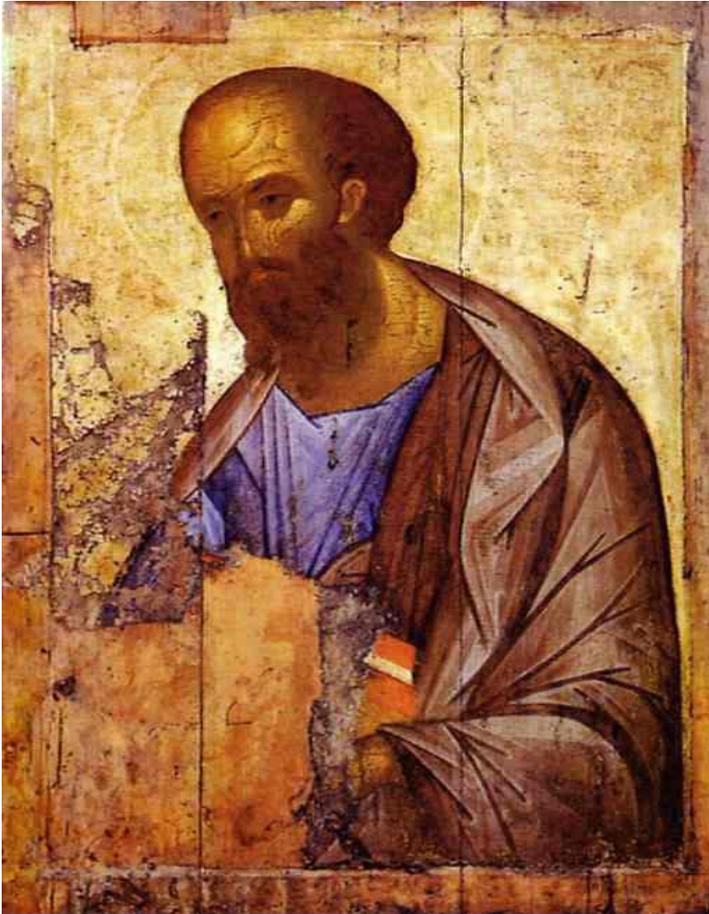
DIVINE EXPECTATIONS IN THE KINGDOM

- ◉ For those “in” the kingdom (Mark 4:10-12) and who know the “mystery of the kingdom” what “obedience” is expected? Consider Mark 10:1-12 and Matthew 19:1-12. The theology of Parables and kingdom activity.
- ◉ What are the “commands of Jesus”? How does our obedience relate to our salvation within the new covenant?
- ◉ What is the ethical frame of reference for discipleship as expressed in the Gospels? Consider one aspect in Mark 10:43-45. Consider another in the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37.
- ◉ Why are kingdom life and ethics so closely tied together? How does this mirror Israel’s mission in the OT?

WORKING TOGETHER

- In groups of 2 read Matthew 18.
- If this discourse focuses on the issue of “living in the Messiah’s assembly” (*ekklesia*), what instructions does Jesus give? What values does he regard as essential to this assembly?
- How do these instructions and values compare to your experience of the contemporary, Canadian *ekklesia*? What is the most prominent difference in your estimation? How could Canadian *ekklesiai* more adequately embrace and express this value?

SESSION SIX - GOD'S MISSION IN ACTS - BREAKING BARRIERS



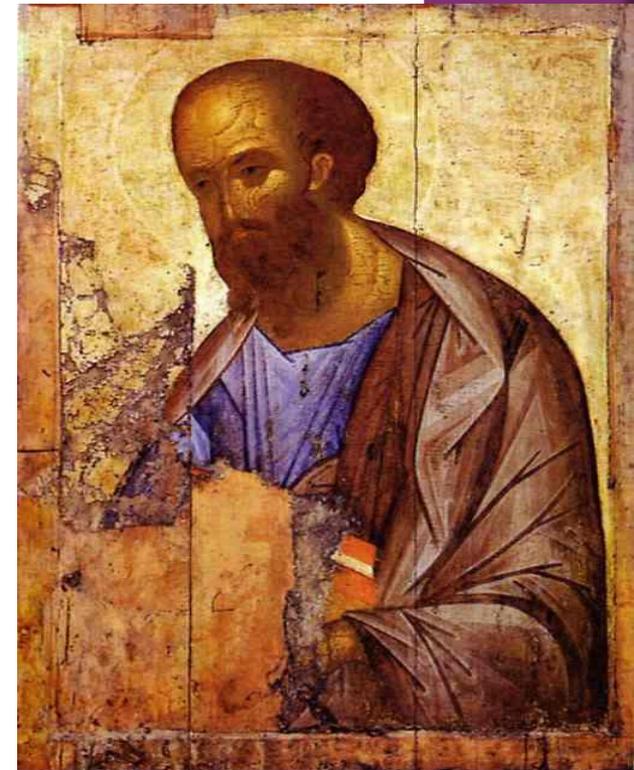
ACTS - LUKE PART II

- ◉ Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-8.
- ◉ Luke 24 and Acts 1 - linkages Luke uses to demonstrate their connection. Same patron, Theophilus.
- ◉ How does Luke define his work?
- ◉ Luke's key words include "Saviour," "salvation," and "saved." cf. Luke 2:12, 29-32; Acts 4:9-13.
- ◉ What does "salvation" mean for Luke in his Gospel/Acts two-volume work?
- ◉ How does he link "salvation" to the death and resurrection of Jesus?



ACTS - LUKE PART II

- Luke's purpose in writing Acts
 - Acts 1:8 - Implementation of Jesus' mission
 - Waiting for the Holy Spirit
 - Inclusive of all nations -
 - How the Messiah's assembly is driven by the Spirit to embrace the Messiah's mission.
 - Breaking barriers
 - Between Jerusalem and Judea - Acts 4-7
 - Between Jew and Samaritan - Acts 8
 - Between Jew and Gentile - Acts 10ff
 - The Journey motif in Gospel and Acts



ACTS - LUKE PART II

○ Luke's purpose in writing Acts

- The Gospel's transition from Jerusalem to Rome.
- The followers of Jesus are not enemies of Rome, when properly understood.
- Most of the opposition to the emerging church in Acts comes from Jewish sources.
- Despite all opposition the church grows exponentially.
- The Spirit directs in the development of the church



ACTS - LUKE PART II

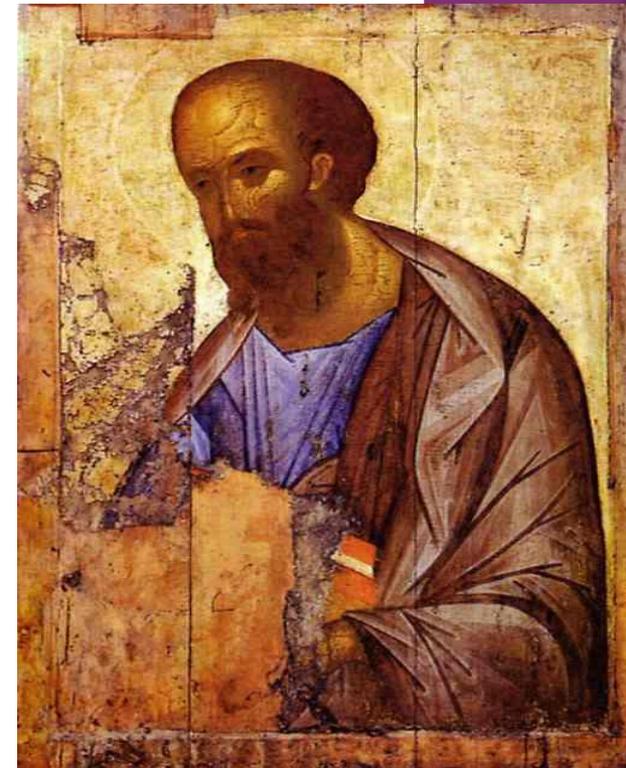
◉ Speeches in Acts

- Hellenistic historians used speeches as vehicles to express their perspectives, having license to put in the mouth of characters what they reasonably thought they would have said at the time.
- In the case of Luke he had access to eye-witnesses (Barnabas, Mark, Peter, etc.) and in some cases he was present, it seems, (last part of Acts) at some of these events.
- The theology expressed in the speeches agrees with that of Paul and Peter in their letters.



ACTS - LUKE PART II

- Speeches in Acts
 - Peter's speeches
 - Acts 2
 - Acts 3:11ff
 - Acts 4:5ff
 - Acts 10:34ff
 - Acts 11:1ff
 - Acts 15
 - Stephen's speech
 - Acts 7
 - Paul's speeches
 - Acts 13:13ff
 - Acts 14:15ff
 - Acts 15
 - Acts 17:22ff
 - Acts 20:17ff
 - Acts 21:37-22:16
 - Acts 23:1ff
 - Acts 24:10ff
 - Acts 26:1ff



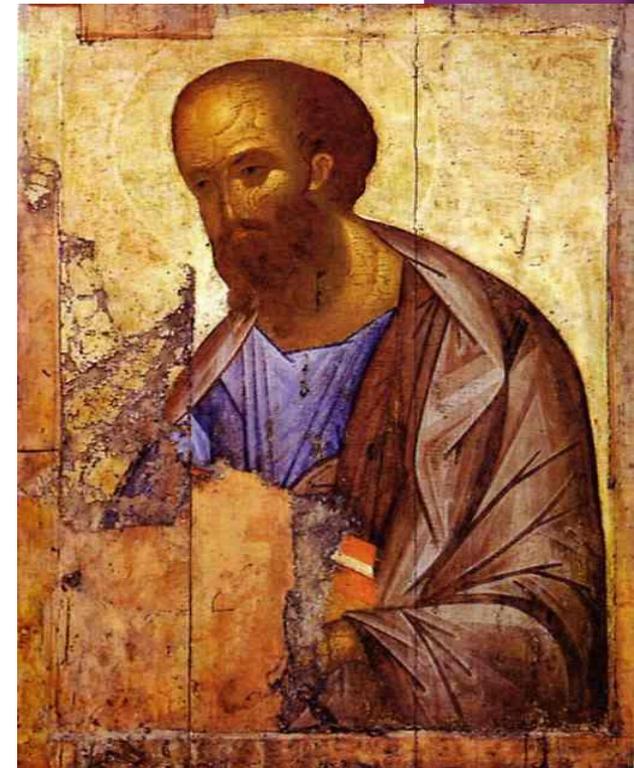
WORKING TOGETHER

- ◉ In groups of four, read Acts 3:11-26 (Peter speech) and Acts 13:16-41.
- ◉ What are four key themes of the gospel expressed by Peter in his speech?
- ◉ What are four key themes of the gospel expressed by Paul in his speech?
- ◉ To whom are these speeches addressed? Does this affect how Peter and Paul present the gospel? Why?
- ◉ What kind of “preaching” are Peter and Paul doing? Can we imitate this today? Where?

ACTS - LUKE PART II

◉ Speeches in Acts

- Paul's acts and speeches mirror those of Peter - Luke's way of demonstrating the apostolic legitimacy of Paul's vocation
- Most speeches are to non-Christian contexts - evangelistic or forensic. Only Acts 20 contains a speech to Christians (apart from the record of the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15)
- Variation depending on Jewish or non-Jewish audience (Acts 13 and 17)
- Key issue - who is eligible to become part of the Messiah's assembly and how is this achieved?



ACTS - LUKE PART II

◉ Speeches in Acts

- Stephen's speech - Acts 7
 - ◉ Ministers among Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem
 - ◉ Arrested for his strong statements about the relationship of the Gospel to the Temple and the Law
 - ◉ Stephen sees clearly that the Gospel means the end of the Temple and the limited usefulness of the law (cf. Gal. 3-4).
 - ◉ Stephen's use of the Jewish Scriptures to argue his thesis that Israel historically has rejected God's overtures.

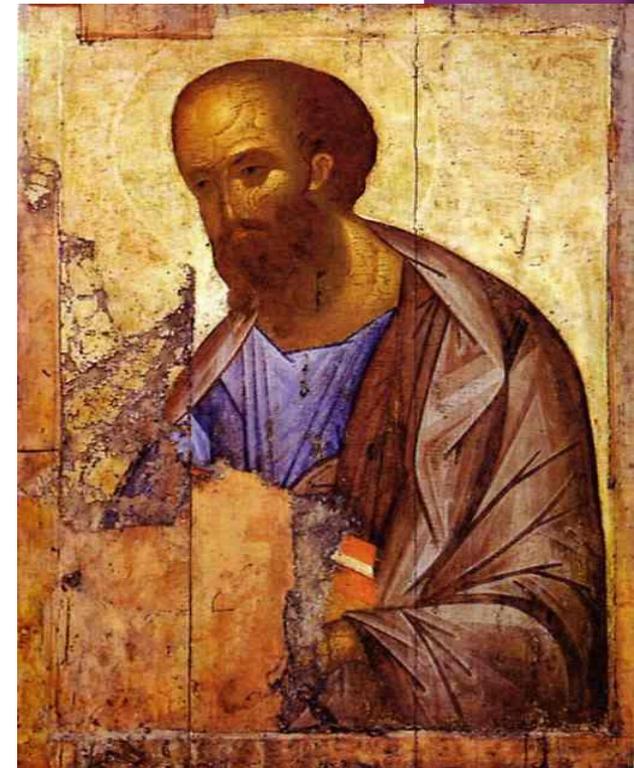


ACTS - LUKE PART II

○ Speeches in Acts

■ Paul's speeches

- Primarily presentations of the Gospel to different audiences - Jewish synagogues (Pisidia Acts 13) and non-Jewish religious centers (Athens Acts 17)
- Note how Paul shifts from using Jewish Scriptures to using Greek poets as his quoted authorities - example of contextualization?
- Paul's defense speeches all related back to the account of his conversion in Acts 9.
- Note his use of Isaiah material (to be a light to the nations) to explain his mission - he carries forward the mission that God originally had given to Israel (cf. Romans 15)



ACTS - LUKE PART II

◉ The Holy Spirit in Acts

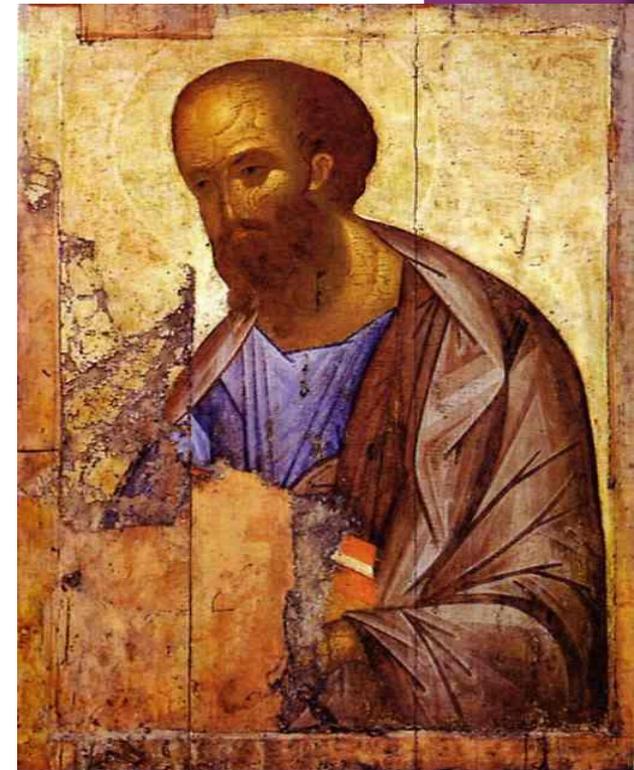
- If Jesus is the key character in Luke, the Holy Spirit is the key character in Acts.
- Peter's speech at Pentecost - Acts 2:32-38 - the promise/gift of the Holy Spirit as the key to conversion (Paul's point in Galatians 3)
- Direction of the mission - Acts 16:6-10 - Paul's vision of the Macedonian man.
- The Spirit's affirmation in breaking boundaries - Samaritans Acts 8:4-24; non-Jews Acts 10:44-48; non-Jews Acts 16:6-10; Johns' disciples Acts 19:1-7.



ACTS - LUKE PART II

◉ The Holy Spirit in Acts

- Baptism in the Spirit - Pentecost - Acts 1:5; 11:16 (cf. 10:44-48); Acts 19:1-7.
- Filling by the Spirit -
 - Verb Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 9:17; 13:9 (Pentecost, Peter's proclamation, Paul's conversion, Paul's pronouncement against Elymas)
 - Adjective Acts 6:3,5,(8); 7:55; 11:24 (the seven, Stephen, Barnabas)
 - Different verb Acts 13:52 - disciples filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.
- Ephesians 1:13, 17-18; 1 Corinthians 12:4,7
- Direction from the Spirit



WORKING TOGETHER

- In groups of 3 discuss this question:
 - The book of Acts is narrative, filled with stories and reported speeches. How do we use this material (as part of the New Testament) to develop a coherent understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit? How do we work from narrative to theology?
 - What would you regard as the key theological principles regarding the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Mission of God that we should take away from Luke's presentation in Acts?

CONCLUSIONS

◎ Gospels/Acts

- Diversity was important in communicating the significance of Jesus. Cultural contexts.
- Begin your exegesis of a story in one Gospel, but always compare where there are parallels.
- Some elements create challenges regarding consistency (e.g. John 2 - cleansing of the temple and Mark 11 - cleansing of the temple). Apologetics are part of Gospel Studies.
- Degree of literacy and availability of manuscript copies.
- Textual challenges - Mark 16:9-20
- Archeological interface - the discovery of “miqveh” and the mode of baptism.
- Using narrative to discern prescriptive principles for life-in-community.
- Moving from a Jewish focus, to a world focus. God’s plan for human salvation; the Messiah’s assembly.



VARIOUS MIQVEH



Qumran miqveh

Near the entrance
to the Temple.
Time of Jesus.

