

# Leadership and power in the book of Acts

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Steve Walton

Trinity College, Bristol

[steve.walton@trinitycollegebristol.ac.uk](mailto:steve.walton@trinitycollegebristol.ac.uk)

# Thesis

The key 'leader' in Acts is God,  
known in Jesus  
and by the Spirit

# Argument

- God is the driver of the narrative of Acts
- the role of the twelve is to be witnesses to God-in-Jesus, particularly in proclamation and prayer
- decisions are made in seeking divine wisdom in prayer and in consulting the Spirit-filled community
- Paul's speech to the Ephesians elders offers a model of Jesus-community oversight

# Divine leadership

- ‘what Jesus began (ἤρξατο) to do and teach’ 1:1
- ‘you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ 1:8
- the Spirit comes at Pentecost 2:4
  - ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα ‘on all flesh’ 2:17

# God as the driver of the narrative

- Peter and John 4:19-20; 5:29
  - divine enabling 4:29-31
- an angel frees the apostles from prison 5:19-21a
- the Spirit empowers Stephen 6:8-10; 7:55-56

# God as the driver of the narrative

- Saul meets Jesus 9:3-6
  - the role of Ananias 9:13-14, 17-18
  - Saul's commission 9:15
  - Saul shows Jesus to be the Messiah 9:22
- Peter meets Cornelius 10–11
  - ἄρα **καὶ** τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὁ θεὸς τὴν μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν ἔδωκεν 'then **even** to the gentiles God has given the repentance that leads to life' (11:18).

# God as the driver of the narrative

- the Jerusalem meeting
  - Peter's speech 15:8-9
    - ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός
    - ὁ καρδιογνώστης θεὸς ἐμαρτύρησεν αὐτοῖς δοὺς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον
    - οὐθὲν διέκρινεν μεταξὺ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν

# God as the driver of the narrative

- the Jerusalem meeting
  - Peter's speech 15:8-9
    - do not resist God 15:10
  - Barnabas and Paul testify to what God has done 15:12



# God as the driver of the narrative

- the Jerusalem meeting
  - Peter's speech 15:8-9
  - Barnabas and Paul testify to what God has done 15:12
  - James
    - God has visited the gentiles 15:16-18
    - the gentiles have turned to God 15:19

# God as the driver of the narrative

- the Jerusalem meeting
  - what God has done 15:3, echoing 14:27
  - Peter's speech 15:8-9
  - Barnabas and Paul testify to what God has done 15:12
  - James
    - 'the Holy Spirit and we decided' 15:28

# God as the driver of the narrative

- the Spirit closes doors
  - to Asia 16:6
  - to Bithynia 16:7
- Paul's night vision of the man of Macedonia 16:9-10

# The role of the twelve

- twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes  
Luke 22:30
- Luke Johnson: possessions as symbolic of authority
  - placing money at the apostles' feet  
4:35, 37; 5:2
- But
  - ἐξουσία not applied to humans



- The Father sets times ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ ‘by his own authority’ 1:7
- Simon the magician seeks ἐξουσία 8:19
  - but Peter and John pray and the Spirit δίδοται ‘is given’ 8:15, 18
  - the Spirit is τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ θεοῦ ‘the gift of God’ 8:20

# The role of the twelve

- twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes  
Luke 22:30
- Luke Johnson: possessions as symbolic of authority
- But
  - ἐξουσία not applied to humans
  - δύναμις is reserved for God, Jesus and the Spirit



- the Spirit brings power 1:8
- Jesus did deeds of power 2:22; 10:38
- the man at the Beautiful Gate was not healed *ἰδία δυνάμει* 'by our own power' 3:12
- ὅσα ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν δι' αὐτῶν 15:12

# The twelve: teaching and prayer

- the replacement for Judas 1:21-22
- ‘the apostles’ teaching’ 2:42
- providing for the hellenistic widows 6:2, 4



# Processes of appointment

- the seven
  - the twelve call the group together 6:2, 4
  - criteria: full of the Spirit and wisdom 6:3
  - the group approves 6:5a
  - the group chooses 6:5b
  - the group commissions: ἐπέθηκαν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας 'they placed hands upon them' 6:6

# Processes of appointment

- the universal gift of the Spirit; cf. Num 11:29
- no sign of 'apostolic succession'

# Decision-making: corporate not individual

- Paul travels with co-workers
- Barnabas vouches for Saul and he is welcomed 9:27, 29-30
- Barnabas brings Saul to Syrian Antioch 11:25-26; 13:1-3
- τότε νηστεύσαντες καὶ προσευξάμενοι καὶ ἐπιθέντες τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῖς ἀπέλυσαν 13:3
  - ‘having been sent out by the Holy Spirit’ 13:4

# Decision-making: corporate not individual

- reflection required after Paul's vision
  - ὥς δὲ τὸ ὄραμα εἶδεν, εὐθέως ἐζητήσαμεν ἐξελθεῖν εἰς Μακεδονίαν συμβιβάζοντες ὅτι προσκέκληται ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς εὐαγγελίσασθαι αὐτούς 16:10
  - things are not 'plain sailing' in Philippi
  - 'I will show him how much he must suffer for my name' 9:16

# Decision making: summary

- focus on God, with openness to God's purposes
- the whole group contributes to discernment
- searching the Scriptures
- testimony to God's action
- not 'very nearly the twitching of human puppets' (Ernst Haenchen)

# Paul's model of eldership 20:17-38

- πρεσβύτεροι and ἐπίσκοποι 20:17, 38
- faithful fulfillment of responsibility
  - πᾶς vv 18, 19, 21, 26, 27, 28, 32, 35
  - gospel proclamation
    - not edited vv 20 27, 31
    - death of Jesus v 22
    - future danger v 30

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  - imitation
    - being alert vv 31, 28
    - watching out vv 19b-20, 28, 20-21, 26-27, 28
    - equipped by God vv 24, 32

# Paul's model of eldership 20:17-38

- πρεσβύτεροι and ἐπίσκοποι 20:17, 38
- suffering
  - Paul v 19b
  - Paul's future suffering v 23
  - the elders' suffering vv 29-30



# Paul's model of eldership 20:17-38

- πρεσβύτεροι and ἐπίσκοποι 20:17, 38
- wealth and work
  - not coveting v 33
  - providing for those in need v 35
- the death of Jesus v 28

# Implications: good leadership

- is exercised in relationship with and dependence upon God, known in Jesus and by the Spirit
- is corporate rather than individual
- involves giving leadership away, rather than holding on to power, in order for the purposes of God to be achieved

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[steve.walton@trinitycollegebristol.ac.uk](mailto:steve.walton@trinitycollegebristol.ac.uk)