

Introducing the Book of Acts

A wonderful and exciting challenge awaits us as we open the book of Acts! There is no other book like it! Acts unveils one of the most thrilling dramas of the Bible. The explosive power of this living document will touch your life in a profound way!

Acts is a record of the unfolding of God's plan to bring people of all nations to Himself. It explains how Christianity emerged from its Jewish roots and how the work among the nations began.

For many centuries God had been working out His eternal plan of redemption through the tiny nation of Israel. Genesis chapter 12 records for us the incredible promises God made to Abraham: *that all peoples and nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham and his descendants.* The rest of the Bible is a development of this promise. From the line of Abraham, Christ our Savior came offering forgiveness and reconciliation through the cross. Throughout the Old Testament God worked with the nation of Israel—bringing them to the time when He sent His Son Jesus Christ, their Messiah and Savior, into the world. Even so, they refused to accept Him because He did not fit their understanding of who their Messiah would be. So they crucified Him as an imposter! But Jesus did not remain in the grave. He conquered death; He arose from the dead, fulfilling all that had been prophesied about Him in the Old Testament!

Within one generation this small band of Jewish disciples grew into a thriving worldwide church, of which we are a part. There are seven "progress reports" that demonstrate the rapid advance of the church as it moved out into the world (Acts 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30, 31). The book might well be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit, for it is the Spirit who controls the advance of the Gospel and guides the movements of the apostles. There are over forty references to the Holy Spirit in the first 13 chapters of the book of Acts. One cannot read this book and deny the power of it!

The key verse found in Acts 1:8 furnishes a broad outline for the book.

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (NIV)

Acts details how these words of Jesus were fulfilled. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the discouraged disciples are transformed into fearless preachers of the Gospel. The result is the expansion of Christianity in all directions—reaching into every nation of the known world!

Acts will grab your attention, trigger your imagination and tug at your emotions. You'll encounter astonishing miracles, breathtaking escapes, powerful preaching, transformed lives, harrowing journeys, life and death decisions, courtroom dramas, thrilling rescues, mystery and adventure! It's not only a terrific story—it's true! How will this book impact your life? You're about to find out!

Bow in Prayer: Blessed Lord Jesus, fill us with Your holy awe as we open the pages of this remarkable book. We want to be the kind of people You can use to radically change the world around us. Show us, teach us, change us, through the mighty power of Your Holy Spirit!

1. Share with your group the expectations you have for spiritual growth as you begin the study of Acts.

Introducing the Chart and Map 1: The purpose of the accompanying Chart is to assist you in gaining an overall view of the contents of the book of Acts. It will enable you to keep the whole book before you as you work through each section. The Chart also presents a concise summary of the main movements in the spread of the Gospel. As you review it you will see how the book is structured. You will want to keep this resource handy for reference as you study.

Map 1 will acquaint you with the cities/territories in and around Jerusalem. Additional maps will be provided throughout the series as needed.

2. ***Locate*** and mark Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria on Map 1.
3. Using the Chart, answer the following questions:
 - a. How many years do the events in Acts cover?
 - b. Identify the main people groups to whom the witness is being given.
4. ***Define*** the following key words using a dictionary and/or Bible dictionary.

Jew –

Gentile –

Samaritan –
5. What do you know about the relationships between these groups of people?

6. **Read:** Find a comfortable place and read through the book of Acts one section at a time; *triumph, transition, travels* and *trials*. Look for the story behind the stories. Take notice of how God is at work in the lives of individuals.

After reading each segment, list the main events from that section and how you were personally affected by the things you witnessed.

Triumph: Acts 1:1-7:60

Transition: Acts 8:1-12:25

Travels: Acts 13:1-21:26

Trials: Acts 21:27-28:31

Throughout the book of Acts we find a distinct emphasis on the sovereignty of God as the Gospel progresses. God's divinely-inspired account of the birth of the Christian church is filled with His beautiful footprints.

7. Glance through the following references to get a sense of what **God** is doing: Acts chapters 8, 9, 10; 11:18; 13:48; 16:14. Record your insights below.

The Author: The human author, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was Luke. Luke had many opportunities to gain first-hand knowledge about the life of Jesus and the history of the earliest Christian church. His sources were the early disciples. He interviewed them on dusty trails, aboard ship and in prison houses. Luke's writings reveal he was a man of culture, well educated and often compared favorably with the best of ancient historians. An early Christian writing, dated between A.D. 160-180, tells us that Luke was a single man who accompanied Paul until his martyrdom, and who died himself at age 84. (Kistemaker, *Acts*, p. 20.) Being the only Gentile contributor to the New Testament, it was appropriate that the universal offer of the Gospel came from the pen of Luke. Suggested dates for the writing of Acts are A.D. 62 to A.D. 64.

8. Several references to Luke are found in other New Testament writings. Read the following passages and make note of what each text reveals about this beloved author. *Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:9-11; Philemon 23-24.*

9.
 - a. Think of someone you know who effectively shares the Gospel with our generation. What qualities do you see in that person?

 - b. What characteristics and qualities do you have that make sharing the Gospel natural for you? What makes it difficult for you to share your faith?

10. Luke's account of how the Gospel exploded into a worldwide force in just a few years will inspire and challenge you to participate in God's supernatural work *through* your church community and the world at large. *Meditate on Acts 1:8 and share how God is challenging you to know and live out your mission in the world (at home, your place of work, your neighborhood, etc.).*

CHART OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

Birth of the Church	Growth of the Church	Scattering of the Church	Extension of the Church	Paul's First Missionary Journey	Paul's Second Missionary Journey	Paul's Third Missionary Journey	Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem	Paul's Trials in Caesarea	Paul's Arrival in Rome						
1	2:3	7:8	9:10	12:13	15:35	15:36	18:22	18:23	21:26	21:27	23	24	26	27	28
Triumph		Transition		Travels			Trials								
Witnessing In the City		Witnessing in the Provinces		Witnessing in the World											
Jews		Jews & Samaritans		Gentiles											
Peter		Phillip, Peter, Paul		Paul											
"Jerusalem"		"Judea & Samaria"		"To the ends of the earth"											
2 Years (AD 30-32)		14 Years (AD 32-47)		14 Years (AD 47-61)											

Chart courtesy of Radio Bible Class

MAP OF ISRAEL IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

