

Acts of the Apostles

Birth and Growth of the Church via Spreading the Gospel

The Book of Acts, sometimes called the fifth gospel, is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Dr. Luke is the writer, as he states in his introduction (v. 1). Sir William Ramsay, after making a critical study of Luke's writings, declared that Luke was the greatest historian, ancient or modern.

The Book of Acts is remarkable in many ways. It is a bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles. The New Testament without the Book of Acts leaves a great yawning gap. As Dr. Houson puts it, "If the book of Acts were gone, there would be nothing to replace it." The last recorded fact about Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is the Resurrection, which is recorded in Acts 1. In the Gospel of Mark, the last recorded act of Jesus is the Ascension, which is also recorded in Acts 1. In the Gospel of Luke, the last recorded fact is the promise of the Holy Spirit. That is also in Acts 1. And in the Gospel of John the last recorded fact is the second coming of Christ. You guessed it—that is also in Acts 1. It is as if the four Gospels had been poured into a funnel, and they all come down into this jug of the first chapter of the Book of Acts. Also the great missionary commission, which appears in all four Gospels, is confirmed in the Book of Acts.

The Book of Acts furnishes a ladder on which to place the Epistles. It would be an enriching experience to read them together, as Acts gives the history of the founding of the churches to which the Epistles are directed.

The Book of Acts records the beginning of the church, the birth of the church. The Book of Genesis records the origin of the physical universe. Acts records the origin of the spiritual body which we designate as the *church*.

The theme or key to the Book of Acts is found in 1:8: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The book divides naturally according to this key verse. The first seven chapters record the Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in *Jerusalem*. Chapters 8 through 12 record the Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles in *Judea* and *Samaria*. The remainder of the book is devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ at work by the Holy Spirit through the apostles unto the *uttermost part of the earth*.

The Book of Acts is not complete. It breaks off with Paul in his own hired house in Rome. It has no proper ending. Do you know why? It is because the Book of Acts is a continuing story. Perhaps the Lord has Dr. Luke up there writing the next chapters now. Perhaps he is recording what you and I do for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. I hope so.

Some special features of the Book of Acts are:

1. **Prominence of the Lord Jesus Christ.** The Lord Jesus has left His disciples now. He is gone. He has ascended in the first chapter of the book. But He is still at work! He has just moved His position, His location. He has moved His headquarters. As long as He was here on this earth, His headquarters were in Capernaum. Now His headquarters are at the right hand of the Father. The Lord Jesus Christ is prominent. He is at work from the vantage place of heaven itself.

2. **Prominence of the Holy Spirit.** Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit. This promise is mentioned in the Gospel of John four times (John 1:33; 7:37–39; 14:16–17; 20:22). The same promise is given in the Book of Acts (Acts 1:8). You and I are living in the age of the Holy Spirit. The great fact of this age is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers.

3. **The power of the church.** There is a power in the church, and, of course, this is the working of the Spirit of God.

4. **Prominence of the church, visible and invisible.** The church is a new institution. It has come into existence in the Book of Acts.

5. **Prominence of places.** The book begins at Jerusalem and ends in Rome. Sir William Ramsay checked all the places mentioned by Dr. Luke and found them to be accurate.

6. **Prominence of persons.** Dr. Luke mentions 110 persons by name, besides the references to multitudes or crowds. I believe that by the end of the first century there were millions of believers in the world. The church had a phenomenal growth in those first two to three hundred years. It certainly has slowed down today, exactly as our Lord said it would.

7. **Prominence of the Resurrection.** The Resurrection is the center of gospel preaching. In too many churches today, we have one Easter sermon once a year. **In the early church the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the very center and heart of the message, and no sermon was preached without it. The theme of Peter on the Day of Pentecost was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He explained that what was taking place was because Jesus was now in heaven at the right hand of God and had sent His Holy Spirit into the world. It was all due to the Resurrection. You will find that the Resurrection is the very heart of the messages of Paul.**

There are a great many people and preachers who like to “ride a hobby.” Some people like to ride the hobby of prophecy; others dwell on the Keswick message or some other facet or phase. Now, if you want to ride a hobby, let me suggest one for you: the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the early church, every Sunday was Easter, a day to proclaim the Resurrection. “He is risen!” was proclaimed everywhere (see Matt. 27:64).

8. **There is a prominence of Peter in the first section of the book and of Paul in the last section.** There is a strange omission of the other apostles. God had good reasons, I am sure, for emphasizing the ministry of these two men.

Also there is a human reason. I believe that Dr. Luke was acquainted with the ministries of these two men. He was an associate of Paul.

Some people hold the idea that there was a disagreement between Peter and Paul. Very candidly, I am of the opinion that Dr. Luke and Peter and Paul got together a great many times and had many talks.

Here are several outlines with which to develop the unit and lessons.

OUTLINE #1

I. THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AT WORK BY THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH THE APOSTLES IN JERUSALEM, CHAPTERS 1–7

- A. Preparation for the Coming of the Spirit, Chapter 1
 - 1. Introduction, Chapter 1:1–2
 - 2. Forty Days Post—Resurrection Ministry of Jesus, Chapter 1:3–8
 - 3. Ascension and Promise of the Return of Jesus, Chapter 1:9–11
 - 4. Waiting for the Spirit, Chapter 1:12–14
 - 5. Appointment of an Apostle, Chapter 1:15–26
- B. Day of Pentecost (Bethlehem of the Holy Spirit), Chapter 2
 - 1. Coming of the Holy Spirit, Chapter 2:1–13
 - 2. First Sermon in the Church Age by Peter, Chapter 2:14–47
- C. First Miracle of the Church; Peter’s Second Sermon, Chapter 3
 - 1. Healing of Lame Man, Chapter 3:1–11
 - 2. Appealing and Revealing Address of Peter, Chapter 3:12–26
 - 3. Believing Five Thousand Men (Results), Chapter 4:4
- D. First Persecution of the Church; Power of the Holy Spirit, Chapter 4
- E. Death of Ananias and Sapphira; Second Persecution, Chapter 5
- F. Appointment of Deacons; Witness of Stephen, a Deacon, Chapter 6
- G. Stephen’s Address and Martyrdom (First Martyr), Chapter 7

II. The Lord Jesus Christ at Work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles in Judea and Samaria, Chapters 8–12

- A. Conversion of Ethiopian Eunuch (Son of Ham), Chapter 8
- B. Conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Son of Shem), Chapter 9
- C. Conversion of Cornelius, Roman Centurion (Son of Japheth), Chapter 10
- D. Peter Defends His Ministry; Gospel Goes to Antioch, Chapter 11
- E. Death of James; Arrest of Peter, Chapter 12

III. The Lord Jesus Christ at Work by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles to the Uttermost Part of the Earth, Chapters 13–28

- A. First Missionary Journey of Paul, Chapters 13–14
- B. Council at Jerusalem, Chapter 15
- C. Second Missionary Journey of Paul, Chapters 15:36–16:40

- D. Second Missionary Journey (continued) Paul in Thessalonica, Athens, Chapter 17
- E. Second Missionary Journey (concluded) Paul in Corinth; Apollos in Ephesus, Chapter 18
- F. Third Missionary Journey, Chapters 18:23–21:14 Paul in Ephesus, Chapter 19
- G. Third Missionary Journey of Paul (continued), Chapter 20
- H. Paul Goes to Jerusalem and Is Arrested, Chapter 21
- I. Paul’s Defense before the Mob at Jerusalem, Chapter 22
- J. Paul’s Defense before the Sanhedrin, Chapter 23
- K. Paul before Felix, Chapter 24
- L. Paul before Festus, Chapter 25
- M. Paul before Agrippa, Chapter 26
- N. Paul Goes to Rome via Storm and Shipwreck, Chapter 27
- O. Paul Arrives in Rome, Chapter 28
(Last seen preaching to Gentiles)¹

OUTLINE #2

Acts 1-7	Church born in Jerusalem Word spread Persecution	Death
Acts 8-14	Word spreads to Samaria Philip and the Ethiopian Saul becomes Paul - Saul (Great one) converted to Paul (little one) - 4 major journeys around the Mediterranean - started at age 50 - wrote 13/27 books of NT - conversion - stopped and confronted by Light - blinded to this world - Voice speaks “I am Jesus” - sent to a true disciple, Ananias (God’s servant) - receives sight - becomes suffering servant (becoming one with the Suffering Servant of God in knowledge and experience) Peter and Cornelius Church includes Gentiles Church grows around the Mediterranean (Paul’s 1st MJ)	Resurrection
Acts 15-18:22	Jerusalem Council Church grows into Macedonia and Greece (Paul’s 2nd MJ)	
Acts 18:23-21:14	Paul goes back into Galatia, Phrygia, Macedonia, and Greece (Paul’s 3 rd MJ)	
Acts 21:15-28:31	Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and sent to Rome (4 th MJ?)	

The Church is born and growing

- 2:41 “3000 added to their number”
- 6:7 “the Word of God spread”
- 9:31 “the church...grew in number”
- 12:24 “the Word of God...spread”
- 16:5 “the churches grew...in number”
- 19:20 “the Word of the Lord spread”

¹McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

Evangelistic Sermons

- 2:14-39 Peter's Sermon to the crowd on the first Pentecost
- 7:2-53 Stephen's address to the Sanhedrin
- 13:16-41 Paul's sermon to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch

OUTLINE #3

I. Birth of the Church

- _____ instructions, commission, and ascension (1)
- Pentacost - _____ comes (2:1-13)
- _____ address to the crowd in Jerusalem (2:14-41)
- Beginnings of fellowship (2:42-47)
- _____ heals the crippled _____ (3:1-10)
- _____ preaches to the crowd (3:11-26)
- Peter and John before the _____ (4:1-22)
- Affirming the believers (4:23-31)
- fellowship (4:32-37)
- _____ and Sapphira (5:1-11)
- Apostles heal (5:12-16)
- Apostles persecuted (5:17-42)
- Choosing of the 7 (6:1-7)
- _____ (6:8-8:1)

II. Growth of the Church (ch.8-28)

- Around Jerusalem
 - _____ in Samaria (8:4-25)
 - _____ and the Ethiopian (8:26-40)
 - _____ conversion (9:1-19)
 - _____ in Damascus and Jerusalem (9:20-31)
 - _____ heals Aeneas and raises Dorcas (9:32-43)
 - Cornelius and _____ (10:1-11:18)
 - Church in Antioch (11:19-30)
 - _____ delivered from prison (12:1-19)
 - _____ death (12:20-25)
- Around the Mediterranean (**Paul's first missionary journey**)
 - Cyprus 13:4-12
 - Bar-Jesus and Sergius Paulus
 - Pisidian Antioch 13:13-52
 - preaching in the synagogue
 - Iconium 14:1-7
 - Lystra and Derbe 14:8-20
 - return back to Antioch 14:21-28
- Council at Jerusalem
 - debate about circumcision 15:1-21
 - letter of resolve 15:22-29
- Into Macedonia and Greece (**Paul's second missionary journey**)
 - disagreement about John Mark 15:36-40
 - Syria and Cilicia 15:41
 - Derbe and Lystra 16:1-4
 - Timothy joins Paul and Silas
 - Phrygia, Galatia, and Troas 16:6-10
 - vision of the man of Macedonia
 - Macedonia 16:11-40
 - Lydia's conversion
 - in prison and delivered
 - Thessalonica 17:1-9

- a. trouble
- 7. Berea 17:10-15
 - a. noble character
- 8. Athens 17:16-34
 - a. preaching in the synagogue and marketplace
- 9. Corinth 18:1-18
 - a. Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla
 - b. Paul stays and teaches for a year and a half
 - c. Priscilla and Aquila share with Apollos
- 10. Ephesus 18:19-21
 - a. Paul taught a short time in Ephesus then traveled back to hometown of Antioch
- E. After spending sometime in Antioch, Paul sets out again on **3rd missionary journey**
 - 1. Ephesus 19:1-41
 - a. Paul teaches about Holy Spirit baptism
 - b. 7 sons of Sceva
 - c. riot in Ephesus
 - 2. Macedonia and Greece 20:1-5
 - 3. Troas 20:6-12
 - a. Eutychus raised from the dead
 - 4. Miletus 20:17-38
 - a. Paul says farewell to the Ephesian elders
- F. Onto Rome (Paul's Testimony to the Jewish leaders, Gentile governors, and the Emperor)
 - 1. Jerusalem 21:17-23:22
 - a. arrested
 - b. before the Sanhedrin
 - c. plot to kill Paul
 - 2. transferred to Caesarea 23:23-26:32
 - a. trial before Felix
 - b. trial before Festus
 - c. before Agrippa
 - 3. Paul sails for Rome 27:1-28:31
 - a. storm and shipwreck
 - b. on Malta
 - c. arrival at Rome
 - i. Paul preaches at Rome while under guard
 - ii. **“Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” (modus operandi of the Church)**

To God be the glory, praise, and thanksgiving! Amen!! Hallelujah!!!
--