

Bible Study Series: The Book of Acts
"Signs of a Healthy Church"
Limitless Love



Background and Introduction - Acts 1:1-5

Topics:

Author, Date Written, Audience/Addressees, Occasion and Purpose for Writing, Message, Themes: *Church beginnings; Holy Spirit; Church growth; witnessing; and opposition.*

Open It Questions

- A. Name an individual, living or dead, who you believe positively influenced the world in spite of experiencing persecution (other than Jesus Christ). Why did you select this person?

- B. What would you do to persuade a young adult to come to church with you next Sunday?

Important Emphasis

Continuance of Christ's Work
Confirmation of the Comforter
Connection of the Community
Conflicting interest of the non-Conformist

Acts contains around 18,500 words which was a preferable length to listen to in a comfortable sitting. The Gospel is the introduction to Acts and the basis upon which Acts is built, but also that the Gospel, in a sense, needs Acts and calls for the continuation in which its message is realized in the world and consequently that Luke and Acts together constitute one work.

The book of Acts serves as a “bridge document” that links the Gospels to the New Testament letters. (*New Testament in Antiquity*) The book of Acts has a couple of Major themes: including the in-breaking of the new era, spirit empowerment, and consequent cross-cultural witness. The date of authorship ranges between A.D. 70 and 100.

This work (of Acts) is viewed as two volumes Luke- Acts. It has been called Deeds and Sayings or Acts and Teachings. The author of this empowering text is Luke. Luke is described as the fellow worker, a Gentile Christian, and a physician.

What is the significance of Acts? David H. Kelsey asked a profound question. What is God using the Bible to do to us? It was Stanley Hauerwas that stated, “the church exists as a story formed community” A story not only means something but also does something. The story performs certain actions when told, heard, and remembered.

The connectivity of the Gospel is that signs and wonders and a foreshadowing of the gospel going out to the nations... The risen Jesus remains active through the church, which continues to bear witness along the lines carefully defined by the apostles whom Jesus himself commissioned... The empowerment of the Spirit is foundational for the rest of the church's mission as is clear from the warning not to leave Jerusalem without it. They are successors of his mission narrated in the Gospel.

Outline of Acts 1:1 To 6:7

- I. Background and Introduction of Acts (1:1-5)
- II. Commission of the Chosen in the New Church (1:6-11)
 - A. Apostles Chosen (1:2)
 - B. Kingdom of God (1:3)
 - C. Holy Ghost Baptism (1:5)
 - D. Restoration of the Kingdom of Israel? (Acts 1:6-8)
 - E. Ascension of Jesus to his Father (Acts 1:9)
 - F. Return of Jesus is Promised (Acts 1:10-11)
- III. Community in the New Church (2:42-47)
 - A. Fellowship (2:42)
 - 1. Apostles' Teaching (2:42)
 - 2. Fellowship [GK *koinonia*](2:42)
 - 3. Breaking of Bread (2:42)
 - 4. Last Supper (Acts 2:46; Luke 22:14-23; 24:30, 35)
 - B. True Sharing (4:32-37)
 - 1. At the Apostles' Feet (4:35, 37; 5:2)
 - 2. Joseph...Called Barnabas (4:36)
 - C. False Sharing (5:1-11)
 - 1. Ananias (5:1-4)
 - 2. Sapphira (5:7-10)
 - D. Church (5:11)
 - 1. GK *ekklesia*
 - 2. Heb *synagogue*
- IV. Continuity and Service in the New Church (6:1-7)
 - A. Grecian Jews...Hebraic Jews (6:1)
 - B. Widows (6:1)
 - C. Waiting Tables (6:2)
 - D. Choosing of the seven (6:5)
 - E. Prayer and Laying on of Hands (6:6)
 - F. Prolific growth in the Word of God, the number of disciples, and in the faith of the priests in Jerusalem. (6:7)

Introduction

The book of Acts, written by Luke, picks up where Luke's Gospel left off, providing details of the birth and early years of the church that Jesus had promised to build. Together the two books, Luke and Acts, form a seamless account of how the followers of Jesus turned the world upside down.

Before documenting this rapid spread of the gospel, however, Luke asserted two important truths in what serves as an introduction to the book of Acts: (1) the indisputable fact of Christ's resurrection; and (2) the indispensable presence of the Holy Spirit. Apart from these two strong foundations, the church would be without hope and without power. What was true in the first century is still true today.

As you read through the Book of Acts, don't miss the story behind the stories. Underlying the stimulating sermons and the display of miracles, look for God at work in individuals. In fact, as much as Acts could be called the story of the early church, it could also be titled "The Miracle of Changed Lives."

When we last saw the disciples, they were running scared and abandoning their Lord (**Matthew 26:56**). Fleeing, denying, disillusioned, and crying, these men seemed the least likely candidates to be boldly proclaiming the gospel. Yet that's what happened. Peter, James, John, and the rest had been _____ from cowardly to courageous, argumentative to articulate, and selfish to selfless. Then they were joined by Paul, whom God also miraculously transformed.

Today's Bible Study will provide an overview and historical background on the Book of Acts. In the upcoming weeks, the focus will be on studying how the first church developed, and how it maintained a healthy, united, and loving environment in most instances. We will also discover how the first church was able to build and sustain rapid growth despite adversity and persecution and manage to survive for over 2,000 years and 42 generations (**Matthew 1:17**), spanning from the 1st century to the current 21st century.

What made the difference? Acts reveals the profound answer. This is their story—the history of the early church and the changed men and women who changed the world. As you read of the Holy Spirit, the gifts, persecution and power, Paul's dramatic conversion, and the rapid spread of the gospel beyond Jerusalem and Judea to the ends of the earth, look for yourself in the stories. Ask God to transform you into the kind of person he can use to change *your* world.

Authorship

Luke: doctor, Gentile Christian, traveling companion of Paul, and writer of the Gospel according to Luke.

Luke was a close friend and companion of Paul. He is listed as the writer of the Gospel bearing his name by nearly all the ancient church fathers, including Justin Martyr (A.D. 100–165), Irenaeus (c. A.D. 120–200), and Tertullian (A.D. 160–230).

The text of the book of Acts clearly reveals the same author as the Gospel of Luke. Both books are addressed to “Theophilus” (**Luke 1:1**; **Acts 1:1**). It makes sense, as well, in light of Luke’s commitment to recording the facts, that Acts be seen as a continuation of the story, a second volume detailing what happened subsequent to Christ’s death and resurrection.

Although the writer does not identify himself by name anywhere in the book, he does use the pronoun “we” beginning with **Acts 16:10**, thereby indicating that the writer had joined Paul in his journeys in Troas at that point. As such, Luke must have become one of Paul’s coworkers, which is what Paul explicitly acknowledges in **Philemon 1:24**.

Audience/Addressee

Theophilus (“one who loves God”), Gentiles, and people everywhere.

Both the Gospel of Luke and Acts name Theophilus (**Luke 1:1**; **Act 1:1**) as the addressee. Because the literal meaning of “Theophilus” is “lover of God” or “friend of God,” some have thought that the books were addressed generally and written to anyone who loves God, not a specific, first-century individual. Others note that “most excellent” is attached to “Theophilus” in **Luke 1:3**. In that day, this title was used only when addressing a Roman officer, thus leading to the conclusion that Theophilus was a Gentile and possibly someone of high rank in Roman society. Beyond those inferences, little is known—the name Theophilus appears nowhere else in Scripture. Many biblical scholars think that Theophilus was a new believer who was having some difficulty with the Christian faith. Thus Luke wrote the gospel account in order to provide solid answers to Theophilus’s questions.

Luke also elaborated in Acts about a subject that he had mentioned in his Gospel account—that the Gentiles are heirs of God’s salvation together with the Jews. The Gospel records stories of Jesus healing non-Jewish people and proclaiming his message to them (**Luke 7:1-10**; **8:26-39**). Acts describes the spread of Christianity among the Jews and then well beyond, to the vast Gentile world. Clearly, then, Gentile Christians would have been eager readers of this book.

Date Written

The date of authorship ranges between A.D. 70 and 100.

While arguments can be made for an earlier date (Hemer, *Book of Acts*, 365–404), the most commonly held position is a middle date, generally AD 70–90 (Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 12; Spencer, *Acts*, 16).¹

Occasion and Purpose

To give an accurate account of the birth and growth of the Christian church.

After reading what Luke had written in his gospel account, Theophilus may have had unanswered questions. So Luke wrote Acts to answer those questions and to underscore the truth of the gospel. By tracing the growth of the Christian church throughout the known world at that time, Luke demonstrated that God's good news of salvation applies to every person—from the lowliest slave to the most respected nobleman and from the Jews to the Greeks and Romans. Luke probably had other purposes in mind for writing the book of Acts.

Historic.

In writing his Gospel, Luke wanted to present “a _____” (Luke 1:3). Thus, he took great pains to verify the historical accuracy of the events he was recording, because his purpose was to write a careful and _____ account of what he had researched and seen. Evidence of his accuracy can also be seen throughout Acts. These facts, along with the numerous details in Acts, reveal the careful and diligent research of a precise historian. In Acts, Luke was writing history.

Apologetic.

The word “apologetic” refers to a _____ of the faith, a presentation of solid evidence that the gospel is true. Because of the rapid spread of the Way (i.e., Christianity) across the Roman Empire, Luke wanted to assure readers that Christianity was _____ or threat but the reality of God becoming flesh and the fulfillment of Israel's hope of a Messiah.

¹ Estes, Douglas. 2016. [“Acts of the Apostles.”](#) In *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, edited by John D. Barry, David Bomar, Derek R. Brown, Rachel Klippenstein, Douglas Mangum, Carrie Sinclair Wolcott, Lazarus Wentz, Elliot Ritzema, and Wendy Widder. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Conciliatory (*peacemaking or appeasing*).

The early church contained two dominant factions—Jewish believers and Gentile believers. Paul had become the champion of reaching the Gentiles, while in many ways Peter had been leading the charge for ministering to the Jews. The _____ at Jerusalem was held to discuss the issue, and the matter was resolved amicably (15:1-35). But old ways are hard to change, so the same issues were raised again and again. Each time, Paul would write to the church to try to defuse the potential explosion and to keep believers focused on the truth.

Check for Understanding

1. Who is believed to be the author of the Book of Acts? (1:1-2)

2. Approximately when and where was the Book of Acts written?

3. For what purposes was the Book of Acts written?

Exploring the Text**Parallels between Peter and Paul**

The book of Acts presents a noteworthy parallel between Peter and Paul. Each conceded specific aspects of the church to the other. For example, Peter conferred upon Paul a second mode of _____ as well as approval for reaching out to Gentiles, not on the merits of the law. At the same time, Paul conceded primacy in the church to Peter and apostleship to the Twelve, due to their earthly relationship with Christ.

Parallels between the 1st Century and 21st Century churches.

In many ways, the church struggles today with the same issues: new believers need encouragement and assurance, nonbelievers need to know that the Christian message is true, and the church needs to avoid petty wrangling and _____ around the core of the gospel message. As you read Acts, recommit to _____ in the church, working together with Christian brothers and sisters to spread the gospel throughout the world. And thank God for his grace, which extends salvation to all kinds of people, even you.

Message

The book of Acts begins with the outpouring of the promised _____ and the commencement of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This Spirit-inspired evangelism began in Jerusalem and eventually spread to Rome, covering most of the Roman Empire. The gospel first went to the Jews, but they, as a nation, rejected it. A remnant of Jews, of course, gladly received the Good News. But the continual rejection of the gospel by the vast majority of the Jews led to the ever-increasing proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles. This was according to Jesus' plan: The gospel was to go from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the remotest part of the earth (**Acts 1:8**). This, in fact, is the pattern that the Acts narrative follows. The glorious proclamation began in Jerusalem (chapters 1–7), went to Judea and Samaria (chapters 8 and following), and to the countries beyond Judea (11:19; 13:4 and on to the end of Acts).

The second half of Acts is focused primarily on _____ missionary journeys to many countries north of the Mediterranean Sea. He, with his companions, took the gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. Some of the Jews believed, and many of the Gentiles received the Good News with joy. New churches were started, and new believers began to grow in the Christian life.

Checking for Understanding

4. What were some parallels between Peter and Paul that may exist in churches today?

5. What is the main message conveyed in the Book of Acts?

6. On whom is the second half of the Book of Acts focused?

Exploring the Text

Main Themes

The main themes in the book of Acts include *Church beginnings; Holy Spirit; Church growth; Witnessing; and Opposition.*

Church Beginnings (1:4-8, 12-26; 2:1–8:40). Acts is the history of how the Christian church was founded and organized as well as how the early church solved its problems. Led by outspoken and courageous apostles, the community of believers grew as individuals put their trust in the risen Christ. Filled with the _____, they were empowered to witness, to love, and to serve. Although pressured and persecuted, they continued to preach, considering it a privilege to suffer for Christ. And the church thrived.

Importance for today. New churches are continually being founded, but _____ Christian churches preach the _____ and _____ Christ. Although believers continue to be pressured to give up or give in, by faith in Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the church can be a vibrant agent for change. God wants to work in you and through you. Filled with his Spirit, as a courageous witness, you also can share the Good News with the world—with *your* world.

The Holy Spirit (1:5, 8) The church did not start or grow by its own power and enthusiasm. The disciples were empowered by God's _____. He was the Comforter and Guide promised by Jesus and sent when Jesus went to heaven. The Holy Spirit came upon the assembled believers at _____ and continued to fill those who trusted in Christ as Savior. Through the Spirit's power, the gospel was preached, and people were _____.

Importance for today. The filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost demonstrated that Christianity was _____. As a result, the church became more Holy Spirit-conscious than problem-conscious. Then, led and empowered by the Spirit, they changed the world. Everyone who trusts in Christ as Savior receives the Holy Spirit. By faith, therefore, any believer can claim the Holy Spirit's power to do Christ's work. Allow God to fill you with his Spirit; then follow the Spirit's leading as you live and minister in this world.

Church Growth (2:37-47; 4:1-4, 32-37). Jesus had told his disciples to take the gospel to all the world (**Matthew 28:19-20**). He also had said that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts

shows the fulfillment of this prediction, presenting the history of a dynamic, growing community of believers from Jerusalem to Syria, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In the first century, it _____ from _____ to _____ in thirty-nine cities and thirty countries, islands, or provinces.

Importance for today. The Holy Spirit brings movement, excitement, and growth. He gives believers the motivation, energy, and ability to spread the gospel. God still loves the world (John 3:16)—the whole world. And he wants people everywhere to hear his wonderful, life-changing message. Consider how you are part of God's plan to _____ the _____.

Witnessing (1:5, 8) Peter, John, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, and thousands more witnessed to their new faith in Christ. By personal testimony, preaching, or defense before authorities, they told the story with _____ and _____ to groups of all sizes. Paul, in particular, took every opportunity to tell others about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and Paul told how God had changed his life. Whether in a synagogue (17:10) or lecture hall (19:9), on a riverbank (16:13) or in prison (16:31-32), or in the public square (17:17), in front of a mob (21:40) or in front of rulers (24:10), Paul courageously spoke the truth.

Importance for today. We are God's people, chosen to be part of his plan to reach the world. We have the truth, the good news about the only way to God, and the message of eternal life. Like the apostles and early believers, we must share this message with boldness and love. And God has promised that the _____ will help us as we witness or preach. Witnessing is also beneficial to us because it strengthens our faith as we confront those who challenge it. To whom has God called you to share his message of forgiveness and hope? Who needs to hear from you about Christ? What can you do to take the Good News to the world?

Opposition (4:1-22). Through imprisonment, beatings, plots, and riots, Christians were **persecuted** by both Jews and Gentiles. Countless numbers suffered financial loss and physical and emotional pain, and many died. Although Christ's message focused on love and forgiveness, it threatened the pagan establishment and brought furious opposition. But this opposition became a _____ for the spread of Christianity as believers, convinced of the truth of the gospel, courageously continued to hold on to the faith and to share it with others. This showed that the Christian movement was not the work of humans but of God.

Importance for today. Christ still threatens the establishment because he identifies sin and calls people to repent and to turn to him. And Jesus' claim to be the **only way** (see **John 14:6**) is said to be impossibly narrow and politically incorrect. So believers continue to be threatened and persecuted for believing in Christ and telling others about him. But God can work through any opposition, and persecution can help spread his word. When severe treatment from hostile unbelievers comes, realize that it is because you have been a faithful witness. Then look for the opportunity to present the Good News. Stay _____ on _____, and seize the opportunities that opposition brings.

Checking for Understanding

7. What are the (5) main themes found in the Book of Acts?

8. What should we focus on to endure and persevere in the face of opposition?
