

Introduction to Acts

Author and Date

Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. Both were written by Luke, a physician who traveled with the apostle Paul. Acts ends with Paul under house arrest, awaiting trial before Caesar, around A.D. 62. Many scholars assume Acts was written at that time because it does not record the aftermath of Paul's arrest.

Theme

The Holy Spirit empowers believers to declare the gospel among both Jews and Gentiles. In doing so they establish the church and continue Jesus' mission in this world. The church is the fulfillment of God's promises from the beginning of time that all nations would "be blessed" (Gen 12:3) and become part of God's family. We are describing Acts this way in this series: The book of Acts shows us a picture of *an ordinary people empowered to continue Jesus' mission in this world*.

Purpose

Luke's purpose for writing his Gospel (see Luke 1:3–4) applies to Acts as well: to give an "orderly" account of the early church after Christ's resurrection as they *continue* the work of Jesus in this world. Dedicating the two-volume work to Theophilus, who many think was a prominent Greek leader, Luke wanted him to have "certainty" about what he had been taught and to continue in the faith despite opposition.

Week 1—Acts 1:1-8

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

Day 1

1. Before you begin the actual study, read the Introduction to *Acts* and consider these questions:

- a. What do you know about the book of *Acts*?
- b. Where does *Acts* fit in the grand story of the Bible? Why is it important to know that?
- c. What does this particular book add to the Bible we wouldn't have otherwise?
- d. What has confused you about *Acts* that you hope to get more clarity on?

Day 2

1. *Read Acts 1:1-2.* Luke says that *Acts* is a continuation of the book of Luke. Read Luke 1:1-4. What does Luke say these two books are intended to be? Why should that be encouraging to us today some 2,000 years after these events occurred?

2. In v. 1 Luke says his first book was “about all that Jesus *began* to do and to teach...” What does that phrase imply about the content of *Acts*?

3. How should that shape the way we view our lives today?

Day 3

1. Read Acts 1:3. What was the significance of the fact that Jesus showed Himself to the apostles and gave “many convincing proofs that He was alive?” How did these proofs impact the apostles for the rest of their lives?
2. The “kingdom of God” was at the heart of Jesus’ teaching (cf. Mt 4:17, Lk 4:43). In your own words, what is meant by this phrase?

Kingdom of God—This refers to the rule and reign of God over all of creation. It should be considered a verb more than a noun, though it is both. Jesus initiated the kingdom in His first coming and all future will culminate in His return when He finally restores all of creation as it was originally meant to be. Therefore, we are currently living in between the “now and not yet” of the Kingdom.

3. What role do Jesus’ followers (including us) play in ushering in the Kingdom of God today? How are you doing this?

Day 4

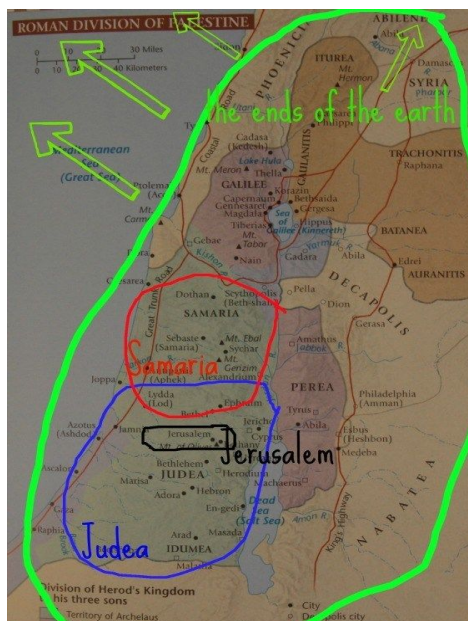
1. Read Acts 1:4-6. What is the “gift” Jesus promised His disciples? What do you know about the Holy Spirit? What questions do you have?
2. What does Jesus say about this “gift” in John 14:15-18, 26-27; 16:7-15? How can this encourage us still today?
3. What do the disciples still not understand about the Kingdom of God (v. 6)? How can we fall into this trap still today?

Day 5

1. Read Acts 1:7-8. What does v. 8 tell us about the purpose of this book? From what you know about Acts, how does this play itself out?
2. Before reading the note below, what does it mean to be a “witness?” Can we still be witnesses to Jesus today even though we didn’t see Him? If yes, why and how do we do this?

Witnesses—From the Greek word *martyrs*, this is to be the *primary task* of the people of God: to make the greatness of God known throughout all the earth. Even in the Old Testament (cf. Isaiah 49:6) God’s desire is that the invitation to join His Kingdom be made to all people. For the apostles, this witness would begin in Jerusalem but then spiral outward “to the ends of the earth.” It will only be successful, however, with the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. Notice the map below. Who might our “Jerusalem, Samaria, Judea and ends of the earth” be today? How can you be a witness in these places?



Jerusalem—

Samaria—

Judea—

Ends of the Earth—

Conclusion

1. What most stood out to you as you studied Acts 1:1-8 this week? *Why* do you think this was the case?
2. What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to *do* as a result of this? Be prepared to share with your group!