

## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

# Acts

**What? Where? When?** Drama of first century church, between the last Gospel (John) and first epistle (Romans), telling how the faith spread for a generation after Jesus' resurrection (A.D. 27-62)

**Who wrote it?** Doctor Luke, author of third Gospel, who accompanied Paul on some mission trips

**Leading players**

- Apostle Peter (2—5; 10—12; 15): "Repent and be baptized . . ." (2:38).
- Apostle Paul (9; 13—28): "We turn to the Gentiles" (13:46).
- Martyr Stephen (6, 7): "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (7:60).
- Evangelist Philip (8): "Philip . . . preached Jesus to him" (8:35).

**Supporting cast**

- Simon the sorcerer (8:9-24)
- James, John: brothers (3:1-11; 8:14; 12:2)
- Ananias, Sapphira: lied to Holy Spirit (5:1-11)
- Matthias: replaced Judas as 12th apostle (1:15-26)
- Ananias: first Christian to meet "new" Paul (9:10-19)
- Ethiopian eunuch: took the gospel to Africa (8:26-40)
- Cornelius: God-fearing Roman soldier (10:1—11:18)
- Dorcas, Lydia: loved the gospel and served others (9:36-42; 16:14, 15)
- James, the Lord's brother: led Jerusalem church (12:17; 15:13; 21:18)
- Herod, Claudius Lysias, Felix, Festus, Agrippa, Caesar: Rome's rulers (12; 23:26—26:32)

**Acts in a sentence:**

After Jesus Christ ascends and sends the Holy Spirit with power, His disciples carry the message of His death, resurrection, and kingdom from Jerusalem across the Roman world, in the face of great opposition.

- Apollos, Aquila, Priscilla, Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Timothy, Titus: Paul's co-workers, companions (13—28)

**Major scenes**

- Christ's Ascension (1)
- Pentecost Explosion (2)
- Stephen Stoned (7)
- Paul Sees the Light (9, 22, 26)
- Gentiles Get Gospel (10)
- First Mission Trip (13, 14)
- Jerusalem Council (15)
- Second Mission Trip (16—18:22)
- Third Mission Trip (18:23—21:17)
- Paul's Arrest (21:27ff)
- Paul Before Agrippa (26)
- Shipwreck! (27, 28)

**Power verse** - 1:8 previews the book:

"You shall receive *power* . . ." (2:1-13)  
 "you shall be witnesses in Jerusalem . . ." (2:14—7:60)  
 "in all Judea . . ." (8:1-4, 26-40; 9:31-43)  
 "and Samaria . . ." (8:5-25)  
 "to the end of the earth" (10ff)

**Holy Spirit power**

- promised (1)
- received (2)
- renews church (4:31)
- energizes deacons (6:3-5)
- goes to Samaria (8:14-17)
- empowers Paul (9:17)
- falls on Gentiles (10:44-48)
- encourages Barnabas (11:24)
- prompts missions (13:2, 9)
- teaches elders (15:28)
- fills new believers (19:1-7)
- testifies the future (20:23)

**Message power:** common ideas in apostles' preaching, or *kerygma* (4:10-12; 5:29-32):

- Prophetic times are fulfilled (2:16-21; 3:22-25; 13:16-27).
- Messiah has come (2:22; 3:18, 26; 10:36-39).
- He was slain (2:23; 3:14, 15; 10:39; 13:28).
- God raised and exalted Him (2:24-36; 3:15; 10:40-42; 13:29-37).
- Therefore, believe and repent (2:38; 3:19; 10:43; 13:38-41).

**People power:** Potency of Christians sprang from generous giving and united praying (1:14; 2:1, 42-47; 4:23-35).

**Power encounters:** Signs, wonders, visions, dreams, angels, divine visitations occur often (1:10; 2:2-4, 43; 3:1-11; 4:31; 5:12-16; 6:8; 8:6-13; 9:33-42; 10:9-17; 12:6-11, 23; 13:6-12; 14:8-10, 19, 20; 16:16-18, 25, 26; 18:9-11; 19:11, 12; 20:9, 10; 23:11; 27:23, 24; 28:3-9).

**Connections with Jesus' words**

- Tarry in Jerusalem (1:4-14; Luke 24:49).
- Spirit will come (2:1-4; John 14—16).
- Go into the world (1:8; Matt. 28:18-20)
- Signs follow believers (previous item; Mark 16:15-18).
- Peter preaches keys; Jesus builds church (2:14-42; Matt. 16:16-19).
- Disciples will be persecuted (see box; Matt.10:17-23).

**Connections with Paul's letters:**

Churches Paul wrote to were founded in Acts: Galatia (14; 18:23); Philippi (16:11-40); Thessalonica (17:1-9); Corinth (18:1-18); Ephesus (18:19ff; 19:1ff; 20:17ff); Rome (28:14ff).

**Growth pains**

The early church was not perfect, not always placid, and never static. It experienced

- personal failures: sin (5:1-11)
- turbulence within: conflict (6:1ff; 11:2ff; 15:1ff; 15:36-41)
- opposition without: persecution (esp. 4-7; 8:1-4; 12; 14; 16; 19; 21-28; also 14:22)
- constant change: gradual transformation from a sect of Judaism into a church with gospel freedom (esp. 1; 2; 6; 8—10; 11; 15)