

## **Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles**

### **Walking Out the Word**

#### ***LIFE School of Ministry***

##### **I. Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles**

###### **A. Author:**

Although Luke is not mentioned as the author of the Acts of the Apostles, he is believed to have authored Acts as well as the third Gospel. Luke was a beloved Physician (Colossians 4:14), an esteemed companion of Paul's (Philemon 24); and a Gentile believer (2 Timothy 4:11). Luke dedicated both the third gospel and Acts to "Theophilus" (Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1) which means "friend of God."

The name "Theophilus" could be a universal reference to everyone who would make Jesus their friend. However, it is more likely that Theophilus was a Roman government official since the term "most excellent" was usually reserved for a person of rank and influence. It is evident that the author of Acts was an educated man with a cultured literary technique. Luke was a partner in ministry with Paul as designated in the "we" sections of the manuscript. As an author Luke substitutes "They did this" to "we did that" (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-6; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). In the beginning of the story Luke wrote as a historian then switches to being a history maker along with Paul and the other leaders.

###### **B. Date:**

The Acts of the Apostles ends abruptly before the death of Paul while Paul is still a prisoner in Rome. The reasonable date of the Acts of the Apostles is around 62 AD, which marks the end of Paul's imprisonment. There is no mention of the persecutions of Christians under Nero which began around 64 AD, nor is there reference of the Fall of Jerusalem which occurred in 70 AD. Luke uses actual terminology of regional government titles that were used by the Roman government of the time. He also uses historical detail that is consistent to him writing the book within the time period of the first century.

###### **C. Characteristics:**

Luke tells the story of the emerging first century church. The Acts of the Apostles bridges the Gospel accounts to the Epistles. His valuable history provides a framework that corresponds with church history and supplies information that shows the value of relationships in building the church. Without Acts, it would be difficult to understand the context in which many of the Epistles were written. The Acts of the Apostles completes the story that was begun by Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The Apostles carried on the message of Jesus and established a new community of faith: the church. It records the spread of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome and to the ends of the earth.

###### **D. The Holy Spirit at Work:**

Acts 1:8 is key to the spread of the gospel when Jesus said to his disciples "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth." The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) expanded the 120 believers beyond the realm of the upper room to become a powerful force in the community. The Apostles ministered by the power of the Holy Spirit and expected people to not only

be converted to the Lord Jesus Christ but to be *baptized* (Acts 1:5) and *filled* with the Holy Spirit, to *receive* the Holy Spirit and to expect the Holy spirit to be *poured* out on them (2:4; 8:17; 9:17; 10:44-45; 19:6). In three of the five occurrences, the people spoke in tongues and in all occurrences it was clear that the Holy Spirit was manifested in their lives.

The person of the Holy Spirit that Jesus spoke of in John 14:12 confirmed in their very lives the promise that Jesus had spoken: “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do because I go to the father.” Jesus also said “And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells *with* you and will be *in* you.” In the Gospels, the Holy Spirit was *with* the disciples. In John 20 when the disciples received the Holy Spirit, He dwelt *in* the disciples and the church began. In Acts 1:8 Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come *upon* the disciples in power. This happened on the day of Pentecost and the church has never been the same!

### E. Key Apostolic Leaders

Although the book is called the Acts of the Apostles, the ministry of two apostles is the primary focus of the book of Acts. Peter takes center stage in the first twelve chapters of Acts as the chief Apostle to the Jews. In chapter 13, Paul moves into the spotlight as the primary Apostle to the Gentiles. It is through the lives of these two men and their companions that we see and hear about the expanding ministry of the universal church.

## II. Outline of the Acts of the Apostles

### A. The Church is endowed with Power to Witness (1-5)

1. The promise of the Holy Spirit
  2. Pentecost
  3. Witness of the Apostles
- a. Peter at Pentecost
  - b. John and Peter
  - c. Life of the early church
  - d. Apostles before council

### B. Persecution spreads the Gospel of Jesus Christ (6-12)

1. Witness of the “Deacons” (6:1-8:40)
  - a. Stephen
  - b. Philip
2. Witness of a Persecutor (9:1 -9:31)
  - a. Saul --- Paul
3. Witness of Peter (9:32 -11:18)
4. Witness of Scattered Believers (11:19)
5. Persecution in Jerusalem (12:1-12:25)

### C. Paul’s missionary journeys (13:1-21:14)

1. Paul’s first Missionary Journey (13:1-14:28)
  - a. Cyprus
  - b. Asia Minor
2. Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)

3. Paul's Second Missionary Journey (15:36- 18:22)

- a. Syria & Cilicia
- b. Asia Minor
- c. Phrygia & Galatia
- d. Greece

4. Paul's Third Missionary Journey (18:23 -21:14)

- a. Syria, Galatia & Phrygia
- b. Asia Minor
- c. Greece

D. Paul's arrest, imprisonment, shipwreck, and witness (21-28)

1. The arrest and trial of Paul – Jerusalem (21:27 -23:35)

2. The witness of Paul in Caesarea (24:1-26:32)

- a. To Felix
- b. To Festus
- c. To Agrippa II

3. The Witness of Paul in Rome (27:1 – 28:31)

- a. Journey to Malta
- b. Journey to Italy

**Acts 1:1-8:40**

## **Walking Out the Word**

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**Guided Study:** Acts 1:1 – 8:40 is briefly outlined below with questions that help you go deeper in your study and reflection. Consider using these questions as a springboard to writing personal entries in *The Daily Life Journal*. Your teacher-facilitator will choose discussion questions to use from this lesson during your group meeting. Enjoy walking out the word together!

#### **Acts 1**

The Holy Spirit Promised (1:1-11)

- How does the last chapter of Luke relate to Acts 1:1-11 (read Luke 24)? Why were the disciples instructed to wait for the promise of the father? What is the promise of the father? (Read John 14-16 again for greater clarity). What kind of kingdom are the disciples looking for in Acts 1:6? How does our past study of the Gospels clarify what Jesus meant by the kingdom?

The Upper Room Prayer Meeting (1:12-26)

- How did they choose a leader to replace Judas? (Casting lots was a provision of the Law from Leviticus 16:8). Following Pentecost in Acts 2, did they ever use this method of choosing leaders again? Why or why not? What is significant about Acts 1:14? Did this impact the coming of the Holy Spirit?

#### **Acts 2**

Coming of the Holy Spirit (2:1-13)

- Why is it significant that the Holy Spirit was given on Pentecost (Read Exodus 23:16 and Deuteronomy 16:9-10)? David Shibley of Global Advance said to “wait” until we have experienced a personal Pentecost and to “go” after we had received power from the Holy Spirit. Have you experienced a Pentecost in your life? How has that impacted your mission in life?

Peter’s Sermon (2:14-39)

- What evidence from the Old Testament does Peter use to prove to the Jews that Jesus was their messiah? How did he explain tongues? In what way did he talk about the importance of Jesus’ resurrection? Are you surprised that Peter became the main spokesman on Pentecost?

A Vital Church Grows (2:40-47)

- Reflect on the fellowship that took place in the early church. Are you drawn to the simplicity of their devotion? In what ways does the busyness of the North American church culture sabotage the simplicity of the church following the day of Pentecost?

#### **Acts 3**

A Lame Man Healed (3:1-10)

- How is the lame man healed? What is the significance in using the “name of Jesus?” Why didn’t Peter heal in “Peter’s name?”

Preaching in Solomon’s Portico (3:11-26)

- Make a list of the Old Testament characters Peter mentions in His sermon. How do these Old Testament characters illustrate the points of Peter’s sermon? Meditate on Acts 3:19. Do you presently need a “time of refreshing?” Where does spiritual refreshment come?

## Acts 4

### Peter and John Arrested (4:1-12)

- The “captain of the temple” served as the commander of the temple police. He was responsible to maintain public order in the temple. With this in mind, why were they disturbed by the by the teaching of Peter and John (reread Acts 4:2-4)?

### The Name of Jesus Forbidden (4:13-22)

- When the leaders rebuked Peter and John from teaching in the name of Jesus, how did Peter and John respond? From the context of this text, do you believe that Peter and John’s response to the leaders was spoken in pride or in humility?

### Prayer for Boldness (4:23-31)

- Notice that when Peter and John returned to their companions, they were in “one accord” (4:24). Do you presently walk in this level of unity with other believers? Do you walk in boldness like Peter and John, or do you tend to fear man more than you fear God?

### Sharing in All Things (4:32-37)

- Describe the characteristics of the believers in Acts 4:32-37. Do we as the church today experience this level of community?

## Acts 5

### Lying to the Holy Spirit (5:1-11)

- What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? If you are reading *The Spirit Filled Life Bible* notice the note on 5:1-11. What is the believer’s best defense against self-deception?

### The Apostles’ Persecuted (5:12-32)

- What reason do the apostles’ give to why they continued to teach, even though they had been put in prison for teaching? (5:29) What evidence do they have for their reply?

### Gamaliel’s Advice (5:33-42)

- What was the essence of Gamaliel’s advice? Why did the apostles rejoice?

## Acts 6

### Seven Chosen to Serve (6:1-7)

- What is the problem in 6:1? How did the apostles address this problem? What does this reveal about their priorities?

### Stephen Accused of Blasphemy (6:8-15)

- Have you ever been falsely accused? Describe Stephen’s character. Why did the leaders accuse him?

## Acts 7

### Stephen’s Address (7:1-53)

- How does Stephen address his accusers? On what evidence does he base his defense? What is the conclusion of Stephen’s address in 7:51-53? On what biblical evidence did he base this conclusion?

### Stephen the Martyr (7:54-60)

- Describe the Sanhedrin’s response to Stephen’s address. What role did Saul play in the trial and execution?

## Acts 8

### Saul Persecutes the Church (8:1-8)

- How did God use the persecution for good? What role did Saul play in the persecution of the church?

Simon the Sorcerer (8:9-25)

- Look at Peter's rebuke of Simon in 8:20-23. What does this rebuke tell you about Simon's motivations?

Christ is Preached to an Ethiopian (8:26-40)

- Philip walks out every believer's call to do the work of an evangelist. What barriers do you personally experience that are presently an obstacle to you sharing your faith?

## Acts 9:1 – 19:41

### Walking Out the Word

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**Guided Study:** Acts 9:1 – 19:41 is briefly outlined below with questions that help you go deeper in your study and reflection. Consider using these questions as a springboard to writing personal entries in *The Daily Life Journal*. Your teacher-facilitator will choose discussion questions to use from this lesson during your group meeting. Enjoy walking out the word together!

#### Acts 9

The Damascus Road: Saul Converted (9:1-9)

- Describe a “Damascus Road” experience in your life. When did God get your attention and reveal himself to you and you realized that you were “blind” to some things?

Ananias Baptizes Saul (9:10-19)

- It was difficult to Ananias to go to “Strait Street” and minister to Saul. Describe an experience that you have had where it was difficult for you to do the right thing.

Saul Preaches Christ (9:20-30)

- Saul had been the church's greatest opponent, now he became one of the greatest advocates. Before you became a Christian, were there things about Christianity that you were opposed to that now you advocate? Be specific in how the Christian faith has changed your life.

Ananias Healed, Dorcas Restored to Life (9:31-43)

- What impact did Ananias' healing and Dorcas' resurrection have on the people in the villages in which they lived? Does God continue to use healing miracles to evangelize people today?

#### Acts 10

Cornelius Sends a Delegation (10:1-8)

- Describe Cornelius. What was it like to be a Centurion in the Roman Army? What do you know about the city of Caesarea?

Peter's vision (10:9-23)

- Why does Peter refuse to eat in his vision? How does his vision impact his determination to go meet with Cornelius, a gentile?

Peter meets Cornelius (10:24-48)

- What have you learned about evangelism from this passage?

#### Acts 11

Peter Defends God's Grace (11:1-18)

- Why were the Jerusalem believers concerned that Paul had preached to the Gentiles? Why did God call Peter to go to the Gentiles?

Barnabas and Saul at Antioch (11:19-30)

- Use a Bible dictionary to look up Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. What connection have Barnabas and Paul previously had?

#### Acts 12

Peter Freed from Prison (12:1-19)

- Who was Herod Agrippa I? What impact did prayer have on Peter's escape from prison?

Herod's Violent Death (12:20-25)

- What is significant about Herod's death? Why did the author of Acts include this information?

### Acts 13

Barnabas and Saul Appointed (13:1-12)

- Why was it significant that they fasted and prayed concerning leadership? What does it mean to "set apart" Barnabas and Saul?

At Antioch in Pisidia (13:13-52)

- According to Paul, what is the climax of the history of God's acts in Israel? What were the positive and negative responses to Paul's message?

### Acts 14

At Iconium (14:1-7)

- How does the experience of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium, differ from their experience in Pisidia? How is it similar? Describe the opposition that they experienced. Have you ever been run out of town for your beliefs? How do you think you would feel if you were constantly opposed for your faith? Would your faith be stronger because of opposition or weaker? Why?

At Lystra and Derbe (14:8-20)

- Describe the reaction of the people to the healing of the lame man. How did the crowd react? Who did they think Paul and Barnabas were? What happened to the crowd response after they were influenced by the Jews? If you were almost killed by a crowd and left for dead, would you keep preaching about Jesus?

Strengthening the Converts (14:21-28)

- Do you spend time strengthening others – in particular new converts to Christianity?

### Acts 15

Conflict over Circumcision (15:1-21)

- Why are Paul and Barnabas especially concerned about this problem? Where did James and Peter initially stand? How did the early church solve this question? What impact did it have on the mission of the church?

The Jerusalem Decree (15:22-35)

- Discuss the letter and how it was delivered. Did it bring resolution to the disagreement?

Division Over John Mark (15:36-41)

- Discuss the negative results from this disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. Were there any positive results to having two missionary teams?

### Acts 16

Timothy Joins Paul and Silas (16:1-10)

- Why did Timothy need to be circumcised? Reflect on Paul's vision of the man of Macedonia. How does God usually speak to you? Has God spoken to you through dreams?

Lydia Baptized at Philippi (16:11-15)

- What was God's part, Paul's part, and Lydia's part in her conversion?

Paul and Silas Imprisoned (16:16-40)

- What do you learn from how Paul and Silas handled their imprisonment? Talk about how they experienced God's power in the midst of the prison cell.

### Acts 17

In Thessalonica and Berea (17:1-15)

- What was Paul's mission strategy in Thessalonica? What was the strategy of the Jews? What was the response of the Bereans?

In Athens (17:16-34)

- Who were the Epicureans? Who were the Stoics? Discuss Paul's mission strategy in Athens.

### **Acts 18**

In Corinth (18:1-17)

- What do you know about the city of Corinth? How did God encourage Paul?

Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos (18:18-28)

- What do you know about Priscilla and Aquila? How did their actions impact Apollos?

### **Acts 19**

Paul at Ephesus (19:1-22)

- Why is it important that these believers receive the Holy Spirit?

The Riot at Ephesus (19:23-41)

- Why did the craftsmen want to get rid of Christians? Does this happen in today's culture?

**Acts 20:1- 28:31**

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#### **Acts 20**

Journey in Greece (20:1-6)

- Notice the growing list of companions of Paul. What does this list say about his ministry?

From Troas to Miletus (20:7-16)

- What do we learn about Paul's ability to speak based on this account? What do we learn about the church's ability to listen?

The Ephesian Elders Exhorted (20:17-38)

- What is significant about the day of Pentecost for the early church? Why would Paul hurry to Jerusalem if he sensed that he would face further persecution?

#### **Acts 21**

Warnings on the Journey to Jerusalem (21:1-14)

- Describe the different partings that Paul and his companions experienced. Why did Paul ignore the warning about Jerusalem?

Paul Urged to Make Peace (21:15-25)

- What do Paul's actions in the passage say about the importance of resolving conflict?

Arrested in the Temple (21:26-36)

- What is the conflict between Paul and the people who seize him? How does Paul experience similar things to what Jesus experienced?

Addressing the Jerusalem Mob (21:37-22:21)

- After being beaten by the mob, Paul still wants to address the crowd. Why does his speech quiet the crowd? How are Paul's reactions similar to what he proclaimed in Acts 21:13? What is the point of Paul's message?

#### **Acts 22**

Paul's Roman Citizenship (22:22-29)

- Why does the crowd turn against Paul? What impact does Paul's Roman citizenship have on how he is handled? How does his citizenship impact the spreading of the gospel?

The Sanhedrin Divided (22:30-23:10)

- What statement of Paul's divided the Sanhedrin? Why? Did Paul anticipate this would happen?

#### **Acts 23**

The Plot against Paul (23:11-22)

- In what way did the Lord encourage Paul in 23:11? How determined are those opposed to Paul to bring him harm? Have you ever experienced God's protection in your life?

Sent to Felix (23:23-35)

- Consider the impact of Roman citizenship and how it helped to protect Paul. How did “Pax Romana” impact the spread of the gospel?

#### **Acts 24**

Accused of Seditious (24:1-9)

- Four charges are brought against Paul. Which of these charges are true?

Felix Procrastinates (24:10-27)

- How does Felix’s greed impact Paul’s case? Why does Felix leave Paul in prison for two years?

#### **Acts 25**

Paul appeals to Cesar (25:1-12)

- Why did the Jewish leaders and the chief priests present charges against Paul as soon as Festus got into power? What does this say about the festering of their concern after two years? Why does Paul appeal to Cesar?

Paul before Agrippa (25:13-27)

- How does Festus describe the case to Agrippa?

#### **Acts 26**

Paul’s Early Life (26:1-11)

- What is Paul’s motive of his speech? Does he desire to make a defense or to share his testimony in order to bring Agrippa, Bernice and Festus to Christ?

Paul Recounts His Conversion (26:12-23)

- If you were in Paul’s position would you share your testimony? Why or why not?

Agrippa Evades Paul’s Challenge (26:24-32)

- What could have happened for Paul if he had not appealed to Cesar? Did appealing to Cesar help Paul’s cause?

#### **Acts 27**

The Voyage to Rome Begins (27:1-12)

- Why did the pilot of the ship not want to in port? What did Paul warn them of?

In the Tempest (27:13-38)

- In the midst of fear, what word did Paul bring? How was Paul able to remain steady when everything around him was unsteady?

Shipwrecked on Malta (27:39-44)

- Compare Paul’s attitude and actions with those of the sailors. Are you in a storm right now? Are you tempted to bail out of it? Have you ever tried to slip away in a lifeboat? What “lifeboat” do you tend to turn to in times of a storm?

#### **Acts 28**

Paul’s Ministry on Malta and arrival in Rome (28:1-16)

- How did the islanders react to Paul? What was the first impression? How did he act towards him after he had been on the island for some time? What encouraged Paul when he arrived in Rome? Why is encouragement necessary in our Christian lives? (Ask the Lord to reveal to you someone who needs encouragement today and follow through with a prophetically precise action of encouragement).

Paul’s Ministry at Rome (28:17-31)

- Why did Paul meet with the Jews in Rome? Is it surprising to you that the Roman Jews had never heard about Paul? Paul spent two years proclaiming the gospel to the Jews in Rome. What was their response? What Scripture did Paul use to conclude his witness to the Roman Jews? Does the end of Acts seem sudden to you?