



Luke the Evangelist · c. AD 62–63 · New Testament · History

Acts

The unstoppable gospel — from Jerusalem to Rome, driven by the Holy Spirit

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

— Acts 1:8

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THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

1

HOLY SPIRIT



The Engine of Mission

Empowered by the Spirit, the church is sent into the world.

2

WITNESS



Jerusalem to Rome

The gospel advances step by step, across cultures and continents.

3

COMMUNITY



The Early Church

Devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer.

4

SOVEREIGNTY



God Over History

Through trials and triumphs, God accomplishes His eternal purposes.



THE JOURNEY OF THE GOSPEL

From Jerusalem... through Judea, Samaria, and the nations... to Rome.

You will *receive power* WHEN THE *Holy Spirit* comes on you... and you will be my witnesses in *Jerusalem*, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the *ends of the earth.*

— ACTS 1:8 —

Visual overview of Acts — the Spirit-driven expansion of the gospel.

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Acts is the sequel to Luke's Gospel and the only narrative account of the early church in the New Testament. Written by Luke the physician (c. AD 62–63), it traces the expansion of the gospel from a small group of frightened disciples in Jerusalem to the heart of the Roman Empire. The book's thesis is stated in Acts 1:8: the gospel will move from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth. Acts is not the story of human achievement — it is the story of what the Holy Spirit does through ordinary, willing people. Every chapter advances this Spirit-driven mission, and the book ends deliberately unfinished — because the story continues in every generation of the church.

SECTION 1

Acts 1–2 PENTECOST — THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH



1:1–26 The risen Jesus commissions his disciples with Acts 1:8 and ascends to heaven. The disciples return to Jerusalem and choose Matthias to replace Judas, restoring the Twelve.

2:1–41 On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends with wind and fire. The disciples speak in the languages of diaspora Jews from every nation. Peter preaches the first Christian sermon; 3,000 are baptized. The church is born.

2:42–47 The early Jerusalem community: devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. They share possessions, meet daily in the temple, and the Lord adds to their number daily.

SECTION 2

Acts 3–7 THE JERUSALEM CHURCH UNDER PRESSURE



3:1–4:31 Peter heals a lame man at the Beautiful Gate, leading to a sermon and arrest. The Sanhedrin commands the apostles to stop preaching; they refuse: "We must obey God rather than human beings." The church prays for boldness and is filled with the Spirit again.

4:32–5:42 The community shares all things in common. Ananias and Sapphira lie about their gift and die. The apostles are arrested again, miraculously released, and flogged — they leave rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Name.

6:1–7:60 Seven deacons are appointed to serve the community. Stephen, full of grace and power, is arrested and delivers a sweeping speech through Israel's history. He is stoned — the first Christian martyr — as Saul watches approvingly.

SECTION 3

Acts 8–12 SCATTERING, CONVERSION, AND THE GENTILE MISSION OPENS



8:1–40 Stephen's martyrdom triggers a persecution that scatters the church — and spreads the gospel. Philip preaches in Samaria and baptizes an Ethiopian eunuch on the desert road. The gospel crosses its first ethnic boundary.

9:1–43 Saul of Tarsus, the chief persecutor, encounters the risen Jesus on the Damascus road and is transformed. He begins preaching in synagogues, to the astonishment of all. Peter heals Aeneas and raises Tabitha from the dead.

10:1–12:25 Peter receives a vision and visits Cornelius, a Roman centurion. The Holy Spirit falls on the Gentiles before they are baptized — the decisive opening of the Gentile mission. The Jerusalem church accepts this breakthrough. Herod kills James and imprisons Peter; an angel releases Peter miraculously.

SECTION 4

Acts 13–15 THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY AND THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL



- 13:1–52** The Holy Spirit calls Barnabas and Saul for the first missionary journey. They travel through Cyprus and Asia Minor, preaching in synagogues and facing both reception and rejection. Paul turns to the Gentiles after Jewish opposition.
- 14:1–28** Paul and Barnabas establish churches in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul is stoned and left for dead in Lystra but rises and continues. They return to Antioch, reporting “how God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.”
- 15:1–35** The Jerusalem Council: the landmark debate over whether Gentiles must be circumcised. Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James all speak. The council’s verdict — Gentiles are saved by grace through faith alone — is the theological foundation of the church.

SECTION 5

Acts 16–20 THE SECOND AND THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEYS



- 16:1–40** Paul and Silas travel through Macedonia. In Philippi, Lydia is converted and a slave girl is freed. Paul and Silas are imprisoned, sing hymns at midnight, and an earthquake opens the prison. The jailer and his household are baptized.
- 17:1–34** In Thessalonica and Berea, Paul reasons from the Scriptures. In Athens, he delivers the Areopagus speech — the model of contextual evangelism, finding common ground with Greek philosophy before presenting the resurrection.
- 18:1–20:38** Paul plants the church in Corinth for eighteen months. His third journey focuses on Ephesus, where he ministers for three years. The riot of the silversmiths erupts when the gospel threatens the idol trade. Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders is one of the most moving passages in Acts.

SECTION 6

Acts 21–28 ARREST, TRIALS, AND THE ROAD TO ROME



- 21:1–23:35** Paul returns to Jerusalem and is arrested in the temple. He delivers his defense to the crowd and before the Sanhedrin. A plot to kill him is uncovered; he is transferred to Caesarea under military escort.
- 24:1–26:32** Paul stands before Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa. His defense before Agrippa is one of the great speeches of Acts — a personal testimony of his conversion and calling. Agrippa declares: “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”
- 27:1–28:31** The harrowing sea voyage to Rome: storm, shipwreck on Malta, miraculous survival. Paul heals the sick on Malta. He arrives in Rome under house arrest — and the book ends with him “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ — with all boldness and without hindrance.”

KEY THEMES

Acts is driven by four interlocking themes that together explain how a small band of frightened disciples became a movement that transformed the Roman Empire.

⁰¹ THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE ENGINE OF MISSION



01

The Holy Spirit is mentioned over 50 times in Acts — more than in any other New Testament book. He is not a background presence but the active director of the entire mission: he descends at **Pentecost**, guides Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, stops Paul from entering Bithynia, calls Barnabas and Saul for the first missionary journey, and leads the Jerusalem Council to its verdict. Acts is not the Acts of the Apostles but the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

MODERN APPLICATION

The early church did not strategize their way to global impact — they were sent and sustained by the Spirit. What would it look like to approach your own calling with the same dependence on the Spirit's leading rather than human planning?

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth."
— Acts 1:8*

⁰² THE UNSTOPPABLE EXPANSION OF THE GOSPEL



02

Acts traces a deliberate geographic expansion following the pattern of Acts 1:8: Jerusalem (chapters 1–7) → Judea and Samaria (8–12) → the ends of the earth (13–28). Every attempt to stop the gospel — imprisonment, flogging, stoning, shipwreck — accelerates rather than halts it. Luke punctuates the narrative with growth summaries: "the word of God spread" (6:7; 12:24; 19:20). The book ends not with Paul's death but with the gospel still advancing.

MODERN APPLICATION

The book of Acts is an unfinished story — it ends mid-sentence, with Paul still preaching. This is intentional: the reader is meant to understand that the story continues in their own generation. Where is the gospel advancing in your context, and what role are you playing?

"But the word of God continued to spread and flourish." — Acts 12:24

⁰³ THE BREAKING OF ETHNIC AND SOCIAL BARRIERS



03

Acts systematically dismantles the barriers that divided the ancient world. The gospel crosses the Jewish-Samaritan divide (Acts 8), the Jewish-Gentile divide (Acts 10–11), the slave-free divide (Acts 16), and the educated-uneducated divide (Acts 17). The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) is the theological ratification of what the Spirit had already been doing: creating one new humanity in Christ. Luke highlights women, foreigners, slaves, and social outcasts as key recipients and agents of the gospel.

MODERN APPLICATION

The early church's diversity was not a social program but a theological statement about the nature of the gospel. What barriers — ethnic, economic, generational — exist in your church or community that the gospel should be crossing?

"God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." — Acts 10:34–35



In Acts, suffering is not an obstacle to mission — it is the means of it. Stephen's **martyrdom** scatters the church and plants the gospel in new regions (8:1–4). Paul's imprisonments give him access to governors, kings, and Caesar's household. The apostles leave the Sanhedrin "Rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (5:41). This pattern echoes Jesus's own path: the cross before the resurrection, suffering before glory.

MODERN APPLICATION

Western Christianity often treats suffering as a sign that something has gone wrong. Acts presents it as a sign that something has gone right — that the witness is real enough to provoke opposition. How does this reframe your own experience of difficulty or opposition?

"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." — Acts 5:41

SYMBOLISM & IMAGERY

Acts' symbols are drawn from the dramatic events of the early church — each one a window onto the nature of the Spirit's work and the unstoppable advance of the gospel.



TONGUES OF FIRE (PENTECOST)

SYMBOL 01

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

On the day of Pentecost, a sound like a **rushing wind** filled the house and what appeared to be tongues of fire rested on each of the 120 disciples. They spoke in the languages of the **diaspora Jews** gathered in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven.

THEOLOGICAL MEANING

Fire in the Old Testament symbolizes God's presence. The tongues of fire at Pentecost signal that God's presence has now come to dwell in his people rather than in a building. The **reversal of Babel** is also in view: where Babel scattered humanity through language confusion, Pentecost gathers humanity through language understanding.



BAPTISM

SYMBOL 02

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Jewish baptism was a ritual of purification. John's baptism was a baptism of **repentance**. Christian baptism in Acts is consistently linked to **repentance**, forgiveness of sins, and receiving the Holy Spirit. It is performed in the name of Jesus and marks entry into the community of believers.

THEOLOGICAL MEANING

Baptism in Acts is the outward sign of an inward transformation. It is not the cause of salvation but its **public declaration**. The **Ethiopian eunuch's** baptism is particularly striking: he is a foreigner, a eunuch, and yet immediately baptized. The gospel breaks every barrier.



THE AREOPAGUS (MARS HILL)

SYMBOL 03

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Areopagus was a rocky hill in **Athens** where the city's governing council met to discuss philosophy, law, and religion. It was the intellectual center of the ancient world. **Epicurean** and Stoic philosophers debated there daily. When Paul was brought before the Areopagus, he was entering the most prestigious intellectual forum of his era.

THEOLOGICAL MEANING

Paul's Areopagus speech is a masterclass in **contextual evangelism**. He begins with what his audience already knows, then moves to what they do not know. He does not quote Scripture to a non-Jewish audience but uses their own cultural touchstones to point to Christ. This models the principle of finding **common ground** before presenting the gospel.



THE SHIPWRECK ON MALTA

SYMBOL 04

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Paul's sea voyage to Rome is one of the most detailed ancient sea voyage narratives in existence. The ship carried **276 people** and was caught in a **northeaster** for 14 days before wrecking on the island of Malta. Paul had warned the captain not to sail; the warning was ignored.

THEOLOGICAL MEANING

The shipwreck narrative is a parable of the entire book of Acts: God's purposes cannot be sunk. An angel had told Paul he must stand before Caesar, and no storm could prevent it. Paul's calm authority during the crisis — distributing bread, encouraging the crew — models the witness of a Spirit-filled believer in extremity. Malta becomes an unexpected mission field: Paul heals the sick and the whole island is transformed.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

These 8 questions are designed for a 60–90 minute small group session. Begin with the icebreaker, then work through observation, interpretation, and application questions. Close with the prayer prompt.

ICEBREAKER

If you could have witnessed any single moment in the book of Acts — Pentecost, Paul’s conversion, the Jerusalem Council, the Areopagus speech, the Malta shipwreck — which would you choose and why?

01

OBSERVATION

Read Acts 2:42–47. List the five practices of the early Jerusalem church. Which of these is most present in your church community today? Which is most absent? What would it take to strengthen the weakest area?

Leader’s Note:

The five practices: apostles’ teaching, fellowship (koinonia), breaking of bread, prayer, and sharing possessions. The passage also notes that the Lord added to their number daily — growth was a byproduct of community, not a program.

02

OBSERVATION

Acts 1:8 gives a geographic outline of the entire book: Jerusalem → Judea and Samaria → ends of the earth. Trace how this pattern unfolds through the book. What specific events mark each transition? What caused the gospel to move from one stage to the next?

Leader’s Note:

The transitions are often forced by persecution (8:1–4 scatters the Jerusalem church) or divine initiative (10:1–11:18 opens the Gentile mission). The church did not always choose to expand — sometimes it was pushed.

03

INTERPRETATION

In Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council debates whether Gentiles must be circumcised. Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and James all speak. What arguments does each one make? How does the council reach its decision? What does this process tell us about how the early church handled theological disagreement?

Leader’s Note:

The council uses three sources: Peter’s experience (God gave the Spirit to Gentiles without circumcision), Paul and Barnabas’ testimony (signs and wonders among Gentiles), and James’ appeal to Scripture (Amos 9:11–12). The decision is made by consensus, not by a single authority.

04

INTERPRETATION

Paul’s Areopagus speech (Acts 17:22–31) is addressed to a non-Jewish, philosophically sophisticated audience. How does his approach differ from his synagogue sermons? What does this tell us about how to communicate the gospel in different cultural contexts?

Leader’s Note:

In synagogues, Paul argues from Scripture. At the Areopagus, he argues from creation, human experience, and their own poets. He finds common ground before presenting the distinctive claims of the gospel. This is not compromise — it is translation.

05

APPLICATION

The Holy Spirit is mentioned over 50 times in Acts — guiding, empowering, and sometimes redirecting the apostles. Think of a time when you felt a clear sense of the Spirit’s leading. How did you respond? What would it look like to cultivate greater sensitivity to the Spirit’s direction in your daily decisions?

06

APPLICATION

Acts ends with Paul under house arrest, still preaching “with all boldness and without hindrance.” The book is deliberately unfinished. In what sense is your own life a continuation of the story of Acts? What chapter are you currently writing?

07

PRAYER PROMPT

Close by reading Acts 1:8 together: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Have each person identify their own “Jerusalem” — the immediate sphere of witness God has placed them in. Then pray for one another, asking the Spirit to empower each person for the witness they are called to.

08

KEY CHARACTERS

Peter



The lead apostle in the first half of Acts, whose Pentecost sermon launches the church and whose vision in Acts 10 opens the Gentile mission. Peter's transformation from the man who denied Jesus three

Paul (Saul)



The persecutor-turned-apostle whose dramatic conversion on the Damascus road and three missionary journeys drive the second half of Acts, culminating in Rome. Paul's life embodies the book's

Stephen



The first Christian martyr, whose Spirit-filled defense before the Sanhedrin surveys all of Israel's history and whose death by stoning triggers the scattering that spreads the gospel. Stephen's final words —

Barnabas



Paul's early mentor and missionary partner, whose generosity and encouragement model the koinonia (fellowship) of the early church. His name means "Son of Encouragement" — and he lives up to it by

Cornelius



The Roman centurion whose conversion through Peter marks the decisive opening of the gospel to the Gentile world. His story demonstrates that God's initiative always precedes human obedience — the

PRACTICAL APPLICATION — LIVING IT OUT TODAY



Be Filled with the Spirit

The disciples were commanded to wait for the Spirit before they acted. Effective witness flows from Spirit-empowerment, not human strategy or eloquence. This week, begin each day with a simple prayer: "Holy Spirit, fill me and lead me today." Then pay attention to the promptings that follow.



Find Your Jerusalem

Acts 1:8 starts with Jerusalem — the immediate, local sphere of witness. Before thinking globally, ask: who in my immediate world needs to hear the gospel? Identify one person in your "Jerusalem" this week and pray for an opportunity to share your faith with them.




Work Within Your Constraints


Paul preached from prison, from house arrest, from chains. Your limitations do not disqualify you from witness — they define the shape of it. What constraint in your life — a difficult relationship, a limited platform, a physical limitation — might be the very context God is using for His purposes?




ACTS –


My Study Journal

1  *Today I Read*

2  *The Holy Spirit at Work*

3  *My Witness Opportunity*

4  *How God Showed His Sovereignty*

5  *My Prayer Response*



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“But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.”

— Acts 12:24