

**A Study of  
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

*“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*

## **INSTRUCTIONS**

**This study is formatted to be a daily study of Acts to be done over a period of 12 weeks. I have tried to design a study that will require, on average, about 20 minutes a day to answer. That being said, please remember that the death of a good Bible study is a legalistic adherence to a “list” or schedule. Godly discipline requires a sensitivity to what the Holy Spirit wants to teach you. If you find yourself being led in a direction different from where my questions would take you, forget my questions, and listen to the “higher authority.” Most of all, enjoy the Word of God. There is no book like it in all of creation.**

## **BRIEF BACKGROUND NOTES ON ACTS**

**Who wrote it?** It was written by Luke, a Gentile physician who converted to Christianity and traveled with the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys.

**What is the relationship between Acts and the Gospel of Luke?** The Book of Acts was originally part of a two-volume “book.” The first volume consisted of the Gospel of Luke. The second volume is the book we now know as “The Acts of the Apostles.” The two volumes were initially circulated together. However, sometime in the late first or early second century, the Gospel of Luke was spun off and circulated with the other Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and John). The second volume became a stand-alone work. It was at this time that it acquired the title it is known by today.

**Who were the recipients?** Luke-Acts is addressed to someone named Theophilus (cf. Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1,2), about whom we know very little. It was likely intended to be read by others, particularly Gentiles.

**Why was it written?** At the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, Luke states that his goal is that Theophilus “...might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.” Luke later referred to this first volume as recording the things that “Jesus *began* to do...” (Acts 1:1). Thus, Acts should be seen as an account of the continuation of Jesus’ works on earth. Above all, Acts roots the Christian faith in history. What Jesus did in real people’s lives back then, He can – and does – do today.

**When was it written?** The evidence suggests that it was written around 64 A.D.

## WEEK ONE: Acts 1:1-2:47

### **Days One and Two:**

1. Read Acts 1:1-2:47.

*Historical Note:* Most commentators believe that the events recorded here occurred around 30 A.D.

2. Summarize these verses by making an outline consisting of numerous “sections”, attaching a brief description for each section. For example, one such outline of Acts 1:1-2:47 is given below:

1:1-8. Jesus teaches His disciples after His resurrection.

1:9-14. Jesus ascends to heaven and the disciples wait for the Holy Spirit to come.

1:15-26. The disciples select Matthias to take Judas’ place.

2:1-13. The Holy Spirit descends on the disciples, causing them to speak in foreign languages.

2:14-21. A crowd gathers round, and Peter tells them that this is a sign that they are in the Last Days.

2:22-36. Peter tells the crowd that the purpose of this event is to witness that Jesus is the Messiah, resurrected from the dead.

2:37-41. Three thousand are saved that day.

2:42-47. The new believers sell their possessions and form a new community in which everything is shared.

Write your own outline in the space below. Try not to refer to other outlines that may be presented in your Bible and elsewhere.

(NOTE: Making an outline is a wonderful way to immerse yourself in Scripture. It forces you to think through the content and organization of the text. In addition, it becomes a valuable resource for later review. If you have never done this before, you will probably find this hard to do the first time around. However, it will become easier over time. Persevere! You will be glad you did.)

**Day Three:**

1. Review Acts 1:1-2:47.

2. Think of some questions that might lead to an important spiritual “discovery.”

For example, Acts 1:20-26 describes how the Apostles chose Matthias to be a replacement for Judas. Accordingly, you might ask, “Why was it important to choose an apostolic replacement for Judas?”

Write your questions in the space below, then pray that God would answer your question(s).

**Day Four:**

1. Read Acts 1:1-8.

2. What instructions/orders did Jesus give His disciples before He ascended to heaven?

3. Why did Jesus tell His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:4,5)?

4A. The Greek word for witness is “*martus*”. This word appears 35 times in the New Testament. It appears 13 times in the Book of Acts, more than in any other New Testament book. Thus, it is fair to say that a key theme of the Book of Acts is being a witness.

4B. Would you like to be a better witness of Jesus? How do you think you could become that?

**Day Five:**

1. Read Acts 1:15-2:4.

Biblical Note: The Old Testament festival “Pentecost” derives its name from Greek, where it means “the 50<sup>th</sup> day.” The original purpose of the festival was to celebrate the end of the grain harvest by bringing the “firstfruits of the wheat harvest” to the Temple (Exodus 34:22). However, it also became celebrated as the anniversary of the giving of the Law from God to Moses 50 days after the first Passover.

2. There is great spiritual significance to the fact that God chose to distribute the Holy Spirit on the anniversary of the giving of the Old Testament Law to Moses: The Old Testament Pentecost marked the giving of the Law on tablets of stone. The New Testament Pentecost marks the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the writing of the Law on the hearts of believers. As such, this day of Pentecost described in the Book of Acts represents the New Testament analog of the giving of the law. Further, it represents the fulfillment of the promise of a “new covenant” which God promised His people in the Old Testament. Look up the verses below and briefly explain in the space below how they support this connection between the Old and New Testament days of Pentecost:

Jeremiah 31:31-34:

Ezekiel 36:26,27:

3. Why do you think it was important to choose a replacement for Judas? (HINT: What is significant about the number twelve?)

4. One possible explanation for the importance of the number twelve is that the Twelve Apostles represent the New Covenant version of the twelve sons of Jacob (Israel). Recall that the twelve sons of Jacob went on to form the twelve tribes of Israel. Recall also that Jeremiah 31:31 says, “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah.”

While the nation of Israel as a whole rejected this “New Covenant”, God was not stymied by the failure of the nation of Israel to respond. Instead, He preserved a remnant and made them into a “new nation” of believers to carry on His kingdom work. The reason for replacing Judas was to emphasize this symbolism. Does this seem like a reasonable explanation to you?

5A. The Book of Acts is notable for its accounts of miracles and supernatural interventions. These supernatural events are best understood as the New Testament analog to the great miracles associated with the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt and the establishment of the Jewish nation.

In the Old Testament, God delivered His people from bondage in Egypt, established a covenant with them at Mt. Sinai, and established them as a nation in the land of Canaan.

In the New Testament, God delivered His people from bondage to sin through the sacrifice of Jesus, which took place at the celebration of Passover. He ushered in a New Covenant by placing His Law in the hearts of believers through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which was initiated on Pentecost, the anniversary of the giving of the Law to Moses. And He established His “nation” of believers by building up the church, as described in the subsequent chapters of the Book of Acts.

Just as God did great miracles to establish the nation of Israel, so He did great miracles to establish His church. In other words, while God still does miracles today, the Book of Acts is not meant to present a “normal” picture of life within Christianity, just as the books of Exodus through Joshua were not meant to be normative for life in the Old Testament. These miracles should remind us that God is clearly drawing a parallel between what He did to establish the “Old Covenant,” and His acts to establish a “New Covenant” with His people.

5B. Read the attachment at the end of this week's study entitled "On the Differences Between the 'Old' and 'New' Covenants." Write any thoughts or questions you have about these two covenants in the space below.

**Day Six:**

1. Read Acts 2:14-39.
2. What is the "great and glorious day of the Lord" (cf. Acts 2:20)?
3. The twin facts that (i) Jesus the Christ/Messiah had been crucified and was risen from the dead (cf. Acts 2:22-24), and (ii) the "great and glorious day of the Lord" is coming, are sufficient to evoke an immediate response from Peter's listeners (cf. Acts 2:37). Why do you think Peter's listeners responded so strongly to these facts?
4. Why did Peter tell the people to repent and be baptized in order to be saved? Why didn't he tell them to simply believe?
5. What did you find most spiritually impacting in this week's study? Elaborate.

## ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE “OLD” AND “NEW” COVENANTS

For the distinction between the “Old Covenant” and the “New Covenant,” consider the following verses:

Hebrews 8:7-13a: “For if there had been nothing wrong with **that first covenant**, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when **I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. **It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers** when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. **This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” **By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete...**”**

Scripture frequently characterizes the differences between the “Old Covenant” and the “New Covenant” by contrasting “law/works/flesh” versus “grace/faith/Spirit”. To see that, consider the following verses:

Romans 3:21-22a: “But now a righteousness from God, apart from **law**, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through **faith** in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

Galatians 3:19a,24: “What, then, was the purpose of the **law**? ...the **law** was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by **faith**.”

Romans 8:3,4: “For what the **Law** could not do, weak as it was through the **flesh**, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the **Law** might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the **flesh**, but according to the **Spirit**.”

Galatians 3:6-14: “Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by **faith**, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who have **faith** are blessed along with Abraham, the man of **faith**. All who rely on observing the **law** are under a curse, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the **Law**.” Clearly no one is justified before God by the **law**, because, “The righteous will live by **faith**.” The **law** is not based on **faith**; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the **law** by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come

*to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by **faith** we might receive the promise of the **Spirit**.”*

*Romans 7:6: “But now we have been released from the **Law**, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the **Spirit** and not in oldness of the letter.”*

*Galatians 4:21-26: “Tell me, you who want to be under the **law**, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. These things may be taken figuratively, for **the women represent two covenants**. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.”*

## WEEK TWO: Acts 3:1-4:31

### **Days One and Two:**

1. Read Acts 3:1-4:31.

*Historical Note:* Most commentators believe that the events recorded here occurred around 30-32 A.D.

2. Summarize these verses by making an outline consisting of numerous “sections”, attaching a brief description for each section (cf. Days One and Two of Week One). Write your own outline in the space below. Try not to refer to other outlines that may be presented in your Bible and elsewhere.

### **Day Three:**

1. Review Acts 3:1-4:31.

2. Think of some questions that might lead to an important spiritual “discovery.” Write them in the space below, then pray that God would answer your question(s).

**Day Four:**

1. Read Acts 3:1-10.

2. The stated times for prayer in Judaism were (1) early in the morning, in connection with the morning sacrifice; (2) at the ninth hour of the day (about three o'clock in the afternoon); and (3) at sunset (source: *NIV Bible Commentary* in the *Zondervan Bible Reference Library* software). Accordingly, this passage of Scripture finds Peter and John going to the temple—the central place of worship in Judaism—to participate in prayers. What is significant about the fact that the early Christians continued to follow the teachings of Judaism? (HINT: Did the early Christians think of themselves as starting a new religion?)

3. The cripple begged money from passersby at the temple gate. However, Peter and John did not give him money. Instead, they healed his crippledness and gave him the power to walk. Notice they weren't intending on going out healing. They were intending to pray in the Temple. Why do you think they decided to heal this man rather than give him money, or walk on by?

4. In Acts 3:6, Peter says, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." What is significant about Peter's invocation of "the name of Jesus Christ?" (HINT: See Acts 3:16.)

**Day Five:**

1. Read Acts 3:11-26.
2. Peter begins his address to the “Men of Israel” by pointing out that they (i) handed Jesus over to be killed, (ii) asked for a murderer to be released in Jesus’ place, and (iii) are thus responsible for Jesus’ death. Why do you think Peter begins his address to the people in this way?
3. Peter then goes on to say, “Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.” After seemingly piling on the guilt, Peter then emphasizes his listeners’ innocence in ignorance. Why do you think he does this?
4. Peter closes his message by calling on his listeners to “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.” In your own words, without using “Christian lingo,” explain what Peter was asking his listeners to do.
5. Do you think Peter’s address can serve as a model today for how Christians can share the message of Jesus Christ with non-Christians? Explain why or why not.

**Day Six:**

1. Read Acts 4:1-31.

2A. *The NIV Bible Dictionary* in the *Zondervan Bible Reference Library* software, gives the following background information about the Sadducees: “SADDUCEES. One of the religious parties that existed among the Jews in the days of Christ and the early church, but exercised comparatively little influence among the people. ...The Sadducees were the political party of the Jewish aristocratic priesthood from the time of the Maccabees to the final fall of the Jewish state. They became leaders in the Hellenizing movement that began with Alexander the Great. Because of their sympathy with the policy of Antiochus Epiphanes, they took no part in the Maccabean struggle, which was supported mainly by the Pharisees. The Sadducees under the Romans become the party favorable to the government.... The Sadducees are mentioned by name in the NT only about a dozen times...; but it must be remembered that when mention is made of the chief priests, practically the same persons are referred to.... After the Day of Pentecost the Sadducees were very active against the infant church.” Distinctive characteristics of the Sadducees were (i) they were comfortable in accommodating the world, (ii) they were highly rationalistic and generally opposed to anything that smacked of the supernatural (e.g., the afterlife, angels, demons, etc.)

2B. Based on this description, why do you think the Sadducees were antagonistic to Peter’s preaching?

3. To what extent do you think people today, both Christians and non-Christians, have the same problems with the Christian message as the Sadducees did? Elaborate.

5. These beginning chapters of Acts detail the formation of the Christian church. Note that the church starts in Jerusalem, the capital of Judaism. Explain why, of all places in the world, Jerusalem after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ would have

been the most unlikely place in the world to start the Christian church. (In other words, can you see why the fact that Christianity starts and thrives in Jerusalem, the capital of Judaism, constitutes powerful evidence supporting the truth of Christianity?)

6. After being commanded to keep quiet, Peter and John respond, “..we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Why couldn’t Peter and John just appreciate what God had done for them and keep it to themselves? Why did they feel compelled to spread the truth that had been given to them?

7. What did you find most spiritually impacting in this week’s study? Elaborate.

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### WEEK THREE: Acts 4:32-6:7

#### **Days One and Two:**

1. Read Acts 4:32-6:7.

*Historical Note:* Most commentators believe that the events recorded here occurred around 32-35 A.D.

2. Summarize these verses by making an outline consisting of numerous “sections”, attaching a brief description for each section (cf. Days One and Two of Week One). Write your own outline in the space below. Try not to refer to other outlines that may be presented in your Bible and elsewhere.

#### **Day Three:**

1. Review Acts 4:32-6:7.

2. Think of some questions that might lead to an important spiritual “discovery.” Write them in the space below, then pray that God would answer your question(s).

**Day Four:**

1. Read Acts 4:32-37.

2. What do you think about the practice of the beginning church to sell their goods and to share with everyone who had need?

3A. Imagine that you were a part of a Christian community in which people radically shared their income/possessions with others in the community. What would be some positive aspects of this?

3B. What would be some negative aspects of this?

4. Given your understanding of the Bible, do you think churches today should be more like the beginning church when it comes to possessions?

5. If you answered yes to the preceding question, what could you do as an individual to help your church be more generous with its possessions?

**Day Five:**

1. Read Acts 5:1-11.

2. What exactly was Ananias' and Sapphira's "crime?"

3. Are you surprised at the harshness with which God judged these two? Can you think of any legitimate reason why God would be so hard on them?

4. What lesson can we learn from this incident?

5A. Read Acts 5:17-40.

5B. Read Acts 4:1-22.

6. Put yourself in the shoes of the members of the Council/Sanhedrin. Try and imagine how you would have behaved towards Peter and the apostles' testimony. How do the members of the Council/Sanhedrin behave differently than what you would have done had you been in their place?

7. Why do you think that people today are often disinterested in knowing whether the claims of Christianity are true?

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**Day Six:**

1. Read Acts 6:1-7.

2. These verses represent the first signs of “trouble in paradise” in the beginning church. Reading between the lines, it is clear that the complaint of the Hellenistic/Grecian Jews against the native/Hebraic Jews involved more than just the overlooking of widows in the distribution of food.

Can you speculate about the source of the problem? (HINT: Hellenistic Jews were probably Jews who had lived a substantial portion of their lives outside of Israel and had relocated to their spiritual homeland. In contrast, Hebraic Jews were Jews who had lived their whole lives in Israel.)

3. The apostles responded to an immediate problem (i.e. making sure that everyone got served food) with a structural change in the administration of the church (i.e., the creation of a “deacon-like” position to assist in the management of the day-to-day affairs of the church). Why do you think they did this?

4. What lesson can we learn from this incident?

5. What did you find most spiritually impacting in this week’s study? Elaborate.

## WEEK FOUR: Acts 6:8-8:3

### **Days One and Two:**

1. Read Acts 6:8-8:3.

*Historical Note:* Most commentators believe that the events recorded here occurred around 35 A.D.

2. Summarize these verses by making an outline consisting of numerous “sections”, attaching a brief description for each section (cf. Days One and Two of Week One). Write your own outline in the space below. Try not to refer to other outlines that may be presented in your Bible and elsewhere.

### **Day Three:**

1. Review Acts 6:8-8:3.

2. Think of some questions that might lead to an important spiritual “discovery.” Write them in the space below, then pray that God would answer your question(s).

### **Day Four:**

1. Read Acts 6:8-14.

*Historical Note:* Concerning the “Synagogue of the Freedmen”, the *NIV Bible Commentary* in *Zondervan’s Bible Reference Library* software says that this was a synagogue composed of Greek-speaking Jews who had been born outside of Israel, having later immigrated to their spiritual homeland. The word “freedmen” can indicate either (i) former slaves who won their freedom, or (ii) free persons as opposed to slaves. Being transplants, no doubt these Hellenistic Jews were viewed suspiciously by the Hebraic Jews. Perhaps because of this, they were particularly sensitive to anyone from their community (such as Stephen) who could harm their reputation as faithful Jews. This would explain their aggressive response to Stephen’s preaching.

2. The charges against Stephen are fourfold:

(i) He spoke against “this holy place” (i.e., the Temple)

(ii) He spoke against the law

(iii) He said Jesus would destroy the Temple

(iv) He said Jesus will change the customs Moses handed down to the Jews

Explain how each of these charges has a basis of truth in Christianity. For example, with respect to (i): Christianity doesn’t say the Temple is a bad thing. However, it does teach that the Holy Spirit indwells each Christian, so that the Christian, in essence, becomes the temple of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16: “*Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?*”). Continue in this fashion for charges (ii) through (iv).

Elements of truth in charge (ii):

Elements of truth in charge (iii):

Elements of truth in charge (iv):

**Day Five:**

1. Read Acts 7:2-7:53.

2. Confirm that Acts 7:2-7:50 can be divided into three parts:

(i) Acts 7:2-8: The founding of the nation of Israel through the patriarchs.

(ii) Acts 7:9-43: The nation of Israel continually rejects God's prophets.

(iii) Acts 7:44-50: God does not reside in the Temple.

3. With respect to part (i), why do you think Stephen begins his address by emphasizing how God raised up a people for Himself by calling it out of other nations?

4. With respect to part (ii), identify the specific instances in Acts 7:9-43 where the Israelites rejected God's prophets.

5. Acts 7:25 could be translated as follows: "And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them salvation through him; but they did not understand." What does that remind you of?

6. With respect to part (iii), why do you think Stephen ends his address by downplaying the Temple, stating that God does not live in houses built by men (cf. Acts 7:48)?

**Day Six:**

1. Review Acts 7:2-53.

2. Consider the following parallels between (i) the history of the nation of Israel as recounted by Stephen in Acts 7:2-53, and (ii) the (infant) Christian church.

<i>ISRAEL</i>	<i>THE CHURCH</i>
Abraham called out of Mesopotamia	The church called out of Israel
God is the main orchestrator of events (cf. Acts 7:2-8 and note that God is the main subject)	God is the one who has been initiating the events that have caused the church to grow
The leaders of Israel (the 12 patriarchs) persecute Joseph	The leaders of Israel (the Sanhedrin) persecute Jesus
God protects Joseph and the His people against a hostile environment (first famine, later persecution by the new Pharoah)	God is protecting the church against a hostile environment (persecution by the Jews and, later, the Romans)
Moses (the Law Giver) rejected by his people a first time, resulting in his exile	Jesus (the Law Fulfiller) rejected by His people a first time, resulting in His crucifixion
Acts 7:25 a perfect description of Moses	Acts 7:25 a perfect description of Jesus (NOTE: the word translated “deliverance” (NASB)/”rescue” (NIV) could also be translated “salvation”)
Moses rejected by his people a second time (cf. Acts 7:37-41) after a period of 40 years	Jesus rejected by his people a second time after a period of 40 days/Pentecost (via the rejection of the gospel delivered by His apostles)
The Old Testament says that the Temple cannot contain God	God will not be “contained” within the nation of Israel, but will expand to the Gentiles