
Acts

Key Theme and Verse

The expansion of the church in the world
[\[Acts 1:8\]](#)

Author

Luke wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts [compare [Luke 1:1-4](#) and [Acts 1:1-3](#)]. Together, they form a two-part series on Jesus' life [Luke] and legacy [Acts].

Outline

<i>Ministry</i>	<i>Center</i>	<i>Primary Audience</i>	<i>Outline</i>
Peter	Jerusalem	Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peter and the Jews, Acts 1-7• Peter and the Samaritans, Acts 8• Conversion of Paul, Acts 9• Peter and the Gentiles, Acts 10-11• Peter's arrest, deliverance, Acts 12
Paul	Antioch (Syrian)	Gentiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paul's first missionary journey, Acts 13-14• Jerusalem conference, Acts 15• Paul's second missionary journey, Acts 16-18• Paul's third missionary journey, Acts 18-21• Paul's arrest, voyage to Rome, Acts 21-28

Highlights

The book of Acts is a transition book, recording what happened to the apostles and church after Jesus ascended to heaven.

The story follows the outline Jesus gave in [Acts 1:8](#). It begins with the establishment of the first church in Jerusalem. Christ told the church in Jerusalem to take the gospel to Judea, neighboring Samaria, and to Gentiles around the world. Unfortunately, the church did not do this willingly. So, God allowed persecution to arise [\[8:1-3\]](#) which caused them to flee Jerusalem and take the gospel to Samaria [\[8:4-5\]](#) and to the Gentiles [\[11:19-20\]](#) as Christ originally desired.

Note how Jewish Christians had difficulty believing that Gentiles could become Christians without becoming Jews [\[10:9-11:18\]](#).

[Acts 15](#) records how the church resolved the early tension between Jewish-background and Gentile-background believers. The questions were: "Can a Gentile become a Christian without also converting to Judaism and keeping the Law of Moses? If so, is there any part of the Law of Moses they should obey?"

[Acts 16:8-11](#) records a key moment in history when the good news of Jesus was taken by missionaries from Asia to Europe.

Paul adapted his preaching-style to his audience without changing the core of his message. Compare how he quoted Scripture to Jews in a synagogue (**13:16-41**) to how he quoted pop-culture and poetry to Gentile philosophers (**17:22-31**).

The last chapters of the book of Acts record Paul's farewell addresses to churches, his arrest in Jerusalem, and his voyage to Rome as a prisoner of the Roman Empire.

Many people warned Paul about the dangers of traveling to Jerusalem (**21:10-14**). Regardless, Paul went. Upon arrival, all the predictions of his arrest and imprisonment

came true and Paul became a "prisoner of the Lord" (**Eph 3:1, Eph 4:1**).

Paul wrote to his beloved churches from prison in what became known as "the prison epistles" (**Eph 3:1, Php 1:13, Col 4:3**).

The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison, ministering to Rome; however, the ongoing story of Acts is being "written" to this day as the church lifts up Jesus and shares His Word with the world. Some call this "Acts 29."

Personal Reflection and Application

Some people are all about appearances. Read the story of Ananias and Sapphira in **Acts 5:1-11**.

Reflect on their thoughts and behaviors.

- Clung to their possessions.
- Agreed to lie about their giving (to God and the church).
- Pretended to be someone they were not.
- Thought they could get by with deception.
- Were more concerned with their appearance to others than with their relationship with God.

Consider whether any of those thoughts and behaviors is a possible snare for you.

God chose Saul for a specific mission (**Acts 9:15-16**). For what mission has God chosen you? If you are uncertain, look for clues in the experiences God has provided you, especially trials. Also consider the abilities, gifts, and resources He has provided. Those are not coincidences. Pray that God make it clear to you how He wants you to use your experiences, time, talents, and treasures. Be in God's Word regularly. That gives the Holy

Spirit an opportunity to guide you in both daily direction and life mission.

In the Bible, a name change reflects a life change. Saul becomes Paul (**Acts 13:2, Acts 13:9**). Saul means desired by man (**Php 3:4-6**). Paul means little (**Php 3:7-11**). God wants to make us smaller so He can use us in a bigger way (**Luke 9:48**). Are you willing to be smaller and allow God to use you in a bigger way?

Notice the four parts to Paul's story.

1. **Life before he met Jesus:** What was Paul's life like before he met Jesus (**Acts 22:1-5**)? What was your life like before you met Jesus?
2. **What Jesus did to reach him:** What did Jesus do to reach Paul (**Acts 22:6-10**)? What did Jesus do to reach you?
3. **How Jesus changed Paul after Paul accepted Christ:** How did Jesus change Paul (**Acts 22:11-16**)? How did Jesus change you?
4. **What God was doing in his life currently:** What was God currently doing in Paul's life (**Acts 22:17-21**)? What is God currently doing in your life?

Small Group Conversation Guide

In [Acts 4:10-13](#), Peter and John demonstrate a great deal of courage.

- What made them bold and confident?
- What does it take to be bold and confident without being mean or disagreeable ([Eph 4:15](#))?

Did you know that you can minister both **for** the Lord and **to** the Lord? Look at [Acts 13:2](#). How can you minister **to** the Lord?

[Acts 16:25-34](#) records the experiences of Paul and Silas in jail. When they were in prison, they sang songs and hymns praising God! What if you were in prison for proclaiming Christ? **Would you rejoice, pray, and sing or would you grumble and complain?** To bring the point home, how is your attitude when you face smaller difficulties at home, work, or church? Do you welcome difficulties with rejoicing or do you face them with pessimism?

Leadership Principles from Acts

Discovering Your Personal Mission

Consider the vision that Jesus communicated to His apostles ([Acts 1:8](#)). It began with a **promise** of how they would be able to fulfill the vision. They would not be operating under their own power. Their part would be obedience. He would provide the power. It included **strategy**: Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria, and finally to the end of the earth. He made the direction clear. The **vision** gave the compelling big picture unencumbered with details. The Holy Spirit would provide the details as they moved in the direction He had specified.

Compare the characteristics of the vision Jesus gave the apostles with your personal vision. What is the source providing the power to fulfill your vision? Is the strategy clear? Is the vision compelling? Where are you getting direction as you move forward?

Choosing a Team Member

With the removal of Judas, the 12 Disciples became 11. They needed a replacement. What did they do? Did they quickly select the first person available? No. They stopped, read Scripture, made sure what they planned to do aligned with it, then prayed specifically for God's direction in selecting a replacement ([Acts 1:15-26](#)). Before you choose your next team member, partner, or staff person, bathe the decision in prayer. Also consider the 4C model. Look for:

- **Character**
- **Chemistry**
- **Competency**
- **Calling.**

Can They Tell How Much You Care?

In [Acts 3](#), notice how Peter gained an audience. Before he shared the gospel, he used the gifts he had to show **compassion**. People noticed the result of his action. This gave Peter an invitation to speak. As a leader, your credibility will come from both your words and your actions. People are more likely to listen if you wait for their invitation to speak. They are more likely to

give an invitation if your actions are noteworthy. Are you using your gifts in ways that demonstrate God's love? Remember, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care! Determine to let your compassion for people earn you respect for your ideas and willingness to act on them.

Charisma

Charisma is the ability to draw people to you or your cause. Would you like to be more charismatic? Look at the qualities that made Peter charismatic in [Acts 2:14-20](#).

Quality	Try These
Confidence	Enjoy the life God has given you. Be thankful. Rely on God.
Conviction	Know God's plan for you. Speak from your heart.
Connection	Focus on others. Treat them well. Expect the best from them. Be vulnerable and real.
Compassion	Give people practical answers to their needs. Share your heart and your resources.

Practice What You Preach

Peter could speak credibly about persecutions because he endured them himself. He practiced what he preached. [Acts 5](#) describes how he suffered for his faith. [Acts 12](#) reports his imprisonment. Eventually, the Romans crucified him upside down instead of right-side up. Peter's message is more reliable because he backed it up with his life. Leader, do others take your requests seriously? If not, check your life to see if you are doing what you ask others to do. Do you have credibility?

Keeping Ego in Check

Success in leadership sometimes brings rock-star status. People lined the streets "laid [the sick] on beds...that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on some of them" ([Acts 5:15](#)). When was the last time people lined up outside your office hoping to simply touch your shadow? In spite of his popularity, Peter singularly focused on the mission. He didn't let an inflated ego get the best of him. As a leader, how do you keep your ego in check? Do you have people in your life who will tell you what you NEED to hear instead of what you WANT to hear? If not, get some ASAP. Your leadership and legacy depend on it! Remember, God calls us to "...be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God..." ([1Pet 5:5-6](#)).

Delegate

Burnout. Frustration. Redlining. Leading on empty. These are all words that characterize most leaders today. The old adage is true: if you want something done, give it to someone who is busy! Unfortunately, this is the life of most leaders. There is too much on their plates and not enough hours in the day to meet the ever-growing demands. Thankfully, the early church leaders experienced this too. Through their actions, we receive a game plan on how to effectively delegate responsibilities that take away from our A1 priorities. Read [Acts 6:1-7](#) to see this unfold. Take notes to help you determine what you can apply to your own leadership situations.

Source of Strong Commitment

Consider the commitment of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. What factors helped Stephen be a leader of such strong commitment? Consider how strong the following are in your life:

Solid biblical foundation	Acts 7:2-38
Eyes fixed on Jesus	Acts 7:55
Godly perspective during trials	Acts 7:60

Master of Encouragement

Consider the leadership behaviors of Barnabas in [Acts 11:22-24](#). He is alert to see God's grace working in the lives of others. He speaks words of encouragement to strengthen their resolve. As a leader, do you watch for signs of God working in the lives of others? Does this bring you joy? Do you encourage and strengthen them with your words?

Willing to Be Smaller

In the Bible, a name change reflects a life change. Saul becomes Paul ([Acts 13:2](#), [Acts 13:9](#)). Saul means desired by man ([Php 3:4-6](#)). Paul means little ([Php 3:7-11](#)). God wants to make us smaller so He can use us in a bigger way ([Luke 9:48](#)). Are you willing to be smaller and allow God to use you in a bigger way?

Style vs. Content

Paul **adapted** his preaching **style** to his audience without changing the core of his message. Compare how he quoted Scripture to Jews in a synagogue ([Acts 13:16-41](#)) to how he quoted pop-culture and poetry to Gentile philosophers ([Acts 17:22-31](#)). How do you vary your communication style to connect with others while keeping your message intact? Think of ways you can improve this skill. Which people in your world pose the biggest communication challenge for you?

Group Decision Making

Consider the decision-making process in [Acts 15](#). Notice how the various participants listened to one another's views. Before finalizing a decision, it is helpful to know one another's minds and move together toward an answer. What can you learn from this to enhance your own decision-making process? How much effort do you spend seeking to understand other's views before you make a decision? What do you do to help others understand your perspective before they make decisions?

Attitude Check

[Acts 16:25-34](#) records the experiences of Paul and Silas in jail. When they were in prison, they sang songs and hymns praising God! What if you were in prison for proclaiming Christ? Would you rejoice, pray, and sing or would you grumble and complain? How is your attitude when you face smaller difficulties at home, work, or church? Do you welcome difficulties with rejoicing or do you scold them with pessimism?

Is It Yours to Fix?

How do you respond when someone brings you a complaint? Read [Acts 18:12-16](#). Notice that Gallio refused to address the complaint because it was not within his jurisdiction. As leaders, we are inclined to solve problems. We like to fix things. Sometimes, we fail to realize that some problems are not ours to solve. When the problem is not your responsibility, you may be able to use the complaint as a teaching moment. While you make it clear you will not solve the problem for the person, you can point out resources and options to consider.

Time Alone with God

Notice in [Acts 20:13](#) that Paul went on foot while others sailed. As leaders, we need time apart from others to be alone with God. We need time for prayer ([Mark 1:30-35](#)). We need direction from God ([Luke 6:9-13](#)). How often do you set aside time to be alone with God?

Would They Miss You?

Have you ever had to say goodbye to a group of people you had led? How did they react? Read [Acts 20:37-38](#). Falling on someone's neck is a Middle Eastern expression of sorrow. What was it about Paul that inspired that reaction? If you had to leave, what about you would people miss?

Hear the Other Side

As a leader, there will be times when you get reports from some people about others. How do you handle situations like that? When Festus arrived, the Jews were quick

to accuse Paul of being dangerous and unfit to live ([Acts 25:14-21](#)). Festus informed them that the Romans would not allow punishment without first hearing the other side of a matter. Do you insist on hearing the other side ([John 7:51](#)) before making a decision?

Source of Direction

When Paul was recounting his story to King Agrippa, he made a leadership statement that would be wise for every leader to consider. He said, "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision," ([Acts 26:19](#)). Once Paul received the vision from God, he viewed anything else but that vision as **disobedience!** Do you have that kind of resolve?

Your Character as a Safety Net

The proven character of a leader can be a safety net to many others ([Acts 27:41-44](#)). The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners. They didn't want any of them to escape. Only because the centurion wanted to save Paul, did the other prisoners also remain alive. Consider how your proven character can be a safety net to others.

Always a Missionary

What story is your life writing ([Acts 28:30-31](#))? Do you see yourself as a missionary in all parts of your life, always sharing the good news ([Php 1:12-20](#)), always buying your field ([Mat 13:44](#))? As a leader, are you allowing Christ to work in and through you ([Php 1:3-6](#))?

Something to Find in Each Chapter

As you read through the book, it may help to have something to find in each chapter.
Try these:

01. Where Jesus told His disciples to take His good news	02. What activities characterized life in the early church
03. How Peter credited Jesus for the miraculous healing	04. How the church prayed for boldness when threatened
05. How Peter obeyed God over the commands of men	06. How the church ensured all widows were cared for
07. How the Jewish leaders responded to Stephen	08. What the Ethiopian was doing when Stephen met him
09. The first thing Jesus said to Saul	10. Why Peter's vision occurred three times
11. How the church at Antioch was started	12. How the prayer group responded to Peter's arrival
13. Why the church at Antioch sent out missionaries	14. How Paul and Barnabas were treated at Lystra
15. What the non-Jewish believers were to abstain from	16. What Paul and Silas did while in jail at Philippi
17. How Berea's response differed from Thessalonica's	18. Who Apollos followed before learning about Jesus
19. Why Demetrius opposed Paul at Ephesus	20. What Paul said would build up the church at Ephesus
21. What Paul said about facing arrest in Jerusalem	22. What Paul said to send the crowd into a rage
23. How Paul divided the council who questioned him	24. What the Jews (through Tertullus) accused Paul of
25. Why Festus offered to transfer Paul to Jerusalem	26. How King Agrippa responded to Paul's speech
27. How hope was lost on the ship during the storm	28. What Paul's life in Rome was like