

Introduction to Acts

Author & Date

[Acts](#) is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. Both were written by Luke, a physician who traveled with the apostle Paul. [Acts](#) ends with Paul under house arrest, awaiting trial before Caesar, c. AD 62. Many scholars assume [Acts](#) was written then because it does not record Paul's defense, release, and further gospel preaching. Luke's purpose for writing his Gospel (see [Luke 1:3-4](#)) applies to [Acts](#) as well: to give an "orderly" account of the early church after Christ's resurrection.

The Gospel in Acts

[Acts](#) is the story of God's grace flooding out to the world, from the cross and resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Nothing is more prominent in [Acts](#) than the spread of the gospel. Jesus promises a geographic expansion at the outset ([1:8](#)), and [Acts](#) follows the news of his death and resurrection as it spreads from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the faraway capital of Rome.

The preaching of Jesus' death and resurrection is central in [Acts](#). The Greek verb for "preach the gospel" (*euangelizo*) occurs more in this book than in any other in the New Testament. About a third of the book of [Acts](#) consists of speeches, and most of these are speeches by Peter or Paul proclaiming the gospel. The good news of the salvation accomplished in Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit extends to the "ends of the earth" through preaching.

In [Acts](#), "grace" is a parallel for "the gospel" or "salvation." Jesus' message is summarized as "the word of his grace" ([20:32](#)), believers are said to have received "grace" or to be "full of grace" ([6:8](#)), and they are challenged to continue in grace. The missionaries in [Acts](#) proclaim the grace of God, and it is through this grace that people are able to respond with faith.

[Acts](#) reveals God's passionate pursuit of his people, beginning with his followers in Jerusalem, expanding to Samaria, then to the rest of the world. By the end of the book we see Paul living in Rome, "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" ([28:31](#)). The gospel draws people in, constitutes them as the church centered on the grace of Jesus, and then sends them out in mission to the world. The new group of believers is marked by the Holy Spirit, who creates such a distinctive community that others are drawn in, experiencing God's grace. At the same time, they take the gospel message to new people and new lands, making God's grace known to the ends of the earth.

The gospel's expansion is the culmination of what God has been doing since the beginning. Luke consistently grounds salvation in the ancient purpose of God, which comes to fruition at God's own initiative. [Acts](#) shows that the new Christian movement is not a fringe sect but the

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Weekly Overview

culmination of God's plan of redemption. What was seen only as shadows in the Old Testament God reveals finally and fully through Jesus Christ. The book of [Acts](#) does not primarily provide human patterns to emulate or avoid. Instead, it repeatedly calls us to reflect upon the work of God, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, establishing the church by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are invited to enter and participate in a story that is much bigger than we are.

In [Acts](#), the gospel expands not through human strength, but through weakness, opposition, and persecution. Demonic forces, worldly powers and authorities, governmental opposition, language and cultural barriers, intense suffering and bloody persecution, unjust imprisonment, unbelief, internal disunity, and even shipwrecks and snakes all threaten to slow down the gospel's advance. But opposition and suffering do not thwart the spread of Jesus' grace; rather, they fuel it.

The gospel spreads despite barriers of geography, ethnicity, culture, gender, and wealth. Many of these barriers appear so inviolable that when the gospel is preached to a new segment of society, riots ensue. But Luke makes clear that no one is beyond the scope of God's saving power, nor is anyone exempt from the need for God's redeeming grace.

All people receive the grace of God through one man, Jesus Christ. Jesus' gospel goes out to all places and all types of people, because Jesus is Lord of all.

Outline

- Preparation for Witness ([1:1-2:13](#))
- The Witness in Jerusalem ([2:14-5:42](#))
- The Witness beyond Jerusalem ([6:1-12:25](#))
- The Witness in Cyprus and Southern Galatia ([13:1-14:28](#))
- The Jerusalem Council ([15:1-35](#))
- The Witness in Greece ([15:36-18:22](#))
- The Witness in Ephesus ([18:23-21:16](#))
- The Arrest in Jerusalem ([21:17-23:35](#))
- The Witness in Caesarea ([24:1-26:32](#))
- The Witness in Rome ([27:1-28:31](#))