

## Acts

Coming immediately after the four gospel accounts that open the New Testament the book of Acts is a gripping narrative account of the development of the early church. It is exciting. It is pacy. And it is a joy to read.

What I want to do in this session is spend some time working our way through the book to understand its structure and contents. Then we will think about how, as a historical narrative, it applies to us today. We will do this in general terms in this session. In the group exercise that follows we will be concentrating in particular on the second chapter of the book and thinking in far more detail about how that applies to us.

### What is the book of Acts?

“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” (1vs1-2)

The first thing we are told is that this is a sequel – “in the first book...” What is it a sequel to? Luke’s gospel. Luke 1vs1 tells us that that was volume 1 of the work to Theophilus. This is volume 2 and it picks up the story where the first book left off.

What is the full title of the book? The Acts of the Apostles. This is the traditional title that has been ascribe to the book. Why? Because we read about the lives (and death) and witness of the apostles after the ascension of Jesus.

But is that an accurate description of the book’s contents? Look once again at the opening verses of the book.

- “Jesus began to do”. **The Acts of the Lord Jesus Christ through his Apostles**
- “Jesus began to...teach”. ¼ of the book consists of key speeches. Which ones can you think of?
  - Peter’s sermon at Pentecost and in the temple courts
  - Stephen’s defence before his martyrdom
  - James “summing up” in Acts 15

Paul’s Sermons:

- In the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch
- On Mars Hill in Athens
- To the Ephesian Elders

Paul’s defences:

- Before the crowd in Jerusalem
- Before Roman Governor Felix
- Before Roman Governor Festus and King Agrippa

**The Acts and Words of the Lord Jesus Christ through his Apostles.**

- “through the Holy Spirit”. **The Acts and Words of the Lord Jesus Christ, by his Holy Spirit, through the Apostles.**

What's in the book of Acts?

"you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (1vs8)

What we have is Spirit-powered witness:

- In Jerusalem (chapters 1-7)
- In all Judea and Samaria (chapters 8-12)
- To the ends of the earth (chapters 13-28)

Luke divides up his account using **summary sentences**

"So the word of God **spread**."

The number of disciples in Jerusalem **increased** rapidly..." 6v7

"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was **strengthened**; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it **grew in numbers**, living in the fear of the Lord." 9v31

"But the word of God continued to **increase** and **spread**." 12v24

"So the churches were **strengthened** in the faith and **grew** daily **in numbers**." 16v5

"In this way the word of the Lord **spread** widely and **grew** in power." 19v20

## 1. The Jerusalem Church, 1v1–6v7

- ch.1: Jesus' departure, the disciples waiting
- ch.2: **Pentecost!**
- chs.3+4<sub>v31</sub>: healing of a lame man and what happened...
- chs.4<sub>v32</sub>-6<sub>v7</sub>: **3 key challenges**: *hypocrisy*, *hostility* and *disunity* (still challenges to the church today!)

“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.” - **6v7**

## 2. Three Key Men, 6v8–9v31

Who will spearhead the great mission ‘to the ends of the earth’?

- **Stephen...?** Martyred
- **Philip...?** Into Samaria
- **Saul!** Persecutor... Chosen!

“Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.” - **9v31**

## 3. Springboard for Mission, 9v32-12v24

- **Gentile Cornelius Converted**
- **Antioch Church Planted**
- **Peter and Herod**  
(chapters 1-12 = Peter, chapters 13-28 = Paul)

“But the word of God continued to increase & spread.” - **12v24**

## 4. Mission in Asia Minor, 12v25–16v5

- Cyprus
- Asia Minor (Turkey)
- Report back – Jerusalem Council
- Revisit at start of 2<sup>nd</sup> journey

“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.” - **16v5**

## 5. Mission around the Aegean Sea 16v6–19v20

Reaching the great cities

- Philippi (Roman)
- Athens (Intellectual)
- Corinth (Trade and Commerce)
- Ephesus (Religious)

“In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.” - **19v20**

“After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also.”” - **19v21**

## 6. To Jerusalem to testify, 19v21-23v11

“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”” - **23v11**

## 7. To Rome to testify, 23v12-28v31

See map.

Rome – centre of the empire and the known world.  
Hub for gospel explosion

## The Book of Acts

1. The Jerusalem Church
2. Three Key Men
3. Springboard for Mission
4. Mission in Asia Minor
5. Mission Around the Aegean
6. To Jerusalem to testify
7. To Rome to testify



Where did we leave our title of the book – “The Acts and Words of the Lord Jesus Christ, by his Holy Spirit, through the Apostles. Is that accurate?

**“The Acts and Words of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
by his Holy Spirit, through his Apostles,  
for the spread of the gospel  
from *Jerusalem* (where it all began)...  
...to *Rome* (capital city of the whole empire)”**

**“I will build my church,  
and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”  
– Jesus, Matthew 16v18**

#### Application

What is descriptive and what is prescriptive?

Immediately see from chapter 1 that apostleship is not something that continues today so certain actions of the apostles are not repeatable. Elsewhere we decide by comparing what happened with the rest of scripture.

Pouring out of the Holy Spirit – see Ephesians 1

Healing – see James 5 & Hebrews 2vs4

Gospel to the ends of the earth

⇒ **Be Global Christians! Care ♦ Pray ♦ Give ♦ Send ♦ Go**