



2020 → Year of Transformation

# Acts

(Introduction & background information provided is from the ESV study Bible)

## Author and Title

Acts is unique among the NT writings, in that its main purpose is to record a selective history of the early church following the resurrection of Christ. It is the second part of a two-volume work, with the Gospel of Luke being the first volume. Both books are dedicated to a person named Theophilus, and Acts 1:1 explicitly refers back to Luke's Gospel.

Both the Gospel of Luke and Acts are anonymous, but the earliest discussions attribute them to Luke. The name "Luke" appears only three times in the NT: Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24. All three references are in epistles written by Paul from prison, and all three mention Luke's presence with Paul.

The earliest discussion of the authorship of Luke and Acts is from Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons in Gaul, writing in the late second century. He attributes the books to Luke, the coworker of Paul, and notes that the occurrence of the first-person narrative ("we") throughout the later chapters of Acts (starting at 16:10) indicates that the author of Acts was a companion of Paul and present with him on these occasions. These "we" passages in Acts are the key to the authorship of both Acts and the Gospel of Luke.

Colossians 4:14 indicates that Luke was a physician, and attempts have been made to bolster Lukan authorship by arguing that Luke and Acts use technical medical language. This does not seem to be the case, as Luke seems to have avoided technical language in order to communicate plainly to his readers, but his detailed description of illnesses perhaps reflects his

interests as a physician (cf. Acts 28:8). In addition, all the external evidence refers to Luke as the author.

Other than the three NT references, nothing certain is known of Luke. Early traditions link him with Antioch, but that is probably based on the reference in Acts 13:1 to “Lucius,” which is a Latin name. “Luke” is a Greek name, and both books are written in excellent Greek. His thorough acquaintance with the OT may reflect that Luke was a converted God-fearer (a Gentile who attended the Jewish synagogue) or Jewish proselyte (convert), though he could have gained his biblical knowledge after becoming a Christian.

## **Theme**

In Acts, believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the good news of Jesus Christ among both Jews and Gentiles, and in doing this they establish the church. In addition to this, Acts explains how Christianity, although it is new, is in reality the one true religion, rooted in God’s promises from the beginning of time. In the ancient world it was important that a religion be shown to have stood the test of time. Thus Luke presents the church as the fulfillment and extension of God’s promises.

## Timeline

	A.D.	30	35	40	45	50	55	60	65	70	75	80
Death, resurrection of Christ (A.D. 33 [or 30]) <sup>†</sup>		█										
Pentecost (30/33)		█										
Stephen stoned (31/33)		█										
Paul converted (33/34*)		●										
Paul meets with Peter in Jerusalem (36/37*)			█									
Paul ministers in Syria/Cilicia (37–45)			█	█	█							
Peter witnesses to Cornelius (38*)			●									
James, brother of John, martyred (41–44)				█	█							
Peter rescued from prison, leaves Jerusalem (44)				●								
Paul's second Jerusalem visit (famine relief) (44–47*)				█	█							
Paul's first missionary journey (46–47)					█							
Peter and Paul at Jerusalem council (48–49*)					█							
Paul's second missionary journey (48/49–51*)					█	█						
Claudius expels Jews from Rome (49)					●							
Paul's third missionary journey (52–57*)						█	█					
Paul ministers in Ephesus (52–55)						█	█					
Claudius dies; Jews allowed back to Rome (54)						●						
Nero's reign (54–68)							█	█	█			
Paul arrested in Jerusalem (57*)							●					
Paul imprisoned in Caesarea (57–59)							█	█				
James, brother of the Lord, martyred (62)								●				
Paul under house arrest in Rome (62*)								●				
Luke writes Gospel of Luke and Acts (62*)								●				
Paul released, resumes ministry, rearrested (62–64)								█	█			
Paul and Peter martyred in Rome (64–67*)									█	█		

cc: \* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810

## Purpose, Occasion, and Background

Luke's stated purpose for both of his books is provided at the beginning of the first (Luke 1:1–4). He had a historian's interest in providing an "orderly account" of "the things that have been accomplished among us." One would assume the latter statement applied both to the ministry of Jesus (the gospel) and to that of the early church (Acts). Dedicating the work to Theophilus, he wanted him to have "certainty" (a firm foundation) for what he had been taught. The exact nature of Luke's purpose depends on how one identifies Theophilus. He

evidently had already been instructed in the Christian way and may have been a new convert or a seeker on the verge of commitment. Since “Theophilus” means “lover of God,” it is also possible that Luke is challenging the devotion of his readers rather than addressing his book to just one of them.

Luke probably had a number of purposes for writing Acts. These are best determined through the emphases or themes found throughout the book.

## History of Salvation Summary

After his ascension (1:9; cf. Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:9–10) Jesus sends the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28–32) to empower the apostles as witnesses (Acts 1:8), to spread the message of the gospel (Isa. 52:7), and to draw to himself people from the nations (Matt. 28:19). (For an explanation of the “History of Salvation,” see the Overview of the Bible.)

## Key Themes

The major themes of Acts can be placed under the general category of “witness,” as set forth in the thematic verse (Acts 1:8).

1. The witness is worldwide—Judea, Samaria, the “end of the earth.”	<u>1:8</u>
2. The witness is inclusive of all kinds of people: Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, the physically handicapped, pagan mountain people, a prominent merchant woman, a jailer and his family, Greek philosophers, governors, and kings.	<u>chs. 2-5; 8:4-40; 10:1-11:18; 14:8-18; 16:11-15, 25-34; 17:22-31; 24:24-27; 26:1-29</u>
3. The witness is guided by the providence of God, who preserves his witnesses for their testimony through all sorts of threats: murderous plots, angry mobs, storms at sea, and constant trials before the authorities, to name only a few.	<u>4:5-22; 18:12-16; 19:23-41; 23:12-22; 24:1-23; 27:21-26</u>
4. On the other hand, faithful witnesses must be prepared to suffer, even to die for their testimony to Christ.	<u>5:41-42; 7:54-60</u>
5. The power behind the witness is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is granted to all believers, both male and female, whom he empowers for witness. The Spirit guides witnesses in moments of special inspiration and is behind every advance in the Christian mission.	<u>1:8; 2:1-13, 18, 38; 4:8; 7:55; 8:17; 10:44; 13:2-12; 19:6, 21</u>
6. In the early days, the witness was often accompanied by “signs and wonders,” the “wonders” being the miracles worked by the apostles, which served as “signs” pointing to the truth of the gospel. Miracles usually opened a door for witness.	e.g., <u>ch. 3</u>
7. Effective witness demands the unity of the church.	<u>2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-14</u>
8. A key component of the witness is the resurrection of Jesus. For the Jews the resurrection demonstrated that Jesus was the promised Messiah. For the Gentiles it pointed to his role as judge and established their need to repent.	<u>1:22; 2:22-36; 17:30-31</u>

9. Acceptance of the message borne by the witnesses depends both on human response and on the divine sovereignty behind the response.	e.g., <u>2:47</u> ; <u>11:18</u> ; <u>13:48</u>
10. The OT Scriptures point to the death and resurrection of Christ, and the prophecies that point to Christ and to his followers must be fulfilled ( <u>1:16</u> ).	(The numerous OT citations in the sermons of Acts illustrate this point.)
11. The witness to the gospel calls for a response. Most speeches in Acts end with some sort of invitation. Representative of this is Paul's exchange with Agrippa II.	<u>26:27-29</u>
12. The response called for is repentance of one's sins in the name of Christ, which brings forgiveness of sins.	e.g., <u>2:38</u>
13. Witnesses must always maintain integrity before the world. In Acts this is illustrated by the many remarks from the authorities about the Christians giving no evidence of any wrongdoing.	<u>18:12-15</u> ; <u>23:29</u> ; <u>25:18</u> ; <u>26:31-32</u>
14. Christian witnesses continue the ministry that Christ "began" ( <u>1:1</u> ). This is illustrated throughout Acts with the many implicit parallels between the experiences of the apostles and those of Christ: his miracles, the forebodings of his journey to Jerusalem, the cry of the angry Jewish mob for his death, and his trial before the governor and the king.	<u>20:36-21:16</u> (cf. <u>Luke 9:22</u> ; <u>13:31-34</u> ; <u>18:31-34</u> ); <u>21:36</u> ; <u>22:21</u> (cf. <u>Luke 23:18</u> ); <u>24:1-26:32</u> (cf. <u>Luke 23:1-25</u> )
15. Faithful witness brings great results. Acts is all about the victory of the Christian gospel. The witness brings results among both Jews and Gentiles. The book ends on this note, with Paul bearing his faithful witness to "all" who came to him in Rome.	<u>4:4</u> ; <u>11:20-21</u> ; <u>13:48-49</u> ; <u>17:4</u> ; <u>18:6-11</u> ; <u>21:20</u> ; <u>28:30-31</u>

## The Setting of Acts

The book of Acts records the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, thus fulfilling the risen Christ's words to his apostles in Acts 1:8.



## Outline

- I. Preparation for Witness ([1:1-2:13](#))
  - A. Jesus prepares the disciples ([1:1-5](#))
  - B. Jesus ascends ([1:6-11](#))
  - C. Matthias replaces Judas ([1:12-26](#))
  - D. The Spirit descends at Pentecost ([2:1-13](#))
  
- II. The Witness in Jerusalem ([2:14-5:42](#))
  - A. Peter preaches at Pentecost ([2:14-41](#))
  - B. The Christian community shares a life in common ([2:42-47](#))
  - C. Peter heals a lame man ([3:1-10](#))
  - D. Peter preaches in the temple square ([3:11-26](#))
  - E. Peter and John witness before the Jewish council ([4:1-22](#))
  - F. The Christian community prays for boldness in witness ([4:23-31](#))
  - G. The community shares together ([4:32-5:16](#))

- H. The apostles appear before the council ([5:17-42](#))
- III. The Witness beyond Jerusalem ([6:1-12:25](#))
- A. Seven chosen to serve the Hellenist widows ([6:1-7](#))
  - B. Stephen bears the ultimate witness ([6:8-8:3](#))
    - 1. The arrest of Stephen ([6:8-15](#))
    - 2. Stephen's address before the Sanhedrin ([7:1-53](#))
    - 3. The martyrdom of Stephen ([7:54-8:3](#))
  - C. Philip witnesses beyond Jerusalem ([8:4-40](#))
    - 1. Witness to the Samaritans ([8:4-25](#))
    - 2. Witness to an Ethiopian eunuch ([8:26-40](#))
  - D. The conversion of Saul ([9:1-31](#))
    - 1. Saul's encounter with Christ ([9:1-9](#))
    - 2. Saul's encounter with Ananias ([9:10-19a](#))
    - 3. Saul's witness in Damascus and Jerusalem ([9:19b-31](#))
  - E. Peter preaches in the coastal towns ([9:32-11:18](#))
    - 1. Healing of Aeneas and Dorcas ([9:32-43](#))
    - 2. Conversion of Cornelius ([10:1-48](#))
    - 3. Peter's testimony in Jerusalem ([11:1-18](#))
  - F. The Antioch church witnesses to Gentiles ([11:19-26](#))
  - G. The offering for Jerusalem ([11:27-30](#))
  - H. The Jerusalem church is persecuted ([12:1-25](#))
    - 1. The death of James ([12:1-5](#))
    - 2. Peter's deliverance from prison ([12:6-19](#))
    - 3. The death of Herod Agrippa I ([12:20-25](#))
- IV. The Witness in Cyprus and Southern Galatia ([13:1-14:28](#))
- A. The Antioch church commissions Paul and Barnabas ([13:1-3](#))
  - B. Paul and Barnabas witness on Cyprus ([13:4-12](#))
  - C. Paul preaches in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch ([13:13-41](#))
  - D. Paul turns to the Gentiles ([13:42-52](#))
  - E. Paul and Barnabas are rejected at Iconium ([14:1-7](#))
  - F. The two missionaries witness in Lystra ([14:8-23](#))
  - G. Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch ([14:24-28](#))
- V. The Jerusalem Council ([15:1-35](#))
- A. The circumcision party criticizes the Gentile mission ([15:1-5](#))
  - B. Peter defends Paul ([15:6-11](#))
  - C. James proposes a solution ([15:12-21](#))
  - D. A letter is sent to Antioch ([15:22-35](#))
- VI. The Witness in Greece ([15:36-18:22](#))
- A. Paul and Barnabas differ over Mark ([15:36-41](#))
  - B. Timothy joins Paul and is circumcised ([16:1-5](#))
  - C. Paul is called to Macedonia ([16:6-10](#))



- D. Paul witnesses in Philippi ([16:11-40](#))
    - 1. Conversion of Lydia ([16:11-15](#))
    - 2. Imprisonment of Paul and Silas ([16:16-24](#))
    - 3. Conversion of the jailer ([16:25-34](#))
    - 4. Release of Paul and Silas ([16:35-40](#))
  - E. Paul witnesses in Thessalonica ([17:1-9](#))
  - F. Paul witnesses in Berea ([17:10-15](#))
  - G. Paul witnesses in Athens ([17:16-34](#))
    - 1. Witness in the marketplace ([17:16-21](#))
    - 2. Witness before the Areopagus ([17:22-34](#))
  - H. Paul witnesses in Corinth ([18:1-22](#))
- VII. The Witness in Ephesus ([18:23-21:16](#))
- A. Priscilla and Aquila instruct Apollos ([18:23-28](#))
  - B. Paul encounters disciples of John ([19:1-10](#))
  - C. Paul encounters false religion at Ephesus ([19:11-22](#))
  - D. Paul experiences violent opposition at Ephesus ([19:23-41](#))
  - E. Paul completes his ministry in Greece ([20:1-6](#))
  - F. Paul travels to Miletus ([20:7-16](#))
  - G. Paul addresses the Ephesian elders at Miletus ([20:17-35](#))
  - H. Paul journeys to Jerusalem ([20:36-21:16](#))
- VIII. The Arrest in Jerusalem ([21:17-23:35](#))
- A. Paul participates in a Nazirite ceremony ([21:17-26](#))
  - B. An angry mob attacks Paul ([21:27-39](#))
  - C. Paul addresses the Jewish crowd ([21:40-22:21](#))
  - D. Paul reveals his Roman citizenship ([22:22-29](#))
  - E. Paul appears before the Sanhedrin ([22:30-23:11](#))
  - F. Zealous Jews plot against Paul ([23:12-22](#))
  - G. Paul is delivered to the governor Felix ([23:23-35](#))
- IX. The Witness in Caesarea ([24:1-26:32](#))
- A. Paul appears before Felix ([24:1-27](#))
  - B. Paul appeals to Caesar ([25:1-12](#))
  - C. Festus presents the case to King Agrippa II ([25:13-22](#))
  - D. Paul witnesses to Agrippa II ([25:23-26:32](#))
- X. The Witness in Rome ([27:1-28:31](#))
- A. Paul journeys to Rome by sea ([27:1-44](#))
  - B. Paul witnesses on Malta ([28:1-10](#))
  - C. Paul arrives in Rome ([28:11-16](#))
  - D. Paul witnesses to the Jews in Rome ([28:17-31](#))



## FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

**BIBLE STUDY FOCUS** – “The Church the World Needs”

**MAIN TEXT:** Acts 17:22-32

### Instructions for Small Group Time:

Option 1: Send the main text to small group members so they can read it ahead of time.

Option 2: Read the text together when you meet

Basic Bible Study Practices:

1. As people read the text, ask them to pay attention to key words
2. As people read the text have them highlight key words, people, and places
3. As people read the text have them pay attention to repetition of key terms, ideas, and people
4. If people are given the opportunity to read the text ahead of small group time, have them read it at least twice so they become familiar with its contents.

### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Read Acts 17:22-32.
2. What are some specific questions or themes that stick out to you about this passage? Take a few minutes and discuss them as a group.
3. What are some of the examples of religion being a hinderance to true relationship with God?
4. Do you find yourself struggling with being “religious”? In what ways? Where do you think those mentalities or habits came from?
5. How is being devoted to Christ different than just being religious? Can a person be both? (Try to use Scripture to support your answers)
6. As Christians, how do we apply Acts 17:22-32 to the world of “Christianity” that we live in?\* And how do we use these verses to guard our own hearts against becoming religious?

\*American Christianity can be a religion for some people too. There are so many people who claim to be “Christians” because they go to church, or have some knowledge of God and the Bible, but they do not live a life that reflects an intimate relationship with Jesus.

## Extra Resources

The Bible Project – Part 2 of The Book of Acts: <https://youtu.be/Z-17KxpiLOQ>

<https://youtu.be/fglSbcGSr3A>

Tony Merida Chapel Sermon: <https://youtu.be/CojoX5LLJg8>