



THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Book of Acts

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SNAP SHOT OF ACTS

- **Purpose:** To give an accurate account of the birth and growth of the Christian church.
- **Author:** Luke; a physician and historian (according to scholars and church tradition).
- **Recipient/s:** Theophilus and people everywhere. Theophilus was probably a Roman official of high rank, as indicated by the title “most excellent” (see Luke 1-4). His name means “lover of God.”¹
- **Date:** Written approximately A.D. 61.²
- **Setting:** Acts records the first three decades of church history. It takes place in the context of the Roman Empire, the largest empire the Western world had yet known.³ Acts provides the background and location for many of the letters that make up the rest of the New Testament.⁴
- **Key People:** Peter, John, James, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, Cornelius, James (Jesus’ brother), Timothy, Lydia, Silas, Titus, Apollos, Agabus, Ananias, Felix, Festus, Agrippa, and Luke.⁵
- **Key Places:** Jerusalem, Samaria, Lydda, Joppa, Antioch in Syria, Cyprus, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Caesarea, Malta, and Rome.⁶

The opening paragraph of The Book of Acts makes it clear that it is a sequel. Part One was The Gospel of Luke, which gave an account of Jesus’ life, miraculous ministry, claims and teachings, the training of his disciples, and his death and resurrection. In Part Two, Luke writes about the continuation of what Jesus “began to do and teach.”

Acts picks up where The Gospel of Luke left off. Each of the four Gospels concludes with the resurrection of Jesus, after which Jesus gave the disciples what has come to be known as “The Great Commission,” to take his message to the world. Hence “Acts” is the apostles “acting out” The Great Commission.

Key Points in The Book of Acts:

Everything is based on Jesus’ resurrection. Without it, Christianity would not exist today. In fact, it would have never begun.

Through the Holy Spirit, God’s presence and power is at work in and through us today.

It is the responsibility of followers of Jesus to spread his message to the entire world

Christians will inevitably face persecution, but this does not compare to the hope that awaits them, as Jesus promises to return and dwell among us in the new heavens and earth.

READ ACTS 1:1-14 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

1:1, What is the significance of the words “began,” and “do,” and “teach”?

1:3, Jesus “appeared” to the disciples and gave them “many convincing proofs that he was alive.” Considering what Jesus wanted the disciples to do with their lives, why was it necessary for them to be utterly convinced that he was alive?

How does Jesus’ resurrection set him apart from the founders of other religions?

1:6, What do you suppose the disciples had in mind when they asked Jesus if the time had come to “restore the kingdom to Israel”?

What do you think Jesus had in mind? (see John 18:36)

1:8, This verse has been called the theme of Acts. Why did Jesus want them to start witnessing in Jerusalem and work their way out in ever-widening circles?

How is this strategy an example for us as we spread the message of Jesus today?

The Holy Spirit is mentioned in verses 4, 5, and 8 (and more than fifty times in Acts). What words stand out to you that describe the Spirit’s role and provision?

1:9, Read Daniel 7:13-14 and discuss what the clouds symbolize regarding his authority.

1:10-11, What does it look like for us to live with anticipation of Jesus’ return?

1:14, The apostles and other believers prayed together in community. What do you think drove them to intense prayer at this time?

How has this Bible study challenged you, convicted you, and/or comforted you?

PRAYER

Praise God for sending Jesus and His Spirit to make salvation to be possible!

Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in you and through you.

Pray for intentionality in sharing your faith where you are, with an eye for the nations.

Pray for a daily anticipation of Jesus' return.

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

Read the rest of Acts 1 which we did not cover in this lesson. (Acts 1:15-26)

Identify anything from Acts 1:1-14 that intrigues you, makes you feel uncomfortable, puzzles you, or resonates with you. Consider examining that further.

To learn more about the promise of the indwelling Spirit, read what Jesus said in John 7:37-39; 14:16-17, 26; and 16:5-15.

Works Cited: 1, 2, 3. Halley's Bible Handbook, page 711. 4, 5, 6. Young Believer Field Guide, page 225.

REVIEW OF ACTS 1

1. How does Acts 1 overlap with the Gospels?
2. How many days was Jesus on earth after his resurrection, and what did he do during that time?
3. What verse has been said to be the theme of The Book of Acts?
4. What did Jesus say to his disciples about the Holy Spirit?
5. How many followers did Jesus have at this point and what did they do after he ascended into Heaven?

INTRODUCTION

It's easy to wake up in the morning and go about our day without giving thought to the significant events in world history that involved billions of people who have lived and died on this same planet. It's hard for us to appreciate the before-and-after impact of events such as the rise and fall of ancient empires like Egypt and Rome; time periods like the Renaissance; wars like WWI, WWII and the US Civil War; inventions and discoveries like the printing press, radio communication, electricity, combustion engines, and even the internet.

Among these world-changing moments which we take for granted, there is the founding of Christianity. Simply put, the world would not be the same if Jesus had never been born. The impact of this one solitary life and of those who have followed him for two thousand years has influenced nearly every area of life, including: social reform and education, art and culture, law and government, science and medicine, holidays, and even the way we keep time (B.C. and A.D.). The World Book Encyclopedia says of Jesus, "Even many people who are not Christians believe that he was a great and wise teacher. He was certainly one of the most influential people who ever lived."

The Book of Acts is a history book which needs to be understood as more than mere sermons, conversions, and missionary journeys. Rather, it must be understood in light of the big picture concerning what God is doing in the world to bring about the restoration of all that was lost because of sin and its curse.

In this study, we are going back to the day, the very moment in history, when Christianity was born (although it's important to note that Christianity can be traced back to the very first man and woman whom God created, as it is a continuation and fulfillment of the Jewish monotheistic worldview).

When Adam and Eve decided to rebel against God, they were turned over to the consequence of their decision: death. However, God's love for His people did not end there. In an effort to rescue people from death, God opened His arms by promising to send a Messiah who would accomplish what it would take in order to make reconciliation with God possible.

Hence, Jesus came and claimed to be that Messiah ("Messiah" is the Hebrew word for "Anointed One"; the Greek word is Christ)¹. The question is, what reasons do we have for believing Jesus is the Messiah?

READ ACTS 2:1-21 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

The Jews of the first century expected God to act in a powerful way to set His people free. The prophets described this in earth-shattering terms that would shake the foundation of the world. Imagine yourself as a news reporter in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. How would you describe what just happened?

v.11, What were people miraculously hearing in their own language?

v.12-13, What can we learn about people based on the different reactions to this event?

NOTE: Peter explained what was happening by appealing to the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy (v.14-21). Incidentally, Jesus prophesied this would happen as well. (see Acts 1:5, 8; Mark 9:1; Luke 24:49)

READ ACTS 2:22-37 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

v.36-37, Peter concluded his message by claiming, "Therefore, God has made Jesus...both Lord and Christ." Their response implied they believed Jesus to be the Messiah. (Our study next week in 2:36-47 will explore the changed lives of about 3,000 Jews who became followers of Jesus that day)

What were the four pieces of evidence Peter appealed to in order to prove Jesus was the Messiah?

v. 25-28, Peter quotes Psalm 16, saying it is a prophecy about Jesus. Even though David wrote the Psalm, what evidence does Peter give that David can't possibly be talking about himself here?

How might the existence of Christianity actually serve as an evidence of Jesus' resurrection?

v.22, With a captive audience, Peter initially addressed the crowd by saying "Listen to this: Jesus..." and expounded from there. This sermon and every other subsequent sermon recorded in The Book of Acts is all about Jesus. What can we learn and apply based on what Peter didn't say?

How has this Bible study challenged you, convicted you, and/or comforted you?

PRAYER

Ask God for eyes to see his “mighty works” all around us, so we can become more worshipful people and shine a spotlight on God for others to see.

Invite the Holy Spirit to work through you in whatever way God sees fit, even miraculously.

Pray for a heightened awareness of the people of other nations who are among us, that we may be intentional to welcome them, befriend them, serve them, and share our faith with them.

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

To learn why we have different languages today, read Genesis 11.

To explore Jesus’ impact, read *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born*, by D. James Kennedy.

To explore messianic prophecy, read *The Case for Christ* (chapter 10), by Lee Strobel.

To explore Jesus’ resurrection, read *The Case for Christ* (chapters 11-14), by Lee Strobel.

Works Cited: 1. Halley’s Bible Handbook, page 488.

REVIEW OF ACTS 2:1-37

6. On what holiday did the first Jews become followers of Jesus?
7. What miracle took place that served to gather an audience for Peter to preach about Jesus?
8. What does the word “Messiah” mean in Hebrew and how is it translated in the Greek?
9. What were the four pieces of evidence Peter appealed to in order to prove Jesus was the Messiah?

INTRODUCTION

The New Testament is made up of 27 books. The first four of those books are four different accounts of the life of Jesus, written by four different people: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books are often referred to as “The Gospels.” Incidentally, Mark introduced his book by stating, “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1, italics mine). It is believed that the word “gospel” means good news. However, to be more specific on the content of that good news, Paul described the saving gospel as being the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

The next book we come to in the New Testament is Acts. “Acts” refers to the “actions” of disciples “acting out” the Great Commission given by Jesus to bring the gospel to the world. Chapter 2 of Acts records the very day in history when Christianity began, as about 3,000 Jews responded to Peter’s message by becoming followers of Jesus.

From there, Acts provides the record of Christianity spreading throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and beyond, including the conversions of Jews and Gentiles. As the apostles went on various missionary journeys, their converts formed the churches that eventually received the letters (a.k.a. epistles) written by the apostles. These letters make up the rest of the New Testament (Romans to Revelation). Hence, the book of Romans was written to the church in Rome; Corinthians to the church in Corinth; Galatians to the churches in Galatia; Ephesians to the church in Ephesus; Philippians to the church in Philippi; Colossians to the church in Colossae; and Thessalonians to the church in Thessalonica. There are also letters addressed to individuals like Titus and Timothy, as well as letters to groups of churches. For example, the book of Revelation addressed “the seven churches in the province of Asia” (Rev. 1:4).

In our last lesson, we took a close look at the message Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. In this lesson, we will look at how Peter’s audience responded to that message.

READ ACTS 2:36-41 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

v.37, While Peter did not mention faith in Jesus as a prerequisite for salvation, how is it inferred?

v.38, Here, Peter teaches how faith in Jesus should be demonstrated. What does it mean to repent?

What does it mean to be baptized?

v.41, What impresses you about the people's response?

READ ACTS 2:42-47 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

v.42, What four things did the first Christians devote themselves to?

What risks does a church face if any one of these four things is neglected?

v.43-47, How else did the early Christians express their faith in practical ways?

NOTE: This communal life of the church was intended to be an extraordinary example of what the Spirit of Christ could do for humanity. This was the model of living that Jesus had taught and lived with His apostles and followers throughout His years of ministry.¹ "The early believers were not Communists. They were "commonists." And there's a big difference. Communism says: What's yours is mine. "Commonism" says: What's mine is yours."²

In what ways have you seen the transforming power of Jesus at work in your life and/or in the lives of others?

How has this Bible study challenged you, convicted you, and/or comforted you?

PRAYER

Thank God for His love and grace that led Him to send Jesus to die for our sins.

Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and transform our lives.

Pray for your church and college ministry to follow the example of the first Christians by meeting the spiritual and physical needs of others.

If you have questions; or have not come to Jesus as your forgiver and leader; or you're already a Christian but are struggling to be faithful; pray for God to do whatever it takes for you to find the answers or strength you need.

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

To explore the subject of baptism, read Mt. 28:19-10; Mk. 16:15-16; Jn. 3:3-6; Rom. 6:3-10; Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:11-12; Tit. 3:3-6; and 1 Pet. 3:21. You can also check out the book, *Understanding Four Views on Baptism*, edited by Paul E. Engle.

To explore the subject of the new covenant: Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27; Heb. 9:11-15.

Works Cited: 1. Halley's Bible Handbook, p.726-727; 2. Jon Courson's Application Commentary, p.62

REVIEW OF ACTS 2:36-47

10. About how many Jews became followers of Jesus and were baptized on the day of Pentecost?
11. What four things did these new Christians devote themselves to?

INTRODUCTION

“Jesus has returned to heaven before the very eyes of the astounded disciples. The Holy Spirit has descended upon the earth with great power and in ways that cannot be explained away by the religious leaders. Thousands are coming to Jesus. The believers of Jesus are together in love, fellowship, and meeting each other’s needs. Instead of the world rejoicing and embracing with open arms all the good things God is doing, resistance begins to build.”¹

In this lesson, as we study the Apostle Peter’s second sermon, let’s be on the lookout for examples we can apply to our lives as we seek to know and share Jesus today.

READ ACTS 3:1-10 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

What can happen when Christians only care about people’s spiritual needs but not physical?

What can happen when Christians only care about people’s physical needs but not spiritual?

NOTE: We must interpret the Great Commission in light of the two Greatest Commandments. (see Matthew 22:37-40; 28:18-20)

3:2-9, In what ways are we like (and should be like) the lame man who was healed?

READ ACTS 3:11-26 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

3:12, What can we learn from Peter that applies to sharing our faith?

3:15-18, Just as in Peter’s first sermon (Acts 2), what four evidences does he appeal to in order to prove Jesus is the Messiah?

3:19,26, Why is it important that sin and repentance be emphasized when sharing the gospel?

3:19-21, What blessings follow repentance?

READ ACTS 4:1-22 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

4:12, “Acts 4:12 has been unpopular within the politically correct climate of the last few generations in the Western world. ‘No other name’? People say this is arrogant or exclusive; and so it can be if Christians use the name of Jesus to further their own power or prestige.”² How is every worldview—including atheists, relativists and universalists—actually a claim of exclusivity?

4:13, How were Peter and John described?

What about this description might apply to you as you share your faith?

4:18-20, What example is there for us today in Peter’s response to being told not to speak about Jesus?

Why is it significant to note that Peter appeals to Genesis, Deuteronomy, 1 Samuel, and Psalms in this one occasion? What can we learn from this?

PRAYER

Thank God for making forgiveness possible through Jesus.

If you’ve been neglecting the spiritual or physical needs of others, pray a prayer of confession.

Pray for enthusiasm and gratitude like the lame man who was healed.

Invite God to use you in any way, even miraculously like he did with Peter.

Pray for eyes to see opportunities to share your faith; for humility; for boldness; and for a new commitment to reading God’s Word.

Pray for your friends who are far from God.

Pray for a daily anticipation of Jesus' return and the restoration of all things.

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

To learn how the church responded to this persecution, read the rest of Acts 4.

To explore the subject of miracles, read chapter 1 of *The Jesus Legend*, by Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd.

To explore the subject of the alleged "Christian Conspiracy," read chapter 7 of *Cold-Case Christianity*, by J Warner Wallace.

To explore the subject of evangelism, read *Becoming A Contagious Christian* by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg.

Works Cited: 1. John Stott, Acts, page 21. 2. N.T. Wright, Acts, page 28.

REVIEW OF ACTS 3:1–4:22

What was the first recorded miracle performed by the apostles after the church was established?

As of Acts 4, how many Jews had become followers of Jesus?

INTRODUCTION

“As soon as the Spirit came upon the church, Satan launched a ferocious counterattack. While it is true that his first and crudest tactic is physical violence...his second is even more cunning: moral corruption and compromise. This form of attack makes sense because Christ is exalted by the integrity of his church. The early church was not exempt. The first example in Scripture of the attempt to insinuate evil into the interior life of the church is the story of Ananias and Sapphira.”¹

READ ACTS 4:32 - 5:11 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

What was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira? Why do you think Luke includes this story in his history of the early church?²

NOTE: “Their death was an act of God, not of Peter, and was evidently intended to be an example for all time of God’s displeasure at the sins of greed and religious hypocrisy. God does not strike us dead every time we are guilty of them. If He did, people would be falling down dead in the churches all the time. But the incident shows God’s attitude toward a wrong heart.”³

What does this story teach us about the spiritual battle we are in? How is this like the way he attacks believers today?⁴

Why does the media seem to love stories about Christians who are revealed as hypocrites?⁵

What is an appropriate response to someone who points to this story as an example of why they don’t want to have anything to do with Christianity?⁶

READ ACTS 5:12-33 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

“After Pentecost, the message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ spread rapidly in Jerusalem as Spirit-empowered witnesses shared the gospel... Signs and wonders accompanied the preaching of the Word, and no one could deny that God was at work in a new way among His ancient people. But not everybody was happy with the success of the church. The “religious establishment” that opposed the ministry of Jesus, and then crucified him, took the same hostile approach toward the apostles... [Jesus said] “They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think he offers God service” (John 15:20; 16:2). These words were beginning to be fulfilled.”⁷

“Throughout the world today, thousands are suffering and dying for Jesus. During the twentieth century, more Christians have been killed...than in all the other centuries combined. Where there is life and growth, Satan will attack.”⁸

Why is it important for us to identify whether our hang-ups are rational or emotional?

READ ACTS 5:34-41 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

NOTE: “Gamaliel [was] the grandson of the revered rabbi Hillel.”⁹ “[He]...was the most famous rabbi of his day. It was he at whose feet Saul (later called by his [Greek] name, Paul) had been brought up (22:3). Young Saul may have been present in this meeting of the Sanhedrin.”¹⁰

What is commendable about Gamaliel’s response to the situation, and how can we follow his example in our own search for truth?

Describe the effect of persecution on the apostles.¹¹

While our lives may not be at risk because of our faith, we can experience degrees of opposition and discrimination. Read Matthew 5:10-12 and discuss what reason we have to rejoice when we are persecuted.

Read Hebrews 13:3 and discuss what it means to “remember” the persecuted church. How might this command be mutually beneficial?

PRAYER

Praise God for the faithfulness of the early church and those gone before us.

Pray that we may be humble, honest people; and that God forgives any hint of hypocrisy in us.

Pray for an awareness of the spiritual battle all around us; that we be intentional in our faith.

Pray for the people around the world who are both experiencing persecution and doing the persecution; that God would intervene and provide strength and relief.

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

To explore the topic of spiritual warfare, read *Lord Foulgrin's Letters*, by Randy Alcorn. Also, read: Mt. 4:1-11; 13:36-43; Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:3,14; Eph. 6:11-12; 1 Thess. 2:18; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 2:10; 12:10.

To explore the topic of persecution, read *Safely Home*, by Randy Alcorn. Also, read: Mt. 5:10-11,43-45; 10:17-18,21-22; Lk. 12:8-9; 21:12-15; Jn. 15:18 - 16:4; 16:2-4; Rom. 5:35-37; 12:19-21; 2 Cor. 4:17-18; Phil. 1:19-21; Heb. 10:32-39; 12:1-3; 1 Pet 3:14-15; Rev. 2:10; 12:11.

Works Cited: 1. John Stott, *Acts*, pg 27; 2. Warren Wiersbe, *Acts*, pg 47; 3. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, pg 730; 4. Warren Wiersbe, *Acts*, pg 44; 5. Warren Wiersbe, *Acts*, pg 48; 6. Warren Wiersbe, *Acts*, pg 48; 7. Warren Wiersbe, *Acts*, pg 48-49; 8. John Stott, *Acts*, pg 27; 9. John MacArthur, *Acts*, pg 21; 10. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, pg 730; 11. John Stott, *Acts*, pg 30

REVIEW OF ACTS 4:32–5:41

- What married couple tested God through their hypocrisy, and how did God judge them?
- How did the apostles escape prison?
- Which Pharisee warned the Sanhedrin not to put the apostles to death? Why?

INTRODUCTION

Acts 6-7 primarily focus on the historic account of one particular follower of Jesus, named Stephen. He is described as “a man full of God’s grace and power” (6:8). The religious establishment was once again threatened. Thus, when Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin (which was the Jewish Supreme Court), they secretly persuaded false witnesses to create a case against him. “Stephen’s speech in chapter 7 is the longest in the book of Acts. In it we see how everything God did in the Old Testament pointed toward what he would one day do in Christ.”¹ Stephen concluded his defense by boldly pointing out that the Jewish leaders were guilty, having “betrayed and murdered [the Righteous One] (Jesus)” (7:52). When they heard this, they dragged him out of the city and killed him by stoning.

“In his continued warfare against the church the devil finally overreached himself. His attack had the opposite effect to what he intended. Instead of smothering the gospel, persecution succeeded only in spreading it. Beginning the day of Stephen’s death, persecution broke out with the ferocity of a sudden storm. Saul, [an accomplice to] Stephen’s stoning (7:58; 8:1), now began to destroy the church, [“going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.” (8:3)] This great persecution led to great dispersion: all except the apostles were scattered [and] those who scattered preached the word wherever they went.”²

“In [chapter 8], the command to be witnesses in Judea and Samaria (see Acts 1:8) is fulfilled.”³ More specifically, Luke records the conversion of Samaritans and a eunuch from Ethiopia, at the preaching of Philip.

READ ACTS 9:1-22 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

What prompted Saul’s continued zeal? Why was he so angry with the Christ-followers?⁴

“This was not the first time Saul had been presented with Jesus Christ. According to Paul’s own words, Jesus said to him, ‘It is hard for you to kick against the goads’ (Acts 26:14), a Greek proverb describing the useless resistance of an oxen who is being broken in.”⁵ “The ‘goads’ were hard spikes mounted to the front of an ox-drawn wagon, meant to keep the ox from kicking against the wagon it was pulling. An unusually stubborn ox would become infuriated with the pain

inflicted by these goads and kick again and again, doing further damage to himself. Jesus was charging Saul with being just such an ox.”⁶

Share a story of a time when God might have tried to get your attention but you were resistant.

While people become followers of Jesus everyday around the world, what’s especially powerful about the conversion stories of famous people, who are highly educated, or atheists, or leaders of other religions, and/or notoriously antagonistic to Christianity?

How does the conversion of Saul serve as an evidence for the resurrection of Christ?

“Show a man his failures without Jesus, and the result will be found in the roadside gutter. Give a man religion without reminding him of his filth, and the result will be arrogance in a three-piece suit. But get the two in the same heart—get sin to meet Savior and Savior to meet sin—and the result just might be another Pharisee turned preacher who sets the world on fire.”⁷

Read 1 Timothy 1:12-16 and discuss what this passage teaches us about God and about people?

Why is the sharing of one’s faith a natural byproduct of the converting of one’s faith?

“The story [of Saul’s conversion] was so important to Luke that he tells it no fewer than three times – here in Acts 9 and then again from Paul’s own lips in chapters 22 and 26.”⁸ Paul uses his testimony as a way to share his faith.

What is unique and particularly powerful about sharing or hearing one’s testimony?

PRAYER

Thank God for His patience and many attempts at getting our attention, that He might exercise His saving power in our lives through Jesus.

Ask God to work in your life and in the lives of people you know who are far from Him, that He

would do whatever it takes to open hearts to His love and truth.

Invite God to use you as an instrument in His kingdom, through your experiences, personality, talents, passions, and testimony, despite your weakness.

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

Read the parts of Acts we skipped over or didn't not complete in this lesson: Acts 6-8; 9:23-43.

To read the passages in Acts where Paul retells his conversion story, read Acts 22 and 26.

To explore the topic of Jesus' resurrection appearance, read chapter 13, "The Evidence of Appearances," of *The Case for Christ*, by Lee Strobel.

Works Cited: 1. *Think Reference Collection, The Bible*, pg. 205; 2. *John Stott, Acts*, pg. 39; 3. *John Stott, Acts*, pg. 40; 4. *Warren Wiersbe, Acts*, pg. 61; 5. *John Stott, Acts*, pg. 46; 6. *R.C. Sproul, What's in the Bible*, pg. 328; 7. *Max Lucado, Acts*, pg. 67; 8. *N.T. Wright, Acts*, pg. 48.

REVIEW OF ACTS 6:1-9:22

- Who was the first Christian martyr and how was he killed?
- What did the church do immediately after the first Christian was martyred?
- Who appeared to Saul of Tarsus?
- What did God ask Ananias to do to Saul?

INTRODUCTION

Immediately after becoming a follower of Jesus, Saul (aka Paul) redirected his passion and went straight to the synagogues to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah.

“Paul spent many days in Damascus preaching Christ (9:23). Then the Jews tried to kill him. He went away and spent three years in Arabia and Damascus before returning to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18), where he stayed 15 days. The Jews in Jerusalem also tried to kill him (9:29), so he returned to Tarsus (9:30).”¹

Acts 9:31 says, “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.”

Peter went to Lydda where he healed a paralytic named Aeneas (9:35), and then to Joppa where he raised Tabitha from the dead (9:42). These miracles influenced many to turn to the Lord.

“From the beginning of time, the Lord’s plan included the entire world. When he revealed himself to Abraham and his descendants, God planned for them to be a light to the nations. After struggling with idolatry throughout their first fifteen hundred years, the Jews basically decided the only way to stay pure was to avoid contact with the Gentile world. The Pharisees, with their extra rules on what constituted “clean” and “unclean,” solidified this conviction. Jesus didn’t share this attitude. He healed the servant of a Roman officer and cast a demon out of the daughter of a woman from Tyre (in modern Lebanon). Although he made it clear he had come for the lost sheep of Israel, he also hinted that eventually the entire world would come to him. That time arrives in these chapters.”²

READ ACTS 10:1-33 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

Who was Cornelius and how was he described? (vv.1-2, 22)

People often ask, “If Jesus is the only way to have a friendship with God, what will happen to those who haven’t heard of Jesus?” How does this story provide at least one possible answer?

Do you have a story of God working in your life through the prayers and influence of a particular person? If so, please share.

READ ACTS 10:34-48 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

Read vv.34-35. While some people interpret Peter's statement to mean that all religions are basically the same and lead to God, how does the rest of Peter's message suggest otherwise (vv.36-43)?

As in Acts 2 and 3, Peter once again appealed to the same four evidences that prove Jesus is the Messiah. What are they?

Though Cornelius was a good person, he was still not "saved" until he heard and responded to the gospel of Jesus (see 11:14). How does this go against what most people believe concerning the basis of salvation?

"Psalmists and prophets foretold the day when God's Messiah would inherit the nations, the Lord's servant would be their light, all nations would 'flow' to the Lord's house, and God would pour out his Spirit on all humankind."³

"In Jesus the Messiah of Israel, God has broken down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles, humiliating both categories (Jews, because they apparently lost their privileged position; Gentiles, because they have to acknowledge the Jewish Messiah) in order to reveal God's mercy to both."⁴

How has this Bible study challenged you, convicted you, and/or comforted you?

PRAYER

"Ask God to open your eyes and your heart where you have been closed to outsiders. Pray that you will see people as God sees them, as beloved by God and in need of the gospel. Thank God for the people who first brought the message to those of your ethnic background, whether it was many centuries ago or recently."⁵

Ask God to forgive you for any hint of impartiality or racist attitude in your heart.

Pray that we not divide over trivial things, but that we strive to keep Jesus at the center of our message and the basis of our unity.

Pray God will use you to go to those needing to hear, and pray God sends others to those you cannot reach.

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

Read Acts 11:1-18 to discover how the church initially responded to the conversion of Cornelius.

To explore Christian unity, read: John 17; Romans 14:1-15:13; Ephesians 4:3-13.

Works Cited: 1. Halley's Bible Handbook, pg. 735; 2. Think Reference Collection, The Bible, pg. 205-206; 3. John Stott, Acts, pg. 51; 4. N.T. Wright, Acts, pg. 56; 5. N.T. Wright, Acts, pg. 57.

REVIEW OF ACTS 10:1-48

Who did God first send to a Gentile household in order to share the message of Jesus?

What was the name of the first Gentile convert to Christianity?

What phenomenon happened to these Gentiles and how did they respond in faith?

INTRODUCTION

“With what took place in the home of Cornelius, Gentiles were admitted as full members of the new and rapidly developing Jesus family without having to become Jews in the process. Luke gives the story several repetitions. We can only conclude that for Luke the admission of Gentiles into God’s people, without needing to take on the marks of Jewish identity (that is, circumcision and food taboos), was one of the central and most important things he wanted to convey.”¹

“[Acts 13-14] chronicle the first of Paul’s missionary journeys. He goes along with Barnabas, the man who welcomed him when all the other disciples were afraid of him. Chapter 13 contains one of Paul’s longest recorded sermons. Luke includes it here to give us a taste of what Paul said when he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues. Like Peter and Stephen, Paul shows how Jesus fulfills the promises of God made throughout the Old Testament. All of these men saw Christ’s work as an extension of what God had done before, rather than a radical change of his eternal plans.”²

READ ACTS 15:1-5 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

Read Acts 14:27 and 15:3. What trend do you see in Paul’s mission work? What can we learn from his example and how can we apply it today?

vv.1-5, What controversy arose in this early church?³

READ ACTS 15:6-12 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

vv.7-9, How does Peter present the case for his viewpoint?⁴

v.11, What final statement did Peter make to the council about salvation?⁵

“Grace” is mentioned 11 times in the book of Acts. What is the definition of grace?

READ ACTS 15:13-21 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

In and of themselves, traditions are not wrong. In fact, it is impossible to avoid them. While our traditions have the potential to be a blessing, how do they also have the potential to become detrimental?

“Paul’s letter to the Galatians was likely written around this moment in the story Luke is telling, in other words, before the great Council of Acts 15.”⁶ Read Galatians 1:6-9; 2:21; 5:4, and discuss the consequences and implications of adding to the gospel things people must do and believe.

What traditions or doctrines have you encountered which religious people have added to the gospel?

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul touched on the attitude we should have in situations in which we must “bear with one another” (i.e., in moments of conflict). Read Ephesians 4:1-2 and discuss what this attitude should be.

With that attitude in place, Paul says we should “keep the unity of the Spirit” (4:3). What should Christian unity be based on and what does it mean to “keep” it?

How has this Bible study challenged you, convicted you, and/or comforted you?

PRAYER

Thank God for His undeserved kindness (grace) made available through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

On behalf of yourself and the church, ask God to forgive us for the times we’ve added our traditions to the gospel and tried to earn His acceptance; and for the times we have failed to keep the unity of the Spirit; and for the times we have made it hard for others turning to God.

Pray for greater humility, gentleness, and love as we inevitably face situations in which we will need to “bear with one another” and resolve conflicts.

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

Read Acts 11-14, which we skipped. Also, to see what the apostles and the Jerusalem church did next, read the rest of Acts 15.

Works Cited: 1. N.T. Wright, *Acts*, page 58; 2. *Think Reference Collection, The Bible*, pages 206-207; 3. Max Lucado, *Acts*, page 84; 4. N.T. Wright, *Acts*, page 76; 5. Max Lucado, *Acts*, page 85; 6. N.T. Wright, *Acts*, page 74.

REVIEW OF ACTS 15

What controversy arose in the early church that led to the convening of a council in Jerusalem made up of apostles and elders?

Peter's appeal to God's grace influenced the council's decision. What is the definition of "grace"?

INTRODUCTION

"[Acts 16-18] detail Paul's second missionary journey. Barnabas has gone off to lead a separate mission team, and now Paul's main partner is a man named Silas. Early in their trip they meet the teenaged Timothy, and he joins their party. Eventually Luke too signs on."¹

READ ACTS 17:10-15 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

v.11, Why is a "more noble character" possessed by those who investigate the claims behind particular worldviews?

What makes for an ideal investigation today?

READ ACTS 17:16-21 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTION

NOTE: "Athens was the home of the great philosophers of the golden age of Greece—Pericles, Socrates, Demosthenes, Plato, [Aristotle]—and remained a center of philosophy, literature, science, and art. It boasted the greatest university of the ancient world and was the meeting place of the world's intelligentsia. It was also a pluralistic city, where many gods were worshiped side by side."²

v.16, Athens was "full of idols." Though we often think of idols as primitive statues and sculptures, there are many sophisticated idols too. "An idol is a God substitute. Any person or thing that occupies the place which God should occupy is an idol."³ What have you seen idolized?

READ ACTS 17:22-34 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

vv.16 and 22, What effect did Paul's "walk around" Athens have on him, and why?

How might we experience the same feeling and response today?

v.22, Paul opened his address at the meeting of the Areopagus by commended the Athenians as being “very religious” people. What does his approach model to us as we consider influencing those in our culture with the message of Jesus?⁴

Paul was wise to take what was in the marketplace (an idol to an “unknown god” in v.23) and quote the popular poets of their day (v.28) in order to turn people’s attention to the true God revealed in Jesus. What would it look like for us to take this approach today?

vv. 26-27, Read again Acts 17:26-27 and then John 17:3, and discuss what is the purpose of life according to the Christian worldview.

vv.24-31, Paul explained what made God different from other gods by proclaiming God as Creator, Sustainer, Ruler, and Father; and Jesus as Judge. In light of these truths, what did Paul encourage them to do, and why?

Truth is not determined by majority vote. What examples can you think of throughout history of predominant cultural beliefs that were proved to be wrong?

How should we handle the commonly accepted beliefs of our day in light of the track record of human mistakes?

Read Colossians 2:8 and discuss what it looks like to “see to it...”?

PRAYER

Pray for people who are aware that there is “an unknown god” but do not know who he is or how to find him. Pray that the Holy Spirit will enlighten them with the knowledge that leads to faith. Pray that the Spirit will use you to be a channel for the knowledge of Christ.⁵

Ask God to give you eyes to see where he is being replaced by things and philosophies and to respond to what you see with a passion to proclaim truth and to honor his name.⁶

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

Read the portions of Acts we skipped over: 16:1–17:15.

To explore the topic of worldviews and philosophies, read *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message*, by Ravi Zacharias, and/or *Lifeviews*, by R.C. Sproul.

To explore the topic of idols, read *CAMPUS gODS: Exposing the Idols that Can Derail Your Present and Destroy Your Future*, by Guy Chmielecki, and/or *Gods at War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Heart*, by Kyle Idleman.

Works Cited: 1. *Think Reference Collection, The Bible*, page 207; 2. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, page 745; 3. *John Stott, Acts*, page 76; 4. *John Stott, Acts*, page 78; 5. *N.T. Wright, Acts*, page 88; 6. *John Stott, Acts*, page 80.

REVIEW OF ACTS 17

Who was of “more noble character” because of their investigative response to Paul’s message?

When Paul spoke to the Athenian philosophers in the Areopagus, what did he use as a segue to preach about God as Creator, Sustainer, Ruler, and Father, and Jesus as Judge?

INTRODUCTION

“Ephesus [which was] a magnificent city with a population of almost a quarter of a million people, was located at the center of the Imperial Highway from Rome to the East, the backbone of the Roman Empire.”¹

“Ephesus was the center of worship of Artemis, also known as Diana. A fertility goddess, Artemis’s statues showed her covered with breasts to nurse and care for all of nature. The largest and greatest temple to Artemis sat in Ephesus. [The temple was] one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In the center sat a shrine hidden by curtains. Within the center shrine the Ephesians guarded an ancient image of the goddess that was said to have fallen from heaven. Most likely a meteorite, this relic set Ephesus apart, making it the place to which worshipers made pilgrimages.”²

“The temple of Artemis was massive and her cult—run entirely by female officials—was the religious center of the whole area. Images of Artemis, large and small, dominated the city. Archaeologists have found dozens of them.”³

“Artemis wasn’t just spiritually important to Ephesus. Tourists flocking to her temple helped feed the local economy. Souvenir shops sold small silver reproductions of Artemis herself. When more and more people turned to Christ, demand for Artemis products dropped, and the economy suffered.”⁴

READ ACTS 19:8-10 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

Paul didn’t just invite people to church. He took the gospel to the secular world. He didn’t just appeal to people’s emotions for a decision without an adequate basis of understanding. Paul taught, reasoned and tried to persuade.⁵ What can we do so that our evangelism is not superficial?

READ ACTS 19:11-22 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

Why couldn’t the Jews successfully exorcise the evil spirits?⁶

How might the report of Sceva's seven sons have been influential in the sorcerer's believing in Jesus?

vv.18-20, What impresses you about the conversion of these sorcerers?

READ ACTS 19:23-28 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

vv.23-27, Why do the silversmiths see Paul and his message as a threat?⁷

Does the gospel present a similar threat today? If so, how?⁸

Read Hebrews 10:32-39 and discuss its relevance to the topic at hand. What examples are mentioned that we should follow? What promises are mentioned that we should trust?

READ ACTS 19:29-41 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

As you read the following observations about the riot, discuss what characteristics you see in our culture today as it pertains to what people believe and why they believe it.

“The assembly was in confusion: some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there” (v.32).

“They shouted in unison for about two hours” (v.34).

“Doesn't all the world know that... [the image of Artemis] fell from heaven?” “These facts are undeniable” (vv.35-36).

How has this Bible study challenged you, convicted you, and/or comforted you?

PRAYER

Like Paul, pray for boldness, patience, and obedience to share Jesus with those far from God.

Like the sorcerers, pray for humility to confess sins and forsake anything that holds us back.

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

Read what we skipped: Acts 18:1-19:10; as well as the book of Ephesians.

Works Cited: 1. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, page 747; 2. *Think Reference Collection, The Bible*, page 207-208; 3. *N.T. Wright, Acts*, page 97; 4. *Think Reference Collection, The Bible*, page 208; 5. *John Stott, Acts*, page 84; 6. *The Wiersbe Bible Study Series, Acts*, page 113; 7. *N.T. Wright, Acts*, page 96; 8. *N.T. Wright, Acts*, page 96

REVIEW OF ACTS 19

- What happened to Sceva’s seven sons when they tried to exorcise evil spirits in Jesus’ name?
- What did sorcerers throw into the fire when they believed in Jesus, and how much was it worth?
- What two names did people call the goddess who was worshiped in Ephesus?

INTRODUCTION

After leaving Ephesus, Paul stayed in Greece for about a year. During that time, he wrote several letters, including a letter to the Christians in Ephesus, entitled Ephesians. The apostle Paul was now on his third missionary journey and headed toward Jerusalem. On his way, he summoned the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him at Miletus.

READ ACTS 20:17-32 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

Listed below are some of the powerful words Paul spoke in his final goodbye to the church leaders from Ephesus. Beside each phrase, indicate whether it challenges you, convicts you, and/or comforts you. Then explain why.

#	Paul’s Statement	Challenge	Convict	Comfort	Why?
1	“You know how I lived the whole time I was with you” (v.18)				
2	“I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews” (v.19)				
3	“I have declared...they must turn to God...and have faith our Lord” (v.21)				
4	“compelled by the Spirit, I am going” (v.22)				
5	“I am going...not knowing what will happen to me” (v.22)				
6	“I consider my life worth nothing to me” (v.24)				
7	“if only I may finish the race and complete the task” (v.24)				
8	“I am innocent of the blood of all men” (v.26)				
9	“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock” (v.28)				
10	“the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (v.28)				
11	“savage wolves will come...Even from your own number” (v.29-30)				
12	“men will...distort the truth in order to draw away disciples” (v.30)				
13	“the word...can build you up and give you an inheritance” (v.32)				

vv.22-23, How was Paul able to stay motivated in the face of such unrelenting opposition and certain persecution?1

Why is it important to recognize that pain is inevitable?2

v. 28, Paul refers to the elders as “shepherds”. Read Hebrews 13:7 and 17, and discuss how this passage might alter the way you view spiritual leaders.

v.28-32, What dangers would threaten the church at Ephesus, and what would protect them?3

Read Ephesians 6:10-18, keeping in mind that what you’re reading was written by Paul to these very same elders along with their congregation. How is “the word of God” described in v.17? Why do you suppose that imagery was used?

READ ACTS 20:33-38 AND DISCUSS THE FOLLOW QUESTIONS

Paul did not allow his encounter with Jesus or his biblical learning to make him proud or wealthy or superior to others. He lived out the message of the gospel as he had understood it, the message of God’s grace, which isn’t primarily a theory but an image-bearing way of life.⁴ The Ephesian elders react with tears and grief to Paul’s departure, especially his words about never seeing them again. What does this communicate about the character of his ministry and the kind of person Paul was?⁵

PRAYER

Pray that your motives and the motives of your Christian leaders for being active in ministry will be pure and never selfish. Pray for protection for the flock of your own fellowship, that no one will be drawn away by distortions.⁶

Pray to respect and follow your spiritual leaders.

Pray for trust, strength, and hope to meet life’s problems.

FURTHER PERSONAL STUDY

Read what we skipped: Acts 20:1-16.

To learn more about the importance of right motives in ministry, read 1 Thessalonians 2.

To explore the subject of pain and problems, read: Acts 5:41-42; Romans 5:3-4; 8:28; 2 Corinthians 1:4-7; 4:17-18; 6:4-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7; 2:19-21; 4:12-16.

Works Cited: 1. John MacArthur, Acts, page 109; 2. Max Lucado, Acts, 107; 3. N.T. Wright, Acts, page 100; 4. N.T. Wright, Acts, page 101; 5. N.T. Wright, Acts, page 101; 6. N.T. Wright, Acts, page 102

SHARE WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

Please share with the group how our study of the book of Acts has convicted you, challenged you, and comforted you. (If you need a refresher on specific lessons we've covered, browse the outline below).

1. Jesus' Plan for Reaching the World: The Great Commission (1:1-11).
2. The Message That Launched Christianity: Peter Preaches at Pentecost (2:14-37).
3. Jesus Changes Lives: Forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and the Church (2:36-47).
4. We Are Witnesses: Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (3:1-4:22).
5. Enduring Persecution: The Apostles Tried and Tested (5:17-42).
6. God's Saving Power: The Conversion of Saul (9:1-22).
7. God's Impartial Love: The Conversion of Cornelius (10:1-48).
8. God's Grace: The Council at Jerusalem (15:1-21).
9. Christianity among Other Worldviews: Paul and the Athenian Philosophers (17:10-34).
10. The Clash of Powers: Paul and the Artemis Riot (Acts 19:8-41).
11. Facing Problems and Pain: Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders (20:17-38).

INTRODUCTION

The Voice of The Martyrs states on their website that, "It is impossible to know with absolute certainty the exact number of Christians killed for their faith each year. However, according to the World Evangelical Alliance, more than 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith."

DISCUSSION THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

Read Philippians 1:14, and discuss ideas for how we can have the spirit of a martyr when we don't have the circumstances of a martyr?

Read Hebrews 13:3 and discuss how our obedience to this command might benefit ourselves and others?

NOTE: "Remember". It's the same word Jesus used in Luke 22:19, when he instituted the Lord's Supper just before he himself was persecuted to the point of death. By sharing bread and wine together, we remember Jesus' body and blood that was sacrificed to reconcile us to God. Remembering the sacrifice of Christ is crucial to the Christian faith. But what value is there in remembering those who are sacrificing their lives for their faith in Christ?

What are some practical ways we can obey this command?

PRAYER

RESOURCES

Podcast:

Randy Alcorn: Those of Whom the World Is Not Worthy: <http://www.epm.org/resources/2010/Jul/23/those-whom-world-not-worthy-audio/>

Scriptures:

Matt. 5:10-11,43-45; 10:21-22; Lk. 12:8-9; Jn. 16:2-4; Acts 4:19-20; Rom. 5:35-37; 12:19-21; 2 Cor. 4:17-18; Phil. 1:19-21; Heb. 10:32-39; 12:1-3; 1 Pet. 3:14-15; Rev. 2:10; 12:11.

Organizations (and Newsletters):

Voice of Martyrs: <http://www.persecution.com>

Open Doors: www.opendoorsusa.org

Jesus Freaks: <http://jesusfreaks.net/>

The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church: <http://www.persecutedchurch.org>

Books:

Safely Home, by Randy Alcorn

The Privilege of Persecution: And Other Things The Global Church Knows That We Don't, by Dr. Carl A. Moeller and David W. Hegg

Jesus Freaks, by DC Talk

The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs, by John

Operation World: A Day-by-Day Guide to Prayer for the World, by Jason Mandryk

The Cost of Discipleship, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

In the Lion's Den: Persecuted Christians and What the Western Church Can Do About It, by Nina Shea

Student Underground (youth curriculum by Youth Specialties):

Music:

Martyr's Song, Todd Agnew; Hard Pressed, Acappella; He Reigns, Newsboys; Overcome, Jeremy Camp; Failure to Excommunicate, Relient K; This Road, Jars of Clay.

Movies:

End of the Spear; Beyond Gates of Splendor; The Hiding Place; Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed; Stories of the Persecuted Church (Series); God's Not Dead.