

Acts of the Apostles

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? Acts shows the Christian church's explosion across the Mediterranean region.

WHO WROTE IT? Luke. He addressed it to Theophilus, as he did the Gospel of Luke.

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? The book covers a period of about 30 years, from the ascension of Jesus to the early 60s A.D.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus and continues through the growth of the early church.

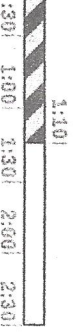
THE BREAKDOWN
 Chapters 1-7: The gospel takes root in Jerusalem
 Chapters 8-12: The gospel spreads throughout Judea and Samaria
 Chapters 13-28: The gospel spreads throughout the Roman Empire

KEY CONCEPTS
 Holy Spirit
 Witness
 Church
 Christians

SCORECARD

- Peter:** The church's first leader
- Phillip:** One of the first deacons; early missionary
- Stephen:** Another deacon; first Christian martyr
- Paul:** Church planter and leader among the Gentiles
- Barnabas:** A leader in the Jerusalem church; companion of Paul
- Silas:** Another companion of Paul
- Lydia:** First convert in Philippi
- Priscilla and Aquila:** Paul's friends and fellow tentmakers
- Luke:** Author of the book; joined Paul on his second missionary journey (16:10)

READING TIME



WORTH MEMORIZING

- 1:8 "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."
 - 2:38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
 - 4:12 "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."
- THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE**
- **WITNESS.** Being a witness for Christ is not for wimps. It takes strength, ingenuity, courage, and stamina that only the Holy Spirit can give.

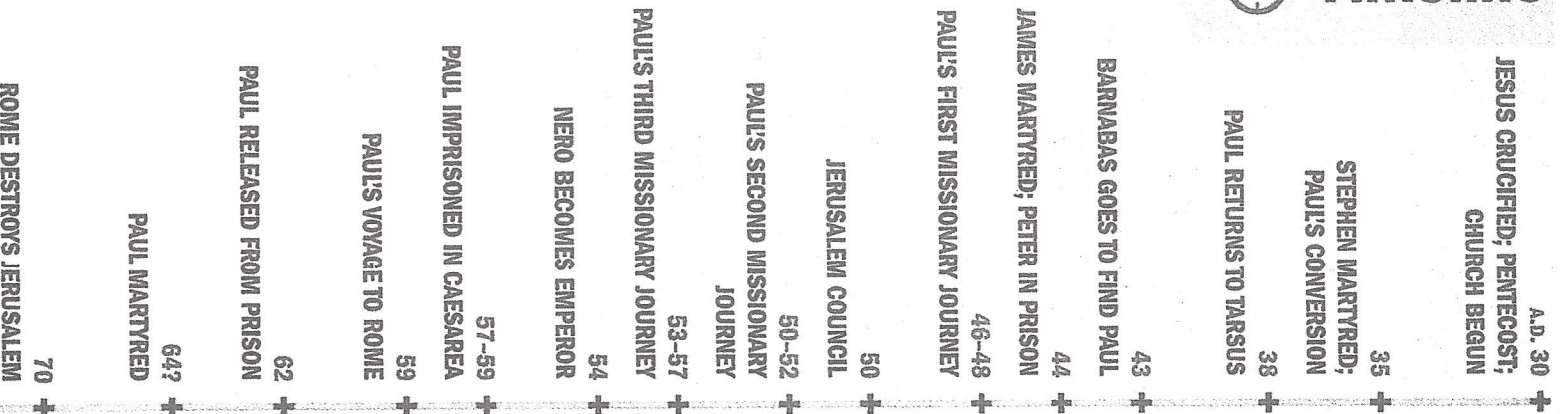
WHAT'S THE POINT OF Acts?

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The unstoppable grace of God in Christ Jesus is for every race and nation.



Timeline





hat exciting days to be followers of Christ! The Church around the world is growing faster than ever, and the number of Christians is exploding. Some people say we're living in the twenty-ninth chapter of the book of Acts. Well, in a sense these last 2000 years of Christian history have been a continuation of the story that began in the twenty-eight chapters of Acts.

In our English Bibles, the fifth book of the New Testament is commonly called, "The Acts of the Apostles." In some ways that title seems a bit misleading. Only two apostles are prominently featured in Acts—Peter and Paul. And the acts that unfold are really the Acts of the Holy Spirit, or, as some said, "The Continuing Words and Works of Jesus by His Spirit Through the Apostles."

The author is Luke, the beloved physician who composed the third Gospel. The books of Luke and Acts are twin volumes of a two-part work. Both cover periods of about thirty years. The Gospel starts with the birth of Christ and finishes the story in Jerusalem. The book of Acts starts with the birth of the Church and finishes the story in Rome.

In Acts 17:6, Luke describes the heroes of Acts as "These who have turned the world upside down." If the world ever needed to be turned upside down, it's now. God grant that you too may turn the world upside down, and that we may indeed be living in the twenty-ninth chapter of Acts.



KEY THOUGHT:

Jesus returned to heaven at the end of His earthly ministry, leaving His Spirit-filled followers with the glorious task of taking His message to the ends of the earth.



KEY VERSE:

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Acts 1:8



KEY ACTION:

"We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Acts 4:20



KEY PRAYER:

Lord, give me the power to reach the world with the Gospel.

BASIC SURVEY

ACTS

AUTHOR: Not stated, but since it's also addressed to Theophilus, it's traditionally attributed to Luke, the author of the Gospel of Luke.

DATE: Covering events of the AD 30s to 60s, Acts was probably written before AD 62.

IN TEN WORDS OR LESS

The Holy Spirit's arrival heralds beginning of Christian Church.

DETAILS, PLEASE

The book of Acts is a bridge between the story of Jesus in the Gospels and the life of the Church in the letters that follow. Luke begins with Jesus' ascension into heaven. Ten days later, God sends the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost—and the Church is born. The disciples are empowered to preach boldly about Jesus. Jewish leaders, fearing the new movement called "the Way" (9:2 NLT), begin persecuting believers, who scatter and spread the Gospel. The greatest persecutor, Saul, becomes a Christian himself and ultimately joins Peter and other Christians in preaching, working miracles, and strengthening the Church.

QUOTABLE

> "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38 NIV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

Acts tells of the Gospel's transition from a purely Jewish message to one for all people (9:15; 10:45), and the beginning of the Christian missionary movement (chapter 13).

SO WHAT?

Christians today can have the same anointing that Acts describes: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (1:8 NKJV).

READ ACTS 1 AND 20.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 209. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 203. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 203. →

HEART OF THE BOOK

THE APOSTLE PAUL

The apostle Paul was born in the city of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia (in southern Turkey) and was named Saul. His father had Roman citizenship, so although he was a Jew, Saul was born a Roman citizen. His Latin name was Paul. Saul was raised a Pharisee and as a young man went to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel, a leading rabbi. He excelled in these studies and was extremely zealous for the Law of Moses (Acts 22:3, 27-28; Galatians 1:14).

Saul agreed to the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr, and went on to lead an intense persecution against Christians throughout Israel. As he was traveling to Damascus to persecute Christians, a bright light shone around him and Jesus appeared and spoke with him. Saul immediately believed and became a disciple (Acts 8-9).

After spending a few years in Arabia and Tarsus, Saul was invited to Antioch to teach and preach. From there, he and Barnabas were sent out as missionaries to both Jews and Gentiles living in the Roman provinces. At this point Saul began using his Roman name, Paul. Paul not only was an effective speaker, but did many mighty miracles. He later traveled with Timothy and Silas and evangelized Greece and Turkey (Acts 11:25-27; 13:1-3).

Paul was eventually arrested and stood trial in Rome before Nero. He was released and apparently traveled west to Spain. Upon returning to the eastern Mediterranean, however, he was rearrested, once again taken to Rome, and this time executed.

READ ACTS 9 AND 26.

- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 209. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 204. →



Paul persecuted Christians before he became an apostle. This painting titled *Saint Paul Writing His Epistles* is by Valentin de Boulogne (1591-1632).

CLOSER LOOK

PREACHING THE GOSPEL

The first disciples personally witnessed Jesus' miracles and saw Him alive again after His crucifixion and resurrection. That's why they repeatedly declared, "We are His witnesses to these things" (Acts 5:32 NKJV). (See also Acts 2:32; 3:15; 10:39.) In the same way, all believers are to be a witness of the change that Jesus has brought to their lives, to "tell what great things God has done for [them]" (Luke 8:39 NKJV).

We should preach the Gospel not only with words, but by our loving attitude and lifestyle. If we're focused on the wonderful things Jesus has done for us, we'll naturally talk about them, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34 NKJV). As Peter said, "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20 NASB).

Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16 NIV). But at times we *do* worry about what others will think of us. Also, we often may not know what to say or how to say it. That's why God desires to empower us for this task with His Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere" (Acts 1:8 NLT). The Holy Spirit gave the first Christians great power and enabled them to be effective witnesses, and He will do the same for us today.

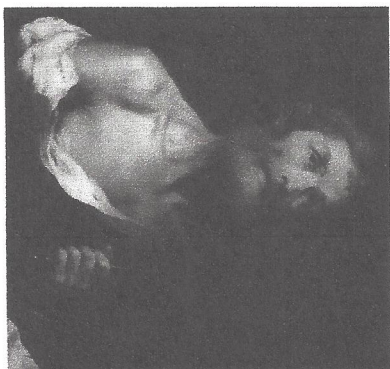
READ ACTS 3 AND 19.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 205.



CLOSER LOOK

SALVATION ONLY IN JESUS



The apostle Peter, who is portrayed in this painting titled *Peter the Apostle* by Giuseppe Nogari (1699–1766), openly stated that Jesus is the only way to salvation.

When Peter and John were brought before the religious council, Peter boldly declared Jesus as the Messiah and Savior, saying, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NASB). Jesus is not simply one of *many* ways to heaven. As He Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6 NLT). And this is the message Jesus' disciples preached.

Paul explained, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5 NIV). A mediator is someone who deals with a problem or issue that separates two people—or two groups of people. The problem between us and God is our sin, and Jesus was the only mediator who could resolve this. Only Jesus can rescue us from death and give us eternal life. The apostle John declared, "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11 KJV).

Why is Jesus so special? Why can only *He* save us? The reason is simple: other so-called saviors and gurus may have some good moral teachings, but only Jesus can forgive our sin. As John the Baptist said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 NKJV). Jesus is the Lamb of God—the only acceptable sacrifice for our sins. We can only find forgiveness in Jesus.

READ ACTS 4-5.

● Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 209.



HIDDEN TREASURE

THE HOLY SPIRIT

God consists of three persons—God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also called the Spirit of God *and* the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9). Some people think the Holy Spirit is just some kind of power or force, but the Bible makes it clear that the Spirit is a person and is equal in power and wisdom and holiness to God. The Spirit knows everything that God knows (1 Corinthians 2:10–11). That’s why He is also called “the Spirit of truth” (John 16:13 NIV). The moment we accept Jesus as Lord, God sends the Spirit to live in our hearts (Galatians 4:6). All believers must have the Spirit living in them to be saved (Romans 8:9), but many Christians believe that being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” is a separate event. In the Bible people sometimes received the Holy Spirit after they became Christians (Acts 8:14–17; 19:1–6).

READ ACTS 8 AND 19.

HIDDEN TREASURE

MIRACLES OF HEALING

When Jesus commissioned His twelve apostles to be witnesses and to preach, He also gave them the power to do healing miracles. Jesus later gave this power to seventy other disciples (Matthew 10:1; Luke 10:1, 9). In the book of Acts, the Twelve did many mighty miracles. “Many wonders and signs were done through the apostles” (Acts 2:43 NKJV; see also Acts 5:12).

Jesus had said, “And these signs will follow those who believe. . . they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17–18 NKJV). And James gave instructions for elders to heal (James 5:14–15). But apparently not *all* Christians had healing powers. For example, when Tabitha became sick and died, none of the Christians of Joppa were able to heal her—but Peter came and raised her from dead (Acts 9:36–41).

READ ACTS 14 AND 17.



The apostles were given the power to heal others. This painting by Karel Dujfijn (1626–1678) is titled *Saint Paul Healing the Cripple at Lystra*.

HIDDEN TREASURE

PREACHING TO THE GENTILES

Peter was staying in Joppa when three Romans, sent by the Roman centurion Cornelius, arrived at the door. God told Peter to go with them, even though Jews were forbidden to keep company with Gentiles, or non-Jews (Acts 10:28). So Peter and several other Jews entered his house. Cornelius had invited all of his relatives and close friends, and explained that an angel had appeared to him, telling him to listen to what Peter had to say. When Peter said that “everyone who believes in him [Jesus] will have their sins forgiven” (Acts 10:43 NLT), the Holy Spirit entered the listeners’ hearts. The Jewish Christians were amazed and said, “We can see that God has also given the Gentiles the privilege of . . . receiving eternal life” (Acts 11:18 NLT).

READ ACTS 11 AND PSALM 102.

HIDDEN TREASURE

TROUBLE FOR BELIEVERS

Is it actually God’s plan for His people to suffer trouble, stress, and persecution? Yes. Paul warned, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22 NIV). God often uses troubles, pressures, setbacks, and even persecution to test our faith and refine us. Christians are literally destined for trouble. Paul wrote to Christians to keep them from being shaken by the troubles they were going through, saying, “But you know that we are destined for such troubles” (1 Thessalonians 3:3 NLT). We’re not even supposed to think it odd. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1 Peter 4:12 KJV).

READ ACTS 12 AND 16.

HIDDEN TREASURE

JEWS OF THE DIASPORA

There were over five million Jews living scattered throughout the Roman Empire. They were called the Diaspora, or the “dispersed among the Gentiles” (John 7:35 KJV). They met weekly in synagogues, and as James said, “The law of Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times” (Acts 15:21 NIV). Many Greeks called *proselytes* converted to the Jewish faith, and those who didn’t go through with circumcision, but who nevertheless believed in God, were referred to as “God-fearers.” When Saul persecuted the Jewish Christians in Judea, many of them fled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch and preached to these Jews and God-fearers. Every time they entered a new city, Paul and his companions preached the Gospel to them first as well.

READ ACTS 13 AND 18.

HIDDEN TREASURE

THE STORM AND SHIPWRECK

Paul was being taken to Rome as a prisoner, and they were sailing south of Crete when a powerful wind drove them out to sea. “The terrible storm raged for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone” (Acts 27:20 NLT). After two weeks, the sailors realized that they were approaching land. So they hoisted the foresail, hoping to be driven up onto the beach. But they got stuck on a sandbar some ways out and the stern began breaking to pieces in the heavy surf. The centurion ordered everyone who could swim to make it to the beach. Those who couldn’t swim hung onto planks and were washed ashore. Miraculously, everyone made it to land safely.

READ ACTS 27-28.



Paul survived a severe storm and shipwreck while he was being transported as a prisoner to Rome. *Shipwrecked on Malta* is by Laurent de la Hyre (1665-1656).

INTRODUCTION TO
ACTS

BACKGROUND

The Acts of the Apostles details how the disciples fulfilled the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20). The title “Acts,” *Praxis* in Greek, is a title used in Greek literature for accounts of great deeds of notable men. In this case, the spotlight is on specific notables, Peter and Paul—and the Holy Spirit.

Luke, a physician and historian, is the acknowledged author of Acts and the Gospel of Luke. Both documents are addressed to a particular Gentile, Theophilus. Luke was noted for his careful investigative procedures (Lk 1:1-4). It is likely he had opportunities to interview apostles Peter and John in Jerusalem for the information used in chapters 1-12. As a close companion of the apostle Paul, Luke was an eyewitness of many of the events recorded in chapters 13-28.

MESSAGE

This narrative book recounts the tumultuous history of the early church. The arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, a fulfillment of “the promise of the Father” (1:4), gives the apostles

OUTLINE

I. The Early Church

- A. Birth of the church
- B. Miracles and testimonies
- C. Persecution spreads the message
- D. Saul’s conversion
- E. The church grows

II. Paul’s Ministry

- A. First missionary journey
- B. Council at Jerusalem
- C. Second missionary journey
- D. Third missionary journey
- E. Paul on trial
- F. Voyage to Rome

the power to carry out the Great Commission. In chapter 2, Peter preaches a powerful evangelistic sermon, just one of the several public gospel proclamations—others were by Stephen and Paul—recounted by Luke. There is nothing secret about this faith. Yet the book is more than speeches; it is a high-action story of faithful witness in the face of persecution as the apostles and believers claim the power of the Spirit in sharing the spiritually liberating message of salvation in Christ.

A high point of this narrative is the conversion of the Pharisee Saul, who becomes the great apostle Paul. Luke chronicles Paul’s missionary journeys, his trials, his appeal to Caesar, and his passage to Rome. Even there, under house arrest, he preached “the kingdom of God . . . with all confidence” (28:31).

TIME

Because the Acts of the Apostles ends with Paul awaiting trial in Rome, Luke probably wrote the Acts of the Apostles around A.D. 62 before the outcome of the trial.

- 1:1-2:47
- 3:1-6:7
- 6:8-8:40
- 9:1-31
- 9:32-12:25
- 13:1-14:28
- 15:1-35
- 15:36-18:22
- 18:23-21:17
- 21:18-26:32
- 27:1-28:31

ACTS

THE BIG PICTURE

What occurred during the brief years of Jesus' earthly life was limited to a small corner of the world. Most of civilization never noticed Jesus bringing hope to a hurting and seemingly forsaken group of people. But just as Jesus predicted, the small band of disciples that met in Jerusalem following his death and resurrection turned the world upside down. And life on planet Earth has never been the same since.

Written by Luke as a sequel to his gospel account, the book of Acts records a history of the early believers and the beginnings of the church. Through the examples of these early believers, we see that the Holy Spirit can powerfully change lives. We learn that God can transform us and help us live at peace with him and with others.

The first half of this book focuses on the ministry of Peter — how he was transformed from an impulsive and unreliable, though well-intentioned, follower of Jesus to a bold and dedicated leader. The second half of the book presents us with the life and ministry of Paul. He and his companions faced difficulties and opposition, but through the power of God these missionaries spread the Good News about Jesus throughout the Mediterranean world.

These men should be an encouragement to us. Both made serious mistakes as younger men, but as they surrendered their lives to God, they gradually were changed. As an angry young man, Paul helped kill the first Christian martyr, Stephen. But later Paul became a selfless and dedicated missionary. Peter, whose cockiness often prevented him from overcoming his weaknesses, became a humble and effective leader in the new church. The changes in both men demonstrate what God can do in our lives too.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL THEMES

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Jesus promised the disciples that after he left, the Holy Spirit would bring them power (see Acts 1:8). Little did they know what kind of power that would be! As these men learned firsthand, the Holy Spirit and his power are real. When we compare Peter's life in the gospel narratives with his life and attitudes in the book of Acts, we can tell that Peter's life had been changed by the Holy Spirit's power. When we look at Saul trying to destroy the early church and then see his dedicated missionary service, we can tell that God had radically transformed him. The power of God changed their

A. TO JERUSALEM: TELLING THEIR STORY AT HOME (1:1 — 8:40)

B. TO JUDEA AND SAMARIA: TRANSITION TO OUTSIDERS (9:1 — 12:25)

C. TO THE WHOLE WORLD: HOW OUTSIDERS BECOME INSIDERS (13:1 — 21:40)

D. JERUSALEM TO ROME: THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS (22:1 — 28:31)

Essential Facts

PURPOSE:

To trace the history of Christianity from its predominantly Jewish roots to a worldwide faith through the impetus of the Holy Spirit.

AUTHOR:

Luke, the physician.

AUDIENCE:

Theophilus, whose name means "lover of God."

DATE WRITTEN:

Sometime between AD 63 and 70.

SETTING:

Acts provides a history of the events that followed the resurrection of Jesus.

KEY VERSE:

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8).

KEY PEOPLE:

Peter, John, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy and Luke.

SPECIAL FEATURES:

The book of Acts is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke.

hearts, giving them confidence to tell the truth about him. In our powerlessness, God makes his power available to us through the Holy Spirit. With God's help, no problem is too great to overcome; no life is so far gone that it cannot be made new.

COMMITMENT THAT OVERCOMES OPPOSITION

Luke did not idealize the people of the early church. They did not have an easy task, nor did they swiftly move toward their objective. Instead, the early believers struggled with controversy, opposition and discouragement. Religious and irreligious people alike misunderstood them. But a common thread was their commitment to God at any cost. As we commit our lives to God, we will also face obstacles, but we can expect to overcome any problems or opposing forces with God's powerful help.

LIVING BEYOND CIRCUMSTANCES

When we read about the early Christians and how they shared their possessions and took care of one another, it is easy to think that somehow they were spared the kinds of problems we experience. That perception is incorrect, because life for the early believers was very difficult. Rather than experiencing an easier lifestyle, these believers learned how to live above their circumstances. They were more conscious of God than they were of their problems. When we focus on the problems we face in our lives, we lose sight of our power source. We may try to succeed on our own power, only to fail and become discouraged. Denying or ignoring our circumstances will not help us, but trusting God and surrendering the circumstances of our lives to him will help us live above our problems too.

SHARING THE MESSAGE

As Peter, John, Philip, Paul, Barnabas and others came to faith in Jesus, they shared the Good News with more people. As we share our own experience of spiritual awakening and God's healing power with others in need, we will find that our faith in God grows stronger and others have the opportunity for spiritual renewal.

Acts

Look closely at an old photograph of people you may not know, and what do you see? Outdated clothing, smiling faces, perhaps an interesting landscape in the background. Beyond that, photographs can capture a moment in time: the way people lived, the relationships they enjoyed, the values they held dear, and at times, the beliefs that guided them into an unknown future.

The book of Acts is a photo album of sorts that recounts the first 30 years of the Christian church. It offers a progression of snapshots that retrace the early church's story from Jesus' ascension to Paul's conversion to the spread of Christianity throughout the Mediterranean region, and finally, to Paul's arrival in Rome to address the Roman emperor. Bolstering its credibility, the book refuses to accentuate only the church's strengths and gloss over its shortcomings (5:1-11; 6:1).

Although technically speaking, the book's author is anonymous, overwhelming evidence points to Luke. Since its inception, various traditions have asserted that Luke wrote the book of Acts as a sequel to the Gospel of Luke. We know that both books were written for the same person (Lk 1:4; Ac 1:1) and that the author of Acts accompanied Paul on some of his travels because at various times the point of view changes from *he/they* to *we/us* (Ac 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-29; 28:1-16). Finally, we know that Luke accompanied Paul on his travels (Col 4:14; 2Tim 4:11; Phm 24). Because the book ends abruptly with Paul imprisoned in Rome—but before his martyrdom in A.D. 64—Luke likely wrote it in the early 60s.

Acts presents various snapshots of effective ways in presenting the Gospel. Peter preaches to curious spectators on the streets of Jerusalem (2:14-40). Philip explains to an Ethiopian court official Jesus' fulfillment of OT prophecy (8:26-40). Peter, John, Paul, and the other apostles perform signs and wonders (3:1-10; 5:12; 16:16-18). Paul appeals to the intellectual elite at

the prestigious Areopagus in Athens, comparing their search for the unknown god with the God of Israel and His Son Jesus (17:19-34).

Most important of all, we read about the church's strongest apologetic—the love that the early Christians shared with one another (2:44-47). The results are striking: “And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved” (2:47; see also 5:14; 16:5). Jesus' followers were first called Christians because they reminded people of Christ (1:126), whose loving deeds validated the words he spoke.

But the book of Acts is so much more than a photo album of snapshots from the early church. It's God's life-giving word, and a visual of how He can work today through the church . . . and you.

Author: Luke

Date: Written in A.D. 60–63; the book of Acts covers events of the early church from the ascension of Jesus through Paul's travels until he reaches Rome

What in the world is going on?

- 27 B.C.–A.D. 476 The era of the Roman Empire
- A.D. 5 Saul of Tarsus (Paul) is born
- A.D. 30 Jesus is crucified, resurrected, and ascends to heaven
- A.D. 30 Holy Spirit's arrival at Pentecost
- A.D. 31 Chinese engineer Du Shi invents hydraulic-powered bellows
- A.D. 33 Stephen is the first Christian martyr
- A.D. 33 Saul of Tarsus converts and is later known as Paul
- A.D. 37–41 Caligula is the Roman emperor
- A.D. 37–44 Herod Agrippa I is king of Judea and Perea
- A.D. 41–54 Claudius is the emperor of the Roman Empire; he marries his niece Agrippina in A.D. 48
- ca. A.D. 43 Antioch is the center of Christian activity
- A.D. 45 Barnabas brings Paul to Antioch
- A.D. 46 Greek biographer Plutarch is born
- A.D. 47–48 Paul and Barnabas visit Galatia during their first missionary journey
- A.D. 49 Council at Jerusalem
- A.D. 49 The Roman emperor, Claudius, forces the Jews out of Rome; Priscilla and Aquila leave Rome and wind up in Corinth where they meet Paul
- ca. A.D. 49–52 Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia and visits there for the first time during his second missionary journey; Timothy travels with Paul and Silas
- A.D. 50 Paul, Silas, and other missionaries land at Philippi; the church is established
- A.D. 50 Paul comes to Thessalonica and establishes a church

THE ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

ACTS (ORIGINAL GREEK TITLE *PRAXEIS*, "Acts") is a unique book in the Scripture. It is really volume 2 of Luke's work and tells the story of the beginnings of the church. It begins with the ascension of Jesus, records the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, and tells the life of the early church. It is not, however, the story of the whole church, or even of all the apostles. It focuses on the beginnings of the church, then on the work of Peter, and finally on the work of Paul. Luke wanted to show how the church spread from Jerusalem all over Palestine and then to the Gentiles.

Luke reports a series of episodes in the life and faith of the early church to show how Christianity rose out of Judaism and has deep roots in the Jewish faith. He shows something of the struggle the disciples felt in moving out in a mission to Gentiles. One of the major themes in the book is the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and strengthening the church as it spread across the Mediterranean world. Another theme is the message that Christianity is not dangerous to the authority or power of the Roman Empire. (Luke—Acts may have been written as a legal document in Paul's defense.) More than one-half of Acts is devoted to the ministry of Paul and his travels to preach the good news.

WATCH WORDS

- power (ability, strength, force)—1:8
- to acknowledge (knowing about an event before it occurs)—2:23 (also 26:5)
- church (assembly of believers)—8:3 (also 19:32, 39, 41)
- Christian (follower of Christ)—11:26 (also 26:28)
- grace (undeserved favor; God's goodness)—14:3 (also 15:11)

A Movement for Everyone

Acts 18:1-3, 24-26; 21:8-9

IN THE EARLIEST DAYS of the Christian church, the body of Christ wasn't governed by bureaucratic agencies in faraway cities. God-fearing people rolled up their sleeves and got to work.

Even more important, everyone's contributions were accepted. It didn't matter whether one was a Jew or Gentile, male or female. All that mattered was love for Jesus and a willingness to serve him with the whole heart.

One important couple who served the church in its formative days was Aquila and Priscilla. They were Jews who shared Paul's faith in God as well as his trade (they were tentmakers or leatherworkers). Introduced here in Acts, they continue to pop up throughout the New Testament (see Romans 16:3, 1 Corinthians 16:19, and 2 Timothy 4:19).

Though Paul was single and taught that celibacy could be for some a better state for serving God than marriage, Aquila and Priscilla showed that it was possible to be married and to faithfully serve Christ at the same time. In their dedication to the cause of the gospel, this couple played a crucial role in tutoring a brilliant speaker named Apollos, and their home was used as a gathering place for believers. Interestingly, Priscilla's name is listed before her husband's four out of the six times the couple is mentioned, perhaps because of her integrity, character, or leadership role in the church.

And in Acts 21 we meet four young daughters of Philip the Evangelist. We know nothing about these young women except that they had "the gift of prophecy."

The early Christians understood that everyone who had received spiritual gifts was to use them in the service of the church. It did not matter if the person was male or female, married or single. Regardless of gender, social status, or occupation, all believers were expected to exercise their gifts to the glory of God.

A Crooked Partnership

Acts 5:1-11

HUSBANDS AND WIVES often disagree over money matters, so it's usually encouraging to see couples thinking alike on a financial plan. But in this shocking case from the earliest days of the Christian church, a man and wife who conspired to cheat God paid the ultimate price.

The church in the book of Acts was a radical group of Christians who were totally sold out to God. They were so committed to the community that they even pooled their financial resources into one big fund. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, were members of the church, and they agreed with this idea—at least publicly. But in private, their priorities were much different. As others in the church had done, they sold a piece of real estate and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution within the church. But instead of turning in the entire sum to the fellowship, the couple kept a portion for themselves while publicly claiming to have given the whole amount.

Peter, with the help of the Holy Spirit, spotted their dishonesty. When he saw Ananias, he confronted him with the truth. "You weren't lying to us but to God!" he said (Acts 5:4). Within seconds, Ananias fell dead! A few hours later, Sapphira showed up. When Peter questioned her, she kept up the ruse she and her husband had agreed upon. Peter charged her with conspiring with her husband against God, and Sapphira, too, died on the spot (5:9-10).

It's good to see couples working together, but husbands and wives need to collaborate for good purposes, not evil ends. When they serve God together, their union is blessed. But when they conspire together in sin, their evil is multiplied.

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES : SERVICE

FULL OF THE SPIRIT AND WISDOM

Acts 6:1-6

When we consider acts of service, there are two kinds of people in the world: guests and hosts. The guests are those who expect to be taken care of; the hosts are those who do the caring. The discipline of service builds on the premise that we, as Christ's followers, are God's hosts in this world.

Division threatened the early church community because not everyone was being cared for adequately. The apostles' response was to call forth a group of hosts who could serve the practical needs of the community. These hosts, later called "deacons" (see 1 Timothy 3:8-10), did not simply perform menial chores. They were also "full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). Whether administering a food program or proclaiming God's truth, these hosts showed God's love in practical ways. Two of them, Stephen and Philip, presented powerful testimonies to the living Lord Jesus Christ (see Acts 7-8.)

No matter what our task, we should seek to be "full of the Spirit and wisdom" as we go about our work. Then others will hear and see the love of Christ in practical ways.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Do you view yourself as a guest or a host? How does picturing yourself as a host affect your view of service? Think of a situation in which you could make a significant impact by being a host. What actions can you take? Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit and wisdom as you enter this situation.

For more on service, turn to Romans 12.

1124 ACTS 26:26

SPEAK THE TRUTH

Receiving Forgiveness

Acts 26:12-18

Confessing our sins to God and to others humbles us and allows us to share our weaknesses. We should encourage others to do likewise. In doing so, we can help others live in the light and speak the truth before God.

Jesus appointed the apostle Paul as his servant and sent him as a witness to the Gentiles. Jesus wanted Paul "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18).

Once we are honest before God and admit our wrongs, we will begin to dispel the darkness in our lives. God wants us to live in the light and receive immediate forgiveness based on the finished work of Jesus Christ. A restored relationship with God awaits us right now if we will confess our sins and receive his forgiveness.

Turn to Romans 2.

FACTS

The God of Islam vs. the God of Christianity

1. Allah is unknowable. Muslims can only know Allah's laws, given in the Koran. In contrast, Yahweh of the Bible is a God whom we can know personally.
2. Allah is one, whereas the God of the Bible is a Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (as noted in Mt 28:19; Mk 1:10-11; Ac 1:4-5).
3. Allah is changeable and thus cannot be trusted. Yahweh does not change, and is therefore always trustworthy.
4. Allah is transcendent and unapproachable. Yahweh made Himself known by entering human history in the person of Jesus Christ.
5. With Allah salvation is based on works of legalism. With Yahweh salvation is based on grace through faith in Jesus.

SEEK GOD AND SURRENDER TO HIM

A Time to Surrender

Acts 9:1-9

There are important moments in life when we must choose whether or not we will surrender to God. These are usually times of crisis, situations that can bring about changes in our entire life direction. These moments can either destroy us or they can forever turn the course of our lives in a much better direction.
Saul of Tarsus faced such a moment. After Jesus' ascension, Saul set out to rid the world of Christians.

As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do. . . . Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything (Acts 9:3-6,8-9).

This event produced a severe crisis for Saul. He had been certain that his religious zeal against Jesus and his followers was what God had expected of him. But suddenly the risen Messiah, Jesus, spoke to him, and then Saul was blind! In his physical blindness, Saul came to see that he had been spiritually blind to the truth about God. In response, Saul sought God. And God healed not only Saul's physical blindness, but also the spiritual blindness that had kept him from accepting Jesus as his Messiah. The persecutor Saul became the apostle Paul, one of the greatest leaders of the Christian faith.
When we sincerely seek God, he promises to reveal himself to us, showing us where we have been blind to the truth. At such moments of crisis, we need to surrender to God. Then he can heal our blindness and lead us to spiritual renewal.

Turn to 2 Corinthians 4.

TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE

Sharing God's Message

Acts 8:26-40

When God begins to transform our lives, we may become so excited that we want to rush right out and tell everyone about the exciting changes in our lives. God will lead us to people with whom we can share this Good News. We can make the most of these opportunities by paying attention to God's leading and by communicating his message effectively.
God led the evangelist Philip to an influential traveler who had gone to Jerusalem to worship and was returning to his native land. When Philip found him, the traveler was sitting in his chariot, reading from the book of Isaiah.

The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. . . . Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:29-31,35).

The way Philip communicated the Good News is a model for us to follow. He allowed God to lead him to someone who was ready to receive the Good News. Then Philip listened carefully to the man's needs and interests and showed him how Christ could fulfill them. The man gladly received the message, was baptized immediately and went home a changed man. Whether we are zealous or shy, following this model can help us communicate our message in a way that people will receive and understand. In this way, God can use us to transform their lives as well as our own.

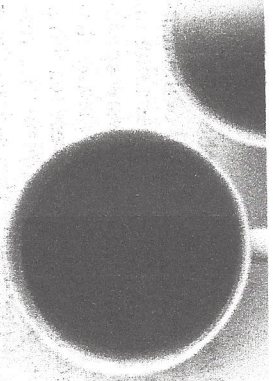
Turn to Ephesians 2.

SPOTLIGHT

HEALING FOR WHOM?

Christians frequently asked God to heal their physical problems—and they should (see James 5:14-16). But in the days of the early church, healing often played an evangelistic role, getting the attention of unbelievers.

Text	Person(s)	Affliction	Believer?
Acts 3:1-10	Beggar at Beautiful Gate	Congenital paralysis	No
Acts 5:12, 15	Crowds of "the people"	Various	No
Acts 6:8	"The people"	Various	No
Acts 8:6-7	Samaritans	Demons, paralysis, etc.	No
Acts 9:17-18	Saul of Tarsus	Blindness	Not yet?
Acts 9:32-35	Aeneas	Paralysis	Yes
Acts 9:36-42	Dorcas	Unknown, but fatal	Yes
Acts 14:3	People at Iconium	Various	No
Acts 14:8-10	Man at Lystra	Paralysis	No
Acts 16:16-18	Fortune-telling slave girl	Demon possession	No
Acts 19:11-12	People at Ephesus	Various, including demons	Unknown
Acts 20:7-12	Eutychus	Death from accident	Yes
Acts 28:3-6	Paul	Snakebite	Yes
Acts 28:7-8	Publius's father	Fever/dysentery	No
Acts 28:9	Other Maltesians	Various	No
Phil. 2:25-30	Epaphroditus	Unknown, but serious	Yes



Speaking of Love

Mrs. Abner Bartlett was born the year after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Eighty-seven years later, President Lincoln was struggling with the Civil War, domestic crises, and depression due to the death of his son. History records that Mrs. Bartlett knitted Lincoln a simple pair of socks, which he found to be very comfortable. His letter of gratitude to her reflects the affection he felt for her support, but the word *affection* is never used.

A pair of socks, coffee for your spouse in her favorite cup, the tender touch of a hand upon a hand, and eye contact that communicates encyclopedias of emotion are all part of the nonverbal language of love.

Words are effective also. God said of Israel that he would allure her and speak tenderly to her. The Song of Songs not only uses words but with those words draws pictures to stir the emotions. The Song implies the use of musical metaphors as well as poetic allusions.

Any group of two or more will have a vocabulary that is peculiar to their personalities and circumstances. Listen to people in any professional group, and they will use language that only they understand.

So it is with a married couple. Early in the marriage, spouses have to learn the love language of the other person. A word of affection to one may not sound like a word of affection to the other. Each partner needs to learn what the physical gestures of the other mean. Eventually, they will create a new language that only they understand.

This process is so powerful, so personal.

Couples that stay together successfully learn to speak and act out their mutual love language every day. Have you expressed your love to your spouse today in that special language that only the two of you share?

communication

Today's Thought
based on Acts 2:6-12

"When your spouse's emotional love tank is full and he feels secure in your love, the whole world looks bright, and your spouse will . . . reach his highest potential in life."

Gary Chapman,
The 5 Love Languages

Read Together:
He Reads: Proverbs 27:1-19
She Reads: Proverbs 18:2

Pray Together:
Teach us, Creator, your words and deeds of love for one another.

For more on this topic, turn to page 1243. For the next reading, turn to page 1207.

Stormy Weather

Lois fumed as she loaded the dishwasher. Daryl had let his grown son from his first marriage move in with them without even consulting her.

Jeff was a good kid. She'd practically raised the boy after she married Daryl. Lois didn't begrudge the financial sacrifice it took to get Jeff through college. But she felt she'd done her part. Taking in Daryl's adult son had doubled her chores, wrecked her grocery budget, and put a strain on her marriage. "Hey, Lois," Jeff sauntered into the kitchen and opened the fridge. "Have you seen Dad?"

Lois tried not to snap. "Your father is watching TV." Jeff took a big drink straight from the milk jug. "The guys are getting together, and I need a few bucks."

Lois watched her husband dole out cash like an ATM. The minute Jeff left the house, she pounced on Daryl. "How much longer are we going to support your no-good son?" She hated how harsh those words sounded, but she wanted to make her point.

"Just until he gets on his feet."

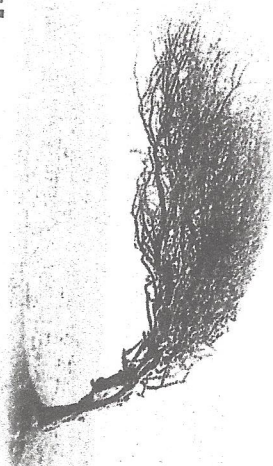
"Well, he obviously means more to you than I do."

Daryl looked surprised. "That's not true."

"I don't see you shelling out cash so I can go out on the town. You treat me as if I'm a stepchild."

Daryl clicked off the TV. "Lois, I'm sorry." He got up and took her hand. "I appreciate everything you've done for my boy. You've loved him as your own. Forgive me for not telling you how much that means to me."

Extremely difficult issues arise in all marriages. Sincere appreciation and praise may not be the first response that comes to our minds but it is with these words that we communicate to our spouse the gravity of our love and devotion to her or him. Words alone may not be the only thing necessary to ease troubling issues, of course, but they can be highly effective tools in nurturing our marriage through stormy weather.



Today's Thought
based on Acts 23:11

"When a marriage relationship hits a trouble spot, it may be difficult to find much to praise. Yet those are the times we need praise the most."

Dennis and Barbara Rainy,
The New Building Your Wife's Self-Esteem

Read Together:
He Reads: Psalm 106:1
She Reads: Proverbs 27:2

Pray Together:
Thank you for sticking with us through the storms of life, God. May we be as faithful our partner as you are to us.

For more on this topic, turn to page 127. For the next reading, turn to page 1720.

ACTS

This book describes the spread of Christianity after Jesus returned to heaven. It tells how Peter became the leader of a large church in Jerusalem. The Christians in Jerusalem suffered much persecution. One persecutor was named Saul. Saul became a Christian and later changed his name to Paul. Most of Acts tells about Paul's missionary journeys to cities all over the Roman Empire. Like a great adventure story, Acts is filled with heroic deeds, great dangers, and thrilling events. But the real focus of the story is the message of salvation through Jesus Christ!

Headlines

JESUS HEADS HOME

Acts 1, page 1486

SAUL SEES THE LIGHT

Acts 9, page 1498

PETER GETS HEAVENLY HELP

Acts 12, page 1502

PAUL IS MYTH-TAKEN

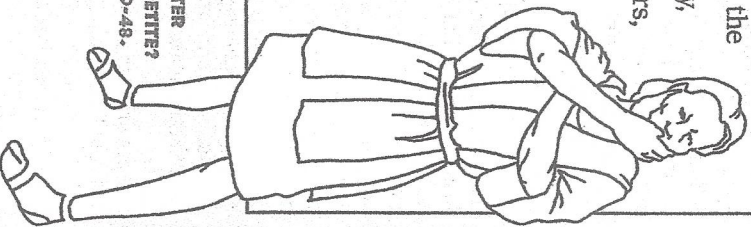
Acts 14:8-18, page 1506

FESTUS NEEDS TO GET AGRIPPA

Acts 25, page 1523

A PRISON PREACHER

Acts 28:17-31, page 1529



WHY DID PETER
LOSE HIS APPETITE?
SEE ACTS 10:9-49.

New Age Not So New

Have you ever seen one of those TV ads asking you to call a psychic for advice? Or have you ever met someone who says that they were someone else in a "previous life"? Or maybe you know someone who thinks crystals give power or that people who died can speak through living people and give advice.

Even though things like this are called "New Age" or "occult," they're not new. When the apostle Paul went to Ephesus almost 2,000 years ago, he knew people who were doing the same things!

But New Age practices can't really solve problems. Only God can help. When Paul told the people of Ephesus about Jesus, many became Christians. Acts 19:19 tells us that some of those people took their books on the occult worth 50,000 silver coins and burned them! They gave up their New Age practices when they believed in Jesus, because they realized their practices couldn't help them. Jesus provides all the help and guidance anyone needs.

In It For Me?

I CAN BE A GOOD
WITNESS BY . . .

TO OTHERS
ABOUT JESUS.

WHAT I HAVE
WITH OTHERS.

OTHERS
WITHOUT PREJUDICE.

OTHERS LIKE
BARNABAS
DID.

THE DANGERS OF MISSIONARY LIFE

It wasn't easy being a missionary for Jesus in Bible times. Here are some things that happened to believers in New Testament times:

- **Beatings.** Paul and Silas were severely beaten without a trial in Philippi. See Acts 16:16-24.
 - **Stonings.** Stephen was stoned to death. People also threw stones at Paul, but he survived. See Acts 7:54-60; 14:19-20.
 - **Riots.** A huge riot broke out in the city of Ephesus, and some of Paul's companions were taken by the mob. See Acts 19:23-41.
 - **Imprisonment.** Peter was imprisoned and was going to be executed, but God set him free. See Acts 12:1-19.
 - **Snakebites.** Paul was bitten by a deadly snake but was unharmed. See Acts 28:1-6.
 - **Assassination plots.** The Jews planned to ambush and kill Paul on his way to Caesarea but never got the chance. See Acts 23:12-35.
- (For other dangers that Paul experienced, see 2 Corinthians 11:24-28).

DID YOU KNOW?

► The book of Acts begins primarily with the ministry of Peter as the church is established in and near Jerusalem. Then the focus shifts to the missionary journeys centered mostly around Paul and his companions.

ACTS

MISSION MINDED
This book does not have a definitive ending, as its works and mission are still proceeding forward to this day.

In the Word

Numerous occasions are recorded where people became followers of Jesus. On the day of Pentecost, about 3,000 people repented and were baptized (2:41).

God With Us

28 The life of Jesus on earth, which began in the Gospels, was completed in Acts 1 when Jesus ascended into heaven.

23,109 WORDS

KEY VERSE

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This verse was brought to reality through the book of Acts, as the believers first ministered in Jerusalem, then in Samaria and Judea, then on missionary journeys into outer parts of the world.

LIFE LESSONS: The good news of Jesus is for everyone (10:34–38).

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW ACTS?

ACTS IN REVIEW

“?” CRYPTIC PHRASES

1. Feeling guilty about betraying Jesus, Judas tried to return the reward money to the chief priests. They didn’t want the blood money, so he used it to buy a property where he hung himself. Because of this, the field was called Akeldama. What does that mean?

- A. Sinner’s land
- B. Traitor’s place
- C. Field of Blood
- D. Hill of Guilt

HOT SEAT

2. I was the runner-up for the replacement of Judas in the Twelve. Which of the following is not one of my names?

- A. Barsabbas
- B. James
- C. Justus
- D. Joseph

TIME TRAVELER

3. You are sitting by a gate called Beautiful begging for money because you can’t work. Why?

WHO SAID IT?

4. “Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.”

“?”

CRYPTIC PHRASES

- 5. What was Nicanor?
- A. A term of contempt used against the people of the Way
- B. The name of a believer chosen to feed widows
- C. A god of Ephesus
- D. An island that rejected the gospel

HOT SEAT

6. That was weird. I had just baptized a eunuch after explaining to him a passage in Isaiah and telling him how it had been fulfilled through Jesus. Suddenly, BOOM! I found myself no longer waist-deep in water but in a city called Azotus. It was so puzzling! Who am I?

“?” CRYPTIC PHRASES

7. What was the Synagogue of the Freedmen?

- A. The church of Christians of Antioch
- B. A place for Jews of Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia
- C. A common place for Saul to grab people of the Way
- D. A church in Athens for worshipers of the god Greca

TIME TRAVELER

8. You are before the Sanhedrin, and you give an account of the beginning of Israel from Abraham to Moses to Solomon. Who are you?

WHO DUNNIT?

9. Who tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit from the apostles but was then rebuked by Peter because he thought he could do so?

WHO SAID IT?

10. “I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.” Whom does Paul quote here?

MINUTIAE & MISCELLANY

11. Who went to Achaia to preach the gospel and won a debate with local Jews about whether or not Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Scriptures?

TIME TRAVELER

12. You insulted Ananias by calling him a “whitewashed wall.” You didn’t realize, though, that Ananias was the high priest, so you didn’t intentionally break the law from Exodus that says not to speak evil about the ruler of your people. Who are you?

- A. Paul
- B. Peter
- C. Barsabbas
- D. Caesar

ANSWERS

- 1. D. A church in Athens for worshipers of the god Greca
- 2. C. A common place for Saul to grab people of the Way
- 3. D. Joseph
- 4. C. Justus
- 5. B. Peter
- 6. D. Caesar
- 7. B. A place for Jews of Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia
- 8. D. Caesar
- 9. C. Barsabbas
- 10. B. Peter
- 11. C. Barsabbas
- 12. A. Paul