

The Acts of the Apostles – An Overview

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The Acts covers the early apostolic period of the Church, from AD 33 to AD 65.

Alternative title - **The Acts of the Holy Spirit**; the Spirit of God is manifestly working (see ch2/8/10/13/16).

A time when the Word of God is marked by great power (see ch6v7, ch12v24, ch19v20).

The Acts is a book of heavenly revelations, relevant to the character of the Church age.

- Ch7: Heaven is opened for Stephen to see the glory of God, and the glory of the Son of man standing exalted at God's right hand, and Stephen is transformed into the same image (see 2nd Cor 3v18).
- Ch9: A saving revelation from heaven to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, and he hears the voice of the heavenly Head, so sensitive to the persecution of the Church, His body on earth.
- Ch10: Peter on the housetop saw heaven opened, and is given the vision of a great sheet bound at the 4 corners, containing all manner of beasts & fowls, ceremonially unclean to Peter's Jewish mind, but he is given instruction to kill & eat, for "**What God hath cleansed, call not thou common**" (ch10v15). The offer of divine cleansing was now going to extend universally to the 4 corners of the earth, and to the Gentiles.

The Acts introduces a whole new dispensation; the day of God's grace, the age of the Spirit of God on earth, the Church age, the summertime / harvest time of God's dispensational dealings (see Lev 23v22).

The Acts lays the foundation for this unique age, which is characterized by 2 great truths:

1. The Lord Jesus is now the glorified risen Man in heaven, the Head of the Church, our Great High Priest and Advocate with the Father – required His ascension back to heaven (Acts 1).
2. The Spirit of God has now come down from heaven to the earth, to indwell believers, and to direct the work of God & the servants of God – required the Spirit to descend to earth (Acts 2).

In Luke's gospel, he wrote to Theophilus "**of all that Jesus began both to do and teach**" (ch1v1), covering the birth and bodily life on earth of the incarnate Son of God for about 33 years.

In The Acts, he writes to Theophilus of the birth and early life of the Church, the mystical body of Christ, on earth, recounting what the risen Christ continues "**to do and teach**" as the exalted Man in heaven.

Ch1-12: The Witness from Jerusalem

Peter gives 3 main sermons (ch2/3/10)

Lame man healed by Peter (3:7-8)

Healing by Peter's shadow (5:15)

Simon the sorcerer rebuked by Peter (8:18-24)

Peter worshiped by Cornelius (10:25-26)

Tabitha raised by Peter (9:40)

Peter imprisoned (12:4)

Ch13-28: The Witness from Antioch

Paul gives 3 main sermons (ch13/17/22-23)

Lame man healed by Paul (14:8-10)

Healing by Paul's clothes (19:11-12)

Elymas the sorcerer rebuked by Paul (13:6-12)

Paul & Barnabus worshiped as gods at Lystra (14:11-18)

Eutychus raised by Paul (20:10)

Paul imprisoned (28:30)

The Lord's words to Thomas in John 20v29: "**because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed** (i.e. Acts 1-12): **blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed** (i.e. Acts 13-28)".

Acts 1v1-11: The momentous 40 days between our Lord's resurrection and His ascension & reception into heaven; v9 "**He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight**"; He is the unseen One to us (see 1st Peter 1v8).

Acts 1v12-26: The unique 10 days between the Lord's ascension back to heaven, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; Matthias chosen to take the place of Judas.

Acts 2-7: Begins with the baptism in the Holy Spirit, a historic event in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (ch2). This was the day of the birth of the Church, as the body of Christ, linked indivisibly with the exalted & glorified Christ, as the Head, God's purpose & great masterpiece of new creation for this present day of grace, comprising Jew & Gentile, both brought onto new ground entirely, as "**one new man**" (Eph 2v15).

Peter makes recurring appeals to the nation of Israel to repent of their great sin of crucifying their Messiah, the Lord Jesus, and be restored to their God (see ch2v22-40, ch3v12-20, ch5v30-31).

God in mercy & longsuffering was giving the Nation a genuine further opportunity to repent; there was the waiting of God as He looked for fruit on the barren fig tree of Israel (see Luke 13v6-9).

The Nation's rulers rejected the appeals of the Spirit, ultimately brutally rejecting the appeal of Stephen (ch7).

Acts 8-19: By means of a persecuted Church, the gospel goes forth to Samaritans (ch8) and then the Gentiles. Three significant conversions in chapters 8/9/10; representative of all of humanity, for all need to be saved. In ch11, the planting of the first Gentile local church in Antioch, the base for Paul's missionary journeys. Paul still reasons first with the Jews, but upon their rejection of Christ, he definitively turns to the Gentiles, as seen clearly at Antioch in Pisidia (ch13v44-48), at Corinth (ch18v4-6), and finally at Rome (ch28v23-29).

The emphasis of Paul's ministry in the 1st journey (ch13v4-14v26) was as an **evangelist** (see ch13v47).

The emphasis of Paul's ministry in the 2nd journey (ch15v36-18v22) was as a **pastor** (see ch15v36,v41, ch16v5).

The emphasis of Paul's ministry in the 3rd journey (ch19v1-21v8) was as a **teacher** (see ch19v8-10, ch20v27).

Those 3 particular gifts that Paul manifested are most significant for the entire Church age (see Eph 4v12).

The Acts was a time of apostolic signs, miracles & wonders (see ch3v7-8, ch5v12-16, ch14v8-10, ch19v11-12), and a time when the gift of tongues operated (see ch2v4, ch10v46, ch19v6).

There was divine attestation of the Church, to the nation of Israel in particular, that those who were regarded as "**unlearned and ignorant men**" (ch4v13) were indeed speaking the Word of God (see Heb 2v4).

Acts 20-28: Paul indicates to the Ephesian elders in ch20 his departure, i.e. the passing of the apostolic age. For this present day, no apostolic succession, and therefore no apostolic gifts operating, now that we have the full revelation of God's Word in the completed NT Scripture.

Paul & the gospel reach the Gentile metropolis of Rome in AD 63; under house arrest for 2 years, he is still testifying to the Jews from the law & the prophets concerning the kingdom of God & the Person of Jesus.

In Rome, Paul writes the prison epistles that unveil the great truth of the mystery of Christ & the Church.