

Acts of the Apostles – Summary: Chapter by Chapter

The Book of Acts documents the birth and growth of the early church, emphasising the work of the Holy Spirit, the expansion of the gospel to all nations, and the perseverance of believers in the face of opposition. Major themes include divine guidance, unity and diversity within the church, the fulfilment of prophecy, and the breaking down of ethnic and cultural barriers. The Acts' historical and theological significance endures, providing a blueprint for mission, leadership, and Christian community. The narrative unfolds across 28 chapters, each contributing to the overarching themes of witness, persecution, community, and divine guidance. Its legacy is seen in the global spread of Christianity and the enduring principles it imparts to believers and church leaders alike. Let us now look at a summary of all the chapters.

Chapter 1: The Ascension and Choosing Matthias

The opening chapter sets the stage after Jesus' resurrection. Jesus instructs his disciples to await the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem and ascends to heaven. The disciples, numbering about 120, gather in prayer. To restore the Twelve, Matthias is chosen by lot to replace Judas Iscariot. This chapter emphasises obedience, prayer, apostolic authority, and preparation for the mission ahead.

Chapter 2: Pentecost and the Birth of the Church

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples, enabling them to speak in various languages. Peter delivers a powerful sermon, interpreting the phenomenon as fulfilment of Joel's prophecy and proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Christ. About 3,000 people are baptised, forming the first Christian community, marked by teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. This chapter introduces the church's supernatural empowerment and communal life.

Chapter 3: Healing at the Temple and Peter's Sermon

Peter and John heal a lame man at the temple gate, drawing a crowd. Peter seizes the opportunity to preach, attributing the miracle to Jesus' name and calling listeners to repentance. He connects Jesus' suffering and resurrection to Old Testament prophecies, highlighting continuity with Israel's story and the necessity of faith in Christ.

Chapter 4: Apostles Arrested and Boldness in Preaching

Opposition arises as Peter and John are arrested by religious authorities. Despite threats, they boldly testify to Jesus' resurrection. After their release, the believers pray for courage, and the Holy Spirit fills them anew. The chapter also describes the

early church's radical generosity, as members share possessions to meet needs, reinforcing unity and reliance on God.

Chapter 5: Ananias and Sapphira, Miracles, and Persecution

Ananias and Sapphira are struck dead for deceit regarding a financial gift, underscoring the seriousness of integrity within the community. The apostles perform many miracles, furthering the church's reputation. Increased opposition leads to their arrest, but an angel frees them. Gamaliel's counsel to the Sanhedrin results in their release after flogging. The chapter balances the church's growth and divine judgement with persistent external challenges.

Chapter 6: Appointment of Deacons, Stephen's Rise

As the church grows, disputes arise over how to distribute food to widows. Seven men, including Stephen and Philip, are appointed to oversee this ministry, introducing the role of deacons. Stephen's wisdom and miracles attract opposition from certain Jewish groups, setting the stage for his subsequent trial. The chapter illustrates the church's adaptability and the emergence of new leaders.

Chapter 7: Stephen's Speech and Martyrdom

Stephen delivers a lengthy defence before the Sanhedrin, recounting Israel's history and accusing the leaders of resisting God. His speech highlights God's faithfulness and Israel's recurring unfaithfulness. He is stoned to death, becoming the first Christian martyr. Saul (later Paul) is introduced as a witness. This pivotal chapter marks a transition, as persecution intensifies and the gospel begins to move beyond Jerusalem.

Chapter 8: Persecution, Philip's Ministry, Ethiopian Eunuch

Widespread persecution scatters believers, spreading the gospel to Samaria and beyond. Philip's ministry in Samaria sees conversions and miracles, and he later explains the Scriptures to an Ethiopian official, who is baptised. The chapter underscores the church's mission to all peoples and the Holy Spirit's role in guiding evangelism.

Chapter 9: Conversion of Saul, Healing of Aeneas, and Dorcas

Saul's dramatic encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus transforms him from persecutor to apostle. After regaining sight through Ananias, Saul begins preaching in Damascus and Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Peter heals Aeneas and raises Dorcas (Tabitha) from the dead in Joppa. The chapter highlights the power of grace and the expansion of leadership in the early church.

Chapter 10: Peter and Cornelius, The Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit

Peter receives a vision that challenges Jewish dietary laws and exclusivity, preparing him to visit Cornelius, a Gentile centurion. As Peter preaches, the Holy Spirit falls

upon Cornelius' household, who are baptised. This turning point affirms that the gospel is for all, breaking ethnic and religious barriers.

Chapter 11: Peter's Defence, Church in Antioch

Peter defends his actions before the Jerusalem church, explaining God's acceptance of Gentiles. Meanwhile, the church in Antioch flourishes, and believers are first called "Christians". Barnabas and Saul (Paul) minister there, and aid is sent to Jerusalem during famine. The chapter demonstrates the church's inclusiveness and growing sense of identity.

Chapter 12: Peter's Escape, Herod's Death

Herod Agrippa 1 persecuted the church, executing James and imprisoning Peter. Miraculously, Peter is freed by an angel. Herod's subsequent death, attributed to divine judgment, contrasts with the persecutor's fate and the church's resilience. The narrative demonstrates God's sovereignty over human rulers.

Chapter 13: Paul's First Missionary Journey Begins

The church in Antioch commissions Barnabas and Saul for missionary work. They travel to Cyprus and Asia Minor, preaching in synagogues, facing opposition, and witnessing conversions. Saul begins to be called Paul. This chapter marks the shift towards the Gentile mission and the centrality of Paul's leadership.

Chapter 14: Ministry in Iconium, Lystra, Derbe

Paul and Barnabas encounter both acceptance and violent rejection as they preach in various cities. In Lystra, Paul heals a crippled man, leading locals to mistake them for gods. Later, Paul is stoned but survives. They strengthen the disciples and appoint elders, then return to Antioch. The narrative illustrates perseverance and the establishment of new churches despite adversity.

Chapter 15: Jerusalem Council, Debate on Gentile Believers

A significant controversy arises over whether Gentile converts must follow Jewish law, particularly circumcision. The Jerusalem Council, led by apostles and elders, decides that Gentiles need not be circumcised but should abstain from certain practices. This decision preserves unity and affirms salvation by grace, apart from the law.

Chapter 16: Second Missionary Journey, Philippi Events

Paul, accompanied by Silas and later Timothy and Luke, travels to Macedonia. In Philippi, Lydia is converted, and Paul exorcises a slave girl, leading to imprisonment. An earthquake facilitates their release, and the jailer's conversion follows. The chapter highlights divine intervention, the spread of the gospel to Europe, and the diverse backgrounds of converts.

Chapter 17: Thessalonica, Berea, Athens

Paul's preaching in Thessalonica prompts both conversions and opposition. In Berea, the Jews are commended for examining the Scriptures. In Athens, Paul addresses philosophers at the Areopagus, contextualising the gospel for a Greek audience. The chapter demonstrates adaptability in evangelism and the challenge of presenting the gospel in diverse cultural settings.

Chapter 18: Corinth, Meeting Aquila and Priscilla

Paul settles in Corinth and works with Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tentmakers. He faces opposition but establishes a flourishing church. Later, Apollos, a learned Jew, is instructed further by Aquila and Priscilla. The chapter underscores the importance of partnership, teaching, and perseverance in ministry.

Chapter 19: Ephesus, Miracles, Riot

Paul's extended ministry in Ephesus includes extraordinary miracles and the conversion of many. The burning of magic books signifies a break with occult practices. Opposition from silversmiths, fearing loss of business, sparks a riot. The chapter highlights the transformative power of the gospel and the social upheaval it can cause.

Chapter 20: Farewell to Ephesian Elders

Paul travels through Macedonia and Greece, then gathers the Ephesian elders at Miletus. He delivers a moving farewell speech, warning them of future dangers and urging vigilance. The chapter is notable for its pastoral tone, concern for church leaders, and emphasis on sacrificial service.

Chapter 21: Journey to Jerusalem, Paul's Arrest

Paul journeys to Jerusalem despite prophetic warnings of danger. In the temple, he is falsely accused and arrested, causing a riot. Roman intervention saves him from violence. The chapter marks the beginning of Paul's legal trials and his unwavering commitment to his calling.

Chapter 22: Paul's Defence Before the Crowd

Paul addresses the hostile Jerusalem crowd, recounting his background and conversion. His mention of his mission to the Gentiles incites further outrage. The chapter illustrates the complexities of Jewish-Christian relations and Paul's willingness to testify despite personal risk.

Chapter 23: Paul Before the Sanhedrin, Plot Against Him

Paul appears before the Sanhedrin, sparking division between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. His nephew's warning thwarts a plot to kill him. Paul is transferred under heavy guard to Caesarea. The narrative highlights God's providence and the legal and political challenges faced by early Christians.

Chapter 24: Trial Before Felix

Paul's trial before the Roman governor Felix involves accusations from Jewish leaders. Paul defends his faith and integrity. Felix delays judgment, keeping Paul in custody for two years, hoping for a bribe. This chapter reveals the intersection of faith, politics, and personal ambition.

Chapter 25: Trial Before Festus, Appeal to Caesar

After Festus succeeded Felix, Paul faced renewed charges. To avoid being handed over to the Jews, Paul appeals to Caesar, exercising his rights as a Roman citizen. King Agrippa expresses interest in hearing Paul. The chapter underscores legal rights and the complex political landscape of the time.

Chapter 26: Paul's Defence Before Agrippa

Paul makes his case before King Agrippa, recounting his conversion and mission. Agrippa is almost persuaded by Paul's testimony but does not commit. The chapter is a masterful example of apologetic discourse and demonstrates the persuasive power of personal experience.

Chapter 27: Voyage to Rome, Shipwreck

Paul embarks on a perilous sea journey to Rome under guard. Despite warnings, the ship is caught in a violent storm and ultimately shipwrecked off the coast of Malta. Paul's leadership and faith encourage all aboard, and no lives are lost. The narrative symbolises trust in God amidst adversity.

Chapter 28: Arrival in Rome, Ministry and Conclusion

On Malta, Paul survives a snake bite and heals many. Upon arrival in Rome, he is permitted to live under house arrest, freely proclaiming the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. The book concludes with Paul's ongoing witness, reflecting the gospel's unstoppable advance.

Discussion Questions on the Book of Acts

1. How does the Book of Acts portray the development and challenges faced by the early Christian community, and what lessons can be drawn for modern faith communities?
2. In what ways do the actions and speeches of Peter and Paul reflect the broader themes of mission and evangelism found throughout the Book of Acts?
3. How does the Holy Spirit function within the narrative of Acts, and what significance does this have for understanding the role of the Spirit in contemporary Christian life?

4. Consider the conflicts and debates described in the Book of Acts, particularly around the inclusion of Gentiles. How did these shape the identity and direction of the early church?
5. What impact did persecution and opposition have on the spread of Christianity in Acts, and how might this be relevant to Christians living in challenging circumstances today?

Reflection questions on the Book of Acts often focus on the Holy Spirit's power, the growth of the early church, mission/evangelism, persecution, and practical application for today, asking how the apostles' experiences with God's guidance, miracles (like tongues, healing), unity challenges, and bold witness relate to our own faith journey and Christian life. Key themes include: How are we witnesses (Acts 1:8)? How do we handle opposition (Acts 9, 11, 17)? What is the role of the Spirit today (Acts 2, 8, 10)? How do we live out community and discipleship (Acts 2, 4, 9)? and What is our mission (Acts 10)?.

On the Holy Spirit & Power

- How does the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) compare to or differ from experiences of the Spirit today?
- What role do signs and wonders play in Acts versus our modern church?
- How can we experience the Holy Spirit's guidance in our daily decisions and ministries, as seen with Philip (Acts 8) or Paul (Acts 13)?

On Mission & Evangelism

- Where does Acts show the gospel spreading geographically and culturally (Acts 10)? How does this parallel our global mission?
- What lessons can we learn from Paul's methods of sharing the gospel in different settings (e.g., synagogue vs. Areopagus in Acts 17)?
- How do we respond when our message is rejected or causes conflict, as Paul and Barnabas did (Acts 13, 14)?

On the Church & Discipleship

- How did the early church handle internal conflict and decisions (e.g., Jerusalem Council in Acts 15)? What does this teach us about unity?
- What does it mean to be a witness today (Acts 1:8)? What gets in the way of our witness?
- How can we balance teaching/discipling fellow believers (Paul in Acts 18) with evangelism?

On Persecution & Suffering

- How did Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7) and Paul's conversion (Acts 9) impact the early church and its mission?
- When have you faced difficulty or loss for your faith, and what did you learn (like Demetrius' business in Acts 19)?

On Key Figures & Events

- What is the significance of the Apostles' focus on prayer and waiting on God (Acts 1)?
- How did events like Tabitha's raising (Acts 9) demonstrate God's compassion and power?
- What is the meaning of the Jerusalem Council's decision regarding Gentiles (Acts 15)?

The Book of Acts Reflection and Discussion Questions

Acts 1- The Apostles knew they needed to replace Judas. Therefore they trusted God to place the right person in that spot. How can we apply this principle to the relationships in our own lives?

Acts 2- Outsiders looking in thought Jesus's followers were drunk because they were so filled with the Holy Spirit. When others look at you, can they tell you are filled with the Holy Spirit as well?

Acts 3- While the people were in awe over the lame man's healing, Peter took that chance to direct the peoples attention to God. In what ways can we apply this to those we come in contact with?

Acts 4- Peter and John, despite knowing what happened to Jesus when He spoke against the scribes, remained firm in their faith. Do you allow fear to consume your choices to speak out about God or do you allow faith to continue to show through?

Acts 5- Peter and the Apostles were ordered not to teach about Jesus. Yet, they refused claiming that they would follow God's instructions. Name a time when you have been asked to not speak about God. How did you respond?

Acts 6- The Apostles knew they had limits. They could not be effective in all the areas that needed to be filled in the ministry that God had entrusted to them. Are there areas in your life that you need to delegate or step away from so you can be effective in the areas God is calling you to lead?

Acts 7- Stephen was persecuted for his beliefs. Yet he stood firm, even though he was to face death. How has your walk with God caused you to be persecuted?

Acts 8- God put Philip in the position to minister to the Eunuch. Name a time when God has caused your paths to cross with someone who needed you to minister to them.

Acts 9- Saul is a great reminder that God can use our pasts as a great testimony to reach others. In what ways has God used your testimony to reach and touch others?

Acts 10- Peter had been focusing on the Jewish community. Yet God laid it on Peter's heart that salvation was for all people. Name a time when you wrestled with the fact that someone was possibly undeserving of God's gift of salvation. How did you overcome it?

Acts 11- Peter was questioned about reaching out to the Gentile community. Have you ever been questioned about reaching out to someone who God has laid on your heart? How did you respond?

Acts 12- Peter was rescued by God from the hands of Herod. Have you ever had a time when God has stepped in and delivered you from a situation?

Acts 13- Paul and Barnabas spoke a message that was not received well. Have you ever had a conviction laid on your heart that was not received well? How did you handle it?

Acts 14- Paul and Barnabas were referred to as gods. Yet, they remained humble and pointed all praise back to God. How do you remain humble when you are praised?

Acts 15 - Throughout history Christians have struggled with unity and contention. How have you handled these issues throughout your life?

Acts 16 - Obeying the call of the Lord in our lives often brings about unexpected trials, but blessing for our obedience is certain to come. What blessings has God given you when you followed a call He's given you?

Acts 17 - Paul was unafraid of preaching the gospel of Christ. He did not fear what man could do to him. How can you be more like Paul and share the gospel with others?

Acts 18 - Not only did Paul preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, but he spent significant amounts of time teaching and encouraging fellow believers. What can you do to teach and/or encourage a fellow believer today?

Acts 19 - Demetrius' business was at stake because of Paul's preaching the truth of Jesus Christ at Ephesus. Have you ever been faced with difficulty or loss of a job because of your faith?

Acts 20 - Paul knew he wouldn't see the believers at Ephesus again. He prepared and encouraged them for the difficulties that would come their way in the future. He was not concerned with himself in any way. How can you be more mission focused in your life, ultimately following both Jesus' and Paul's example?

Acts 21 - Paul's heart and life were solely devoted to Christ. He did not fear a martyr's death. If faced with this being part of your future, how do you think you would respond?

Acts 22 - Paul was not hesitant to give his testimony, even though his past was laden with sin. His life proves that God CAN and WILL use ANYONE who has a willing heart. Who can you share your testimony with today? How has God used you in spite of your past?

Acts 23 - God revealed that He was not yet finished with Paul and that he would give his testimony in Rome. When have you thought that God was finished with you, but He used you again?

Acts 24 - Felix heard Paul's case and found no reason to make a ruling, he even hoped that Paul would pay him off to be released. Instead he kept him bound just to satisfy the Jews. Have you been faced with unjust judgment in your life? If so, how did you respond?

Acts 25 - Nothing brought against Paul could be proven, yet no ruler would let him go. How have you responded to untrue accusations that couldn't be proven in your life?

Acts 26 - Though Paul was imprisoned, he was allowed to speak for himself and give his testimony again, just as God promised. Has God ever given you another opportunity to share your testimony with someone? If so, did you take advantage of the opportunity?

Acts 27 - Paul was able to witness again for Christ and reveal what God had promised, that all the lives aboard the ship would be saved. How have you been able to share God's promises with others?

Acts 28 - No matter where Paul went or was taken, he shared his testimony and allowed God to work through him. Where has God given you the opportunity to witness that seemed unlikely or unusual?