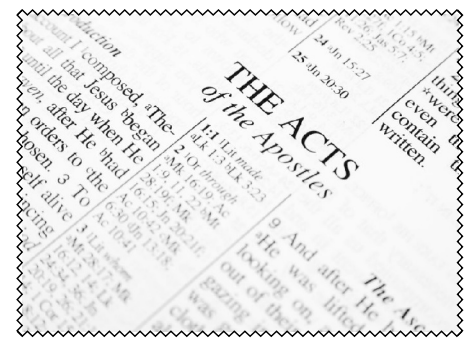


Church of God Sunday School

THE BIBLE — NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY



DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** Jesus gives the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:6-8).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** The Holy Spirit is given (Acts 2:1-11).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** The church faces persecution (Acts 4:1-3; 8:1-4).
- ❑ **Thursday:** Saul is God's chosen vessel (Acts 9:10-16).
- ❑ **Friday:** Peter learns that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:1-16, 34-35).
- ❑ **Saturday:** Saul and Barnabas are sent forth by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:1-5).

MEMORY VERSE: *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*
—Acts 1:8

Acts of the Apostles

The fifth book in the New Testament is often classified as history. Since the second century it has been called "Acts" or "Acts of the Apostles." Some have stated a more accurate title would be "Acts of the Holy Spirit Working Through the Apostles." It was God's Spirit that made all the "Acts" possible.

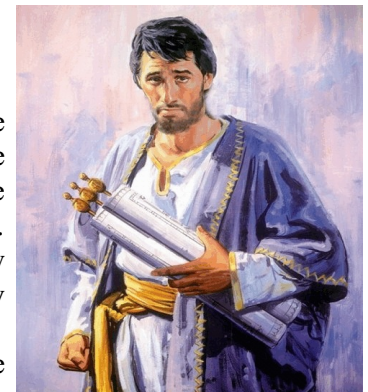
This book was not written in the style of the Gospels (books before Acts) nor was it written in the style of the Epistles (books after Acts). The genre (category) of Acts was well known at that time: recording events, deeds, and words of people or places. Some scholars call this "historiography." Like other ancient histories, which would often include speeches, Acts contains more than 20 speeches.

The author of Acts is believed to be Luke, sometimes called "Luke the Evangelist." Luke is also said to be the author of one of the Gospels. When Luke first wrote this Gospel and Acts, they were a single book. Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. It is then the focus moves from "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (1:1) to "the apostles whom he had chosen" (1:2). Both books are addressed to Theophilus. Luke addressing him as "most excellent" (Luke 1:3) causes commentators to state Theophilus was possibly a high ranking Roman official. His name means "one who loves God," causing some to believe he was a Christian.

Acts Is Vital to the New Testament

The Book of Acts is vital to the New Testament. It forms a bridge between the Gospels and the Epistles (letters). Without it we would not know how the gift of the Holy Spirit was given. We would not know who Paul was—his persecution of the Christians, his conversion, his call to be an Apostle, or why he wrote several Epistles. This book tells us of the history of the early church, the Great Commission and how it was carried out, and the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Luke was the only writer to record Christ's Ascension.

Although this book is called "Acts of the Apostles," it is not about all of the Apostles. Only the acts of four Apostles are recorded (Peter, John, James, and Paul). The first half of this book is primarily about Peter (1:1 to 12:24), and the second half is mostly about Paul (12:25 to 28:31).



"All One in Christ Jesus"

While Jesus was here on earth, He taught and gave guidance to His disciples. After He returned to Heaven, direction and guidance came through the Holy Spirit (1:1-3). At first the Apostles, filled with the Holy Ghost, preached the Gospel in Jerusalem (primarily to the Jews). But in the Great Commission, Jesus instructed them to also preach in Judea, in Samaria, and to the whole world. The Gospel was not for only the Jews but for the Gentiles as well.

The blending of Jews and Gentiles under the preaching of the Gospel was not always easy. For hundreds of years the Jews had been told that they were to be a separate people (to protect them from being affected by the idol-worshipping nations around them). But in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile]" (Galatians 3:28). All people are the same in God's eyes. This truth was revealed to Peter in a vision of a sheet coming down from heaven with clean and unclean animals (10:9-15). God showed Peter that no one was to be called "common or unclean" (10:28).

It was not uncommon for some of the Christian Jews—"certain men" (15:1)—to expect Gentile converts to obey the old Law (15:1-5). Peter asked why the Jews wanted to put the "yoke" (burden) of the Law on these Gentiles, when they themselves had been unable to bear it (15:7-10). Salvation comes "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (15:11), not through the works of the old Law and Jewish rituals. The Apostle Paul (called of God to be an Apostle to the Gentiles; 22:21 and Ephesians 3:1) also made it clear that this was so. He wrote that it was not the outward appearance which made one a true Jew, "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly" (Romans 2:28-29).

To give a commission is to give authority to carry out a certain task or duty.

The Gospel Spreads

The Church is not a building, but it is the body of Christ.

The Greek word for "church" is ekklesia, which means "called out ones."

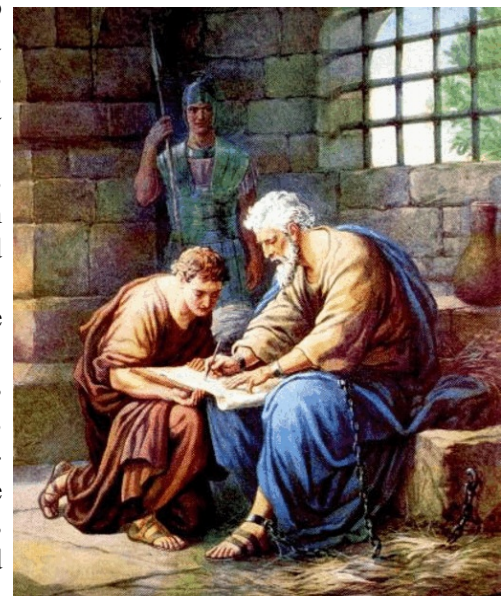
Persecution caused the Gospel to spread. Christians left Jerusalem because many believers were being imprisoned. Yet, wherever they fled to, they continued to be "witnesses" for Jesus (1:8). "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). In the second half of the Book of Acts, we read of Paul's missionary journeys. During these journeys, the Gospel was preached, and many people believed and were

saved. The Great Commission was being fulfilled! Churches were "established in the faith, and increased in number daily" (16:5).

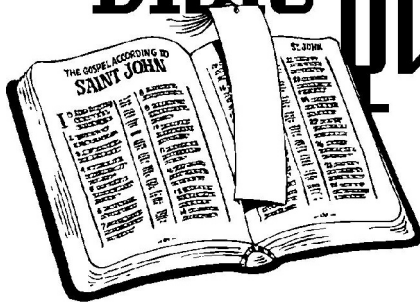
The last few chapters of Acts tell of Paul's imprisonment and journey to Rome (capital of the Roman Empire). Yet, this too was in God's divine plan (23:11). Paul had opportunities to witness to Claudius Lysias (a chief captain), Felix (a governor), Festus (a governor), and Herod Agrippa (a king). Paul's testimony and message was so powerful that King Agrippa said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (26:28).

The last chapter of this book lets us know that although Paul was under the guard of a soldier (28:16), he was permitted to live in "his own hired house" (28:30). While there Paul wrote many letters (Epistles) and also preached to many who came "to him into his lodging" (28:23). Because of his ministry to the Christians in Rome, they were "much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Philippians 1:14).

Tradition tells us Paul eventually stood before Caesar. This was foretold to Paul by an angel (27:24). Bible dictionaries and commentaries state that it is commonly believed Paul was beheaded during the persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Nero. Although Paul died, the Gospel continued to spread. Because these "Acts," messages, and events were recorded, people yet today can hear the Gospel, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and . . . be saved" (16:31).



Bible Quiz



1. What is the Great Commission? _____

2. What is the definition of historiography? _____

3. Acts is said to contain more than 20 speeches. Name one person who gave a speech in this book: _____

4. Why is Acts such an important book in the New Testament?

5. The "Acts" of which four Apostles are described in this book? _____

6. What did Peter say that some Jewish Christians were trying to put on the Gentile Christians? _____

7. How did persecution help spread the Gospel? _____

8. Paul's imprisonment and journey to Rome gave him opportunities to witness to very important people. Who were they? _____

9. Who told Paul that he would stand before Caesar? _____

10. Read Acts 21:10-14. Who bound his own hands and feet? _____

Why? _____

11. What did King Agrippa tell Paul in Acts 26:28? _____

**In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit
moved on men.
In the New Testament the Holy Spirit
lives in the hearts of men.**

How is this different?

SCRIPTURES TO CONSIDER:

**1 Samuel 10:10 Ezekiel 11:19 John 7:39
2 Peter 1:21 Judges 13:25 John 14:17**

