

ACTS

CHAPTERS 1-7

**Growth Group
Participants Book**

Acts 1-8

Sermon Series	Sermon Date	Passage
Week 1	5-Feb	Acts 1
Week 2	12-Feb	Acts 2:1-39
Week 3	19-Feb	Acts 2:36-47
Week 4	26-Feb	Acts 3
Week 5	5-Mar	Acts 4
Week 6	12-Mar	Acts 4:32-5:11
Week 7	19-Mar	Acts 5:12-42
Week 8	26-Mar	Acts 6:1-7
Week 9	2-Apr	Acts 6:8-7:60

For an overview of Acts see the two video summaries from *The Bible Project*:

Acts 1-12: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/acts-1-12/>

Acts 13-28: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/acts-13-28/>

Date, author and historical background

Acts is part of a two-volume work, with the Gospel of Luke being the first volume. Neither book names its author, but Luke is clearly the author of both. External evidence (i.e., church tradition from mid-second century AD support Luke as the author) and internal evidence (i.e., Luke refers to himself in the 'we' sections of Acts (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21; 27:1ff; 28:16) and is mentioned by in several of his letters as his companion (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11; Phil 24), support Luke as the author.

Luke was gentile from Antioch and a medical doctor. He was not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry, but an early convert and second-generation member of the early church. He accompanied Paul on his 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys.

Scholars date Acts as early as 62AD, a guess based primarily on the abrupt conclusion of the book where Paul is in Rome under house arrest awaiting his trial before Caesar (Acts 28:30).

How are we to read and apply ACTS today?

How are we to use Luke's historical account of the church's expansion in Acts to 'do' church in the twenty-first century? Is it valid to take the descriptions of events back then and simply implement them in the church today? This seems to be the way many in the church apply the book of Acts today, and the reason we have such diversity of opinion on the practices to be adopted by the church.

The critical question is, 'What was Luke's intention when he wrote the book of Acts?' It was not primarily to describe the history of the early church in detail. Only one line of church expansion is described (from Jerusalem to Rome). Nor was it to give clear descriptions of exactly how things happened (i.e., how people were baptised or how the church was organised). The detail is just not there. Yet, Luke's intention is to show how the church expanded and leave this for us as a model for us to follow. As Gordon Fee puts it in the article *Acts- the Problem of Historical Precedent*, "...he (Luke) was trying to show how the church emerged as a chiefly Gentile, worldwide phenomenon from its origins as a Jerusalem-based Judaism-oriented sect of Jewish believers, and how the Holy Spirit was directly responsible for this phenomenon of universal salvation based on grace alone. The recurring motif that nothing can hinder this forward movement of the church empowered by the Holy Spirit makes us think that Luke also intended his readers to see this as a model for their existence. And the fact that Acts is in the canon further makes us think that surely this is the way the church was intended to be – evangelistic, joyful, empowered by the Holy Spirit."

If it is Luke's intention to give us a model, then how can we then apply the model presented in Acts to the church today? Firstly, we need to identify the principles the Luke's intends to teach us in Acts (i.e., the expansion of the church is Holy Spirit empowered and so prayer is an important church activity). The article by Gene Getz, *A Look through three Lenses* is helpful in distinguishing function from form as we read the Bible. He makes the point of page 38, "*the Bible often teaches function without describing form. Where it does describe form, it is partial and incomplete. What form is described varies from situation to situation ... it is not possible to absolutize something that is not described; that is always incomplete; and that is always changing from one setting to another ... On the other hand, functions and principles are absolute – if they appear consistently throughout New Testament history and are not self-delimiting.*" In other words, the functions are normative – we must baptise people, appoint elders, pray and teach the Word etc, but exactly how we go about this is not normative. The only caveat to this is that we also consider the rest of Scripture. It may be that in another part of Scripture a particular practice is taught as normative for the church.

What does this mean for the actual practices of the church? Can we simply ignore the detail in Acts. Fee suggests on page 101 that "*biblical precedents may sometimes be regarded as repeatable patterns – even if they are not to be regarded as normative.*" This is especially the case if we find it repeated in the New Testament. For example, preaching in monologue form is a repeated pattern in Acts although not exclusively. Therefore, it is valid for that form to be repeated today.

We, therefore, have freedom to determine the form of a particular function where the Scripture does not prescribe a specific detail of practice. To determine how exactly to implement the biblical principles laid down in Acts in the church today, we need to take into considerations: (1) practice in history and (2) the cultural norms of the day.

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD *(Goals: See what God is saying to us in this week's passage)*

Read Acts 1:1-26

1. Luke writes in Acts 1:1, "in my former book (the gospel of Luke) I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach." What does this imply about the content of Acts?
2. In verse 2-5 we're told Jesus taught the disciples about the Kingdom of God and charged them to stay in Jerusalem until they were baptised by the Holy Spirit. Why do the disciples ask the question about restoring the Kingdom to Israel in verse 6?
3. How does Jesus' response in verses 7-8 challenge expand the disciples thinking and understanding of the gospel?
4. Verses 3-11 tell us that Jesus, who suffered and died, appeared to the disciples over a 40-day period, instructed them in the things of Kingdom of God, promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit, commissioned them to be his witnesses, and would one day return. What does this tell us about His place and role in the church today?
5. Read Psalm 55:12-15; 69:25 & 109:8. (Note: Psalms 69 & 109 are quoted by Peter in vs 20.) Together these Psalms speak of the betrayal, removal from office and replacement of Judas. Why was it important that Judas be replaced?

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD *(Goals: See what God is saying to us in this week's passage)*

Read Acts 2:1-39

1. What is the significance of the appearance of the Spirit (v 2-4) as a mighty wind and fire?
See Exodus 13; Ezekiel 1
2. In verses 5-13 the disciples speak in tongues (Luke makes it clear these were real languages which could be understood). This did not depend on their learning or their eloquence, but it was a work of God's Spirit. What was the purpose of the miracle of languages?
3. Peter in his sermon explains the miracle of the languages (vs 21). He quotes the prophet Joel 2:28-32. What parts of the Joel prophecy was fulfilled in Acts 2 and which parts are yet to be fulfilled?
4. Verse 23 tells us that God is sovereign and that no evil can change his plan. In fact, he uses what was intended for evil for his redemption plan. Where else in Scripture do we see a clear view of God's sovereignty over world events and human responsibility for evil?
Discuss Sovereignty of God and human responsibility.
5. In verses 23-36, Peter provides a summary of the gospel supported by OT quotes from Psalm 16:8-11 & Psalm 110:1 which talk about Jesus' resurrection and exaltation. What is Peter's summary of the gospel?
6. Why did the crowd's respond to Peter's gospel message and what does Peter tell them to do (vs 37-41)?

APPLYING GOD'S WORD (*Goals: Turn understanding into discipleship, make real resolutions on which you can take action*)

7. When have you been convicted of your sin by the Spirit of God, so that you were cut to the heart and repented and turned to Christ for the forgiveness of your sin?

8. The focus of the church's witness (& our own witness as God's people) is the proclamation of the good news of Jesus who is Lord and Messiah. What are the things that hinder us from being effective witnesses in our day and culture?

9. How can we encourage each other and how can the church help us be more effective witnesses? Think of practical things that might help?

10. Jesus is Lord. Yet the rampant consumerism of our culture tells us that we are 'lords' of our lives and can choose what to buy, where to go, how to live. Choice is king. How are we effected by this, and how can we resist this so Jesus remains Lord of every area of our lives?

11. Discuss practical actions (*option to do in pairs and/or triplets*)
 - a. Discuss one way you will personally put what you have learnt into practice

 - b. Who will you tell this week about what you've learned?

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD *(Goals: See what God is saying to us in this week's passage)*

Read Acts 2:36-47

1. What happens when someone receives the good news of Jesus in repentance and faith (vs 38)?
2. What does it mean that the promise is for 'all who are far off – for all the Lord will call' (vs 39)?
3. The grace of God is fruitful and effective as three thousand were added to the church on the day of Pentecost (vs 41). What happens when God works in these first believers individually and collectively?
4. What characteristics show that the early church was a learning church, a loving church, a worshipping church, outreaching church? How do these characteristics show in TCMB?
5. Why is the local church not optional for the follower of Jesus?

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD *(Goals: See what God is saying to us in this week's passage)*

Read Acts 3

1. Luke was a medical doctor. What does he tell us about the crippled man's condition in vs 1-10? Why did Peter ask him to look at him?
2. This miracle of healing is spectacular, instantaneous, and complete. The lame man didn't just stand but jumped to his feet and was seen walking and jumping and praising God. The healings in the gospels and Acts were unique. Why? Why was it important that Peter healed the man in the name of Jesus?
3. In verse 11-16, Peter describes Jesus as the servant of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Holy and Righteous One, the author of life? Why does he describe Jesus in this way?
4. Peter preaches the gospel in verses 11-26. What are the core elements of the gospel mentioned here? What is the challenge of the gospel that Peter preaches?
5. What are the three blessings that result from repentance and a turning back to God?
6. Why is it important that Peter mention the witness of the prophets in verses 24-26

APPLYING GOD'S WORD (*Goals: Turn understanding into discipleship, make real resolutions on which you can take action*)

7. In this story when the lame man receive blessing through Jesus Christ, it is always results in rejoicing and praise? What have we received (Ephesians 1:3ff)? To what extent do rejoicing and praise characterize our lives? Why is this important?

8. How can we become more joyful and praising in our lives and in our community at TCMB?

9. C.H. Spurgeon once said, "Out of all our Saviour's names, there is not one that rings with such sweet music as this blessed name 'Jesus.' I suppose the reason for this is that it answers to our name, the name of sinner." Followers of Jesus have had their sins forgiven. What difference should this make to the way we relate to God and treat others? Think of areas in your life that needs adjusting (idols to de-throne, love to be practiced towards others, forgiving those who have hurt you).

10. What can we look forward to in the future? How should that shape our lives today?

11. Discuss practical actions (*option to do in pairs and/or triplets*)
 - a. Discuss one way you will personally put what you have learnt into practice

 - b. Who will you tell this week about what you've learned?

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD *(Goals: See what God is saying to us in this week's passage)*

Read Acts 4:1-31

1. List the titles and names of those in verses 1-6 who were involved in bringing Peter and John to trial. Why were the disciples suddenly in so much trouble?
2. Despite the intimidation and threats against the disciples they were focussed on one thing. What was it that preoccupied the disciples. Why?
3. List all the things we discover about Jesus in the first 22 verses of Acts 4?
4. How did the church respond to threats? What do they pray for? Why would Psalm 2 be a particular comfort to the disciples?
5. What does the way the early Christians pray have to teach us?

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD *(Goals: See what God is saying to us in this week's passage)*

Read Acts 4:32-5:11

1. Standing back from the passage and taking it in, what are the elements of a great and growing church (vs 14)?
2. In what ways were the believers caring for each other (vs 32-37)? How would this help in times of persecution?
3. What did Ananias and Sapphira do wrong? What was their sin? Why was this so dangerous in the church?
4. How does Peter's response show that the church is precious to the Lord Jesus Christ?
5. What does it mean in verses 5 & 11 when it says 'great fear seized the whole church'?

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD *(Goals: See what God is saying to us in this week's passage)*

Read Acts 5:12-42

1. What two interesting and opposite results did the miracles described in verse 12-16 lead to? Why?
2. What reasons are given in verses 17-28 for the apostles being in trouble this time? How does vs 28 show us Jesus' determination for his gospel to be preached in Jerusalem (see Acts 1:8)?
3. What truths about God do the Apostles emphasize in verses 29-32? Why are they important?
4. In what way do verses 33-42 show an escalation of hostility against the Apostles? (Note how God uses the words of Gamaliel to protect the Apostles)
5. What does it mean to be "counted worth of suffering disgrace for the Name," vs 41? How is it possible to rejoice in this?

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD *(Goals: See what God is saying to us in this week's passage)*

Read Acts 6:1-7

1. What was the complaint of the Hellenistic Jews? How serious an issue so you think this was?
2. According to verse 2 what is in danger of happening because of this complaint?
3. How do the Apostles set about finding a solution to the problem? How does this compare with the way we make decisions at TCMB?
4. What was the result of this decision by the Apostles to delegate the authority to distribute food to the widows – verse 7?
5. Does the preaching and teaching of the Word of God have precedence over looking after the poor? Discuss

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD *(Goals: See what God is saying to us in this week's passage)*

Read Acts 6:8-7:60

1. What do we learn about Stephen from Acts 6:5, 8-15 How did this spiritual zeal translate into action?
2. What specific complaints were made against Stephen? Why was the charge against him so serious? What does it teach us about Satan's opposition (see John 8:42-47)
3. What significance is there that Stephen's face was 'like the face of an angel' verse 15?
4. What does Stephen say about the presence of God in verses 1-53? Where were Abraham, Joseph, and Moses when God appeared to them? What does this tell us about the presence of God? What does Stephen say about the temple in verses 44-50? How does this answer the accusations against him concerning the temple?
5. How is Stephen's speech a masterful, Holy Spirit inspired presentation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? How is Stephen's death full of Christ reflecting his master's death?

