

Acts

- 1. Who wrote the book of Acts? To whom specifically was it written? What place does the writer have within the book?** According to Acts 1:1, the book of Acts was written to someone named Theophilus, whose name means "lover of God". This verse refers to a first account that had already been written to Theophilus. This first account is the gospel of Luke -- see Luke 1:3. It is clear from a comparison of these two Scriptures that Luke wrote the book of Acts. Just as Luke carefully recorded the information of Jesus' earthly ministry in his gospel account, so he dutifully has given us a precise account of the history of the early church in the book of Acts. Although Luke never shows up by name in the book of Acts, he has a secondary role within the book beginning at chapter 20. The viewpoint of the writer changes in the first part of chapter 20 from the third person to the first person. Apparently Luke joined up with Paul somewhere in Macedonia and accompanied him to Troas. From that point forward, Luke was a traveling companion to Paul, even attending him on his journey as a prisoner to Rome.
- 2. Why was this book written? What is it about?** In the beginning of this letter, Luke says that his gospel account was about all that Jesus "*began* to do and teach until the day that He was taken up." The implication is that the book of Acts is about what Jesus continued to do and teach following His ascension to the throne. This is exactly what we find in the book of Acts. The full title of this book is "The Acts of the Apostles." This book is about the work of the early church; how Christianity grew from a tiny group into a powerful force that turned the world upside down. The book of Acts shows us things both from a human perspective as well as from God's viewpoint. My dad, Jay Wilson, says that the role of the Christians in the book of Acts is that of praying and preaching, while God's part concerns guidance and growth. In other words, it is important to remember that the primary characters in this book did not know how things were going to work out. They were in the middle of it, praying and preaching, with no idea at the time of the scope of the history that they were making. On the other hand, God was guiding the church; opening doors and closing doors; turning sparks into flames; and fanning those flames into a fire that would sweep through the whole world. While the first-century Christians were planting and watering, God was causing the growth; creating a spiritual revolution, with the aftershocks continuing for centuries. Notice the praying and preaching throughout the book of Acts:
 - Preaching -- Peter to the 120 about the need for a replacement for Judas -- Acts 1:16-22
 - Praying -- praying for God to show which man to choose as an apostle -- Acts 1:24
 - Preaching -- the apostles' message on the Day of Pentecost -- Acts 2:14-36
 - Praying -- devoted to prayer -- Acts 2:42
 - Preaching -- Peter's message following the healing of the lame man -- Acts 3:11-26
 - Preaching -- Peter's message before the Jewish rulers -- Acts 4:8-12
 - Praying -- the church's prayer for protection and boldness -- Acts 4:24-30
 - Preaching -- apostles' witness to the resurrection -- Acts 4:33
 - Preaching -- apostles' message in the temple -- Acts 5:20
 - Preaching -- Peter and apostles' message to the Council -- Acts 5:29-32
 - Preaching -- in the temple and from house to house -- Acts 5:42

- Prayer and Preaching -- apostles' devotion to prayer and to the ministry of the word -- Acts 6:4
- Praying -- prayer for selection of men (maybe deacons) -- Acts 6:6
- Preaching -- Stephen before the people and then the Council -- Acts 6:10-7:53
- Preaching -- those scattered by persecution went about preaching -- Acts 8:4
- Preaching -- Philip in Samaria -- Acts 8:5
- Praying -- Peter and John before laying on of hands to distribute gifts of the Spirit -- Acts 8:15
- Preaching -- Peter and John's preaching to Samaritan villages -- Acts 8:25
- Preaching -- Philip's message to the Ethiopian eunuch -- Acts 8:35
- Preaching -- Ananias to Saul -- Acts 9:17
- Preaching -- Saul in the synagogues of Damascus -- Acts 9:20-22
- Preaching -- Saul in Jerusalem -- Acts 9:28
- Preaching -- Peter in Lydda and Joppa -- Acts 9:35, 42
- Praying -- Peter for the raising of Dorcas -- Acts 9:40
- Preaching -- Peter's message to the household of Cornelius -- Acts 10:34-44
- Preaching -- those scattered by persecution with Stephen kept preaching to Jews -- Acts 11:19
- Preaching -- men of Cyprus and Cyrene preaching to Gentiles -- Acts 11:20
- Preaching -- Saul and Barnabas at Antioch -- Acts 11:26
- Praying -- for Peter when he was arrested by Herod -- Acts 12:5,12
- Praying -- before sending out Barnabas and Saul -- Acts 13:2-3
- Preaching -- Paul's first missionary journey :) -- see map -- Acts chapters 13 and 14
- Praying -- in conjunction with appointing elders -- Acts 14:22
- Preaching -- Paul and Barnabas at Antioch -- Acts 15:35
- Preaching -- Paul's second missionary journey :) -- see map -- Acts chapters 15-18
- Praying -- Paul and Silas in the jail at Philippi -- Acts 16:25
- Preaching -- Paul's third missionary journey -- see map -- Acts chapters 18-21
- Praying -- Paul with the elders from Ephesus -- Acts 20:36
- Praying -- Paul in his farewell to the brethren at Tyre -- Acts 21:5
- Preaching -- Paul's defense before the Jews -- Acts 22:1-21
- Preaching -- Paul's messages before the Council, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa -- Acts chapters 23-26
- Praying -- Paul's giving of thanks for food on ship to Rome -- Acts 27:34
- Praying -- Paul before healing a man at Malta -- Acts 28:8
- Praying -- Paul's giving of thanks for brethren meeting him at Rome -- Acts 28:15
- Preaching -- Paul before the Jews at Rome -- Acts 28:17-28
- Preaching -- Paul continues to preach to all who will listen at Rome -- Acts 28:31

Notice God's guidance and causing of growth in these Scriptures:

- Growth -- 3000 souls added at Pentecost -- Acts 2:41
- Growth -- Lord adding to the number daily -- Acts 2:47
- Growth -- number of the men grows to 5000 -- Acts 4:4

- Guidance -- place where they prayed was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit -- Acts 4:31
- Guidance -- abundant grace was upon them all -- Acts 4:33
- Growth -- multitudes were constantly added -- Acts 5:14
- Guidance -- Gamaliel's advice to the Council -- Acts 5:33-40
- Guidance -- God uses persecution to spread His word -- Acts 8:1,4
- Growth and Guidance -- church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria were blessed -- Acts 9:31
- Growth and Guidance -- presence of God's grace and considerable numbers were brought to the Lord -- Acts 11:23-24,26
- Growth -- word being spread through the whole region of Pisidia -- Acts 13:48-49
- Guidance -- God bearing witness to His word -- Acts 14:3
- Growth -- many disciples at Derbe -- Acts 14:21
- Guidance -- report that God had opened doors to the Gentiles -- Acts 14:26-27
- Guidance -- God closes doors in Asia and Bithynia, but opens them in Macedonia -- Acts 16:6-10
- Guidance -- God assures Paul that He is with him at Corinth -- Acts 18:9-10
- Growth -- word of the Lord growing mightily in Ephesus -- Acts 19:20
- Guidance -- Paul commends the elders of Ephesus to God and His word -- Acts 20:32
- Guidance -- God assures Paul that He wants him to witness at Rome also -- Acts 23:11

The point is that God has this huge plan. Our responsibility is to pray and to preach. God is the One who guides us, opens doors, and causes the growth. This doesn't happen as fast as you can turn the pages of the book of Acts. It happens over a period of years, decades, and even centuries. Let's do our part and long for the day that we can read God's history book of our time.

3. **In chapters 1-12, the primary focus is on whose ministry? How about for chapters 13-28? Is there a bigger shift of focus that is being communicated through the change in primary characters?** In chapters 1-12, the primary focus is on Peter, while in chapters 13-28, the focus shifts to Paul. Peter was one of the original apostles. His ministry kick-started the church, particularly in reference to Jews being saved. Although Peter opened the door of salvation to the Gentiles with Cornelius, Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. The focus in the second half of the book is on the spread of Christianity, not just to the Jews, but to the whole world.
4. **What conditions for salvation do we find in the book of Acts?** The book of Acts is, among other things, a history of the early church. Hence we find recorded many messages dealing with salvation as well as many examples of conversions. Here is a list of verses that specifically deal with the topic of salvation:
 - Acts 2:21 -- call upon the name of the Lord
 - Acts 2:38 -- repent and be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ
 - Acts 2:40-41 -- immersed
 - Acts 3:19 -- repent and return

- Acts 4:12 -- the name of Jesus Christ
- Acts 5:31-32 -- Jesus is Savior, obedience
- Acts 8:35-37 -- belief, confession, immersion
- Acts 10:43 -- believe in Jesus
- Acts 11:14 -- words
- Acts 13:38 -- through Jesus it is preached
- Acts 15:11 -- through the grace of the Lord Jesus
- Acts 16:31 -- believe
- Acts 22:16 -- be immersed, calling on the name of the Lord
- Acts 26:18 -- turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God

5. **What do we learn about the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts?** The Holy Spirit shows up all over the place in the book of Acts. Here are some of the things we learn:

- Immersion with -- 1:5, 11:15-16
- Speaks through prophets -- 1:16, 4:25, 13:2, 15:28, 20:23, 21:11, 28:25
- Filled with -- 2:4, 4:8, 4:31, 6:5, 7:55, 9:17, 11:24, 13:19, 13:52
- Jesus was anointed with Him on earth and received Him at His ascension -- 10:38, 2:33
- We can receive Him -- 2:38, 5:32, 8:17, 10:47, 19:2, 19:6
- Don't lie to Him or resist Him -- 5:3, 7:51
- He is a witness -- 5:32
- He is given -- 5:32, 15:8
- He gives comfort -- 9:31
- Holy Spirit sent people out and made overseers -- 13:4, 20:28
- He closes doors -- 16:6

6. **What do we see about God's kingdom in this book?** The kingdom has a central role in the book of Acts:

- Jesus spoke about it -- Acts 1:3
- The apostles asked questions about it -- Acts 1:6
- After the start of the church, it was a central part of the preaching -- 8:12, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23, 28:31
- Through many tribulations we enter it -- 14:22

7. **Why did Paul and Barnabas part ways? Who do you think was right? What can we learn from this?** The relationship between Paul and Barnabas started shortly after Saul had become a Christian in Damascus. When Saul came to Jerusalem, the brethren weren't willing to associate with him, not really believing that he was a disciple. However, Barnabas stuck up for Saul and communicated that he was a legitimate Christian. Sometime later, we see that Barnabas went to find Saul and bring him to Antioch to help make disciples of both Jews and Gentiles there. Barnabas and Saul then got sent out together on Paul's first missionary journey from the church at Antioch. They had excellent teamwork and great success on that first missionary trip, and then made plans to go on another one. This was where the sharp disagreement arose between the two. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along with them, while Paul was adamant that he couldn't come. Mark had abandoned

them on the first missionary journey, and Paul wanted someone dependable. They split up over this agreement and Barnabas took his cousin Mark with him, while Paul chose Silas to accompany him. It is interesting to note that Paul and Silas were the ones committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord -- see Acts 15:40. It seems that Paul was right in terms of getting the work done, while Barnabas made the right decision for Mark. The Scripture informs us that Mark was faithful and at some point even became useful for service to the apostle Paul. We should learn that personality conflicts and disagreements in opinion (not doctrinal) over how certain things should be done don't disqualify someone from being a Christian. The important thing is to continue to work for the Lord, and in time He will pull us back together again.

8. Some variation of the phrase “turned to the Lord” or “turn to God” shows up multiple times in the book of Acts. From this book and other Scriptures, can we establish how a person “turns to the Lord”? Throughout the book of Acts, we see that “turning to the Lord” is synonymous with a person’s salvation. As a matter of fact, sometimes the King James Version translates the term “turned” as “converted.” Here are some places we see this terminology used in the book of Acts:

- Acts 3:19 – repent and return
- Acts 9:35 – those who lived at Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord
- Acts 11:21 – a large number in Antioch believed and turned to the Lord
- Acts 14:15 – Paul preached to those at Lystra that they should turn from idols to a living God
- Acts 15:19 – they chose not to trouble those who were turning to God from among the Gentiles
- Acts 26:18 – Paul was chosen by God to preach to the Gentiles that they would turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God
- Acts 26:20 – Paul preached in Judea and even to the Gentiles that people should repent and turn to God

So what does it mean to “turn” to God? Where does this turn take place? Most of the time we think of turning as repentance; however, the Scriptures are clear that turning and repentance, though related, aren’t synonymous. In other words, you wouldn’t tell someone to repent and repent. A quick comparison of Acts 2:38 with Acts 3:19 shows a parallel message in these two verses. If this is a direct parallel, then turning is synonymous with immersion into Christ. Sure enough, this can be backed up by comparing 2 Corinthians 3:14-16 with what we know from other Scriptures. Notice that in 2 Corinthians 3:14, the veil is removed *in Christ*. Now check out verse 16 – “whenever a man *turns to the Lord*, the veil is taken away.” How does a person get into Christ? Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 agree that a person enters into Christ at his immersion. We can establish then that a person “turns to the Lord” in the waters of immersion.

9. How many times in the NASB version of the book of Acts do we see that Paul “reasoned” or was “reasoning” with others about Christ? What reasonable conclusion can we draw from this? ☺ Six times in the book of Acts, it is noted that Paul reasoned with nonChristians about Christ. Here are the verses:

- Acts 17:2 – Paul reasoned with those at Thessalonica, giving evidence of Christ’s death and resurrection
- Acts 17:17 – Paul was reasoning in the synagogue at Athens
- Acts 18:4 – Paul was reasoning in the synagogue at Corinth every Sabbath, trying to persuade both Jews and Greeks
- Acts 18:19 – Paul reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue at Ephesus
- Acts 19:8 – Paul was again in Ephesus, in the synagogue, reasoning and persuading about the kingdom of God
- Acts 19:9 – Paul had to leave the synagogue, but continued to reason daily in the school of Tyrannus

The conclusion that we can draw from the example of Paul is that it is important to logically establish for people the validity of the Scriptures. For those who had a belief in God, Paul established from prophecy that Jesus was the Christ. For the pagans, Paul began with the evidence of creation, and that the Creator is the living God – message given on Mars Hill at Athens. We are on the right track, brethren, beginning our Bible studies with proof that the Bible is the Word of God. Let’s keep making disciples, trusting that God will fan the flames of this spiritual revolution!

- 10. What do we see is the thrust of the teaching about Jesus according to the recorded sermons from the book of Acts?** From the recorded preaching in the book of Acts, we find some points that are continually hit in reference to Jesus. The preaching focuses on Jesus’ earthly ministry (Acts 10:36-39), His death (Acts 3:15), His resurrection and appearance (Acts 2:32), and culminates in His ascension where He holds the position of King and Savior (Acts 5:31). While not every message brings out each of these points in full, they are all emphasized multiple times.
- 11. What are some different ways that the book of Acts describes the unity of the brethren?** The unity of the early church is another thread that runs throughout this book. Here are some ways that this unity is phrased:
- One mind -- 1:14, 2:46, 15:25
 - One accord -- 4:24, 5:12
 - One heart and soul -- 4:32
 - Together -- 1:15, 2:1, 2:44, 2:46, 4:31, 12:12, 14:27, 15:6, 15:30, 20:7-8
 - Common -- 2:42, 4:32
- 12. How did the early church handle persecution?** During the first century, persecution of Christians was prevalent, first from the Jews and then later from the Romans. The book of Acts primarily deals with the time of Jewish persecution. Here are some things that we learn from the early Christians’ conduct when faced with these intense trials:
- They hung together -- 4:31-32, 12:12
 - They prayed -- 4:31, 12:5, 16:25
 - They rejoiced that they were considered worthy -- 5:41
 - They kept preaching -- 5:42, 8:4; the missionary journeys
 - They shook off the dust of their feet -- 13:51