

# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE



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## The Book of Acts – Study #13

### Introduction:

The Book of Acts has been viewed as:

1. A history of the early church – as outlined in Acts 1:8
2. A defense of Christianity before Roman rulers
3. An apologetic against false charges by the Jews
4. A theology to show how Christ is building his church (Matt 16:18)

### Some Background Information.....

1. Acts was written by the Apostle Luke between 62-64 A.D (alt. date A.D. 80-95).
2. Acts was originally the second volume of Luke's Gospel. The books were separated, and it is unlikely that Luke even had a title for the second volume. The title of the book that became the most prominent was "The Acts of the Apostle." (2nd-3rd century).
3. "Acts" in the ancient world was a recognized genre which characterized books that described the great deeds of people or of cities.
4. The Book of Acts takes the reader through a whirlwind tour of three decades of church history (that stretches from Jerusalem to Rome).
5. The Book can also be divided in half; the first centering upon the Apostle Peter, and the second portion upon the Apostle Paul. (1-12; 13-28). Some see the division as first, a mission to the Jews (1-12) and second, a mission to the Gentiles (12-38).

Witnessing in Acts				
Reference	Center	Primary Witness	Acts 1:8	Audience
Acts 1-12	Jerusalem	Peter	Judea & Samaria	Primarily Jewish
Acts 13-28	Antioch	Paul	Ends of the Earth	Primarily Gentile

6. The unfolding of the Book of Acts follows the outline given in Acts 1:8.

He (Jesus) replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know.<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:7-8).

Geographical Location	Verses
From Jerusalem	1:1-6:7
To Judea and Samaria	6:8-9:31
To the ends of the Earth (i.e. Rome)	9:32-28:31

Below is the opening verse of the Book of Acts. From the outset, Luke is implying something very significant by this introduction.

Dear Theophilus: In my first book I told you about everything Jesus began to do and teach. (Acts 1:1)

Luke presents two overarching principles that are intrinsically connected and serve as a logical continuum to God’s plan.

1. In his Gospel, he records what Jesus did and taught in his body – his earthly ministry
2. In Acts, he records what Jesus continues to do and teach in his body – the church

#### Principles for Interpreting the Book of Acts.

1. It must be remembered that Acts is a record of a transition period in the early life of the church
  - 3 inaugurations of the kingdom are evident
    - i. The church among Jews in Jerusalem (1-7)
    - ii. The church among Jews in Judea and Samaria (8-9)
    - iii. The church going out into the uttermost parts of the earth (10-28)
2. The biggest interpretive problem with the Book of Acts is determining what is descriptive versus prescriptive.

e.g. Baptism by the Holy Spirit (accompanied by tongues) after conversion.

3. The narrations are intended to tell about God, His grace and sovereignty in seeing the church expand from a small sect in Jerusalem to a community of believers that encompasses the known world.
4. Remember when we studied narratives how God was the "hero" of every story. We would not treat the people in the stories as always demonstrating characteristics that were prescriptive.
5. Some of the narrations may intend to indicate norms for the life of the church. However, such norms must be established exegetically and in concert with other Scripture, particularly the epistles.

e.g.        -Baptizing by immersion (where does tongues fit in?)  
              -Celebration of Communion  
              -Appointing leaders (look at the differences and changes between Acts 6 and 1 Tim 3)

6. We must read Acts as a record of celebration and not as a purely prescriptive source even though we recognize some norms that are validated by the epistles.

### The Theological Contributions of Acts

1. God and His Plan
2. Jesus as Messiah and Lord
3. Salvation and the Atoning Work of Christ - Resurrection
4. The Holy Spirit
5. Witness and Mission – centered on the Resurrection
6. Miracles
7. Magic and the Demonic – Spiritual Warfare
8. The Church
9. Spiritual Gifts
10. Suffering and Discipleship
11. The Kingdom of God