



New Testament

Acts & Paul's Epistles

Course 1

Acts

[Leader's Guide](#)

Lesson 1: Overview of Acts

Lesson 2: Gospel for Jews & Gentiles












Lesson 3: Gospel & Restoration

Lesson 4: Apostolic Church

Lesson 5: Author & Audience



Resource Pack: Graphics/Images

<p>Greek plaque</p> 	<p>Socrates</p> 	<p>Mars Hill</p> 	<p>Roman road</p> 
<p>Ignatian Way</p> 	<p>Scythopolis</p> 	<p>Tiberius</p> 	<p>Rome</p> 
<p>Citizenship</p> 	<p>Mediterranean Map</p> 	<p>Ethiopian</p> 	

Acts 1–2, 7, 22–28

In the Text

Q. What purpose does Acts play in the New Testament?

A. It is the historical framework for the Apostolic Church, providing the narrative background for the Epistles. This is reinforced by historical speeches that make up 30% of the book.

Acts shows the development of the Kingdom of God, which was the prominent theme in the Gospels, as it expresses itself in the Church's witness in the power of the Spirit. (The Kingdom of God is contrasted with the kingdoms of men just as it has been in the Old Testament and the Gospels.)

([□◁ Acts as a Foundational NT Text](#), [□◁ Jesus & the Kingdom in Acts](#), [✉ Herod Agrippa I & Simon Peter—Two Kingdoms](#), [□◁ Speeches \[Bonus\]](#))

 Behind the Text

Q. Explain how the spread of the Early Church was accelerated by Greco-Roman realities.

A. Note the role of language (Greek), philosophy, cities (*polis*), roads, citizenship, religion and peace (*Pax Romana*). ([□□ Greek Language & Philosophy](#), [□□ Cities & Roads](#), [□□ Citizenship & Religion](#), [□□ God's Perfect Timing](#))

Q. Describe your impressions of Paul's missionary journeys and what struck you as you worked through the iMap.

A. Paul travelled over 10,000 miles planting and nurturing churches. Sites with content to discuss: Jerusalem, Antioch of Syria, Tarsus, the Sea, Pisidian Antioch, Perge, Ephesus, Miletus, Philippi, Thesalonica, Athens, Corinth and Rome. ([📄 Paul's Missionary Journeys](#), [🗺️ iMap: Paul's Missionary Journeys](#))

 In Front of the Text

Q. Explain how Acts is the first chapter in the history of the Church and how this history reflects the mission of God.

A. Christianity is more of a movement than a religion. God is reaching the uttermost parts of the earth through his witnesses. "Journey" is a great metaphor not only for our Bible study but also for God's people who are "on the move" together as they reach the nations for him. ([□□ The Mission of God](#), [□□ Onsite: Journey—Adversary & Camaraderie](#))

Q. How is Paul's use of Roman roads a precedent for how the Church can use technology to spread the Gospel?

A. Paul used roads, like Greek, citizenship, cities, etc, as God-given opportunities. Today we have other kinds of virtual roads like the internet. ([□□ Onsite: Roman Roads](#))

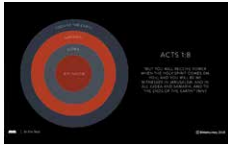
Challenge Questions

- Record your impressions when you think about your church being a continuation of Acts.
 - What are some ways your church could become more like the apostolic Church?
- A.** ([□□ Household Conversions: David Collum \[Bonus\]](#), [📄 Your Church & the Apostolic Church](#))



Resource Pack: Graphics/Images

Dispersion



1st Journey



2nd Journey



3rd Journey



Jewish centers



Jerusalem



Judea



Samaria



Syria



Galatia & Asia



Macedonia



Rome



Jerusalem to Joppa



iMap sites



Gate Beautiful;



Temple colonnade



“Keep out”



Acts 3–6, 8–15

 In the Text

Q. What does the Acts 8 scene have in common with the other biblical scenes (e.g. Garden of Eden, Tower of Babel, Babylonian Exile)? What is different?

Explain other kinds of “movement” that are apparent in Acts.

A. Scattering as judgment (Eden, Babel, Exile) vs. dispersion as discipleship and mission (Abraham, Early Church). This happens in Acts through persecution as well as by Paul’s sense of calling. The movement also shifts from Temple to synagogues to churches, from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome.

([📖 Driven out of Jerusalem](#), [📖 Dispersion in Acts](#), [📖 Movement in Acts: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria](#), [📖 Movement in Acts: Syria, Galatia, Macedonia, Rome](#), [📖 Temple, Synagogue & Church \[Bonus\]](#), [📖 A Gospel for Jews, then Gentiles](#), [📖 iMap: First Missionary Journey of Paul & Companions](#))

Q. Explain the biggest issue facing the Church in its first generation.

A. What to make of Gentile conversion...Are they second class in the Kingdom? Are they responsible for keeping all of the covenant laws? The 1st Church Council decided (with reference to Amos 9) that Gentiles were full participants in the covenant but were not bound to keep the whole law. They were like the included foreigners in Leviticus (and predicted outsiders in Isa 56) and fell under laws for Noah's descendants. Although Paul is officially the Apostle to the Gentiles, Peter has his own dramatic calling to Cornelius which opens his eyes to the reality of full Gentile inclusion. ([📖 The First Church Council](#), [📖 Challenge of Gentile Inclusion](#), [📖 Peter & Cornelius](#))

Behind the Text

Q. Discuss the background of Jews and Judaism as the Early Church was growing.

A. The Jews had many significant population centers in the Roman world. They kept their traditional laws, assuming that any Gentile converts would need to become Jews in every way (circumcision, food and ritual purity law observance, etc). The Gospel went by Paul and other apostolic church-planters to these centers announcing the good news of the New Covenant but without requiring these things to receive the Holy Spirit. The Church was born on the steps of the Temple and moved out to synagogues and then homes without losing its Jewish heritage, but without imposing it on Gentiles. Paul himself would continue to go to the Temple for holy days and to fulfill personal vows he had made. ([📖 iMap: Jewish Centers in the Roman Empire](#), [📖 Temple: The Church's Birthplace \[Bonus\]](#), [📖 Onsite: Paul's Ongoing Jewish Practices](#))

In Front of the Text

Q. How has the Church in our own day been spreading just as it had in the 1st century?

A. It continues to grow by scattering because of persecution as well as by intentional mission work. Iran is a dramatic example in our onsite interview. "Rome," the center of every civilization, becomes the enemy and the object of God's work in every generation. This is where Peter and Paul died, knowing it was God's will to bring the Good News of another Kingdom to this hostile and demonic city. ([📖 Scattering & Church Growth Today: Pastor Manochehr Hosseinzadeh \[Bonus\]](#), [📖 Jerusalem & Rome](#))

Challenge Questions

- What kinds of barriers exist today to the spreading of God's message?
 - What intellectual or emotional barriers have you personally experienced in people, or heard about from others' experience, that hinders responsiveness to the Gospel?
- A. ([📄 Wide & Broad](#) pt 1, [📄 Wide & Broad](#) pt 3, [📄 The Telegraph: Wide & Broad](#), [📄 Wide & Broad](#) pt 4)



Resource Pack: Graphics/Images

Dodd's Outline

Babel & Pentecost

Babel	Pentecost
From the one, many	From the many, one
Done in the power of man	Done in the Spirit of God
Men trying to reach toward heaven	Heaven reaching toward humanity
Speaking in many languages	Hearing in many languages
Confusion	Understanding
Scattered	United

Time & Space

Eschatology

Secular Writers

NAME	APPROXIMATE DATE	QUALITY	CONCEPT	IN PAUL
EREMIANUS	100 BC	"FOR WITH MY HAND AND MIND I AM HERE FOR KING"	CRITICISM	ACTS 17:28
ARISTOTLE	350-320 BC	"WE ARE HIS OFFSPRING"	PHALLOCHROMA'S	ACTS 17:28
ATHEMANNUS	341-293 BC	"READ COMPANY COMPANY'S GOOD COMPANY"	TRUTH	1 CORINTHIANS 15:53
EREMIANUS	100 BC	"THE SCENE OF LIFE WITH ME LASTS THEY ARE THE JERUSALEM AND JUDAH"	DE ORACULIS	TITUS 1:2

Acts 16–21

In the Text

Q. What is the “Gospel” in Acts?

- A.** It is news that the Messiah has come in Jesus Christ and that the signs and wonders in his ministry validated his claim to bring in God's kingdom. His crucifixion was God's will for the salvation of the world (both Jews and Gentiles, all lost in sin). His resurrection proved his identity and opened up all that God had promised—including a full “restoration” of both Jews and Gentiles.

This restoration is a reversal of the curse on Babel. God is now uniting all the nations of the world. This had a surprising dimension for Jews: Gentiles would now be fully included.

([A Gospel of Restoration](#), [Common Gospel Refrains in Acts](#), [Early Christian Preaching in Acts](#), [The Gospel in Acts \[Bonus\]](#), [Restoration from Exile in Acts \[Bonus\]](#), [Pentecost & Babel](#) pt 2, [Good News & Bad News](#))

Behind the Text

Q. How does the festival of Pentecost point to the spiritual realities in Acts?

- A.** Jesus was both the Passover lamb and the “first fruit” from among the dead. 50 days later Israel was meant to celebrate *the beginning of the whole harvest* with the first fruits of barley and wheat. Passover was also the time when Jews

recalled the covenant made on Sinai. In Acts, they would have recognized this as the inauguration of the New Covenant promised by the prophets.

Note that this system follows the biblical emphasis on “Jew first, then Gentiles” which was foundational for Paul’s ministry, even though he was the Apostle to the Gentiles.

([□◁ The Pilgrimage Holidays \[Bonus\]](#), [□◁ Harvest & the Age to Come \[Bonus\]](#), [□◁ Onsite: The Story of the Bible in a Sheaf of Wheat](#), [□◁ Onsite: Paul & the Jews: View from an Early Synagogue in Ostia](#), [□◁ 360 View: Paul & Lydia at Philippi](#))

Q. What is the significance of Paul’s use of secular writers in his speeches?

A. He is relating to the broader cultural context and affirming that God is working through their own culture to reveal himself. ([📖 Paul’s Use of Secular Writers pt 1](#), [📖 Paul’s Use of Secular Writers pt 2](#))



In Front of the Text

Q. What are the universal implications of the Gospel?

A. It provides the answers for all people of all time. We can follow Paul’s example in contextualizing the Good News in the language and cultural ideas people are familiar with (Jews and Gentiles). It can cost us our lives to proclaim this Gospel but it is for everyone. Even though the world is made up of countless types of people, the fundamental merging of Jews and Gentiles is still central.

([□◁ A Gospel for all People](#), [□◁ God Has Not Forgotten the Jews](#), [□◁ Onsite: Contextualizing the Gospel for Greeks: With Paul on Mars Hill, Athens](#), [□◁ A Continuation of the Emmaus Road \[Bonus\]](#), [□◁ Paul & Interreligious Dialogue: Pastor Ramy Nayer \[Bonus\]](#))

Challenge Questions

- Do you think anyone is “beyond the Gospel”? Do you ever feel like there are people who should change before they get the opportunity to receive the Gospel? (i.e., “They don’t deserve the Gospel.”)
- What groups do you struggle to have compassion for? If you think about the Gospel going to people in this group, do you assume they would be receptive or not? Why or why not?

A. ([📖 People Considered Beyond the Gospel](#))

Resource Pack: Graphics/Images

Peter & Paul



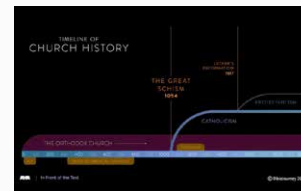
House Churches



Women



Church History



Review Acts

In the Text

Q. What kind of shifts take place as the Apostolic Church evolves? What stays the same?

A. Shifts: Paul becomes increasingly prominent outside of Jerusalem where James (Jesus' brother) and Peter have influence. Eye-witnesses and "sent ones" (*shaliyah*) had authority. Rome begins to be an objective for the Gospel. The distribution of gifts by the Spirit was operationalized. Some say Jesus' ministry was "vertical" while the apostles' ministry was "horizontal." Much of the behavior of the Early Church was responsive and reactive rather than driven only by the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Continuity: Acts 1 and Luke 24 demonstrate apostolic continuation of Christ's ministry of healing and teaching/proclaiming the Good News ... and suffering.

([□](#) [The Church, Jesus' Family, the Twelve](#), [□](#) [The Authority of "Those Sent," Acts 1 & Luke 24](#) pt 1, [▢](#) [Acts 1 & Luke 24](#) pt 3, [□](#) [Jesus, Peter & Paul](#), [▢](#) [Vertical & Horizontal Ministry](#) pt 1, [▢](#) [Vertical & Horizontal Ministry](#) pt 2, [□](#) [Responsiveness of the Early Church](#), [▢](#) [God's Guidance of Paul](#))

 Behind the Text

Q. What characterizes the Christian movement as it moves west?

A. The mix of Jews, Gentiles, men, women, business people, slaves is noticeable. The churches often gather in homes where the patrons/hosts (both men and women) provided leadership. ([□□ Onsite: Lydia & a Jailer—First Converts in Europe](#), [□□ Households & House Churches](#), [☞ The Role of Women](#))

 In Front of the Text

Q. What are the missions implications of the first two conversions in Europe? What should we make of the composition of the early churches in this region?

A. Discuss how God was involved in the vision of the Macedonian and then the presence of Lydia at the river and the miracle in the prison: God opened the hearts of a wealthy female and a Roman citizen. In subsequent centuries the churches continued to have evidence of significant female and Gentile involvement.

([□□ Onsite: The Church of Lydia](#), [☞ Men & Women in the Church](#), [☞ Women on the Frontline](#) pt 1, [☞ Women on the Frontline](#) pt 2)

Challenge Questions

- Discuss which of the topics in the Workbook should be viewed as “prescriptive” or “descriptive”: prayer, speaking in tongues, sharing all possessions, caring for widows, meeting in houses, going to synagogues, meeting by the river and fasting. Explain your rationale for categorizing in one way or the other. You may refer to the interviews as reasons for your views. You might also discuss how you are affected by your sensibilities as Protestants (if that is your tradition).
- A.** ([□□ Acts: Descriptive or Prescriptive?](#), [☞ Descriptive or Prescriptive? pt 1](#), [□□ Miracles in the Middle East Today: Pastor Sameh & Nader Maurice](#), [□□ Dreams & Visions Today: Pastor Manochehr Hosseinzadeh](#), [□□ Post-Biblical Christianity \[Bonus\]](#), [□□ Onsite: Early Church Interpretation at Antioch \[Bonus\]](#))



Review Acts

In the Text

Q. What do we know about the author of Acts?

- A.** Luke the physician was a close companion of Paul's who wrote the Gospel of Luke and then this companion volume as an orderly account for a Roman of some standing (Theophilus). The particular choice of words and themes in Luke are similar to those in his Gospel. The "we" passages in Acts reflect parts of Paul's journeys Luke accompanied him on.

From other literature we have reason to believe that Luke was an educated Gentile from Antioch.

([□](#) [The Author Luke](#), [☞](#) [Lukanisms in Acts](#) pt 2, [☞](#) [Who Was Luke?](#))

Behind the Text

Q. What do we know about the kind of history Luke was writing?

- A.** Like his Gospel, this book is an orderly account. It is a somewhat typical Hellenistic history which had speeches that provide some glue to the narrative. The parallels between Josephus' account of Herod Agrippa's illness and that of Luke show us how much in common they had but also how Luke's purposes were different.

Luke is also an "apology," a defense of the early Christian movement to outside critics and interested observers. While painting a positive portrait of the virtues of this movement, Luke is also subversively honoring Jesus Christ as the true Son of God and the subject of real "good news" rather than the Caesar who was worshiped in Rome. He traces Paul all the way to the Empire's capital which he "conquers" by martyrdom, just as Jesus Christ had begun the movement in Jerusalem.

([□](#) [Luke the Historian](#), [☞](#) [The Death of Agrippa in Josephus & Acts \[Bonus\]](#) pt 2, [□](#) [Luke the Apologist](#), [Onsite: Pisidian Antioch—The Imperial Cult](#), [□](#) [Onsite: The Real Conquest—With Paul on the Appian Way](#), [□](#) [A Scandalous Gospel!](#))

In Front of the Text

Q. How does Luke communicate both to Jews and Gentiles?

- A.** Just as the terms for Son of God and Gospel have double meanings, the term *ekklesia* which, in the Roman world, referred to voluntary associations but in the Jewish Septuagint (Old Testament) meant the assembled people of God.

Luke brings a Gospel to Jews that is the power of God and to Gentiles that is rational and wise—but a Gospel that is offensive to both “for the right reasons.” ([□□ Bicultural Communication in Acts](#), [□□ Paul Through the Eyes of Luke \[Bonus\]](#))

Challenge Questions

- What are some of the various cultures that you experience regularly? Include among ethnic cultures any that have strong subcultures like clubs, school groups, company/corporate culture, etc.
- What might “bicultural” communication of the Gospel look like in those various cultural groups?
- Are you “bicultural” like the Apostles? In what ways do you already demonstrate this sensibility, and in what ways do you need to improve in this area?

A. ([☞ Bicultural Communication](#))

Guiding Questions

([☞ Guiding Questions](#))

- Q1.** What has this book revealed about God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)? Include metaphors, characteristics and the mission of God as it unfolds.
- Q2.** What has this book revealed about God’s people, their relationship with God and each other and their role and mission in the world? Include metaphors, mission, ethics, worship, “living by faith,” etc.
- Q3.** How does this New Testament book echo Old Testament Scripture? Include typology, promises, predictions and the overall history of redemption.
- Q4.** How does God’s revelation in this book engage (and challenge) cultural and literary forms? Take into account the genres of Scripture and comparisons with extra-biblical parallels. Consider the divine and human dimensions of God’s Word.
- Q5.** In what ways has God spoken to you personally in your journey through this book?