

The Book of Acts

Study Guide

LESSON
TWO

THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF ACTS



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON AND STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video lesson. If you do not have access to the video, the study guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the lesson and study guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — In the Notes section of the study guide, the lesson has been divided into sections that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the study guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each section and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Preparation

- Read the book of Acts

Notes

I. Introduction (0:26)

It helps to know where the story is going and what literary techniques or strategies Luke used.

II. Rhetorical Strategy (1:34)

It is important to become familiar with the way the author persuades his readers of his points of view.

A. Stated Purpose (2:52)

1. Historical Account (3:57)

Luke was keenly concerned with writing a true history of the early church.

Luke's concern with true history (Luke 1:1-3):

- Referred to things that have been fulfilled among us.
- Consulted eyewitnesses.
- Carefully investigated details.
- Wrote an orderly account.

God:

- Reveals himself in real history, in space and time.
- Works through history to bring about his salvation and judgment.

Luke was not trying to write pious fiction; he intended to report real history:

- Made it easy to verify or disprove his claims.

- Readers could examine his research independently.

Luke was a reliable historian:

- Knew specific historical terminology (Acts 28:7).
- Described Paul's actions onboard ship in ways that have been confirmed by historical research (Acts 27:21-26).

God's eternal truth is not detached from the realities of life.
Salvation comes in and through real history.

2. Gospel Message (10:54)

Luke wanted his readers to adopt certain perspectives on the theological significance of historical events he reported in the book of Acts.

Luke viewed the world and all of history through the lens of Christ's lordship and kingdom.

B. Reliance on Authority (13:01)

Luke did not assert historical and theological truths based on his own authority, but on the authority of Christ and his apostles.

1. Words (14:16)

Luke recorded the testimony of the Lord's chosen eyewitnesses.

The most prominent way Luke presented authoritative words was by recording speeches.

About 30% of Acts is:

- debates
- dialogues
- monologues
- sermons
- oral presentations

The speeches in Acts:

- Tell us who the early church leaders were and what they thought about many issues.
- Show us why the disciples were willing to suffer for the sake of Christ.
- Bear witness to the apostles' service to Christ
- Record the apostles' instructions for building his kingdom.
- Authorize Luke's perspectives on the history of the early church.

The speeches represent authoritative apostolic teachings.

The speeches are accurate representations of real speeches because they have:

- distinctive styles
- specific contexts
- individual speakers
- acknowledged summations

2. Deeds (21:23)

The Holy Spirit empowered the apostles in miraculous ways that validated their gospel message.

Luke recorded authoritative words and deeds to persuade his readers of the truth of his accounts.

C. Structural Pattern (23:53)**1. Summary Statements (24:11)**

Authorial comments: when a writer steps forward to make explicit comments on what takes place in his accounts

Luke made many authorial comments throughout Acts.

One of the ways Luke commented on events in his book was through summary statements.

Luke used summary statements for six periods of time in his history:

- Jerusalem

- Judea and Samaria

- Syrian Antioch

- Cyprus, Phrygia and Galatia

- Asia, Macedonia and Achaia

- Rome

2. Church Growth (27:06)

Luke regularly mentioned two pairs of forces:

- within the church:
 - internal growth — the positive effects of the gospel within the Christian community

 - tension — problems, questions, controversies and struggles

 - Reciprocal relationship

- outside the church:
 - external growth — numerical growth of the church by adding new members

 - opposition — conflict between the church and the unbelieving world

 - Reciprocal relationship

Every major section of the book of Acts depicts the growth of the gospel as it spread through the witness of the early church.

III. Content (30:52)

Luke described the development of the church as the partial realization of God's kingdom on earth.

Jesus instructed the apostles to proclaim the gospel first in Jerusalem and then to the rest of the world.

A. Jerusalem (33:07)

- capital city of ancient Israel
- central role in God's kingdom throughout Old Testament
- central role in Jesus' ministry
- apostles' work in spreading the gospel was rooted here

Four major narratives:

- outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 1–2)
- Peter’s temple sermon (Acts 3–4)
- Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5)
- selection of deacons (Acts 6:1–8:4)

Internal growth :

- apostles’ commission (Acts 1)
- outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2)
- miracles in Jerusalem (Acts 3–5)

Tension:

- twelfth apostle (Acts 1)
- Ananias and Sapphira’s lie (Acts 5)
- discrimination against Hellenistic widows (Acts 6)

External growth:

- day of Pentecost (Acts 2)
- John and Peter jailed (Acts 4)
- Jewish priests added (Acts 6)

Opposition:

- arrest and beating (Acts 5)
- martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7)
- scattering by persecution (Acts 8)

B. Judea and Samaria (38:25)

Two main stories:

- ministry of Philip (8:5-40)
- conversion of Paul (9:1-31)

Internal growth:

- new believers filled (Acts 8)
- Saul made an apostle (Acts 9)

Tension:

- questions the Holy Spirit (Acts 8)
- Simon the magician (Acts 8)

External growth:

- Phillip's evangelistic ministry (Acts 8)
- conversion of Paul (Acts 9)

Opposition

- persecuted believers (Acts 9)
- attempt to assassinate Saul (Acts 9)

C. Ends of Earth (40:58)

1. Phoenicia, Cyprus, Syrian Antioch (41:28)

First significant spread of the gospel beyond Judea and Samaria.

- Peter's ministry in Lydda and Joppa (9:32-43)
- Peter's ministry in Caesarea (10:1-11:18)
- expansion of gospel to Syrian Antioch (11:19-30)
- Peter's deliverance from prison (12:1-25)

Internal growth:

- Gentiles brought into church (Acts 10)
- Peter's miraculous deliverance (Acts 12)

Tension:

- Jews hesitate to receive Gentiles (Acts 11)
- resist loosening dietary restrictions (Acts 11)

External growth:

- conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10)
- ministry of Barnabas (Acts 11)

Opposition:

- death of James (Acts 12)
- imprisonment of Peter (Acts 12)

2. **Cyprus, Phrygia, and Galatia (44:07)**

The gospel stretched into eastern portions of Asia Minor.

- Paul's first missionary journey (13:1–14:28)
- council in Jerusalem (15:1-35)

Internal growth:

- strengthening the churches (Acts 14)
- Jerusalem council (Acts 15)

Tension:

- circumcision and diet (Acts 15)

External growth:

- first missionary journey (Acts 14)

Opposition:

- Paul rejected by unbelievers (Acts 14)

3. **Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia (46:34)**

- Paul's second missionary journey (15:36–18:22)
- Paul's third missionary journey (18:23–21:16)

Internal growth:

- instruction of Apollos (Acts 18)
- teaching in synagogues (Acts 19)

Tension:

- Paul and Barnabas argued (Acts 15)
- Paul warned the church (Acts 20)

External growth:

- many converts (Acts 15–21)
- churches planted (Acts 15–21)

Opposition:

- angry mobs (Acts 17 and 20)
- zealots pursued Paul (Acts 17 and 20)

4. Rome (49:16)

- Paul's witness in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17–23:11)
- Paul's imprisonment (Acts 23:12–26:32)
- Paul's journey to Rome (Acts 27:1–28:14)
- Paul's witness in Rome (Acts 28:15-31)

Internal growth:

- Gentile coming to faith (Acts 21)
- willingness to suffer (Acts 22)

Tension:

- rumor (Acts 21)
- tension in Jerusalem church (Acts 21)

External growth:

- high-ranking officials (Acts 23–26, 28)
- preached without hindrance (Acts 28)

Opposition:

- arrest and imprisonment (Acts 24)
- imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28)

IV. Modern Application (52:30)

A. Literary Character (52:49)

If we hope to understand Acts, we must take into account the kind of literature it is and the ways this kind of literature communicates its ideas.

1. Selective (54:04)

Luke was led by the Holy Spirit to select details that:

- were critical to understanding Jesus' work through the apostles
- persuaded readers to embrace central teachings

Luke did not record everything about this period of church history.

- Narrative discourse (Gospels and Acts):
 - tells a story

 - teaches implicitly

One way to evaluate and apply biblical narrative is to see how God reacts.

- emulate the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that are pleasing to God

- avoid those that oppose him

Another way to see Luke's implicit teaching is to observe examples.

B. Discontinuities (1:05:38)

Although the Bible was written for us, it is not written directly to us.

1. Different Time (1:06:44)

God's activities through the apostles:

- specific to that time and place
 - groundbreaking
 - foundational
 - never to be repeated

- existence of apostles was unique

- Holy Spirit was poured out in dramatic, miraculous ways

2. Different Circumstances (1:09:59)

- The events in Acts took place in the historical circumstances of the first century.

- Many aspects of Luke's accounts are conditioned upon these historical and cultural circumstances.

Many Christian groups have tried to return to the cultural practices of the first-century church.

We often find different applications of the same principle even in the book of Acts itself.

C. Continuities (1:13:06)

1. Same God (1:13:24)

- serve and testify to Jesus Christ
- empowered by the Spirit
- act for the glory and honor of the Father

God worked through the gospel in the first century and he continues to do so today.

2. Same Goal (1:15:06)

In Acts, God's purpose was to build his kingdom in Christ through the apostles.

5. Discuss and give examples of internal growth and tension, and external growth and opposition that took place in Judea and Samaria.

6. Discuss and give examples of internal growth and tension, and external growth and opposition that took place at the “ends of the earth,” as it was known in that day.

9. What continuities exist between Luke's original audience and us? How do these affect?

Application Questions

1. Why is it important to interpret Acts correctly?
2. What relevance is there in believing that Acts records real history?
3. What is the relationship between the church and God's kingdom on earth?
4. What kinds of growth should we expect from our own congregation? How can we achieve these kinds of growth?
5. What encouragement can be found in conflict?
6. What does God approve of and bless, and what does God disapprove of or curse? Why should we pay attention to these things?
7. How do our circumstances resemble the circumstances of Acts? How are they different? Why should the modern church consider these similarities and differences when applying Acts to our modern lives?
8. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?

Glossary

Ananias – Man who, along with his wife Sapphira, lied about the amount of money they received from the sale of their property when they made a contribution; both were struck dead as punishment (Acts 5)

Apollos – Eloquent Jewish speaker who received additional instruction about Christ in Ephesus

argumentative discourse – Literature that represents a conversation, such as when a writer speaks directly to his audience; literary device used to communicate ideas directly and explicitly

Cornelius – Captain of the Roman army from Caesarea who was converted to Christianity through Peter's ministry (Acts 10–11)

Elymas – Magician from Cyprus who was miraculously made blind, convincing the proconsul to believe the gospel (Acts 13)

episodic – Term meaning a successive selection of smaller accounts

narrative discourse – Literature that tells a story; literary device used to communicate ideas and lessons indirectly

Philip – Name of a deacon from the church in Jerusalem; preached the gospel in Samaria and made many converts, including the Ethiopian eunuch; not Philip the apostle

Priscilla – Woman who, along with her husband Aquila, gave instruction to Apollos in Ephesus

Simon – Magician from Samaria who tried to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit