

Introduction to Acts

The book of Acts carries a unique role in our Bibles, and yet many have treated it as a book to read, but not to preach. Should we get our theology from Acts? We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful, including this great document. Before we consider how to preach it, we need to make sure we are familiar with its unique contours and features.

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I. Simple Geographic Overview

<i>Main Character</i>	Peter	Paul
<i>Location</i>	Jerusalem → Judea / Samaria	Antioch → Rome
<i>Chapters</i>	1 12	13 28

Theme = "You will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8; cf. Lk.24:48)

II. Big Themes in Acts

- A. **“Witness” / “testify”** – The same term (martus) is used 27 times in Acts – meaning to be a witness, or to testify. The theme verse for the book is Acts 1:8 – “You shall be my witnesses!” Acts tells the story of the first witnesses to the resurrection of Christ and how their witness changed the world.

- B. **Sovereignty of God (divine necessity)** – Just as in Luke’s gospel, there is a clear sense that God is in control of events. There is a sense of necessity throughout the book, that the story of the building of the church “must be” this way.

- C. **Preaching the Resurrection of Christ (the Exalted Christ)** – The Apostles are seen as preachers of Christ, but specifically, preachers of the Resurrection of Christ. Christ, who

had been crucified by the Jews, God had raised and therefore vindicated. Now that exalted Christ was the focus of their preaching!

- D. Holy Spirit Power** – The book is sometimes called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is seen indwelling believers as the church is born in Acts 2, and then empowering the believers in their witness program.
- E. Prayer (& prayer meetings)** – Acts contains numerous (at least 33x) references to prayer and prayer meetings. There is clearly power in prayer, individually, but also corporately.
- F. Persecution** – As the message of the gospel spread, and lives were changed, persecution followed. Just as Jesus was persecuted, so too are His followers. Even in this, the purpose of God is fulfilled.
- G. The local church** – Acts presents the birth and early years of the church age. All through the book we see the importance of the local church, the center of God’s action on earth, the sending base for missionaries, the goal of missions work.
- H. Missions & the spread of the gospel in world** – From the beginning, Acts is a missionary book, telling a missionary story. The gospel spread from Jewish Jerusalem to Pagan Rome.
- I. Inclusion of Gentiles** – The transition from being a sect of Judaism to being a “religion” for the Gentiles is fantastic to watch in Acts. This is key to understanding many of the epistles that follow.
- J. Salvation** – We must not miss the simple theme of the gospel that runs throughout the book. The message of salvation, given in Luke, now spread in Acts, is awesome! It is only in the name, and by the power of Jesus, that salvation can be found.
- K. End-times / Eschatology** – Acts has many references to the future of the nation of Israel, and other end-times ideas. In a very real sense, the end-times began at Pentecost, we are living in the last days now, and yet Acts points forward for there is more still to come.

III. Action and Speeches in Acts

A. The action is selective

B. The story is driven forward through, not despite, the speeches.

Of approximately 1000 verses in Acts, 365 form part of a speech or partial speech. (See Marion Soards, *The Speeches in Acts*, 1994)

C. The speeches are as follows:

1. The words of the risen Jesus and the angels to the apostles (1:4b-5, 7-8, 11)
2. Peter's speech and the disciples' prayer prior to the enrollment of Matthias (1:16-22, 24b-25)
3. **Peter's speech at Pentecost (2:14b-36, 38-39, 40b)
4. **Peter's speech in Solomon's portico (3:12-26)
5. Peter's speech to the Jewish authorities after his and John's arrest (4:8b-12, 19b-20)
6. The prayer of the apostles' and their friends (4:24b-30)
7. The speech of Peter and the apostles to the council (5:29b-32)
8. Gamaliel's speech to the council (5:35b-39)
9. The speech by the Twelve prior to the appointment of the Seven (6:2b-4)
10. **Stephen's speech (7:2-53, 56, 59b, 60b)
11. Peter's speech in Cornelius' house (10:28b-29, 34b-43, 47)
12. Peter's speech to the circumcision party (11:5-17)
13. **Paul's speech at Pisidian Antioch (13:16b-41, 46-47)
14. **The speech of Barnabas and Paul at Lystra (14:15-17)
15. Peter's speech at the Jerusalem Council (15:7b-11)
16. James's speech at the Jerusalem Council (15:13b-21)
17. **Paul's speech at the Areopagus, Athens (17:22-31)
18. Paul's speech to the Corinthian Jews (18:6b-d)
19. Gallio's speech to the Corinthian Jews (18:14b-15)
20. Demetrius' speech in Ephesus (19:25b-27)
21. The speech of the Ephesian town clerk (19:35b-40)
22. **Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders at Miletus (20:18b-35)
23. Agabus's speech in Caesarea (21:11b-c)
24. Paul's speech to the disciples in Caesarea (21:13b-c)
25. The speech of James and the Jerusalem elders (21:20b-25)
26. The speech of the Jews from Asia (21:28)
27. Paul's speech to the Jerusalem Jews (22:1, 3-21)
28. Paul's speech before the council (23:1b, 3, 5, 6b)
29. The Pharisees' speech in the council (23:9c-d)
30. Tertullus's speech (24:2b-8)
31. Paul's speech before Felix (24:10b-21)
32. Paul's speech before Festus (25:8b, 10b-11)

33. Festus's speech (25:14c-21, 24-27)
34. Paul's speech before King Agrippa (26:2-23, 25-27, 29)
35. Paul's speeches during the sea voyage to Rome (27:10b, 21b-26, 31b, 33b-34)
36. Paul's speech to the Roman Jewish leaders (28:17c-20, 25b-28)

Suggested Readings:

Darrell Bock, *Acts* (Baker, 2007)

David Gooding, *True to the Faith* (Myrtlefield House, 2013)

Marion Soards, *The Speeches in Acts* (Westminster, 1994)

Walter Liefeld, *Interpreting the Book of Acts* (Baker, 1995)