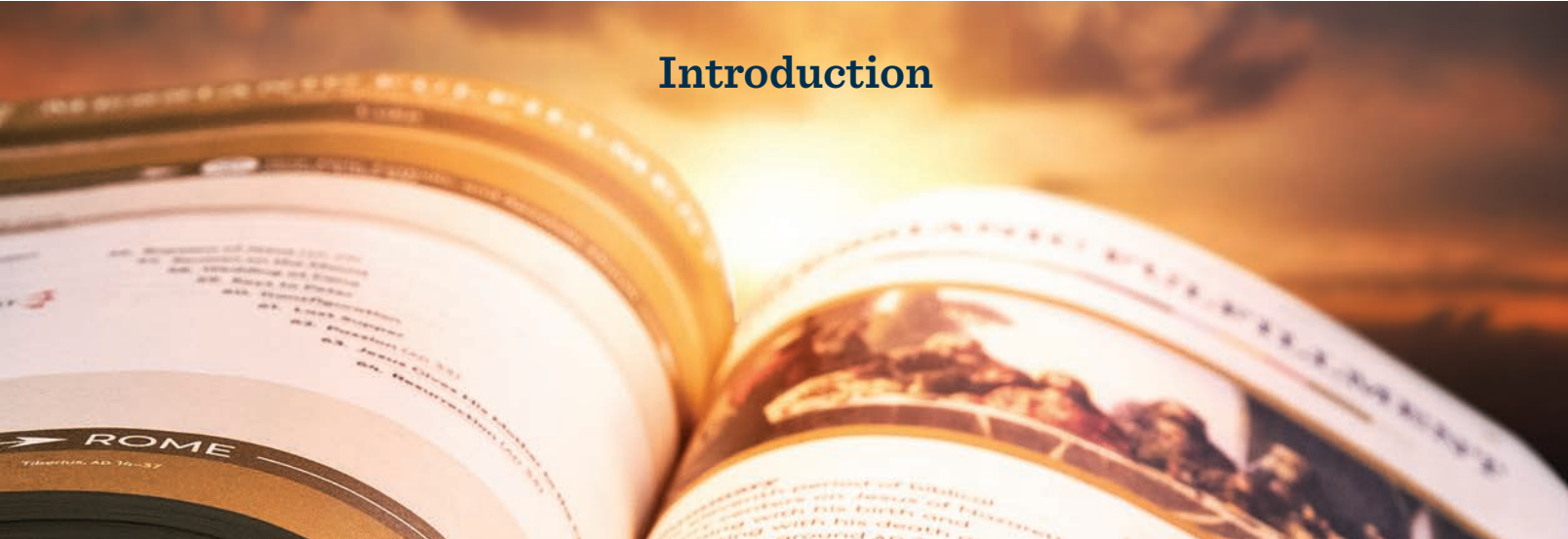


Session One

Introduction



Acts: The Spread of the Kingdom

This study of the Acts of the Apostles wraps up the three-part foundational Bible study series that begins with an overview of Scripture in *The Bible Timeline: The Story of Salvation* and continues with *Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*. While each of these studies can stand on its own, they are best appreciated when done together and in order. *The Bible Timeline* takes the reader on a journey through the Bible narrative, giving the “big picture” perspective that is crucial to understanding Scripture and God’s plan of salvation. Matthew’s Gospel introduces Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who fulfills all of God’s promises to Israel and establishes God’s kingdom on earth. The Acts of the Apostles shows the work of Christ continuing beyond his resurrection as he empowers believers with the Holy Spirit to do his work. Once you have completed the series of three studies, you will have a strong foundation to support and augment a lifetime of Scripture reading, study, and understanding.

This study uses *The Great Adventure Catholic Bible*, an RSV-2CE Bible.

Note: This Introduction summarizes some of the major points covered by Jeff Cavins in the video presentation for Session One.

Remember to do the reading and study questions for Session Two to prepare for the next small-group discussion.

Symbol System

Background information in this workbook is indicated by themed icons for easy identification. Each box contains indispensable information that will enrich your study.



Greek columns are used to indicate key cultural, geographical, and historical information that will help you understand the passage more clearly and make the Scriptures come alive.



If the box is marked with a bust, look for a personality profile that highlights an important individual.



The stained-glass icon indicates time-tested guides and guidebooks for your journey through Acts. These sources include official Church documents and “well-traveled” individuals like the early Church Fathers and saints.



A scroll is used to point out and define Greek words or phrases that shed light on the passage being discussed.



A shovel icon indicates fascinating archaeological discoveries that will confirm the historicity of the Scriptures and enrich your study of the Sacred Page.

Overview

The Acts of the Apostles covers about a thirty-year period following the resurrection of Jesus, a time when the early Christians “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6) by spreading the Good News. The dramatic spread of the gospel and the zeal of the early Christians—even in the face of terrible persecution—was made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles and other believers. The Acts of the Apostles provides an unparalleled look at the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the lives of the early Christians, and the seeds of the Church. It also explains the spread of the gospel beyond the Jews to the Gentiles, revealing God’s plan of universal salvation and providing a defense of St. Paul’s apostolic mission.

Author

The authorship of the Gospel of St. Luke and the Acts of the Apostles is almost universally attributed to Luke. Luke was a companion of St. Paul and was known as “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). Acts serves as a “sequel” to St. Luke’s Gospel, which is clear to see in a comparison of the two prologues. St. Luke’s authorship is confirmed by the earliest Church Fathers, including St. Irenaeus and St. Clement of Alexandria, by the historian Eusebius, and by the Muratorian Canon. Some scholars also point to the internal evidence of style and language as well as a number of what are called “we-passages” beginning in Acts 16:10, in which the third-person narrator suddenly shifts to the first-person plural. It follows that the author of Acts was a traveling companion of St. Paul and followed him at least as far as Rome, where the story ends abruptly.

Language and Date of Composition

The Gospel of St. Luke and the Acts of the Apostles were both written in Greek. The Gospel of St. Luke is the oldest existing New Testament manuscript. Although the exact date of composition is difficult to determine, some historical events recorded in the Acts of the Apostles can be dated. For example, Josephus has confirmed the death of Herod Agrippa (seen in Acts 12) as occurring in AD 44. Many scholars place the writing of Acts in the early AD 60s shortly after Paul's imprisonment, which is described in the final chapter of Acts. Another clue to the dating of the Acts of the Apostles is the lack of any reference to several significant events in early Church history. For example, the Acts of the Apostles makes no mention of the persecutions of Nero (AD 65), St. Paul's martyrdom (AD 64–67), or the Roman siege on Palestine by Vespasian and Titus and the resulting destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (AD 70).

Audience

Most scholars agree that St. Luke's primary audience is Gentile Christians or potential Gentile converts. He omits items that would be of interest mainly to Jews and avoids terminology that presupposes a knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic. St. Luke wants to show how the Gentiles figure into God's plan of salvation, which was promised in the Old Testament and is embodied in the words and deeds of the first disciples.

Structure and Outline

There are several approaches to looking at the structure of the Acts of the Apostles, but the simplest division is given in the opening chapter. In Acts 1:8, the resurrected Christ charges the apostles with preaching the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. With this in mind, the book can be divided as follows:

Acts 1:1–8:3	Witness in Jerusalem
Acts 8:4–12:25	Witness in Judea and Samaria
Acts 13:1–28:31	Witness to the ends of the earth

Others divide the book according to the missions of Peter and Paul. For example, Acts 1–2 focuses primarily on St. Peter's mission to the Jewish people, while Acts 13–28 focuses on St. Paul's ministry to the Gentiles and the spreading of the Church beyond its center. The following chart will appear at the start of each session and will help you keep track of where you are in the story. Paul's three missionary journeys, during which he established new churches and encouraged them through visits and letters, occur during the third time period on the chart.

THE CHURCH'S MISSION TO THE JEWS	Acts 1:1–8:3	Witness in Jerusalem	Center: Jerusalem Main Apostle: Peter	Two-year time frame
	Acts 8:4–12:25	Witness in Judea and Samaria	Center: Jerusalem Main Apostle: Peter	Ten-year time frame
THE CHURCH'S MISSION TO THE GENTILES	Acts 13:1–28:31	Witness to the ends of the earth	Center: Antioch Main Apostle: Paul	Seventeen-year time frame

Maps

The action in the Acts of the Apostles follows the spread of the gospel from its center in Jerusalem, outward through Judea and Samaria and eventually as far as Rome. The following maps will help you trace the spread of the gospel.

Paul's First Missionary Journey



Paul's Second Missionary Journey



Paul's Third Missionary Journey



Paul's Journey to Rome



Focus of This Study

The Acts of the Apostles could have just as easily been called the “Acts of the Holy Spirit.” The book paints a picture of the Church on fire, empowered by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to continue the work of Jesus Christ on earth. Luke reinforces this message by means of a number of striking parallels between incidents from the life of Christ, which he describes in his Gospel, and similar incidents from the life of the early Church, which he includes in the Acts of the Apostles. For example, in Luke 3, Jesus is praying after his baptism when the Spirit descends on him. In Acts 1 and 2, the disciples are praying while awaiting the baptism of the Holy Spirit when it alights on them.

This point is confirmed as Luke draws parallels in the Acts of the Apostles between the lives of Peter, who is sent to the Jews (Acts 1–12), and Paul, who is sent to the Gentiles (Acts 13–28). As the gospel spreads and the Church grows, the similarities continue. Together, these parallels help to illustrate that Christ did not leave his followers alone but empowered them with his Spirit to do his work in his name. We who believe today are equally called to be his witnesses and to do his work. We also receive the same power from God in the Holy Spirit to do so.

Parallels between Luke and Acts and between Peter and Paul are listed on pages 7 and 8.

May God richly bless you as you begin your study of the Acts of the Apostles.

Reminder: *Please complete the study questions for Session Two before the next small-group discussion.*

Jesus' Life Mirrored in the Life of the Church

JESUS IN LUKE		THE CHURCH IN ACTS	
3:21	Jesus prays after his baptism.	1:14, 1:24	The disciples pray as they await the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
3:21-22	Anointing by the Holy Spirit	2:1-4	Anointing by the Holy Spirit
4:14-21	Jesus preaches to the Jews.	2:14-39 13:16-41	Peter preaches to the Jews. Paul preaches to the Jews.
4:16-30	Jesus' ministry begins with a sermon about the fulfillment of Scripture and the people's rejection of him.	2:14-40	The Church's ministry begins with a sermon involving fulfillment of Scripture and the people's rejection of Jesus.
4:31-8:56	The fulfillment is demonstrated by preaching and healing. The conflict illustrates rejection.	2:41-12:17	The fulfillment is illustrated by prophecy and wonders. Persecutions illustrate unbelief.
5:17-26	Jesus heals a paralytic.	3:1-10 20:9-12	Peter heals a paralytic. Paul heals a paralytic.
4:40	The sick are brought to be healed.	28:9	The sick are brought to be healed.
17:11-19	Jesus' healing ministry extends to the Samaritans.	8:4-8	Philip's healing ministry extends to the Samaritans.
22:26, 23:1, 23:8, 23:13	The four trials of Jesus (before the Sanhedrin, Pilate, Herod Antipas, and Pilate)	23-26	The four trials of Paul (Sanhedrin, Felix, Festus, Herod Agrippa)
22:66-71	Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin	22:30-23:10	Paul's trial before the Sanhedrin
23:16, 23:22	Pilate says he will release him.	26:32	Agrippa says, "This man could have been released."
23:34, 23:46	Final surrender to the Father; prayers for forgiveness of persecutors	7:59-60	Final surrender to the Father; prayers for forgiveness of persecutors

Comparison of Peter and Paul's Ministries in the Acts of the Apostles

PETER IN ACTS		PAUL IN ACTS	
2:1-4	A special manifestation of the Spirit	13:1-3	A special manifestation of the Spirit
2:14-40	Apostolic preaching results from the Holy Spirit.	13:16-40	Apostolic preaching results from the Holy Spirit.
2:22-39	Preaches to Jews	13:26-41	Preaches to Jews
3:1-10	A mighty work follows. A lame man is healed.	14:8-13	A mighty work follows. A lame man is healed.
3:12-26	The healing of the lame man is followed by a speech beginning "Men, ... why?"	14:15-17	The healing of the lame man is followed by a speech that begins "Men, ... why?"
5:15	Heals through a sign of his presence	19:12	Heals through a sign of his presence
6:8-8:4	Stephen is stoned to death at the instigation of Jews of the Diaspora after a speech. The result is the preaching in a widening context.	14:19-23	Paul is stoned at the instigation of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium after a speech and is thought to be dead. The result is more preaching in a wider context.
8:17	Confers Holy Spirit through laying on of hands	19:6	Confers Holy Spirit through laying on of hands
8:18-24	Rebukes a magician	13:6-11	Rebukes a magician
9:36-41	Raises the dead	20:9-12	Raises the dead
10-11	Peter has a mission to the Gentiles. Divine guidance leads Peter in a direction different than what he has planned. In 10:9-16, the Spirit guides Peter through a vision. He then has to justify his actions in Jerusalem.	13-21	Paul has a mission to the Gentiles. Divine guidance leads Paul in a direction different from what he has planned. In 16:6-10, Paul is led by a vision to Macedonia. He then has to justify his actions in Jerusalem.
12	The first half of Acts ends with the imprisonment of Peter at a Jewish feast (12:4). The jailing of Peter is associated with a "Herod" (12:5-6), involves escape from the hands of the Jews (12:3-4, 6-11), and concludes with no information about the fate of Peter (12:17) but only the success of the Word of God (12:24).	21-28	The second half of Acts ends with the jailing of Paul at a Jewish feast (21:16). The jailing has a loose relation to a "Herod" (25:13, 23-24), involves escape from death at the hands of the Jews (23:12-35), and concludes with no information about the fate of Paul (28:30-31) but only the success of the Word of God (28:30-31).
12:6-11	Miraculous delivery from prison	20:9-12	Miraculous delivery from prison

SESSION ONE TALK NOTES

Introduction

I. Acts in the Context of *The Great Adventure*

- A. *The Bible Timeline: The Story of Salvation*
- B. *Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*
- C. *Acts: The Spread of the Kingdom*

II. Study Overview

- A. Workbook symbols
- B. Book was written to Theophilus, “lover of God”
- C. Luke is the author of Luke’s Gospel and Acts
- D. Thirty-year time span
- E. Could be called “Acts of the Holy Spirit”
- F. Key verse – Acts 1:8
 - 1. “You shall receive power” (Gk., *dunamis*)
 - 2. Spread of gospel witness
 - a. To Jerusalem (Acts 1:1–8:3)
 - b. To Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:4–12:25)
 - c. To the end of the earth (Acts 13:1–end)
- G. Emphasis is now on the message to the Gentiles

III. Author (Luke)

- A. Physician
- B. Accompanied Paul for some of the journey

IV. Date

- A. Likely before AD 60 or in early AD 60s; see page 3

V. Structure (Intertextual Relationships)

- A. Parallels between the life of Jesus and the life of the Church
- B. Parallels between Peter and Paul in Acts
 - 1. Chapters 1–12 focus on Peter – sent to Jews
 - 2. Chapters 13–28 focus on Paul – sent to Gentiles

VI. Preparing for Class

- A. Allow time to do the reading and questions
- B. Recommended Bible for this study: *Revised Standard Version*, Second Catholic Edition (RSV-2CE)

NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION

Session Two



Mosaic of the Ascension of Jesus, St. Mark's Basilica, Venice

A. Establish the Context

During this first week, quickly read through the entire book of the Acts of the Apostles. Do not spend too much time; try to get an overall impression rather than attempting to absorb everything at once. This “big picture” exercise will be indispensable to your study of the individual chapters of Acts. Make a note of your overall impressions, any words and phrases you see repeated, themes you encounter, and the personalities that stand out to you. Record any questions you have.

Knowing the context is important to understanding the story, so be sure to read Session One before you continue.

B. Read the Story

Carefully read Acts 1. Place yourself in the overall story by finding the reading in the chart on the next page. Ask yourself these questions as you read: *Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?*

As always, pray before you read.

2. What is the purpose of the forty days the resurrected Christ spends with his disciples before his ascension?

THE ASCENSION (ACTS 1:6-11)

3. The apostles' question about the kingdom in Acts 1:6 indicates they expect Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom with political power.
 - a. How does Jesus answer them?
 - b. What will the power he gives them enable them to do?
4. **Old Testament Connection:** The disciples' question about the restoration of the kingdom of Israel flows out of a long history of messianic expectations. In part, the people expect the Messiah to reunite the twelve tribes of Israel (long since dispersed in exile) under a king who will sit on David's throne in Jerusalem. Read Daniel 7:13-14, 7:18, 7:22, 7:27, and record what you learn about the kingdom.
5.
 - a. Read Matthew 10:5-6. What are Jesus' instructions to the Twelve the first time he sends them out?
 - b. Read Acts 1:8. How has that commission changed?

- c. Think About It:** What does this new charge have to do with their question about whether Jesus will restore the kingdom to Israel?

- 6.** Re-read Daniel 7:13-14, and then read CCC 697. What is the significance of Jesus being taken up into a cloud?

- 7. Living Tradition** (optional): Read the discussion of Christ's return in glory in CCC 668–682.
 - a.** “Christ already reigns through the Church.” What do you learn from this passage about Christ's kingdom?

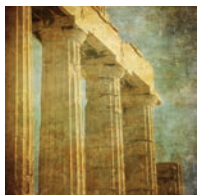
 - b.** Read CCC 671–672: “... until all things are subjected in him.” How will Christ's earthly reign be fulfilled someday?

- 8. Think About It:** Why is it important for the apostles to witness Christ's ascension? Why is it important to the Christian Faith that Jesus does not just return to life but rises in glory to heaven?

THE CHOOSING OF MATTHIAS (ACTS 1:12-26)

- 9. a.** What qualification does Peter put forth for nominating the new apostle?

- b.** What means do the disciples use to choose a new apostle from between the two candidates?



LOTS

Interestingly, St. Luke begins both his histories with a story involving “lots.” In the Old Testament, lots were used to determine which of the Levitical priests would offer incense in the Temple (see 1 Chronicles 24:3-19). St. Luke begins his Gospel with the choosing of Zechariah by lots to perform this once-in-a-lifetime function. It was during this liturgy that Zechariah was visited by an angel and told of the birth of John the Baptist. Most scholars believe “lots” were stones distinguished by colors or inscriptions. It was not a game of chance but a way to help God’s people discern his will. For other mentions of “lots” in the Old Testament, see Leviticus 16, Joshua 14:2, and Proverbs 16:33.

- 10.** Even though the Holy Spirit has yet to descend on the apostles with power, this first chapter of Acts is full of his presence. Read Acts 1 again. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit’s activity?

D. Application

These questions will help you apply one of the key themes of the session to your life. After meditating on them, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

- Does Acts 1:8 apply to you? If not, why not? And if so, what specific actions does it suggest for you? (See CCC 942; see also *Gaudium et Spes* 43.)
- Does the means used to determine Judas’ successor (the casting of lots) surprise you? What are some unusual ways God has helped you discover his will in your life?

Dear Lord ...

SESSION TWO TALK NOTES

Acts 1: Prelude to Power

I. Introduction to Acts 1

- A. From Resurrection to Pentecost
- B. Written to Theophilus, like Luke's Gospel
 - 1. Lover of God
 - 2. Believed to be a *catechumen* (Gk., "informed")
- C. Purpose
 - 1. Luke: explains all Jesus did and taught (Acts 1:1)
 - 2. Acts: tells what Jesus continues to do through the Church
- D. Proofs of Resurrection
 - 1. Empty tomb – John 20
 - 2. Jesus presents himself alive to apostles – Luke 24:13-31
 - 3. Invites eyewitnesses to touch his resurrected body – Luke 24
 - 4. Shows himself alive to more than five hundred people – 1 Corinthians 15:6
 - 5. Reveals himself to Paul
- E. Appears for forty days
 - 1. *Mystagogy* – final period of Jesus' teaching about the kingdom
 - 2. "Forty" as number of testing, preparation
 - a. Flood and rain for forty days – Genesis 7
 - b. Moses is on Mount Sinai for forty days and nights – Exodus 34
 - c. Israel is in the desert forty years – Deuteronomy 8
 - d. Spied the land for forty days – Numbers 14
 - e. Philistine oppression for forty years – Judges 13
 - f. Elijah fasts for forty days and nights – 1 Kings 19
 - g. Nineveh takes forty days to repent – Jonah 3
 - h. Jesus is in the wilderness forty days – Matthew 4
 - i. Forty-day period of preparation – Acts 1
 - j. Liturgical calendar – forty days of Lent
- F. Promise of the Father = Holy Spirit (see Luke 24:49)

II. Restoration of the Kingdom of Israel

- A.** Kingdom splits – 930 BC
- B.** Assyria takes away the Northern Kingdom – 722 BC
- C.** Babylonian captivity (Southern Kingdom) – 587 BC
- D.** Spiritual restoration of the kingdom
 - 1.** Jesus is enthroned in heaven
 - 2.** Power of Holy Spirit will come from a restored King

III. Power of the Holy Spirit and Witness

- A.** Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, the ends of the earth
- B.** Power = Gk., *dunamis* = “dynamite”
- C.** Witness = Gk., *martus* = “martyr”
 - 1.** Power of witness to change the world
 - 2.** Dying to self daily – Romans 8:12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:31; 1 Peter 2:24

IV. The Ascension of Jesus

- A.** Heb., *Remez* = “to hint”; rabbinic method of teaching
- B.** Clouds = messianic language
 - 1.** Presence of God
 - 2.** Pillar of cloud by day – Exodus 13
 - 3.** Holy Spirit – Isaiah

V. Relationship Between Acts 1 and Daniel – Restoration of the Kingdom

- A.** Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of five kingdoms – Daniel 2
 - 1.** Four future kingdoms (Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome)
 - 2.** Fifth, everlasting kingdom (of God)
- B.** Daniel 7 – Son of Man
 - 1.** Highest title, most used by Jesus
 - 2.** Son of Man comes with clouds of heaven – Daniel 7:13-14

VI. With One Accord, Devoted to Prayer

- A.** Mary intercedes
 - 1. Queen Mother = Heb., *Gebirah* (1 Kings 2), intercedes with king
 - 2. First mention of Mary is in John's Gospel – interceding at Cana
- B.** Peter is the spokesman – see Matthew 18 (Heb., *al ha-bayit* = “vicar”)
- C.** The company of 120 – number needed to start a new community
- D.** Fulfill the Scripture of David
 - 1. Psalms written when king is under attack – Psalms 69, 109
 - 2. Failed plot to overthrow David – 2 Samuel 15–18
- E.** Judas' office must be filled – New Israel needs twelve pillars
- F.** Apostles as witnesses of the Resurrection – CCC 860
- G.** Casting lots = a means of discerning
 - 1. Leviticus 16:7-10
 - 2. Proverbs 16:33
 - 3. 1 Chronicles 24:31 – assigning duties of priests in Temple
 - a.** Jesus as the new Temple, apostles as the new priests