

A (Very Brief) User's Guide to the Book of Acts

- **Who?**
 - Luke the physician?
 - Companion of Paul
 - 2nd generation, 1st century Christian
 - Well-educated
- **When?**
 - Most likely in the 80s AD
 - Post 70 (destruction of the temple)
 - Unaware of Matthew's Gospel or that Paul's letters have become "scripture"
- **Where?**
 - Almost no clue
 - Less important than with other Gospels
- **Why?**
 - To provide a definitive account of key moments in the first decades of the church
 - Pastoral support for Christians struggling with challenges
 - Demonstrate the role and importance of the apostles
 - Illustrate the continuing role of Holy Spirit in the ministry of the post-Ascension church

Sources

- Stories collected by the early church
- Eyewitness accounts by author, especially in the later chapters

Major Emphases

1. What God has Done

- Made Jesus the source and guarantee of Israel's salvation
- Fulfillment of God's promises to Israel (and the whole world)
- Death and resurrection are the decisive moment
- Key passage: Acts 2:1-36 – Peter's Pentecost Sermon

2. What God Does

- Opens up vast new possibilities through the death and resurrection of Jesus

- Continues to reveal the breadth of possibilities as followers fulfill their mission
- Empowers believers to meet those opportunities
- The believers are changed *as much as* the “converted”
- Key passage: Acts 10

3. Discernment and Change

- The church changes radically and repeatedly over the course of the narrative
- Decisions based on new conditions lead the church in very unexpected directions
- These decisions are usually communal and based on discernment rather than personal preference
- These decisions help to shape the church’s identity
- Key passage: Acts 15:1-21 – The Council of Jerusalem

4. Opposition

- The church’s identity is also shaped by conflict and opposition
- Conflict invites the believers to steadfastness in the faith
- Provides opportunity for demonstration of God’s power
- Key passage: Acts 16:16-40 – Paul & Silas Jailed in Philippi

5. Saints Around the Edges

- Peter dominates the first half of the narrative, Paul the second half
- However, a number of vivid stories happen around the apostles
- Women, foreigners, and other “marginal” people are key to the unfolding of God’s work
- Key passage: Acts 8:26-40 – Philip and the Ethiopian