

WITNESSES OF WONDER
THE BOOK OF ACTS

Bible Studies

Acts 1-7

Blacktown Anglican Church

www.bac.org.au

Version 1.0 2024

Luke Thomson (study material) & Larissa Larin (Acts Outworked)

Free to copy and distribute

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Over 24 chapters, Luke writes his gospel outlining the story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the book of Acts, Luke continues that story as he provides an account of the Acts of the Apostles, and the work of the Spirit of God in the life of his people after the ascension of Jesus.

Here, Luke records a selective history of the early church, as it transforms from a small Jewish sect in Jerusalem, toward a significant movement that reaches the very centre of the Roman Empire. These first witnesses to the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus become witnesses to the world; witnesses of the wonder of all that God has done through the Lord Jesus.

I hope and pray these studies will, among other benefits, assist you in growing in awe and wonder of Jesus.

Luke Thomson
Senior Minister



WITNESSES TO THE WORLD

6	Timeline of Events	
8	Witnesses to the World	Acts 1:1-11
10	Witnesses of the Resurrection	Acts 1:12-26
12	The Wonder of the Spirit	Acts 2:1-41
14	Diagram: The Nations at Pentecost	
15	Diagram: Preaching in Acts	
16	The Wonder of Community	Acts 2:42-47
18	The Wonder of Faith	Acts 3:1-26
20	Courageous Witnesses	Acts 4:1-31
22	Counterfeit Witnesses	Acts 4:32-5:11
24	Persistent Witnesses	Acts 5:12-42
26	Witnesses of the Word	Acts 6:1-7
28	Witnesses of History	Acts 6:8-8:1
30	Additional resources	
32	Acts Outworked	



TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Year	Events	Place in Acts	Other New Testament References
A.D. 30	Jesus is crucified, resurrected and appears for 40 days. Pentecost and the initial growth of the church in and around Jerusalem.	Acts 1-2	
A.D. 31-33	Rising tensions between Jewish leaders and Christians. Stephen is killed. Saul is significant in persecuting Christians. Persecution after Stephen's death leads to dispersion of Christians and the spread of the gospel.	Acts 3-8	
A.D. 34	Saul witnesses the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus. He is commissioned as an apostle to the Gentiles.	Acts 9-10	Galatians 1:15-16
A.D. 34-37	Saul is in Damascus. He returns to Jerusalem as a Christian in A.D. 37 and meets with the Apostles.	Acts 9:26-30	Galatians 1:18
A.D. 37-46	Saul ministers in Tarsus, Syria and Cilicia.	Acts 9:30	Galatians 1:21
A.D. 38	Peter visits Cornelius, the first recorded conversion of Gentiles.	Acts 10	
A.D. 43	James (the brother of John) is killed. Peter is imprisoned, rescued by an angel, and leaves Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas return to Jerusalem.	Acts 12	
A.D. 48	Paul's first missionary journey (with Barnabas) from Antioch to Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra.	Acts 13-14	
A.D. 48	Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch. Paul confronts Peter for withdrawing from the Gentiles due to pressure from the Judaizers.	Acts 14:26-28	Galatians 2:11-14
A.D. 48-49	Paul writes his letter to the Galatians.		
A.D. 49	The Jerusalem Council, where it is agreed that Gentiles do not have to conform to Jewish laws, such as circumcision.	Acts 15	
A.D. 49-50	Paul and Barnabas part ways over a dispute about John Mark. Barnabas goes to Cyprus, while Paul takes Silas to Syria and Cilicia.	Acts 15:36-41	

Year	Events	Place in Acts	Other New Testament References
A.D. 50-52	Paul's second missionary journey (with Silas) from Antioch to Syria, Cilicia, southern Galatia, Macedonia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Achaia, Athens and Corinth (where he stays for about 18 months). Paul and Silas are joined by Timothy (in Lystra) and Luke (in Troas).	Acts 15:39-18:22	
A.D. 51-52	Paul writes his two letters to the Thessalonians while in Corinth.		
A.D. 52	Paul returns to Jerusalem.	Acts 18:22	
A.D. 53-57	Paul's third missionary journey from Antioch to Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, Greece.	Acts 18:23-21:16	
A.D. 54	Paul writes his second letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus. (Note: we call this 1 Corinthians, as we do not have a surviving copy of his first letter. See 1 Corinthians 5:9-10)		
A.D. 55	Paul's second visit to Corinth which does not go well (not recorded in Acts). He follows up this visit by writing a third letter to the Corinthians (we do not have a surviving copy of this).		2 Corinthians 2:1-4; 12:14-18; 13:1-3, 10.
A.D. 56	After hearing a good report from Titus, Paul writes his fourth letter to the Corinthians (What we call 2 Corinthians). He then returns to visit Corinth.		
A.D. 56-57	Paul writes the letter to the Romans from Corinth.		Romans 16:1
A.D. 57-59	Paul returns to Jerusalem and is arrested. He is taken for trial to the Roman Governor, Felix, in Caesarea Maritima, and remains in prison for two years.	Acts 21:17-24:27	
A.D. 59	Porcius Festus succeeds Felix. Paul is put on trial once more, before Festus and Herod Agrippa II.	Acts 25-26	
A.D. 59-60	Paul is taken to Rome	Acts 27:1-28:16	
A.D. 60-62	Paul remains in Rome under house arrest. It is here that he likely writes the letters of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus.	Acts 28:17-31	



WITNESSES TO THE WORLD

Acts 1:1-11



SHARE

Do you have a favourite moment, period or story from history?
What is it? Why does it capture your imagination?



EXPLORE

Read Acts 1:1-11

Luke begins with a very brief summary (vv. 1-3). What hints does this give us about the rest of the book?

What do you think the disciples were expecting from Jesus? (v. 6)

What task does Jesus give them? (vv. 7-8) How do you think they would have felt hearing this?

What are they to bear witness to?

How does Luke describe the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit? (vv. 2, 4-5, 8)



Acts 1:8 provides the summary of the entire book, as the gospel goes out from Jerusalem. While the whole world is ultimately in view, the 'ends of the earth' has a more immediate focus on Rome, the influential centre of the empire.



HISTORY BITE

Luke writes to a Gentile audience who would have been very familiar with their own cultural stories of god-like figures disguised as humans. But they would be less familiar with stories of resurrection.

As one example in Greek mythology, Herakles was the son of Zeus, and the god of strength (later adapted by the Romans as the figure we know as Hercules). At the end of his life, having being poisoned, Herakles builds a fire and burns himself to death. Herakles is said to have his mortal part burned up, while his divine part ascended to Olympus and he becomes a god.

Writing to people familiar with such stories, Luke is very keen in the opening verses of Acts to emphasise the significant evidence of a great many witnesses to the historical, physical resurrection of Jesus. Interestingly, the resurrection of Jesus is the only consistent theme that appears in every gospel explanation through the entire book.

LIVE

Have you ever considered that the primary task of a Christian is to be a ‘witness’? Since we aren’t witnesses to the resurrection, in what ways can we be a ‘witness’?

What can make this task feel overwhelming? What can make it joyful?

How could you support other Christians in their ‘witness’:

- members of your community group?
- members of our church?
- our mission partners?



PRAY

Reflecting on the passage:

- What does it lead us to praise or thank God for?
- What kinds of people does it prompt you to pray for?
- How does it lead us to pray for the continual spread of the gospel?



WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION

Acts 1:12-26



SHARE

What is the most incredible, inspiring or historic moment that you have witnessed with your own eyes?



EXPLORE

Read Acts 1:12-14

What hints do we see about how these first Christians lived after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus?

Read Acts 1:15-26

What does Peter want to make clear concerning Judas' betrayal? (vv. 15-17, 20)

What criteria do the disciples require for someone to replace Judas? (vv. 21-22)

An *apostle* is someone who is commissioned and sent out for a task. In the New Testament, the word implies that they are commissioned directly by Jesus himself. What do the apostles understand their role to be? (vv. 22-25)



Luke's account of Judas' fate differs from Matthew's (Matt 27:3-10). Luke's concern is highlighting the need to replace Judas, while Matthew wants to critique the Jewish leadership for their involvement. The commissioning of 12 apostles likely relates to their initial witness to the 12 tribes of Israel.



HISTORY BITE

The way early Christians quote the Old Testament is somewhat surprising to a modern reader. For instance, Peter's reference to the Psalms in Acts 1:15-20 might appear to be an unusual interpretation in contrast to the original context of those Psalms.

However, as we will see through the course of Acts, early Christians often understood aspects of the Old Testament as describing the *type* of way in which God works in creation. They show patterns of God's behaviour. As such, Peter takes a principle he identifies in the Psalms, and quite logically applies it to what he has witnessed in the present with regard to Judas. (This method is known as *typology*.)



LIVE

Acts regularly describes the early Christians devotion to prayer (e.g. 2:42; 3:1; 4:24; 6:4; 10:8; 12:5, 12). To what degree ought Christians be 'constantly in prayer'? (v. 14)

How ought this shape:

- Your personal habits of prayer?
- The place of prayer in your Community Group?
- The place of prayer in church services?



PRAY

Reflecting on the passage:

- What does it lead us to praise or thank God for?
- What kinds of people does it prompt you to pray for?
- How does it lead us to pray for the continual spread of the gospel?



THE WONDER OF THE SPIRIT

Acts 2:1-41



SHARE

Do you have a favourite famous speech? (It could be by a historical or fictional character) What is it? Why does it resonate with you?



EXPLORE

Read Acts 2:1-13

The events of Pentecost occur at the time when many had gathered from across the world to Jerusalem (see map on page 14). How does this event contribute to fulfilling the mission assigned in Acts 1:8?

How would you have felt if you witnessed these events?

Read Acts 2:14-36

What stands out to you from Peter's speech?

What is Peter wanting to make clear to his listeners?

Read Acts 2:37-41

What responses does Peter call for?



It is estimated that the population of Jerusalem in the 1st Century was around 100,000 people. During Pentecost, this number would have likely doubled in size.



HISTORY BITE

In contrast to other ancient historians of his time, Luke includes a surprising amount of speeches in the book of Acts, about a third of the book. One reason for this is that he is writing about a historical movement of which evangelistic preaching was at the very centre.

Most likely, Luke is using written accounts and eyewitness testimony as he records these speeches. His desire to write an accurate, orderly account (Luke 1:1-4), along with the important role of words for the Christian movement, gives us confidence that when Luke records these speeches in Acts (which we should largely understand as summaries of what was said), he is providing a good sense of what took place.

LIVE

What convictions does Acts portray as necessary to be a Christian?

Is there anything about this story, or its implications, that makes you uncomfortable in any way? If so, how should we respond to those feelings?

What challenges do you think the early church would have faced with such rapid growth?

How do we depend on the Holy Spirit:

- As individuals?
- As a church?



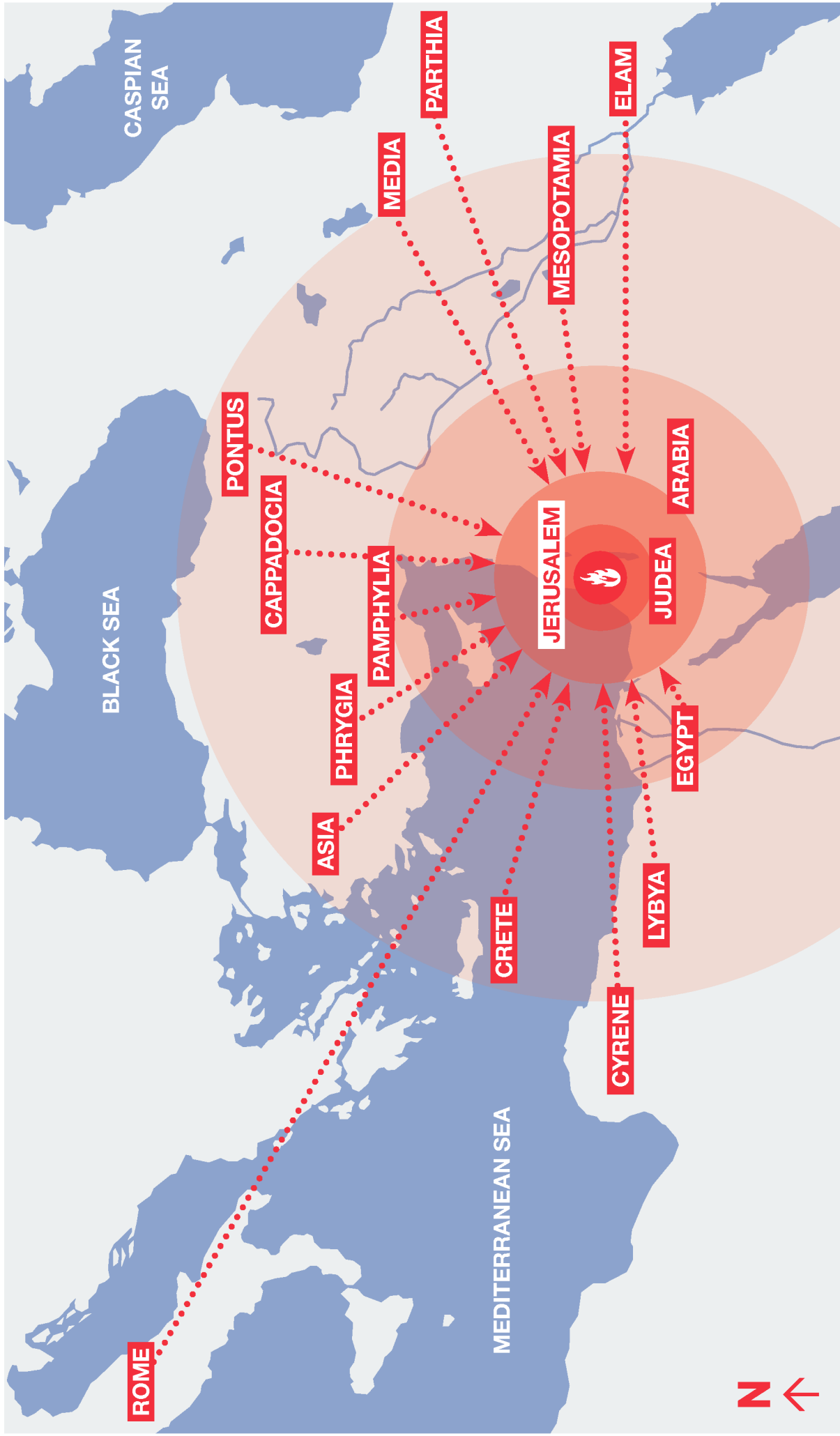
PRAY

Reflecting on the passage:

- What does it lead us to praise or thank God for?
- What kinds of people does it prompt you to pray for?
- How does it lead us to pray for the continual spread of the gospel?

THE NATIONS OF PENTECOST ACTS 2:9-11

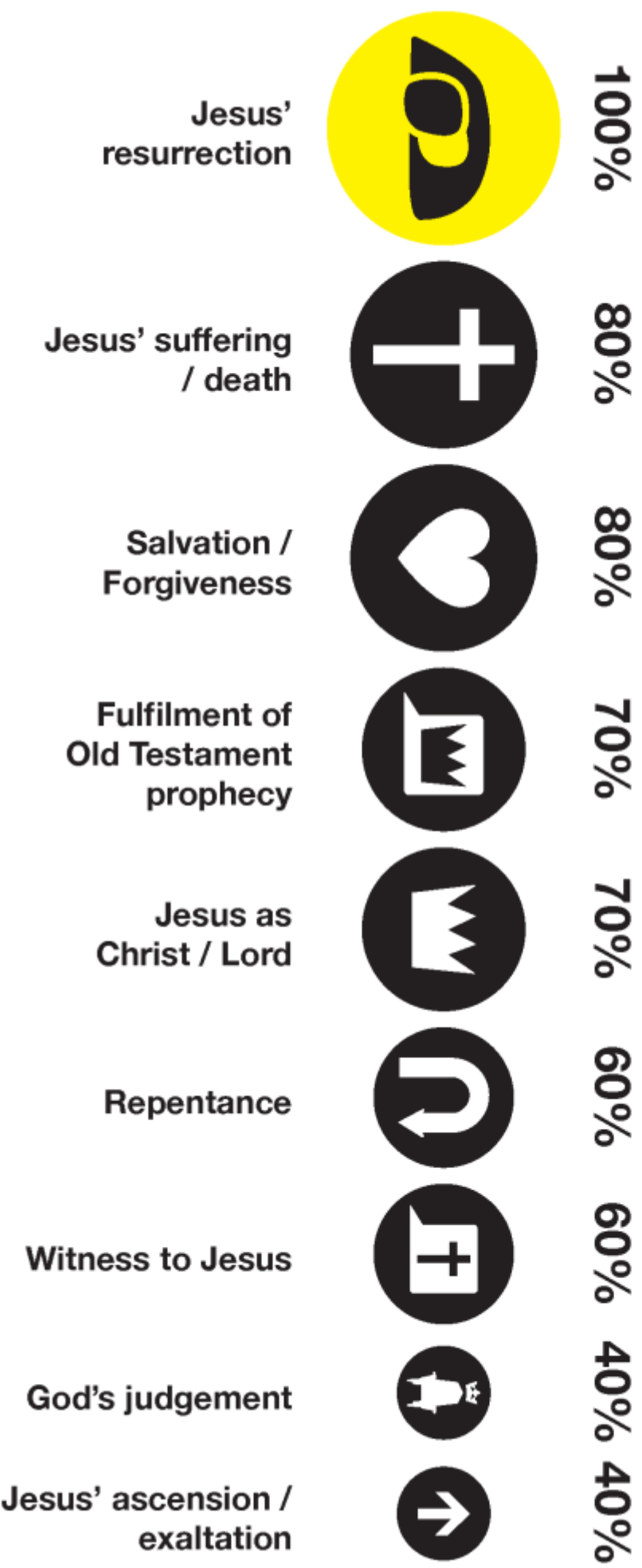
© Mark Barry 2009 | visualunit.me | Please do not republish without permission, but feel free to copy for personal use.



RESURRECTING THE GOSPEL

Jesus' resurrection lies at the heart of the apostles' preaching throughout the book of Acts. Although all the themes below are integral to the proclamation of the "good news", the message of the risen Jesus is the single theme that appears in every recorded gospel explanation in the book and is clearly the motivation that drives them to boldly proclaim Jesus "from Jerusalem ... to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In fact, Paul was renown for simply "preaching Jesus and the resurrection" (17:18) and was ultimately arrested and put on trial because of his belief in the risen Lord Jesus (23:6; 24:21).

% of appearances in gospel explanations





THE WONDER OF COMMUNITY

Acts 2:42-47



SHARE

What has been the most meaningful experience of belonging somewhere that you have felt? (e.g. a family; a church; a community group; a town; a team; a workplace; etc.) Why?



EXPLORE

Read Acts 2:42-47

The book of Acts describes *what* happened in the early church. It doesn't necessarily tell us what *should* always happen. What stands out to you about the way they lived?

Luke highlights four key activities in v. 42, which he expands upon in the following verses. What challenges do you think they might have faced in prioritising each of these?

- devoted to the apostles teaching
- fellowship (literally 'sharing in common')
- breaking of bread (eating together, including the Lords Supper)
- prayer



Christians ate together far more frequently than any other group in the ancient world. The 'fellowship' (v. 42) portrays a close-knit community, and discussion of the scriptures or lectures over meals would have been common.



HISTORY BITE

The description of the disciples sharing everything in common, and selling possessions as needed (vv. 44-45) uses familiar Greek language at the time that depicted a utopian community. What is especially noteworthy in this passage is the disciples radical valuing of people over possessions. They weren't selling possessions because they thought them to be evil or unnecessary. Nor is this describing an ancient form of communism. Rather, this radical way of life is depicted as a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. This was a Spirit empowered, Jesus shaped community. In the kingdom of God, care and provision for one another is central to a life of faith in community.



LIVE

What resources help you to prioritise walking with Jesus in community? What challenges do you feel?

Consider the habits and practices of the following groups (not the stated beliefs; we're only assessing our practice here). Could you write a summary sentence for each that accurately describes the core priorities based on their practices?

- Blacktown Anglican Church
- My community group
- My personal Christian life

Do you observe any ways in which our practice does not strongly reflect stated beliefs?



PRAY

Reflecting on the passage:

- What does it lead us to praise or thank God for?
- What kinds of people does it prompt you to pray for?
- How does it lead us to pray for the continual spread of the gospel?



THE WONDER OF FAITH

Acts 3:1-26



SHARE

Who was your childhood hero? What made you consider them to be extraordinary?



EXPLORE

Read Acts 3:1-10

What did the man expect to receive? (vv. 3-5)

What do you think gave Peter such confidence in his words to the man? (v. 6)

Read Acts 3:11-26

What is the relationship between the miraculous healing and the preaching of the gospel? (vv. 12-16)

What similarities do you notice between this speech of Peter, and his speech in Acts 2:14-36? What differences?

How does this episode in Acts 3 advance the story of the book of Acts? (Consider Acts 1:8)



It was often believed that God would perform miracles by means of especially devout people. Peter (and Luke writing this account) wants to be clear that the apostles were ordinary people filled with God's Spirit (v. 12).



HISTORY BITE

In 1st century Judaism, providing for the poor and needy was seen as a worthy act of worship to God. Aiding beggars by providing money, food or other material goods would have been common practice among the Jews (more than other cultures of the time). Begging around the temple gates would be especially effective for receiving a favourable response from worshippers who were going to the temple to pray.



LIVE

Peter is keen to emphasise his own ordinariness (v. 12) and point people to praise Jesus. In what ways is it tempting to view the early Christians as extraordinary? How can this inhibit us from learning from their example?

Do you ever find it difficult to direct praise to Jesus rather than claim it for yourself? How tempting do you think the early Christians may have found this?

Do you ever feel that you are too 'ordinary' to be used by God? Has this ever prevented you from taking a bold step of faith?

How does this story encourage us when we feel 'ordinary'?



PRAY

Reflecting on the passage:

- What does it lead us to praise or thank God for?
- What kinds of people does it prompt you to pray for?
- How does it lead us to pray for the continual spread of the gospel?



COURAGEOUS WITNESSES

Acts 4:1-31



SHARE

What is the most courageous thing that you have ever done?

What helped you to show such courage?



EXPLORE

Read Acts 4:1-22

Why do you think the number of Christians continued to increase despite the growing opposition? (vv. 1-4)

How would you feel if you were taken into this court-like setting?

What do Peter and John believe they have responsibility to do? (vv. 18-20)

Read Acts 4:23-31

What would you expect the disciples to pray for after this episode? What do the disciples pray for? (v. 29)

Verse 31 affirms that their prayer was answered. How does this connect larger story of Acts?



The Sanhedrin was the highest court of the Jews, with authority in civil, criminal and religious cases. It could not, however, enforce capital punishment, and the Romans reserved the right to interfere as they so desired.



HISTORY BITE

Sadducees and Pharisees were two distinct groups within 1st century Judaism. Sadducees controlled the temple and the priesthood, and their identity was tied closely to the rituals and rites performed at the temple. Pharisees were laymen who were well schooled in the Scriptures, but they had little influence at the temple. Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection, while the Pharisees did (Luke 20:27).

Though Sadducees did not have a friendly relationship with the Pharisees, they saw the early Christians as a far bigger threat because of their proclamation of the historic resurrection of Jesus (Acts 4:2), as well Jesus' own warning of the destruction of the temple (Luke 21:5-6). The temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, and with it, the Sadducee movement came to an end.



LIVE

How courageous do you feel in your faith when confronted with opposition?

Are you more likely to pray for (a) courage; or (b) an end for the need to show courage?

How can this Community Group contribute to growing our courage?

Is there an upcoming opportunity where we can pray for you to have courage?



PRAY

Reflecting on the passage:

- What does it lead us to praise or thank God for?
- What kinds of people does it prompt you to pray for?
- How does it lead us to pray for the continual spread of the gospel?



COUNTERFEIT WITNESSES

Acts 4:32-5:11



SHARE

Have you had an experience where you felt particularly cared for by others?
How did they show care?



EXPLORE

Read Acts 4:32-37

What aspects of the Christian community does Luke highlight in this summary?

How does Jesus alter the priorities of Christian?

Read Acts 5:1-11

What does Peter accuse Ananias of doing? (vv. 3-4)

What does he accuse Sapphira of doing? (vv. 8-9)

How do Ananias and Sapphira contrast with Joseph (vv. 4:36-37)

How could their behaviour have undermined the witness of the church?



There was a large Jewish community on the island of Cyprus from around 300 BC. Christian converts first travelled to Cyprus after the death of Stephen (Acts 11:19). Later, Paul and Barnabas preach in the Jewish Synagogues (Acts 13:4ff).



HISTORY BITE

In the Ancient Near East, honourable burial was a very important family concern. The account of Ananias' death shows it is highly abnormal for two reasons: he is buried by non-family members; and his wife is unaware of his death or burial.

There was no requirement for Christians to contribute the entirety of their proceeds of a property sale. However, the spirit of the giving by Ananias and Sapphira is contrasted with that of Joseph (Acts 4:36-37). Ananias and Sapphira intend to deceive the Christian community and therefore bring distrust among them. Peter frames such deceit as, in effect, "lying to the Holy Spirit".



LIVE

What obstacles do we face in attempting to live like the early Christians? (vv. 4:32-37)

Do you think God's judgement on Ananias and Sapphira was too harsh? Why or why not?

Jesus said "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Matthew 6:24)

Why are money and possessions so attractive to us? How can we use them for good?



PRAY

Reflecting on the passage:

- What does it lead us to praise or thank God for?
- What kinds of people does it prompt you to pray for?
- How does it lead us to pray for the continual spread of the gospel?



PERSISTENT WITNESSES

Acts 5:12-42



SHARE

In the past 12 months, what is one thing—big or small—you have achieved through patient persistence?



EXPLORE

Read Acts 5:12-16

(Translation note: Although v. 12 mentions 'all the believers', commentators agree that it is much more likely that this is specifically about the apostles. Solomon's Colonnade was a section of the temple courts [See also Acts 3:11]).

What similarities and differences do you notice with previous summary passages? (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35)

Read Acts 5:17-42

Would you have had the same boldness as the apostles to return to the temple courts and preach? (vv. 17-21a)

How does Peter defend their actions? (vv. 29-32)

How does Gamaliel manage to quieten the crowd? (vv. 33-40)



Gamaliel was probably the most influential Pharisee leader of the time, and had a reputation as one of the greatest Jewish teachers. He was also the teacher of the Apostle Paul (Acts 22:3).



HISTORY BITE

The first century Jewish historian, Josephus, also mentions the same rebellion of Judas that Gamaliel speaks of in Acts 5:37. He also mentions a rebellion by a 'Theudas', though this does not appear to be the same person mentioned in Acts.

Josephus does note that there were "ten thousand other disorders in Judea" during the time of Herod. As such, it is not unlikely that among the very many rebellions, there was more than one by a man named 'Theudas' (a common Jewish name at the time).



LIVE

Are there people for whom you find it difficult to be open about your faith?

What does it mean to be "counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name"? (v. 41)

What can make this a difficult perspective to embrace in our own lives?

How does the story of Acts (to this point) provide us with confidence in the face of opposition?



PRAY

Reflecting on the passage:

- What does it lead us to praise or thank God for?
- What kinds of people does it prompt you to pray for?
- How does it lead us to pray for the continual spread of the gospel?



WITNESSES OF THE WORD

Acts 6:1-7



SHARE

What are your most favourite and least favourite household chores?



EXPLORE

This short story shows us another example of the kinds of challenges faced in the early Christian community (see also Ananias and Sapphira in the previous chapter).

What are the apostles chiefly concerned with? (vv. 1-2)

How might caring for the widows *distract* the apostles from their primary task?

How might caring for the widows *assist* the apostles in their primary task?

What qualifications are deemed necessary for the seven who are set apart? (v. 3) What does this suggest about the importance of this work?

What is the result of solving this challenge? (v. 7) What does this suggest about the connection between word and deed?



The seven men set apart (Acts 6:5) all have Greek (Hellenist) names, suggesting that they belong to the broader group that includes the Hellenistic widows.



HISTORY BITE

Hellenistic Jews were Greek speaking, whilst the Hebraic Jews likely spoke Aramaic (or perhaps Hebrew). There is no apparent difference of beliefs between these two groups, but rather, a difference in whether they are native to Jerusalem.

Jewish widows would ordinarily be supported by their wider family. However, if these Greek speaking women had immigrated to Jerusalem with their husbands (before becoming widowed), it is likely that their family support networks were too distant to provide for them. It was a common practice to return to Jerusalem when death was imminent, as it was considered virtuous to be buried in Israel. This may have led to an increase in widows arriving from foreign lands, and therefore, a need for support that could not be met via traditional means.



LIVE

Are there aspects of life that you find it more difficult to match your actions to your beliefs?

Are there people or groups within our church who you feel might be overlooked in some way? How could you go about meeting their needs?

How could our church leadership support our members to be more effective servants?

How could we support our church leadership to be more effective in their responsibilities?



PRAY

Reflecting on the passage:

- What does it lead us to praise or thank God for?
- What kinds of people does it prompt you to pray for?
- How does it lead us to pray for the continual spread of the gospel?



WITNESSES OF HISTORY

Acts 6:8-8:1



SHARE

What relatively small, insignificant thing really gets on your nerves? What helps you process the anger in a healthy way?



EXPLORE

Reads Acts 6:8-15

What false accusations are made against Stephen? (vv. 11-14)

Read Acts 7:1-53

Is there anything that surprises you in Stephen's speech?

What do you think Stephen might have hoped would result from his speech? (vv. 51-53)

Read Acts 7:54-8:1

Why are the members of the Sanhedrin so angry? (v. 54)

Why do you think Luke includes a note about Saul's presence and approval? (vv. 7:58-8:1)



Christians were initially viewed as just another Jewish sect. Stephen's speech and death mark a significant theological split between Judaism and Christianity. It becomes a pivotal moment for the spread of the gospel in Acts.



HISTORY BITE

Stephen follows a very conventional form of speech in providing his defence. He spends a great length outlining his positive common ground with his hostile audience (vv. 2-34) in an attempt to persuade them to see his view. He then moves to laying out his argument regarding the history of God's people rejecting God's prophets (vv. 35-50). Finally, Stephen lands his accusation upon his audience with a highly emotional plea (vv. 51-53).

In Acts 6:9-15, Luke makes it clear that the charges against Stephen are false, and Stephen's speech does not even attempt to defend those false charges. Rather, he goes on the offensive, and instead accuses his audience of failing to obey the law (Acts 7:53).



LIVE

Are there some sins that are easier to admit and confess than other?

Why can we find it difficult to admit our own sin and disobedience to God?

How tempting is it for us to sit in judgment over the members of the Sanhedrin who stoned Stephen to death? Why is this an unhelpful response?

How ought Stephen's speech lead us to confession of our own sin, and seeking God's forgiveness?



PRAY

Reflecting on the passage:

- What does it lead us to praise or thank God for?
- What kinds of people does it prompt you to pray for?
- How does it lead us to pray for the continual spread of the gospel?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Online Articles

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/introduction-to-the-gospels-and-acts/>
A short introduction to the book of Acts, including purpose, historical reliability, and relationship to the gospels.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/knowning-bible-acts/>
A short, 12-week study outlining the main ideas and themes of Acts.

<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-acts/>
A short introduction to the book of Acts, with links to further resources

Online Commentaries

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/Acts>
A short, accessible commentary for insight into the passages.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/acts/>
Another short, accessible commentary for insight into the passages.

<https://journeythrough.org/courses/acts/>
A series of short devotional readings through Acts by David Cook (former principal of Sydney Missionary & Bible College).

Books

The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary.

Ben Witherington III. Grand Rapids: Eerdemans, 1998.

This large, in-depth commentary provides an excellent exploration of not only the text of the book of Acts, but also the surrounding social, cultural, political and historical climate of the day that bear upon how we read this book.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Videos

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/acts-1-12/>

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/acts-13-28/>

A pictorial outline of the book of Acts.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/category/luke-acts-series/>

Includes four videos outlining the story of Acts.

Podcasts

<https://bibleproject.com/podcast/series/luke-acts-series/>

A 13-part series breaking down the book of Acts. Includes interviews with theologian N.T. Wright.



ACTS OUTWORKED

WEEK 1 | 18/2

The Power of the Wonder Working Gospel

I love the book of Acts.

I love the way it reflects the simplicity of following Jesus.

I love the encouragement of seeing lives being transformed by the gospel of Jesus.

I love how it captures the spread and the growth of the early Church within the first century.

As we launch our new sermon series in the book of Acts, we are also embarking on a new season together, one that extends beyond our four walls.

Along side Acts, we will be running an evangelistic challenge, called Acts Outworked. We are going to explore various ways in which we can be more active and attentive to sharing the Good News of Jesus within our community. This is not a mere program or initiative. This is a rallying for us as a church to represent Jesus well.

It is an invitation to step out in faith, to share the Good News of Jesus with confidence, urgency, and compassion. A call to embody the love of Christ wherever we go.

Each week we will share an encouragement and a challenge. You will find the outline of the challenge inside these Bible study booklets. We will be exploring the theme more in-depth within mission spots at church during our services.

One excellent resource we will be drawing from is a wonderful book called 'How to talk about Jesus without being that guy' by Sam Chan.

My personal prayer for Acts Outworked is that this challenge will help inspire, equip and empower us as a whole church to bring the news of Jesus to our city and community. Let us boldly step into this adventure of faith, depending on the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us as we continue the mission of Jesus in the city of Blacktown.



ACTS OUTWORKED

WEEK 2 | 25/2

The Power of Fear

Fear can be a powerful emotion. It is a natural reaction that is meant to protect us from possible danger. It can also, unhelpfully, prevent us from doing things, we want to do—or know we should do.

Within the spheres of evangelism, there are a multitude of fears that can stop Christians from sharing the gospel with their friends and family. Whether it is fear of rejection, fear of embarrassment or fear of offending, there are a plethora of reasons to feel worried about ‘being that guy’ and bringing up Jesus within a conversation.

All of these reasons are very real, but one particular thing we can do to help overcome fear, is to pinpoint the root of it. This week, let’s overcome our fear of evangelism by locating what we are worried about, and reminding ourselves that God is growing His Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

WEEK 3 | 3/3

The Power of Prayer

Not too long ago, I came across a really simple song, which for the main part says ‘*I don’t care what the world says, I’ve got the gospel running through my veins, and I’m sold out, sold out for You.*’ (*Sold Out by Housefires*)

I find great comfort in that. Despite where I go, who I meet, what I do, or what I say; Christ lives deep within me. When I talk to others about Jesus, I never do it alone.

Prayer is a powerful weapon. This week, let’s go forth depending on the Spirit through prayer, as we spread the gospel beyond our four walls.



ACTS OUTWORKED

WEEK 4 | 10/3

The Power of Listening

Introducing Jesus into a conversation is not an easy thing most of the time. There can be times where people are eager to hear our testimonies; in other cases, even mentioning church attendance can be met with resistance. However, I've found that listening can serve as a powerful tool to naturally incorporate Jesus into our discussions.

If we want people to listen to us, we need to listen to them. The key is to ask safe questions and try to get them to share for as long as possible. The longer you listen to them, the longer they will be willing to listen to you. Active listening is a brilliant tool and involves demonstrating that you have heard the thought, understood it, and empathise with the feeling.

WEEK 5 | 17/3

The Power of Going and Inviting

Community is important. Yet, when we attempt evangelism, we often try to go solo – only to find we're the weirdo on the out. But what if we combined our efforts?

'Merging your universes' is a term Sam Chan uses in his book, *How to talk about Jesus*. It is a technique of bringing your Christian and unbelieving communities together.

Being evangelistic is more than a simple invite or reposting of a Bible Verse online, it is a deepening of convictions and growing in your relationships. Through being attentive to invite our friends and merge our universes, as well as being active to attend what they invite us to, we can help strengthen our relationships and display Christ to them within our everyday.



ACTS OUTWORKED

WEEK 6 | 24/3

The Power of Sharing Your Story

Sharing the Good News of Jesus is not about having the perfect theological answers or the most logical explanations. Rather, it centres on simply telling people about Jesus. Throughout the ages, stories have always had a particular power for getting messages across. In our current culture, personal stories hold a particular weight, often seen as synonymous with truth.

The God we follow is a personal and relational God, and we can help show that to our friends and family through sharing our stories of Christ and how we are growing our faith in Him.

WEEK 7 | 7/4

The Power of Asking Questions

When I was 16, I struggled to sustain conversations with others, particularly in social settings. One of my closest friends was a massive extrovert, and thrived off meeting new people, whilst I often found myself at a loss of words, especially when we were together at a new event or gathering. It used to frustrate me, so I decided to devise a solution.

I wrote a list of 100 questions on my phone that I could use as conversation starters. It helped tremendously. After a simple introduction with someone, I would whip out the list from my phone and start to rattle out the questions that were everything between 'Which do you prefer, tomato or BBQ sauce' and 'Who is the best listener you know?'

Questions have the power to guide a conversation, set tones, and uncover heartfelt truths. When we are prepared with various questions for different situations, we can be best equipped to share the Good News of Jesus.



ACTS OUTWORKED

WEEK 8 | 14/4

The Power of Being a Jesus Shaped Presence

Why are you a disciple of Jesus? For me, my faith in Jesus stems from a deep belief life finds its true meaning in Him. The gospel isn't merely a set of doctrines or a prayer prayed; it's a living force actively transforming the body of Christ and renewing all things. I need the gospel everyday.

Holding these convictions helps me to be a Jesus Shaped Presence within my everyday rhythms. Your reasons for following Jesus may differ from mine, but the reasons hold the same weight in your decision to be a follower of Jesus.

Understanding this, it can help motivate us to be a Jesus Shaped Presence wherever we go. It can help us to stand out from the crowd, showing Christ's unique and radical love, through purposeful and intentional actions.

WEEK 9 | 21/4

The Power of Leaning into Disagreement

It can be scary to go into a conversation knowing you disagree with the opinions of the other person. I personally hate conflict, and try to avoid it as much as I can. However, as a diverse community, we inevitably hold differing opinions on various matters. When handled effectively, discussions around disagreements can serve as valuable opportunities for personal growth.

The goal of coming out of a disagreement well is to not go into it thinking you will win the conversation and change the person's mind. We want to win the friendship, not the argument. When we are prepared for disagreement, we can go into conversations confident in ourselves and our faith in Jesus.



ACTS OUTWORKED

WEEK 10 | 28/3

The Power of Celebration

