



## ***Book of Acts (Pt.1): Introduction & Overview***

Billy Humphrey - January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

### **I. Introduction**

- A. We are going to take the next several months and go deep into the study of the Book of Acts as a spiritual family. We feel strongly that this next season for us is a time to emphasize the *Road* component of our discipleship framework. We want to continue to build the *Altar* and *Table* components, in prayer, house churches, small groups, discipleship, and family, while we move forward in emphasizing and developing more thoroughly our participation in the Great Commission as we multiply and pioneer.
- B. I have been personally struck as I have leaned into studying the book of Acts during the last several weeks. I feel challenged to live a life that more evidently mirrors the faith that the first Church had. I long to live the way I see the apostles lived, and I also long for our spiritual family to live this way.

### **II. Simple Outline of the Book**

- A. Acts 1 – Commission of the Church
- B. Acts 2-7 – Birth of the Church
- C. Acts 8-12 – Expansion of the Church
- D. Acts 13-28 – Missionary Work of the Church

### **III. Overview**

- A. The book of Acts is the 2<sup>nd</sup> volume of a two-part account written by Luke and addressed to Theophilus (whose name means “friend of God”). Most scholars agree that it was written between 60-90 AD.
- B. We find that Luke explained His original purpose for the two volumes of the book of Acts in Luke 1:1-4.

**Luke 1:1-4** – “<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, <sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, <sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, <sup>4</sup> that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”



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- C. Luke said, “many have set in order a narrative of the things that have been **fulfilled** among us...” His use of the word “fulfilled” makes it clear that He isn’t simply approaching the works as a history record, but as a fulfillment of prophecy. He is tying together the ancient hope of Israel, that a messiah would come and deliver the nations from their sins to their current moment and all that took place through Jesus.
- D. He acknowledges that other accounts of Jesus’ life have been written, but that he wanted to write an **orderly account** by going back to the original eyewitnesses to lay out “the things that have been fulfilled among us.”
- E. In Acts 1:1-2 He continues the same sentiment, tying the two accounts together:  
**Act 1:1-2** – “<sup>1</sup> The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen.”
- F. In volume one (The Book of Luke), Luke laid out an account of all Jesus began “to do and teach.” In volume two (The Book of Acts), the account is about what Jesus continued to do and teach, except this time it wasn’t Him personally accomplishing the works, but the Holy Spirit accomplishing the works through the believers.
- G. The first volume (Luke) is about the things Jesus did until He ascended. The second volume (Acts) is about the things He did after He ascended.

### **IV. Distinguishing Marks of the First Church**

- A. I have been incredibly encouraged, strengthened, and challenged as I have revisited the key characteristics of the Church in the book of Acts. Altogether, I see about a dozen distinguishing marks of the first Church. They are:
  - 1. Empowerment of the Holy Spirit – The defining moment for the early Church was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). The Spirit empowered the believers for bold witness, miracles, signs, and effective ministry. This dependence on the Holy Spirit was central to their growth and vitality.
  - 2. Devotion to Prayer and Worship – The early Church prioritized prayer, both corporately and individually. They were continually devoted to prayer (Acts 1:14; Acts 2:42), and significant decisions, such as choosing leaders (Acts 1:24; Acts 13:2-3), were birthed in prayer. Worship, often expressed through hymns and praise (Acts 2:47; Acts 16:25), was a core practice. Scholars confirm that the early Church practiced daily prayer meetings for the first several hundred years.



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3. Radical Generosity and Unity – The believers shared a deep sense of unity, described as being “of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32). They held possessions in common, selling property to meet the needs of others (Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:34-35). This radical generosity set them apart in their culture.
4. Bold Proclamation of the Gospel – The Church was relentless in its mission to proclaim the Gospel, focusing on the message of Jesus' death, resurrection, and lordship. Despite persecution, they continued to preach with boldness (Acts 4:31; Acts 5:42).
5. Signs and Wonders – Miracles, signs and wonders accompanied the apostles' ministry, confirming the truth of the Gospel and drawing many to faith (Acts 2:43; Acts 3:1-10; Acts 5:12-16).
6. Commitment to the Word – The apostles' teaching was central to the life of the early Church (Acts 2:42). This focus helped the believers grow in understanding and remain steadfast in the face of opposition.
7. Inclusion of the Gentiles – The Church broke down significant cultural and social barriers, welcoming both Jews and Gentiles into the community of faith (Acts 10; Acts 15). This inclusivity demonstrated the gospel's power to unify diverse groups.
8. Joy in Persecution – Persecution was a common experience for the early Church (Acts 4:1-3; Acts 7; Acts 8:1). Rather than shrinking back, believers responded with joy and courage and saw opposition as an opportunity for the Gospel to spread (Acts 8:4).
9. Global Mission – The Church embraced Jesus' commission to be His witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The missionary journeys of Paul and others exemplified this outward focus (Acts 13–28).
10. Communal Life and Fellowship – The Church lived as a close-knit community, sharing meals, resources, and daily life (Acts 2:42-46). This fellowship was marked by joy, commonality, mutuality, continual care, and a shared commitment to Christ.
11. Spirit-Led Leadership – The Church's leadership was Spirit-led, with decisions most often made through prayer and discernment (Acts 6:1-7; Acts 13:2-3).



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12. Societal Transformation – The Church's presence transformed the cities it reached. It challenged societal norms, brought hope to the marginalized, and turned the world "upside down" (Acts 17:6) with its countercultural message and practices.

### **V. Key Themes**

#### **A. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit**

1. The Holy Spirit's Leadership – The Holy Spirit was the chief Guide and Director of the early Church. The Church's decision making and mission were directed by the Holy Spirit, continually. The apostles relied on prayer and obediently followed the Spirit's promptings (Acts 1:24-26, Acts 8:29, Acts 13:2-4, Acts 16:6-7).
2. The Holy Spirit's Empowerment – The Holy Spirit empowered the believers to be witnesses to the gospel with boldness. Peter is an obvious example, though he denied Jesus before a servant girl on the night Jesus was betrayed, He stood and declared with boldness the truth of the resurrection. Acts records that they were filled with the Holy Spirit and boldness (Acts 4:29-31) in the face of threats and persecution.
3. The Holy Spirit's Manifestation – The Holy Spirit worked many, many miracles, signs, and wonders through the hands of the believers. There are at least 25 instances of specific signs, wonders, and miracles that take place in the book of Acts. There are also at least 6 occasions where there is an untold number of signs, wonders and miracles that took place. (Acts 2:43, 5:12, 6:8, 8:13, 14:3, 15:12) All of this was recorded over a 30-year period.

#### **B. The New Christian Community**

1. Equality – What began as a Jewish messianic movement made up of only Jewish people almost instantly became an ethnically diverse community of men and women, rich and poor, slave and free who were all valued and treated with equality. This equality was rooted in their shared allegiance to Jesus alone. Only through His blood and faith in Him are people able to accept and affirm one another regardless of their cultural background, gender, or generation. The inclusion of the Gentiles into the family of God is one of the most outstanding features of the New Testament Church.



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2. Generosity – Many of the new believers experienced the loss of family relationships, their goods, and their jobs because of their allegiance to Jesus. The new Christian community demonstrated radical generosity by pooling their resources to make sure that none among them lacked having their needs met (Act 2:44-45, Acts 4:32-35).
3. Unity – Against all odds, the early Church worked diligently to maintain unity in the Spirit. Beginning with the believers “in one accord” at Pentecost (Acts 2:1), their shared life grew into a community where they “had all things in common” (Acts 4:32). Challenges arose, such as the neglect of Hellenist widows in food distribution (Acts 6), but moments like the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) showed their commitment to Spirit-led unity. Despite diversity and struggles, their dedication to unity became a defining mark of their witness.

### C. Evangelism & Mission

1. Paul’s Witness – One of the most striking methods of early church evangelism was the apostle Paul’s approach. It was his custom upon entering a new city to go to the synagogue and preach to the Jews that the long-awaited Messiah had come. He would boldly declare that Jesus was confirmed to be the Messiah by the fact that He was raised from the dead. This proclamation often stirred debate, particularly between the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, and Pharisees, who affirmed it (Acts 23:6-8). He would further explain, that not only was Jesus the Messiah and raised from the dead, but that Gentiles were now welcomed to be a part of Messiah’s new spiritual family. Nothing could have been more controversial and disruptive, because according to the Jews, the Gentiles were estranged from the promises of God and outside of the Kingdom. It was a bold proclamation of God’s redemptive plan and simultaneously incredibly disruptive.
2. Proclamation & Mission - The book of Acts is filled with details of believers preaching the Gospel to advance the Kingdom. There are over 30 instances where it is explicitly stated that believers proclaimed the Gospel or were living on mission. (Acts 2:14-41, 3:11-26, 4:1-12, 5:12-42, 6:8-10, 7:1-53, 8:4-8, 8:26-40, 9:20-22, 9:32-35, 10:34-48, 11:19-21, 13:4-12, 13:13-52, 14:1-7, 14:8-20, 15:35, 16:13-15, 16:25-34, 17:1-9, 17:10-15, 17:16-34, 18:1-11, 19:1-10, 19:17-20, 20:17-38, 21:37-22:21, 23:11, 24:24-26, 26:1-29, 28:23-31). A part of that list is Paul’s three missionary journeys and his journey to Rome [(1) Acts 13:1-14:28, (2) 15:36-18:22, (3) 18:23-21:17, (Rome) 21:18 – 28:31].



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### D. Persecution & Suffering

1. Suffering as an Honor – In the first Church, suffering was not viewed as a defeat but as an honor. After being flogged, the apostles rejoiced “because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for [Jesus’] Name” (Acts 5:41). Paul and Silas, beaten and imprisoned, worshiped God through songs in the darkness of their cell, leading to miraculous deliverance and the salvation of their jailer (Acts 16:23-34). Their joyful response to persecution is notable and challenging. They truly experienced joy amid suffering.
2. Persecution as a Catalyst- The book of Acts highlights how persecution became a catalyst for the spread of the gospel. When Peter and John were arrested and commanded to stop preaching, they boldly declared, “We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Rather than shrinking back, the early believers prayed for boldness and were filled with the Holy Spirit, continuing to proclaim Christ despite threats (Acts 4:29-31).

### E. Key Prophetic Fulfillments

1. Jesus is the Son of David – Peter’s sermon at Pentecost declared Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promise to David that one of his descendants would sit on his throne forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13, Psalm 16:10). While Jesus is currently reigning at the right hand of God in heaven, the full realization of His reign as the Son of David will occur at His second coming, when He will physically return to establish His kingdom on earth (Acts 2:29-36).
2. Pentecost – Joel’s prophesied that in the last days God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh (Joel 2:28-32). Peter declared that the supernatural events of the day of Pentecost were evidence of Joel’s prophecy being fulfilled. The complete fulfillment of these prophecies will manifest in the generation of the Lord’s return and the establishment of His earthly reign (Acts 2:16-21).
3. Inclusion of the Gentiles - The acceptance of Gentiles into the family of God fulfilled the promise that salvation would reach all nations. When Peter preached to Cornelius and his household, the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles, confirming Isaiah’s prophecy that God’s light would be a beacon to all people (Isaiah 49:6; Acts 10:44-48). Paul further declared this fulfillment, proclaiming that the Gospel was for both Jews and Gentiles alike (Acts 13:47).