

Bible Reading Notes  
**Acts**

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## Acts 1

**1:8** – This verse serves as an outline of the book of Acts as the gospel makes progress from Jerusalem to Rome.

**1:14** – **devoting themselves to prayer** – They had learned this habit from the three years of observing Jesus and his prayer practices.

**1:15 – 120** – That group was smaller than our congregation, yet God used them to turn the world upside down. The Lord can do much with a small group of dedicated people.

**1:20** – These quotations are from Psalms 69:25 and 109:8.

## Acts 2

**2:1** – It is now ten days after the ascension of Christ. **Pentecost** was the celebration of the completion of the grain harvest.

**2:4** – **other tongues** – These were other human languages which they had not learned (vv. 8, 11).

**2:17-21** – Peter's text is a quotation from Joel 2:28-32.

**2:25-28** – Peter quotes Psalm 16:8-11

**2:34-35** – Peter continues his emphasis on the Old Testament's teaching about Christ, quoting from Psalm 110:1.

**2:43** – **wonders and signs** – Like Jesus' signs, these were done to confirm the message that they proclaimed in Jesus' name.

**2:46** – They had both large congregational gatherings as well as small group meetings in homes.

## Acts 3

This chapter provides an example of the wonders and signs the apostles did in their ministry (2:43).

**3:1** – ninth hour = 3:00 pm.

**3:11** – portico called Solomon's – This was a large area along the eastern wall of the temple, open to the public. It became a favorite meeting area for the church (Acts 5:12).

**3:13-16** – Peter follows the same sermon outline he had at Pentecost – You killed Jesus, but God raised him from the dead and has glorified him.

**3:23** – Peter is alluding to Deuteronomy 18:19 and Leviticus 23:29.

**3:25** – This is a quotation from Genesis 12:3 when God first called Abram.

## Acts 4

It did not take long for the apostles to experience the persecution that would come because of their association with Jesus.

**4:4** – about five thousand – This is the total number of men in the Jerusalem congregation. Adding women and children would have made the congregation at least twice as large.

**4:7** – name – This term is key to this episode in chapters 3-4, where it is used eight times. It was in the name of Jesus the man was healed, and Peter will make this clear in his defense.

**4:20** – Peter is similar to Jeremiah's inability to not proclaim the Lord's message in Jeremiah 20:9.

**4:25-26** – This is a quotation from Psalm 2:1-2.

**4:28** – God is sovereign in all things, including the persecution of the church.

4:29 – They did not pray that the persecution would end, but that they would be bold in the midst of it.

4:34 – **not a needy person among them** - This was the ideal as spoken of in Deuteronomy 15:4.

## Acts 5

5:3 – Ananias' sin was not withholding part of the proceeds, since they were his to do as he wished. His sin was lying by pretending he had followed Barnabas' example in giving it all to the church.

5:13-14 – Luke's point is that after hearing about Ananias and Sapphira, no one who was not truly committed to Christ dared join themselves to the church. But true believers were attracted and did join the number.

5:29 – This is the principle for conduct. We cannot obey any human law that would require us to sin. Not witnessing would have been sinful for the apostles.

5:37 – **Judas the Galilean** – He was the founder of the Zealots, a Jewish group who sought the destruction of Rome's power in Israel.

5:41 – They rejoiced because they recognized that their suffering was part of their identification with Christ.

## Acts 6

6:1 – There are two distinct groups in the church. Hellenists who were Jews from Gentile areas, and spoke Greek, and Hebrews who were native to Israel and spoke Aramaic.

6:2-4 – Caring for the widows was an important task, but it was distracting the apostles from their primary calling (prayer and the ministry of the word).

6:5 – These seven men became the church’s first deacons.

6:7 – **great many of the priests** – Now the gospel was impacting the priests in Jerusalem.

6:11-14 – This was the same tactic that they had used with Jesus.

## Acts 7

Stephen’s defense will be full of Scripture. Take note of the many quotes and allusions to the Old Testament that he uses.

Stephen’s defense includes a summary of God’s work since Abraham and Israel’s response to it. This lays the foundation for his accusation against the people of his own day.

7:37 – This promise from Deuteronomy 18:15 was made in reference to Christ.

7:42-43 – This is a quote from Amos 5:25-27

7:49-50 – Stephen is quoting Isaiah 66:1-2.

7:51 – This marks a sudden change in attitude and language as Stephen moves from Israel’s past history to accuse the current leadership of the same sins.

## Acts 8

8:1 – **they were all scattered...except the apostles** – God used persecution to push his church out to fulfill their mission of taking the gospel to the world. They had remained centered in Jerusalem instead of expanding out.

8:4 – It was not the apostles who were the first to communicate the gospel outside of Jerusalem but the church members who had been scattered.

8:5 – **Philip** – He was one of the original seven deacons (Acts 6:5).

- 8:17** – This is the reception of the Holy Spirit by the Samaritans. Note that the signs of Pentecost were not present (wind, tongues of fire). But the gift of the Spirit is the indication by the Lord that the Samaritans too were to be viewed as part of God’s people.
- 8:24 – Simon** – Early church history and tradition indicates that Simon never repented. He is believed to be the founder of the early Gnostic heresy.
- 8:32-33** – He was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8 about Christ, the suffering servant.

## Acts 9

- 9:1 – still breathing** – Since Stephen’s death (7:58; 8:1). The persecution in Jerusalem has continued and now Saul is expanding it to the area of Damascus.
- 9:4 – persecuting me** – When the world persecutes the church, it is really directed against Christ.
- 9:5 – I am Jesus** – Imagine Saul’s response to hearing Jesus whom he believed to be dead. It was life transforming.
- 9:16** – Paul’s life and ministry after his conversion would be marked by suffering (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).
- 9:27 – Barnabas** – His name means “son of encouragement.” He shows the aptness of his name here and will later in his dealings with John Mark (Acts 15:37).
- 9:29 – Hellenists** – Greek speaking Jews who had lived outside of Palestine.
- 9:32 – Lydda** – The city was located northwest of Jerusalem on the road leading to Joppa on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

## Acts 10

This chapter contains the account of the greatest shift in the church in Acts as the door is opened to Gentiles.

**10:1 - Caesarea** – Is on the coast about thirty miles north of Joppa.

**10:2 – feared God** – God-fearers was a technical term for Gentiles who worshipped the Lord but did not become circumcised.

**10:20 – without hesitation** – Most Jews would have been hesitant to go with Gentiles for fear of becoming ceremonially unclean (v. 28).

**10:28** – Probably the most radical statement that Peter ever made. His insight transformed the church and its mission.

**10:43 – everyone** – This occasion expanded in Peter’s mind that “everyone” also included Gentiles.

**10:45 – believers** – There were 6 men who had accompanied Peter (11:12).

## Acts 11

**11:2 – circumcision party** – These were Jewish members of the church who insisted that to be a Christian one needed to obey all the law, including the ceremonial and food laws. They are sometimes referred to as “Judaizers.”

**11:16** – He is remembering Jesus’ words recorded in Acts 1:5.

**11:18** – This does not settle the issue. It will only be resolved later at the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15.

**11:29-30** – This was an important encouragement by the gentile Christians to the Jewish church in Jerusalem.



## Acts 12

- 12:2 – In Matthew 20:22-23 Jesus had warned James about the cost of following him.
- 12:15 – It is very possible to pray without faith!
- 12:19 – **examined** – This no doubt involved flogging.
- 12:20-23 – This is very similar to the judgment of God on Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:28-33.

## Acts 13

- 13:9 – **Paul** – First time this name is mentioned for Saul.
- 13:10 – Paul is very gentle with the man (yes, that is sarcasm).
- 13:16ff – Paul's sermon is very similar to Stephen's defense in rehearsing the history of God's dealings with his people, culminating in Christ.
- 13:33 – Like Stephen's defense, Paul quotes extensively from the Old Testament in reference to Christ.

## Acts 14

Acts 14 reflects the ongoing persecution that the apostles faced from unbelieving Jews. As we will see there were some Jews who followed the apostles in order to stir up crowds against them.

- 14:11 – **The gods have come down to us** – There was an ancient myth that Zeus and Hermes had once come down in human form and visited Lystra. The people believed this was another visitation.
- 14:19 – This was the stoning Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 11:25.
- 14:23 – Presbyterianism (rule by a plurality of elders) was established in the churches from the beginning.

## Acts 15

- 15:1 – This was the context for Paul writing to the Galatians.
- 15:2 – This is the foundation for Presbyterianism. We don't make important decisions about doctrine and practice as individual congregations but seek the advice and counsel of the broader body of Christ. The Jerusalem Council was the first General Assembly.
- 15:13 – James – This is the brother of Jesus, who by this time has been recognized as the leader of the church in Jerusalem.
- 15:16-18 – James quotes Amos 9:11-12.
- 15:38 – The account of John Mark's leaving them is found in Acts 13:13. Later Paul will recognize Mark's value and ask him to come to him (2 Timothy 4:11).

## Acts 16

- 16:1 – This family may have been some of the converts of Paul's earlier visit to Lystra (Acts 14).
- 16:3 – **circumcised him** – Not as a step necessary for salvation but to remove a barrier to Timothy's ministry among Jews.
- 16:15 – **and her household** – The apostles understood that baptism was the sign of the covenant for the New Testament church. They also recognized that the members of the covenant were believers and their household, just as it had been for Abraham (Genesis 17:23).
- 16:27 – **kill himself** – The penalty for allowing a prisoner to escape was death. The jailer believed that suicide would be better than the expected suffering at the hands of his superior.

16:31, 33 – household...all his family – Note the covenantal language that Luke uses here.

16:40 – they – Luke stayed in Philippi and will not rejoin Paul until Acts 20:5.

## Acts 17

17:11 – This is the hallmark of the diligent believer – comparing all things with Scripture.

17:19 – Areopagus – The name is a reference to a hill but was also used as a reference to the council of philosophers who provided leadership on philosophy, religion, and morals in Athens.

## Acts 18

18:2 – The expulsion of Jews from Rome occurred in AD 49.

18:11 – a year and six months – This was one of the longest stays of Paul in one location during his ministry.

18:23 – This is the start of Paul's 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey.

18:27 – through grace had believed – We must believe to be saved, but we can only believe if the Lord gives us grace to do so.

## Acts 19

19:3 – John's baptism – John's baptism was an Old Testament baptism meant to prepare people for the coming of Christ. Christian baptism is distinct and is in the name of the triune God.

- 19:10 – two years** – This was the longest stay for Paul in one town that Luke records.
- 19:15-16** – God uses evil spirits in his battle with Satan making it clear that Jesus alone was Lord.
- 19:19 – fifty thousand pieces of silver** – Uncertain about the exact modern equivalent, but it was a considerable sum of money in the first century.
- 19:24 – no little business** – It is interesting how often the Gentile’s persecution of the church is based on economic factors. Being polytheistic, they couldn’t argue against another god. But their wrath over income loss was what motivated them.
- 19:31 – Asiarchs** – ESV note = high ranking officers of the province of Asia.

## Acts 20

- 20:1** – The context is the riot in Ephesus recorded in the previous chapter.
- 20:5 – us** – Luke has now rejoined Paul. This is the first mention of Luke since Acts 16:40.
- 20:9** – The danger of preachers who preach too long!
- 20:21** – The proclamation of the gospel is both repentance and faith in Christ.
- 20:28 – overseers** – This term refers to the elders’ role of overseeing a congregation in Christ’s name. Overseeing involves care for the church (v. 28) and protecting the church (vv. 29-30).

## Acts 21

The context of this text is Paul’s trip to Jerusalem bringing financial gifts from the Gentile churches to the saints in Judea.

**21:1-12** – There are two more examples here of Paul being warned that he would be arrested if he went to Jerusalem (vv. 4, 11).

**21:28 – Greeks into the temple** – There was a courtyard area outside the temple that Gentiles could use for prayer, but no Gentiles were allowed into the temple itself.

## **Acts 22**

**22:1-21** – Paul’s defense or testimony will be given again in chapter 26 when he appears before Agrippa.

**22:16** – Baptism does not wash away sins but is the picture of sins being washed by God and is one of the first steps to become a disciple of Jesus.

**22:21-22 – Gentiles** – The Jews cannot stand the thought that God would accept Gentiles as part of his covenant people.

## **Acts 23**

**23:1 – council** – The Sanhedrin, the highest court in Judaism.

**23:5** – Paul quotes from Exodus 22:28. Notice that Paul sees application of this verse even when the high priest has acted unlawfully.

**23:23 – third hour of the night** – 9:00 pm.

**23:35 – Herod’s praetorium** – was a palace that served as a center of the Roman government in Caesarea.

## Acts 24-25

**24:27** – Paul’s time in Caesarea was lengthy, waiting for the different authorities to finally make a judgment about his case.

**25:11** – **I appeal to Caesar** – As a Roman citizen Paul had the right to make this appeal. The Lord had told him that he would testify about the Lord in Rome (23:11). The Lord used the circumstances in Paul’s life to accomplish his purpose.

## Acts 26

Paul gives his defense before Agrippa including an extended testimony of his conversion.

**26:8** – As he had in all of his defenses, Paul makes the resurrection of Christ the central issue.

**26:14** – **kick against the goads** – This statement is given only in this extended testimony. Goads were sharp sticks used to keep oxen in line, which would produce pain if the oxen kicked back against them.

**26:16-18** – This is the mission that the Lord gave to Paul when he was called.

**26:23** – **first to rise from the dead** – Not that Jesus was the first to ever rise from the dead but that his resurrection was first in that all believers’ resurrection flows from his.

## Acts 27

Finally, after over two years in prison in Caesarea, Paul is on his way to Rome.

**27:24** – Paul will be delivered because the Lord had determined that Paul would testify about him in Rome.

**27:27 – fourteenth night** – This was a long and stressful time to be in a storm at sea.

## Acts 28

**28:16** – Paul's great wish to come to Rome (Romans 15:24) has been fulfilled, but not in the way he had previously planned.

**28:23** – Christ is the main message of the the Old Testament (**law and the prophets**).

**28:26-27** – Paul quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10, which was part of God's call to Isaiah.

**28:30 – two whole years** – We believe that at the end of two years Paul was released from his confinement and returned to his ministry. Later he would be rearrested and suffer martyrdom.

