

ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

STUDY HELPS

FORMER ADVENTIST FELLOWSHIP BIBLE STUDY

INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

Acts is unique among the NT writings, in that its main purpose is to record a selective history of the early church following the resurrection of Christ. It shows how believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the gospel. Moreover, it explains how Christianity, although “new”, is really the one true religion rooted in God’s promises from the beginning of time. Luke presents the church as the fulfillment and extension of God’s promises.

Author

- Luke, a physician
- Luke mentioned only in Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24

Date

- Probably circa A.D. 62
- Some scholars place it as late as 70-80s, but because it ends abruptly before Paul’s death, it probably was written before his death occurred.

Literary Features

The book of Acts is a small anthology of individual literary genres. The list includes hero story, adventure story, travel story, conversion story, and miracle story. Drama also figures prominently: there are 32 speeches in Acts.

Following the story line becomes easy when one realizes that the book of Acts is structured on a cyclic principle in which a common pattern keeps getting repeated: (1) Christian leaders arise and preach the gospel; (2) listeners are converted and added to the church; (3) opponents (often Jewish but sometimes Gentile) begin to persecute the Christian leaders; and (4) God intervenes to rescue the leaders or otherwise protect the church. While this pattern is most obvious in the first half of the book, it extends in modified form to the journeys of Paul, whose repeated buffetings are followed by the expansion of the church.

The book of Acts is noteworthy for its narrative qualities. It is the report of an adventure, replete with arrests, imprisonments, beatings, riots, narrow escapes, a resurrection from death, a shipwreck, trial scenes, and rescues. Places play a key role in Acts. The places that matter most are the great cities of the Mediterranean region in the first century. Geography assumes a symbolic as well as literal importance, as Jerusalem, where the story begins, symbolizes the Jewish religion from which Christianity emerged, and Rome, where the story ends, symbolizes the Gentile world to which Christianity gravitates as the early history of the church unfolds.

OUTLINE OF ACTS

1. Preparation for Witness (1:1–2:13)
 1. Jesus prepares the disciples (1:1–5)
 2. Jesus ascends (1:6–11)
 3. Matthias replaces Judas (1:12–26)
 4. The Spirit descends at Pentecost (2:1–13)
2. The Witness in Jerusalem (2:14–5:42)
 1. Peter preaches at Pentecost (2:14–41)
 2. The Christian community shares a life in common (2:42–47)
 3. Peter heals a lame man (3:1–10)
 4. Peter preaches in the temple square (3:11–26)
 5. Peter and John witness before the Jewish council (4:1–22)
 6. Christian community prays for boldness in witness (4:23–31)
 7. The community shares together (4:32–5:16)
 8. The apostles appear before the council (5:17–42)
3. The Witness beyond Jerusalem (6:1–12:25)
 1. Seven chosen to serve the Hellenist widows (6:1–7)
 2. Stephen bears the ultimate witness (6:8–8:3)
 1. The arrest of Stephen (6:8–15)
 2. Stephen's address before the Sanhedrin (7:1–53)
 3. The martyrdom of Stephen (7:54–8:3)
 3. Philip witnesses beyond Jerusalem (8:4–40)
 1. Witness to the Samaritans (8:4–25)
 2. Witness to an Ethiopian eunuch (8:26–40)
 4. The conversion of Saul (9:1–31)
 1. Saul's encounter with Christ (9:1–9)
 2. Saul's encounter with Ananias (9:10–19a)
 3. Saul's witness in Damascus and Jerusalem (9:19b–31)
 5. Peter preaches in the coastal towns (9:32–11:18)
 1. Healing of Aeneas and Dorcas (9:32–43)
 2. Conversion of Cornelius (10:1–48)
 3. Peter's testimony in Jerusalem (11:1–18)
 6. The Antioch church witnesses to Gentiles (11:19–26)
 7. The offering for Jerusalem (11:27–30)
 8. The Jerusalem church is persecuted (12:1–25)
 1. The death of James (12:1–5)
 2. Peter's deliverance from prison (12:6–19)
 3. The death of Herod Agrippa I (12:20–25)
4. The Witness in Cyprus and Southern Galatia (13:1–14:28)
 1. The Antioch church commissions Paul and Barnabas (13:1–3)
 2. Paul and Barnabas witness on Cyprus (13:4–12)
 3. Paul preaches in synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (13:13–41)
 4. Paul turns to the Gentiles (13:42–52)
 5. Paul and Barnabas are rejected at Iconium (14:1–7)
 6. The two missionaries witness in Lystra (14:8–23)
 7. Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch (14:24–28)
5. The Jerusalem Council (15:1–35)
 1. The circumcision party criticizes the Gentile mission (15:1–5)
 2. Peter defends Paul (15:6–11)
 3. James proposes a solution (15:12–21)
 4. A letter is sent to Antioch (15:22–35)
6. The Witness in Greece (15:36–18:22)
 1. Paul and Barnabas differ over Mark (15:36–41)
 2. Timothy joins Paul and is circumcised (16:1–5)
 3. Paul is called to Macedonia (16:6–10)
 4. Paul witnesses in Philippi (16:11–40)
 1. Conversion of Lydia (16:11–15)
 2. Imprisonment of Paul and Silas (16:16–24)
 3. Conversion of the jailer (16:25–34)
 4. Release of Paul and Silas (16:35–40)
 5. Paul witnesses in Thessalonica (17:1–9)
 6. Paul witnesses in Berea (17:10–15)
 7. Paul witnesses in Athens (17:16–34)
 1. Witness in the marketplace (17:16–21)
 2. Witness before the Areopagus (17:22–34)
 8. Paul witnesses in Corinth (18:1–22)
7. The Witness in Ephesus (18:23–21:16)
 1. Priscilla and Aquila instruct Apollos (18:23–28)
 2. Paul encounters disciples of John (19:1–10)
 3. Paul encounters false religion at Ephesus (19:11–22)
 4. Paul experiences violent opposition at Ephesus (19:23–41)
 5. Paul completes his ministry in Greece (20:1–6)
 6. Paul travels to Miletus (20:7–16)
 7. Paul addresses the Ephesian elders at Miletus (20:17–35)
 8. Paul journeys to Jerusalem (20:36–21:16)
8. The Arrest in Jerusalem (21:17–23:35)
 1. Paul participates in a Nazirite ceremony (21:17–26)
 2. An angry mob attacks Paul (21:27–39)
 3. Paul addresses the Jewish crowd (21:40–22:21)
 4. Paul reveals his Roman citizenship (22:22–29)
 5. Paul appears before the Sanhedrin (22:30–23:11)
 6. Zealous Jews plot against Paul (23:12–22)
 7. Paul is delivered to the governor Felix (23:23–35)
9. The Witness in Caesarea (24:1–26:32)
 1. Paul appears before Felix (24:1–27)
 2. Paul appeals to Caesar (25:1–12)
 3. Festus presents the case to King Agrippa II (25:13–22)
 4. Paul witnesses to Agrippa II (25:23–26:32)
10. The Witness in Rome (27:1–28:31)
 1. Paul journeys to Rome by sea (27:1–44)
 2. Paul witnesses on Malta (28:1–10)
 3. Paul arrives in Rome (28:11–16)
 4. Paul witnesses to the Jews in Rome (28:17–31)

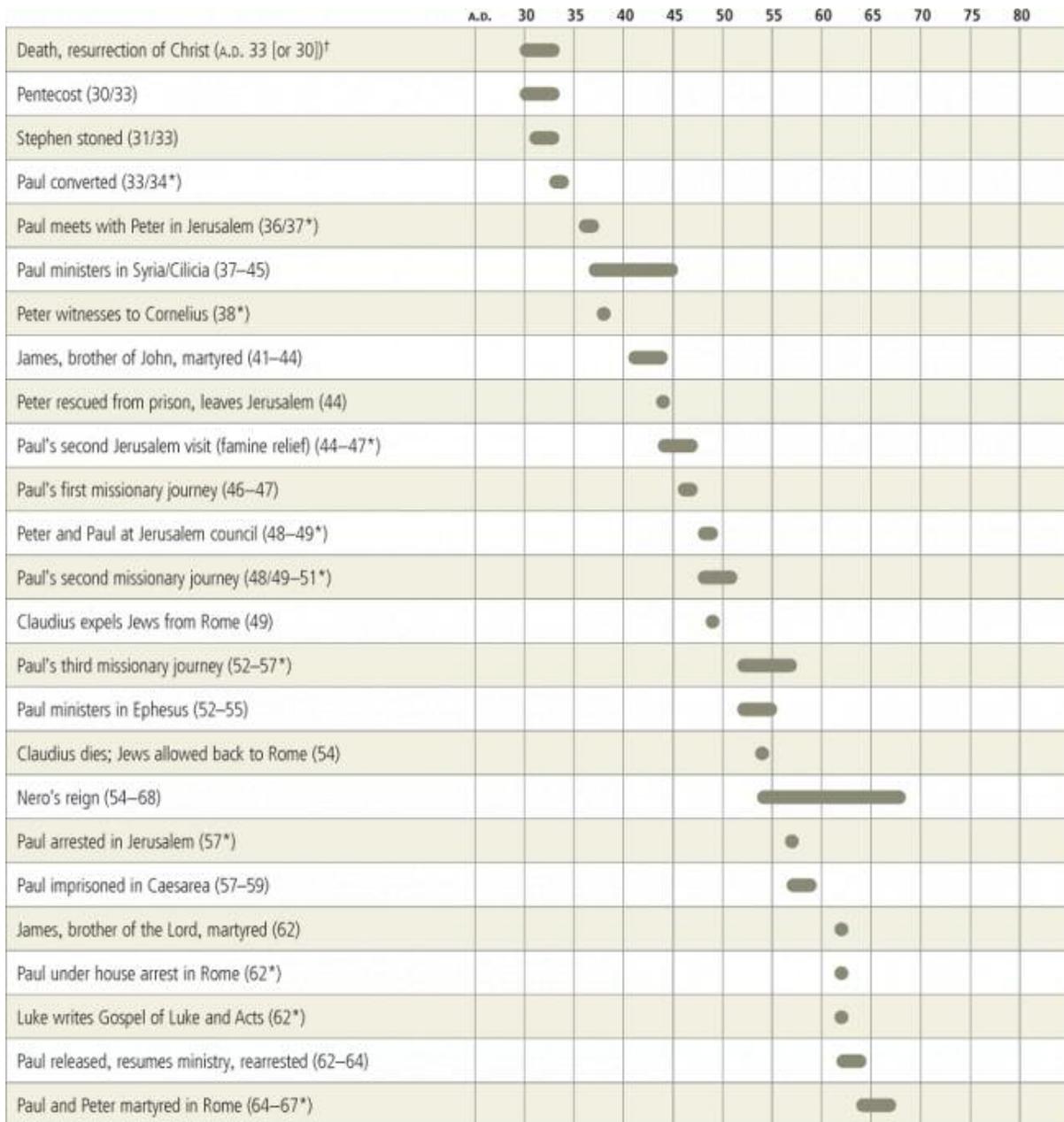
Nations at Pentecost

C. A.D. 30

Pentecost attracted Jews from all over the world to Jerusalem to celebrate the annual festival. Those who heard the apostles' message in their native languages at Pentecost came from various regions within the two great competing empires of the day—the Roman Empire and the Parthian Empire—with Jerusalem near the center.



Timeline



* denotes approximate date; / signifies either/or; † see *The Date of Jesus' Crucifixion*, pp. 1809–1810