

Reading Acts

The Big Picture

1-2	Jesus' followers are empowered to be witnesses to Jesus	15-18	Paul's missionary journey to Greece
2-5	The disciples' witness in Jerusalem	18-21	Paul's witness in Ephesus
6-12	The disciples' witness around Jerusalem	22-23	Paul arrested in Jerusalem
13-14	Paul's missionary journey to the nations	24-26	Paul's witness imprisoned in Caesarea
15	The Jerusalem council	27-28	Paul's witness in Rome

Key Themes in Acts

1. Jesus's commission to be witnesses to the Gospel "in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" becomes the framework for the entire book: chs. 1-5 Jerusalem, chs. 6-12 Judea and Samaria, chs. 13-28 the ends of the earth.
2. God's purpose is begin a new family of redeemed people in Jesus that will cross all social, cultural, and ethnic boundary lines: the stories of those who respond to the Gospel and are empowered by the Spirit are all over the spectrum:
 - Jews, non-Jews, Samaritans, the poor, the rich, Roman soldiers, the sick and handicapped, religious leaders, governors, city leaders, kings, tribal chieftains, everybody!
 - Key chapters that emphasize this theme: 2, 8:4-40, 10-11, 14, 16, 17, 24, 26.
 - The Jerusalem council in ch. 15 is a crucial moment in the story of Christianity: it was decided there that non-Jews could become followers of the Jewish messiah without having to become Jewish themselves (by circumcision, keeping Sabbath and eating kosher). These disputes arose often in the early church, as Paul's letters to the Galatians and Romans attest.
3. Being a faithful witness to the good news about Jesus brings hardship and sometimes suffering:
 - Witnesses to Jesus are often subject to persecution: 4:1-31; chs. 6-8, 16, 19, 21
4. The power to be a witness to the good news about Jesus is given by God's Spirit, who provides wisdom, courage, a sense of God's presence and power in situations where the Gospel is spreading: 1:8; 2:1-13; 4:8; 7:55; 8:17; 10:44; 13:2-12; 19:6
5. The church is most effective when it is unified in the Gospel and focused on witness and helping the poor: 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-7
6. Sharing the Gospel involves creative ways of retelling the story of the Bible so that it culminates in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus
 - The many speeches in Acts show ways of sharing the Gospel: Peter in chs. 2, 3, 5; Stephen in ch.7; Paul in chs. 13, 14, 17
 - The Gospel in Acts always includes the resurrection of Jesus along with the cross: the two events go together in explaining the good news: 1:22; 2:22-36; 17:30-31
7. Acts emphasizes the victory of the Gospel everywhere it goes: when Jesus' followers are faithful to share the good news, people respond: 4:4; 11:20-21; 13:48-49; 17:4; 18:6-11; 21:20; 28:30-31

