

Notes on studying Acts

18th March 2026

The Ascension

What did the disciples think at the time?

Did they expect Jesus back soon?

Did they realise that Jesus was going to heaven?

The selection of Matthias

Should the disciples have chosen someone to replace Judas? Is this them wanting to keep their existing structure or was this God's intention?

This was the first time that the disciples are taking control of their congregation; they are looking at how they will serve their own congregation. It is important that Peter steps in.

There is a move from having Jesus and having the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. There is a definite change in how God is communicating with them.

The coming of the Holy Spirit

When the Holy Spirit comes, the first thing is spreading the message; on the day of Pentecost they are all Jewish adherents. It takes about half of Acts before the Gentiles get included.

The first few weeks

Peter grabs opportunities. We can learn from Peter quoting scripture.

Faith is important — if the lame man had not tried to stand up, would he have been healed?

Peter and John clearly had Jesus' blessing to do this. Doing things in the name of Jesus is doing things that Jesus would want.

When human powers try to stop God's message getting through, God will find other ways.

Living as a community

There are so many different ways of living in the community.

Ananias and Sapphira

God knows what you are doing and the motives — it's no use trying to pretend.

The apostles performing miracles

The apostles perform miracles and people come for the miracles — ? out of self-interest?

If God has a plan for you, it will go forward.

Stephen

Stephen's speech is a bit long — he doesn't get to the point very quickly — but it is all based in the Jewish faith that his hearers know.

There are similarities in the way Stephen died to the way in which Jesus died.

Philip and the Ethiopian

Philip is able to use what the Ethiopian is reading as the basis for the Gospel.

Saul's conversion

It was a bit creepy when the scales dropped from his eyes.

Peter and Dorcas

We do not understand what death is.

Peter and Cornelius

Peter learned his lesson through the dream not to call anyone 'unclean.'

People turn up, confirming what he has just seen.

Cornelius and his guests are open to what Peter is going to say.

The Gentiles have been accepted.

It is important that the story is told twice.

Peter's arrest

The angel appeared in shining clothes.

The story of Herod's death is backed up by what we know from history.

Paul's first missionary journey

The blinding of Elymas, the sorcerer, replicates what happened to Paul.

Paul uses the symbolism of shaking the dust off his feet which Jesus recommended.

Paul references the prophets to explain the gospel.

Paul's second missionary journey

Why did Paul think it was necessary to circumcise Timothy?

God chooses to open the doors when they are imprisoned in Philippi rather than help Paul and Silas to escape; Paul doesn't try to escape.

At Athens Paul takes advantage of the fact that people were worshipping an unknown god for fear of missing a god out to proclaim the gospel.

At Corinth Crispus, the leader of the Jewish synagogue, becomes a Christian.

There are interesting parallels between Apollos not understanding the way and being taught by Priscilla and Aquila and people whom Paul found at Ephesus and needing to teach them.

Back in Judaea

After the riot in Jerusalem Paul mentions that he is a Roman citizen by asking a question.

The cultural difficulties for Felix in accepting Paul's message. Luke gives a lot of detail but this leads up to Paul talking to Felix on multiple occasions.

Paul only uses his Roman citizenship when he needs to — in this case to avoid a possible ambush on the way to Jerusalem.

Paul at Rome

Paul always starts preaching to the Jews before preaching to the Gentiles even though God specifically called him to preach to the Gentiles.

Review

Studying Acts felt easier than studying Genesis because there was a continuous story, especially around Paul, rather than lots of little stories. The historical background had been useful.

The digressions had been less helpful. Breaking into little bits breaks the overall flow.

It would be useful to have questions to reflect on.