

ACTS

A 12-WEEK STUDY



Justin S. Holcomb

Knowing the Bible: Acts, A 12-Week Study

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S E R I E S P R E F A C E

KNOWING THE BIBLE, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, to help understand the Bible in this deeper way, we urge readers to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available in various print and digital formats, including online editions at www.esvbible.org. The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer
Lane T. Dennis

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



Getting Acquainted

Acts is the story of God's grace flooding out to the world. Nothing is more prominent in Acts than the spread of the gospel.¹ Jesus promises a geographic expansion at the outset, and Acts follows the news of his death and resurrection as it spreads from a small group of disciples in Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the faraway capital of Rome.

Through the repeated preaching of the gospel² to different people groups, the gospel of grace draws them in, constitutes them as the church centered on the grace of Jesus, and then sends them out in mission³ to the world. Acts is a historical account of how the resurrection of Jesus changes everything through the birth of the early church.

God is clearly central to the gospel's expansion. He is at the heart of the gospel message and, through the Holy Spirit, he is responsible for its remarkable growth. The gospel expands not through human strength but through the power of God over significant barriers of geography, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, wealth, persecutions, weaknesses, suffering, sickness, and imprisonments. Many of these barriers appear so inviolable that, when the gospel is preached to a new segment of society, riots ensue. But Acts makes clear that no one is beyond the scope of God's saving power, nor is anyone exempt

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

from the need for God’s redeeming grace. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2073–2079, or visit www.esvbible.org.)

Placing It in the Larger Story

Acts shows that the new Christian movement is not a fringe sect, but the culmination of God’s plan of redemption. What was seen only as shadows in the Old Testament, God reveals finally and fully through Jesus Christ. The book of Acts does not primarily provide human patterns to emulate or avoid. Instead, it repeatedly calls us to reflect upon the work of God, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, establishing the church by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The gospel’s expansion is the culmination of what God has been doing since the beginning. Acts consistently grounds salvation in the ancient purpose of God, which comes to fruition at God’s own initiative. This reveals God to be the great benefactor who pours out blessings on all people. Even the opportunity to repent is God’s gift.

Key Verse

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Date and Historical Background

Acts is the second part of a two-volume work, with the Gospel of Luke being the first volume. Neither book names its author, however the Lukan authorship of Luke–Acts is affirmed by both external evidence (church tradition) and internal evidence. Church tradition supporting Luke as the author is both early (from the mid-2nd century AD) and for over a century and a half unanimous (it was never doubted until the 19th century). The “we” sections of Acts (16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16) reveal that the author was a companion of Paul and participated in the events described in those sections. So the author of Acts was one of Paul’s companions listed in his letters written during those periods (Luke is listed in Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philem. 24) and not one of the men referred to in the third person in the “we” sections (see Acts 20:4–5). It seems clear that the author was from the second generation of the early church, since he was not an “eyewitness” of Jesus’ ministry (Luke 1:2), and was a Gentile (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.4.6, says Luke was “by race an Antiochian and a physician by profession”; see Col. 4:14).

A number of scholars date Acts as early as AD 62, a guess based primarily on the abrupt conclusion of the book. Since Acts ends with Paul in Rome under house arrest, awaiting his trial before Caesar (28:30–31), it would seem strange if Luke knew about Paul’s release (a proof of his innocence), about his defense before Caesar (fulfilling 27:24), and about his preaching the gospel as far as Spain (see note on 28:30–31), but then did not mention these events at the end of Acts. It seems most likely, then, that the abrupt ending is an indication that Luke completed Acts c. AD 62, before these later events occurred.

Outline

- I. Preparation for Witness (1:1–2:13)
- II. The Witness in Jerusalem (2:14–5:42)
- III. The Witness beyond Jerusalem (6:1–12:25)
- IV. The Witness in Cyprus and Southern Galatia (13:1–14:28)
- V. The Jerusalem Council (15:1–35)
- VI. The Witness in Greece (15:36–18:22)
- VII. The Witness in Ephesus (18:23–21:16)
- VIII. The Arrest in Jerusalem (21:17–23:35)
- IX. The Witness in Caesarea (24:1–26:32)
- X. The Witness in Rome (27:1–28:31)

As You Get Started . . .

What is your understanding of how Acts relates to the storyline of the New Testament and of the whole Bible? How does it help you to better understand the cultures and people of other New Testament books?

What is your overall understanding of how Acts relates to Luke, knowing that this is part 2 of a two-part narrative? Do you have any sense of what Acts

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

uniquely contributes to that narrative? Do you have any sense of similarities and continuities between Luke and Acts?

How do you understand the contribution of Acts to Christian theology? From your current knowledge of Acts, what do you think this book teaches us about God, the church, the gospel, and other doctrines?

What aspects of Acts have confused you? Are there any specific questions that you hope to resolve through this study of Acts?

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a few moments now to ask the Lord to bless you, change you, and help you understand and apply the unique light Acts throws on the gospel to your life.

Definitions

¹ **Gospel** – A common translation for a Greek word meaning “good news,” that is, the good news of Jesus Christ and the salvation he made possible by his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Gospel with an initial capital letter refers to each of the biblical accounts of Jesus’ life on earth (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

² **Preach the gospel** – The preaching of Jesus’ death and resurrection is central in Acts. The Greek verb, “preach the gospel” (*euangelizo*), occurs more often in this book than in any other in the New Testament. About a third of the book of Acts consists of speeches, and most of these are speeches of Peter or Paul proclaiming the gospel. The good news of the salvation accomplished in Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit extends to the “ends of the earth” through preaching.

³ **Mission of God** – God’s plan of redemption for all of creation, initiated at the beginning and culminating in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. The mission of God is his work to reconcile the world to himself through Jesus Christ by lavishly offering grace to sinners and sufferers.

WEEK 2: YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

Acts 1:1–26



The Place of the Passage

In this opening chapter of Acts, Luke introduces several important gospel perspectives that recur throughout the rest of the book. Chief among them is that the book of Acts is first and foremost a book about Jesus. He is the primary character of the book and the focus of all its events. Acts depicts the continuing actions and teachings of Jesus, following his ascension, in a way that no other book of the Bible does. Acts demonstrates that as the budding Christian movement spreads, Jesus himself is at work. The church is Jesus' vehicle to continue his work in the world. In the opening chapter, Jesus promises his disciples the Holy Spirit in power (1:5), commissions them to take the gospel to the "end of the earth" (1:8), ascends into heaven (1:9), and is promised to return again (1:11).

The Big Picture

Acts 1 shows us that the ministry of Jesus did not stop with the Gospels; it is an ongoing work, initiated by Jesus' death, resurrection,¹ and ascension, and thereafter mediated by the Holy Spirit.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Acts 1:1–26. Then review the questions below concerning this first chapter of Acts and write your notes on them. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2080–2082, or visit www.esvbible.org.)

1. The Promise of the Holy Spirit and Jesus’ Return (1:1–11)

Acts 1:1 addresses “Theophilus” and references a previous book, the Gospel of Luke. Here in the first verse of Acts the work and teachings of Jesus are center stage. Why do you think that is? Why do you think that might be important to what Luke is going to say?

In Acts 1:1 Luke also makes the point that in the Gospel of Luke he wrote about “all that Jesus began to do and teach.” What does that phrase imply about the content of Acts?

In Acts 1:6 the disciples ask Jesus, “will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus responds by telling them that it is not for them to know the times or seasons, but rather “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and

Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1:8). How does Jesus’ response challenge and expand the disciples’ thinking and understanding of the gospel?

How might Acts 1:8 provide a structural and thematic template for the rest of the book? Where do you see this?

2. Matthias Chosen to Be among the Apostles (1:12–26)

One way to summarize the message of Acts is that it is the story of the continuing work of Jesus through his witnesses, despite significant internal and external oppositions and barriers. Throughout Acts we will see that God often-times directly uses these oppositions to advance the gospel. This latter half of the first chapter of Acts describes how this was true even for the first disciples of Jesus. Judas, one of their very own, betrayed Jesus. But we see that Jesus uses significant barriers, oppositions, and even sins like this to advance his kingdom. How do we see this in Acts 1:12–26 and the choosing of Matthias? Can you think of any other Old Testament or New Testament passages that also illustrate this?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

WITNESSES. The primary task of the people of God is to bear witness to his great deeds. For the first disciples, they quite literally were charged to bear witness to the risen Christ, whom they had seen with their eyes (see 1 John 1:1–3). This witness would begin in Jerusalem, but would spiral outward in concentric circles to “the end of the earth” (1:8; compare Isa. 49:6). Jesus does not command his disciples to perform certain rituals, to act according to certain rules, or to refrain from certain activities. He promises them that they would testify to his power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. This is not a new concept: God has always desired that his people would be witnesses to his greatness. “I have redeemed you,” God says in Isaiah. “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he’” (Isa. 43:1, 10; compare Isa. 43:12; 44:8).

KINGDOM OF GOD. The disciples ask Jesus about the restoration of “the kingdom to Israel” (1:6), expecting and hoping that Jesus’ reign will apply to their current national identity. Jesus corrects them by patiently pointing them to the kingdom of God,² the sovereign rule of God over all of creation, not just Israel. He points to the spread of the gospel and their witness: from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth (1:8).

Whole-Bible Connections

ALREADY AND NOT YET. Jesus’ disciples were hoping that, after all of the wonderful things they had seen in the life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, God would now bring about the end, the new heavens and new earth promised in Isaiah (65:17–25). But they learn that this is not yet the time to look for Jesus to return. He will return, but in the meantime they will be clothed with power and assurance from his Holy Spirit to go forth and bear fruit in the confidence that God will be with them to the end of the age.

REDEMPTIVE HISTORY. Luke and Acts are narratives about God’s plan of salvation. They were written to provide “certainty concerning the things” that had been revealed to Luke and others about what Jesus did and taught (Luke 1:1–4; Acts 1:1–5).

Theological Soundings

TRINITY. Before his ascension, Jesus promises his apostles³ that they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses (Acts 1:6–8). According to Jesus, the Father has “fixed” the time for restoring the kingdom “by his own authority” (1:7); the apostles “will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come” upon them (1:8); and they will be Jesus’ “witnesses” (1:8). We see here all three persons of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—who are equal in nature but distinct in role and relationship. Broadly speaking, Christian theology teaches that the Father orchestrates salvation, the Son accomplishes salvation, and the Spirit applies salvation.

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. The Spirit is clearly at work in the key events throughout the history of salvation, including creation, Christ’s incarnation, Christ’s resurrection, human regeneration, the inspiration and illumination of Scripture, and the believer’s sanctification. Throughout Acts, baptism and the gift of the Spirit are closely related. Repentance, forgiveness, water baptism, and reception of the Spirit comprise the basic pattern of conversion. John the Baptist had contrasted his “repentance baptism” with Jesus’ “Holy Spirit baptism” (Luke 3:16; Mark 1:8). Jesus points his disciples back to the promise of God to give the Spirit and forward to the fulfillment of this promise in Acts 2.

CHRIST’S ASCENSION. The ascension is Christ’s return to heaven from earth (Luke 24:50–51; John 14:2, 12; 16:5, 10, 28; Acts 1:6–11; Eph. 4:8–10; 1 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:14; 7:26; 9:24). The incarnation does not cease with Christ’s ascension. Jesus lives, now and forever, as true man and true God to mediate between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). He will come again as he left, fully God and fully man (Acts 1:11). Jesus’ ascension is a crucial event in his ministry because it explicitly shows his continual humanity and the permanence of his resurrection. The ascension guarantees that Jesus will always represent humanity before the throne of God as the mediator, intercessor, and advocate for needy humans. Because of the ascension, we can be sure that Jesus’ unique resurrection leads the way for the everlasting resurrection of the redeemed. Jesus also ascended to prepare a place for his people (John 14:2–3) and to send the Holy Spirit to fulfill his ministry of witness and empowering (John 16:7), a development which, he said, would be more advantageous for the church than if he had stayed on earth (John 14:12, 17).

CHRIST’S RETURN. Someday Jesus will return in great glory and there will be a definitive, comprehensive acknowledgment that he is Lord over all. He will then judge the living and the dead. All people and forces that oppose him will be vanquished, including death itself (Matt. 25:31; 1 Cor. 15:24–28), “so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10–11).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Acts 1:1–26 for your own life today. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Acts 1:1–26

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of Acts. Take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.

Definitions

¹ **Resurrection** – The impartation of new, eternal bodily life to a dead person at the end of time (or, in the case of Jesus, on the third day after his death). This new life is not a temporary resuscitation of the body (as in the case of Lazarus; John 11:1–44) but a transformation or reconstruction of the body that is permanent (1 Cor. 15:35–58). Both the righteous and the wicked will be resurrected, the former to eternal life and the latter to judgment and the living death to which condemnation leads (John 5:29).

² **Kingdom of God** – The sovereign rule of God. At the present time, the fallen, sinful world does not belong to the kingdom of God, since it does not submit to God’s rule. Instead, God’s kingdom can be found in heaven and among his people (Matt. 6:9–10; Luke 17:20–21). After Christ returns, however, the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of God (Rev. 11:15). Then all people will, either willingly or regretfully, acknowledge his sovereignty (Phil. 2:9–11). Even the natural world will be transformed to operate in perfect harmony with God (Rom. 8:19–23).

³ **Apostle** – Means “one who is sent” and refers to one who is an official representative of another. In the NT, the word refers specifically to those whom Jesus chose to represent him.

WEEK 3: PENTECOST

Acts 2:1–47



The Place of the Passage

In Acts 2 Jesus' promise of the Spirit becomes a reality as the Spirit descends on the disciples at Pentecost. The disciples "began to speak in other tongues" (2:4), and devout Jews from many nations were amazed, "because each one was hearing them speak in his own language" (v. 6). God thus shows that the gospel is breaking through linguistic barriers and going to all nations, and then Peter stands up and, in the first recorded sermon in Acts, explains how Pentecost is the glorious and long-anticipated fulfillment of God's plan of redemption that has been in place since the beginning. Through Peter's sermon we see the most prominent theme of Acts: the gospel of Jesus will go out to the nations, through the witness of his disciples and the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

The Big Picture

In Acts 2:1–47 Jesus' disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit so that they are enabled to be Jesus' witnesses to the world.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Acts 2:1–47. Then review the questions below concerning Pentecost and write your notes on them. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2082–2086, or visit www.esvbible.org.)

1. The Coming of the Holy Spirit (2:1–13)

Acts 2:2–3 describes the filling and presence of the Spirit as a mighty wind and fire. Considering passages like Exodus 13 and Ezekiel 1, what is the significance of the Spirit appearing and being described in this way?

In 2:5–13 the disciples speak in other tongues, and the resident foreigners “hear them telling in [their] own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11). This miraculous communication did not depend on their education (which was minimal, among “these . . . Galileans”; v. 7) nor eloquence, but on the movement of God’s Spirit. Where else in Scripture do you see the power of God working despite or through human weakness?

2. Peter’s Sermon (2:14–41)

In Acts 2:14–21 Peter starts his gospel presentation with a citation from Joel 2:28–32. Joel says God’s Spirit will be poured out in the last days, the days

before the final judgment (the “day of the Lord”). It is clear that Peter is saying the “last days” have begun. What does Peter’s quote from Joel 2 say will happen?

In Acts 2:23 we see that God is so sovereign and creative that what was intended for evil he uses for his redemptive plan. God both foreknew and foreordained that Jesus would be crucified, yet that still did not absolve of responsibility those who contributed to his death, for Peter goes on to say, “*you* crucified and killed” him. Read Genesis 50:20. Where else in Scripture do you see a clear teaching of God’s sovereignty over world events and human responsibility for evil deeds?

In Acts 2:34–35 Peter cites Psalm 110 and refers to Jesus being at God’s “right hand.” Jesus also refers to himself as being at the “right hand” (Matt. 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; Luke 20:42; 22:69). Read Psalms 16:11; 17:7; 98:1; 139:10; and Romans 8:34 regarding the right hand of God. Considering these passages, what does it mean for Jesus to be at the “right hand” of God?

WEEK 3: PENTECOST

Peter finishes his speech in 2:36 with a short summary of his message: Jesus is “Lord¹ and Christ.”² Throughout his speech Peter provides a number of different points of evidence for the lordship of Jesus. What evidence does Peter point to?

3. The Spirit at Work in the Disciples (2:42–47)

The grace of God is fruitful and effective, and we see God taking the initiative to spread his grace to ever-expanding numbers of people. Considering Acts 2:42–47, what happens when God works in these first believers individually and collectively?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

FOR ALL WHO ARE FAR OFF. Jesus promised that the gospel would spread to the end of the earth, and Peter proclaims that “the promise is . . . for all who are far off” (Acts 2:39). The gospel is not confined by geographical boundaries

but is universal in scope. But “far off” is not just geographical: by his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ has reconciled to himself all of us who were formerly “far off” from God and from one another. No one is so far removed that God cannot redeem them.

GOD INITIATES. When the celebration of Pentecost comes, Acts 2:1, 5 places 120 of the disciples (1:15) together in Jerusalem. Acts 2:2 then says “and suddenly there came from heaven.” The direction of agency is important. While often in non-Christian religion humans must first do the equivalent of speaking in other tongues (mysterious incantations, complicated rites, elaborately altered behavior) in order to lure the gods into visitation, at Pentecost God’s Spirit rushes into the scene of his own accord: the apostles are just waiting. Pentecost illustrates the fact that God is the initiator of our salvation; he comes to us independent of our control.

Whole-Bible Connections

BABEL. Following the tower-building at Babel, the nations of the earth were divided by language, unable to come together as a result of their rebellion against God (Gen. 11:1–9). Already in God’s redemptive acts of the Old Testament, however, he singled out the Jewish nation in order to mediate blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:1–3; Ex. 19:6). Yet in the ministry of the prophets, the good news of God’s grace was communicated only in the Hebrew language. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, though, the curse of Babel begins to unravel. No longer is the gospel confined to the Hebrew language; it is available directly to all nations and all languages. The restored order of God’s kingdom begins to break into the dark and confused world of sin. Pentecost is, in a sense, a magnificent reversal of Babel.

PENTECOST. Pentecost is the New Testament name for the second of the annual harvest festivals, the “Feast of Weeks,” coming 50 days after Passover. It was a one-day festival celebrating the wheat harvest (Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:15–21; Deut. 16:9–12). Like other celebrations in the Old Testament, the Feast of Weeks was associated with the renewal of the covenant made with Noah and then with Moses. In later Judaism, Pentecost was associated with the day when the law was given at Mount Sinai, so it is significant that God chose to send the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Theological Soundings

SALVATION HISTORY. Peter begins his famous Pentecost sermon with an extensive reference to the Old Testament, focused on a citation from the prophet Joel,

WEEK 3: PENTECOST

who predicted that God’s Spirit would be poured out in the last days, the days before the final judgment (the “day of the Lord”). According to Peter, the last days have begun. This “new religion” is actually the continuation of what God has been doing through Israel all along. Better yet, this God made promises years ago that these “last days” would come, and at Pentecost God was demonstrating that he is faithful and powerful to keep his promises. As he promised, God is pouring out his Spirit on all flesh—men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile. God is mercifully and joyfully calling all people to salvation.

LORDSHIP OF JESUS. In Peter’s first sermon, an important theological teaching comes into view: Jesus is Lord (Acts 2:36; compare Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3). This simple statement poses a fundamental challenge both to the Jews and to the Romans. The Jews, entrenched in their strict version of monotheism, reject the claim of Jesus’ lordship as blasphemy. They simply cannot conceive of the one true God coming to earth as a man, especially one who was scorned, mistreated, and killed. A crucified God is a stumbling block and folly (1 Cor. 1:23). Similarly, Jesus’ lordship presents an explicit defiance of the Roman political system, which was founded on the supremacy of Caesar as Lord.

HUMAN SIN. Peter tells his listeners, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). Sin is anything (whether thoughts, actions, or attitudes) that does not express or conform to the holy character of God as shown forth in his moral law. According to the Bible, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Only the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has opened up the way for the forgiveness of sins.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Acts 2 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Acts 2:1–47

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of Acts. Take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.

Definitions

¹ **Lord** – Someone superior in authority or status to another, similar to “master.” It is a common translation for several different Hebrew titles for God in the OT, and in the NT it refers to Jesus. When spelled in the OT with small capital letters (LORD) it translates Hebrew *Yahweh* (YHWH), “I AM,” the personal name of God.

² **Christ** – Transliteration of the Greek for “anointed one” (equivalent to Hebrew *Messiah*). The term is used throughout the NT as a title for Jesus, indicating his role as Messiah and Savior.

WEEK 4: GROWING WITNESS AND OPPOSITION

Acts 3:1–5:42



The Place of the Passage

The first three chapters of Acts form a triad, focused on the Spirit and the empowerment for witnessing to the name of Jesus that the Spirit will bring. Chapter 1 was waiting for the Spirit, chapter 2 marked the coming of the Spirit, and now chapter 3 shows the apostles being empowered by the Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost begins to ripple throughout Jerusalem and the new church, empowering miraculous healings and bold preaching of the gospel. The church continues to grow and experience tremendous blessing, but a new theme is introduced: significant opposition. Chapter 4 marks the first persecution, a topic that will continue through to and reach its culmination in the stoning of Stephen (ch. 7). From chapter 4 on, Acts will illustrate the diametrically opposed systems of the “world” and the lordship of Jesus Christ. The apostles are threatened, jailed, and beaten, and conflict arises even from within. Despite the rising opposition, the message of Acts 3–5 is clear: the gospel will advance because God is at work.

The Big Picture

Immediately following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Acts 3:1–5:42 records the growing church’s experience as Jesus’ witnesses: Spirit-empowered ministry, and opposition to that ministry.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Acts 3:1–5:42. Then review the questions below concerning this section of Acts and write your notes on them. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2086–2091, or visit www.esvbible.org.)

1. The Church Continues to Grow in Jerusalem (3:1–4:31)

After the lame beggar is miraculously healed, how does the crowd respond to this miracle (Acts 3:9–11)? How does the beggar respond (vv. 8, 11)? How do Peter and John respond to the crowd’s amazement in verses 12–16?

Consider the number of different names and titles Peter attributes to Jesus in his speech in 3:12–26. What are they, and how does that help you understand Peter’s message?
