

## ST Lesson 17: An Introduction to Acts

### Getting Started—The Main Ideas

When you hear the word *church*, what comes to mind? Do you think of a building with a cross on top? Do you think of a place where people go on a Sunday morning? If this is what you think, you're not entirely wrong, but you're not entirely right either. People say things like, "Oh, that's such a beautiful church," or "The church is just two blocks down the street." When people make statements like these, they're talking about church buildings. [540115460](#)



But there is a biblical meaning for the word *church* that does not refer to a building at all. When Jesus told his disciples, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18), he was not talking about buildings constructed out of wood, brick, steel, and glass. He was talking about building his kingdom made up of people he had come to redeem from the fall. This Church includes Old Testament people who trusted God's promises that one day a Savior would be born who would die for the sins of the world (John 1:29). And it includes people from every nation and race who professed faith in Christ since that time. It includes believers in Jesus who have already died and believers who are still living today. [847575018](#)



How did people all over the world learn about Jesus? The world of the first century was very different from what the world is like today. There was no internet, no television, no radio, and no newspaper. The book of Acts tells how the good news about the Savior, Jesus, spread from Jerusalem throughout the Roman empire and even to the capital, Rome. In this lesson you will learn more about life in the first century. You will also learn more about the book of Acts and its author, Luke.

### Topic 1—The World of the First Century

By 2020, the world's population is expected to grow to 7.6 billion people. But in the first century, there were only about 300 million people on the whole Earth. The world today is a lot more crowded than it used to be!

In the first century, about 15 percent of the world's people, or 45 million, lived in the Roman Empire. It extended from its capital, Rome, in Italy, as far away as present-day Iran (Mesopotamia) on the east and Spain on the west. Palestine and present-day Israel, where Jesus lived and where the Church began, was just a small province on the outskirts of the Empire.

[501794155 \(Roman Empire\)](#)



Many languages were spoken through the whole empire, just as many languages are spoken in Europe today. The languages used

in Jerusalem included Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Most people could not speak all four languages; their knowledge depended on their education and what they did for a living. And most people could not read. Boys were more likely to be taught how to read and write than girls were. There were no formal schools like we have today; parents taught their children at home.

Most people worked at home. Families grew their own food and kept animals. If they lived by the shore, they fished. Everyone had chores to do, including children.

Even though the majority of the population did not live in big cities, but in small villages and in the countryside, there was the trading of goods throughout the Roman Empire. People traveled on foot, on a horse or donkey, as part of a caravan, or by boat. Part of what the Roman Empire had done as it expanded was to create a network of paved roads to facilitate conquest, communication, and trade.

The book of Acts mentions the names of many cities and towns. Today, scholars study the ruins of ancient cities, such as Philippi in Greece, or Ephesus and Antioch in Turkey. Their findings help prove the accuracy of the Bible. Archaeological findings include buildings such as temples and shrines dedicated to Greek, Roman, and other gods and goddesses; monuments; parchment; coins; and many items used in daily life.



618437222 (Ephesus)  
825534456 (Philippi)

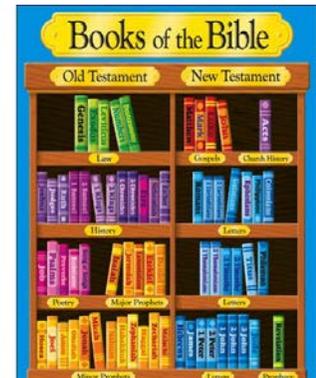
**Caption:**

Ruins at  
Ephesus and  
Philippi

In this world of many gods, many languages, and many roads, the good news about Jesus would change lives and the course of history. A spiritual revolution was about to begin.

## Topic 2—The Book of Acts

In a previous lesson you learned that the Bible is a collection of 66 books composed by about 40 different writers over the span of 1,600 years. It has two parts: the Old Testament, written before Jesus was born, and the New Testament, written after his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. God used the writers of Scripture to communicate truth to us. [Claire, reuse G1 TR 1.3.1A Books of the Bible](#)



The New Testament, which has 27 books, was the work of at least eight different people. (The author of the book of Hebrews is unknown.) Four people wrote the biographies of Jesus that we know now as *the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John*. The book that follows the Gospels is called *the Acts of the Apostles*, often shortened to *Acts*. It was written in Greek at least three decades after Jesus' death, perhaps between AD 62 and 70, probably in the city of Rome.

The first part of Acts focuses mainly on Peter, the leader of the apostles in Jerusalem, and how the Church began. The second part of the book of Acts focuses on Paul, who traveled far and wide proclaiming the gospel.

Acts looks at the lives of the apostles who were witnesses to Jesus' life and ministry. A **witness** is someone who has personal knowledge about a specific matter. The apostles had personal knowledge of Jesus. They had been with him for three years; they heard him teach, preach, and perform miracles; they saw when he was killed; and they saw Jesus alive again, not just once but many times over a period of 40 days. He told them:

**"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

What is the purpose of Acts? First, it is a historical record. It tells what happened after Jesus died and rose again. It continues the story of the disciples and how the Church began. Second, Acts fulfills a theological purpose: it makes a statement about our faith. It tells how, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the good news about Jesus spread and the disciples came to understand that the good news was not just for Jesus' family, friends, and acquaintances, nor just for the Jewish people, but for everyone.

When the Holy Spirit came upon them, Jesus' disciples did become his witnesses: they shared their personal knowledge and belief in Jesus with others. Do you know Jesus personally? Have you shared your knowledge with others? The Holy Spirit is the Power that prompts you, and every believer, to share about Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:3). [183408068 \(teen with Bible, blue sweater, cropped\)](#)



To **testify** is to share personal knowledge or belief or provide evidence or proof. The disciples' testimony is part of the evidence that Christians rely on today to tell others that Jesus is God's Son and our Savior.

(in grade 6 colored box)

### **Witness**

Someone who has personal knowledge about a specific matter

### **Testify**

To share personal knowledge or belief or provide evidence or proof

The book of Acts shows how personal knowledge about Jesus was shared with others. And the growth of the Church was amazing! But not everyone was excited about it. Some people looked at the followers of Jesus and wondered if they were dangerous criminals. So, a third purpose of Acts was to offer a defense of the newly formed Church, describing how the first believers lived together in peace and were unjustly accused of stirring up trouble. A fourth purpose was to encourage them to continue following Jesus. By telling the story of the Church, Luke reminded the saints of all that God had already accomplished, and of what the Holy Spirit was continuing to do.

The four purposes of Acts—as a historical record, a statement about the faith, a defense of the Church, and an encouragement to believers—are intertwined through the whole book.

### **Topic 3—Who was Luke?**

Do you remember who Jesus' apostles were? [103311152 \(Jesus with disciples\)](#)



<sup>16</sup> These are the twelve he chose: Simon (whom he named Peter), <sup>17</sup> James and John (the sons of Zebedee, but Jesus nicknamed them “Sons of Thunder”), <sup>18</sup> Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon (the zealot), <sup>19</sup> Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him).

Mark 3:16–19

Luke's name is not on the list of apostles. So who was he? How did he come to know so much about Jesus that he could write one of the four Gospels in the New Testament?



Before Luke began to write his account, he did research. Have you ever had to do research to write a report for school? Did you have to visit the library or go online to find all the facts you needed? Today we have many resources available to do research, but in ancient times it was much harder to do this. However, Luke wanted to make sure that what he wrote was true and trustworthy. Luke was a careful historian. 508006096 (kids doing research in library)

In addition to reading what others had written, Luke interviewed eyewitnesses to learn what Jesus had done and taught. And Luke himself was an eyewitness to much of what he wrote about in Acts. In four different passages in the book of Acts, Luke switches pronouns. Instead of talking about what the apostle Paul and his companions did using the word *they*, Luke says *we* (Acts 16:10, 20:6, 21:1, and 27:1). This shows that Luke was with them. The cities that Luke visited included Antioch, Philippi, Ephesus, and Rome, among others. Luke visited many different places as he worked, along with Paul, to spread the gospel. He was an evangelist, telling people the good news about Jesus.

Luke met new people wherever he went. His profession probably helped him to do this. Luke was a doctor. In writing to the brothers and sisters at the church in Colossae, Paul said:

<sup>14</sup> Luke, the beloved doctor, sends his greetings. Colossians 4:14

Luke was a person who wanted others to be healed and well. He wrote about many healings that were also reported by Matthew and Mark in their Gospels, such as those of Peter's mother-in-law, the paralyzed man, and the man with the deformed hand. But, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Luke also reported on healings that no one else wrote about, such as the healing of the woman who was bent over for 18 years (Luke 13:11–13) and the healing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:11–19).

As a doctor, Luke paid attention to many little details. Mark and Luke both told about Jesus healing many sick and demon-possessed people around sunset (Mark 1:32–34, Luke 4:40–41), but only Luke reported that healing came at the touch of Jesus' hand. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all told about the healing of a man with leprosy (Matthew 8:2–4, Mark 1:40–45, Luke 5:12–16), but only Luke wrote that it was an advanced case of the disease. The three writers all described the incident with Jairus' daughter, but only Luke reported that she was about 12 years old (Luke 8:42). 150955439 (Jesus touching a man's face)





Luke told more stories about women and girls than the other gospel writers. For example, while Matthew told us Joseph's side of the story of when Jesus was born, Luke told us Mary's side. He is the one who told us what the angel Gabriel said to Mary and how she responded. [150955416](#)  
(Gabriel with Mary)

Luke was a compassionate person. Some important stories that only Luke wrote about are Jesus' parable of the two debtors, the parable of the Good Samaritan, and the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Luke's compassion wasn't just a matter of his line of work or his skill as a writer. He lived it out. This is what Paul wrote when he was in prison in Rome:

<sup>6</sup> As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. . . . <sup>9</sup> Timothy, please come as soon as you can. <sup>10</sup> Demas has deserted me . . . Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus has gone to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me in my ministry. 2 Timothy 4:6, 9–11

If you were in prison, facing death, and your friends had abandoned you or been called away, how would you feel about the one friend who stayed behind and helped you? Paul was surely grateful for Luke's company. Many scholars think that this is when Luke started writing the book of Acts and telling the story of the Church. In the next lesson, you will begin reading this exciting story!