

Acts is the history of the development of the first churches and the spread of Christianity. For about the first decade after the death of Jesus, Christianity existed almost exclusively among the Jews. The first part of *Acts* portrays the meaning of Christianity, how it was shared, and how it was lived out in a closed community of Jews whose common culture was based on the Old Testament.

After about the first decade, Christianity started growing in other people groups and cultures having beliefs and understandings quite different from the Jews. Much of *Acts* deals with keeping a consistent and complete Gospel message, how it is shared, and how it is lived out in different people groups and cultures. The lessons learned from *Acts* are applicable to modern Christians and churches, and are also essential when trying to understand Paul's letters (which comprise much of the New Testament).

A purpose of the *Acts Series* is to tell some of the information of the book of *Acts* from different vantage points. Luke said that he made a careful investigation of the facts before writing *Luke* and *Acts*. His three primary sources of information probably were: his own experiences, written sources, and talking to people who were personally involved. *Acts Series* illustrates the stories that he might have heard from a dozen of the characters featured in his book of *Acts*.

A theme that dominates *Acts* is this timeless message: A mission of Holy Spirit is to grow Christ's world-wide Church by growing local congregations through empowering individuals.

Although the episodes of this series stay true to the messages of *Acts*, part of the goal of these episodes is to provide context and facts that people in the first century would have innately understood, but people of later times and places likely would not. Personality traits and other story lines have been added in an effort to make the episode and characters more memorable.

A familiarity of the geography of the eastern part of the Roman Empire is necessary for a thorough understanding of Acts. For that reason, **Reference 1** has maps showing the locations of countries and cities, and also show possible routes of the first three missionary journeys. Throughout the series, you will likely be referring to these maps.

Since *Acts* is not necessarily written in chronological order and because no dates are given in it, it is also highly unlikely that you will thoroughly understand *Acts* unless you attain a grasp of its chronology and order of events. Although scholars debate many aspects of this chronology, it is imperative to have a grasp even if it is slightly off in either date or order. One very good chronology is shown in **Reference 2**. Throughout the series you will likely refer to this chronology often. (Spoiler alert: You will also be referring to this chronology when you study the *Paul's Letters Series*)

As an example of the importance of chronology, try to answer these questions: What year did Cornelius become a Christian? What year was the first Council at Jerusalem when the question of circumcision was debated? Why do those questions matter?

You will find the answers to those questions in upcoming episodes, but here is a simple rule of thumb as you go through this series: Christianity went almost exclusively to the Jews in the 30's AD; Christianity slowly started going to non-Jews (Gentiles) in the 40's AD; Christianity went mostly to the non-Jews as the 50's AD progressed into the 60's AD; and, the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD when most Jews in Jerusalem were killed or scattered throughout the Empire. With just this simple understanding, you will better understand *Acts*.

Acts is a simple story. Jesus ascends; the Holy Spirit comes back and empowers the apostles to start Christianity and the Church; and, Christianity grows from Israel to Rome because of the efforts of Peter, Paul, and a host of other Christian leaders and "regular" Christians. Now, it is time to hear more details from eyewitnesses.