

Acts

Structure of Acts

There are several different ways to outline Acts, all of which yield satisfactory results:

- (1) personally: centered on the two main apostles, Peter and Paul;
- (2) geographically: from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth;
- (3) progressively: centering on Luke's seven "progress reports."

Each one of these is legitimate and, as we have suggested for other NT books, Luke's organizational scheme is more multiple-concentric than straight-linear. That is to say, Luke is developing three distinct motifs all at once: the role of Peter and Paul (thus, two main sections can be detected), the expansion of Christianity according to the outline seen in Acts 1:8, and progression at certain climactic moments. The ideal way to outline this book—as with so much of ancient literature—would be to draw three overlapping circles, each of which expands concentrically as the book unfolds. Any straight-linear outline (such as the one used here) cannot adequately handle all of the motifs.

The Structure of Acts based on Peter and Paul – Personally

Book One: Peter (1:1-12:24)

Book Two: Paul (15:25-28:31)

The Structure of Acts based on 1:8 - Geographically

⁸ *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

Book One: Jerusalem (1:1-6:7)

Book Two: Judea and Samaria (6:8-9:31)

Book Three: To the ends of the earth (9:32-28:31)

1. The Expansion of the church in Jerusalem (1:1-6:7)
"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly" (6:7)
 - The period of waiting and the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1:12-2:13)
 - The beginnings of the church in Jerusalem (2:14-6:7)
2. The Expansion of the church in Judea and Samaria (6:8-9:31)
"...all...were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria...(and) preached the word whenever they went." (8:1, 4)

“...the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.” (9:31)

- The spreading of the gospel to Judea, Samaria and Caesarea (6:8-8:40)
- The conversion of Paul (9:1-31)

3. The Expansion of the church to the ends of the earth (9:32-28:31)

“...as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch...” (11:19)

- a) The ministry to the Jews - *“...telling the message only to the Jews...” (11:19)*
- The ministry in the Mediterranean coast (9:32-11:18)

“But the word of God continued to increase and spread.” (12:24)

- b) The ministry to the Gentiles - *“...began to speak to Greek also...” (11:20)*
- The ministry in Antioch and the beginning of the ministry of Paul (11:19-12:5)

“...Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul...” (13:1)

“...throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia...” (16:6)

- c) The first missionary journey (13:1-14:28)

“...Gentiles have been converted...” (15:3)

- d) The Jerusalem Council (15:1-35)

“...throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia...” (16:6)

“...over to Macedonia...” (16:9)

Asia Minor

- e) The second missionary journey (15:36-18:22)
- f) The third missionary journey (18:23-21:17)

“...came to Rome...” (28:16)

“...God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles...” (28:28)

- g) The journey to Rome (21:18-28:31)

The Structure of Acts based on Progressive Reports

I. Book One: The Birth of the Church in Jerusalem (1:1–2:47)

- A. Prologue (1:1-2)
- B. Anticipation: From Resurrection to Pentecost (1:3-26)
- C. Realization: The Day of Pentecost (2:1-41)
- D. Conclusion of Book One (2:42-47)

^{AC 2:42} They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they

continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

II. Book Two: The Expansion of the Church in Jerusalem (3:1–6:7)

A. A Healing by Peter and Its Consequences (3:1–4:31)

B. Community and Discipline (4:32–5:11)

C. Healings by the Apostles and their Consequences (5:12-42)

D. Community: Distribution and Administration (6:1-6)

E. Conclusion of Book Two (6:7)

^{AC 6:7} So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

III. Book Three: The Extension of the Church to Judea and Samaria (6:8–9:31)

A. Stephen's Martyrdom (6:8–8:1a)

B. Philip's Ministry (8:1b-40)

C. Saul's Conversion (9:1-30)

D. Conclusion of Book Three (9:31)

^{AC 9:31} Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.

IV. Book Four: The Extension of the Church to Antioch (9:32–12:24)

A. The Preparation of Peter for the Gentile Mission (9:32–10:48)

B. The Preparation of the Leaders of the Jerusalem Church for the Gentile Mission (11:1-18)

C. The Preparation of the Church at Antioch for the Gentile Mission (11:19-30)

D. Herod's Persecution of the Church at Jerusalem (12:1-23)

E. Conclusion of Book Four (12:24)

^{AC 12:24} But the word of God continued to increase and spread.

V. Book Five: The Extension of the Church to Asia Minor (12:25–16:5)

A. The Commission of Barnabas and Saul at Antioch (12:25–13:3)

[Paul's First Missionary Journey (13:4–14:28)]

B. The Mission of Barnabas and Paul In Asia Minor (13:4–14:28)

C. The Council at Jerusalem Concerning the Gentile Mission (15:1-35)

D. The Confirmation of the Churches in Asia Minor (15:36–16:4)

[Paul's Second Missionary Journey [15:36–18:22]]

E. Conclusion of Book Five (16:5)

⁵ So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

VI. Book Six: The Extension of the Church to the Aegean Area (16:6–19:20)

A. Philippi (16:6-40)

B. Thessalonica (17:1-9)

C. Berea (17:10-14)

- D. Athens (17:15-34)
- E. Corinth (18:1-18a)
- F. Return to Antioch (18:18b-22)
- G. Ephesus (18:23–19:19) [*Paul's Third Missionary Journey (18:23–21:16)*]
- H. Conclusion of Book Six (19:20)
 - ²⁰ *In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.*

VII. Book Seven: The Extension of the Church to Rome (19:21–28:31)

- A. The Plan Announced (19:21-22)
- B. The Riot in Ephesus (19:22-41)
- C. The Journey to Jerusalem (20:1–21:16)
- D. Paul In Jerusalem (21:17–23:30)
- E. Paul in Caesarea (23:31–26:32)
- F. The Voyage to Rome (27:1–28:10)
- G. Paul In Rome (28:11-31)
- H. Conclusion of Book Seven (28:30-31)
 - ^{AC 28:30} *For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Themes in Acts

1. Speeches
2. salvation
3. discipleship
4. holy spirit

1. Speeches

There are 12 speeches recorded in Acts:

- i. peter's sermon during Pentecost (2:14-40)
- ii. peter's sermon in the temple (3:11-26)
- iii. stephen's defense (7:2-53)
- iv. peter's sermon to Cornelius (10:27-43)
- v. peter's explanation of his ministry to the Gentiles (11:4-17)
- vi. paul's sermon at Antioch (13:16-41)
- vii. addresses in the Jerusalem council (15:7-11; 13-21)
- viii. Paul's preaching in Athens (17:22-31)
- ix. Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders (20:17-35)
- x. Paul's defense in Jerusalem (21:37-22:21)
- xi. Paul's forensic address before Felix (24:10-21)
- xii. Paul's defense before Agrippa (26:2-23)

Pattern of speeches

- appeal for hearing, including a connection between the situation and the speech
- Christological kerygma supported with scriptural proof
- The offer of salvation, repentance, forgiveness of sins
- Interpretation of the sermon by the audience or by the narrator

These speeches also appear at crucial junctures in the narratives. Eg the speeches of Stephen and Peter in 7:2-53 and 10:34-43. These speeches push the narrative beyond Jerusalem and Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Also, these speeches act as witness. These speeches are given by witnesses, suggesting that Luke himself is giving witness to Christ through these speeches. Of approximately 1000 verses in Acts, 365 are given to speeches (about 35%).

2. Salvation

God's plan for salvation is evident throughout Acts. Here we see God in action through angels, visions and prophecies. Eg the incident of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch; Peter and Cornelius; the Macedonian call; Peter's miraculous escape and the intervention of the angels.

The gospel is being preached to everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike.

AC 11:18 When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

There is nothing that can stop the gospel from being preached

- not the religious leaders (5:39)
³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."
- not unbelieving Jews, even including Paul (8:1-3)
AC 8:1 And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.
On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.
- not the church in Jerusalem (11:1-18)
AC 11:1 The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."
- not secular political leaders (12:1-24)
AC 12:1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. ² He had James, the brother of

John, put to death with the sword. ³ When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

- not opponents within the church, such as the Judaisers (15:1-35)
AC 15:1 ¹ Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." ² This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. ³ The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. ⁴ When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.
- not religious or secular opposition from Greeks (16:16-40; 19:23-41)
16:19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. ²⁰ They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar ²¹ by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice
19: ²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen
- not shipwrecks and snakes (chapters 27-28)

3. Discipleship

allegiance to the Lord – often results in suffering and persecution.

Theme of obedience

4. Holy spirit

The spirit has been active throughout Acts, just as he has been active in the ministry of Jesus. The power of the spirit is manifested through signs and wonders, certifying the presence of God.

The HS also breaks down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles. The evidence is through the gift of the HS as evidenced through speaking in tongues by both Jews and Gentiles (10:45-46; 11:17).

2:3-4: ³ They saw what seemed to be *tongues* of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak *in other tongues* as the Spirit enabled them.

10:46 - *AC 10:44* While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking *in tongues* and praising God.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." ⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

19:6 - ^{19:1} While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

AC 19:3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

AC 19:4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke *in tongues* and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.