



ACTS

BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

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.

Acts 1:8



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Introduction

As we journey from Epiphany to Lent (January to March) we will spend seven weeks reading through the New Testament book of Acts using:

1. Daily readings that move through the book Monday to Friday, and focus on the reading for the upcoming sermon during the weekend;
2. Cedar Group sessions digging deeper into the book of Acts; and
3. Sermons in Sunday services.

Use this guide by yourself, following the Daily Readings from 13 January to 2 March, and in Cedar groups. If you're not already in a group and would like to join one contact hello@bow.church to find out more.



The book of Acts

Acts tells the story of the first Christians. It was written by Luke, and is the sequel that follows up on his gospel which told the story of Jesus's life, death and resurrection from the dead. It starts with Jesus leaving his tiny group of followers, who are scared and hiding out in Jerusalem, struggling to get to grips with the reality and meaning of His incredible resurrection.

Just before he ascends to heaven, He gives them the mission to spread the good news of the kingdom of heaven all over the world. At that point the mission seems very unlikely, pretty much impossible in fact. But then – as Jesus has promised to his disciples – the Holy Spirit comes and empowers the church at Pentecost, and things really take off!

As you read the book you journey with many of the apostles, disciples and first converts to the faith as they spread the good news (gospel) of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit. The action starts with the apostles Peter and John in Jerusalem, but quickly spreads, with much of the second half of the book following Paul as he spreads the gospel in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), Greece and eventually, even Rome.



Along the way you meet people who want to know Jesus as soon as they've heard about him – like Lydia, a wealthy merchant who quickly gets a church going in her house. You meet others who get the chance to hear about Jesus again and again, but can't bring themselves to think about what the good news about him means – like Felix, the Roman governor who keeps Paul imprisoned for years while trying to figure out what to do about him. In some places the good news is welcomed. In others the apostles are chased out of town. And sometimes they get both of those responses at the same time.

For us in Bow Church, this vacancy season raises thoughts and questions on what it means to be our church, and how we live out our calling as Christians in Bow. This Cedar series is an opportunity for us to learn the story of the early church in Acts, and to draw from it what God wants us to know for the church in our time and place.

As you read, you'll see that Acts is just as relevant now as it was when Luke first wrote it. The people in Acts are wrestling with the same questions we have today: what should church look like if it's being faithful to God?



What do you do when you disagree with other believers, especially on stuff that feels central to your faith and identity? How should you behave when the people around you don't like or agree with what you believe, and live differently to you because of it?

The people in Acts are also working in the power of the Spirit of God to heal and love others. The book is packed full of miraculous accounts and Spirit-filled sermons to build our faith and inspire us as we try to share it with others today. Like us, these people were figuring out how to follow Jesus after his resurrection and ascension, once he was no longer there with them in person but they knew he would return one day. Like us, many of the people in the book come to faith having never met or seen Jesus in person, instead encountering Him first through the conversations and actions of other believers, and the power of His Spirit working through it all.

As you read of how – through the work of God in their lives – these people changed the world, perhaps you might find God's living Word at work today, changing you, too.



The daily readings

Acts is a long book, which means the readings in this series may be longer than you are used to reading in your quiet time. It's worth committing to this, and figuring out ways to make it possible and practical for you.

Perhaps you like long readings so it's all good. Perhaps you could give yourself a bit longer for your quiet times, starting or ending your day a little earlier to make that space for yourself. You could also try meeting a friend to read the book together.

If the readings are a challenge, how about using an Audio Bible instead? We recommend the free Youversion Bible app. Just find Acts in the app, make sure the Bible version is set to NIV(UK), select the chapter you want and press play. This version is read by David Suchet and it's really engaging. It gives you a sense of the excitement and adventure of the book, and you get to join in with the first readers of the book thousands of years ago... who would actually have been listeners rather than readers as well!

Reading the Bible regularly



Perhaps you've not regularly read the Bible before. If so, here are some things that might help you get started. You could pray first that God would give you a hunger to read God's word, and know more of God.

Pick a time to read each day – maybe that's first thing in the morning, last thing at night, or on your lunch break. Find a quiet place to read, free of distractions. If you're using your phone to read or listen to Scripture, mute your notifications so other things don't pop up to steal your attention. Keep on praying – ask God to speak to you through what you read.

Be accountable to someone else for your reading – maybe you can track how you go with someone from your Cedar group, encouraging each other to keep going and helping each other to get back on track when you're finding it hard or have missed a few days. Finding it hard is normal, which is part of why having others in your Christian community to support you helps.

Some people also find writing helpful – journaling thoughts and reflections, your prayers, or both. You could even buy a journaling Bible with room to scribble in, or a notebook you use just for these quiet times.



Further resources

If you'd like to go deeper than this guide and explore the scholarship on Acts for yourself, here are some starting points that might be helpful. These resources have informed this guide. This guide owes a lot to each of these sources.

The Bible Project (www.bibleproject.com) has a guide to Acts and overview videos about the book as well as a series of more detailed videos on Luke-Acts with accompanying podcast episodes which you can find on your preferred podcast playing app. The Bible Project is a great place to start looking more deeply at the Bible, especially if you've never done that before.

The Challenge of Acts by Tom Wright is a fairly short and readable book by a renowned Bible scholar. It provides an overview of Acts, taking it four chapters at a time, with lots of useful context about the book. If you've never read a commentary before, this is a good place to start.

Acts: An Introduction and Commentary by I. Howard Marshall in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series is a good and approachable academic commentary, if you are looking to delve more deeply into studying Acts.

The Lost Letters of Pergamum by Bruce W. Longenecker is a historical fiction novel written by a New Testament scholar. It's written in the form of letters between Antipas (a Roman leader who's just found out about the story of Jesus) and Luke (the writer of Acts). Antipas thinks it's all nonsense at first, but gradually becomes intrigued by this new faith and the people practising it in his city. It's a fascinating look at how it might have felt to learn about the gospel and become part of the church at the time of the events of the book of Acts.



DAILY BIBLE READINGS



WEEK 1

Monday 13 January	Acts 1.1-26	Jesus is taken up into heaven
Tuesday 14 January	Act 2.1-41	The Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost
Wednesday 15 January	Acts 2.42-3.10	Fellowship and healing
Thursday 16 January	Acts 3.11-4.12	Peter and John in the temple
Friday 17 January	Acts 4.13-37	Peter and John face the elders
Saturday 18 January	Acts 2.1-13	Read and pray for tomorrow's sermon
Sunday 19 January	Acts 2.1-13	Pentecost – Spirit-filled disciples

WEEK 2

Monday 20 January	Acts 5.1-26	Holiness, healing and persecution
Tuesday 21 January	Acts 5.27-6.7	Apostles and deacons
Wednesday 22 January	Acts 6.8-7.29	Stephen seized by his opponents
Thursday 23 January	Acts 7.30-8.3	The stoning of Stephen
Friday 24 January	Acts 8.4-40	Philip spreads the word
Saturday 25 January	Acts 4.32-5.11	Read and pray for tomorrow's sermon
Sunday 26 January	Acts 4.32-5.11	Community – Grace-filled believers

WEEK 3

DAILY BIBLE
READINGS

Monday 27 January	Acts 9.1-31	The conversion of Saul (also known as Paul)
Tuesday 28 January	Acts 9.32-10.8	Peter, Aeneas, Dorcas and Cornelius
Wednesday 29 January	Acts 10.9-48	Peter's vision of the Gentile believers
Thursday 30 January	Acts 11.1-30	The disciples are called 'Christians'
Friday 31 January	Acts 12.1-25	Peter's miraculous escape from prison
Saturday 1 February	Acts 6.1-10, 7.54-60	Read and pray for tomorrow's sermon
Sunday 2 February	Acts 6.1-10, 7.54-60	Deacons – Servant leaders

WEEK 4

Monday 3 February	Acts 13.1-31	Barnabas and Saul begin their journeys
Tuesday 4 February	Acts 13.32-52	Barnabas and Saul face opposition
Wednesday 5 February	Acts 14.1-28	Paul and Barnabas preach and flee persecution
Thursday 6 February	Acts 15.1-35	The council at Jerusalem on Gentile believers
Friday 7 February	Acts 15.36-16.21	Paul and Barnabas continue their journeys
Saturday 8 February	Acts 11.19-30	Read and pray for tomorrow's sermon
Sunday 9 February	Acts 11.19-30	Christians – Marked out for Christ

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

WEEK 5



Monday 10 February	Acts 16.22-17.9	Paul and Silas in prison, and then set free
Tuesday 11 February	Acts 17.10-34	Paul addresses the Areopagus in Athens
Wednesday 12 February	Acts 18.1-28	Paul, Priscilla and Aquila - fellow workers in Christ
Thursday 13 February	Acts 19.1-22	Paul in Ephesus
Friday 14 February	Acts 19.23-20.12	The Ephesians riot against Paul
Saturday 15 February	Acts 15.1-11, 22-35	Read and pray for tomorrow's sermon
Sunday 16 February	Acts 15.1-11, 22-35	Jerusalem – Culture changers

WEEK 6

Monday 17 February	Acts 20.13-38	Paul's farewell to the Ephesian believers
Tuesday 18 February	Acts 21.1-26	Paul journeys to Jerusalem
Wednesday 19 February	Acts 21.27-22.21	Paul's arrest and testimony
Thursday 20 February	Acts 22.22-23.11	Paul faces the Jewish elders in Jerusalem
Friday 21 February	Acts 23.12-35	Paul transferred in prison to Caesarea
Saturday 22 February	Acts 17.16-34	Read and pray for tomorrow's sermon
Sunday 23 February	Acts 17.16-34	Athens – Influencers

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

WEEK >



Monday 24 February	Acts 24.1-27	Paul's trial before Governor Felix
Tuesday 25 February	Acts 25.1-27	Paul tried by Governor Festus
Wednesday 26 February	Acts 26.1-32	Paul before King Agrippa
Thursday 27 February	Acts 27.1-44	Paul sails for Rome
Friday 28 February	Acts 28.1-16	Paul in Malta and Rome
Saturday 1 March	Acts 28.17-31	Read and pray for tomorrow's sermon
Sunday 2 March	Acts 28.17-31	Rome – Evangelists...to the ends of the earth?





Reflection Questions

Here are some questions you can use to give structure to your daily reading and your response to the reading. Spend a few minutes working through them in relation to the passage you have read that day, perhaps focusing on one or two questions that you find really relevant to that day's reading. You might want to journal your responses.

Reading and understanding

What do we learn about God?

- △ God's character – who is God? What is God like?
- △ God's conduct – what is God doing?
- △ God's concerns – what are the things, people and events God cares about?

What do we learn about people?

- △ Do we learn about what it means to be created in God's image?
- △ Do we see evidence of what it means to be sinful?
- △ Do we see examples of how we should live as people of God?



What do we learn about relating to God?

- △ Look for things for which we can praise and thank God
- △ Look for our own sin to confess and repent
- △ Look for promises and truths to believe

What do we learn about relating to others?

- △ How we should interact with and treat others
- △ How we should pursue reconciliation with others
- △ How we can love, serve and care for others

Prayer and application

These are great follow up questions to take to God in prayer after you have read the passage and reflected on your understanding of it.

*What does God want me to **understand**?*

*What does God want me to **believe**?*

*What does God want me to **desire**?*

*What does God want me to **do**?*

These questions were developed by Matthew S. Harmon, and can be found online at [4 Questions You Should Ask When Reading the Bible | Crossway Articles](#).



CEDAR GROUP SESSIONS

This outline is for Cedar Groups to use in midweek meetings. It provides a brief overview of the week's daily readings and a discussion question in relation to the week's sermon reading. You can also use the reflection questions on the previous page to help you go deeper with the text in conversation. Group leaders might have additional questions or take you to other sections of Scripture to help make sense of what you're discussing.

Don't worry if you struggle with the readings or discussions – it takes time to get to grips with the Bible. Focus on what you understand and stay curious about what you don't. And be kind when sharing your views with one another.



19 January 2025

Pentecost – Spirit-filled disciples

Acts 2.1-13

Weekday readings

After Jesus's resurrection and then His ascension, the disciples wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit which He has promised to them. The Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost in Jerusalem, empowering the disciples speaking in Aramaic to be understood by the Jews gathered there each in their own languages. The disciples boldly preach the gospel and perform miracles. They face opposition straight away – at first, by the religious authorities in Jerusalem.

Sunday sermon reading

What would the disciples have felt and gone through after Jesus left them, as they waited for the Spirit to come?



26 January 2025

Community – Grace-filled believers

Acts 4.32–5.11

Weekday readings

Ananias and Sapphira's deaths bring a stark reminder of God's holiness. The apostles continue their miracles and healings, and make decisions on people who will organise practical aspects of the community's life, like food distribution. Those they appoint are also filled with God's grace and power in their words and actions. Opposition to them grows until one of them, Stephen, is killed and the rest are scattered, continuing to preach the word wherever they go.

Sunday sermon reading

What questions do these different and shocking stories of the early church raise for you, and what do they suggest about how we treat our possessions and how we treat God?



2 February 2025

Deacons – Servant leaders

Acts 6.1-10, 7.54-60

Weekday readings

In a shocking twist, Saul, who persecutes believers, meets Jesus and is transformed. He is accepted by the people he previously harmed and begins to share the gospel. Peter hears from God about Gentiles (non-Jews) joining the community, a huge change for this Jewish group of Jesus followers. In Antioch, the disciples are called Christians for the first time. In Jerusalem, the apostle James is killed by the king, while Peter escapes through a miracle.

Sunday sermon reading

What were the qualifications the early church thought were needed for those called to 'wait on tables'? What can we learn from Stephen's example for our lives today?



9 February 2025

Christians – Marked out for Christ

Acts 11.19–30

Weekday readings

Barnabas and Saul, following the Holy Spirit's instructions, set off on a missionary journey. They travel and teach people about Jesus, founding new Christian communities as well as facing opposition and difficulties. Returning to Antioch, they report on the amazing spread of faith among Gentiles. The church in Jerusalem formally includes Gentiles in the community of believers. Paul and Barnabas disagree and part ways, continuing their missionary work separately, with Paul later joined by Timothy.

Sunday sermon reading

What can we learn from the church in Antioch about what it means to be called a Christian?



16 February 2025

Jerusalem – Culture changers

Acts 15.1-11, 22-35

Weekday readings

Paul and Silas are imprisoned and freed miraculously by God. Their travels continue. Paul preaches to philosophers in Athens. In Corinth he shares his ministry with Priscilla and Aquila, staying in the city for over a year. Paul travels to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila. Here the people eventually riot against him – led by artisans reliant on goddess-worship of Artemis for their livelihoods, who see the threat this new faith without idols presents to them.

Sunday sermon reading

What do you like, dislike or feel surprised by in the church's formal inclusion of Gentile believers, and what can it teach us about resolving disagreements well today?



23 February 2025

Athens – Influencers

Acts 17.16-34

Weekday readings

Paul bids farewell to the Ephesian church elders and sets off for Jerusalem, where he knows hardship awaits. On the way Paul hears prophetically that he will be bound and handed over to the Gentiles, but obeys God's call to go there. Paul arrives. A riot is stirred against him, ending in his arrest by the Roman commander. He faces the crowds, the Roman soldiers, and the Jewish elders – boldly sharing his testimony before all.

Sunday sermon reading

Paul meets the Athenians on their home ground and explains the gospel by relating it to their own places of worship and searches for truth. Can we follow this approach to share our faith now, and what challenges might this bring?



2 March 2025

Rome – Evangelists...to the ends of the earth?


Acts 28.17-31

Weekday readings

Paul is imprisoned in Jerusalem and tried by a series of leaders, testifying to each of them of the gospel. Unable to find him guilty of anything, they finally send him to be tried in Rome. Paul arrives in Rome, having miraculously survived a shipwreck on Malta. He boldly preaches the good news of God's kingdom and Jesus's resurrection in the very heart of the empire that had dared to crucify the Son of God.

Sunday sermon reading

Why does the book seem to end abruptly in the middle of Paul's ministry, and is there an invitation Luke is making to his readers in the way he ends his narrative? It might help to compare with the similarly sudden ending of the gospel of Mark.



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