

# Contents

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<b>1</b>	<b>You Will Be My Witnesses—<i>June 30–July 6</i></b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Pentecost—<i>July 7–13</i></b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Life in the Early Church—<i>July 14–20</i></b>	<b>31</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The First Church Leaders—<i>July 21–27</i></b>	<b>44</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>The Conversion of Paul—<i>July 28–August 3</i></b>	<b>57</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>The Ministry of Peter—<i>August 4–10</i></b>	<b>72</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Paul’s First Missionary Journey—<i>August 11–17</i></b>	<b>85</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>The Jerusalem Council—<i>August 18–24</i></b>	<b>98</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>The Second Missionary Journey—<i>August 25–31</i></b>	<b>111</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>The Third Missionary Journey—<i>September 1–7</i></b>	<b>124</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Arrest in Jerusalem—<i>September 8–14</i></b>	<b>137</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Confinement in Caesarea—<i>September 15–21</i></b>	<b>150</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Journey to Rome—<i>September 22–28</i></b>	<b>163</b>

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## The Victory of the Gospel

Many historians believe that the three most crucial decades in world history occurred when a small group of men, mostly Jews under the power of the Holy Spirit, took the gospel to the world. The book of Acts is an account of those three crucial decades, which spanned from the resurrection of Jesus, in A.D. 31, to the end of Paul's first Roman imprisonment, in A.D. 62 (*Acts 28:30*). The book must have been written shortly thereafter, for it stops the narrative at that point, though evidence exists that Paul was released from that imprisonment and that he resumed his missionary endeavors, preaching and traveling until he was arrested a few years later and then executed in Rome, in A.D. 67.

The book is silent about its author, but church tradition always has identified him as Luke, "the beloved physician" of Colossians 4:14 and traveling companion of Paul (*2 Tim. 4:11, Philemon 24*). Luke also traditionally is believed to be the author of our third Gospel, no doubt "the first book" mentioned in Acts 1:1. (*Compare with Luke 1:3*.) Luke and Acts are twin volumes on the beginnings of Christianity, respectively its origin (Jesus' life and ministry) and expansion (the apostles' missionary endeavors).

Together they comprise about 27 percent of the New Testament, the largest contribution of a single author. Writing to the Colossians, Paul refers to Luke as a Gentile coworker, someone who was not "of the circumcision" (*Col. 4:7-14*). Luke, then, is the only non-Jewish author of a New Testament book.

This seems to explain one of his main themes: the universality of salvation. God has no favorites. The church is called to witness to all people, irrespective of their race, social class, or gender (*Acts 1:8; 2:21, 39, 40; 3:25; 10:28, 34, 35*). A failure to do so, whether by prejudice or convenience, is a distortion of the gospel and contrary to the most basic truths of God's Word. We are, before God, all the same: sinners in need of the redemption found in Christ Jesus.

It is not by chance, then, that Luke's main hero is Paul, "the apostle to the Gentiles" (*Rom. 11:13, NIV*), to whom almost two-thirds of the book of Acts is dedicated.

Other important themes found in Acts include: the sovereignty of God and His divine purpose (*Acts 17:24, 25; 20:27; 23:11*); the exaltation of Jesus as Lord and Savior (*Acts 2:32, 36; 3:13, 15; 4:10–12; 5:30, 31*); and especially the role of the Spirit in empowering and guiding the church for its mission (*Acts 2:1–4; 4:24–31; 8:14–17, 29, 39; 10:19, 20*). In

fact, the achievements of the early church were not the result of human wisdom or ability, though it pleased God to use someone like Paul to impact the world in a way that no other apostle did or perhaps was able to do (*1 Cor. 15:10*).

Acts deals with the formative period of the early church, in which there was considerable administrative and even theological growth. We can see this, for example, in the way the church dealt with questions concerning the time of Jesus' second coming, the status of the Gentiles, and the role of faith for salvation. What the early church was able to accomplish in such a short period of time, however, is a perpetual testimony of what God can do through those who humble their hearts in prayer, live beyond individual differences, and let themselves be used by the Spirit for God's honor and glory.

Acts is the story of those called of God to start the work; what can we who are called of God to finish it learn from their story?

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# How to Use This Teachers Edition

## Get Motivated to Explore, Apply, and Create

We hope that this format of the teachers edition will encourage adult Sabbath School class members to do just that—explore, apply, and create. Each weekly teachers lesson takes your class through the following learning process, based on the Natural Learning Cycle:

1. Why is this lesson important to me? (Motivate);
2. What do I need to know from God’s Word? (Explore);
3. How can I practice what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Apply); and
4. What can I do with what I’ve learned from God’s Word? (Create).

And for teachers who haven’t had time to prepare during the week for class, there is a one-page outline of easy-to-digest material in “The Lesson in Brief” section.

Here’s a closer look at the four steps of the Natural Learning Cycle and suggestions for how you, the teacher, can approach each one:

**Step 1—Motivate:** Link the learners’ experiences to the central concept of the lesson to show why the lesson is relevant to their lives. Help them answer the question, Why is this week’s lesson important to me?

**Step 2—Explore:** Present learners with the biblical information they need to understand the central concept of the lesson. (Such information could include facts about the people; the setting; cultural, historical, and/or geographical details; the plot or what’s happening; and conflicts or tension of the texts you are studying.) Help learners answer the question, What do I need to know from God’s Word?

**Step 3—Apply:** Provide learners with opportunities to practice the information given in Step 2. This is a crucial step; information alone is not enough to help a person grow in Christ. Assist the learners in answering the question, How can I apply to my life what I’ve learned?

**Step 4—Create:** Finally, encourage learners to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (*James 1:22*). Invite them to make a life response to the lesson. This step provides individuals and groups with opportunities for creative self-expression and exploration. All such activities should help learners answer the question, With God’s help, what can I do with what I’ve learned from this week’s lesson?

When teachers use material from each of these four steps, they will appeal to most every student in their class: those who enjoy talking about what’s happening in their lives, those who want more information about the texts being studied, those who want to know how it all fits in with real life, and those who want to get out and apply what they’ve learned.