ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Tuesday Evenings | 7:00-8:00 PM | Via Zoom | April 14 - June 23, 2026

About This Study

This eleven-week study takes us through the entire book of Acts, from the Ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to Paul's arrival in Rome proclaiming the Kingdom of God. We read Acts sequentially, following its narrative arc from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth and tracing the movement of the Spirit through communities of every background and culture.

Discussion questions in each session draw substantially from the Yale Bible Study (Yale Divinity School), presented by Dr. Harold W. Attridge and the Rev. Dr. David L. Bartlett. They are supplemented by material shaped by C. K. Robertson's Conversations with Scripture: Acts of the Apostles (Anglican Association of Biblical Scholars, 2010) and the BibleProject's guide to Acts.

Each session is designed for one hour via Zoom. Participants are warmly encouraged to read the assigned chapters before each gathering.

Session Schedule

Session	Date	Reading	Topic
1	April 14, 2026	Acts 1-2	The Promise Fulfilled: Commission, Ascension, and Pentecost
2	April 21, 2026	Acts 3-5	Signs, Generosity, and Opposition: The Early Jerusalem Church
3	April 28, 2026	Acts 6-8	New Leaders, First Martyr, and the Gospel Moves Out
4	May 5, 2026	Acts 9-10	Unlikely Converts: Saul and Cornelius
5	May 12, 2026	Acts 11-12	Antioch, Persecution, and the Providence of God
6	May 19, 2026	Acts 13-14	Into the World: The First Missionary Journey
7	May 26, 2026	Acts 15-16	The Jerusalem Council and the Gospel Crosses into Europe
8	June 2, 2026	Acts 17-18	Philosophers, Skeptics, and Tentmakers: Athens and Corinth
9	June 9, 2026	Acts 19-20	Ephesus and Farewell: The Spirit, the Silversmiths, and the Elders
10	June 16, 2026	Acts 21-24	Jerusalem, Arrest, and the First Trials
11	June 23, 2026	Acts 25-28	Rome at Last: From Prison to the Ends of the Earth

Overview of the Book of Acts

The following overview is drawn from **BibleProject**, "Guide to the Book of Acts," bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-acts.

Authorship and Purpose

Acts is the second volume of a unified two-part work. Both books were written by Luke, a traveling coworker of Paul (Colossians 4:14). In the opening lines of Acts, Luke references his "first volume" -- the Gospel -- about all the things Jesus began to do and teach. Acts is therefore about what Jesus continued to do and teach, through the Holy Spirit working in and through his followers.

Though the book is traditionally titled The Acts of the Apostles, the single figure who unifies the entire story from beginning to end is Jesus himself, appearing personally or acting through the Holy Spirit. The title The Acts of Jesus and the Spirit would be more accurate to Luke's purpose.

The Big Idea

> *The good news of the risen King Jesus leads to the formation of communities where individuals from various backgrounds are treated with equality as they pledge their allegiance to Jesus and live according to his teachings.*

Acts 1: Jesus Commissions His Disciples

The risen Jesus spends forty days teaching his disciples about the Kingdom of God before ascending. He promises that the Holy Spirit will come upon them, fulfilling the Old Testament prophets' hope that God's Spirit would dwell among his people in a new temple (Isaiah 32:15; Ezekiel 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-32). When this happens, Jesus says, the Spirit will empower his disciples to be witnesses "in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (1:8). This opening commission gives Acts its geographical structure: chapters 2-7 in Jerusalem, chapters 8-12 in the surrounding regions, and chapters 13-28 throughout the Roman Empire.

Acts 2-7: Pentecost in Jerusalem and the Birth of the Church

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples as wind and fire -- evoking Old Testament images of God filling the Temple -- and they begin speaking in languages they had never learned. Peter's Pentecost sermon draws on Joel and the Psalms to interpret what has happened, calling for repentance. Three thousand believe that day. The new community is marked by the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.

Luke then structures chapters 3-5 around two competing "temples": God's new temple (the Jesus community gathering daily in the old Temple courts, healing the sick, practicing radical generosity) and the Jerusalem Temple establishment that opposes it. This conflict culminates in chapters 6-7 with the martyrdom of Stephen, whose death scatters the Jerusalem believers into Judea and Samaria -- exactly as Jesus had planned (Acts 1:8).

Acts 8-12: An International Movement

Luke assembles stories showing how the mostly Jewish, Jerusalem-based community became a multiethnic, international movement. Philip brings the gospel to Samaria and baptizes an Ethiopian court official. Saul of Tarsus -- the church's fiercest persecutor -- is transformed on the Damascus road into its most passionate advocate. Peter's rooftop vision breaks down the barrier between clean and unclean, and the Holy Spirit falls on the Gentile household of the centurion Cornelius. The section culminates in Antioch -- the first large multiethnic church -- where disciples are first called "Christians."

Acts 13-20: Mission to the Nations

The Antioch church sends Barnabas and Paul on three successive missionary journeys across the Roman Empire. Paul always visits the Jewish synagogue first; many believe, but opposition often follows. A pivotal theological council in Jerusalem (ch. 15) establishes that membership among Jesus's people is not based on ethnic identity or Torah observance. Throughout these chapters Paul and his companions are accused of political subversion because they proclaim "another king, Jesus" (17:7) -- yet Roman officials consistently find no legal grounds for condemning them.

Acts 21-28: From Jerusalem to Rome

Paul's final journey ends in Jerusalem, where a riot leads to his arrest. He is tried before the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, the governors Felix and Festus, and King Agrippa II -- all without a finding of guilt. Unable to release him after his appeal to Caesar, Rome transfers Paul by sea to the capital. After a shipwreck on Malta, Paul arrives in Rome and is placed under house arrest. For two full years he welcomes all who come to him, "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (28:31).

The unified work of Luke and Acts tells the story of how God's Kingdom arrived on earth -- beginning with Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, and continuing through the Spirit's empowerment of his followers to bear witness from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

Reading Acts as Anglicans

This section draws on C. K. Robertson, *Conversations with Scripture: Acts of the Apostles* (Church Publishing, 2010), part of the Anglican Association of Biblical Scholars series.

A Conversation with Scripture

Anglicanism has always understood Scripture to be the primary authority for Christian faith and life. The Thirty-Nine Articles describe the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as containing "all things necessary to salvation," and Richard Hooker's foundational work in the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity established the classical Anglican framework: Scripture, Reason, and Tradition working together -- not three equal authorities, but a coherent approach to truth in which Scripture holds priority, while reason and tradition serve as indispensable aids to its interpretation.

This means that when Anglicans open the Bible, they do not come to it as isolated individuals. They come as members of a community shaped by centuries of common prayer, creedal confession, and theological reflection. The Book of Common Prayer -- itself saturated with Scripture -- has formed Anglican sensibility by immersing worshippers in the rhythms of the biblical narrative week by week and year by year. To read the Bible as an Anglican is to read it prayerfully, communally, and with the whole tradition listening over one's shoulder. All the while remembering its authority.

Reading Scripture can be a conversation with God, and that lens is a very common approach in the Anglican tradition. We treat Scripture as a place where we encounter the living God -- where we are addressed, questioned, formed, and sent. A common approach to understanding the Bible is to understand the text in its ancient context by bringing together historical and critical scholarship, with intentional listening for what the text is saying to the church today. In this way we are formed by the Bible, not just informed by it.

Three Lenses for Reading Acts

1. Scripture in conversation with Scripture. Acts is saturated with the Hebrew Bible. Peter's Pentecost sermon, Stephen's speech, Paul's synagogue sermons -- all read the events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as the fulfillment of Israel's long story. An Anglican reading attends carefully to these connections, asking not just "what does this passage say?" but "how does this passage read the rest of Scripture?"

2. Scripture in conversation with tradition. The Anglican tradition reads the Bible in communion with the whole church -- the patristic writers, the councils, the reformers, and the living community of faith. We do not read Acts from nowhere; we read it as heirs of a tradition.

3. Scripture in conversation with reason and experience. Anglicanism's "three-legged stool" affirms that God-given reason is an indispensable tool for understanding Scripture. This means that careful historical study, attention to literary form, and honest engagement with difficult questions all belong to faithful reading. Acts raises a lot of interesting historical questions -- about Luke's sources, his purposes, the tensions with Paul's own letters. It is useful to wrestle

with these questions while maintaining that reason serves us in understanding Scripture, rather than judging it.

For more information on the “three legged stool of Anglicanism”: https://edod.org/theology-matters/the-three-legged-stool-of-anglicanism/

Acts as a Mirror for the Church

The book of Acts is not primarily history for history's sake -- it is theology in narrative form. Luke is showing us what the church is meant to be. The pattern he traces -- proclamation, reception, opposition, movement, the Spirit's constant guidance -- is not locked in the first century. It is the pattern of the church's life in every generation.

Reading Acts as Anglicans means allowing this pattern to question and form us. The unexpected protagonists -- Barnabas, Priscilla and Aquila, Philip, Lydia, the Ethiopian eunuch -- remind us that God's mission characteristically works through overlooked and unlikely people. The repeated crossing of boundaries challenges every community that has grown comfortable with its existing borders. And the book's remarkable open ending -- Paul under house arrest in Rome, proclaiming the Kingdom without hindrance -- invites us to ask where we find ourselves in this unfinished story.

Suggestions for Faithful Reading

1. Read the assigned chapters before each session. Come with observations and questions.
2. Notice the Old Testament echoes. Ask: what is Luke drawing on? What is he claiming about Jesus?
3. Pay attention to who is at the margins of the story. Often they are central to Luke's point.
4. Be willing to sit with difficult passages. The tradition has learned from wrestling with hard texts.
5. Ask what this passage would say to your community, your neighborhood, your own life of faith.
6. End each session in prayer. The same Spirit who empowered the early church is at work in our gathering.

SESSION 1 · TUESDAY, APRIL 14, 2026

The Promise Fulfilled: Commission, Ascension, and Pentecost

Reading: Acts 1-2 ·

Summary of the Reading

Acts opens as the second volume of Luke's two-part work. The risen Jesus spends forty days with his disciples, teaching them about the Kingdom of God, then gives the commission that structures the entire book: 'You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (1:8). He promises the Holy Spirit and ascends into heaven. The disciples return to Jerusalem, devote themselves to prayer, and -- noting that the Spirit-filled community must number twelve to mirror the twelve tribes of Israel -- replace Judas by casting lots.

On the Day of Pentecost, as Jewish pilgrims from across the known world crowd into Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit descends in wind and flame. The disciples begin speaking in languages they had never learned, and astonished onlookers hear them declaring God's mighty deeds in their own tongues. Yale Bible Study scholars Attridge and Bartlett point to the two great themes already at work: continuity (the Spirit comes to Jerusalem, the city of David, first to Jews) and change (the gospel is now translatable into every language -- not a reversal of Babel but an expansion of proclamation). Peter preaches his foundational sermon, drawing on Joel, the Psalms, and the events of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, calling for repentance and baptism. About three thousand believe that day. The new community forms around four marks: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.

Questions for Discussion

1. Throughout Acts we see two competing themes: continuity with Israel's story and radical change through the Spirit. How do you see both of these themes developed in Acts 1-2? Where do you experience that same tension -- between continuity and change -- in the life of your own church?

2. Peter's Pentecost speech is an interpretation of Scripture applied to a concrete situation, culminating in a call to decision. Attridge and Bartlett note that Luke wrote many of the speeches in Acts to express his own theology. What are the main themes of Peter's sermon, and what do they tell us about Luke's priorities? How does good preaching today resemble or differ from this pattern?

3. Prayer is the defining activity of the disciples before Pentecost, and the new community is marked by prayer from its first moments. How does prayer function for the apostles in these chapters? What might we learn from their example about the place of prayer in the church's discernment and life?

4. The Pentecost miracle is emphatically not speaking in private ecstatic syllables -- it is intelligible proclamation in the languages of real nations. What does it mean for the gospel to be inherently translatable? Where do you see that translating work happening -- or needing to happen -- in mission today?

SESSION 2 · TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2026

Signs, Generosity, and Opposition: The Early Jerusalem Church

Reading: Acts 3-5 ·

Summary of the Reading

Peter and John heal a man who has been disabled from birth at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. The miracle draws a crowd, and Peter preaches again: the power behind the healing is Jesus -- the Holy and Righteous One whom the Jerusalem authorities killed but whom God raised from the dead. The pattern Yale scholars identify will repeat throughout Acts: miracle, then speech interpreting the miracle, then a call to repentance. Five thousand more people believe. When the Sanhedrin arrests Peter and John, Peter speaks with astonishing boldness -- quoting Psalm 118 -- and the council can only release them because of popular support.

The community responds to persecution with corporate prayer rather than retreat, asking not for safety but for boldness to keep speaking. Barnabas appears for the first time, illustrating Luke's hopes for the church: he sells a field and gives the proceeds to the apostles. The community holds all things in common, distributing to those in need. But the story of Ananias and Sapphira interrupts this picture of generosity: they sell property, keep part of the proceeds while pretending to give all, and die as a consequence. Luke is not describing a commune so much as underscoring integrity before God and the community. A second wave of persecution follows -- miraculous release from prison, flogging -- and the apostles leave the Sanhedrin 'rejoicing that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.'

Questions for Discussion.

5. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is striking and difficult. Attridge and Bartlett describe it as a tale with a moral: you cannot deceive the community or God about your generosity. If you were leading a Bible study on this text, what would you hope participants might take from it? What does it say about the relationship between integrity and community life?

6. Peter declares before the Sanhedrin that he must 'obey God rather than any human authority' (5:29). Under what circumstances does this principle apply today? How do Christians discern when obedience to God requires civil disobedience?
7. The wise Pharisee Gamaliel urges his colleagues to wait and see: if this movement is of human origin, it will fail; if it is of God, they cannot stop it. How useful is Gamaliel's test for evaluating movements in the church today? What are its limits?
8. Luke structures chapters 3-5 around 'two temples' -- the old Temple and the new community of Jesus' followers. What does this suggest about what the church is supposed to be? Where do you see the church fulfilling -- or failing -- that vocation today?

SESSION 3 · TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2026

New Leaders, First Martyr, and the Gospel Moves Out

Reading: Acts 6-8 ·

Summary of the Reading

As the community grows, a practical crisis emerges: Greek-speaking widows are being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles propose a solution: the Twelve will devote themselves to prayer and proclamation; seven new leaders will handle practical service. Yale scholars note that Luke, writing toward the end of the first century, is reflecting organizational realities of his own day -- the roles of elders and deacons had become more distinct, though the actions of exemplary deacons like Stephen and Philip suggest they played a much larger role than their title implied. All seven have Greek names, and one is identified as a convert from Antioch -- a sign that diversity was built into the Jerusalem church from the beginning.

Stephen, one of the seven, becomes a bold and controversial preacher. He is arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin. His response -- the longest speech in Acts -- retells Israel's entire history, reaching its climax in an indictment: Israel has always resisted God's messengers, and the council has now betrayed the Righteous One. Yale scholars observe that Stephen's speech marks a turning point in Acts' attitude toward the Temple. The council is enraged and stones Stephen -- the first martyr -- while a young man named Saul watches. Stephen dies praying for his killers. The persecution that follows scatters the Jerusalem believers across Judea and Samaria, exactly as Acts 1:8 had anticipated. Philip preaches in Samaria, then meets an Ethiopian court official on a desert road, interprets Isaiah 53 as speaking of Jesus, and baptizes him. The gospel is beginning to cross every conceivable boundary.

Questions for Discussion

9. Stephen's speech offers a pointed critique of any attachment to a particular sacred space as the definitive dwelling of God. Is this critique purely about first-century tensions, or does it speak to twenty-first-century Christians? Are there 'sacred spaces' -- buildings, traditions, institutions -- that we might revere more than is healthy?

10. Stephen's speech also models a way of reading Israel's history as a lens on the present. Luke-Acts does this throughout. How might we tell the story of the church's history in a way that sheds light on our present situation? What episodes in our own tradition's story would you emphasize, and why?

11. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch encounter each other on an unlikely road, and a single conversation about a single Isaiah text leads to baptism. What does this story tell us about how the Spirit works -- through Scripture, through conversation, through unexpected encounters? What is Philip's role, and what is the Spirit's?

12. The appointment of the Seven addresses both a practical need and a theological claim: all ministry is Spirit-filled and God-honoring. How does your congregation understand the relationship between practical service (feeding, caring, organizing) and 'spiritual' ministry? Is that distinction healthy or harmful?

SESSION 4 · TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2026

Unlikely Converts: Saul and Cornelius

Reading: Acts 9-10

Summary of the Reading

Two pivotal conversion narratives, carefully constructed and placed in parallel, dominate Acts 9 and 10. Yale scholars Attridge and Bartlett identify the two great motifs at work in both: (1) God is entirely in charge; and (2) the world keeps getting turned upside down. Saul, breathing threats against the disciples, is stopped on the Damascus road by a blinding light and the voice of Jesus: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' He is led blind into the city, fasting, until Ananias -- commanded by God against his better judgment -- comes to him and says the single most stunning word of the encounter: 'Saul, brother.' Paul's own account in Galatians 1 describes the same event as a prophetic call, like Jeremiah's, rather than a conversion. Both framings are present in Luke's telling.

The story of Peter and Cornelius is the longest sustained narrative in Acts. Luke constructs it with extraordinary care: parallel visions, God directing both men simultaneously, building to Peter's climactic declaration: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.' Peter's vision of the sheet lowered from heaven is not primarily about kosher food laws -- it is about who can be

included in the community of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit falls on the Gentile household before baptism, the Jewish believers with Peter are astonished. Cornelius functions, Yale scholars suggest, as a kind of surrogate for Luke's patron Theophilus: a God-fearing Gentile not yet part of the Jewish covenant, who is exactly the kind of person Luke is writing for.

Questions for Discussion

13. The story of Paul's Damascus road experience is one of the defining stories of Christian history. Luke tells it three times in Acts (chs. 9, 22, 26), and Paul gives his own account in Galatians 1 and 2. Comparing these versions: what themes does Luke emphasize that Paul does not, and vice versa? What does this tell us about how we tell our own stories of faith?

14. Visions appear repeatedly in Acts -- directing, commissioning, reversing expectations -- and they are explicitly validated by the narrative. How do visions function in Acts as a way of representing messages from God? How do we, as contemporary readers, understand claims of divine guidance through dreams, visions, or other extraordinary experiences?

15. Peter's vision of the sheet is explicitly not about food laws -- it is about fellowship and inclusion: 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' Where do we find barriers today -- ethnic, social, economic, religious -- that the gospel calls us to examine and challenge? What might a contemporary 'sheet vision' look like for our community?

16. God is in charge throughout both stories -- directing Ananias against his fears, giving Cornelius a vision before Peter arrives, pouring out the Spirit before baptism. What does this pattern say about the relationship between divine initiative and human response in the life of the church?

SESSION 5 · TUESDAY, MAY 12, 2026

Antioch, Persecution, and the Providence of God

Reading: Acts 11-12

Summary of the Reading

Peter returns to Jerusalem and faces immediate criticism: he has eaten with uncircumcised men. His account of the visions and Cornelius's household silences the critics. But as Yale scholars note, this affirmation will have to be made again at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 -- the tensions are real and ongoing. Meanwhile, those scattered by persecution travel as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Some begin speaking to Greeks as well as Jews, and a large

number believe. The Jerusalem church sends Barnabas to investigate; he finds the grace of God at work, rejoices, and encourages the community. He then travels to Tarsus to find Saul and brings him to Antioch, where they teach together for a whole year. It is here that disciples are first called 'Christians.' Barnabas and Saul carry a famine relief offering to Jerusalem -- an early sign of the financial solidarity between communities that will mark Paul's ministry.

Chapter 12 brings a painful reversal: King Herod Agrippa executes James, the brother of John, by the sword. He then arrests Peter. The church prays earnestly. The night before Peter's trial, an angel wakes him, his chains fall off, and he walks past the guards and through the iron gate to freedom. The scene that follows is almost comic: he arrives at the house of Mary (mother of John Mark), where the community is praying for him, and the servant Rhoda recognizes his voice but is too astonished to open the door. They don't believe her. Peter keeps knocking. Yale scholars find in this scene Luke's characteristic humor alongside a serious theological point: the community prays for what it cannot quite believe God will do, and God does it anyway. Despite everything, 'the word of God continued to advance and gain adherents.'

Questions for Discussion

17. The community at Antioch becomes the first truly multiethnic Christian gathering, and it is here that disciples are first called 'Christians.' What obstacles -- theological, social, practical -- did they have to overcome to become that community? What analogous obstacles do our own churches face in becoming genuinely multiethnic and welcoming?

18. Peter's vision and his experience at Cornelius's house forced a fundamental revision of a distinction he had held his entire life. What inherited assumptions or categories has following Jesus called you or your community to reconsider? How do we hold both our tradition and the Spirit's continuing challenge?

19. The community is praying for Peter's release -- and then can barely believe it when it happens. What does this very human scene say about the nature of faith, prayer, and our expectations of God? Have you had an experience of being surprised by an answered prayer?

20. Despite the death of James, the imprisonment of Peter, and Herod's menace, Luke closes chapter 12 with 'the word of God continued to advance.' Where do you see the church enduring through difficulty and the gospel advancing in unlikely ways today?

SESSION 6 · TUESDAY, MAY 19, 2026

Into the World: The First Missionary Journey

Reading: Acts 13-14 ·

Summary of the Reading

The Antioch church, while worshiping and fasting, hears the Holy Spirit's call to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a new work. After prayer and the laying on of hands, the first intentional missionary team departs -- sent by the Spirit through the community, not by individual initiative. They travel to Cyprus, where they confront a Jewish magician named Bar-Jesus/Elymas who opposes their message before the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus. Paul (the name he will use from this point) pronounces blindness on Elymas, and the proconsul believes. Yale scholars note that Luke consistently portrays Roman officials as, at worst, reluctant pawns; here the proconsul is a straightforward convert.

In Pisidian Antioch, Paul delivers his first major sermon in Acts -- tracing Israel's history to its fulfillment in Jesus' resurrection. Many are eager to hear more, but when Jewish opposition forms, Paul and Barnabas make their most consequential declaration: since the Jews have judged themselves unworthy, they are turning to the Gentiles, fulfilling Isaiah 49:6 -- to be a light to the nations. Yale scholars observe that this passage from Second Isaiah likely shaped Paul's own self-understanding. The pattern repeats in Iconium, Lystra (where the crowd attempts to worship them as Zeus and Hermes), and Derbe. Paul is stoned in Lystra and left for dead; he gets up and walks back into the city. On their return, the missionaries appoint elders in each new community and commend them to the Lord.

Questions for Discussion

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21. The encounter at Lystra vividly portrays the tension between the gospel and the cultural imagination of its hearers: the crowd's instinct is to fit Paul and Barnabas into their familiar category of visiting deities. Are there elements of contemporary culture -- local, national, or global -- that present a similar tension with what Christians stand for? Where are the places the gospel is most easily misheard or miscategorized today?

22. In several episodes in these chapters, significant tensions arise between Paul's message and traditional Jewish communities. How do we, as twenty-first-century Christians, understand those tensions in Acts? What are the analogous tensions between Christians and Jews, or between Christianity and other faiths, in our own day?

23. Paul's sermon in Acts 13 draws heavily on the Hebrew Scriptures -- the Psalms, Isaiah, Habakkuk -- to make the case for Jesus. How important, for twenty-first-century

Christians, are those Old Testament connections? How do you understand the Christian community's relationship to the scriptural heritage of ancient Israel? (Yale Bible Study)

24. The first missionary journey begins not with a strategy session but with worship, fasting, and listening. What does this suggest about how churches discern God's call for new ministry? Where do worship and prayer belong in your own process of discernment?

SESSION 7 · TUESDAY, MAY 26, 2026

The Jerusalem Council and the Gospel Crosses into Europe

Reading: Acts 15-16

Summary of the Reading

A serious controversy reaches Antioch: some teachers from Judea insist that Gentile believers must be circumcised and keep the full Mosaic Law to be saved. Paul and Barnabas dispute this vigorously, and the church sends them to Jerusalem. The council that follows is, Yale scholars observe, the pivotal theological moment of the book. Peter rises to speak of his own experience: God gave the Holy Spirit to Cornelius and his household without circumcision. Paul and Barnabas report what God has done among the Gentiles. James, drawing on Amos 9, proposes a decision: Gentile believers are not required to be circumcised, though some minimal food practices will enable table fellowship with Jewish Christians. A letter is sent to the Gentile communities, and they rejoice.

After a painful separation over John Mark, Paul takes Silas and departs on a second journey. In Lystra he recruits the young Timothy, having him circumcised -- not as a requirement for Gentile salvation, but as a practical measure for ministry among Jewish communities. The Spirit redirects their travel plans twice before Paul receives a night vision of a Macedonian man calling them across the sea. In Philippi, the gospel first reaches European soil: a businesswoman named Lydia and her household are baptized. When Paul casts out a spirit of divination from a slave girl, her owners have him and Silas flogged and imprisoned. An earthquake opens the prison; the jailer -- facing self-execution -- is converted and baptized with his whole household that same night.

Questions for Discussion

25. The Jerusalem Council is the first great deliberative assembly of the church, reasoning together under the Holy Spirit about a deeply divisive question. What does its process -- hearing from multiple witnesses, drawing on Scripture, listening for the Spirit's guidance -- offer to churches facing difficult questions today?

26. In Philippi, Paul and Silas face imprisonment precisely because the gospel disrupts an economic arrangement: the slave girl's owners have lost their source of income. Luke recounts several similar stories where the gospel disturbs the economic order. How do we think about the relationship between the gospel and economic self-interest today?

27. The Philippian jailer asks: 'What must I do to be saved?' (16:30). In your own words -- not a rehearsed formula -- how would you answer that question? What does this story suggest about the conditions under which people become open to the gospel?

28. The Spirit redirects Paul's travel plans twice before the Macedonian vision opens the door to Europe. How do you understand the Spirit's guidance in the closing of doors as well as the opening of them? Have you experienced the Spirit leading through redirection or disappointment?

SESSION 8 · TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 2026

Philosophers, Skeptics, and Tentmakers: Athens and Corinth

Reading: Acts 17-18 ·

Summary of the Reading

In Thessalonica, Paul argues from the Scriptures in the synagogue for three weeks, and many believe -- but opponents drive him out. In Beroea the reception is warmer: the people 'examine the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.' Paul is sent ahead to Athens while Silas and Timothy remain behind. Athens, the philosophical capital of the ancient world, is full of idols, and Paul is deeply distressed. He engages in the synagogue and in the marketplace, and is invited to the Areopagus. His speech there is one of the most carefully constructed in Acts -- he begins with the altar to the 'unknown god,' commends the Athenians' religious seriousness, draws on Greek poets, and leads them toward the one God who has appointed a man through whom he will judge the world and has given proof by raising him from the dead. Some mock; some want to hear more; a few believe.

Paul arrives in Corinth in weakness and fear -- as he later tells the Corinthians themselves. He meets Priscilla and Aquila, Jewish tentmakers recently expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius. Yale scholars point to the chronological anchor of this section: the proconsul Gallio, who dismissed charges against Paul, can be dated to 51-52 AD via a Delphic inscription. Paul spends eighteen months in Corinth -- his longest stay anywhere -- before sailing east. In Ephesus he meets Apollos, the eloquent Alexandrian preacher, and Priscilla and Aquila give him a fuller account of the faith. Yale scholars emphasize the cooperative dimension of this period: Paul is never a solo operator; his ministry is always embedded in a network of companions, co-workers, and supporting communities.

Questions for Discussion

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29. Luke's reference to the proconsul Gallio (18:12) can be dated to 51-52 AD by an inscription found at Delphi -- providing a rare chronological anchor for Paul's ministry. How important is it for our understanding of early Christianity to uncover and confirm such historical data? Does our faith depend on Acts being historically reliable? What is at stake in how we classify Acts as history?

30. The persecution of Christians in Ephesus (ch. 19, the riot over Demetrius the silversmith) because the gospel disrupted the economic order is a recurring theme in Luke. Can you recall other texts in Luke or Acts that offer a similar perspective? What do you make of the pattern?

31. Paul's speech at the Areopagus begins with what his audience already knows and values -- the altar to the unknown god, Greek poets -- before working toward Jesus and the resurrection. How does this approach to evangelism -- starting with common ground -- sit with you? What are its strengths and risks in our own context?

32. Paul and his colleagues -- Priscilla and Aquila, Silas, Timothy, Apollos -- form a genuine missionary team in which different people contribute different gifts. What does this 'co-operative ministry' model offer to the church today? Who are the quiet co-workers in your own community's ministry?

SESSION 9 · TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2026

Ephesus and Farewell: The Spirit, the Silversmiths, and the Elders

Reading: Acts 19-20 ·

Summary of the Reading

Paul arrives in Ephesus and encounters disciples who have received only John's baptism. He lays hands on them; the Holy Spirit comes; they speak in tongues and prophesy. He spends three years in Ephesus -- his longest ministry anywhere -- first in the synagogue and then in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. The gospel spreads through the entire province of Asia. Remarkable healings accompany Paul's ministry. Many Ephesian believers publicly burn their books of magic -- a costly, visible break with their past.

The climax of Paul's Ephesian ministry is a riot. Demetrius the silversmith, whose business making shrines of Artemis has been devastated by Paul's preaching, stirs up his colleagues and the city. For two hours the crowd chants 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' in the great theater. Yale scholars note that this theater could hold some 25,000 people -- Luke wants us to

feel the scale of the opposition. The city clerk finally restores order. Paul then makes a final circuit of his communities and stops at Miletus, where he summons the elders of Ephesus for his farewell. The Miletus speech is the only speech in Acts addressed to Christian leaders -- a model of pastoral accountability, warning, and affection. They pray together, weep, and know they will not meet again.

Questions for Discussion

33. Luke's account of Paul in Ephesus includes historically specific detail -- the lecture hall of Tyrannus, the theater that could hold 25,000 people, the riot over Artemis. How important is it for our faith that we can place Paul's ministry in real history? How do you think about the relationship between the historical and the theological in Acts?

34. The riot over Demetrius the silversmith is fundamentally about economics: the gospel is threatening livelihoods connected to idolatry. Luke places this story within a broader pattern of the gospel disturbing established economic arrangements. What parallel situations can you identify in the church's history or in our own time?

35. Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders presupposes a particular model of church leadership -- elders who are to 'keep watch over themselves and over all the flock' (20:28). How does this model of church order compare with other models in the New Testament? How normative is it for us today?

36. Paul warns the Ephesian elders of threats to come -- wolves from outside, and people from within the community itself who will distort the truth. Are there analogies to these challenges in the situation of the church today? What does wisdom look like in the face of both external opposition and internal fragmentation?

SESSION 10 · TUESDAY, JUNE 16, 2026

Jerusalem, Arrest, and the First Trials

Reading: Acts 21-24 ·

Summary of the Reading

Paul's journey to Jerusalem is shadowed by repeated prophetic warnings. The prophet Agabus uses Paul's own belt to enact a sign: 'The Holy Spirit says that the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt.' Yale scholars note that Agabus's role here parallels Jesus' own passion predictions in Luke's Gospel. The community begs Paul not to go; he replies that he is ready not only to be bound but to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. They pray together: 'The Lord's will be done.' In Jerusalem Paul visits James and the elders, agrees to sponsor four men in a purification rite to demonstrate his respect for Torah, and goes to the Temple. He is recognized by Asian Jews who incite a riot on false charges. The Roman tribune arrests him to restore order.

From the steps of the barracks Paul addresses the crowd in Aramaic, telling his story: his formation as a Pharisee, his persecution of Christians, his encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus road -- now understood explicitly as a prophetic call to the Gentiles, modeled on Jeremiah's call. Yale scholars observe that this retelling shifts from conversion (ch. 9) to call (ch. 22), and is closer in this respect to Galatians 1. The crowd listens until he mentions the Gentiles, then erupts. The Roman tribune orders flogging for examination; Paul reveals his Roman citizenship and the flogging stops. Before the Sanhedrin, Paul provokes a debate between Pharisees and Sadducees over resurrection. God speaks to him in the night: 'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome' (23:11). A plot against his life is uncovered, and Paul is transferred under heavy guard to Caesarea and Governor Felix.

Questions for Discussion

37. Yale scholars draw an extended parallel between Paul's final journey to Jerusalem and Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem in Luke's Gospel -- both protagonists face danger, defend their mission, and are vindicated not by escape but by the continuation of the gospel. How does this parallel help us understand the theological purposes of Acts? What does Luke want his readers to feel and understand?

38. Luke uses geography with a theological purpose throughout Acts. Paul's movement from Jerusalem to Rome carries the same freight as Jesus's movement toward Jerusalem in the Gospel. How does geography function as a theological statement in Acts? What does it mean that the gospel must reach Rome?

39. Paul uses every legal resource available -- his Roman citizenship, his appeal to the Sanhedrin's internal divisions, his request for a proper hearing. What does this tell us about how Christians relate to civic structures and institutions? Is this a model for political engagement, or a concession to imperial power?

40. In Paul's speech before the Jerusalem crowd, he tells the Damascus road story as a story of prophetic call rather than conversion -- he is sent specifically to the Gentiles. What themes in his defense help us understand what the entire Christian movement is about, as Luke sees it? In Chapter 22 Paul tells his story yet again in the first person. How do the themes of the defense here compare with Luke's third-person account in Chapter 9?

SESSION 11 · TUESDAY, JUNE 23, 2026

Rome at Last: From Prison to the Ends of the Earth

Reading: Acts 25-28

Summary of the Reading

Two years have passed since Paul's arrest. The new governor Festus reviews his case. Jewish leaders press for Paul to be brought to Jerusalem; Paul exercises his right as a Roman citizen and appeals to Caesar. Shortly afterward, Festus invites King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice to hear Paul. Paul's speech before Agrippa is widely recognized as the most rhetorically accomplished in Acts: he recounts his formation as a Pharisee, his persecution of Christians, the Damascus road experience (now in its third telling, each one shaped for its audience), and his commission to be a witness to the Gentiles -- 'to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light.' Agrippa's famous reply -- 'Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?' -- suggests Paul's speech has landed. Both Agrippa and Festus agree Paul is innocent, but his appeal to Caesar is irrevocable.

The sea voyage to Rome is one of the most vividly narrated passages in Acts: storms, navigation, the threat of shipwreck, Paul's calm authority, and finally disaster on Malta -- and then recovery. Yale scholars observe that Luke uses conventions of ancient sea voyage narratives while dressing them in the specific colors of Paul's own story: God has promised he will testify in Rome, and God will deliver him there. On Malta a snakebite leaves Paul unharmed; he heals the island's sick. Finally Paul reaches Rome. He is placed under house arrest but immediately invites the Jewish leaders to hear him, explains his situation, and spends a day reasoning with them from the Law and the Prophets about Jesus. Paul quotes Isaiah 6 and declares that 'this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.' The book ends -- famously, without a verdict -- with Paul for two full years welcoming all who come to him, 'proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.'

Questions for Discussion

41. Yale scholars note that Paul's final journey to Rome closely mirrors Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem in Luke's Gospel: both face danger and opposition, both defend the faith, and in each case the protagonist's seeming defeat is not the end of the story. Having read the whole book, how has this parallel shaped your understanding of Acts? What does Luke want us to feel and believe as we reach the end?

42. Luke uses geography with a preaching purpose throughout Acts. The story begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome -- moving from the center of God's covenant with Israel to the center of the Gentile world. As you look back over the whole of Acts, how does geography serve as a theological statement? What does the fact that Paul is proclaiming the Kingdom of God in Rome, 'unhindered,' mean?

43. Paul's speech before Agrippa is explicitly a defense of the gospel, not just of Paul personally. He places the whole Christian movement in the context of Israel's hope and the fulfillment of the prophets. How does personal testimony function as theological argument in Acts? How does telling our own story serve as witness?

44. Acts ends without a verdict -- Paul is still under house arrest, still waiting. Luke does not tell us how the story ends for Paul. Why do you think Luke ends here? What does that open ending say to us? And looking back over eleven weeks together: how has reading Acts shaped your understanding of the church, of mission, of the Holy Spirit, and of your own calling?