TELLING THE GOOD NEWS · STUDY NOTES

Study 7: The gospel in Acts

For personal study or groups

Your name

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How to use these notes. Watch each part's video on biblehelp.net, or read the text below. Look up each passage in your own Bible and write the answer on the lines. The verses are printed at the back if you need them. At the end there are questions to think about on your own or to discuss in a group.

PART 1

Peter to a Jewish crowd

Beginning with the Scriptures (Acts 2:14–41)

This study hears the gospel proclaimed to three very different audiences. Peter speaks to thousands of Jews who know their Bibles. Philip sits in a chariot with one foreign traveller. Paul stands before the thinkers of Athens, who have never opened the Scriptures. The beginnings differ, but watch for what does not change: Jesus crucified, Jesus risen, and the call to repent.

1. Beginning from Scripture (2:14–21). Seven weeks earlier, Peter had denied that he knew Jesus. Now he stands up in the city where Jesus was killed. He uses the crowd's question as a way in, and he goes straight to the Scriptures, because these people know them. With Jesus and the gift of the Spirit, "the last days" have begun. The Spirit is poured out on all God's people. The Day of the Lord is coming, and "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved". By the end of the sermon, Peter has shown who that Lord is.

1 **Read Acts 2:14–21**

How does Peter explain what the crowd has seen? What promise ends the quotation from Joel?

See also: Joel 2:28–32.

2. His life, death and resurrection (2:22–24). The sermon is about Jesus. Peter speaks of His life: God certified Him by miracles, "as you yourselves know". He speaks of His death: Jesus' death was part of God's plan, and yet those who put Him to death were guilty. God worked through their sin to carry out His purpose. And Peter says "you", tenderly but plainly. He speaks of the resurrection: "But God raised Him from the dead." It was impossible for death to keep Him in its grip.

2 **Read Acts 2:22–24**

Whose plan was Jesus' death, and who was guilty of it (verse 23)? Why does it matter that both are true?

3. David's psalm (2:25–32). Psalm 16 speaks of One who will not be abandoned to Hades and will not see decay. It cannot finally be about David, for David died and his tomb was still there. God had promised him that one of his descendants would sit on his throne. The psalm is about one of David's descendants: the promised Christ. Peter gives his hearers Scripture on the one hand, and eyewitnesses on the other: "God has raised this Jesus to life, to which we are all witnesses."

3 **Read Acts 2:25–28**

What does David say about the Lord's Holy One?

4 **Read Acts 2:29–32**

Why can this psalm not be about David himself?

Full of the Bible

Much of Peter's sermon quotes or explains the Scriptures. When we speak to people who respect the Bible, we can do what he did, and show them that it points to Jesus.

4. Lord and Christ (2:33–36). The risen Jesus has poured out the Spirit. Joel said that God would do this, and Peter says that Jesus has done it: Jesus is doing what only God does. Psalm 110 speaks of David's Lord at God's right hand. Then comes the conclusion: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!" The Man they nailed to the cross is the Lord on whom everyone must call.

5 **Read Acts 2:33–36**

What does Peter conclude about Jesus? Why would this have been so terrible to hear?

5. Cut to the heart (2:37–38). A preacher can reach the ears, but only the Spirit reaches the heart. To the question "What shall we do?", Peter answers: repent, and be baptised. Repent: change your mind about Jesus, about yourself and about your sin. Be baptised, every one of you: an open confession in the city that crucified Him. Baptism does not wash sin away: the blood of Christ does that, and baptism is the believer's public answer. And see the mercy here. The first people offered forgiveness after the resurrection were those who had killed Him. There is no sin that Christ's blood cannot forgive.

6 **Read Acts 2:37–38**

What did the people ask, and what did Peter tell them to do? What does he promise?

6. Three thousand (2:39–41). The promise reaches their children and those far off, "all whom the Lord our God will call to Himself". Peter urged them to be saved. And those who embraced his message were baptised and added to the believers. This was God's work, not Peter's skill.

7 **Read Acts 2:39–41**

Who is the promise for? What happened to those who embraced the message?

7. Learning from Peter. Begin where your hearers are. Keep Jesus at the centre. Speak plainly and tenderly about sin. Tell them what to do. And trust the Spirit.

PART 2

Philip and a traveller

One man on a desert road (Acts 8:26–40)

After the crowds, Luke turns to one man. God cares about crowds, and He cares about one person.

1. Go where God sends (8:26–28). Philip was in the middle of great blessing in Samaria, yet he was told to go to a desert road, and "he started out". God is the real evangelist: every true conversion is an appointment He has made. The Ethiopian was a great official, and wealthy. But he was also an outsider: a foreigner, and a eunuch, who under the law could not enter the assembly of the Lord. He had travelled far to worship, and he was going home with a question.

8 **Read Acts 8:26–28**

What did Philip have to do? Who was the man in the chariot?

See also: Deuteronomy 23:1.

2. A good question (8:29–31). "So Philip ran up." He does not begin with a speech. He asks about what the man is already doing: "Do you understand what you are reading?" A good question is one of the best tools we have. And the great man answers with humility: "How can I, unless someone guides me?" He was a great official, a man of means, and he had travelled far to worship, and still he did not understand. That is why God uses people.

9 **Read Acts 8:29–31**

How does Philip begin? What does the man's answer show?

3. Beginning with this very Scripture (8:32–35). He was reading Isaiah 53, the great chapter of the suffering Servant. "Who is the prophet talking about?" is the question everyone needs to ask. "Then Philip began with this very Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus." He started where the man was, and went from there to Christ. The most important thing to understand in the Bible is Christ, and every part of it can lead to Him.

10 **Read Acts 8:32–35**

What was the eunuch's question? Where did Philip begin, and where did he go?

See also: Isaiah 53:4–7; Luke 24:27.

4. A name better than sons and daughters (Isaiah 56:3–5). A little further on in Isaiah, God made a promise to people just like this man. Luke does not tell us that he read it, but the promise was there. There is no outsider too far out for the gospel.

11 **Read Isaiah 56:3–5**

What does God promise the foreigner and the eunuch? Who are the outsiders near you?

5. "What is there to prevent me?" (8:36, 38). All his life this man had come up against what prevented him. Now nothing did. He heard, he believed, and he was baptised. (Some later manuscripts add a verse 37. It is not in the earliest copies.)

12 **Read Acts 8:36 and 38**

What did the eunuch ask, and what happened?

6. He went on his way rejoicing (8:39–40). He lost his guide, but not his joy, for his joy was in Christ. It is not baptism that shows a changed heart, as Simon the sorcerer shows earlier in the chapter, but joy in Christ and a life that follows Him. And the gospel had travelled a long way in one conversation. Philip simply carried on. We often never see what comes of a word that we have spoken.

13 **Read Acts 8:39–40**

How did the eunuch go on his way, even without Philip? Why?

Learning from Philip

Go where God sends you. Run when the door opens. Ask a good question, and listen. Begin where they are. Go to Jesus. And leave the outcome with God.

PART 3

Paul at Athens

The gospel for people with no Bible (Acts 17:16–34)

Most people around us have never read the Bible. What then? Do we begin somewhere else? Do we change the message?

1. A burdened heart (17:16–18). Paul "was deeply disturbed in his spirit to see that the city was full of idols". Evangelism begins with a burdened heart. Our idols are different, but the sin is the same. He reasoned in the synagogue and the marketplace. The Epicureans thought the gods were far away and took no interest in us. The Stoics thought God was in everything. They called him a "babbler", but he was proclaiming "Jesus and the resurrection".

14 **Read Acts 17:16–18**

What moved Paul to speak? Where did he go, and how was he treated?

2. New ideas (17:19–21). For the Athenians, ideas were entertainment. Many people today enjoy a discussion about religion that costs them nothing.

15 **Read Acts 17:19–21**

What was the Athenians' interest in Paul's teaching?

3. An unknown God (17:22–23). Paul begins politely, with something true, and he has taken the trouble to understand them. The altar to an unknown God admits, in stone, that there is something they do not know. He starts from what is in front of them. But he does not say that they are nearly there. All their religion has left them ignorant.

16 **Read Acts 17:22–23**

How does Paul begin? What does he say about their worship?

4. The God who made the world (17:24–25). For people without the Bible, Paul begins with God the Creator, for they need to know who God is first. Everything he says comes from the Bible, though he does not quote it. God made the world, cannot be kept in a building, and needs nothing from us. The gospel is not a help-wanted sign, but a help-available sign. To the self-sufficient that is the worst of news, and to the needy it is the best.

17 **Read Acts 17:24–25**

What does Paul say about God? How is this different from the gods of Athens?

Their gods and the true God

Their gods were made by people; the true God made us. Their gods needed offerings; He gives us everything. Their gods were far away, or were part of everything; He is above us, and near. And gods that we make never judge; He will judge by the risen Man.

5. Not far from us (17:26–28). All peoples come from one man, and all are one family. God intended that people would seek Him and "perhaps reach out for Him", like a blind man feeling along a wall. Yet "He is not far from each one of us". The One you think is far away gave you your

last breath. Paul quotes their own poets. That does not make them Scripture, but they had seen something true, and he uses it.

18 **Read Acts 17:26–28**

What does Paul say about all nations? How near is God?

6. He commands all people (17:29–31). Now Paul tells them that they are wrong. God "now commands all people everywhere to repent". The gospel is a command from the King. For He has set a day of judgement, and man-made gods never judge. The Judge is the Man whom God raised from the dead. Paul changed his starting point, but not his message. If he had left out repentance, judgement and the resurrection, he would have left out the gospel.

19 **Read Acts 17:29–31**

What does God command, and why? What proof has He given?

7. Three responses (17:32–34). Some mocked. Some wanted to hear more. And some believed, and Luke gives their names. The same three responses meet the gospel today. In the most sceptical city in the world, God had His people.

20 **Read Acts 17:32–34**

What were the three responses? Have you met them?

8. Study 7 in summary. To those who know the Bible, begin with Scripture. To a seeker, begin with his question. To those with no Bible, begin with the Creator. But always come to the same place: who Jesus is, His death for sinners, His resurrection, and the call to repent and believe. Adapt the way in, and never adapt the message.

THINK IT THROUGH

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. When you speak about your faith, is Jesus at the centre? Is there anyone you think is beyond forgiveness? Could you open the Bible with someone, and show them Jesus?

2. Is there someone you could ask a simple question this week? Could you show someone how a passage of the Old Testament leads to Jesus? Who are the outsiders near you?

3. What do you feel when you walk through your town? What are the "altars" around you? Are you tempted to leave out the parts of the message that people laugh at?

HIDE IT IN YOUR HEART

Memory verse for study 7

Learn this verse by heart this week. Cut out the card and keep it where you will see it.

TELLING THE GOOD NEWS · STUDY 7 · MEMORY VERSE

“Although God overlooked the ignorance of earlier times,
He now commands all people everywhere to repent.”

Acts 17:30

Berean Standard Bible · biblehelp.net

“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.” (Psalm 119:11, BSB)

AT THE BACK

The Bible passages (BSB)

1 **Acts 2:14–21** *14Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, lifted up his voice, and addressed the crowd: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen carefully to my words. 15These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It is only the third hour of the day! 16No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17'In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18Even on My menservants and maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. 19I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. 20The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and glorious Day of the Lord. 21And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*

2 **Acts 2:22–24** *22Men of Israel, listen to this message: Jesus of Nazareth was a man certified by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know. 23He was delivered up by God's set plan and foreknowledge, and you, by the hands of the lawless, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross. 24But God raised Him from the dead, releasing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep Him in its grip.*

3 **Acts 2:25–28** *25David says about Him: 'I saw the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 26Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will dwell in hope, 27because You will not abandon my soul to Hades, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay. 28You have made known to me the paths of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence.'*

4 **Acts 2:29–32** *29Brothers, I can tell you with confidence that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that He would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31Foreseeing this, David spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did His body see decay. 32God has raised this Jesus to life, to which we are all witnesses.*

5 **Acts 2:33–36** *33Exalted, then, to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. 34For David did not ascend into heaven, but he himself says: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand 35until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."' 36Therefore let all Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!"*

6 **Acts 2:37–38** *37When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and asked Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 38Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

7 **Acts 2:39–41** *39 This promise belongs to you and your children and to all who are far off—to all whom the Lord our God will call to Himself.” 40 With many other words he testified, and he urged them, “Be saved from this corrupt generation.” 41 Those who embraced his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to the believers that day.*

8 **Acts 8:26–28** *26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go south to the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official in charge of the entire treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his return was sitting in his chariot reading Isaiah the prophet.*

9 **Acts 8:29–31** *29 The Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to that chariot and stay by it.” 30 So Philip ran up and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. 31 “How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.*

10 **Acts 8:32–35** *32 The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so He did not open His mouth. 33 In His humiliation He was deprived of justice. Who can recount His descendants? For His life was removed from the earth.” 34 “Tell me,” said the eunuch, “who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” 35 Then Philip began with this very Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.*

11 **Isaiah 56:3–5** *3 Let no foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, “The LORD will utterly exclude me from His people.” And let the eunuch not say, “I am but a dry tree.” 4 For this is what the LORD says: “To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, who choose what pleases Me and hold fast to My covenant — 5 I will give them, in My house and within My walls, a memorial and a name better than that of sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.*

12 **Acts 8:36, 38** *36 As they traveled along the road and came to some water, the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is there to prevent me from being baptized?” 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.*

13 **Acts 8:39–40** *39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip appeared at Azotus and traveled through that region, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.*

14 **Acts 17:16–18** *16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply disturbed in his spirit to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, and in the marketplace with those he met each day. 18 Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others said, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was proclaiming the good news of Jesus and the resurrection.*

15 **Acts 17:19–21** *19So they took Paul and brought him to the Areopagus, where they asked him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? 20For you are bringing some strange notions to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." 21Now all the Athenians and foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing more than hearing and articulating new ideas.*

16 **Acts 17:22–23** *22Then Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious. 23For as I walked around and examined your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore what you worship as something unknown, I now proclaim to you.*

17 **Acts 17:24–25** *24The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by human hands. 25Nor is He served by human hands, as if He needed anything, because He Himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.*

18 **Acts 17:26–28** *26From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands. 27God intended that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. 28'For in Him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His offspring.'*

19 **Acts 17:29–31** *29Therefore, being offspring of God, we should not think that the Divine Being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by man's skill and imagination. 30Although God overlooked the ignorance of earlier times, He now commands all people everywhere to repent. 31For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead."*

20 **Acts 17:32–34** *32When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some began to mock him, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this topic." 33At that, Paul left the Areopagus. 34But some joined him and believed, including Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others who were with them.*

Scripture: Berean Standard Bible (BSB), public domain. Quotations keep its American spelling. Like many English Bibles, it often says 'man', 'he' or 'brothers' where it means people in general, men and women alike.

FOR GROUP LEADERS

Study 7: The gospel in Acts

> **Memory verse:** “Although God overlooked the ignorance of earlier times, He now commands all people everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17:30). Say it together at the end, and ask who can say it without looking.

Aims

- See from Acts 2 how Peter began with Scripture, spoke plainly about sin, and called people to repent and be baptised.
- See from Acts 8 how Philip began with the question in front of him, and went from Isaiah to Jesus.
- See from Acts 17 how Paul began with the Creator for people with no Bible, and did not change the message.

Suggested timing (about 100 minutes)

- **5 min** Welcome and short prayer.
- **35 min** Part 1 video (16 min); Acts 2:14–21, 22–24, 25–28, 29–32, 33–36, 37–38, 39–41.
- **25 min** Part 2 video (14 min); Acts 8:26–28, 29–31, 32–35; Isaiah 56:3–5; Acts 8:36, 38, 39–40.
- **30 min** Part 3 video (16 min); Acts 17:16–18, 19–21, 22–23, 24–25, 26–28, 29–31, 32–34.
- **5 min** Reflection questions. Close in prayer.

For most groups, take one part each week.

Tips

- Keep the main point in view: the way in changes, and the message does not. Ask the group to compare the three beginnings, and then what stayed the same.
- On Acts 2:23, some may ask how people can be guilty if God planned it. The Bible teaches both, as we saw in study 4, and we may not be able to explain it fully. God is not the author of sin.
- Do not speak as though all Jewish people are guilty of Jesus' death. Peter speaks to those in Jerusalem, and the verse also says "by the hands of the lawless". We were all guilty before God, for it was for our sins that He died.
- Believers differ about tongues and the gifts. The study does not take up that question. Bring the group back to Peter's sermon.
- On baptism, the study teaches that it follows faith and does not save. Keep the discussion gentle.
- Acts 8:37 is not in the main text of the BSB. If someone's Bible has it, explain that it is a later addition, and that nothing depends on it.
- Be careful and kind in speaking about the Ethiopian's condition. The point is that he was an outsider, and that God welcomed him.
- On quoting pagan poets, Paul is not saying that they are Scripture. He is using what is true in them.

Answers to watch for

- **Acts 2:14–21:** it is what God promised through Joel; "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved".
- **Acts 2:22–24:** God's plan and human guilt; the cross was no accident, and they were still responsible.
- **Acts 2:25–28:** He will not be abandoned to Hades, or see decay.
- **Acts 2:29–32:** David died and his tomb was still there; he foresaw the resurrection of the Christ.

- **Acts 2:33–36:** God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ; they had crucified Him.
- **Acts 2:37–38:** "what shall we do?"; repent and be baptised; forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit.
- **Acts 2:39–41:** for them, their children and those far off, all whom God calls; they were baptised and added to the believers.
- **Acts 8:26–28:** go to the desert road; a foreign court official, in charge of the treasury, reading Isaiah.
- **Acts 8:29–31:** with a question about what he was reading; humility, and the need for a guide.
- **Acts 8:32–35:** who the prophet was speaking about; he began with that Scripture, and told him about Jesus.
- **Isaiah 56:3–5:** a place in His house, and an everlasting name.
- **Acts 8:36, 38:** what could prevent his being baptised; they went down into the water, and Philip baptised him.
- **Acts 8:39–40:** rejoicing; his joy was in Christ.
- **Acts 17:16–18:** the idols in the city; the synagogue and the marketplace; he was mocked as a babbler.
- **Acts 17:19–21:** curiosity about new ideas.
- **Acts 17:22–23:** politely, with something true; they worship what they do not know.
- **Acts 17:24–25:** He made everything, needs nothing and gives everything; their gods were made and served by people.
- **Acts 17:26–28:** all come from one man; He is not far from each one of us.
- **Acts 17:29–31:** to repent, because He has set a day of judgement; He raised the Judge from the dead.
- **Acts 17:32–34:** some mocked, some wanted to hear more, and some believed.