

WHO(SE) ACTS?

What is Acts all about?

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The history of the early church?

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2

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3

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- **Acts 8 set in Samaria**

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The history of the early church?

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 - Acts 1–7, 9:26–12:24 set in Jerusalem and Judea
 - Acts 8 set in Samaria
 - where is 'the end of the earth'?
 - Rome?
 - Spain?

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The history of the early church?

- 1:8 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, **and to the end of the earth.**'
 - 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as **a light for the nations**, that my salvation may reach **to the end of the earth.**' Isaiah 49:6
 - Isaiah 49:6 is also quoted more fully in Acts 13:47

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The history of the early church?

- Acts covers 30–35 years
 - edited highlights
- Acts' coverage is patchy
 - believing community in Galilee? 9:31
 - believing community in Palestine after Acts 12?
 - Paul's letters?
- Acts is a very sketchy 'church history'

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Who Acts?

Acts is a book about God,
focused on God
and what God is doing

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Key lines of evidence

- verb choices
- believers' speeches

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Verb choices

- 'God' as subject of verbs
 - God raises 9x
 - God raised Jesus from the dead 8x
2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 37; cf. 26:8

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Verb choices

- 'God' as subject of verbs
 - God raises 9x
 - God gives 6x
 - past: deliverance 7:25; Saul as king 13:21
 - present: Jesus to be seen 10:40; the Spirit 5:32; 11:17
 - repentance which leads to life 11:18

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Verb choices

- 'God' as subject of verbs
 - God raises 9x
 - God gives 6x
 - God does/makes 7x
 - signs and wonders through Jesus 2:22; Jesus as Lord and Messiah 2:36
 - 'all/the things that God had done' 14:27; 15:4; 21:19
 - signs and wonders through Barnabas and Paul 15:12
 - extraordinary deeds through Paul 19:11

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Verb choices

- 'God' as subject of verbs
 - God raises 9x
 - God gives 6x
 - God does/makes 7x
 - God fulfilled 1x
 - promises to ancestors by raising Jesus 13:32-33

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Verb choices

- 'God' as subject of verbs
 - God raises 9x
 - God gives 6x
 - God does/makes 7x
 - God fulfilled 1x
 - God says 3x
 - God spoke to Abraham 7:2; to Moses 7:7
 - God **speaks** through Joel's prophecy 2:17

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Verb choices

- 'God' as subject of verbs
 - God raises 9x
 - God gives 6x
 - God does/makes 7x
 - God fulfilled 1x
 - God says 3x
 - God shows 1x
 - Peter not to regard Gentiles as 'common' 10:27

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Verb choices

- 'God' as subject of verbs
 - God chose 3x
 - our ancestors 13:17
 - Peter to be the one through whom Gentiles hear the gospel 15:7
 - 'chose by hand' Saul of Tarsus 22:14

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Verb choices

- 'God' as subject of verbs
 - God chose 3x
 - God calls 2x
 - people to himself 2:39
 - Paul and his team to preach in Macedonia 16:10

17

Verb choices

- 'God' as subject of verbs
 - God raises 9x
 - God gives 6x
 - God does/makes 7x
 - God fulfilled 1x
 - God says 3x
 - God shows 1x
 - God chose 3x
 - God calls 2x

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Verb choices

- I hit Muhammad Ali
- I was hit by Muhammad Ali

19

Verb choices

- I **hit** Muhammad Ali
 - **active** verb
- I **was hit** by Muhammad Ali
 - **passive** verb

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Verb choices

- divine passives
 - 1:9 'After he said these things, as they watched, **he was lifted up** and a cloud took him from their sight.'
 - 2:41 'So those who received his message were baptised and that day **there were added** about three thousand.'
 - 4:31 'The place in which they were sitting was shaken, and **they all were filled** with the Holy Spirit.'
 - 10:31 'Cornelius, **your prayer has been heard** and **your alms have been remembered** before God.'

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Verb choices

- 'it is necessary'
 - 1:16 'Brothers, **it was necessary** for the Scripture to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas'
 - 4:12 'there is no other name under heaven given among people by which **it is necessary** for us to be saved.'
 - 9:16 'For I will show him how much **it is necessary** for him to suffer for the sake of my name.'
 - 23:11 'The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so **it is necessary** for you to testify also in Rome."

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Believers' speeches

- 1:16-26 to Jewish believers
16 'the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus...20 For it is written in the Book of Psalms, "May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it" and "Let another take his office" ...24 And they prayed and said, 'You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen 25 to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.' 26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

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Believers' speeches

- 2:14-36 to Jewish not-yet-believers
 - vv 16-21 present events fulfil Joel 2:28-32
 - v 22 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know'
 - vv 23-24 'this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.'
 - vv 25-28, 31, 34-35 citing Scripture: Psalms 16, 110
 - v 36 'Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

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Believers' speeches

- 10:34-43 to godfearing Gentiles
 - v 34 'Truly I understand that God shows no bias'
 - v 36 'As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ'
 - v 38 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him'
 - v 40 'God raised him on the third day and made him to appear'
 - vv 41-42 'us who had been chosen by God as witnesses...he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify'
 - v 42 'he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead'
 - v 43 'To him all the prophets bear witness'

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Believers' speeches

- 17:22-31 to pagans
 - v 23 'What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.'
 - vv 24-25 'The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by humans, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all humankind life and breath and everything.'
 - vv 27-28 'that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being," as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring."'

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Believers' speeches

- 17:22-31 to pagans
 - v 29 'Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that **the divine being is like gold or silver or stone**'
 - vv 30-31 'now **he [God] commands all people everywhere to repent**, because **he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed**; and of this **he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.**'

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Believers' speeches

- 26:2-23 forensic defence by Paul to Agrippa
 - vv 6, 8 'And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in **the promise made by God** to our fathers... Why is it thought incredible by any of you that **God raises the dead?**'
 - v 15 And the Lord said, '**I am Jesus** whom you are persecuting.'
 - v 18 'so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan **to God**'
 - v 19 'I was not disobedient to the **heavenly** vision'
 - v 20 'that they should repent and turn **to God**'
 - v 22 'To this day I have had **the help that comes from God**'
 - vv 22-23 'saying nothing but **what the prophets and Moses said** would come to pass'

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Believers' speeches

- 1:16-26—to believers
- 2:14-36—to Jewish not-yet-believers
- 10:34-43—to godfearing Gentiles
- 17:22-31—to pagans
- 26:2-23—on trial
- **all centre and focus on God**

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Some implications

- 'Your thoughts concerning God are too human' (Luther to Erasmus)
- the danger of making it all depend on us
 - semi-deism
- the danger of being over-cerebral
 - Cardinal Suenens: 'Theology is too sacred to be disconnected from prayer'
- the need for real openness to God surprising us

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Some implications

- failing to talk about God
 - at an official level
 - among Christians when they meet
- by-products
 - tribalism
 - fitting into today's culture too comfortably
 - being deaf to what God may say through today's culture

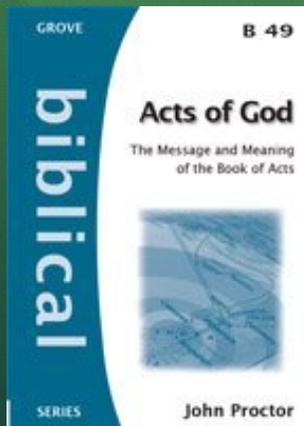
33

And finally...

'But the Word of the Lord
abides forever'

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A short book on Acts

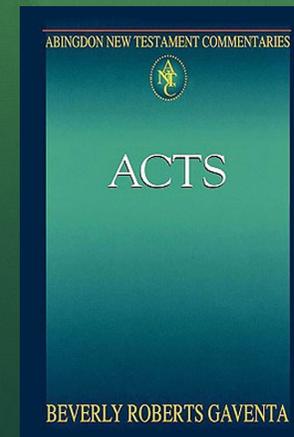


John Proctor,
*Acts of God: The Meaning and
Message of the Book of Acts,*
Grove Biblical series 49,
Cambridge: Grove, 2008.

grovebooks.co.uk

35

A medium commentary on Acts



Beverly R. Gaventa,
Acts,
Abingdon NT Commentaries,
Nashville: Abingdon, 2003.

36

A monograph on Acts

WORLD UPSIDE DOWN



C. Kavin Rowe,
*World Upside Down: Reading Acts
in the Graeco-Roman Age*,
Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 2009.

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You can get these slides from:

Acts and More

<http://stevewalton.info>

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