

# ‘The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’ (Acts 3:13)—Is That All? Learning about God from the Book of Acts

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## Introduction

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- James Dunn and Paul’s view of God: *Theology of Paul*, esp. 28-30
  - 1 Thess 1:9-10; Kirby Applegate, ‘God the Father as Giver of Life’

## The gateway to Acts, chs 1–2

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- 1:1 ἤρξατο ‘began’; note 9:43; 3:6; 1:8; 9:5; 1:5, 8:2:33
- The message is of God’s βασιλεία ‘kingdom’, esp. 1:3; 28:31 with 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23
- The ascension scene 1:9-11
- Prayer: orientation to God and his purposes 1:14, 24-25 [casting lots Prov 16:33]
- Scriptural interpretation 1:16
- Pentecost: narrative 2:1-13; speech 2:14-40; narrative 2:41-47
  - Sound ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ‘from heaven’ 2:2; cf. Luke 3:21-22
  - Phenomena echo Scripture and go beyond Scripture
    - Passive ὤφθησαν ‘appeared’ 2:3 implies divine action
  - Interpretation through two scriptural lenses
    - Joel 3:1-5a LXX (EVV 2:28-32a); cf. Num 11:29—it is now Jesus pouring out the Spirit 2:33
    - Pss 15:8-11a LXX (MT 16:8-11a); 109:1 LXX (MT 110:1)
  - Jesus as object of verbs and God as subject vv 22, 23, 24, 32, 36
  - Response to God 2:39; cf. LXX Exod 3:18; 5:3; Joel 3:5 (EVV 2:32)
    - those who are μακρὰν ‘far away’; cf. 22:21
- Community life 2:42-47—‘the Lord’ adding to the community v 47

## Three key passages

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- 3:1–4:31
  - narrative 3:1-10; speech 3:11-26; narrative 4:1-4, 5-22 (including speech by Peter, 4:8-12); prayer 4:23-31
  - healing in Jesus’ name 3:6 leads to praising God 3:8, 9
    - the healing is accomplished by the ancestral God 3:13 (cf. Exod 3:6, 15) through faith in Jesus’ name 3:16

- Peter's speech in the temple focuses on God's action and right and wrong ways to respond 3:13, 15, 18, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26
  - Scriptural interpretation: Jesus as prophet like Moses 3:22-23 (Deut 18:15, 18-19); crowd as υἱοί ('children/sons') of God's covenant with Abraham 3:25
  - Death of Jesus: God reversed the human verdict 4:2
- Peter's speech to the Sanhedrin 4:8-12
  - God raising Jesus 4:10, and man 'saved' (σέσωται) in the name of Jesus
  - Ps 118:22 (LXX 117:22) interpreted 4:11—Jesus now the source of salvation 4:12
  - Contrast the council's expediency 4:14-18 with Peter and John's focus on God 4:19-20
- Prayer 4:23-31
  - God as δέσποτα 'sovereign Lord' 4:24; cf. v 28; LXX Gen 15:2, 8; Jdt 9:12; Sir 36:1; 2 Macc 15:22; 3 Macc 2:2; Josephus, *Ant.* 2.1.12 §270; 20.4.2 §90; Philo, *Heir* 23
  - God as creator 4:24b
  - God (the Holy Spirit) as speaker of Scripture 4:25-26 = Ps 2:1-2 LXX; contrast Pss. Sol. 17:21-25
  - 'the Lord' = God as addressee of the prayer through Jesus 4:29-30; and signs and wonders done through Jesus 4:30
- 4:32–5:11
  - summary 4:32-35; positive example 4:36-37; negative example 5:1-11
  - 'great power' δυνάμει μεγάλη and 'great grace' χάρις...μεγάλη 4:33; cf. 1:8; 2:22; Luke 2:40
  - 4:34 = Deut 15:4 LXX; cf. Ezek 36:26-27
  - God in the story of Ananias and Sapphira 5:3, 4, 9
  - νοσφίζω 'pilfer, steal' 5:2, 3; LXX Josh 7:1; 2 Macc 4:32
  - Nadab and Abihu Lev 10:1-3; Korah Num 16, esp. vv 23-25; Uzzah 2 Sam 6:6-7; Judas Acts 1:16-29; Herod Acts 12:20-23
- 9:1-22
  - The exalted Jesus acting in ways characteristic of God in Jewish Scripture
  - κύριος 'Lord' 9:17 Jesus
    - 9:5 cf. biblical theophanic scenes
    - 9:5 persecuting Jesus; cf. God present in many places 7:2, 4, 9-10, 34, 30-34, 48
    - 9:10-11, 13, 15 Jesus appears to Ananias; ἰδοὺ ἐγώ, κύριε 'Here I am, Lord' echoes Gen 22:1 LXX
    - Saul's visual impairment 9:8; cf. Exod 4:11—irony in 9:17]
    - Carrying the Lord's name and suffering 9:15-16; cf. 22:16
  - Saul's proclamation of Jesus as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ 'the son of God' 9:20, viz. ὁ χριστός 'the Messiah' 9:22; cf. Ps 2:2, 7; Gal 1:16

## Conclusion

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- God portrayed in tune with the portrait in the Jewish Scriptures: 'this is that' hermeneutic 2:16 KJV
- God as sovereign ruler, creator, acting through Jesus' ministry, death, resurrection and exaltation, bringing salvation (closely linked to relationship with Jesus)
- God-talk functions to validate and vindicate Jesus, and to interpret and validate the development of the overall story of Acts
- Acts expands portrait of God to include Jesus and the Spirit
  - Jesus: worship, prayer, 'adding to the Lord Jesus' 5:14; 11:24
  - Spirit: holiness, universal gift to God's people, more personal understanding of the Spirit
- God in cosmic battle with Satan, with agents including Jesus, the Spirit, and angels

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