

# Characters of the Acts

**A Thirteen Lesson Bible Study  
by Jeff S. Smith**





# *Introduction*

The 28 chapters of the Acts of the Apostles provide a wide variety of compelling characters, both good and bad. The book is filled with some of the finest saints ever to live, coming into contact with some of the most evil enemies of the cross ever to trouble the church. Acts includes apostles, prophets and miracle workers. It has giants in faith, both men and women. It has sorcerers and governors. From these men and women, we can gain a great variety of instruction regarding our daily walk with Christ. In those outside the body of Christ, we seem to find wickedness personified; still, their error is instructive as well.

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# Lesson 1: *Luke and Theophilus*

*Both his gospel and the book of the Acts of the Apostles are addressed from Luke to Theophilus. Who are these men? The writer is revealed in a few passages while the recipient remains shrouded in mystery.*

1. What was Luke's profession (Colossians 4:14)?
2. With whom was he at this time?
3. How might his profession and scientific mindset affect the way that he records history?
4. What did Paul say of Luke to Timothy (Second Timothy 4:10-11)?
5. What does this imply about Luke's dedication to the apostle?
6. What does Paul call Luke when writing to Philemon (Philemon 23-24)?

7. From whence is Paul writing this letter? What does this prove in Luke's character (Second Timothy 1:8)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. Does the writer of this gospel account name himself (Luke 1:1-4)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. What purpose in writing this gospel does the writer give to the reader?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Does he claim to have been an eyewitness of the things he records?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. What sort of account does he intend to write for Theophilus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. What does the name "Theophilus" mean (Acts 1:1-3)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. What is the implication of the word "we" the author uses throughout Acts (16:11)?

## Lesson 2: *The Apostle Peter*

*We first meet Simon Peter in the gospel accounts as he is selected to be one of Jesus's twelve apostles. He distinguishes himself in that service as both loyal and headstrong, often saying and doing things without thinking them through, only to receive a rebuke from his Teacher. Following the seminal event in his discipleship, the betrayal at the cross, Peter matures and overcomes many of his foibles.*

1. What was Peter's name and occupation before meeting Jesus (Mark 1:16-18)? What was his father's name?
2. What occupation did Jesus have in mind for Peter and his brother? Explain.
3. Peter is presumed to be the first pope by Catholics who demand that their earthly head be unmarried. Does Peter fit this qualification (Mark 1:29-30)?
4. How did Peter reply to the question concerning Christ's identity (Matthew 16:13-19)? Do you think this took courage?
5. How did Peter respond when Jesus predicted his death (Matthew 16:21-23)?
6. What reason does Jesus give for Peter's shortsightedness and impetuous statement?
7. What did Jesus say to Peter when he fell asleep (Matthew 26:36-41)?

8. Do you ever find yourself in a situation in which you know the right thing to do, but are powerfully tempted to do wrong? Would the Lord's advice to Peter help?

9. What was wrong with Peter's assertion that he would never betray Jesus (Matthew 26:31-35, cf. First Corinthians 10:12)?

10. Where was Peter while Jesus was being tried by the high priest (Matthew 26:69-75)? How many times does this gospel record someone asking Peter to make the same basic confession of chapter 16?

11. What did Peter do when he heard the rooster crow? What does it appear this reaction signifies (James 4:9-10)?

12. In the midst of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, he utters the words recorded in Acts 2:36. What does this type of language show about Peter's courage and loyalty to Jesus?

13. How did he and John answer those who forbade them to preach (Acts 4:13-20)?

14. What role did Peter play in tearing down the wall of racial separation between Jew and Gentile (Acts 10:9-48)?

15. Why did Peter stop eating with his Gentile brethren in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-21)?

16. What similar lesson did James teach in James 2?



## Lesson 3: *The Apostle Paul*

*The conversion of Saul of Tarsus provides great evidence to the authenticity of Jesus's claim to be the Messiah. That such a persecutor of the church could be led to confess his target was right all along is strong proof that Jesus was indeed the son of God. As Saul of Tarsus was bitterly opposed to the spread of the gospel, so Paul of Jesus was just as intense in teaching the lost and glorifying that blessed name.*

1. On what occasion do we first meet Saul of Tarsus (Acts 7:58, 8:1)? Was he on the victim's side or not?
2. How did Saul occupy his time (Acts 9:1-2)?
3. What event caused Saul to consider being converted to Christ (Acts 9:3-9)?
4. Who came to see Saul in the city and preached to him (Acts 9:10). What does his reaction to the Lord's command to go to Saul tell us about the latter?
5. What amazing fact do we learn in Acts 9:22?
6. After Barnabas's help in securing the confidence of the other Christians, he and Paul became close companions and traveled together. However, the issue of taking John Mark along caused them to part (Acts 15:37-40). What did John Mark do to lose Paul's support (Acts 13:13)?
7. Do you think this decision is in keeping with the character of Paul? Was he justified?

8. Why was he able to say that he was innocent of the blood of all men (Acts 20:26-27)?
  
9. Why would it sometimes be a trial to declare the whole of God's word (Second Timothy 4:1-5)?
  
10. After persecuting Christ, how could Paul claim that he had lived in all good conscience (Acts 23:1)?
  
11. Is it possible then to live sincerely and conscientiously, but still be wrong and unapproved in the sight of God?
  
12. Consider Second Corinthians 4:8-9, 11:23-28 and 12:9-10. Did Christianity come at no expense to Saul of Tarsus? Was he discouraged and ready to quit because of his trials?
  
13. How many books of the New Testament did Paul write?
  
14. For whom did Paul call when near death in Second Timothy 4:11?
  
15. What passage is considered Paul's farewell speech?
  
16. What ornamentation did Paul anticipate?

## Lesson 4: *Philip, the Evangelist*

*Philip the evangelist bursts onto the New Testament scene as one of the seven men selected to minister to the Greek widows among the Jerusalem church. His greatest contribution to the gospel, however comes a short time later. The eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is devoted to his preaching work in Samaria and the deserted road between Jerusalem and Gaza. Philip is a quiet character, but his boldness and effectiveness in spreading the word of God speaks volumes.*

1. What group of Christians lodged a complaint in chapter 6 and what was it (Acts 6:1-6)? Did the apostles want to sacrifice teaching time to increase their labor in this physical matter?
2. What three qualities did the men chosen to serve have to possess?
3. Because of persecution, men like Philip were scattered from their homes in Jerusalem. Where did he end up (Acts 8:4-13)? What was the state of relations between Jews and Samaritans (John 4:9)?
4. Since Philip was likely a Greek, what difference would this make?
5. Did Philip possess the ability to perform miracles? What did he do?
6. Who was one of Philip's celebrity converts? What was his profession?
7. Verse 12 says that Philip's message focused on two things. What were they? What lesson does this teach us?

8. Did these people receive the Holy Spirit by Philip's hands or in being baptized by him (Acts 8:14-17)?
  
9. If Philip could not pass on such gifts, what group of men could (Acts 8:18-20)?
  
10. How did Philip respond when the Lord called him away from this successful work in a populated area to travel to a new, deserted location (Acts 8:26-40)?
  
11. Whom did Philip find on the road? What was he doing?
  
12. What message did Philip preach for him in response to his questions on Isaiah's prophecy?
  
13. How did Philip respond to the eunuch's question about being baptized?
  
14. Did Philip then sprinkle some water on his forehead and depart? Or, did he pour a pitcher of water over his head and leave?
  
15. What did Philip do?
  
16. What is the last word on Philip in Acts 8?
  
17. What is Philip doing when we find him again in Acts 21?

## Lesson 5: *Barnabas, Son of Encouragement*

*We first meet Joses, who was also called “Barnabas by the apostles” in Acts 4:36-37. His act of generosity and honesty is the precursor to the awful sin of Ananias and Sapphira. His stock rises in the annals of the New Testament as he bears out his nickname so well. Every church needs at least one Barnabas. If the elders were to give you a nickname, what would it be?*

1. What was Joses’s nickname and what does it mean (Acts 4:36-37)? Where did he get it?
2. What did Barnabas do with his relatively great wealth? Why?
3. How did most of the Jerusalem Christians react when Saul of Tarsus tried to join their number (Acts 9:26-28)? Did they have some justification?
4. What was the result of Barnabas’s vouching for him?
5. What character traits of Barnabas enabled him to contend for Paul this way?
6. What role should we play when one of our brethren is unfairly accused of something or becomes the subject of gossip and slander?
7. What occasioned Barnabas’s journey to Antioch (Acts 11:22-26)?
8. What did Barnabas encourage them to do?

9. Luke says three things about him in verse 24. What are they?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
10. What else resulted from his mission of edifying the saints there?
11. Why didn't they call Barnabas "Hermes" (Acts 14:8-18)?
12. How did he and Paul react when the men tried to sacrifice to them?
13. What character trait of Barnabas is revealed by this event?
14. What caused a rift between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-39)?
15. How should we treat brethren who disappoint us and then ask for another chance?
16. What could have caused Barnabas to fall into this error (Galatians 2:11-13)?
17. Why is this hypocrisy in the case of Barnabas?

## Lesson 6: *Stephen, the Martyr*

*Stephen is introduced to the reader in Acts 6 as the first of seven men selected to minister to the Greek widows among the Jerusalem church. In the very same chapter, he is accused of blasphemy by the Synagogue of the Freedmen and put on trial before the Jewish council. His defense is actually a testimony to the Messianic claims of Jesus, for which he too is martyred by the Hebrews. Stephen is a paragon of loyalty and the willingness to accept physical death over spiritual suicide.*

1. What service did men like Stephen provide the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-7)?

2. Is there still a need in the local church today for men like these seven to assist the weak with physical needs? Is this primarily or exclusively the job of the elders and preacher?

3. What did these Greek speaking Jews do when they could not dispute Stephen's scriptural arguments (Acts 6:8-15)?

4. Verse 10 says that these men could not "resist the wisdom and the Spirit" by which Stephen spoke, but in 7:51, Stephen accuses them of resisting the Holy Spirit just as their fathers did. How can these two statements be harmonized?

5. Stephen's defense is not of his own practice, necessarily, but of the claims made by Jesus whom he preached (Acts 7:1-50). He sets up a number of parallels between Old Testament characters and events and those of the Messianic age. Their focus is mainly the Hebrews' history of rejecting the leaders God sends them. Who is the first in Acts 7:9? How was he rejected?

6. Who was the second rejected leader (verse 35)?
  
7. Stephen makes two accusations about their sincerity in the search for truth in verse 51. What are they (Acts 7:51-53)? What do they mean?
  
8. In what ways do Christians sometimes fall into this trap today?
  
9. With what accusation does Stephen close his sermon in verse 53?
  
10. How might this apply to Christians?
  
11. Before their hearts were uncircumcised; now they are cut there (Acts 7:54-60). Does this mean they have been converted to the truth?
  
12. What statement by Stephen is the last straw?
  
13. What did they do with Stephen?
  
14. What were Stephen's last two statements on earth?
  
15. What do each of these statements prove about Stephen's character?



## Lesson 7: *Aquila and Priscilla*

*The Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla became close friends of the apostle Paul because they shared a trade and later, a faith. This couple is a great example of people coming to God and dedicating themselves fully to his service.*

1. Why had Aquila and Priscilla left Rome for Corinth (Acts 18:1-4)?
2. Why did Paul decide to stay with them?
3. Is there any indication here that they were Christians before meeting Paul?
4. What are some things that we might have in common with people that could lead us to share also our faith with them?
5. For what reason did the couple reprove Apollos (Acts 18:24-26)?
6. In what way did they reprove him?
7. Why do you suppose they did not rebuke him harshly in the presence of everyone?

8. Should Aquila and Priscilla just have looked the other way and allowed Apollos to teach his error at will? Why, or why not?
  
9. Why was the situation with Paul and Peter in Galatians 2:11-14 different?
  
10. What would the couple be forced to do if Apollos refused to correct himself?
  
11. How does Paul describe Aquila and Priscilla now (Romans 16:3-4)?
  
12. What had they done on his behalf? What trait does this prove in them which we should all imitate?
  
13. According to Paul, what was going on in their house?
  
14. Is it scriptural to have a church assemble outside of a “church building” (First Corinthians 16:19)?
  
15. If we move to an area with no sound church, why should we not just meet with any religious group that happens to be close?

## Lesson 8: *Ananias and Sapphira*

*Ananias and Sapphira are introduced to the reader in Acts 5, but they quickly gain only posthumous notoriety. The story of their demise is told in contrast to the sincere generosity of Barnabas that closes the previous chapter. While their stay on the Bible stage is brief, it is nonetheless memorable and instructive.*

1. When famine struck the churches of Judea in the first century, how did the brethren deal with it (Acts 4:32-37)?
2. What type of character was necessary for the well-to-do to take this action?
3. What type of character was necessary for the poor to accept their help?
4. Was Barnabas among the needy or the well-off?
5. What possession did Ananias and his wife Sapphira sell (Acts 5:1-11)?
6. What did they do with the proceeds?
7. Their sin is not particularly explicit in the text, but is implied by Peter's rebuke. What was their lie to man and God?
8. Was it permissible for them to give only a portion of their proceeds?

9. What character flaws appear in these two who pretended to do more than they really did?

10. It is evident these two were doing their charity with the purpose of impressing men. Consider Matthew 6:1-4: what one word would describe Ananias and Sapphira?

11. How might Christians fall into this trap today?

12. According to First Corinthians 16:2, what should be the first guideline for deciding what amount we will give to the church?

13. According to Second Corinthians 9:7, what attitudes should also influence our giving to the collection?

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

14. What universal law governs giving and blessing (Second Corinthians 9:6)?

15. What happened to Ananias when Peter was done talking to him? Why?

16. What did Sapphira do when Peter asked if the land sold for the amount her husband had said? What happened to her?

## Lesson 9: *Apollos*

*Apollos arrives on the Bible scene in Acts 18:24 and immediately becomes entrenched in a potential controversy. How he comports himself when rebuked at the very root of faith is instructive to any Christian or soul that must likewise face the rebuke of a dearly held doctrine. His name means literally, “destroyer,” but it is only iniquity and error that he seeks to annihilate.*

1. There is a dichotomy (dual nature) to Apollos, involving his birthplace and hereditary religion (Acts 18:24). Explain this dual nature and its importance in the first century.
2. What two commendations does Luke give Apollos? How do these traits compare with the apostle Paul (First Corinthians 2:1-4, Second Corinthians 10:10)?
3. How does the narrator describe his zeal for teaching (Acts 18:25)?
4. Use an English dictionary to define the word “fervent.”
5. Use a concordance to find six other places in the New Testament where the words “fervent” or “fervently” are used. Exclude the references in Second Peter. Summarize each of them.

6. Jesus accuses at least three of the churches in Asia Minor of losing their fervor. How does he phrase the accusation against each of these:
7. With what baptism was Apollos familiar (Acts 18:25-26)? Was this baptism still in effect as he taught?
8. Although the passage does not explicitly relate his reaction to the reproof of Aquila and Priscilla, what is the implication?
9. Consider that Apollos was a man unmatched in eloquence, knowledgeable about the scriptures and a bold and familiar speaker in the synagogue of Ephesus. What type of character must he have possessed to accept correction so willingly?
10. How did Apollos handle his fellow Jews who had rejected Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 18:27-28)?
11. Is it right to contend earnestly with our friends who are not Christians about the faith? Or should we go along to get along and pretend that we do not object to error and unfaithfulness?
12. The inevitable downside of eloquence and wisdom comes back to haunt Apollos (First Corinthians 1:12, 3:4). What have the people there done with his name?

## Lesson 10: *Timothy*

*We meet Timothy in the city of Lystra as Paul begins his second missionary journey. From the first, we are impressed with both the young man and his mother and grandmother. Paul was just as impressed and thus began a relationship that would last a lifetime: the older Paul and his apprentice, the younger Timothy.*

1. Was Timothy already a Christian when Paul arrived in his hometown (Acts 16:1-5)?
2. What were the religious leanings of his mother and father?
3. What was Timothy's reputation in that region?
4. What sort of things would give a young man in particular a good reputation?
5. What did Paul do to Timothy before taking him along? Why?
6. Considering all the ramifications of this operation, what does Timothy's submission show about him (cf. Gen. 34:22-25)?
7. With what words does Paul refer to Timothy in Romans 16:21 and First Corinthians 16?
8. (Second Timothy 1:3-7) What was it about Timothy that Paul enjoyed remembering when they were separated? How had he gained this quality?

9. Sometimes the children of Christians are baptized themselves just to please or follow their parents. Does Paul imply this might be the case with Timothy?

10. Paul exhorts Timothy to use the miraculous gift that he had received. Although we do not have miraculous abilities these days, we all have gifts that we need to stir up and use. What are some of the gifts that your brethren possess in this church?

11. Some have suggested that Timothy may have had a problem with timidity and this seems to be suggested in a number of passages (First Corinthians 16:10-11, First Timothy 4:12). Instead of timidity, what should mark our discipleship (Second Timothy 1:7)?

12. We learn something great about Timothy from Paul's letter to the Philippians (Philippians 2:19-23). List the commendations the writer gives Timothy in these five verses:

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13. What was Timothy's mission in Thessalonica (First Thessalonians 3:1-3)?

14. What type of person does it take to do this kind of work?



# Lesson 11: *The Bereans*

*To fully understand the character of the residents of the city of Berea, one must first consider the people in Thessalonica, for the Holy Spirit uses these two populations in comparison in Acts 17. The Bereans are noted for their noble character; in that they gladly received the gospel and verified it against the scriptures.*

1. Where did the Jews gather in the city of Thessalonica? What is that (Acts 17:1-9)?
2. Why would Paul choose to go there in particular?
3. What was the general composition of the converts made at Thessalonica?
4. Verse 5 reveals the motivation for the Jews' rejection of the gospel in Thessalonica. What characteristic of theirs caused them to respond so violently?
5. Who was Jason?
6. What is horribly ironic about the Jews' statement concerning kings to the city rulers in verse 7?

7. This establishes the reception the gospel received in Thessalonica, which Luke will contrast with Berea. In general, how was the truth received in Thessalonica?

8. Where did Paul and Silas go when they reached Berea (Acts 17:10-15)?

9. Is this foolish after what happened in Thessalonica?

10. What does Luke say about the minds of the Bereans?

11. What does he offer in verse 11 as evidence that this is so?

12. Does this imply that they simply believed everything Paul and Silas told them without question?

13. Summarize in your own words the example we get from the Bereans' fair-minded character.

## Lesson 12: *The Jewish Rulers*

*The Jewish rulers were hardly satisfied, personally or effectively, with the crucifixion of Jesus. The fact of his resurrection and the dedication of his disciples continued to give them fits. Rejecting truth, they went about trying to stamp out the gospel wherever they found the flames.*

1. What were the priests, the temple captain and the Sadducees upset about (Acts 4:1-22)?
2. When all the rulers and the others had the apostles at a hearing, what question did they ask?
3. What caused the rulers to marvel at Peter's speech?
4. Did they doubt that a miracle had been done by the apostle's hands?
5. Why then did they continue to reject their message?
6. What accusation did the high priest make against the apostles (Acts 5:17-42)?

7. Were the Jewish rulers somewhat responsible for Christ's death (Matthew 26:59-61, 27:18)?
  
8. What plot did these high and noble men of Israel decide to undertake with the apostles?
  
9. What does this show in their character and their courage?
  
10. Which Pharisee tempers their plans? How?
  
11. How did the rulers send the apostles away?
  
12. How did they come to accuse Stephen (Acts 6:8-15)?
  
13. What was their fault (Acts 7:51-53)?
  
14. Who was one of the toughest persecutors employed by the Jewish council (Acts 8:1-3)?

# Lesson 13: *The Roman Rulers*

*Paul found himself in the hands of the Roman rulers toward the end of Luke's history. He made his case before two governors and a lesser king, each time proclaiming Christ in his defense. The reactions of these three men reveal the flaws in their characters and also point out what keeps many people from becoming Christians in any age.*

1. Why was Paul in custody at this time (Acts 23:23-35)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. When the Jews' prosecutor, Tertullus, gave his opening statement, he accused Paul of many things. What were they (Acts 24:1-9)?
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3. After hearing Paul's defense, Felix decided to put off a decision (Acts 24:22-27). What character flaw does he show by this?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What parts of Paul's sermon seemed to make Felix afraid?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. How do these very themes turn many away from the gospel today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Be careful when politics and money collide. What did Felix hope to gain from Paul more than teaching? Why did he leave him incarcerated when he left office?

7. Did politics motivate the new governor, Festus (Acts 25:1-12)?
  
8. Who came to visit Festus in Caesarea (Acts 25:13-27)?
  
  
  
  
  
9. Was Agrippa completely ignorant of Jewish prophecy and customs (Acts 26:1-3)?
  
  
  
  
  
10. How does Paul ask Agrippa to listen to him? What would this involve?
  
  
  
  
  
11. Did Festus listen patiently? How did he interrupt Paul (Acts 26:24-32)?
  
  
  
  
  
12. Did Paul take the bait and shout back at Festus? How did he respond?
  
  
  
  
  
13. What question did Paul ask Agrippa?
  
  
  
  
  
14. What is the implication from the indication that Agrippa did believe the prophets?
  
  
  
  
  
15. How does Agrippa respond to Paul's question? Was his belief enough to make him a Christian then?



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