

Note

Introduction to Acts – Part 1 of 1

Acts – Part 1 of 1

Summary

Introduction to Acts - Part 1 of 12

Written by John, Acts is an accurate, factual brief that gives an overview of Christianity. It is a bridge between the Gospels and the epistles, and presents the principles of the model church. In a nutshell, Acts covers the acts of God through the Holy Spirit acting in men, leading people to Jesus Christ.

From Acts, we see three principles for the model church: It is about the people, not the building; it is a universal priesthood, where everyone serves; and there are no denominations in God’s church, instead His people are a family. Acts also offers a manual for missionaries.

Acts - Part 1 of 110

The book of Acts traces the history and growth of the church. The Holy Spirit empowers the disciples to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and to the rest of the world. Acts shows God intends His message of hope and salvation to be for both the Jews and the Gentiles. Acts also records Apostle Paul’s 3 missionary journeys, his trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea and his journey to Rome. Despite opposition and persecution, God’s plan to advance the gospel continues to grow and transform the lives of the disciples.

Transcript

Introduction to Acts – Part 1 of 1

Today we look at the book of Acts of the Apostles.

When I taught Luke, I told you that actually Luke and Acts were really one book, two volumes, both written by Luke. Now in Acts chapter 1, we see how this is confirmed.

Acts chapter 1:1-3 ESV

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Isn't this interesting? It says, in the first book, that's Luke, O Theophilus, same guy who was addressed in Luke. In Luke, he was called "most excellent Theophilus". Now, this is kind of unusual. That kind of title is usually given to very respected people, and even today it's given to judges – "Your Honor", in the court. And possibly, Theophilus was a judge and possibly, Luke was writing a brief to give to the judge so that he would have a background of what was going on. Now the name Theophilus - Theo is the word "God" (theology), and "Philus" this is the word from "filial" – love. So he is God-lover or God-friend, Mr. God-friend. So actually Luke may be writing the book of Luke and Acts as a factual brief to a judge who had no idea about Christianity. And Luke was trying to give this judge a good background in the book of Luke, how the faith started through Jesus Christ. And then in the book of Acts, how Paul got involved in this faith and what Paul did to promote this faith. So it's possible that the original purpose of Luke - Acts, these two books, was written for one original purpose, which was to provide Paul a fighting chance at his coming trial in Rome. But of course, God can inspire Luke to write something very factual because when you are to write a brief for a judge, you have to be very accurate. Lawyers always have to be very precise and accurate. Luke was just the right guy to do that as he was trained as a physician. In those days, physicians didn't have a lot of, what we call, clinical aids. They had to use their eyes to observe, then, they had to get history from the patients, to

interview and then to record it down very clearly. So Luke was just the right guy to write a legal brief, for the Apostle Paul. So just by the word, “most excellent Theophilus”, we can sort of guess that this could be a possible reason why the book of Luke and Acts were written.

Now another good suggestion that it is a legal brief is the way this book ends. The book of Acts ends in a very strange way. It ends with Paul in prison, awaiting a trial. Now, if this is about the history of Christianity, then you would want to know how Paul died probably or if it's the history of Paul, you would want to know what happened and how he died. Not a word about it. It's just about him in prison, and it ends there. So it looks like he was waiting for a trial. Furthermore, if this is the history of Christianity, as many people would say, how Christianity spreads, Paul doesn't say anything about the church in Rome. Though there was a church in Rome but not a word was mentioned about the church in Rome. Now, if you think this is the history of Christianity, wouldn't you want to tell us today what the church was like in the capital of the world? But not a word about it. In fact, you see in the whole book of Acts and even in the book of Luke, Luke keeps emphasizing the fact that the faith was not rejected by the Romans, it was rejected by the Jews. You see in the book of Luke, it was recorded three times that Pilate said, “I find no sin on Him, he is innocent”. Three times, Pilate, the Roman governor said Jesus was innocent. And then even when he records about Paul, he says that as far as the governmental Roman authority was concerned, Felix, Festus said if Paul had not appealed to go to Caesar, he would have been freed already. So you see that Luke is suggesting that actually, Paul was going to trial not because he was guilty, but because of Jewish opposition. In fact, it's mentioned very clearly in Acts 21:39 that Paul was a Roman citizen. So I hope this gives you an idea that this could be the reason why this was written and why it's very precise.

More importantly for us today, it acts, primarily, as a bridge between the gospels and the epistles. Now in the gospels, they were not really a church yet, they were not really believers yet. How could they? They didn't even know that Christ is going to die and rise again. So it was laying the foundation for their faith, that they will see Christ die for their sins and rise from the dead. That's what the purpose of the gospels were. But if you don't have the book of Acts; you have just the gospels and then the epistles, you'll find the epistles are already about people who are already believers. So in gospels, they were not yet believers. In the epistles, they were already believers. And in the epistles, there were letters written to churches with believers in them. Now the question is, how did people become

believers? That's where the book of Acts comes in. The foundation was laid in the gospels, and then the building came up very fast, churches were sprouting up everywhere and epistles were written to them. So the book of Acts serves as a bridge. It's very important to understand how a person gets saved - when he knows Christ died and rose again. So you see that in the book of Acts they were already saved. So we see how a person gets saved, we call it the conversion experience. He needs first to repent. Admit that he's a sinner, and that Jesus died for his sins, then he needs to be baptized. And after he's baptized, he needs the power of the Holy Spirit to live out his Christian life. Now, if you don't have the book of Acts, you wouldn't know this because in the epistles, they were already believers. So the whole process which you and I know, is because of the book of Acts.

Secondly, you also wouldn't know Paul, who is Paul? He's not found in the gospels. And Paul wrote most of the epistles, so who is this writer of the epistles? If we don't have the book of Acts, you say, "Why should I even read this letter from Paul to the Philippian church and the Ephesian church? Who is he?" In the book of Acts, we understand that he is that faithful apostle, the 13th apostle, so to speak, that God used to write most of the epistles.

Furthermore, if we don't have the book of Acts, you don't know what a model church would look like. In fact, when Paul wrote the epistles, he was writing basically to address the problems in the churches. There was a model given in the book of Acts. And of course, when people try to build, they don't exactly follow the model and they go out of hand. And then the epistles were written to say, "Hey, why are you doing this? Hey, why do you allow believers to do that?" So in the book of Acts, you see the model church. That's very important, because today, we have all kinds of versions of churches built on their denominational blueprint or their traditional blueprint. And if you ask them, "Why do you do this?" "Well, that's the way we've been doing it, or that's our denomination practice." That's their answer. But what should be our model? In the book of Acts, you do see the principles of a model church. What do we base our faith on? The Word of God. And in the Word of God, in the book of Acts, we see it. You say, "What do you mean? What do you mean by a model church?"

Number 1 - there was no big deal about a building in the book of Acts, none at all. They went everywhere, preach, and fellowships came up, and communities came up, or we can call them Christian fellowships, families, communities, ecclesia, whatever you want to call them. And they popped

up, but there was never a focus about a building. They knew that they were the temple of God, not the building. So if we understand from the book of Acts, that when we have to build our church, we should not focus on building a geographical site or architectural building.

Number 2 - we don't see in the book of Acts, a paid professional clergy - a class of priest. We see every believer serving. So in the book of Acts, there was a universal priesthood of all believers exercising their spiritual gifts in their community. We see the church not as an organization, but more as a family. It's quite clear that we see everyone serving, there were no spectators in the church.

Number 3 - there was no order of service. I don't see an order of service which is so important today. If there was a lot of persecution, I guess they didn't sing a lot because it's not safe. If they were not terribly educated, they probably knew the scripture by listening a little bit here and there, an epistle here and there. And then they ministered to one another. One another's. So we see here there was obviously no denomination. In every church, there were elders. And basically, they were a family. Whatever doctrines they learnt from the word, they believed that, they prayed a lot together, they encouraged one another, disciplined one another. They were not really highly educated, but they were filled with the Holy Spirit, serving God. So that's the model church. If you don't have the book of Acts, you have to make your own models. Today, there are so many denominations, each one thinking they are right, but if we all went back to the book of Acts, and we built our church with that model, I don't think we'll have over 40,000 denominations fighting one another. I don't think there will be so many weak churches struggling to keep their buildings, to keep their training schools for their priests, or their clergy. These are man-made problems.

Number 4 - it's a missionary manual. It's the only missionary manual we have. Not only how to build a church, but how that church sends out people. And we see here the missionary model is very clear. The apostles were the people who were the "sent ones". People sent out. And they generally went to the cities. And then, because that city could impact the surrounding area, what did they do? They basically preached the gospel. And then after they preached the gospel, they planted churches, appointed elders, and then they left. They left the locals to do the job. Now, today we don't really see that missionary model. We see foreigners going in, and pastoring the church forever, and bringing a very foreign model into the church. And so, in countries that are totally Asian, we have totally European- or American-

style worship. It's because the foreigners are still there. They are there forever. They think the natives are too dumb to run the place. But if you see the missionary model in the book of Acts, very soon they left. The locals became elders in a year, the word "elders" in the book of Acts is not somebody who's got trained in Bible school, they were just more mature than the others or spiritually "elder" than the others.

So, we see here in the book of Acts, these very important things:

-the bridge between the gospel and the epistles.

-What is a conversion experience? Is it just get born into a church and you become a believer? A lot of Christians believe that. But the conversion experience in the book of Acts is personal. You, personally have to repent, you, personally have to believe, you, personally get baptized, not infant baptism. So, if we don't have that, then we understand the mess we're in now. Obviously, you build God's house in your own way, you expect God to bless you, you're kind of strange, right?

-the missionary model. No wonder the world never really understood. You get a foreigner - one guy goes in and spends 40 years in the same church, planting a foreign plant. I always say that if you plant an apple tree in a tropical country, you don't get a lot of fruit. And you spend all your life maintaining the tree to get two or three apples, sour apples a year.

So basically that's what the book of Acts is for. It may be written as a defense brief, but it does have a very important purpose for you and me today.

Now, can we take everything in the book of Acts as our practice today? Of course not. There are some things in the book of Acts we would call not normal. You can use the word "abnormal" but that sounds a bit funny. For example, Paul's conversion experience: he's walking to Damascus, a light shines so brightly that he gets blinded, he falls to the ground, he hears a voice from heaven. Do you expect that? I don't expect that. It's one-off, it's never repeated. So it's abnormal. Ananias: he wants to donate something to God, but he wants to keep some for himself, he's not honest and he gets struck dead; his wife comes three hours later, does exactly the same thing and she's struck dead. Do you think that's going to happen now at church? I don't think so. These are one-offs.

How do you know whether something in the book of Acts is normal for today's time? Or it's just a one-off event at the beginning or inauguration of the New Testament Church? For me, it's quite simple. If it only happened

once, like Paul's conversion, and Ananias and Sapphira's lie, then I would say, it's probably not for us. If it happened to Paul, then to Epaphroditus and then it happened to Luke, then I would say, "Oh, maybe that's for all of us". It happened once, that's it. So it's probably not for us. That's the way I would look at it. But if it's repeated, then I would say, "Oh, maybe this is something we have to say it can happen and may need to happen again". For example, the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost once, Acts chapter 2. In Acts chapter 10, the Holy Spirit came down in Cornelius' house. It's a huge revival. Gentiles getting saved; a whole house load of Gentiles, a soldier's house getting saved and then later, Acts 19 again. I say, "Hmm, this type of revival, I better don't say it can never happen again". It can, because it's not a one-off event, so I have to be a bit careful.

Another way I look at it: Is this confirmed elsewhere in the scriptures? I say the model church has no building. In the book of Acts, I don't see any building, wherever they went, they started a fellowship, wherever they were gathered. They had the doctrines, they prayed for one another, they broke bread, they had life on life ministry, they had a family of Christians, I mean, a fellowship of believers. You mean, "In the book of Acts, that's the model? That's the model?" Yes, it's confirmed in the epistles. So many times, they repeated-the church, the ecclesia in the house of such and such, ecclesia in the house of such and such, so it's confirmed. So I can say that the model Acts church is not "building-centric"; buildings are not critical to its existence at all.

So I hope this helps us to understand how to read the book of Acts. Some parts of it, it's one-off because it's a new event. It's a start, it's like the opening ceremony of something. You can't have an opening ceremony everyday. So some things are unique for the book of Acts because it is a unique time. But some things are meant to be for our time. How do you know? It's repeated, or it's confirmed in other parts of the Bible.

Now this book is called Acts of the Apostles. That's kind of quite a horrendous title to me. There were 12 apostles, but the only apostle of the original 12 who is really featured in the book of Acts, is Peter. Peter takes up the first part, first one-third or so of the book of Acts and the other 11 apostles are hardly even mentioned. So how can this be the Acts of the Apostles? There were 12 of them, only one is featured and he is only featured in the first one-third. Then in the later part, it's Paul, the so-called 13th apostle. I use the word "later", he came in later, he was not an original

apostle. So how can this be the Acts of the Apostles? It just doesn't make sense to me. Now, if you have to look at who is the real personality featured in this book, some people will say Paul is the main person. That's not true. If you use a concordance, you will see that God is featured about a 100 times in this book. The Holy Spirit, if you use a concordance, about 70 times. And then Jesus Christ, it's about 40 times. So really, who is this book about? It's about God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ. It's not Acts of the Apostles. So a better title would be Acts of God through the Holy Spirit, acting in human apostles, leading men to Jesus Christ. Now that's a long title of course. But certainly, Acts of the Apostles is not an appropriate title. Acts of God, if you want it to be short. You want it to be longer? Acts of God through the Holy Spirit. You want it even longer? Acts of God through the Holy Spirit, acting in men, apostles. You want it much longer? Acts of God through the Holy Spirit, acting in men, leading people to Jesus Christ. That's probably the real title of this book. So, if you understand this, then you get your bearings right, as you read this book of Acts.

This is an introduction to the book of Acts. I think we need to settle the word 'apostle' because today some people claim to be an apostle, and others get very troubled by it, because they don't understand the word "apostle". The word "apostle" simply means "someone sent out", or "the sent one", the person sent. That's all it means.

Now there are, maybe, about five different types of apostles. We have to be careful, because if we just said, "He's an apostle", he's a sent one, that's all it means.

-There is a chief apostle, if I can use that term, that's Jesus Christ; He was sent from Heaven to this Earth. Sent, that's really sent. Sent from Heaven to Earth. To send somebody obviously you got to go from one place to another. That's a sent one, Jesus, the chief apostle.

-Then they are the 12 apostles, the original apostles. We can call them the 12 apostles who were with Jesus. One fell away, and then Matthias replaced him.

-Then there's a 13th -that's Paul. What kind of apostle was he? He was a "sent one". He was a very special "sent one", as you will see the book of Acts, and he wrote lots of Scripture, the epistles. So none of us can be the chief apostle obviously, you can't be one of the 12 obviously, you can't be writing inspired scripture like Paul obviously. So they were three types of apostles.

-the fourth type of apostle - basically someone sent from one place to another to plant the church. Paul was one, Barnabas was one, they were

church planters. They were sent out to be church planters. There were plenty of such. You want to use the word “apostle”? It confuses people because we don't know Greek. So when we say “apostle” we think, “Oh, the 12”. So I don't use that word. He's just sent out, he is a missionary, sent out on a mission. So that's probably the fourth type, a church planter. Quite a typical, traditional way to plant a church in a place where there is no church.

-the fifth type - anyone sent to serve. We have someone called Epaphroditus. If you read about Epaphroditus, he never planted a church, he was sent to Rome to be Paul's, sort of, helper. Paul was getting old, he was in prison, he couldn't do a lot of things. He needed someone, and the church sent Epaphroditus to help Paul. There are (such) people, and I'm basically an Epaphroditus; I am sent out to help other pastors in other countries. Do I call myself an apostle? I don't think that helps because it confuses people. When people think of the word “apostle”, there are certain words that have definitions in our mind, may not be the official definition, but certain words. And words have a certain current meaning. And so when we say we are an apostle, it's like, “Oh really?” And you have to spend time explaining. When people ask, “What do you do?” I say, “I'm sent out to help people in the field. I'm sent out to help men who are serving God.” That's all I am, I'm an Epaphroditus, I'm just a lowly helper of servants of God. But the moment I say, “I'm an apostle”, “Wah, PC (Paul Choo) thinks he's a big deal. He think he's Peter, James or John.” No, no, no! So technically speaking, if I say, “I'm an apostle”, I'm not wrong, but emotionally, it can cause a lot of unnecessary troubling of people's minds. Why do that? That's totally unnecessary.

I hope this little introduction helps you to see some things as we move into the book of Acts. And when we get into the book Acts, you'll see some amazing things about this wonderful God.

Acts – Part 1 of 1

The Book of Acts is about how the faith is being spread to the world. Up to that time, God had revealed himself primarily to the Jews.

In the beginning of the Book of Acts, it is basically a Jewish church. However, at the end of the book, it becomes an international church. It makes sense as God is the God of the universe.

God has chosen Israel to be his missionary. However, they had failed badly in their chosen mission. Hence, they were sidelined for a while. God then chooses another group of people, “The Church” to be His missionary, to bring across His message i.e. “To invite the world to know Him through Jesus Christ”.

It is quite a normal process for the past 2000 years to spread the faith in which everybody tries to share the gospel with somebody. However, we need to understand that this was not the norm in the past. In the past, every group of people had their own local god. They had gods of their own races in their local communities or a god of a particular tribe or tiny group of people. Everybody had his own god, and the vast majority, 99.999% of people were born into that religion, and they died in that religion. This meant nobody bothered to spread the gospel. To them, this is my god and that is your god. If you are happy with your own god, please don't come and disturb me. I don't want to tell you about my god, neither should you tell me about your god. You do your own thing and I do my own thing!

But in the Book of Acts, we are told to bring the good news to the world. It is something that will cause a lot of clashes as we will see in the Book of Acts. It is like breaking the ways people have been doing forever.

The Book of Acts can be divided into five parts:

Chapter 1 - Introduction;

Chapter 2 to 7 - The action as it happened in Jerusalem

Chapter 8 to 12 - The action as it happened in Judea and Samaria (we called the Samaritans half-Jews compared to the Jews in Jerusalem);

Chapter 13 to 20 - The missionary journeys where Paul reached out to the Gentiles in their territories;

Chapter 21 to 28 - Paul's arrest where he was brought to Rome and the spread of the gospel to the world when Rome was then the center of the world.

Chapter 1:1-3 ESV

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day that when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

So here the author is connecting with his earlier book of Luke where the last part connects to this part of Acts where Jesus showed himself to his apostles and his people for 40 days, after which he went up to heaven.

v4

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

The beginning of the book tells us we are moving into a whole new phase of God's work. The New Testament church can be called “The age of the Holy Spirit” because every believer is in-dwelt with the Holy Spirit, the fellowship and empowering of the Holy Spirit is in every believer. We are now living in the age of the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament told us that only a few selected people had the Holy Spirit and had the Holy Spirit only for a temporary period. Example, when God wanted them to do something, he gave Samson a certain amount of strength to push down the pillars. And during that time, Samson was not using his own strength but rather the power of the Holy Spirit. After pushing down the pillars, he was a weak man again. Here we see the key thing about the New Testament age is that we have the Holy Spirit. As New Testament believers, I hope you are excited by this fact- that what the prophets had were little bits and pieces, but you are potentially much more effective and blessed than them.

But very few Christians get excited about this fact. We live in this amazing age when God, through His Spirit lives in us. This is a mind boggling fact!

v9-12

And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you

saw him go into heaven.” Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away.

Jesus ascended back to the right hand of God to be with his Father, the rightful place where he always was since eternity. He was the apostle sent to us by God as the chief apostle and now He goes back to reign with God. One day, He will come back again to reign on this earth.

I want you to know that the two angels said to them, “He will come back in the same way....to Mount of Olives”. So, there will be a bodily return where He will come in body. We can then anticipate that his feet will eventually land again in the Mount of Olives.

Chapter 2 to 7 is about the action in Jerusalem.

Chapter 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly that came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

I want you to know that as they were there, fire came on their heads and each person had fire resting on him. What is the significance of this fire?

Now this reminds us of the time when God told Moses to build a tabernacle, and that is where God would come. When Moses had built the tabernacle, on the day of inauguration, a pillar of fire came down on that tabernacle, signifying God was dwelling here in the tabernacle.

Same situation with Solomon's temple when it was inaugurated, a fire came down on Solomon's temple. What does this tell us? God's presence was there!

So what is God telling all these men on the day of Pentecost? "I am no longer in the building, I'm in you, and you are the temple of God." This inauguration thousands of years ago showing God was in that tabernacle, then it was in Jerusalem, is now in you.

v5-8

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?"

Then it goes on to list the 15 different languages. It says they were from every nation. In the Old Testament books like Ezekiel etc, it says that one day God would build a temple and all of Israel would then come together. These are Jews coming from everywhere, a re-gathering. It is a kind of initial fulfilling of the prophecies as we have been studying, that the prophets had prophesied that one day Israel would be re-gathered.

Though they all spoke different languages and they had been scattered for hundreds of years, now they could understand each other. It is almost like a reversal of the Tower of Babel where nobody understood each other and they scattered. They were Galileans, they were just simple people like farmers and fishermen, now they could speak and understand different languages.

So here we see a little hint of the great day when God will bring back Israel and we would all be able to communicate with each other. There will no longer be the Tower of Babel which we are now still living in with our biggest problem where we can't communicate with each other.

Acts Chapter 2:42-47

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

So what is the church? What is the ecclesia? It's a family and not an organization. They just came together to help one another, took care of each other just like a family. Not a hierarchical type of structure, rather just having fellowship, breaking bread, eating together and sharing with one another. Basically we see "the seed" of what is a real model Acts Church.

Chapter 3 to 5, we see a clash. What is this clash that we see? Two temples were clashing! The apostles were actually the temple of the Holy Ghost. They had the Holy Spirit in them and they were doing amazing things. Peter healed a lame man and he did it in the temple. The old guys i.e. the priests who managed the temples were chastising them for what they were doing.

Everybody gathered around Peter because he was the new temple and they were neglecting the old temple i.e. that building with the old priest! They clashed because the old temple had become just a relic and the new temple was the people who were in-dwelt by God. Let us remember that the temple is a place where God dwells and hence we are the temple of

God. The old temple became archaic and irrelevant and the priests could not accept it. Hence they arrested Peter, charged him and put all kinds of restrictions on him.

In Chapter 6, God raised a guy called Stephen who stood up and preached against the priests saying that they reject the prophets and reject God. What did they do to Stephen? They stoned him and he became a martyr of the faith. After Stephen was martyred, the apostles moved on to the next phase.

Acts Chapter 8 to 12: The apostles moved out of Jerusalem.

So far, Acts Chapter 2 to 7, all the action was centred in Jerusalem and in the temple where the apostles always gathered. But there was a clash between the old temple and the new temple.

I want to emphasize to you - Don't forget that you are the temple of God! With the Covid virus happening right now, some people may say that they can't go to church. However, we must remember that we are the temple of God.

Acts Chapter 8:1

And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

We are now witnessing a scattering because of the persecution, they couldn't stay on in Jerusalem. They were not wanted in the temple anymore as the "new temple" is not wanted in the old temple. What happened when they're scattered?

v4. Now those who are scattered went about preaching the word.

This is wonderful as God allows them to be scattered. God sometimes allows a pandemic so that all of us don't gather in one place. Same effect.

While the followers were scattered, what did they do? In the past, they would go out to the temple and listen to the Word. Now, they would go out and preach the word. Sometimes, God has to do certain things to get us out of our comfort zones!

v5-8

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.

And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city.

What happened then? Samaritans were saved because Philip was kicked out of Jerusalem. We see that Philip had led the Samaritans to Christ, and then.....

Chapter 8: 26-27

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship....

Philip shared the gospel to an Ethiopian. The Ethiopians were worshipping in the Jewish way because of the Queen of Sheba. They had brought a lot of the teachings that Solomon shared with the Queen of Sheba which she brought back. In Ethiopia today, there is still a Jewish church and it is believed that the Ark of the Covenant is still there. Ethiopia is also part of that Jewish influence though it is now Africa. Thus we see the gospel spreading to Africa with the first African convert.

Acts Chapter 9: This chapter is about the interesting and amazing conversion of Saul and how he had previously persecuted the church.

Acts chapter 10: This chapter is about Peter and how he gets to see a vision.

Peter was told to go to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. He had never been to the house of a Gentile before. However, God asked him to go and he went and preached.

Chapter 10:44-46

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

Peter preached about Christ to the Gentiles, a house full of them, as the Centurion had invited all his friends to go there and God saved them all. It was a marvellous revival among the Gentiles!

Acts Chapter 11:19-21

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus, and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

We now see the spread of the gospel outside of Judea and Samaria, into Antioch. And this becomes the first International Church, no more in Jewish style. Antioch was then a very cosmopolitan city. It was probably the most cosmopolitan city in that part of the Roman Empire. It was the home of Luke, the writer of this book.

Acts Chapters 8-12 spoke of the spread of gospel outside of Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria and then it hits the border outside of the Jewish territory into Antioch. Thus Antioch became the first International Church and the place where believers were called Christians.

Up to this point, they were always called disciples or followers. The term "Christian" then was derogatory and wasn't a nice term. The term that was commonly used to describe the apostles was always "followers" or "disciples".

Acts Chapter 13-20: This chapter speaks of Paul's missionary journeys.

At the Antioch church, people of Jerusalem were astonished that the believers were Gentiles believers. Thus they sent two people, Paul and Barnabas, to make sure that the people at Antioch were not out of order. Hence, they were sent to three missionary journeys.

In Acts Chapter 13-20, the first missionary journey they made was to Asia Minor. Today, we call Asia Minor as Turkey.

After the first mission trip, the apostles went back and then went on a second mission trip to the same place - Asia Minor, but this time further across to Greece. So on their second missionary trip, they travelled to Asia Minor and Greece. The third missionary trip, they went back to visit the churches they had planted in Asia Minor and Greece.

On their mission trips, what was their modus operandi or standard operating procedure (SOP). Paul would go to a synagogue as it was easier to reach out to the Jews there. Then, through the scriptures he tried to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. And at every place, some Jews believed while others didn't.

Therefore, there was a clash where people who didn't believe would reject the gospel and caused problems. There were problems in Philippi, Athens and Ephesus. There was a huge cultural clash in the Jewish church as Paul went in and spoke about the Messiah. He was telling things that were so different from the Jewish traditions. The Jews struggled with this fact. But for the pagans, when Paul shared the Messiah with them they were shocked as all they knew was only their idols. To them, there was no such thing as a "god of the world" as their gods were always the local gods. They challenged whether their local gods were useless and less effective compared to Paul's powerful God. However, their biggest problem they had was with the Romans because the Romans believed there's no other king except Caesar whereas Paul was preaching there's a new king, Jesus. So there were clashes everywhere during that time and Paul often went through a lot of sufferings.

After his first missionary trip, there was a very important event as Paul returned to his home church in Antioch, the church that sent him out. He discovered that people from Jerusalem who went to Antioch said to the church in Antioch, the international Gentile church, that they needed to be circumcised if they wanted to be a true believer Christian. They needed to

follow their food laws. This made Paul and Barnabas furious as they became believers by believing in Christ, not by circumcision.

Thus, they brought their disputes to the council in Jerusalem. The council with Peter and James (the biological half brother of Jesus), sat down and decided whether Gentiles needed to be Jews to become believers. The only condition to be a believer was faith in Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross for us.

Chapter 21 to 28: We now come to the last section which is Acts Chapter 21 to 28 where Paul was arrested and finally ended up in Rome where God wanted him there.

Paul's arrest after his third missionary trip back to Jerusalem where the people there saw him as the Jews "in action" in Asia Minor-These Jews had also gone back to Jerusalem for the Passover feasts. They recognised that Paul was the guy who was preaching against the Jewish faith and caused a stir whereby the Romans finally had to save him from being beaten to death by the Jews. When the Romans arrested him, he was put on trial to stand before the Sanhedrin which was the Jewish Council. As they were then under the Roman Empire, Paul had to stand trial before Felix, the governor. When Felix was reposted elsewhere, he was replaced by, another governor, Porcius Festus. Hence Paul had to stand trial before governor Festus and everyone just passed "the buck" around. They didn't know what to do with Paul as he was not a criminal and they couldn't charge him. Yet the Jews kept insisting that he was a criminal. As Festus doesn't know what to do, he passed "the buck" to King Agrippa. Finally, all of them decided that there was no charge against Paul. But the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council, the wicked people of the old temple, insisted that Paul was wicked. Being typical of politicians, they played on both sides and Paul was stuck there awaiting trial. The legal process for a trial was very long even up till this day.

We may then say for all those years, Paul could have gotten out and do mission works somewhere. However, we forget that this is probably Paul's most powerful mission work because he has the chance to preach to the Sanhedrin leaders, otherwise they would not have listened to him. It was also his chance then to preach to governor Felix, governor Festus and King Agrippa. Finally, when he was brought to Rome, he had a chance to be in Caesar's Palace where people came from all over the world. Again it was a chance to preach there while he was under house arrest in Rome.

The last two verses of the Book of Acts Chapter 28 reflected Paul's conditions:

Chapter 28:30-31

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Concluding Summary:

Paul was in Caesar's Palace and under house arrest without freedom to go out. However, anyone could visit him. When the people heard about Paul who had been preaching about the Messiah and His resurrection, they went to listen to him. These guys who went to Caesar's Palace were not nobodies but somebodies. During Paul's house arrest period, he probably preached his most important messages and even wrote the most important documents which we called the "prison epistles" -Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and more. Thus Paul left behind those legacies to us. While sometimes we see persecution as a problem, persecution causes the faith to spread. Likewise, the problem of Paul in jail. While Paul was in jail and under house arrest, he got to preach to kings and rulers, which nobody else would have a chance. This is how ultimately the gospel spread to the world.

This ending to the Book of Acts is kind of weird as it probably is a defense document written by Luke. However, what happened to Paul thereafter

nobody knows. Church history stated only that Paul won the trial and was freed. But he was later re-arrested for something else and beheaded.

Hence, a document about church history seems very strange as we read the whole document and didn't see a word about the Christians in Rome. Is this book written by Luke for the purpose of a defence? Is this book written by Luke a legal brief to a judge? I don't know, who knows, who cares? But what we learnt in the Book of Acts is that God is the God of the universe and more importantly, is a God of love. So what does it mean to you when you love someone? What do you do? You want to be close to that person? That's an instinct to love.

Book of Acts tells us God loves me and God lives in me. Which other faith tells you that? None! Only the Holy Trinity, the God whom we believe. God in heaven sent His only Son to die for us on the cross, the Son rose, went back to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to live in our hearts. All three, the Son, the Father and Holy Spirit are God.

Can any other god die for us on the cross?

Firstly, their god is all alone up there. He is a lonely god and doesn't know what love is since he's all alone from eternity. Moreover he doesn't even know what fellowship is by himself.

When people talk about the Holy Trinity, do they understand the beauty of the Trinity? That this God whom we worship is "three persons." Can they understand? Can they appreciate? Can they fall in love with this Triune God? Yes!

Are you in love with this Triune God? I don't know about you but I am because He lives in me!

For any other faith, when you say God lives in you, they would be utterly shocked and wonder what you are talking about. I know what I'm talking about. How do I know? I know because I experience it every day. He lives in me, He walks with me, He guides me!

The pagans have their temples where they go to. But, I have a God who comes to me and lives in me. Do you appreciate this God? Do you understand the Book of Acts with the fire coming down? You are the temple of God. A God who loves you so much and doesn't want to be just with you, but a God who lives in you. He loves me supremely and makes his home in me!

May you love this God. May you when you read the Book of Acts see God's planning and working to live in you. God bless you!