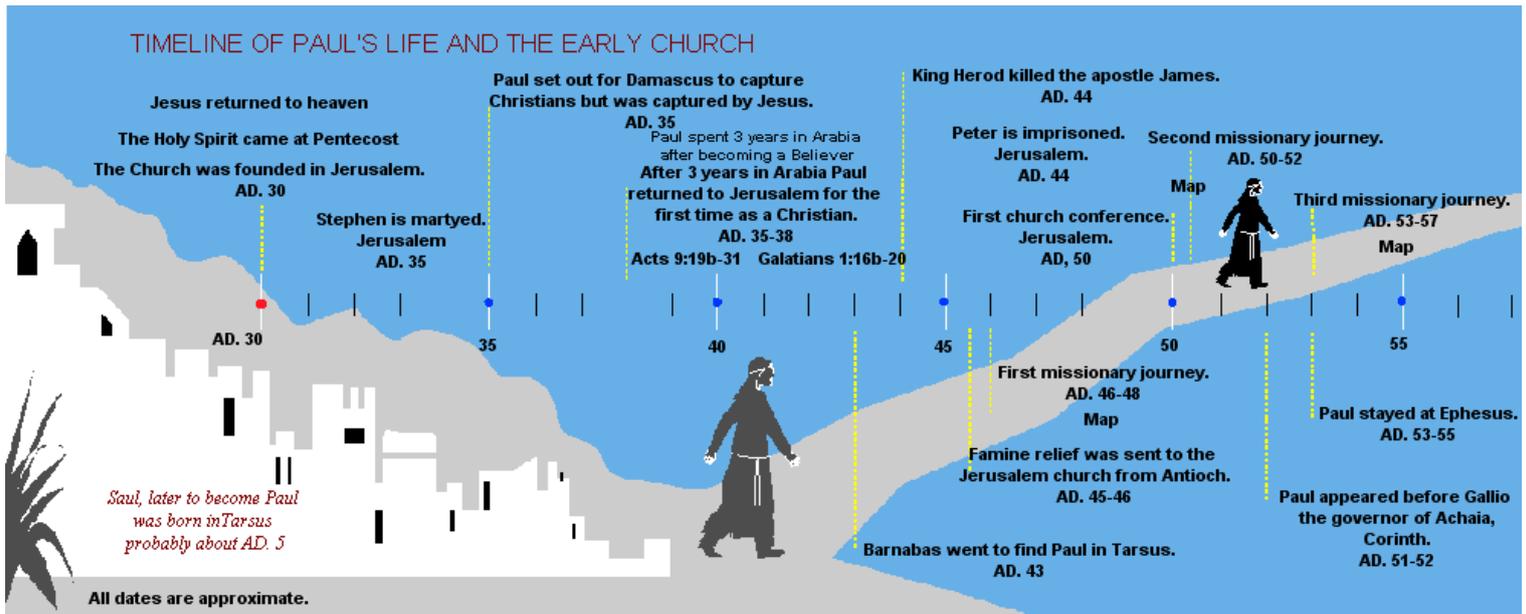


The Acts of the Apostles 01 – An Overview

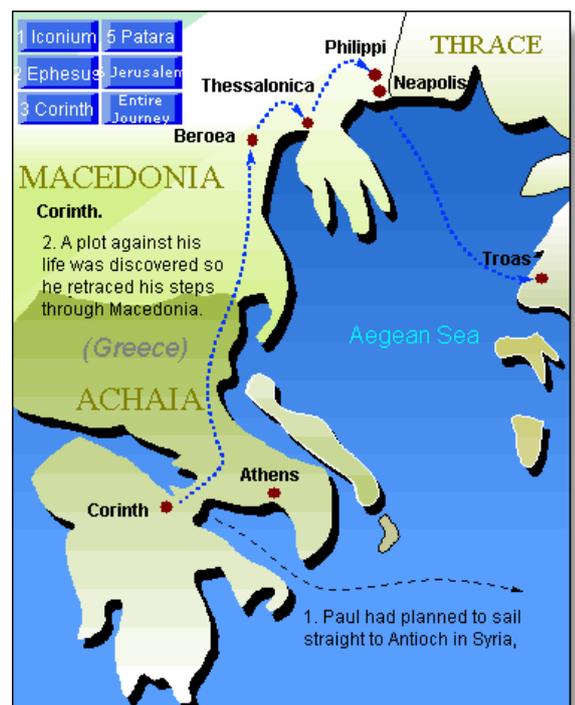
The Gospels (written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) covered the 33 years (approximately) of the life of Jesus on Earth. The Book of Acts covers (approximately) the first 33 years of the ministry of the Holy Spirit on Earth. 'Joy for Life' has subtitled this study 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit' because the whole book is permeated by the directions He gave the Apostles. As they were guided by Him, we can see the amazing miracles and direction that took place as the infant church slowly began to understand that they were part of a worldwide and life-changing movement that will never end until the return of Jesus as Lord and King.



The Book of the Acts was written by Luke. It follows on from his Gospel. Luke was a doctor and had been trained to be meticulous in identifying and recording incidents and events. He had the added advantage that He was a disciple from the early days of the Church and was the constant companion of Paul. He probably met Paul in Troas as he travelled back from Corinth on one of his Missionary Journeys and as a doctor, he would have seldom been out of a job, as wherever Paul went and preached the Gospel, he was often met with hostility so he was probably in need of a doctor on more than one occasion! **2 Corinthians 11:23-27**

But although the Book of Acts features Paul many times, it certainly is not all about Him. It is a record of the events leading up to the formation of the Church and its establishment, how the Apostles were led and guided by the Holy Spirit. It is one of the most exciting and dynamic books in the Bible and can be read from beginning to end in excitement, awe and wonder at what God can do with ordinary men and women.

Have you ever considered that, as an ordinary person, God wants to use you to do extraordinary things on the Earth?



He is looking for people who are prepared to put Him first in all they do. Get alone with God, talk to Him, listen to Him, tell Him the things that are on your heart, obey Him and follow His commands, 'For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him'. **2 Chronicles 16:9**. You may think that through something you did (or did not do) perhaps years ago, that you have messed up, and missed God. But the good news is that God has not missed you. He knows where you are, and He is just waiting for you to turn back to Him, and just as the Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son, He will welcome you with open arms, **Luke 15:11-32**.

So how does such a book begin? In a very matter-of-fact way – just as you might expect from Doctor Luke. It was written to Theophilus. Whether this was a man by that name or to be interpreted literally as the translation of the word – 'Lover of God' – we will never know this side of Eternity, but it certainly has appeal, meaning and direction for Christians (Lovers of God) in today's world.

It was written between the years 63 and 70 AD while Paul was still alive, but under house arrest in Rome, and forms a connecting bridge between the Gospels and the Letters to the



Churches that were established in Ephesus, Philippi, Galatia, Corinth, Rome, the Jewish Christians (Hebrews), Colosse, Thessalonica. We can include those Churches to which Jesus wrote special words in Revelation, Ephesus, and those in Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, **Revelation 1:9 – 3:22**, and to the people leading them.

It also covers the transition from the preaching of the Gospel to the Jews to the preaching of it to the Gentiles. It is exciting to understand that there was never a time as

favourable to the expansion of the Gospel as in those days until now - the days that we live in. There have been revivals throughout the 2000 or so years since then, but never has the Gospel been so widely preached to such a devastating effect that it literally changed the entire known world. That opportunity has been left to us in these days before Jesus returns for His Bride – the Church.

It is safe to say that by the end of the first Century AD – less than 70 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, every country in the known world had heard the Gospel. The men and women who were responsible under the Holy Spirit for that feat were dedicated, selfless and totally convinced that Jesus was, as He had said **THE Way, THE Truth and THE Life**, and that **no-one** would come to the Father except through Him, **John 14:6**. **For your encouragement seeing the growth of the Church today go to the web site www.lookingforgod.com see the prayer of salvation, then go to www.godrev.com to see the results of people praying to receive Jesus today all over the world! It is so wonderful, join in with the angels' rejoicing in heaven.**

The beginnings.

This book of the Acts of the Apostles begins with the disciples sharing their lives together in the upper room – probably the same room in which they had taken the Last Supper together with Jesus – sharing fellowship with the risen Lord, and learning from Him. They must have been excited enough to want to tell others, because Jesus commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, **Acts 1:4-5**. After 40 days He left for Heaven to send the Holy Spirit (the

Comforter) to them, but not before instructing them what to do after the Holy Spirit came, **Acts 1:8**. The focus at the beginning of the book is on Peter who was changed over night from a fearful follower (**John 18:25-27**) to a truly dynamic disciple with Holy Spirit power, **Acts 2:36-41**.

We are certainly not any greater than the Apostles, so we need the empowering of the Holy Spirit before we are to be truly effective in our ministries to which the Lord has individually called us and for which He has prepared us. The word 'power' carries with it the meaning of 'ability, efficiency and might'. Without the Holy Spirit coming upon us, we cannot have this power for it is God-given, and the only way to receive Him is by having Him come upon you. How does the Holy Spirit 'come upon' you? Well, **first** of all, it happens individually. We can be reminded of the way in which the Holy Spirit clothed Gideon with Himself as He empowered him to deliver Israel, **Judges 6:34**.

As a Christian, unless the Holy Spirit clothes us with Himself, we will never achieve the mighty works that God Himself has prepared for us to do, **2 Timothy 3 :17**. We will still be a Christian, but we will remain without the power. **Second**, the Holy Spirit will only clothe us with Himself as we allow Him. There is a price to pay for that – death to what we want to do, and **obedience** to what God wants for our life, **Galatians 2:20**. **Are we prepared for that?** Life as a Christian may not be simple; it may be very hard work. It may also be a life of contention. **Thirdly** the Apostles were to wait in Jerusalem. So where is our Jerusalem? Do we have to wait and if so, where do we have to wait?

Our beginnings

The experience of becoming a Christian (being born again) is likened in the Bible to being born the first time and in other places the Bible likens our (spiritual) food intake to the real food intake of a new-born baby, **Hebrews 5:12-14**. Paul wrote to the Corinthians telling them to grow up in the Lord, **1 Corinthians 3:1-3**. When we are born again, we desire and require spiritual food. It is what our newborn spirit needs and yearns for above everything else; in many respects, just as a newborn baby cries out for milk, our spirit cries out for the milk of the Word of God.

The ideal place to grow up as a Christian is at home, surrounded by the people who love us and in turn those whom we love and trust. That home can be in our local church. It is here that we should be able to get all the nurture and spiritual input we need to make us grow strong in the Lord and in His Word. If we make a mistake as we grow up in this environment, there are always people who can help and love us with the same love that Jesus has for us. Like a tree, we need to put down deep roots as we grow. It is here that we will make lifelong friends – people with whom we will enjoy doing the work of the Lord, **Psalms 1**. However, what is the Holy Spirit saying to us in this Acts passage? **Wait upon the Lord. Listen to Him and do ONLY what He allows you to do. Learn to hear Him.**

We need to have a balance in our life between doing and being. We need to be involved, but if all we do is **work** for God, we will end up not hearing Him because we are too busy. However, if all we do is **sit still listening**, we will end up hearing things that God never said to us. We need a 'balanced diet' (a mixture of involvement and learning) on which our spirit will flourish.

Wait in Jerusalem until then GO

It is in Acts that we see the establishment of the Church. Contrary to popular opinion, the Church is not the building! The Church is the people. The Church started in Jerusalem. The disciples did as they were asked by Jesus Himself. They waited in Jerusalem. Following Jesus' Ascension into Heaven they returned to the Upper Room, **Acts 1:12-15**. Then they replaced Judas Iscariot (who had by this stage committed suicide rather than repent and ask God for forgiveness) with Matthias. Finally, when the day of Pentecost arrived, the Holy Spirit came (**Acts Chapter 2**). The Church that had been meeting behind closed doors for fear of the Jews, found Power, and with it, found its voice. The whole of Jerusalem heard the Gospel, including those who were staying there, finishing their holidays. Every nation on earth had a representative at that time in Jerusalem. Every nationality heard the unschooled Galilean

Christians tell them about what Jesus had done for them by dying on the Cross on Calvary and rising again on the third day, (just as He said He would!), **Acts 2:5-8 (NIV)**.

The Church burst out into the open and the numbers rose from 120 to 3,000 in a single day, **Acts 2:41** but the numbers in the Church did not remain static nor did they 'empty out of the bottom' as God filled the top. The Church grew on a daily basis as God **added** to them such as should be saved, **Acts 2:47**, then the numbers **multiplied**; and then **increased vastly**; **Acts 6:7**.

Time to move out – but where do I move out to?

Now as the Church in Jerusalem grew, so did persecution. The devil is never happy when the Church grows. It was only a few weeks earlier that he had been made an 'open show' of, and Jesus had stripped him of the keys to death and hell – and the Church at that point consisted of just ONE. Now there were thousands of people just like Jesus – people who were lost forever from the kingdom of darkness and changed forever to the Kingdom of Light. The Church had been too focussed on Jerusalem. The Apostles had been so 'flat out busy' coping with what had been happening locally that they had forgotten what Jesus had said to them, **Acts 1:4-5**. They had been baptised in the Holy Spirit and they were still in Jerusalem! They needed to focus on Judea, Samaria and all nations, **Acts 1:8**.

They really needed to be removed from their 'comfort zone' – to be pushed out of the 'nest'. Persecution was extremely distressing, but it gave them this opportunity. It came initially from the religious Jews who saw their power base being eroded, and their religion being exposed for the empty set of rules it now was. It continued with the Romans whose Emperor had decreed that he was a god, and therefore saw Christianity with its emphasis on the One True God as a threat. But persecution in fact gave Christianity all the exposure it ever needed. Christians were crucified (like their Leader), they were fed to lions; they were forced to live in holes in the ground. Like their ancestors about whom we read in **Hebrews 11**, they suffered horror and deprivation but this is what God says about them: '....too good for this world. for God wanted them to wait and share the even better rewards that are prepared for us', **Hebrews 11:32-40**. Of course, these Christians were about to share in the 'even better rewards' alluded to in the passage above. This persecution drove them out of Jerusalem, **Acts 8:1-8**

At this time, it is essential that we do not sit in our comfortable chairs in our beautiful buildings, waiting for the world to come to us. **First**, it won't, **second**, God has a much bigger plan for us! It is that we should **GO. Do not wait to be kicked out of the nest, rather, leave willingly**; play your part in the expansion of the Kingdom of God. Passports and backpacks cost very little. The higher cost is the personal cost to our own pride as we begin to speak about something we think people will not want to hear. (Satan has been the author of this lie, but we have exposed him now!). Speak to people. They **DO** want to hear. They have been watching us, all the time wondering why we are so beautifully different and radiant. The new disciples went first to Judea. This was a relatively safe place to go. Judea was, after all, Jewish. No-one was going to get killed for going there! Samaria on the other hand was a country which had been at enmity with the Jews for a long time. In fact, any self-respecting Jew who travelled from Galilee to Jerusalem or vice-versa would never go through Samaria. Samaritans were considered outcasts. The Jews would have nothing to do with them. The Samaritans had used Mount Gerizim as an alternate place to the Temple at Jerusalem to worship the Living God but that was destroyed 150 years earlier.

Jesus did not live by this prejudice or tradition so asked messengers to go ahead of Him to get things ready. (**Luke 9:52**). He went the shorter route. (**John 4:4**). He wanted His followers to preach the Gospel there. (**Acts 1:8**). They did. Philip went to Samaria and **Revival** broke out! **Acts 8:4-8** 'Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit'. **Acts 8:14-17**

We need to remember the instructions Jesus had given earlier. **Mark 16:15-18**
What about you? Are you prepared to listen, to be obedient, and to share the truth of the Gospel?

In that case, there is no limit to how God can use you! Will you get your passport up to date, buy a suitcase or a backpack and be ready to go? 'But where should I go?' you ask. Wherever God says. 'What do I say?' Whatever God tells you to say. 'How will I pay?' God will bring you the money. **But the key question is this – 'Are you willing to go?'** If you aren't prepared to go, why would God ask you? He has no need to.

Of course, the movement of the Christians from Jerusalem did not stop as they went into Judea and Samaria. On the contrary, it was almost no time before Christianity was being spread throughout the world. This amazing advance was made as Christians were directed by the Holy Spirit to speak to those people whose hearts He had already made receptive. This was remarkably evident as the young man Saul, who had guarded the coats of the mob as they stoned Stephen, suddenly and dramatically met with Jesus whose followers some of whom he was throwing into prison, others of whom he was killing. **Acts 9:1-6**

It so happened that there was an ordinary man named Ananias in Damascus who was a Christian and who listened to God, **Acts 9:7-16**. The reluctant Ananias did as he was asked, went to Straight Street and laid his hands on this newly reformed man, Paul. The result was not only the regaining of his sight, but also the repairing of his spiritual sight that had been warped by the religion of the day into something akin to bigotry and hatred, **Acts 9:17-19**. The result of this ordinary man's obedience was that not only the Gentile world heard the Gospel, but the most accurate and precise explanation of Christianity has been passed down to us today. This is in the form of encouraging and explanatory letters written to new Christians in new Churches all over the Roman world of the day. Nothing that Satan, his devilish followers or any man could do was able to prevent the relentless and exciting march of Christianity in the world of that day or ever since. There has always been a remnant even in the darkest and most satanic times who have not bowed the knee to the devil. **1 Kings 19:10; 18.**

Today, we stand on the edge of the greatest revival the world has ever known. We stand at the culmination of history, very close to the time when Jesus will return for His Bride – the Church. Never in human history has there been such an important time. Why are you and I alive at this exact point in time? Because Jesus Who knew us before the beginning of time has chosen us to be alive now. **Ephesians 1:4-5**



He was present at our conception, and He oversaw us being knit together in our mothers' womb, **Psalm 139:13**. Paul's birth was no accident either. It made no difference that he had been breathing hatred and murder against the Christians. He was chosen by God for a specific task – the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, **Acts 9:15-16**. Paul knew before he accepted

the job how much suffering he would have to go through. When he gave testimony in **2 Corinthians 11:23-27**, he said it without any disappointment or distress, because Jesus had already shown him how much he would suffer to get the job done. And when he had finished the course, completed the race, he was able to write to his friend and brother in the Lord Timothy, to not be afraid but work for Jesus' return, **2 Timothy 4:5-8**.

Paul undertook three, and probably four of the most challenging and stressful journeys ever accomplished by man. These were his missionary journeys.

The first was from Antioch where the Holy Spirit impressed upon the Church that He wanted to start a special mission, **Acts 13:1-3**

Then Paul went on his second journey. It was to be more extensive and challenging than the first. **Acts 15:36-41**

A third journey followed, as he started out again from Antioch; 'After spending some time there, he left for Turkey again, going through Galatia and Phrygia visiting all the believers, encouraging them and helping them grow in the Lord'. **Acts 18:23-26**

And finally, it is thought that Paul may have taken a fourth journey following his release from prison (**Acts 28:30**) – almost to the edge of the known world. **Romans 15:23-29**. We shall find out whether he undertook this journey and what happened when we speak with him in heaven!

The second half of Acts is focused primarily on Paul's missionary journeys to many countries north of the Mediterranean Sea. He, with his companions, take the gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

Some of the Jews believe, and many of the Gentiles receive the Good News with joy. New churches are started, and new believers begin to grow in the Christian life.



As you read Acts, put yourself in the place of the disciples - feel with them as they

are filled with the Holy Spirit, and thrill with them as they see thousands respond to the gospel message. Since their commitment they have given every ounce of their talent and treasure to Christ. And as you read, watch the Spirit-led boldness of these first-century believers, who through suffering and in the face of death take every opportunity to tell of their crucified and risen Lord. **Then decide to be a 21st-century version of those men and women of God.**



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The Acts of the Holy Spirit 01 – An Overview – Challenge Questions

Please try to answer all the questions as this will help you to participate more fully in the Group Discussions. Also, you might be able to help others who are finding it difficult to answer the questions. Do not be concerned about getting answers 'wrong'. Everyone will learn something from these sessions. **You should be wise about sharing some of the answers to personal questions although writing the answers down may help you.**

- 1. Read the Notes and the Bible Verses** referred to in them. Highlight the points that are relevant to you

- 2. a.** Fill in the blanks: The Book of The Acts of the Apostles was written by who was, by profession, a

- b.** Why do you think that this Book can be relied on to give us the facts of what happened in the first 33 years of the Holy Spirit being on this earth?

- 3.** What do you think about Paul's change of lifestyle from murderer of Christians to supporter?

- 4.** Why, in your opinion, is growing up as a Christian in your own home church important? And why is it important not to be too busy on church work as a Christian?

Read Acts Chapter 1.

- 5.** Did Jesus appear to His disciples after His death and before His ascension? Can you identify any of these appearances from the Gospels? If so write down the references.

- 6.** In the meeting recorded in **Acts Chapter 1**, Jesus told His disciples not to leave Jerusalem until after the occurrence of a specific event. What was that event to be? What does the word 'baptised' mean when it is used to describe what would happen at this event?

- 7.** There were four places in which Jesus said that the disciples would testify about Him when the Holy Spirit had come upon them. Where were they? Do you think that when He instructed them He meant just a select few? Explain your answer.

- 8.** Did Jesus intend that people are born again only in the church? Who should expect to be able to lead people to Jesus and in which locations?

Read Acts 1:9-11.

- 9.** Jesus had risen to Heaven and the disciples were staring after Him. Describe some of their thoughts as they stood on the Mount of Olives that day.

- 10.** The angels promised that some day Jesus would return 'just as He went'. What does this phrase mean? Will He return as a baby again when He does?

- 11.** Jesus has promised to return one day. Sometimes it seems that He is taking too long about doing it. What reason does He give for any apparent delay? See **2 Peter 3:9-10**

Read Acts 1: 12-26.

- 12.** What did the disciples do when they returned from the Mount of Olives?

- 13.** Who were in the group in Jerusalem?

- 14.** Why did the disciples appoint someone else in place of Judas? How did they go about it? Do you think that Judas would ever have repented and come back to ask Jesus' forgiveness? Why do you think this way?

- 15.** What verse really spoke to you from this first chapter? Try to learn it by heart and at least take note of it in a note book, on computer or phone.