

The Acts of the Holy Spirit 32 – a Summary – Part 1.

Finally, after 28 exciting and thrilling Chapters we come to the end of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles – or do we? If this is the end of the Book then it ends abruptly almost as if the writer had put down his pen to go to sleep and never woken up again!

There are no final paragraphs, no signoff saying 'Dear brothers, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Sincerely, Paul.' No good wishes to all the people at the various churches Paul and his fellow workers had planted, just a factual comment, **Acts 28:30**

The comment is no surprise either. Of course Paul preached with all boldness about the Kingdom of God and about the Lord Jesus Christ. He didn't know any other way to do it. He was full of excitement and joy. He wanted everyone to experience the same things he himself had experienced. He wanted people to know Jesus as he himself knew Him – The One True Living God, the ONLY way to the Father. He had been through suffering, deprivation and violent opposition to what he was releasing into the world – the Word of God Himself – so why would he change his ways? He wouldn't! He held open house in Rome and everyone who visited got the message, **Acts 28:23**.

In contrast to the rest of his Christian experience, nobody tried to prevent him from preaching the Word. Nobody could have done it even if they had tried. The only thing that would have stopped him would have been death itself and he had proved that death no longer had dominion over him. There was One more powerful in Whose hands he had placed his life many years earlier and this One Who was none other than God Himself still had work for Paul to do. The devil had attempted to kill him several times over and had failed. Paul was in the hands of the One from which none could pluck him. He had not finished the race. His time to be reunited with his Saviour had not yet come.

The sooner we understand that neither men, nor the world, nor the devil can stop us completing the work that Jesus has set before us, the more challenging, fulfilling and purposeful our lives will be. God has a purpose for our lives individually, and the only person who can prevent us from completing it is us ourselves – or to be more precise, you yourself for your life and I myself for my life!

The only person who can stop you from completing your task on earth is you! It is you who can allow the world to dominate you. It is you who can choose whether or not to receive the rubbish that people may speak over you. (e.g. you will never amount to anything You foolish person! etc and worse) and you are the one who can choose to speak rubbish over your life (e.g. I think I am getting sick, I think it's the flu..... I can't do this work I am losing my memory!etc and worse). The Bible states that 'You shall have whatsoever you say' and 'No weapon forged against you shall prosper and every tongue that rises up against you, you shall refute' (**Isaiah 61:17**), and it also states that God says 'My people perish from lack of knowledge!' **Hosea 4:6**

So why does the book of Acts end here and so abruptly? The book is not about the life of Paul, but about the spread of the gospel, and that has been clearly presented. God apparently thought it was not necessary for someone to write an additional book describing the continuing history of the early church. Now that the gospel had been preached and established at the centre of trade and government, it would spread across the world.

The book of Acts deals with the history of the Christian church and its expansion in

This is God's gift to you. It does not depend on who you are, how good you are, your age, sex or educational attainment. It depends on whether you believe it and receive it!

YOU ARE FREE,
THE VERDICT IS

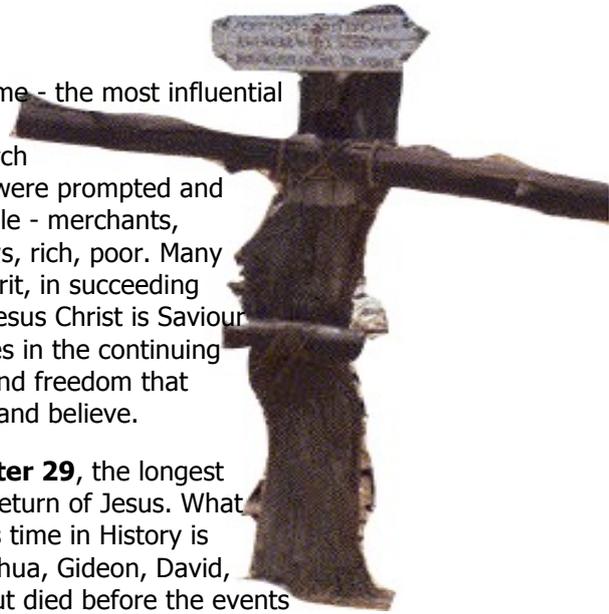
NOT GUILTY

So there is no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ Jesus.

ROMANS 8:1




ever-widening circles touching Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome - the most influential cities in the Roman Empire of the day. Acts also shows the mighty miracles and testimonies of the heroes and martyrs of the early church - Peter, Stephen, James, Paul and many others. All their ministries were prompted and held together by the Holy Spirit working in the lives of ordinary people - merchants, travellers, slaves, jailers, church leaders, male, female, Gentiles, Jews, rich, poor. Many unsung heroes of the faith continued the work, through the Holy Spirit, in succeeding generations, changing the world with a changeless message - that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord for all who call on Him. Today we can be the unsung heroes in the continuing story of the spread of the gospel. It is that same message of hope and freedom that we Christians are to take to our world so that many more may hear and believe.



Your work and mine is the continuing story of Acts; it is really **Chapter 29**, the longest of all the chapters in the Bible, and it will not be complete until the return of Jesus. What an opportunity we have, and we are not the only ones to see it. This time in History is the one that the faithful of old, people such as Moses, Abraham, Joshua, Gideon, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and thousands upon thousands more, knew about but died before the events we are now part of, began, **Hebrews 12:1-2**. The writer to the Hebrews tells us that these men are looking down from heaven watching our progress as we run this leg of the race, **Hebrews 11:13-16**. Now it is up to us. These men died, some in horrific circumstances, reviled and outcasts, because of what they knew and were prepared to believe, knowing that God had laid up for them a far better life, an eternal one. God wanted them to receive what he also wants us to receive! We must carry on the fight of faith to help usher in the long-awaited and longed-for King of Kings and Lord of Lords! **Hebrews 11:32-40**. These men and women are watching our progress from the Grandstands of Heaven encouraging us as we progress towards the goal.

In **Acts**, we are privileged to be given a glimpse of the establishment of the Church. A few men and women hiding away behind locked doors for fear of the Jews; and in response to Jesus' instruction to wait in Jerusalem, **Acts 1:4-8**. The Holy Spirit came upon them just as Jesus said and empowered them, turning these disappointed and confused men and women into the extraordinary witnesses that they became. He enabled them, within just a few decades, to turn the world the right way up, to speak before rulers and governors with power and authority that nobody had seen or heard before. Millions of people were brought from spiritual darkness into the light of Jesus, the anointed One; the tide of the Gospel began to flow and to flood the entire world never, ever to ebb.

When Jesus was on earth, He prayed for us, for you and me, knowing exactly who we are and what we would be doing in His Kingdom, **John 17:20-26**. Jesus' prayers were always answered. How could we possibly refuse to do His will when He did that for us? What would all those who are watching from those grandstands think if we put our feet up and relaxed instead of moving the Kingdom of Heaven forward by using the Gifts that God has specifically given us by the Holy Spirit?

Acts Chapters 3-6

Peter, who had lied and had disowned Jesus a matter of weeks before, had then abandoned the events of the previous three years to return to his old trade of fishing, was met by Jesus and commissioned again to be a part of establishing the Church. We read of him preaching his first sermon, and of how three thousand became Christians, then five thousand, then adding was no longer sufficient and the Church was described as multiplying. Peter began to flex his 'faith muscles' and as he and John were on their way to pray at the Temple, they met a man lame from birth, at the Beautiful Gate, **Acts 3:1-11**. They weren't surprised by this turn of events; quite the contrary, they used the opportunity to speak plainly about who was to blame for Jesus' death, and about the Way of Salvation. When you and I speak about the things of the Lord, we must realise that He will honour it and will cause people's hearts to turn to Him. There is only one way to salvation and that is through Jesus Christ.

However, we should also recognise that when Paul spoke in the synagogues, he was invariably eventually rejected along with those who accepted what he had to say. Of course that was how churches were formed. Although there was then a place where the Believers could regularly meet, the thrust of the growth of the church was centred on individuals and families – their lives and their homes. That is how it should be today. If we wait for people to turn up at the church so that they can hear the leader speak before accepting Jesus into their lives, we will be sorely disappointed. Our friends are far more likely to come into our homes and

talk in a relaxed and non-threatening environment than they are to walk through the door of a church that to them is an entirely unknown, and (perhaps) threatening and sometimes cold place.

That is how the Church grew. The Believers met from house to house, and there was great favour on them! People loved and accepted them for who they were – Believers – and those who had not yet received Jesus as Lord of their lives met with them – why wouldn't they? Even today we invite people for a meal or even a coffee to meet new friends and to talk about what is happening to us.

This openness caused a great stir among the religious authorities of the day. They felt threatened as their man-made traditions were rapidly undermined. Jesus is the Messiah. He has come to earth as He said He would, and as His plan always had always been! He has established His Church (His Body) on earth, and even the very gates of hell itself will not prevail against it. Those are His words, so why do we doubt them? No religion is ever going to overcome the Church. Jesus is Lord – At the Name of Jesus, all will bow, and the Name has been given to Believers, to those who honour Jesus as Lord. It is by Grace through Faith that we have been saved (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). It is God's free gift to us; the only way to receive it is through Jesus. The healing of the crippled beggar brought down the wrath of the Sanhedrin who questioned them and threatened them, then let them go. What was **Peter's and John's** response? 'We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we saw Jesus do and heard him say.' **Acts 4:19-20**. What was the reaction of the other **Believers**? 'Then all the believers united in this prayer:.....' **Acts 4:23-30**. And **God's** reaction?

'After this prayer, the building where they were meeting shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly preached God's message'. **Acts 4:31**. If that was what God did when the Believers stood firm in their faith, what would He do for us if we stood firm? It is time that we drew a line in the sand and said 'so far and no further!' to those who would demean the Name and Authority of God in our Land. Stop waiting for the clergy, the church leaders or anyone else to take the initiative. The initiative is with us, so let us take it and use it. Invite your friends round to your home, introduce them to Jesus and watch the results.

The opposition to the Gospel becomes furious as we see the Apostles being arrested again, thrown into jail and being set free by an angel of the Lord. The members of the Sanhedrin were at their wits' end to know what to do with them. Gamaliel came up with a solution which basically was to do nothing and see what happened, **Acts 5:40-42**. The Apostles discovered that they were getting bogged down in the detail of life. They were supervising food handouts as well as praying, preaching and teaching. Something had to give, so they appointed seven deacons to take care of the day-to-day work around the place, **Acts 6:3-4**. A constant theme in the Book of Acts is the empowerment through the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Without it, the Gospel would not have been spread far and wide; without it, the food programme would have continued to be administered by the Apostles, the very people who did not have either the time or the anointing to do it; their real work for which they were anointed by the Holy Spirit – preaching, teaching and prayer – would have suffered. They got it right! God's message was preached in ever-widening circles, **Acts 6:6-7**. Stephen was one of those chosen, full of faith and the Holy Spirit's power, **Acts 6:8**

Read Acts Chapter 7

But he provoked jealousy amongst the Jews who lied about him, brought in more men to lie about him and accused him of blasphemy. Stephen responded by preaching the Gospel and explaining the Way of Salvation – the way in which all men can be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven and into the realms of eternal life. The Jews were totally obsessed. Stephen was lynched – stoned to death, but in his dying, the Lord shows us that when we die, we will be welcomed into Heaven. The throes of death itself are, for the Christian, submerged in joy and excitement as we are taken up to be with the Lord. Truly we can agree that 'Death is swallowed up in Victory', and we can really ask 'O Grave, where is your sting?' because we are no longer bound by the law of sin and death, but are subject instead to the Law of Life! **Acts 7:54-60**

Read Acts Chapter 8-9

At this point the emphasis on personalities shifts from Peter and the other Apostles to Paul. Paul was in complete agreement with the killing of Stephen. He began a great wave of persecution against the Believers and everyone except the Apostles fled into Judea and Samaria. The expansion of the Church out of Jerusalem where it had grown dramatically was long overdue. Jesus had told the Believers before His resurrection that they were to wait in Jerusalem until they were empowered by the Holy Spirit; life since had been exciting and too busy to remember. As often happens, trials and in this case persecution caused the migration of the Believers. In fact it was time that the people in Judea and the Samaritans heard the Word of God. Philip went to Samaria where he told the Samaritans about what had happened in Jerusalem and explained the way of salvation to them. He probably had not expected it, but he ended up with 'Revival' on his hands. The Apostles

in Jerusalem heard about it and sent Peter and John to investigate. They found that the new Believers had not heard about the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, so they laid their hands on them and they received this Gift.

Simon the Sorcerer saw with his own eyes and wanted the power to lay his hands on people so that they would get baptised in the Spirit. He even offered money for this ability. But the Gospel and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are free to all who will accept Jesus. The entire price was paid on Calvary. There can be no further cost, no further price. 'It is finished', said Jesus on the Cross then gave up His Spirit. Peter rebuked Simon the Sorcerer as well as every other person down the ages who thought or thinks that he or she can make a fast buck out of the Gospel. It is FREE!

We learned that God can make any connections He wishes. While Philip was in the middle of the Revival in Samaria, God told him to move out, **Acts 8:26-29**. Philip did what was asked, the eunuch became a Christian, was then baptised and took the Gospel to Ethiopia. We don't know how many became Christians there, but we may safely assume that every person in Candace's court heard of the amazing events that had occurred when Philip explained to the eunuch what had happened to him as a result of his new relationship with Jesus. Are we listening to what God says to us? If we are, will we do what He asks? Your obedience may be the key that unlocks the door of spiritual, mental or physical prison. We cannot help but be challenged by the obedience of Philip who could have been excused for thinking that what he was doing in Samaria was far more important. What are the priorities in our lives?

Acts 9 describes Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. It was a divine appointment with Jesus that changed the entire face of the world. Paul became a Christian, was baptised in the Holy Spirit and then baptised in water. Jesus explained to him how much he must suffer for the sake of the Gospel, then the former persecutor of Christians and murderer immediately began to preach and encourage the Believers in Damascus, so fervently that the Jews could not withstand his proof that Jesus was indeed the Christ (**Acts 9:22**), and so was established the pattern that was to characterise the remainder of his life, **Acts 9:23-25**. After his escape from Damascus, he visited Jerusalem where following his acceptance by the other disciples, the Jews tried to kill him; he was taken to Caesarea, then he went back home to Tarsus. The immediate result of Paul's conversion was 'the church had peace throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria, and grew in strength and numbers', **Acts 9:31**. What an amazing relief this must have been to the new Church. After being hounded and terrorised by those who followed Saul (then Paul), they were left to grow and develop in their faith without hindrance, and the result was even more growth and favour with God and men.

It is important for us as Christians to understand that standing firm for the Truth will cause us trouble in the short term, but we need to look at the lessons of the New Testament and see beyond the opposition that is bound to come our way. The Truth is absolute as it IS the One True God. There is no shame in being opposed for telling the Truth. Jesus said that He did not come to bring peace but a sword, so why do we expect that we shall live in a cosy environment all the days of our lives? The disciples got on with living their lives in the light of the Gospel and sharing their new-found faith with their friends and neighbours. Peter travelled around visiting the Believers.

There is nothing more exciting than working with the Lord Jesus, and being involved with what He is doing. All we need to do is to be prepared to speak for Him and to do **WHATEVER** He instructs us. Peter went to Lydda as part of his travels. Here he met Aeneas who had been paralysed and bed-ridden for eight years. Peter (the man who had so nearly given up on his faith, who had denied Jesus) spoke what Jesus told him to say to Aeneas. "Aeneas! Jesus Christ has healed you! Get up and make your bed." **Acts 9:34**. The result was twofold. **First**, Aeneas was healed – instantly; he got up and made his bed. **Second**, the whole population of Lydda and Sharon turned to the Lord when they saw Aeneas walking around. Now if that happened in those days, why wouldn't it happen today? After all, Jesus is the same, yesterday, today and forever! Why would it not happen through us? Next stop on his travels was Joppa where Dorcas was raised from the dead through Peter and the news raced all over town, **Acts 9:36 – 42**

These were important events in the life of the Church. They meant that Jesus was doing what He had promised to do – be with the Believers, **Matthew 28:18-20**

So Peter stayed in Joppa for a while. The Bible is not specific about what he did there except that he lived with Simon the Tanner, but I believe that after Dorcas being raised from the dead, he would have been constantly asked to explain how it had happened. Imagine if that had been you, what an opportunity to speak to people about the Lord!

Read Acts 10 - 11:18

Finally in this section, in **Chapter 10**, we read about the Lord dealing with Peter's preconceived ideas. In writing this in the Book of Acts, Luke is laying down for us an instruction to do away with preconceived ideas. The Kingdom of God is not about rules and regulations, but about freedom in the Holy Spirit. It is not about 'You cannot do this and cannot do that', it is about a loving relationship with your Heavenly Father who can and will and wants to use you in His service.

Peter is gently and lovingly shown that a Roman invader who is by definition, a Gentile, can also become a Christian. Peter, a Jew who would be well aware of the Jewish traditions, of not being permitted to be involved with 'unclean' people, was initially shocked, but then was obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in his life. He left Joppa, went north to Caesarea, met Cornelius, who was ready to do whatever was necessary to become a Christian, and subsequently saw a great move of the Lord in the family and friends of Cornelius.

The message to you and to me is this: Do not let the traditions of men bring the Word of God to nought. Always check that what you have been instructed to do by men lines up with the Word of God! If it doesn't then stop doing it! How long the tradition has been established is utterly irrelevant if the Bible instructs otherwise. Be bold enough to 'stand on' the Word of God.

Believe first, then be baptised in water and be baptised with the Holy Spirit. The order of the last two events is unimportant, what is key is that all three events happen to you and the quicker they happen, the better for you and for all those around you who will become Christians because of you in the future.

'Even as Peter was saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those listening! ⁴⁵ The Jews who came with Peter were amazed that the gift of the Holy Spirit would be given to Gentiles too! ^{46,47} But there could be no doubt about it, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Peter asked, "Can anyone object to my baptizing them, now that they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?" ⁴⁸ So he did, baptizing them in the name of Jesus, the Messiah. Afterwards Cornelius begged him to stay with them for several days'. **Acts 10:44-48**

Receive your new heavenly language and speak it. As you praise God you will quickly run out of earthly words. Use your new heavenly language. Its vocabulary is never limited!

Peter eventually returned to Jerusalem where he had to give account for what had happened. He initially had those who objected to what he said and argued with him, but when he had told his story:

'When the others heard this, all their objections were answered and they began praising God! "Yes," they said, "God has given to the Gentiles, too, the privilege of turning to Him and receiving eternal life!"' **Acts 11:18.**

The Acts of the Holy Spirit 32 – a Summary Part 1 – Challenge Questions

Please complete all questions marked with * and then complete the rest of the study. The more you look in the Word the more you will get out of it.

Read the chapter at the beginning of the week then you have time to meditate on it, rather than rushing! Make the Word your number one priority.

1. ***Read the Notes and the Bible Verses** referred to in them. Highlight the points that 'speak' to you and share with the group.
2. *Is the Church Inclusive or Exclusive? Are there levels of Christianity? The Bible says that if a person should be a Master (a Leader) of all, he should be a servant. Can you explain what this means today. Give examples of success or otherwise of this instruction.
3. *Why did Herod arrest Peter? Read the story of Peter's deliverance and write down the points that really affect you. Can you share these with the group, together with the reasons for your being affected?
Acts 12
4. What happened to Herod? Why do you think he died like this? Do you think he is in heaven? Give precise reasons for your answer.
5. Paul was brought from his home town of Tarsus to Antioch by Barnabas. What did they do there? Some Teachers and Prophets met together one day. What did the Holy Spirit say to them about Paul and Barnabas? What did they do to commission them for their task, and what was their task? **Acts 13.**
6. Was their First Missionary Journey successful? Why? Was it easy for them? Describe some of the difficulties they faced.
7. *What has God asked you to do? Are you doing it? Is it easy? Describe some of the challenges of your normal Christian walk. Where do you think God is leading you now?

8. *On their return from their journey, what did Paul and Barnabas do first? How did they then spend their time? Did they travel anywhere else and if so, why did they go?
9. Paul could never stay in one place for long. On his return from Jerusalem, where did he next go and why did he go there?
10. *Paul's Second Missionary Journey also involved some difficulties. What were they and where did they take place? Do you think that your life can be directed by God as was that of Paul and his companions? Explain how that can be. From **Acts 15:36 - 18**
11. On his Third Missionary Journey, Paul knew that he would never be coming back. How do you know this? Can you give two examples of Paul wishing to cram as much teaching into the Believers as he could?
12. *On their arrival back in Jerusalem, what happened to Paul? How did he nearly die at the hands of the Jews? Who saved him, and where did he get sent? Why did he have to go there? **Acts 21** onwards
13. Who did Paul speak to while he was imprisoned in Caesarea? Were these people important, and what nationality were they? Did they become Christians as a result of the things Paul explained to them? **Acts 23:23 – Acts 24**
14. Give a short account of how the Lord helped Paul on his trip to Rome. Also give two examples of those he prevented from dying during his journey. What authority has God given you and me to help others and what have you and I done about it?
15. *Can you sum up the lessons you have learnt from all the Holy Spirit has spoken to you about while studying Acts?