

The Book of ACTS

- By Luke, probably a physician – “our dear friend the Doctor, Luke” in Colossians 4.14
- Luke is an accomplished writer, extremely well educated. Precise and detailed accounts.
- to Theophilus – probably a high class Roman.
- Follows straight on from the Gospel of Luke, covers 33yrs
- Luke spent significant time with Paul, and clearly immersed in the early church. Often says “we” when with Paul.

The Book of ACTS

The ~~Acts of the Apostles~~

Acts of the Holy Spirit!

(Prophesied eg. Isaiah 32.15, Joel 2.28, Ez.36.26,27)

[Acts 1.1](#) Luke says Gospel about what “Jesus began to do”

Book of Acts - Jesus continued to do!

ACTS – is a bridge

The Gospels -
the life of Jesus



The Letters –
Romans to
Revelation

A Hub which connects the whole New Testament

ACTS – is a book in two halves

- I. Peter and the beginning of the church
in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria
(Chapters 1-12)

- II. Paul and the Expansion of the Church from Antioch
to Rome (Chapters 13-28)

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Contains passages of:

- History – can date many episodes due to historical references
- Politics – major and minor political figures mentioned
- Sermons – 4 from Peter, 4 from Paul, 1 from Stephen
- Court hearings – Jewish and Roman
- Church Meetings
- Sea journey and shipwreck – 60 verses on trip to Rome

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The disciples asked –

“will you now restore the Kingdom to Israel?” (Ch. 1.6)

NO... restore Israel to the Kingdom

Dan 7:18 *But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever – yes, for ever and ever.'*

Disciples to be “Witnesses”

~~Disciples = students, learners~~

Apostles = witnesses, messengers to:

- Jerusalem (Chapters 2 - 7)
- Judea, Samaria (Chapters 8 - 12)
- Ends of the earth (Chapters 13 - 28)

The story of the Church



Not about a building...

Presence of God not
in the Temple,

But in the People.



...About a people

We are the Temple of the Holy Spirit

Pentecost – the Church launches!

Luke understood the connection between Old Testament, and what was happening now. He describes key events that resonate with the O.T.

- Pentecost – Flames and wind – just as in God's presence filling the temple; mentions all the different races who heard the tongues because of prophecies to reunify all tribes of Israel together under the messianic king, and good news to spread to the world ([Isaiah 11](#), [Ezekiel 37](#))
- God's presence now filling His people – they are the temple, and are witnesses to draw all God's people to Jesus the messianic King.

The New Temple and the Old

- The new Temple – the church, starts meeting in the old Temple.
- Peter etc. healing in the Temple, and being arrested for doing God's work.
- Sharing of goods and feeding the poor relates to the commandments in Deut 14.23-29, how the Jews were meant to treat the poor, alien and stranger, and centred around the Temple itself.

The Church in Jerusalem (Ch. 2-7)

The Church settles into a routine...

- Meeting in homes
- Meeting in the Temple Courts
- Breaking bread together (meals?)
- Sharing everything, supporting each other
- Miracles part of everyday life
- “enjoying the favour of all the people” - Ch. 2.47

The Church in Jerusalem (Ch. 2-7)

A repeating pattern emerges:

- Preaching the gospel;
- Church growth;
- Arrests by the Jewish authorities;

Peter & John preach to the High Priest, his family and the Sanhedrin (Ch. 4)

The Apostles (not just Peter) - preach to the Sanhedrin (Ch. 5)

Stephen – preaches to Chief Priest and Sanhedrin (Ch. 7)

The Church in Jerusalem (Ch. 2-7)

- The tension between the two temples culminates in Stephen accused of speaking against the Temple (6.13)
- The murder of Stephen and following persecution meant the gospel spread, and the Church became a multi-ethnic, international movement.
- But it appears it was still only preached to the Jews – those Jewish by birth, and gentile converts to Judaism

Acts 11:19 *“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.”*

Judea and Samaria, the Gospel spreads (Ch. 8)

- Saul appears as a major persecutor of the Church in Jerusalem, then further afield.
- The scattering of believers continues (persecution focused on the Hellenists, so not most Apostles), who “preached the Word wherever they went” - everyone was a witness!
- Philip preaches in Samaria – later followed by Peter and John
- Philip meets the Ethiopian and baptises him

Saul the persecutor (Ch 9)

- The conversion of Saul – he has gone as far as Damascus (a major transport hub) - there must have been a significant community of believers there already ~AD 35
- Saul starts to preach the Gospel he had tried to destroy
- Ch. 9.23 - “after many days” is > 2 years, most of which he spent in “Arabia” before returning to Damascus (Gal 1.17,18)
- The story of rejection and attempts to kill him begin. He has to escape Damascus over the wall

Saul and Barnabas (Ch 9)

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- Barnabas appears in the narrative (9.27), being encouraging!
- Saul gets into mission with Peter and James. Concerned about the death threats he is sent home to Tarsus for safety.
- [Acts 9.31](#) - *“then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace”* [political? focus on Saul?]

Peter and Cornelius (Ch 10,11)

- Peter travels north of Jerusalem to Lydda and Joppa - heals notably Aeneas and raises Dorcas from the dead.
- Peter struggles with leaving the Jewish Law behind, throughout Acts, despite the vision and direct instruction from the Spirit in Ch.10 (vv. 10-16), which he obeys.
- Cornelius' family believe, but the key point for Peter, seems to be when he says: **10:47** "*Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.*"

A New Thing

The Gospel brought radical new thinking for the Jews:

From Israel God's nation, and Jews the chosen people to:

Gal 3:28 *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”*

Also brought radical new thinking for the R.O.W. which had no concept of equality let alone that there is only 1 God, and He has been crucified and risen again so that all can be saved!

1Cor 1:23 *“but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles”*

Antioch becomes a focus (Ch 11)

Acts 11:20-22 “Some of them... went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. News of this reached the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch”

Barnabas goes to find Paul who has spent ~8 yrs in Syria and Cilicia, and they spend a year there in Antioch (3rd city of Roman Empire). Get called Christians (usually “followers of The Way”) and Antioch becomes a centre for the gospel.

Antioch – which Antioch?



The Politics – Herod (Ch. 12)

- AD 41-44 Persecution in Jerusalem again
- First record of death of an Apostle – James, brother of John
- Peter arrested “to please the Jews” – story of Peter freed by an angel, and not being let back into the house
- The death of Herod – a section of politics vv 19-23. It appears that Luke sees God’s hand of judgement on Herod, as he was a Jew, not a Roman.
- Saul, Barnabas and John Mark return to Antioch

Missionary Journey 1 (Ch. 13, 14)

- Barnabas and Saul “set apart” by the Holy Spirit, after fasting and praying.
- for 1st time “also known as Paul” (13.9) Jewish/Roman names
- Travel through “Galatia” (modern Turkey) ~AD 46 - 48
- Paul returns to Antioch and stays there for “a long time”, and may have written Galatians whilst there.
- Then heads to Jerusalem for a big meeting - the “Jerusalem Council”

Paul's first mission



The Jerusalem Council (Ch. 15)

- Some believers from Jerusalem have gone to Antioch saying have to become a Jew to be saved – circumcision, foods etc.
- Paul and Barnabas reject this, so go to Jerusalem to see the “apostles and elders” to settle the argument.
- James seems to be most senior here. All agree write a letter to say only have to stop pagan practices and eating of meat sacrificed to idols. This is a major step and clarified the situation which had probably been an issue from the beginning.
- Was this letter the basis for the Didache? (1st century document)

The first 20 years of the Church

- | | |
|----------|--|
| AD 30 | Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost |
| AD 33/35 | Death of Stephen; later, Saul's conversion |
| AD 44/45 | Saul and Barnabas build Antioch church |
| AD 46-48 | Paul first missionary journey |
| AD 48/49 | Letter to the Galatians? |
| AD 49/50 | Jerusalem Conference |

Mission Journey 2 (Chs. 15 - 18)

It starts badly, with argument over John Mark, Paul retraces the steps of his first journey, this time with Silas.

In Lystra, Paul invites Timothy to join them – but circumcises him first, and then gives the message of the Council!

Turns left instead of right! Called to Macedonia, not Bithynia

Approx 2 years, spends a long time in Corinth

Whilst there, may have written 1 and 2 Thessalonians



Mission Journey 3 (Chs 18 - 21)

Maybe only a few months after Paul gets back to Antioch, he's off again for about 3 years (~ AD 51 - 54)

He follows the same route through Asia Minor and into Greece again, then back to Jerusalem (Ch. 18.23 - 21.16)

Paul spends most of the time in Ephesus, and has a lot of trouble from the silversmiths. Wrote 1 Corinthians from here.

The incident in Troas (20.7-12 where Eutychus falls out of the window) gives a glimpse of Christian worship at the time – on a Sunday evening, in a house, taking communion and a meal



MACEDONIA

Philippi

Treas

GALATIA

Assos

ASIA

Mitylene

Ephesus

PHRYGIA

Samos

Miletus

ACHAIA

Cos

Patara

Antioch

Rhodes

Tyre

Ptolemais

Caesarea

Jerusalem

Mission Journey ends in Jerusalem

Whilst in Macedonia he wrote 2 Corinthians; whilst in Corinth, he probably wrote Romans;

When leaving Ephesus (20.17-35), we read the only speech to Christians, and Luke is present at the time.

On his way to Jerusalem, we meet Agabus the prophet (he had prophesied the famine in Judea in 46AD for which the Antioch church took a collection). He tells Paul what awaits him in Jerusalem.

Ch. 21.27 – Paul is recognised in Jerusalem, and despite showing all his Jewishness he is accused of defiling the temple and has to be saved from being lynched by Roman soldiers

Paul's Jerusalem arrest (Ch. 21-22)

Paul was allowed to explain himself to the crowd and give his testimony, but when he mentions telling Gospel to Gentiles the Jews riot again. The Romans decide to flog him, to find the "truth", but he declares he is a Roman Citizen which puts them in a difficult position.

To understand the dispute the Commander puts Paul before the Sanhedrin, but knowing he will get nowhere Paul leads them into arguing amongst themselves.

40 Jews take a vow to kill Paul, and plot a trap, so the Romans take Paul to Caesarea to Governor Felix for safety (or pass the problem on). Again the Jews fail to make a case, but Paul kept in jail for 2 years as Felix wanted a bribe and to keep the Jewish leadership happy.

And so to Rome... (Ch. 25-28)

- New Governor Festus, new hearing, Jews try to get Paul tried in Jerusalem so he can be murdered but Paul appeals to Caesar.
- So to Rome he must go. Ch.27 is all the detail of a sea voyage and wreck! Most detailed description of a ship in a storm in ancient literature. Why? ... because Luke was there!?
- Acts finishes with Paul spending 2 years under house arrest in Rome from where he writes the rest of his Letters.
- Most likely that Luke wrote his Gospel, and Acts, whilst in Rome with Paul. Would explain why no mention of Paul's final trial or execution. ++++++

What can we learn from Acts?

Acts can teach us about:

- Discipleship
- The Church
- Values
- Teaching/Doctrine
- Integrity of the Gospel
- Settling disputes

What can we learn - 2

- Even very early on, the Church had issues!
 - **Lack of fairness** (distribution of food)
 - **Corruption** (Ananias and Saphira)
 - **Arguments** (resolved by discussion, prayer & Holy Spirit!)
(or even just going separate ways – Paul & Barnabas)
- The church needs structure, and people to do the everyday tasks
- Often, bad things turn out for the good

What can we learn - 3

- Persecution is not always bad – caused gospel to spread – too comfortable in Jerusalem!
- Our backgrounds, ethnicity and outlook can be wrong! Jesus overturns many of our assumed “truths” - Gentiles can be saved!
- We can trust the Holy Spirit to empower and to guide
- Preaching the gospel and making disciples go hand in hand

What can we learn - 4

- Church is a place where we:
 - **Share the Good News in word and action**
 - **Disciple and encourage one another**
 - **Form diverse communities where all are equal and are treated as such**
 - **Interact with each other with love and forgiveness**
 - **Trust in the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit**
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Broad coverage

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(Prophesied eg. Isaiah 32.15, Joel 2.28, Ez.36.26,27)

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NO... restore Israel to the Kingdom

Dan 7:18 *But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever – yes, for ever and ever.'*

Even now, the disciples are focused on the idea of the supremacy of the Jewish nation.

Without the Holy Spirit we remain earth-bound and restricted in our thinking.

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Disciples = ~~students, learners~~

Apostles = witnesses, messengers to:

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The story of the Church



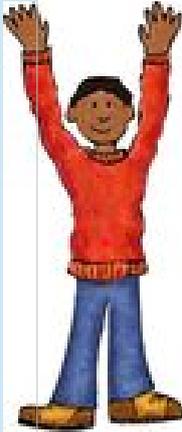
Not about a building...

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The change of focus away from the temple is very important to Luke.

At what point did the church take the focus back to a building?

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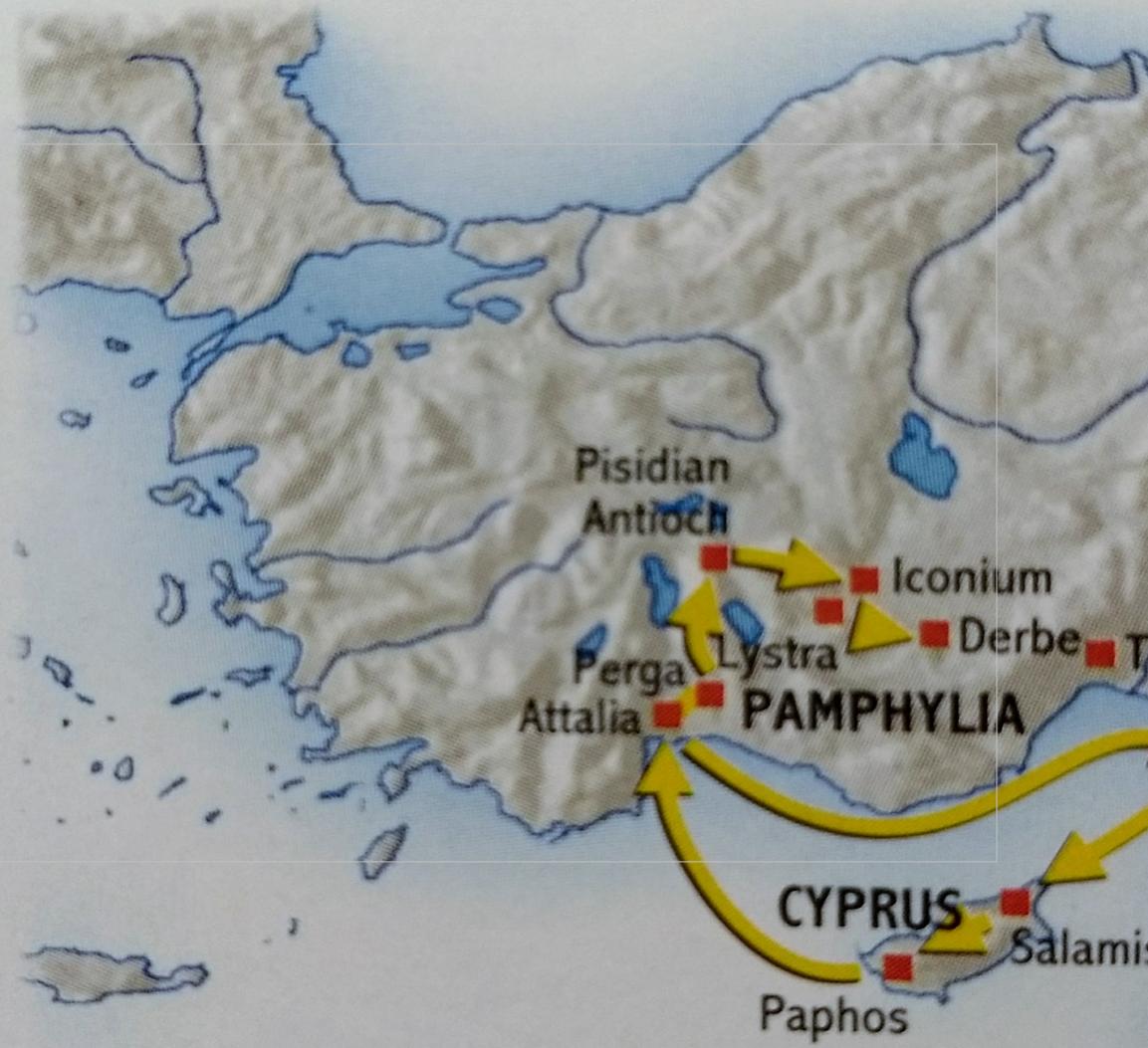
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AD 48/49	Letter to the Galatians?
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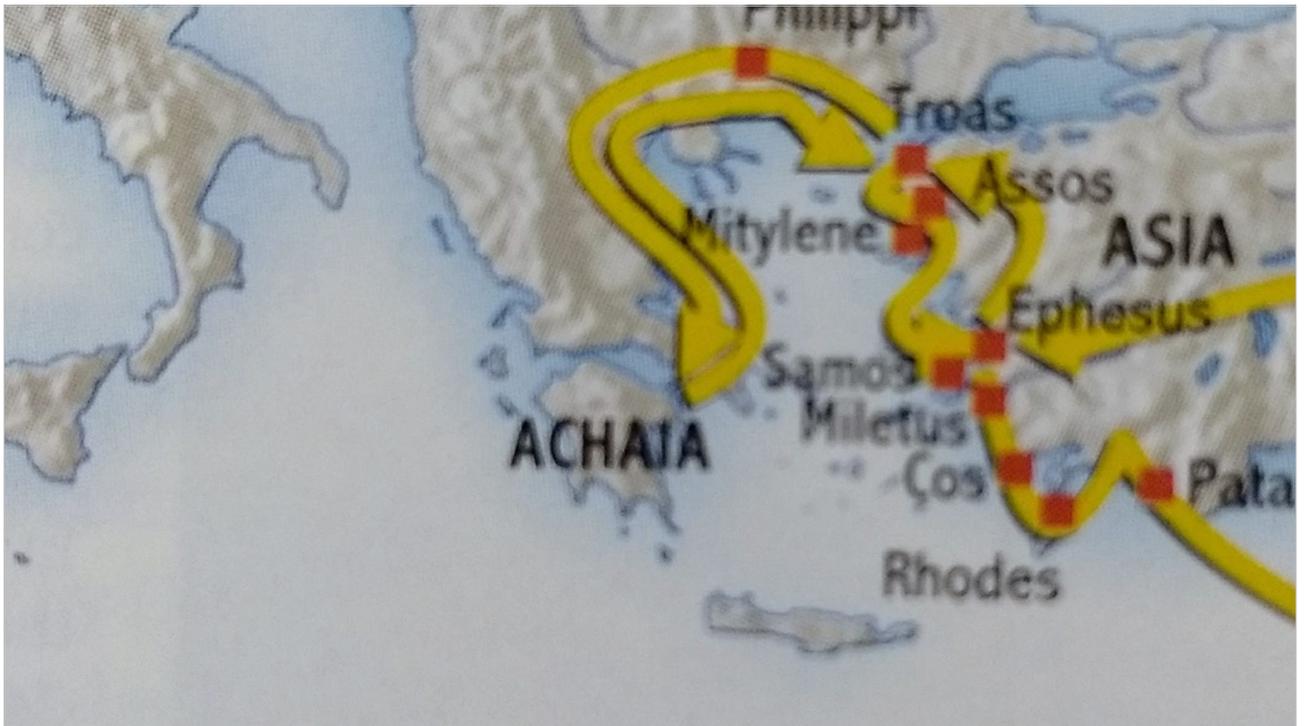
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