

Understanding the Message of Acts

Pastor Mark Blair, BICF ZGC, July 2011

“The Acts of Exalted Jesus, done in the power of the Holy Spirit through the Apostolic Church”

1. A Bridge

IF NO Book of Acts > John 21 to Romans 1 > 1ST word ‘PAUL’ Who? What? Church in ROME? How did FAITH Leap Across Mediterranean Sea??

a. to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem

Almost half of Luke’s Gospel records Jesus’ process of getting to this fateful City.

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. Luke 9.51

...he was heading for Jerusalem. Luke 9.53

Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Luke 13.22

Jesus: “I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day--for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!” Luke 13.33

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along... Luke 17.11

Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem..." Luke 18.31

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Luke | Acts |
| Jesus going TO -----→ Jerusalem | -----→ Church going FROM |

GOSPEL Jesus TO Jerusalem / ACTS Jesus Spirit-fill Church FROM Jerusalem

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1.4,5,8

NT Mission is CENTRIFUGAL NOT CENTRIPETAL > Going OUT not IN

Mission work is not bringing people to church, but primarily going to them.

b. between OT Promise and NT Fulfillment

Peter stood up among the believers...and said, "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David...
Acts 1.15,16

Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Acts 2.14-17

But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer.
Acts 3.18

Paul: "We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.
Acts 13.32

Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: "Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."..."Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"
Acts 28.25-28

c. between Jewish Covenant and Global Church

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"
Acts 1.6

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. Acts 9.31

Peter: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" Acts 10.34,35

d. from Person of Apostles to Proclamation of Apostles

Letters to *Timothy, Titus, Philemon* > How did they GET IN the STORY?

James – Half Brother of Jesus – in Gospels JAMES is NOT Even BELIEVER!

Jude – Also Half Brother of Jesus – ALSO NOT BELIEVER!!

2 Letters from **PETER??** – Guy who DENIED Jesus THREE TIMES!!

How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was *confirmed to us by those who heard him*. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will. Hebrews 2.3,4

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the *faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*. Jude 3

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Revelation 22.18,19

e. from Ancient Church to Contemporary Church

"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1.11

Meet PAUL Prolific Writer, 13 NT Letters: Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi...

Corinthians CONTENTION about Holy Spirit and His GIFTS

Galatians CONFUSION about Law of Moses and Faith of Jesus

Thessalonians CONCERN about whether Jesus Came Again and Left Behind?

Philippians COMMENDED for the Generous, Sacrificial GIVING

KEY to Understand ISSUES > ACTS Narratives of Paul's Missionary Journeys

f. from Fearful Followers to Established Churches

"These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here..."
Acts 17.6

All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.
Colossians 1.6

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia... 1 Peter 1.1

2. Advancing the Church's Mission

a. Prominence of Preaching - 30% of the Book is Sermons

Many sermons in Acts, most based on OT texts, most about Messiah

Several of the sermons are prompted by miraculous events.

Sermons excerpts are recorded, Luke was not present for all the preaching.

In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. Acts 19.20

b. Diplomacy Without

Roman Authorities have nothing to fear from Christianity; legal, prayerful, respectful, morally upright.

Roman officials were friendly to the faith: Soldier at the Cross, Cornelius the Centurion, Sergius Paulus proconsul of Cyprus

Roman Courts found no fault with the faith or followers: Jesus before Pilate, Paul in Philippi, Ephesus, Felix, Festus, Agrippa

Christian faith was Legal according to Roman Law– ancient faith (not new invention) – fulfillment of Hebrew Scriptures

c. Diplomacy Within

One Church – Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles

Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord. Acts 9.31

United Leadership – Apostles Jews and Gentiles – Peter and Paul , diverse leadership in Antioch, Jerusalem Council

Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. Acts 15.22

d. Structure of the Book

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1.8

This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. Acts 9.15

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|---------|--|
| 1 – 7 | Jerusalem (Peter / Stephen [Saul approves Stephen’s death]) |
| 8 – 12 | Judea and Samaria ([Saul prompts Dispersion] / Philip to Samaria, Ethiopian / [Saul Converted] / Peter begins Gentile mission) |
| 13 – 28 | Ends of the Earth (Paul / [Peter confirms Gentile mission]) |
| 13 – 20 | Before Gentiles |
| 24 – 26 | Before kings |
| 22, 28 | Before Israel’s sons |

3. Birth Record not a Blueprint

a. 'Once for All' Redemptive History: Significant acts of God for the salvation of the world.

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. Acts 1.3

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight...“This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1.9,11

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." Acts 11.18

"Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' Acts 26.15-18

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve...and *last of all* he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

1 Corinthians 15.3-8

b. A Real church not a Romantic Ideal

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit..." Acts 5.3

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Acts 6.1

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Acts 8.1

They (Paul and Barnabas) had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Acts 15.39

c. A Church in Formation

Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. Acts 1.26

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Acts 2.1-4

When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Acts 8.15-17

During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) Acts 11.27,28

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13.2

d. Selective History

“Twelve Apostles” – only given information about Peter, John, James (beheaded), and Paul

Geographic Spread – North and West, not South (except Ethiopian) and East

3. Revelation explains Redemption – God Speaks when God Saves

When God ACTS to deliver His people as their Savior, then God SPEAKS to declare His praises as their Sovereign.

This occurred in three primary periods of history: Moses/Joshua, Elisha/Elijah, Jesus/Apostles.

The Word of God spoken describes the Work of God in salvation.

"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." Acts 20.32

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. 1 Thessalonians 2.13

a. Miracles confirm Revelation

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. Acts 2.42,43

Peter: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”... But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.
Acts 4.12,14

At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. The apostles

performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. Acts 5.10-12

When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. Acts 8.6

Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun." Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord. Acts 13.8-12

The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. Acts 15.12

Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. Acts 20.10,11

The things that mark an apostle--signs, wonders and miracles--were done among you with great perseverance. 2 Corinthians 12.12

b. God's Fame not Famous Men

Not Biography: Key People Peter and Paul > Much we DO NOT Learn: Physical Appearance, Parents, Politics, Hobbies, Death >> **Focus – Sermons & Service for Jesus**

Many Individuals > CONNECTING Theme > FOLLOWERS of Jesus
Individuals have SUPPORTING ROLE > MAIN ACTOR is JESUS

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Acts 4.13

As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself." Acts 10.25,26

"Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God..." Acts 14.15

At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane." Acts 26.24

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. Acts 20.24

4. Particular Examples not Eternal Principles

a. Applying Acts: Two Extremes

Draw Lots for Leaders?? Flames for Headdress?? Live in Communes?? Spirit Subsequently??

1) All - Miracles, Drawing Lots, Community Property, Preaching all Night, Drinking Blood

2) Nothing - 'Private Property' Only, Paul failed to preach Christ in Athens, No Miracles

b. Application: Principles not Particulars

1) Historical Examples are Not Normative for Whole Church

Just because something happened once in the Church does not mean it must/will happen in every church.

Things that happened in a church without a complete canon of Scripture may not happen in a church with the entire Bible.

"He answered, `Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "Abraham replied, `They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' ""No, father Abraham,' he said, `but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, `If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Luke 16.27-31

2) Historical Narrative is not conducive for Theological Explanation

Luke is giving a brief overview of selected people/events in the history of the early church.

“The Bible gives us true truth, not exhaustive truth.”

Francis Schaeffer

The brief excerpts from the sermons in Acts does not fully explain the theology of Paul, Peter, or James. Their letters give us a fuller understanding of their theological perspectives.

NT Letters give Direct Address to Faith and Life of Local Church

5. Theology of Luke / Acts

a. Sovereignty of God: Plan of God and Prophecies Fulfilled

...they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ""Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. "

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Acts 4.24-29

b. Salvation through Jesus: No other name, for all to call upon

Peter: "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead...Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Acts 4.10,12

c. Spirit upon on all flesh, forming one Church

Peter: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning... God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ" Acts 11.15,17

6. Summary Statements in Acts

"the word... kept on spreading... the disciples continued to increase..." Acts 6:7

"the church... continued to increase." Acts 9:31

"the word... continued to grow and to be multiplied." Acts 12:24

"the churches... grew daily in numbers." Acts 16:5

"the word... was growing mightily..." Acts 19:20

...preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered. Acts 28:30-31

Our missionary God sent His missionary Son to build a missionary Church by the power of His missionary Spirit. The Jerusalem church became more occupied with maintaining their traditions and heritage than making the necessary changes to get with God's global program. No 'mission to the Gentiles' is ever launched from Jerusalem. At the end of Acts, Antioch is the mission sending center, Rome is the center of Church and Empire, and Jerusalem is about to be made rubble.

Today, God's mission program has not changed. It is moving to His appointed conclusion with the return of the Chief Missioner and the gathering of all nations before Him. The choice remains the same for all Christians and churches; will we be dynamically engaged in His global mission, or lifeless rubble?
