

THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Spread of the Powerful Gospel

The Global Expansion of Christianity

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJ0dZhHccfU>

Patterns of Global Expansion of Christianity

- Christianity spread rapidly from the day of Pentecost to the rise of Christendom early in the 4th century through to the conquest of Constantinople (now Istanbul) in 1453
- From there Christian missions encountered the age of discovery and spread further through colonial expansion during the early modern era (1500–1800) through most of the “Great Century” in missions (1800–1914)
- Finally, Christian mission spread tremendously in 20th century through the processes of globalization and migration from the West to Africa, Latin America, and Asia (particularly Korea)

Purpose of the Book of Acts

- If the Gospel of Luke is about “all that Jesus began to do and to teach (Acts 1:1), Acts is about what Jesus continues to do through his disciples in the power of the Spirit
- The role of the disciples is to be Jesus’ “**witnesses**”—his representatives
- “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” (1:8)

Purpose of the Book of Acts

- Acts 1:8 serves both as the central theme of the book—the power of the gospel—and its general outline
- Structure of the book
 - Jerusalem (1-5)
 - Judea (6-7)
 - Samaria (8)
 - Rome and the ends of the earth (9-28)

Crossing Boundaries and Contexts

- Chapters 1-5 reveal a homogenous Jewish context in Jerusalem
- Acts 1:12-26 records the replacement of Judas and the appointment of Matthias as the 12th apostle. Why not stick with 11? This sets the stage for God to continue his work upon the foundation of apostles
- Acts 2 records the Day of Pentecost, the preaching of Peter, where 120 people were gathered and the miraculous conversion of 3,000
- In Acts 6, the gospel goes into a more diverse context, where the question of the Palestinian and Hellenistic widows emerges

Crossing Boundaries and Contexts

- When the gospel moves into a context, new challenges are presented. If the church accepts those challenges and relies on the Holy Spirit, the church grows
- Due to persecution, the gospel goes into Samaria (chpt 8), where the Hellenistic non-apostles share the gospel
- Saul or Paul is converted on the road to Damascus (chpt 9) and is called by Jesus to minister to the Gentiles
- Cornelius is converted as the first Gentile believer (chpt 10)
- A Gentile church is established in Antioch as a sending church (chpt 11)

Paul's 1st Missionary Journey (12:25-14:28)

- Barnabas and Paul set off (12:25-13:3)
- In Cyprus (13:4-12)
- In Pisidian Antioch (13:13-52)
- In Iconium (14:1-7)
- In Lystra and Derbe (14:8-20)
- Return to Antioch in Syria (14:21-28)

The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35)

- The church convened the first ecumenical council around AD 50
- They declared that one does not have to be circumcised (i.e., become Jewish) to be a Christian
- The council then sent out a letter to Gentile believers (15:22-35)

Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey (15:36-18:22)

- Disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (15:36-41)
- Timothy joins Paul and Silas (16:6-10)
- Lydia's conversion in Philippi (16:11-15)
- Paul and Silas in prison (16:16-40)
- In Thessalonica (17:1-9)
- In Berea (17:1-9)
- In Athens (17:16-34)
- In Corinth (18:1-17)
- Return to Antioch (18:18-22)

Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey (18:23-21:16)

- Paul in Ephesus (19:23-28)
- Riot in Ephesus (12:23-41)
- Passing through Macedonia and Greece (20:1-6)
- In Troas (20:7-12)
- Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders (20:13-38)
- Paul onto Jerusalem (21:1-16)

Paul's 4th Missionary Journey (21:17-28:31)

- Paul's arrival at Jerusalem and arrest (21:17-21:36)
- Paul speaks to the crowd as a Roman citizen (21:37-22:29)
- Paul before the Sanhedrin and the plot to kill him (22:30-23:22)
- Paul is transferred to Caesarea and tried before Felix (23:23-24:27)
- Paul is tried before Festus and Agrippa (25:1-26:32)
- Paul sails for Rome and shipwrecked at Malta (27:1-28:10)
- Paul arrives at Rome and preaches under guard (28:11-31)

Doing Church

- The early church in Jerusalem was characterized by four elements: (1) devoted to the apostles' teaching, (2) fellowship, (3) communion, (4) prayer (Acts 2:42-47)
- Acts 4:36-37 records a major threat to the church, when Barnabas sells a field and gives the proceeds to the apostles. This is juxtaposed with Acts 5, when Ananias and Sapphira sell a field but give the impression that the full amount was donated but they actually held back the money
- They both died (5:5) and people were afraid (5:11). Their sin was not one of greed but hypocrisy. They wanted to be like Barnabas but didn't have the same character. The

Doing Church

- Acts 6 records an interesting scenario. Diversity is actually an opportunity for growth, not a problem
- Hellenistic Jews from the outside complained that their widows were not properly cared for
- They were asked to choose people among themselves to address the problem (6:2-3)
- There was a legitimate problem, and was addressed by a proper division of labor
- The church needs to attend to both the spiritual and physical needs of its people

Conclusions

- In depicting the effective expansion of Christianity, the Book of Acts serves as an apologetic for at least two reasons:
- To show the power of the gospel to believers, so we may have the confidence to continue the work of Christ on earth
- To demonstrate to the Roman authorities that Christianity is not a seditious sect of Judaism that would threaten the peace and the well-being of society
- There exists today 2.4 billion Christians and remains the religion with the largest number of followers around the world

Conclusions

- In 1793, when William Carey traveled to Calcutta India to signal the start of the modern missionary movement, 98% of Protestant Christians lived in the West
- Today the Majority World Church lives outside the West, with the Bible translated in over 2,000 languages across the globe