

*‘Six Conversations with the Acts of the Apostles’
led by the Revd Tom Stuckey at Christchurch Priory*



1. Why the Church? (Acts 1)

Monday 29th April at 7-30pm & Tuesday 30th at 10.30am

WHAT SORT OF BOOK IS THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES?

“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1.1-5)

1. Who wrote it?
2. Who was it written to?
3. Is it accurate?
4. What sort of history?

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.” (Luke 1.1-4)

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE OF ACTS?

- Going on a journey
- The boldness of Christians and the unstoppable spread of faith
- Looking & listening (words and deeds)
- Seeing how people respond and making your own response
- One church consisting of Jews and Greeks
- The fulfilling of prophecy (use of Old Testament)

WHY THE CHURCH?

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (v.6-9)

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away; and when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. In those days Peter stood up among the brethren (the company of persons was in all about a hundred and twenty), and said, ["we need another apostle"] (v.11-26)

DO THE TEXTS ABOVE GIVE YOU ANY CLUES ABOUT **WHY** THE CHURCH?

The journey - Jerusalem, Samaria, Greece, Rome

SIX SECTIONS. Each part ends with a refrain about more and more people joining the church.

1. Acts 1:1-6:7

In the first part, Luke describes how the church grew in **Jerusalem**. It ends like this. "The word of God continued to spread; the number of disciples increased greatly... many priests obeyed the faith".

2. Acts 6:8-9:31

We learn how the good news reached **Samaria** because of Stephen's death. This part ends "Meanwhile, the church throughout **Judea, Galilee** and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers".

3. Acts 9:32-12:24

In this part, the writer tells how Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. Damascus is a city in Syria. We learn how the gospel reached **Antioch**, the capital city in Syria. We read also of how both Peter and Cornelius were converted. Cornelius was a Greek. This sections ends like this: "But the word of God continued to advance and gain adherents"

4. Acts 12:25-16:5

Luke now describes how the gospel spread through more countries (**Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe**). It ends like this: "So, the churches were strengthened in faith and increased in numbers daily".

5. Acts 16:6-19:20

Here we learn how the good news about Jesus crossed new cultural boundaries (**Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus**). Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. Paul spent two years here This part ends "So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed".

6. Acts 19:21-28:31

In the final part, Luke tells us of Paul's journey to Rome. He is still a prisoner awaiting trial but was able to preach and teach about "the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance".

*Almighty Father, who in your great mercy made glad the disciples,
with the sight of the risen Lord:
Give us such knowledge of his presence with us,
that we may be strengthened and sustained by his risen life
and service you continually in righteousness and truth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

EXERCISE:

Compare the list of disciples Acts 1.13-14 & Luke 6.13-16

NOTES

The Luke 'we' passages in Acts 16.10,11,13etc, 20.5, 6, 7etc, 27.5,7etc, 28.16

Paul and Luke Col.4.14 & 2 Tim.4.1

Written AD 80-90 (?)



2. What was the Early Church like? (Acts 4)

Monday 6th May at 7-30pm & Tuesday 7th at 10.30am

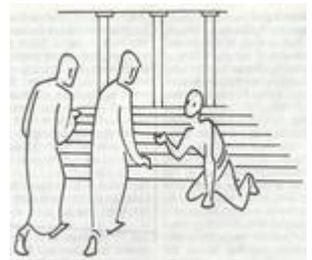
1. PRAYER AND WORSHIP

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2.41-46)

Jesus' ministry is punctuated with events and stories of eating together. These are presented as enactments of the Kingdom of God. (Luke 5.29f, 7.36f, 9.12f, 14.7f, 15.23f, 19.1f, 22.14f, 24.13f).

2. SIGNS AND WONDERS

(a) Healing miracles - A lame man is lifted up and walks (Acts 3.1-10)



Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles...[people] even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and pallets, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. (Acts 5.12-16)

(b) The boldness of the apostles (Acts 2.14, 4.13 & 17-21 & 29)

3. ALL THINGS IN COMMON

'Fellowship' (2.42) (*koinonia*) is both a spiritual and economic word for 'togetherness'

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4.32-37)

Money and the sharing of resources was a source of contention from the very beginning. The hypocrisy of Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5.1-11) & the uneven distribution of resources (Acts 6.1-6) are illustrations of this. Paul was later to have similar problems with the Corinthian Church (1 Cor.16.1-4).

WHY DID THE CHURCH KEEP GROWING?

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip... (etc). (Acts 6.1-7)

4. PERSECUTION - WHY

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the morrow, for it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand. (Acts 4.1-4)

But the high priest rose up and all who were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the common prison. But at night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out and said, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." And when they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and taught. (Acts 5.17-27)

STEPHEN'S LONG SERMON IN CHAPTER 7 ENDS:

"But it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me', says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?' You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

THE SERMONS TO JEWS (by birth or by converting)

1. An Old Testament passage explained prophetically
2. The declaration that Jesus is Lord and Messiah (Christ) (with added proof texts from the OT)
3. God's promises are true
4. There is forgiveness of sins and freedom
5. You need to repent (you crucified your Messiah!) (you got the Scriptures wrong!)
6. Believe, be baptised and join the new community

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. (Acts 7.47-53)

EXERCISE:

Look at the shape of the sermons:

Peter: Acts 2.17-39

Stephen: Acts 7.1-60

*God of peace
who brought again from the dead
our Lord Jesus Christ,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
by the blood of the eternal covenant:
make us perfect in every good work to do your will,
and work in us that which is well pleasing
in your sight;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*



TIME-LINE

30	death of Jesus	(Roman Emperors)
33	Conversion of Paul	Tiberius
67	Paul & Peter executed in Rome	Nero
67	Marks Gospel	
70	Jerusalem Temple destroyed	Vespasian
80?	Luke & Acts	Titus or Domitian
90?	Matthew's Gospel	Nerva?
90?	John's Gospel	

NOTES

"Christians shared their goods, their meals, their worship, everything except their wives." (Cassius Dio (?) 190AD)

"It's a scandal...These godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well" (Emperor Julian 334AD)

3. Outsiders and Insiders: A challenge for Peter (Acts 10)

Monday 13th May at 7-30pm & Tuesday 14th at 10.30am

PETER'S SERMONS

Acts 1.14-40: (i) OT explained (ii) God raised up Jesus (with proof texts) (iii) Jesus is Lord (iv) repent

And when Peter saw it he addressed the people, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know; and the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old. (Acts 3.12-20)

Also 4.4-21

PETER'S JOURNEY & CONVERSION?

Calling (Lk.5.1-11); Confession (Lk.18-20); Denial (Lk 22.54-61); Leader (Acts 1.15); Preacher & apologist (2.14; .3.12f; 4.4f; 5.29); Missioner in Lydda & Joppa (9.32 – 10.48); Returning to Jerusalem (11.1-4); escapes prison(12.1-19).

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people, and prayed constantly to God. About the ninth hour of the day (3.00 pm) he saw clearly in a vision an angel (messenger?) of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." And he stared at him in terror, and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those that waited on him, and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa. (Acts 10.1-8)

THE SOCIOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE EARLY CHURCH				
A	B	C	D	E
Traditional Jews <i>"the Jews"</i>	Greek speaking Jews <i>"Gentiles"</i>	Converts of Judaism <i>"proselytes"</i>	Romans <i>"God-fearers"</i>	Pagans
For these traditional Jews living in Palestine the Jerusalem temple is their main focus. (2.14, 9.23; 14.19)	These are Jews of the 'dispersion'* called 'Hellenists' the local synagogue is their main focus (2.5 & 22: 13.48)	'Gentiles' (outsiders). These are true converts to Judaism and accept the mark of circumcision (2.10)	Romans sympathetic to Judaism who give support but refuse circumcision (Lk.7.1-9; Acts 10.2)	hostile to Judaism & Christianity(Atheism)* (17.1-18; 24.27)

The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision which he had seen might mean, behold, the men that were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood before the gate and called out to ask whether Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you. Rise and go down, and accompany them without hesitation; for I have sent them." (Acts 10.9-20)

DO THE SAME TENSIONS EXIST IN TODAY'S CHURCH BETWEEN:

The traditional attendees who have long links with the building

AND

New comers with a different experience and who have different ideas about how things should be run.

So he called them in to be his guests. The next day he rose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. The next day he rose and went off with them, and some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And on the following day they entered Caesare'a. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his kinsmen and close friends. When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am a man." And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered; and he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit any one of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me." ... (Cornelius tells his story)... And Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. (Acts 10.21-35)

Peter preaches about Jesus, the resurrection and forgiveness of sins. His sermon concludes:

While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. (Acts 10.44-48)

AFTERMATH

The Jerusalem Council discusses the issue of circumcision (the sign of different between Jews and Gentiles)

When they (Barnabas and Paul) came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses." The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." (Acts 15.4-11)

Peter disappears from the scene. James become leader of the Jerusalem Church (15.13-14)

I tell you that, when you were younger, you used to fasten your belt and go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt about you and take you where you do not wish to go (Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God). (John 21.15-17)



EXERCISE:

**Compare Sermons
of the sermons:**

Peter: Acts 10.35-43

Paul: Acts 13.26-49

*Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the resurrection
and the life of all who put their trust in him:
raise us, we pray, from the death of sin
to the life of righteousness;
that we may seek the things which are above
where he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen*

Cavavaggio in Santa Maria Del Popolo Roma

NOTES & NEXT TIME

'Freedman' (6.9) they were Hellenistic Jews of the dispersion who attended their own synagogue. They are despised by the other Hellenistic Jews because of their lower status since they had formally been 'slaves'

'dispersion' Palestinian Jews who have settled in other parts of the Roman Empire

Acts ch.9: ch.13; ch.15.12 to 16.5; ch.22.22-30; ch.26; Rom 1.16-17; Gal chs 1 & 2; Philipps 3.4-11

4. Saul the persecutor becomes Paul the apostle (Acts 9)

Monday 20th May at 7-30pm & Tuesday 21st at 10.30am

WHO WAS HE?

I (was) circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss (rubbish) because of Christ. (Philippians 3.4-7)

A Roman citizen (Acts 22.25-29), born in Tarsus (Acts 9.11 & 30), a philosopher (Acts 17.18), a clever Jewish Rabbi (23.6-10), he supervised the execution of Stephen and led the first persecution of Christians (Acts 8.1-3, 26.9-11).

THE EVENT ON THE DAMASCUS ROAD

Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining round me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It hurts you to kick against the goads." And I said, "Who are you, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles -- to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26.12-19)

Luke relates this conversion story three times. In the above Paul is addressing the Roman authorities. In the second, like Jesus he is brought before the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. Here he speaks in Hebrew (Acts 22.22-21) giving his story different ingredients from that above.

I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cili'cia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gama'li-el, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brethren, and I journeyed to Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished. (v.3-5)

Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, "What shall I do, Lord?" And the Lord said to me, "Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do." And when I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, "Brother Saul, receive your sight." And in that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, "The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. (v.9-15)

This retelling of his story is shouted down at the mention of 'Gentiles'. The council demands the death penalty. The third more well know version is in Acts 9. There are additional features: the reluctance of Ananias to go to 'Straight Street', the mention 'scales' falling from his eyes after the laying one of hands, the personal suffering he will have to endure.

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9.13)

Paul's story is dramatic and sudden. Most have us have no 'blinding flashes' but we still have a story to tell of how God has touched our lives and brought you here. SHARE IT.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

The missing years (Acts 9.26-30). Barnabas gets Saul/Paul (Acts 11.25-26). They start their tour (13.2-3) beginning in Cyprus (13.4). Paul become leader and preaches in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13.13-52) His sermon follows the same set pattern (which we have seen already) but contains new elements:

Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest there come upon you what is said in the prophets: "Behold, you scoffers, and wonder, and perish; for I do a deed in your days, a deed you will never believe, if one declares it to you." (v.39-41).....But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy we are now turning to the Gentiles (v.45-46)

A repeating pattern of ejection from the synagogues in Iconium, (Acts 14.5), Lystra & Derby (14.19-21).

THE FIRST ECUMENICAL CONFERENCE

The main item on the agenda

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question....When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them.. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the law of Moses." The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. (Acts 15.1-7)

The concluding resolution

After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brethren, listen to me". Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name....Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood....Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leaders amongs the brothers with a letter. (Acts 15.13-22)

Paul's red hot letter to the Galatians (churches in the regions he has visited) suggests that some within the churches were not prepared to accept this decision.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to another gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! (Gal.1.6-8)....For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (v.5.1)



EXERCISE:
Have a look at Paul's personal account of this controversy in Galatians chapters 1 & 2

Almighty God, who alone can bring order to the unruly wills and passions of sinful men: give us grace, to love what you command and to desire what you promise, that in all the changes and chances of this world our hearts may surely there be fixed where lasting joys are to be found through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Cavavaggio in Santa Maria Del Popolo Roma

NEXT TIME

Focus on the Churches in Philippi, Athens and Ephesus

Acts 15.36-40. Then chapters 16, 17, 18, 19. 1 Corinthians 1.1-3. Romans 16

5. Different sorts of Church (Acts 17 etc)

Monday 27th May at 7-30pm & Tuesday 28st at 10.30am

Paul: Romans citizen by birth, philosopher, Jewish Rabbi, distrusted by the Jews and Jerusalem Christians.
A change of companions and the start of the European mission

And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the brethren in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." And Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem (Acts 15.36-16.5).

PHILIPPI

And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing beseeching him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia (Greece) and help us." And when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Ne-apolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia, and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days and on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. And when she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us. (Acts 16.6-15)

Important Roman Garrison on the via Egnatia. Paul and Silas accused, stripped beaten and imprisoned. An earthquake, the jailer converted (v.16-34). An intriguing postscript. (v.35-40)

Next to synagogues in Thessalonica (troubles from the mob but saved by the authorities) To Beroea; again Jews stir up trouble but saved by new converts; 'Greek women and men of high standing' (Acts 17 12). Paul ends up in Athens where he first 'dialogues with the Jews' but then with the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (Acts 17.16-21) on the Mars Hill under the shadow of the Acropolis.

ATHENS

"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.' Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead." Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from among them. But some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Are-opagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them. (Acts 17.22-34)

How is this different from the other sermons in Acts?

Then to Corinth meets Aquila & Priscilla (Acts 18.1-11) Jewish opposition but magistrates defend Paul (Acts 18.12-17). Paul leaves after a year and a half (v.11) and returns to Jerusalem and reports.

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him. (in Corinth) (Acts 18.24-28)

Paul's views about women has been grossly misrepresented (because of 1 Cor 11 & Eph 5.22-33). Paul affirms and enables them to minister. Paul's vision of new humanity in Galatians

For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! (Gal 6.15).....There is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3.28).

Your experiences of 'good' churches!!

EPHESUS

Paul leaves Jerusalem returns to Ephesus after staying in Antioch and then travelling through Galatia (Acts 18.23).

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in all. And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God; but when some were stubborn and disbelieved, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. And God did extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul. (Acts 19.1-11)

Paul's strategy is to unashamedly plant new congregations. The impact of his ministry undermines the finances of the temple of Artemis (one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world) and provokes a riot but again he is protected by the Roman authorities (Acts 19.32-41)

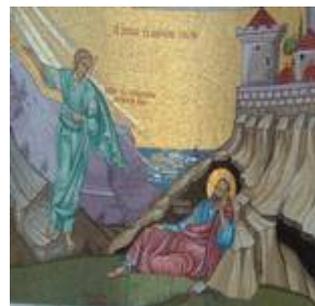
EXERCISE:

1. Look through Romans 16.

How many are women?

2. What have you Learnt from these studies?

*Almighty God and everlasting God
you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray
and give more than either we desire or deserve.
Pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid:
and giving us good things which we are not worthy to ask
save through the merits and mediation
of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen*



NOTES & NEXT TIME – Final session – Pentecost and Journey

Stoics – matter impregnated with spirit (reason); fatalistic; cultivate virtues for now and for the afterlife.

Epicurian – universe accidental; no reason or spirit; fatalistic; live the good life now.

Via Ignatia main highway between Rome and Constantinople

PENTECOSTS Acts 2.1-4; 4.29-31; 10.44-46; 19.1-6; Eph.5.17-20

JOURNEY Acts 20.25-35; 26.31-32; chapters 27 & 28. 2 Tim. 4. Philippians 4

6. Journeys to Pentecost (Acts 19)

Monday 3rd June at 7-30pm & Tuesday 4th at 10.30am

PENTECOST

The promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1.8) first realized on the Day of Pentecost.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. (Acts 2.1-5)

Also when Peter addresses the household of Cornelius

While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can any one forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. (Acts 10.46)

Paul in Ephesus asks 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed'. They had only been baptized into John's baptism of repentance.

On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. (Acts 19.6)

Speaking in tongues (*glossalalia*). Paul has to visit Corinth because of they have gone spiritually 'over the top' (1 Cor. chs 12,13,14). While in Ephesus he writes to the Christians in Rome requesting sponsorship for a mission further West (Spain?). (Rom. 15.19-20). In chapter 8, he sets out his teaching on the Holy Spirit.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When you cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – if in fact we suffer with him so that we may be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. (Rom. 8.14-18)

TRIALS AND THE TROUBLES

Paul and his companions leave Ephesus travel to Greece, Philippi, Troas, (Acts 20.1-17). There is a brief stop-over at Ephesus (the port).

And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that all you among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom will see my face no more. And when he had spoken thus, he knelt down and prayed with them all. .. And they brought him to the ship. (Acts 20. v17-25 & v.32-38)

He travels via Rhodes, Cyprus, Tyre, to Caesarea (Acts 21). At a further 'stop-over'. The leaders beg him not to go to Jerusalem but he replies.

"What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And when he would not be persuaded, we (note Luke is here) ceased and said, "The will of the Lord be done." (v12-14)

PAUL'S TIME-LINE

He is arrested in the Jerusalem temple and saved from the mob by the Roman soldiers. He gives his testimony to the Jews, is saved by the Romans from an assassination attempt and imprisoned in Caesaria for his own safety Acts 23). His case is reviewed 2 years later by Festus and Agrippa and he is sent to Rome. Acts ends (chapter 27-28) with a brilliant account of Paul's journey to Rome (WHEN YOU GET HOME READ IT). What happened next is a matter of conjecture.

WHAT HAS PAUL LEARNT?

He catalogues his troubles and difficulties in 2 Corinthians 11.23-30. But these have become a source of hope and joy. The note of 'joy' permeates his letter to the Philippians

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice...Do not worry about anything....The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus...I have learnt to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learnt the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Philippians 4.4-13)

5BC?	Birth Paul	
29/30	Death of Jesus	Acts
30-33	Christians persecuted	8.1: 12.1
33	Conversion	9.1-19
47	Antioch	11.22-30
48	1 st Mission	13 & 14
	GALATIANS?	
50-52	2 nd Mission	15.36- 18.18
	1 & 2 THESSALONIANS?	
53-56	3 rd Mission (focus Ephesus)	19
	1 & 2 CORINTHIANS	
(54	Emergency visit to Corinth	20.2-6)
	ROMANS	
57	Imprisoned in Caesarea	23-26
60	Journey to Rome	27-28
62	Imprisoned in Rome	
	COLOSSIANS/PHILEMON	
(62-64	4 th Mission??	1 Tim 1.3)
64	Nero's attack on Christians	
65-67	Imprisoned in Rome	2 Timothy
	EPHESIANS/TIMOTHY/TITUS?	
68	Executed	

70 years and only 10 in active ministry

Looking back on your own life so far. What lessons have you learnt?

PAUL'S PENTECOST LESSON

Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.....but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns...making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph.5.17-20)

NOTE 'be filled' (Acts 4.31)

PAUL'S DEATH

He is deserted at his trial and abandoned by many of his followers. Luke alone is with him. Just before his death Paul says:

For me I am already being poured out as a sacrificial offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day (2 Tim.4.6-8)



EXERCISE:
**What have you learn
from this course?**

Eternal God, the King of Glory
you have exalted your only Son
with great triumph to the kingdom of heaven,
Leave us not comfortless,
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us
and exalt us to the place
where Christ is gone before,
and where with you and the Holy Spirit
he is worshipped and glorified,
now and for ever. Amen