

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we continue the introduction to the book of ACTS. Today in part 2, we will learn about the division, the characteristics and the main messages of the book of Acts.

POINT 5. THE DIVISION OF ACTS

The book of Acts may be divided into *two* parts.

Part one: The extension of the church in and from Jerusalem.

This is written in Acts chapters 1-12. This part may again be divided into two sections:

Section one consists of the extension of the church in Jerusalem. These events took place between the years A.D. 30-33/4 and are recorded in Acts 1:1 to 8:3. The events include the ascension of Christ, the choice of Matthias to replace Judas as an apostle (1), the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the first local church in history (2). It also includes the rapid growth of the church at Jerusalem (3-4), which resulted in persecution, the arrest and imprisonment of the twelve apostles (5:18), and the testimony and martyrdom of Stephen, which was witnessed by Paul (6-7).

Section two consists of the extension of the church from Jerusalem into all Judea and Samaria. These events took place between the years A.D. 33/34-46. The great persecution of the church at Jerusalem caused the Christians in Jerusalem to be scattered all over Judea and Samaria, where they continued to preach the gospel. The events include the missionary work of Philip, which spread to Samaria and Ethiopia (8); the conversion of Paul and his missionary work in Damascus and Jerusalem (9) and the missionary work of Peter in the coastal areas and his calling to go to the first Gentiles in Caesarea (10). Finally it includes the missionary work of Christians that reached Antioch in Syria and Paul's involvement in the work at Antioch (11). The first part of the book of Acts closes with the martyrdom of the apostle James and the imprisonment of Peter (12).

Part two: The extension of the church from Antioch, mainly through the missionary work of Paul.

This is written in Acts chapters 13-28. This part may be divided into five sections:

Section one consists of Paul's first missionary journey and the Jerusalem conference.

Paul's first missionary journey took place in A.D. 47-48 (13-14) and the Jerusalem conference in A.D. 49/50 (15). These events are recorded in Acts 13-15.

Section two consists of Paul's second missionary journey.

This took place in A.D. 50-52 and is recorded in Acts 16-18.

Section three consists of Paul's third missionary journey.

This took place in A.D. 52-57 and is recorded in Acts 19-20.

Section four consists of Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and imprisonment in Caesarea.

This took place in A.D. 57-59 and is recorded in Acts 21-26.

Section five consists of Paul's voyage to Rome and his first imprisonment in Rome.

This took place in A.D. 59-61 and is recorded in Acts 27-28.

POINT 6. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ACTS

First. The book of Acts is the second volume of Luke's two volume work.

One. The first collection of Christian documents consisted of the letters of Paul. Soon after the death of the apostle Paul, the first collection of Christian documents took place, namely a collection of '*the letters of Paul*'. It is quite possible that Timothy collected all the letters of Paul, promoted the making of copies of this collection of the letters of Paul and spread it to the various churches. According to 2 Peter 3:16, it seems probable that a collection of the letters of Paul existed by A.D. 64, when Peter was martyred under Nero's persecution.

Two. The second collection of Christian documents consisted of the Gospels. Originally the two volume work of Luke, produced in A.D. 62-63 circulated together as one complete and independent work. However, after the publication of the Gospel of John between A.D. 70-98, towards the end of the first century or beginning of the second century, the four Gospels were gathered together into one collection and began to circulate as '*the Fourfold Gospel*'. This meant that the

first volume of the two volume work of Luke was detached from the second volume and this second volume began to pursue a career of its own.

Second. The book of Acts proofs that Paul was as much an apostle as Peter, and the rest of the apostles.

In Acts 20:29-31, Paul was aware that ‘savage wolves’ were following him everywhere he went to destroy his missionary work. These people belonged to ‘the Judaizing party’.

Jesus Christ had first sent his disciples to the lost sheep of Israel, but before his ascension he sent them to make disciples of all the nations (Mt 10: 5-6; 28:19). In the beginning of the history of Christianity, after Pentecost, the Christians consisted only of Jewish Christians, but after the missionary journeys of Paul, very many Gentiles became Christians too. This led to a clash between the Jewish and Gentile Christians, first in Antioch and later in the southern Galatian cities of Asia Minor.

Like the other apostles, Paul began his preaching to the Jews in the synagogue meetings on the Sabbath. He did not make this accommodation out of principle, but on purpose in order to win the Jews for Christ (1 Cor 9:20). Certain Jewish Christians held on to ‘the shadows’ of the Old Testament law (Heb 10:1). They believed that they should still keep the many regulations of the Jewish ceremonial law, especially circumcision, the Sabbath and other Jewish festivals and the Jewish food laws. They even made circumcision a requirement for salvation (15:1). While the apostle Paul wanted to convert the Jews to become Christians, the Judaizing party wanted to convert the Gentile Christians to become Jews! The Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15, decided that ‘the yoke’ of the Jewish ceremonial law may not be put onto the Gentiles (15:10,28)! But the Gentile Christians should be considerate to the Jewish Christians by abstaining from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood (15:20-21, 1 Cor ch 8,10). All those Jewish Christians who refused to accept this united decision of all the apostles, continued their propaganda campaign against Paul and his preaching of the gospel and they became known as ‘the Judaizing party’. Paul opposed their false teachings especially in his letters to the Galatians, (Gal 4:8-11; 5:2-3; 6:10), Corinthians (2 Cor 11:4), Philippians (Phil 3:2-3) and Colossians (Col 2:16-17).

The opposition of this Judaizing party in Asia Minor was dealt a severe blow when, on the one hand, the book of Acts started to circulate in the churches in Asia Minor and brought about a revival of interest in the apostle Paul, and on the other hand, when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in A.D. 70. The Judaizing party gradually developed into sects called the Nazarenes and the Ebionites, which continued to exist for several centuries. Thus, the book of Acts proved to the whole Christian Church that Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles, was as much an apostle as Peter and the other apostles, who mainly concentrated on the Jews.

Third. The book of Acts provides the historical proof that not only Paul, but all the other apostles, were true apostles of Jesus Christ.

The book of Acts is the proof that the teachings of Marcion were false. In about A.D. 144 this false teacher preached a false view that Jesus Christ revealed a completely new religion that had no relationship to the Old Testament or any other Jewish influence. He *took out* of the Gospel of Luke and ten of the letters of Paul all materials related to the Jews, and called it respectively “the Gospel” and “the Apostle”. Marcion thus limited the “canon” or “list of inspired books of the New Testament” to only these eleven documents. Marcion rejected the whole Old Testament, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John and the letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus, and he rejected all the other apostles of Jesus and their writings as being false.

The false teaching of Marcion challenged and stimulated the true Christian Church to oppose Marcion and compelled them to more accurately define the Christian “canon” or “list of the inspired New Testament books”, which were already accepted by the Christian churches everywhere. For the true Christian Church, the New Testament did not supersede the Old Testament, but stood alongside it and the Old and New Testament together formed the inspired revelation of God to man. The Old and New Testaments together are called “the Bible”. For the true Christian Church, *the Bible* consisted of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. For the true Christian Church *the Gospel* did not comprise of one document like Marcion’s list, but consisted of the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And for the true Christian Church *the Apostle* did not comprise only of ten of Paul’s letters like Marcion’s list, but consisted of all thirteen letters of Paul and the letters of the other apostles like Peter and John. For the true Christian Church the book of Acts provided the historical proof that not only Paul, but also all the other apostles were true apostles of Jesus Christ. From that time onwards the book of Acts was known as ‘*the Acts of the apostles*’. (This title is found in the Anti-Marcionite Prologue to the Third Gospel, dated between A.D. 150-180).

Fourth. The book of Acts especially draws a comparison between the apostles Peter and Paul.

Peter was especially the apostle to the Jews and Paul was especially the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:8). Peter was the champion of the early Church in Jerusalem, while Paul was the founder of the Gentile churches. There is a summary of

the preaching of Peter in Acts 2, and of Paul in Acts 13. Both preached justification by faith: Peter in Acts 10:43 and Paul in Acts 13:38-39 (Isa 53:11). Both healed a lame man: Peter in Acts 3 and Paul in Acts 14. God brought swift judgement through Peter to Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, and through Paul to Elymas in Acts 13. Both were freed from imprisonment by divine intervention: Peter in Acts 12, and Paul in Acts 16. Both stressed the work of the Holy Spirit: Peter in Acts 2 and Paul in Acts 19. Both summarised the gospel by preaching the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: Peter in Acts 2 and Paul in Acts 13.

POINT 7. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF ACTS

First. Acts shows which gospel message Christians should preach.

One. According to Acts 4:12, Christians must proclaim that salvation is found in no one else, for the only name given by God to men by which they *must* be saved is Jesus Christ.

Two. According to Acts 17:3 and 18, Christians must proclaim that Jesus Christ had to die on the cross and that he was resurrected from the dead.

Three. According to Acts 20:21, Christians must proclaim to all people that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Four. According to Acts 10:43 and 13:38-39, Christians must proclaim that everyone who believes in Christ is justified, that is, his sins are forgiven and he is saved.

Five. According to Acts 26:20, Christians must proclaim to people that they must prove their repentance by their deeds.

Second. The book of Acts teaches how local churches came into existence.

The local churches are the historical result of the sovereign intervention of God and the obedience of Christians to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, "Go and make disciples of all nations". For example, in Acts chapter 2, God poured his Holy Spirit out and the apostle Peter preached the gospel. As a result, the first local church among the Jews was planted in Jerusalem.

In Acts chapter 8, God allowed a great persecution of Christians in Jerusalem that scattered them and they preached the gospel wherever they went. As a result, churches were planted throughout Judea, Samaria and Galilee (9:31).

In Acts chapter 10, God gave visions to a Gentile military officer, called Cornelius, and to the apostle Peter on a rooftop, before Peter went to the Gentiles and preached the gospel to them. As a result the first local church among the Gentiles was planted in Caesarea.

In Acts chapter 11, God's hand was with those who had been scattered by the great persecution. They began to preach the gospel to Gentiles in Antioch of Syria. As a result a large local church was planted in a foreign country.

In Acts chapter 13, God called, set apart and sent Paul and Barnabas on missionary journeys and they made disciples in every city they came. As a result local churches were planted in other Asian countries.

In Acts chapters 16-20, God, through the Holy Spirit guided the missionary team to where they should go and where they should not go. As a result they went and preached the gospel to new places and local churches were even planted in European countries.

In Acts chapter 18, God even directly commanded and encouraged Paul to stay in a particular place and teach God's word for a longer period of time.

Third. The book of Acts teaches how these local churches functioned.

According to Acts 2:42-44 and 5:15-16,42, the basic activities of the local church in the beginning were *to gather* and *to scatter*. The Christians gathered regularly together for worship and prayer, teaching and preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and for fellowship and service. But they also scattered into their neighbourhood, into the streets and houses, and even to the neighbouring towns to preach, teach and to heal.

Fourth. The book of Acts teaches how these local churches were led.

According to Acts 14:21-23 and 20:17,28, each local church was led by "*a body of elders*". The qualifications, tasks and limited authority of elders are clearly recorded in the Bible. Although the local church should have leaders, these leaders may not lead the church as they wish. According to 1 Timothy 3:14-15, the way a church should function is clearly taught in the Bible. No leader in the church has the authority to change these instructions. Moreover, the Lord Jesus in Matthew 20:25-28 and the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5:1-4 teach that no church leader may lord it over the Christians that are entrusted into their care.

Fifth. The book of Acts teaches where these local churches conducted their meetings.

The book of Acts shows that the local churches, which are described in the New Testament, conducted most of their meetings in the houses of Christians. The churches were *house churches*! According to Philemon 1:1-2, the local churches met in houses for the regular worship service. According to Acts 5:42, the local churches met in houses for teaching and preaching. According to Acts 12:5-12, the local churches met in houses for praying. According to Acts 10:24-27, the local churches met in houses for evangelism. And according to Acts 18:24-28, the local churches met in houses for training of their workers. Even today, in many places of the world, local churches still meet in houses.

Sixth. The book of Acts is a guidebook for church missions.

One. According to Acts 2 and 13, the motive to do missionary work is to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Two. As seen above, the missionaries presented the gospel message in a way that people could understand it. They preached that Jesus Christ was the only way to God and salvation, that Jesus Christ died to atone for sins and was resurrected as a proof that God accepted his atoning sacrifice; that people should repent and believe; that everyone who believes is justified and that those who believe should prove their genuine faith by the way they live.

Three. According to Acts 10:43 and 26:22-23, the written word of God was their only weapon.

Four. According to Acts 4:23-30, the Christians depended entirely on the power of God working through the Holy Spirit.

Five. According to the whole book, the missionaries had a definite missionary plan. They first preached the gospel in the great population centres of the world at that time, like Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth and Rome. From there, the gospel spread to the surrounding cities, towns and villages.

Seventh. The book of Acts shows how persecution only results in the growth of the church.

According to Acts chapters 7:1-8:4, the Christians who witnessed or preached the gospel were soon opposed and even persecuted. Stephen was a layman. In the book of Acts is recorded how courageously he witnessed for Jesus Christ. Especially the last day of his life is described in chapter 7. He spoke to the government of the Jews, which was called the Sanhedrin. He said that while the Jews in the Old Testament killed *the prophets* who predicted the coming of the Messiah, the Jews in the New Testament betrayed and murdered *the Messiah*. He challenged them to stop hardening their hearts against the Holy Spirit. The members of the Sanhedrin dragged Stephen outside Jerusalem and stoned him to death. *It is not the length of time we live on earth that counts, but how we live!* Stephen was the first martyr of the Christian Church. His testimony and death had a great effect on Paul, who was still unconverted at that time. His death also was the beginning of a great persecution of the Christians in Jerusalem. The majority of the more than five thousand Christians living in Jerusalem fled and scattered all over Judea and Samaria. Wherever they went, they preached the gospel and local churches were founded. Throughout the book of Acts, we read how *persecution only led to the spreading of the gospel to all places and to the growth of the church in numbers and in quality of life*. No person and no persecution can thwart God's purpose and plan. The gospel will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations and then the end will come (Mat 24:14).

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week, read Romans 1-8. Next week we will introduce the letter to the Romans.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".