

# Acts & the Church

Acts tells the story of the explosive growth of early Christianity.

This story continues today as we share the good news of Jesus with our world.



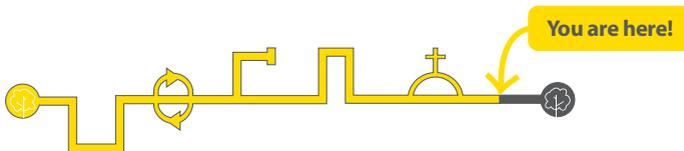
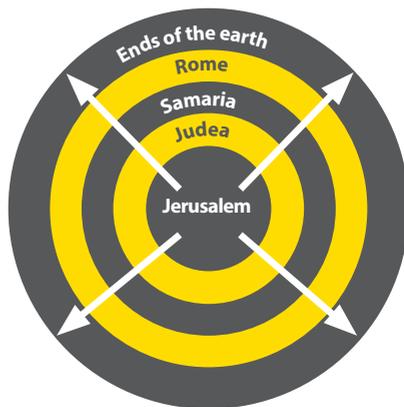
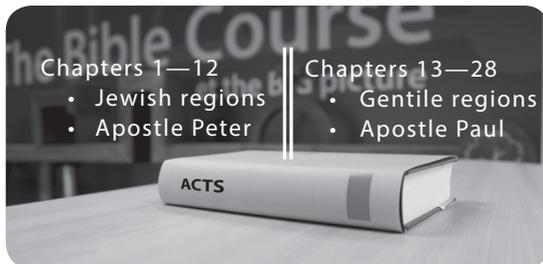
Session 7

# Introducing Acts

- Acts records the spread of early Christianity: c. AD 30–63
- Written by Dr Luke as a sequel to his Gospel
- Luke's Gospel = all that Jesus did in the power of the Holy Spirit
- Acts = all that Jesus' followers did in the power of the Holy Spirit

*'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.'*

Acts 1.8





# Peter

## Key References

Luke 5.1-11; John 21; Acts 2—5; Acts 10—12

## Context

- Lake Galilee – 60 miles north of Jerusalem
- Under Roman occupation c. 30 AD

## Bio

- Fisherman with his brother Andrew and business partners James and John
- Jesus changed his name from Simon to Peter or Cephas
- (Linked to *petra*, meaning 'rock')
- One of 12 apostles
- Denied knowing Jesus (three times)
- Key figure in early Church
- Author of 1 & 2 Peter
- Died a martyr's death



*Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed the crowd ... 'Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.'*

**Acts 2.14, 36**

# The Holy Spirit transforms us

## New courage

- Peter preached boldly in the same city where he denied Jesus
- The Holy Spirit frees us from fear and gives boldness

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... All who believed were together and had all things in common.*

**Acts 2.42,44**

## New community

- Three thousand were baptised on one day
- Pentecost was the birthday of the Christian Church
- Christianity is all about community

MY NOTES 

# Cycles of expansion

The early growth of Christianity occurred in cycles with similar features (see Acts 3—4, Acts 5—6, Acts 7—8):



*'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.'*

Tertullian, c. AD 155–240



## Discussion Time

Pause the video for 25 minutes.

Acts chapter 7 records Stephen's speech and the moment he was stoned to death. We then see what happened next.

### Read Acts 8.1–8

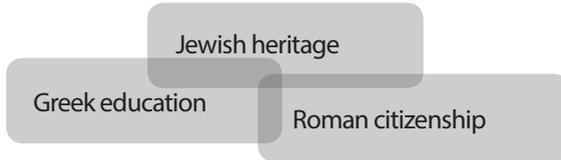
- Given the context in verses 1–3, what impresses you about the response of these persecuted Christians in verse 4?
- Philip shared the good news in Samaria. Why was this a radical thing for a Jew to do? How can we step out of our comfort zones and share the message of Jesus?
- How did God work through Philip? What experiences have we had of God's power accompanying the good news of Jesus?



***Restart the video and move on to PART 2.***

# The Apostle Paul

## Paul's background



*Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews ... a Pharisee... a persecutor of the church'*

**Philippians 3.5–6**

## Paul's conversion

- Saul hated Christians and believed Jesus was a blasphemer
- On the road to Damascus, he met the risen Jesus (Acts 9)
- Jesus called him to take the gospel to the Gentiles
- He became known as Paul (Roman), not Saul (Jewish)

# Mission to Gentile regions

## Acts 13—14

- Paul and Barnabas set off from Antioch on a mission trip c. AD 46
- Travelled to cities in region of Galatia (Turkey)
- Preached the gospel, faced persecution and planted churches
- Paul later wrote the letter 'Galatians' to these churches

MY NOTES 



# The Council of Jerusalem

The controversy: *Do Gentile Christians need to observe Jewish laws?*

Jesus + Jewish laws (e.g. circumcision) = Salvation

OR

Jesus = Salvation

- The apostles gathered in Jerusalem to decide
- They wrote a letter to all churches with their conclusion (Acts 15.28–29)

*It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.*

*Farewell.*



# Paul's mission trips



Cities where Paul and his team planted churches (🏛️)

## Paul's approach to mission

- Strategic cities: urban centres reached whole regions
- Creative preaching: the gospel is versatile to reach any culture
- Church planting: Christians formed radical new communities of faith

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

**Galatians 3.28**

# How to read the epistles

- Twenty-one letters in the New Testament
- Written to churches or individuals
- Thirteen written by Paul are arranged in size order

**WHAT?** *What was the original context of the letter?*

- Background information explains issues raised
- E.g. Corinth: wealthy cosmopolitan city notorious for immorality

*Flee from sexual immorality ... Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit ...? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

**1 Corinthians 6.18–20**

**NOW WHAT?** *Now what do these letters mean for us?*

- Cultural practices change but the principles remain
- New Testament letters are God-breathed and authoritative

MY NOTES 

# Romans: A letter that changes lives



## St Augustine (4th century)

After reading Romans 13.13–14:

*'Relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled.'*



## Martin Luther (16th century)

As a monk, he tried to please God by good works. Through Romans, he grasped the gospel and sparked a Reformation:

*'This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.'*



## John Wesley (18th century)

In 1738 at a meeting in London he heard someone reading Luther's Preface to Romans:

*'I felt my heart strangely warmed. And an assurance was given that he had died for my sins, even mine.'*



## Danny (21st century)

A former drug addict who studied Romans and concluded:

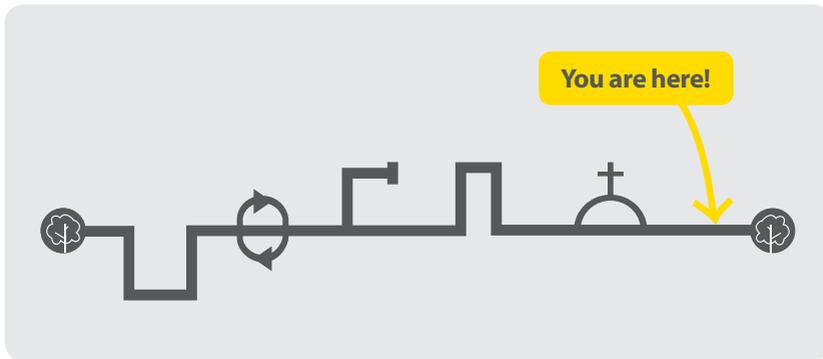
*'I've taken a lot of medicine in my time but now the Bible is like my medicine, fixing me up on the inside.'*

# The story continues ...

- Acts finishes with Paul under house arrest in Rome
- The end of Acts is not the end. The mission continues.

*Paul lived in Rome for two years, 'teaching about the LORD Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance'.*

**Acts 28.31**



*Now it's our turn to share the good news of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.*



# Personal Reflection

Suggested: 10 minutes

Take a moment to reflect on this verse:

*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses ... to the end of the earth.*

**Acts 1.8**

Write down something from this verse or the session that has inspired you ...

Write down something that has challenged you ...

Why not share your reflections with others and pray to finish.

MY NOTES 

# Daily Bible Readings: Week 7

Read each passage through carefully. Then consider:

**WHAT?** *What did this passage mean in its context?*

**NOW WHAT?** *Now what does this passage mean for my life today?*

- Write down a key verse or phrase that stands out.
- Pray it through, asking God to help you live in this truth.

**Day 1** Revelation 1.1–20

John, the Alpha and Omega – a vision of Jesus Christ

**Day 2** Revelation 3.1–22

Trials, commendation and challenge – a vision of the church

**Day 3** Revelation 4.1–11

The door, the elders and the throne – a vision of heaven

**Day 4** Revelation 7.1–17

Tribes, the throne and the lamb – a vision of God's people

**Day 5** Revelation 20.11–15 and 21.1–27

Judgment, the city and the glory – a vision of new creation

**Day 6** Revelation 22.1–21

The river, the tree and the LORD – a vision of the end

