

X. **The Acts of the Apostles**

The Book of Acts was written to provide an overview of the life and ministry of Jesus for those unfamiliar with the Jewish faith. The author, Luke, who is not a disciple, writes this documentary to a person referred to as *Theophilus*, meaning “friend of God,” allowing the recipient of this writing to remain anonymous and unknown.

The hidden intent behind not identifying the receiver allows the message to remain universal to all who would be friends of God, particularly those outside the Jewish faith who had an interest in their beliefs at that time.

The treatise was intended to address the events that followed the death and resurrection of Jesus Messiah. The writing of Luke continues to address the ongoing question of the validity of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. Luke is a witness to the works done by those appointed by Jesus the Messiah to continue the objective of teaching the message of the Kingdom of Heaven.

40 Days of infallible proof

Luke makes mention of the infallible signs that occurred in the forty days following the Messiah's resurrection. The signs and wonders provided evidence that Messiah survived the vile death of the crucifixion. Signs like this would prompt people to ask questions, and each query would provide an opportunity for the story of the Messiah's victory to be retold.

Passover

The 14th day of the first Jewish month is the date subscribed for Passover. (Lev. 23:5) Passover is the celebration of the Jewish ancestors' being set free from their physical oppression and bondage in Egypt. They were instructed to slaughter an unblemished lamb and paint the doorways with its blood.

The Jewish calendar during the time of Jesus-Messiah would place Passover on a Thursday, after sunset. Because the Jewish day begins at sunset, Wednesday sunset to Thursday before sunset would be considered one complete day. The lamb for Passover must be slaughtered the day prior, anytime on Thursday before sunset.

There is a parallel between the Jewish celebration of Passover and the crucifixion of Jesus Messiah. The crucifixion of Jesus-Messiah began on the day before Passover, ending sometime just after the 9th hour, 3-4 p.m. (Luke 23:44, John 19:14). This timetable would allow for His body to be taken down and prepared for burial before the formal Passover would begin. (John 19:31,38-42) His blood would remain painted on the wooden post used for a cross all day during the Sabbath, in the likeness of the doorpost painted four thousand years earlier in Egypt.



There is another Feast Day that must be celebrated before Pentecost begins. It is the “Feast of First Fruits,” a celebration of the first harvest of the season. This celebration starts on the day following the Passover Sabbath. (Lev. 23:9-11) The first day after the Passover Sabbath (Saturday) is Sunday, the first day of the week.

The resurrection of Jesus Messiah was three days after His burial. To accumulate three days, the first day must start on a Thursday, the day of the crucifixion. In Hebrew culture, any part of a day before sunset constitutes a complete day. With this understanding, placing the body in the tomb on Thursday before sunset is considered the first day and night of the series. Thursday, after sunset, to Friday before sunset, is the second day/night series. Friday after sunset to Saturday before sunset is the third day and night series. A new day begins on Saturday after sunset, marking the transition to Sunday, the first day of the week. The resurrection occurring any time after the Passover Sabbath sunset would qualify as an early morning resurrection celebration on the first day of the week. (Matt. 28:1)

The resurrection of Christ occurred on the same day the Jews celebrated the Feast of First Fruits, associating the Messiah with the first fruits of the Harvest. (ICor 15:20,23)

Pentecost

The day of Pentecost was a count of fifty days following the first day after the Passover Sabbath. This feast will last for seven Sabbaths, counting from the Sunday after the Passover Sabbath. (Lev. 23:15)

After the celebration of First Fruits (The Resurrection), the Jews were instructed to count seven Sabbaths, forty-nine days. When they completed celebrating the seventh Sabbath, they were told to bring a new meat offering on the following day. Pentecost, which means “fiftieth,” would fully come on the first day following the Passover Sabbath.

The day after the Sabbath-Passover places Pentecost on the first day of the week, Sunday, the same day assigned to the First Fruits and the resurrection of Christ. Pentecost was a celebration of the Torah because the day Moses came down from Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments was fifty days after the first Passover, which was celebrated in the land of Egypt.



Early Church Development

The work of the Church, inaugurated by the Son of God (God actively present on Earth), was entrusted to the disciples, who would eventually spiritually mature into the Apostles and Church Fathers of the early New Testament Church.

Prior to the glorious ascension of Christ into the heavens, they are instructed to begin the work in Judea among their Jewish brethren, continue the outreach initiated by the Messiah to the Samaritans, and ultimately launch a campaign to preach and teach the gospel to the ends earth. (Acts 1:8)

The Apostles continued to practice and observe all Jewish ceremonies and traditions, including daily prayers, but they also introduced a new, less formal encounter to their Jewish brethren. They met in Jewish homes to study the Torah and the teachings of the Messiah and to break bread and fellowship together.

*This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:
(Acts 7:38)*

The defining moment of the Old Testament Church is referenced in the New Testament in the book of Acts. The early church is chronicled in the Acts of the Apostles, and the author pays homage to the Church in the wilderness.

Moses is the prophet of the Church in the wilderness. He was called out of the Nile River in Egypt, and his life was spared to fulfill a greater calling assigned to him by God. (Exodus 2:5-6) Moses guided the Israelites through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. He was guided to a mountain incensed with fire and smoke in the Sinai wilderness. The voice of God beckoned Moses to ascend the mountain. Amidst the fire and smoke, God spoke to him and provided a tailored manuscript of His divine commandments, God's living oracles (words).

The first impact of the new Apostles was captured on the day of Pentecost, when devout Jewish men from many nations heard the twelve collectively speaking the words of the Torah in languages native to the audience. (Acts 2:5-8) Peter addresses the large audience of men with the first declaration that their Rabbi teacher is the anointed messiah. (Acts 2:36)

The New Testament church is founded upon the principles first established at Mount Sinai, which is the signature symbol of receiving God's living word (commandments).



History and Progression of the Church

Religious temples have existed as far back as the Egyptian pyramids.

Many ancient cultures constructed monuments to honor kings and conquerors, believing these structures would survive their demise and serve as a lasting testament to their legacy for all time. The Romans were well known for building coliseums with large columns and imposing features to signify their greatness and strength.

The early church began as a movement and transformation of faith among Jewish practitioners. A prominent edifice was not an objective because the first believers in the Messiah already had a physical structure that represented their faith and culture. The first believers continued to visit the temple and observe its rituals. A time did come later after the Messianic movement began to grow in extraordinary measure when they were targeted in their synagogues as dissidents and betrayers of Judaism. The movement was driven by its belief in the Messiah, and a physical building or religious monument was not a factor in establishing or promoting their faith.

The first gatherings of the early Church were held in residential locations. The first Church Apostles were granted opportunities to teach and speak in some of the existing Jewish synagogues, but the deep dive into understanding the truth that the Messiah left in the care of His disciples to pass on to others was accomplished through house-to-house encounters among Jews and Gentile households.

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time, there was a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. (Acts 8:1)



The Church at Jerusalem - The Jerusalem church was the central hub of the early Christian movement. It was the lead Church within the Pentarchy structure. (Jerusalem, Alexandria (Egypt), Constantinople, Antioch, and Rome) James, the brother of Jesus, was the Chief Apostle, leading the ministry to oversee all Jews and Gentiles who believed in the Messiah.

The Jerusalem Church faced great persecution, which led to its dispersion and the expansion of the Messianic movement into the regions of Judea and Samaria. The man Saul, who would later become the great Apostle to the Gentiles, had a significant role in the persecution of Christians. He requested permission from the Jewish leaders to track down dissidents and return them to stand trial for their betrayal of the Jewish faith.

In a turn of fate, Saul's conversion to faith in the Messiah was such a threat to the Jewish leaders he once served that they set chase after him to take his life. The Christians he once hunted and persecuted helped him escape the deadly pursuit of those determined to take his life. (Acts 9:23-26)

The Church at Rome – The Apostle Paul does not use the term “church” directly in his epistle to the Church; he refers to them instead as “called by Jesus Christ” and “called to be saints,” a term that defines the Church as the Ekklesia, “*the called out.*”

In the letter, the Apostle states that the faith of Roman believers was known throughout the world. (Romans 1:8) This was a Church that the Apostle prayed for often. The large number of Jewish converts who populated the Church were strongly influenced by religious history. However, they embraced the truth about the Messiah; they still believed Jews were the privileged religious class because they were chosen. A substantial portion of foundational Church doctrine, which continues to guide the Church today, is captured in the epistle written to the Romans.

The local Church in Rome would begin to diminish because of the persecution against Christians, first led by orthodox Jews and eventually by Roman monarchs. The Church scattered from Jerusalem and Roman provinces to find safety outside the reach of Rome's empire. The diaspora reduced the numerical strength of the local Church, as Churches outside of Rome and Palestine flourished.

The Church at Rome was a part of the Pentarchy, the network of five Churches representing a united faith in the Messiah across multiple countries and cultures. When Constantine came into power, he reversed the edicts and Rome's stance on the persecution of Christians.

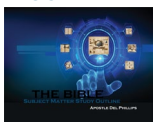
When Rome's new leader contemplated new strategies to maintain control of the vast Roman Empire, whose expanse stretched to distant lands and diverse cultures, he recognized the Church's exponential growth outside Palestine, and Rome could be leveraged to undergird the Roman Empire.



During his reign from 306 to 337 AD, Constantine the Great forged an alliance with the Church in Rome, which enabled him to extend his influence worldwide, thereby establishing Christianity as the official religion of the Empire.

The alliance with Rome elevated the status of the Roman Church. Over time, the leadership of the Church in Rome became increasingly aligned with the Roman Emperors rather than with Church leadership within the Pentarchy.

The new trajectory of the Church in Rome set the groundwork for the birth of the Roman Catholic (Universal) Church.



Now those who were scattered abroad because of the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but only to the Jews.

(Acts 11:19)

The Church at Phenice (Crete) – [Acts 15:3, *27:12] As a result of persecution, the Church expands west to Crete, the largest Greek Island in the Mediterranean. Introducing the gospel of the Messiah to the Greeks was a significant strategic accomplishment because the Greek language and culture had already begun to spread worldwide. Three hundred years before the Church arrived, Jewish practitioners completed the first translation of the Torah into a non-Hebrew language, resulting in the Septuagint, a Greek interpretation of Hebrew texts.

The physical location of the Church meeting place is not mentioned in scripture. However, it is likely that a Jewish synagogue already existed in Crete. In Acts 2:11, members of the Cretan Jews are identified among the devout Jews attending the celebration of Pentecost.

The Cretan Jews were among those who heard the convicting truth about the Messiah and committed to repentance and baptism. Messianic believers migrating from Jerusalem to Crete would be welcomed and received by others already practicing the same faith.

A synagogue is a type of social center where a community gathers to discuss or listen to matters of importance. The synagogue in Crete would have been a natural gathering place for Jews who shared a faith in the Messiah.

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The Church at Cyprus – [Acts 13:4, 15:39, 21:3,16, 27:4] The persecution against the Church caused some Jews to travel north and move offshore to a small nearby island. Cyprus is located in the Mediterranean Sea, to the west of Palestine. The island was a thoroughfare to other cities well-traveled by the Apostle Paul, including southern Galatia, Ephesus, and Crete.

Jewish believers migrating to Cyprus established synagogues within their communities. (Acts 13:5) The Hebrew term for synagogue is “*beit midrash*,” meaning “a place of study.” The synagogue was a place for observant Jews to spend their time studying sacred texts.

A synagogue created by Jews migrating from Jerusalem because of their faith and belief in the Messiah signals a hunger to learn and understand the teachings passed on to His disciples.



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The Church at Antioch (Syria) –[Acts 11:20-22,*26, 13:1]

The majority of the people migrating to avoid persecution made their way north of Jerusalem into Syria with hopes of finding asylum in Antioch. This was the persecution initiated and led by Saul of Tarsus. Ironically, the converted “Paul” will be among those assigned to provide instructional ministry to the Antioch Church in Syria. Among the early members of the Antioch was Nicolas, the proselyte from Antioch who would be named among the first Church Diaconate. (Acts 6:5)

Initially, when the diaspora arrived, they preached only to other Jews. However, men from Cyrene and Cyprus came to Antioch and began preaching to the resident Grecian population. The growth of the Messianic faith among Jews and Gentiles was so great that news of the impact was relayed to the Church leadership in Jerusalem. The Church of Jerusalem sent Barnabas to provide additional ministry support in response to Antioch's growth and spiritual hunger. Barnabas took a detour to pick up Paul to join him on the mission, and for an entire year, they remained in Antioch teaching the Church.

Antioch became the fastest-growing congregation during the period of church persecution. The persecution of Saul of Tarsus was followed by a significant onslaught against Messianic Jews that came from Herod. He found that persecuting the Christianized Jews earned him favor with the Orthodox Jewish leaders, which aided his cause to maintain favor with his Roman overlords.

The persecution of Herod added to the flight of Jews from Jerusalem, and many made the trek north to relocate to Antioch. The Church's numerical growth required the leadership in Jerusalem to send prophets and teachers to Antioch; among them was a prophet named Agabus.

The prophet predicted a worldwide drought in the days of Claudius Caesar, who ruled from AD 41 to 54. Claudius was the third Roman emperor following the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The practice of relief offerings was initiated after the dearth. The Church collected donations to send relief to the Church leadership in Judaea. (Acts 11:28-30)

A complete list of those assigned to minister to the Church at Antioch is captured in Acts 13:1. Barnabas is the lead appointee and mentor specifically to Paul, followed by Simeon, also known as Niger, which means “black,” indicating his native origin, and Lucius of Cyrene, a city in Libya North Africa (*Romans 16:27). Manaen, who grew up alongside Herod as a child, is among the selected prophets/teachers. Finally, Saul (Paul) is listed among those responsible for ministering to the congregation in Antioch. The details added to describe the nativity of men in the list reveal the diversity of the church leadership in Antioch, which likely also reflects the congregation's diversity.



Among the chief recognitions associated with the Church in Antioch is their inspiration for the name that represented the growing movement; they would be called “Christians.”

*I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea:
(Rom 16:1)*

The Church at Cenchrea –[Acts 18:18]

The House Church in Corinth presents a woman named Phebe, the Apostle Paul assigned to lead the ministry. The people are told to receive her solely based on the Apostle’s assessment. They are instructed to assist and support her in any matter she deems necessary concerning the church.

The Apostle Paul visits the Church later in his ministry to shave his head for a vow he made after spending 18 months embattled with Jews in the synagogue at Corinth that opposed his teaching about the Messiah.

*Acts 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and came to Corinth; 2 And found a sure Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.
3 And because he was of the same craft, he aboded with them and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.*

*Rom 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus:
4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house.*

The Church House of Priscilla/Aquila –

The Apostle Paul encountered a husband-and-wife team, Priscilla and Aquila, during his ministry trip to Corinth. They were both Jews from Italy with Roman heritages, like himself. The Apostle and the couple also shared the same occupation in tent-making. During his time at the Church in Corinth, he lived with them.

The Apostle identifies the husband and wife team as his helpers in Christ, crediting them with laying down their lives on his behalf. The closing salutation in Apostle Paul’s letter to the Church at Rome includes a reference to the Church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila.



*Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours
(1Cor 1:2)*

The Church of God at Corinth –

The Apostle's letter to the Church opens with a salutation acknowledging the "called out," the Ekkesia, which is the Church. The early church was referenced more by its spiritual character than by a well-constructed, marketable name with a catchphrase statement.

The Church is known for "calling upon the name" of Jesus Christ in the same manner it is done in every place. Sameness was a sign of spiritual consistency and unity. It should be possible to visit a Christian congregation in any place, hear consistent truth, and find uniform characteristics that signal belief in one God, faith, and baptism.

1Cor 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

1Cor 16:19 The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

The Churches in Galatia and Asia –

There are multiple churches and communities of believers in the messiah throughout Galatia and Asia.

This is a tremendous testimony to the commitment of the Apostles and the early Church to fulfill the commission given to them by the resurrected Son of God.

The Church cannot be content with being a local organization but should focus on being a global organism. The Church was intended to be the size of the world where it is planted. The Church is a living entity, not a building. The Church is an organic movement, not a structured set of lines and boxes on a sketchpad.

The Church of God should be reflected in every culture, community, and country. When the Church of God, His called-out people, becomes world-focused, the world will become focused on God in the Church.

