

The book of Acts (Lesson 01) -

Pastor Joh. W. Matutis

www.nnk-berlin.de

E-Mail: pastor@matutis.de

To the studies

I **recommend** to read through the respective book in the bible at first. Our manual is the bible. And then to go through one to two pages of the material every day, i.e. also to look up and read the given bible scriptures to become thoroughly acquainted with the subject. Another suggestion would be to use this material as one's regular devotion.

I am asking every one who would like to **obtain a degree (certificate) at the end of the seminar**, to answer the **test questions** at the end of each lesson and to send or email it to us with your full name and address. And now I wish you lots of joy and spiritual profit during your bible study.

Pastor Joh.W.Matutis

Introduction

The book of Acts in the New Testament is the history of what the first Christians were doing with their experience and teachings of Jesus after their visual acquaintance and experiences with Him had been brought to an end.

The book of Acts is the continuation of the sending of Jesus through His apostles and disciples.

Who is the author?

The book of Acts was written to conclude the story that the author, the physician Luke, had started in the **Gospel of Luke**. Part 1 of Luke was "**The works of Jesus**" and part 2 "**The works of the apostles**". In the 2nd part Luke describes how the small group of disciples turned into a worldwide dynamic movement.

It depicts the way of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

Neither the third Gospel nor the book of Acts mentions the name of the author. As the companion of Paul he has been called "**Luke**" since the 2nd half of the 2nd century.
(Philemon 24/ 2 Tim. 4, 11/ Col. 4, 14)

In Col 4,14 he was called a physician. His training and his medical expertise are being expressed or reflected in his systematic and precise way to approach things and to express himself when he wrote his reports. **In those times physicians were often skillful slaves** who had obtained freedom from their masters. Maybe this explains to us his relationship with Theophilus, who might have been the one who had let him go and thus provided for his studies.

After Luke met the apostle Paul he was a respected and continuous companion of the apostle, even in prison. In 97 verses of the book of Acts (the so-called "**we-verses**") that start in Acts 16,10 Luke uses the first person ("I" and "we" are preferred over "they" and "you") which shows that he was there and a part of the actions.

The reliability of those records seem to be approved in the chapters 16, 20, 21 and 27 of Acts, where the narration partly goes over to the "**first-person plural narrative**" and therefore points to an eye-witness of the actions and the existence of a companion of Paul.

Very promising are the so-called "**we-reports**" that speak about the events in the "first-person plural narrative" (Acts.16, 10-17/ 20, 5-15/ 21, 1-18/ 27,1-28) But now Luke is the only one among the co-workers of Paul that could be related to the details of these reports. Both **Timothy** (Acts 20, 4-5) and **Silas** (Acts 15, 22) are out of the question.

However, the method of suddenly changing the narrative from third-person singular (he, she, it) or plural (you) to first-person singular or plural (we, I) and vice versa, is a stylistic device of ancient literature. Therefore the "we-parts" of Acts do not necessarily point to an eye-witness as the author. In the contrary, many parts of the book of Acts make it seem more likely that the author was not closely acquainted with Paul and supposedly did not know his later letters.

Besides the several theological differences between Paul and the book of Acts it is remarkable that for example, **the book of Acts denies Paul the title of the apostle** (except for Acts 14. 4, 14) and portrays him as a man of the second generation of religious tradition, while Paul himself emphasizes to be counted as an apostle (Gal. 1) who has not adopted his faith from the "old apostles". In addition there is a friction concerning the chronological order of Paul's visitations at Jerusalem (Act. 9, 26-30/ 11, 30 with Gal. 2) and concerning the content of the agreement of Jerusalem, the so-called "Council of Apostles" (Apg. 15, 28/ Gal. 6, 6). For this reason a permanent co-worker of Paul cannot be considered as an author of the book of Acts.

From the 3rd Gospel and out of the book of Acts it can be concluded that the author was a Greek-speaking, educated Christian who was close to and familiar with the Judaism before his devotion to the Christian faith. This is approved by the way he uses the Septuaginta (the Greek Old Testament).

We don't know his name, **it is quite possible that his name was Luke** because this name was common. To keep it simple we will call him Luke in the following.

Luke is only mentioned by name three times in the New Testament. (Col. 4, 14/ 2Tim. 4, 11/ Philemon 24)

These scriptures tell us the following (summarized):

Luke was an educated Greek who lived in Asia Minor, he was a Gentile (Col 4, 12-14) and as such the only author of the New Testament with a pagan background. Luke was able to speak Greek and his entertaining spelling style for the Greek novelists of this era.

Luke claims to be an **Evangelist**, which can be noticed in his Gospel as well as in the book of Acts and his goal is to portray God's guidance of the Christian church framed in the historical background.

Luke was an educated man who was used to exact thinking and observation. When reading, his historical accuracy in his records is quite impressive (Acts 5, 34-39/ 12, 1-3; 20-24/ 18, 12/ 23, 34/ 24, 24/ 25, 1-13), and also his knowledge about the official names of the representatives of Rome.

Wherefrom and how did Luke receive his information?

Luke was not an eye-witness of the story of Jesus that he describes in his Gospel and he was not present in the happenings which he reports in the first 15 chapters of the book of Acts. He is not even sure whether he has really seen Jesus.

In the introduction of his Gospel he tells how and where he could get the information. (Luke 1, 1-5)

Time, place and form of the composition of the book of Acts

About place and time there are no certain (100%) references.

He heard about Jesus from the apostles and the other witnesses who told him what they had seen and heard. Both of the books written by Luke were probably authored approx. 30 years after the resurrection of Jesus (between 58 and 63 AD)

The book of Acts finds a sudden end at the point when Paul was imprisoned in Rome (probably between 60-62 AD) Its formulation, however, implies the existence of the Gospel of Luke, so that a period before AD cannot be considered.

Provided that the author needed some time to collect the records for the tradition, a period between 60 and 70 AD could be considered. The book of Acts could hardly have been written later, because it is obvious that the author did not yet know the collection of the letters of Paul, since they are not being referred to as sources..

Date of Composition

We do not know for certain, where and when this book was written. It is conspicuous that Luke interrupts his record in the second year of Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28,31) without giving further information about the outcome of the trial.

This sudden interruption is an indication for a change of circumstances. The heavy batch of Rome (64 AD) or a lack of opportunities to continue the writing or political reasons or the death of Luke could have been the reason why the record is not complete.

It must have been written before the year 70, because the temple was still intact (Acts 21,30) he also tells about the high priest (Acts 23,2) and Jerusalem was not desolated yet (Acts 25,3) . All this causes us to assume with reasonable certainty that the book of Acts was written about 63/64 AD.

The exact determination of the date of composition is, however, of minor importance, because the historical reliability of the book is based on the detailed sources that the author uses to support his narration.

Most interpreters consider **Rome** the place of composition.

Luke exploits extensive and diverse traditional material. The prologue (introduction of the Gospel of Luke, which can be called the preface of the total work, is an indicator of such a method and by examination of this book those expectations could be approved. Apart from a conscious literary practice that distinguishes the works and provides for the unity of a book it, **the use of several different sources can still be acknowledged.**

The separation and reconstruction of the utilized sources, however, is very difficult and can be doubted. Luke describes in the book of Acts - just as in an account of a journey - **the way of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.** The single stories are stations and chapters on the way to get there.

Such a **“small book of Acts”** can be found in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 16, 19-20) ***“And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.”***

Luke uses stories of the wonders that are related to the apostles to prove that Jesus is always the same and continues to work through them.

- The healing of the lame at the door of the temple (Acts 3, 1-10)
- The healing of Acts 9, 32-35)
- The raising of Tabitha (Acts 9, 36-42) in both places Peter already found Christian churches
- The authorized dealing with Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5, 1-11)
- Peter's deliverance from prison (Acts 12, 5-17)
- The banishing of the wizard Elymas (Acts 13, 8-12) – a court miracle
- Paul's and Silas' deliverance in Philippi (Acts 16, 25-34)
- The raising of Eutychus (Acts 20, 9-12)
- The maid's demon is being cast out (Acts 16, 17)
- All these stories were Mark's foundation and decoration of his “small book of Acts”.

Within the book of Acts there are certain main streams within the records than can be elaborated:

1. Records of the ancient church in Jerusalem (Acts 1-5)
2. Records of the actions of single persons (i.e. Peter, Acts 9, 32 to chapter 12, and Phillip Acts 8, 4-40)
3. Records of the beginnings and the foundation of the church in Antioch (Acts 6, 1-8, 3/ 11, 19-30/ 13, 1-3)
4. A kind of journey account about the apostle Paul (Acts 16, 10-17/ 20, 5-15/ 21, 1-18/ 27, 1 bis 28, 16) Luke sequenced the abundant and collected material as a whole through adding the different elements in a sound manner and to juggle the pieces with each other with the use of editorial formulations.

The text clearly shows that the author was **drawing from several sources.**

We will only name the important ones:

- First of all, Luke used his personal memories as he was a witness of the majority of the events that he reports about. Let us only remember the “we-reports”
- The 2nd definite source is Paul. Who could better provide information about his life, his conversion and occupation than the apostle himself?
- During chapters about Paul's missionary work where Luke is not assisting him, he is relying on reports of eye-witnesses.
- Luke certainly drew records of the beginnings in Jerusalem from the Palestinian-Jewish-Christian source. We are especially referring to Peter and other disciples. It is also called the Peter-Phillip-Source. He was definitely not lacking witnesses.

About 1/3 of the book of Acts consists of monologues.

The monologues are an important stylistic device. Perhaps the author wrote all of them himself. Therefore this cannot be counted as an authentic speech because there are no manuscripts available. Luke does not integrate traditional language or confessions (i.e. the easter confession) into the monologues.

The composition is interrupted by the insertion of a **story of Phillippe** (Acts 8, 5-40) and a **story of Peter** (Acts 9,31-11,18)

This description presumes the report of **Saul's calling**, which is associated with the martyrdom of Stephen. In Acts 15 and 21 we also encounter the **Lord's brother James**.

Formally the book of Acts is a historical piece interwoven with theological aims. The author's guideline is the Hellenistic style of historical writing.

Altogether there are about 25 sermons included in the book of Acts, which were mainly held by Peter and Paul, but also by Stephen and James as well as non-Christians. They were integrated to construe and interpret the events in certain turning points. To integrate sermons was usual in Greek literature and the author Acts adopted this custom.

A special kind of sermons are the so-called **mission sermons** by Peter and Paul.

- The sermon of Pentecost (Acts 2,29-31/3/4)
- The sermon of defense (Acts 5)
- The sermon of Stephen (Acts 7)
- The sermon about Cornelius (Acts 10) – in the beginning this was only a story of conversion
- The sermon in Pisidic Antioch (Acts 13)
- The sermon of the Areopagite in Athens (Acts 17)

Many sermons can be distinguished by their extensively common structure or scheme.

- An introduction describing the conditions of the situation
- A frequent enhancement of the Jew's guilt concerning the death of Jesus
- Proclaiming of the message, often in a way that contracts the guilt of the Jews
- Emphasizing of being a witness, often by the use of cross-references
- A call to repentance in the end

Furthermore the Book of Acts contains sermons of the Lord Jesus from heaven:

- **The sermon to the persecuted Saul near Damascus** (Acts 9,4-6/ 22,7-10/ 26,16)
This revelation is listed 3 times in the Book of Acts.
This is Jesus speaking the first time after His resurrection. Before that Stephen only saw the heaven open and Jesus standing at the right side of God. This speech can be compared to the transfiguration once on top of the mountain. Paul was surrounded by light, became blind and needed guidance to get to his accomodation.
He heard how Jesus called his name: "Saul, Saul." This hits the inner man. Jesus encounters him there when he still was his enemy and persecutor. Jesus tells him: " I am Jesus, whom you persecute."
- **The assignment to Ananias concerning Saul** (Acts9, 10-16)
Also Ananias is called by Jesus personally. He is given a clear instruction where he is supposed to go. And the Lord even tells him what Saul is just doing: Behold, he is praying. And He also tells him what had happened to him and what he had seen: "And has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight". Ananias also receives concrete information what Saul is called to do.
"...for he is a **chosen vessel** unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."
- **The sermon to Saul in the temple that announces his sending to the Gentiles** (Acts 22; 17-21)
Saul experienced a rapture and a revelation. And a voice told him: "Make haste, and get quickly out of Jerusalem: because they will not receive your testimony concerning me.
Depart: because I will send you far away to the Gentiles."
- **The appearance before Saul - "I send you now"** (Acts 26,16-18)
Here he received a clear **assignment go out as a missionary** by Jesus Himself, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."
This is a clear appointment concerning his office.
- **To Peter in the rapture on the rooftop** (Acts 10,13-16)
This was supposed to be the introduction for the Gentile mission
- **To Paul in Corinth** (Acts 18,9-10)
Paul came from Athens and was discouraged. But the Lord encouraged him: **Fear not, but speak and do not be silent**. And he receives a promise of God: **Because I am with you and no one shall touch or harm you**.

The same promise that **Joshua** received when he was supposed to lead the people across the Jordan to possess the land. **“For I have much people in this city.”**

- **To Paul near Jerusalem** (Acts 2,11)
He is being prepared for his journey to Rome. **“Be of good courage Paul. For just as you testified of Me in Jerusalem, you must also testify in Rome”.**
- **To Paul in the boat during the storm** (Acts 27, 23-26)
This is not literally the Lord speaking, but what God told him is being referred to as a concrete speech. Paul is best-informed of everything that happens in the following.

In the sermons that he puts in the mouth of the leading personalities of the early church, Luke uses the main themes of the Christian messages in the beginning.

These were supported by **traditional ways of researching evidence** and were imparted through the use of memorable phrases:

- 1) for the Jews – **collection of texts**
- 2) for all Greeks – **threads of popular philosophy**
- 3) and **for all** a foundational proclamation of Jesus as the crucified and resurrected, connected with a call to repentance and baptism.

Luke was probably acquainted with the outline of early **Christian campaigns** and with his distinct empathy he was able to put authentic values and considerable importance into his teachings.

The historical value of the Book of Acts is based on the accuracy of Luke's investigation that he assures for the composition of the Gospel, and the reliability of his sources.

It needs to be considered that Luke was not collecting and composing his material with the intention of presenting an objective collection of facts, but with the **intention to proclaim**. He emphasized what would best express his concern, and with this in mind he directs the course of the events of the story. Therefore it is comprehensible that shortages, simplifications and gaps can be found in the Book of Acts. Nevertheless, all of this does not undo the reliability of this book. It is remarkable that Luke draws a picture of the missionary workings of Paul – which can easily be filed into the letters of Paul, except for a few details - without using his letters.

For the former events within the early church we have no such comparison. But the probability of the reported events and the apparent respect of Luke for the sources inspire confidence.

The theological center of the Book of Acts

- they are conform to those of the Gospel of Luke to a large extent
- Luke reserves the term “Apostle” for the 12 disciples, as witnesses of the life of Jesus
- he does not usually refer to Paul as an apostle, except Acts 14
- the way of Christianity is a God-planned and God-lead story
- the church is lead by the Holy Spirit, visions and dreams
- the Gentile mission was not a result of people's choice but of God's will
- the Gentile-Christian church is a legitimate part of God's people.

The purpose of the book.

Luke tells us that at the time when he wrote his books many Christian authors felt the need to write down the story – which means the reports about Jesus. (Luke 1, 1) Amongst them were John, Mark and other eye-witnesses of Jesus' life, who literally caused a **writer epidemic**:

- 1) In many places Christians were severely attacked (Acts 8,1/ 3,12/ 12,1/ Heb 10,32-34)
- 2) Stephen and James had been persecuted, tortured and put to death (Acts 7,57-60/ 12,2)
- 3) Paul was in a Roman prison and was expecting his interrogation (Acts 21,33/ 24,27)
- 4) The apostles expected heavy persecution and severe threats for the Saints
- 5) Many of the original eye-witnesses, people who knew Jesus in the flesh, grew older and were about to die and some were already dead (1 Cor 15,6)

If the next generation was supposed to know Jesus and the truth about Him upon whom faith should be established, they had to keep a written record of all these things. Luke was here one who felt the need to write down the things he found out.

Eventhough this book was dedicated to only one person Theophilus (Luk 1,3/ Acts 1,1) God made sure that the book was included in the Bible and available to all Saints.

Why did Luke address his two books to Theophilus?

Luke was a physician (Col 4,14) and in those times physicians were often skillful slaves that were enfranchised by their masters. Maybe this way we can explain his relationship to Theophilus. Perhaps he let him go and provided for his studies.

Acts is written in an apologetic style with intention. It is the will of the author that the book will not only be used within the church but would reach beyond the church.

The author apparently wanted to win people for Christianity and counteract skeptics. Therefore the Book of Acts emphasizes that the Gospel is **not dangerous** even more than the Book of Luke.

From the author's point of view the appearance of Jesus and the Christian episodes are the will of God according to the promise of the Old Testament.

At first the Gospel of Jesus was passed down orally.

How did the early Christians keep the story of Jesus and the beginning of the church alive?

Luke said: **"Eye-witnesses have told us the facts."** (Luk 1,2)

Christians of the 1st century have told and retold the Good News. People who had seen Jesus told what they have seen, felt and heard. Jesus gave His disciples a special assignment to impart his story to others in detail: **"...and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded."** (Math 28,20)

Eventually we can assume that the Holy Spirit lead and determined the writing process from the beginning to the end (Joh 16,13-15) This way the authors had a reliable collection of faith facts to put together the story of faith.

Two men who were involved commented this development:

Peter: *"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty."* (1 Pet 1,16)

John: *"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."* (1 Joh 1,3)

Luke continued to research and collect the stories.

He collected, surveyed and assured himself of the facts prior to writing them down. (Luk 1,3: "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an **orderly account** for you, most excellent Theophilus.")

Luke probably collected the material for his pieces during the 2 years when Paul was in prison in Ceasarea. Luke was there at the same time, accompanied and provided for the apostle during his imprisonment. Luke had enough time to invite eye-witnesses, talk to him, collect detailed information of (for example) Christians in Ceasarea who had escaped the persecution in Jerusalem.

Luke said that one might regret that there is no evident account of the workings of the other apostles or about the foundation of single churches, like the church of Alexandria not even about the church of Rome where the Christian faith had already gained ground before the arrival of the apostle Paul.

We can also see that there were already believers in **Pompeii** (amongst others) who they were providing. (Acts 28, 13-15)

But we also do not get to know anything about the apostolic mission of Peter outside of Palestine. The **people's missionary Paul** whom Luke dedicates the whole 2nd part of Acts, plays an outstanding role in the text of Luke. It is obvious that Luke did not want to offer a complete account of the early church, but rather a description of the dynamic with which Christianity was spreading.

Luke writes the story to proclaim a message. The Book of Acts differs from the pieces of ancient story writers not primarily by the way of expressing the events but above all by its aim. It wants to undermine and deepen the Christian faith by pointing to the indwelling power of the faith, the power of the Holy Spirit in the course of of the history of the early church.

Why do we study the Book of Acts?

After the 4 Gospels which display the personal story of Jesus' teachings, His death and resurrection, the Book of Acts could be the most important book of the New Testament. There are some teachings in Acts that cannot be found anywhere else in the NT.

The Book of Acts is the story about **Jesus continuing His work through the Holy Spirit and the apostles** after his death and resurrection.

- The book of Acts shows us **Jesus in action** as the head of the church
- Acts shows that **through Jesus people can receive the Holy Spirit**
- shows how the **message of Jesus**, the love of God and salvation can be applied in a **practical way on earth**
- shows the beginning of the church

- shows how important true Christian fellowship is and how it can be put into action

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would lead us into all truth (Joh 16,13)
It helps to read the bible and to read with an open heart and to study with an open heart. To expect that God will enlighten you life in many surprising and enriching ways.

Concerning the content and the aims of the Book of Acts it can be added:

The illustration of the Book of Acts shows how the word of Jesus that stands in the beginning is fulfilled.
You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the world.
(Acts 1.8)

- 1) **Faith first strikes root in Jerusalem** where the first church grows in grace and number (Acts 1-5)
- 2) **Soon after that the spreading started.** It was initialized when Greek-speaking, intelligent Jews who accepted Christ – in Acts they are called Hellenists - and came into conflict with the traditional Jews and the High Council because of their interpretation of the Law.
- 3) Their banishment after the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6,8-8,3) **that lead to the spreading of the Gospel in Samaria** and the regions to the South and the West of Jerusalem up to the coast and to Ceasarea.
- 4) The narration of Paul's conversion, however, shows that at this time **there were already Christians in Damascus.** (Acts 9,1-30) 9,1 especially emphasizes in a summarized way the spreading of faith.
- 5) **Then Antioch receives the message of Jesus** (Acts 11, 19-26) The Christian church becomes the shining center of this city. And yet the relationship with the first church is being nourished. (Acts 11,27-30) In agreement with the church of Jerusalem they were dealing with basic questions about the mission. (Acts 15, 1-35)
- 6) Now it is about bringing the message of salvation to the Gentiles. After the **admission of the Gentile Cornelius to the church** (Acts 10,1-11,18) and the imprisonment of Peter in Jerusalem (Acts 12,1-18) he departs to an unknown destination. (Acts 12,7)
- 7) **Now Paul moves into the center of attention** after a first journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor (Acts 13-14) and the fundamental clarification of the possibility of Jews and Gentiles coming to salvation through faith in Christ
During his 2nd mission journey Paul reaches Macedonia and Greece. (Acts 15,36-21,17)
- 8) **Several times Paul visits Jerusalem** (Acts 15/ 18,22/ 21,15-17)
After his arrest in Jerusalem and his imprisonment in Ceasarea (Acts 21,18-26,32) Paul was taken to Rome as a prisoner but still as a missionary, where he proclaimed Christ in chains. (Acts 27-28)
- 9) With the unhindered proclamation by Paul in Rome the condition for the spreading of the faith **to the ends of the world** is given and Luke is able to finish his book.

The Book of Acts and the historical back round

The area where Christianity had its first beginnings was partly the Roman Empire. Rome ruled over the whole Mediterranean area, Europe up to Gaul, Britain, Germania, and Spain over North Africa, Egypt and also to Israel the homeland of the Jews.

The capital of the Empire was Rome. 30 AD the ruler was Caesar Tiberius. Nowhere was the hate of the Roman emperors and the revolutionary wishes more powerful than in Israel. The Jewish historian Josephus Flavius reports that there were almost 1000 accounts of anti-Roman rebellion during the 1st century in Rome.

The history shows that the “Jesus movement” caused the Roman empire to accept Christianity within less than 300 years, starting from a dozen simple fishermen from Galilee and then especially because of Paul's leadership.

The Book of Acts shows the church of Jesus in its original form, in her inner and outer crisis and especially under the heavy attacks from the Judaism, but also the devotion of the believers for the spreading of the gospel.

And it also points out the way of the gospel from the Jews to the nations, the people of this world, as well as the beginning of the mission history.

Actually the “Book of Acts” should be called the “Book of Missions”. Because actually there is not much reported about the apostles. Only in the very beginning when they appeared together. But immediately after the persecution we read that the apostles and the members of the first church were scattered and established churches where ever they went.

Basically in Acts there is not so much reported about the apostles as much more about the start of the missionary works, for example how Peter goes to Samaria to the house of Cornelius the Gentile, how the Ethiopian converts and then how the great missionary Paul comes to faith and how he is being sent as a

missionary to Antioch.

The Book of Acts describes the way of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.

In his first book, the Gospel, Luke tells Theophilus about everything Jesus did and taught until He was taken into heaven. (Acts 1, 1-2)

Before Jesus gave instructions through the Holy Spirit and the ones He had chosen. He showed them through many signs after His suffering that He was still alive. For 40 days He appeared to them and spoke about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1, 3)

The great and important instructions of the disciples by Jesus happened after His resurrection. After His victory, His resurrection.

The kingdom of God (Math 4,17) also stays the big topic of the sermons and teachings of the apostles (Acts 8, 12/ 19, 8/ 20, 25/ 28, 23; 31) such as it was the topic of Jesus (Math 3,2/ Mar 1,1)

To Luke (Acts 1,4) **Jerusalem** is the predestined center of Jesus' work of salvation (Luk 2,22 & 38) and also the final point of Jesus' assignment on earth as well as the starting point of the universal sending of the apostles (Luk 24, 47/ Acts 1, 8, 12/ 6, 7/8, 1/ 11,19/ 15, 30; 36.)

The theological contribution of Acts

The faith in Jesus Christ – the foundation of the apostolic kerygma – is being pointed out here.

If one wants to discuss the **“theology of Acts”** you could also talk about the **“theology of the way.”** It shows how the salvation of God is being imparted over and over again. As one of the signs we see for example that after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the apostles imparted the Spirit of God through the **laying on of hands** or by the help of the Holy Spirit. (Acts)

Simon also wants to obtain or buy this ability. (Acts 8,9-26)

The **Holy Spirit is the gift of God** per se. (Acts)

Initially Luke is totally fulfilled with the triumph of the human **Jesus as Kyrios** (Lord) because of the resurrection

In Acts Jesus is also portrayed as the **“righteous one”**. (Acts 2,22-36)

Then this Jesus becomes known as the **“Son of God”** (Acts 9,20) which is conform to **“Messiah”** (Acts 9,22) out of the mouth of the apostle Paul. Jesus calls Himself “the Son” (Math 21,37) who is above the angels (Math 24,36), who calls God “Father” in a special way (Joh 20,17) that is to say “my Father” (Math 7,21)

Jesus holds the “status of being the Messiah” (Math 22, 42-46)

The term **“Son of Man”** (Math 8,20) is based on the powerful resurrection as the confirmation of Jesus being the Son of God.

The title **“Son of Man”** can be found in Acts 7,56 in the speech of Stephen and also in Rev 1,13/ 14,14.

Jesus preferred to call Himself “Son of Man”

- partly to express His abasement (Math 8,20/ 11,19/ 20,28)
- but also to describe His passion (Math 17,22)
- then to point to His eschatological exaltation when He was raised (Math 17,9)
- and to announce His glorious return and His coming judgment (Math 25,31)

The title is influenced by the Aramaic term that originally meant **“Man”**. (Hes 2,1) The fact that He calls Himself **“Son of Man”** pulls our attention to the lowliness of Jesus' human entity. At the same time the term “Son of Man” has an apocalyptic meaning to the Jews (Dan 7,13). This Son of Man is a mysterious human being that excels everything, which Paul expresses in Rom 9,5: **“...who is over all, the eternally blessed God.”** Here Paul calls Jesus **“God”**. In Phil 2,6 Paul states that Jesus was “in the form of God”. In Titus 2,13 he speaks about “our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”.

When Paul speaks about Jesus, he reminds us of the historical Jesus who in his concrete reality was **“God who became flesh”**. (Phil 2,5/ Col 1,15). Therefore he pictures Him as submitted to His father (1 Cor 3,23/ 11,3) in the process of the creation (1 Cor 8,6) as well as in the process of the Eschatological new creation (Rom 16,27/ 1 Cor 15,27)

The title **“Kyrios”** (Lord) was given to Jesus when He was resurrected (Phil 2,9-11/ Eph 1,20-22) and that is nothing less than the name of God that was used in the Old Testament (Rom 10,9,13/ 1 Cor 2,16)

To Paul Jesus is essentially the **“Son of God”**, (Rom 1, 3/ 5, 10/ 8, 29/ 1 Cor. 1, 9/ 15, 28/ 2 Cor. 1, 19/ Gal. 1, 16/ 2, 20/ 4, 4; 6), **“His only begotten Son”** (Rom 8,3;32) and the **“Son of His love”** (Col 1,13).

From the speeches of Acts we know the **most important texts** that were used in the early church - under

the guidance of the Holy Spirit - to **verbalize Christology** and to reason with the Jews.
Be aware of the **theme of the Servant of God** (Acts 3, 13; 26/ 4, 27; 30/ 8, 32-33) and then the understanding of Jesus being the **new Moses**, the new law-giver. (Acts 3,22/ 7,20)

Peter preaches that Jesus is the "**Initiator**", "**Leader**" or "**Prince**" of life (Acts 3,15) which means that He leads the ones who belong to Him to life and gives them the share of life He owns (Acts 5,31/ Heb 2,10) Jesus is ruler and saviour, He is the author of life (Acts 5,31) and is therefore the new Moses (Acts 7,2-53)

The resurrection of Jesus is based on Psalm 16, 8-11 and is regarded as the fulfillment of a prophecy (Acts 2,24-32/ 13,34-37)

The story of the chosen people is supposed to be a warning of the rebellion against the grace of God. (Acts 7,2-53/ 13, 16-41)

The apostles are above all "witnesses" (Acts 1,8)

witnesses testify sth - bear witness/ give a testimony (Acts 15,8)

Jesus came to confirm the truth (Joh 18,37) Therefore Jesus does not testify of Himself but of His father.

A witness always speaks on the behalf of someone else.

The apostles were His eye- and ear-witnesses (Acts 1, 22/ 2, 32/ 3,15 / 1 Joh 4, 14/ 23,11)

Luke expresses the Kerygma (message) of the apostles in a summary (Acts 1,22) and how God confirmed it through signs and wonders.

The Book of Acts contains in its main features

- 5 sermons of Peter (Acts)
- 1 sermon of Paul (Acts 13,16-41)
- 1 sermon of Stephen (Acts 7)

In the center of attention there is always a testimony (Acts 1,8)

- about the death of Christ
- His resurrection (Acts 2,24)
- His exaltation (Acts 2,33;36)

Furthermore it **contains the oldest accounts of details about the sending of Jesus**

- that which has been announced by John the Baptist (Acts 10,37/ 13,24)
- that which was spread by the teachings and wonders of Jesus (Acts 2, 22/ 10, 38)
- that which was confirmed by the appearance of the resurrected one (Acts 10, 40-41/ 13, 31)
- that which was fulfilled by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2,33/ 5,32)

After all the apostolic sermons reveal a greater context, by **looking back to the past** of the Old Testament with the help of its prophecies. (Acts 2, 23-25) and then **looking forward to the future:**

- the messianic time has come
 - Jews and Gentiles are called to conversion (Acts 2,38) so that the Parousia may come soon (Acts 2,20-21)
- the Gospel also follows this scheme to unfold the original proclamation

Luke dedicates his Gospel and the Book of Acts only to one person

(Luk 1, 3/ Ac 1, 1)

Who was this Theophilus?

His character remains hidden in the dark. The gospel of Luke calls him „KRATOSTOS“, which means most powerful, most respectable, governors used to be called by those names (Acts 23, 26/ 24, 3).

This Theophilus (means: God loves) must have been a person of high status, whose influence could have become very important for the church.

It is also assumed, **that Theophilus lived in Italy**, because places in Palestine are being described in detail while he seems to recognize other places in Italy without further information.

The Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are written in sophisticated Greek, the language of the aristocracy at that time.

Through Acts Luke wanted to show a Gentile convert how the Gospel reached him and how it gained the width, breadth and freedom which were its characteristics.

Acts shows us a clear plan of the continuation of the Godly work, which we can see when we look the establishment of new churches and their separation of the fallen people of God (Israel). After the Jews

rejected the Gospel and thus rejected Jesus the apostles now turn to the Gentiles.

The Book of Acts starts with a command

The disciples were supposed to learn obedience – and stay in Jerusalem until they would be clothed with the power from above. They were supposed to wait for

- the promise of the Father (Acts 1, 4; 2, 38; 10, 45)
- the Holy Spirit, the comforter, the godly helper
- the baptism of the Holy Spirit, that had already been announced by John the Baptist (Math 3,11/ Acts1,5)

The Holy Spirit is the favorite topic of Luke

Here He can be seen as power (Luk 1, 35/ 24, 49 / Acts 1, 8/ Rom. 15, 13+19/ 1 Cor. 2, 4-5/ 1 Thes.1, 5/ Hebr 2, 4). **This power is necessary** to spread the message of salvation (Acts 2,33)

The Spirit of God gives the gifts (charisma) that confirm the proclamation (1Cor 12,4), for example

- the gift of speaking tongues (Acts 2,4)
- the gift of working wonders (Acts 10,38)
- the gift of prophecy (Acts 11, 27/ 20, 23/ 21,11)
- the gift of wisdom (Acts 6,3; 5; 10)

The Holy Spirit gives the power to proclaim Jesus despite of persecution and rebellion. (Acts 4,8+31/ 5, 32/ 6,10/ Phil 1,19) It gives us strength to testify Jesus (Math 10, 20/ Joh 15, 26/ Acts 1, 8).

The Holy Spirit intervenes in basic decisions, like for example when in the admission of the Gentiles to the church (Acts 8, 29+39/ 10, 19+44-47/ 11, 12-16/ 15,8).

The gift of the Holy Spirit is the fulfillment of the Father's promise and the answer to Jesus' prayer (Acts 1,4/ 2,33)

The gift of the Holy Spirit was announced by the prophets for the messianic time (Hes 36, 27/ Joel 3, 1-2/ Zach 4, 6/ 6,8).

This spirit renders human beings with supernatural power and represents in a mysterious way the new creation of the inner man, which enables a man to keep the law of God with faithfulness. (Hes. 11, 9/ 36, 26-26/ Ps. 51, 12/ Is. 32, 15-19/ Zach. 12,10).

According to the prophecies of the old prophets this outpouring of the Spirit will happen by the mediation of the Messiah (Is. 11, 1-3/ 42, 1/ Math. 3, 16). And this indeed happened as an answer to the prayer of Jesus after His resurrection.

The key verse of Acts is:

Acts 1,8: ***You will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all of Judah and Samaria until the ends of this world.***

Acts contains the following areas:

- Jerusalem and Judah (chapter 2-7)
- Samaria (chapter 8)
- the whole world (chapter 9-28)

The first part of Acts (ch 1-7)

It starts with the account of Jesus' ascension

This event has already been mentioned in the end of the third Gospel (Luke) because this was the glorious finale of the story of Jesus.

In the Book of Acts **the Ascension is being described in detail**. It is **the core piece** between Jesus and the apostles. It is very important for the history of the church and the congregation. The exalted and glorified Lord being the head of the church. (Acts 1,9)

The Ascension is the piece that relates the Gospel and the Book of Acts, Jesus and the apostles, the unseen and the visible world.

The **role model for the ascension of Jesus** is the ascension of Elijah (2 Kin 2,11) and how Elisha continues the ministry of Elijah and works twice as much miracles as his forerunner.

Out of the letter the **Letter of Hebrews** mentions the Ascension and its meaning for us (Heb 6, 20/ 7, 25/ 9, 24/ 10, 20/ 12, 2). **Jesus is now the eternal priest**, and practices His office as our advocate and mediator in heaven. (Rom 8,34/ 1 Joh 2,1). His pleas are similar to those of the Holy Spirit who interceeds for the Saints (Rom 8,27)

A cloud took him away (Acts 1,9) and hid him from their view. This was the Ascension. At this point the

disciples receive the promise of Jesus' return. (Acts 1, 11)

Acts 3,30-21: **heaven must keep Him** until the time of restoration that God has proclaimed through the mouth of His holy prophets from the very beginning (Mal 3,23-24)

This Jesus will come back on a cloud (Math. 24, 30-31/ 1 Thess 4, 17/ Rev 1, 7/ 14, 14-16).

Daniel announces the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom through the "Son of Man" who arrives on a cloud.

The cloud belongs to the common images of God's appearances in the Old Testament (Ex 13, 22/ 19, 16/ 34, 5/ Ps. 18, 12/ 97, 2/ 104, 3/ Is. 19, 1).

The glorious resurrected one is ascended into heaven

The one who was "exalted" on the cross by people (Joh 12,32-33/ 8,28) was exalted by God into glory (Phil 2,9/ Acts 2,33/ 5,31) "Sit to my right until I will make your enemies your footstool." (Ps 110,1)

The Ascension to heaven is of crucial importance for all the **three offices of the Redeemer**

- for the **prophetic office** – the transition of the direct prophecy into the **prophecy of the spirit**. The life of the child, the young boy, the growing man revealed the glory of God (Joh 14,9) "Who saw me has seen the Father" where Jesus shows the divine ideal of a usual development of man (Luk 2,40+52) **Since the baptism of Jesus prophetic teaching was added unto prophetic life**. Jesus taught as someone with authority and not as the Pharisees. (Matth. 7, 29/ Luk. 24, 19/ Joh. 7, 46). His topic was the **Kingdom of God** (Matth 4,17) But His ascension initiated the transition of a **direct prophecy into an indirect prophecy** and related to Pentecost, the beginning of a spirit prophecy that comes from above. Through the Holy Spirit Jesus now appears to us in "word and spirit" to teach us (Joh 14,18+28) Now it is not only His messengers, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers (Eph 4,11) but within them and within the message itself Christ enters in. (Matth 10,40) and thus his prophetic work is being continued from glory through the spirit.
- for the **office of the priest** the Ascension is the transition into the **office of the High Priest** "according to the order of Melchisedec" (Heb 5, 1-4/ 9, 6-23/ 10, 1/ Col. 2, 16-17). His ascension is therefore not only the turning point between his position of lowliness and his position as royalty, but also it is the turning point between 2 ways of His acting as a High Priest.

When Christ ascended He entered into the Holiest of Holies, "not with foreign blood" as the high priests of the OT at the Day of Atonement. (Lev 16,15-19)

But with "His own blood", which means by His own effort, His own sacrifice at Golgotha. And this is now the foundation of our redemption (Heb 9, 11-14+24-25/ Rom 8, 34).

Thus the Ascension also becomes the justification of the crucified (Joh 16,10/ Phil. 2,9/ 1 Tim. 3,16)

The reception of the work of the Son by the Father (Heb 5,10)

This is also the confirmation of the validity of Jesus' sacrifice and the end of all Jewish sacrifices. It is the abolishment of the Aaronic priesthood and the appointment of the Melchisedechian priesthood. (Heb 7, 12-18+25/ 9, 26).

for the **royal office**, the expansion of the royal authority to a royal sovereignty.

The Ascension is the accession to the throne of the "King of Glory" (Ps 24, 8+10)

From heaven Christ reveals His royalty in many ways:

- by the foundation of the church and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2,33/ 1 Cor 12,3)
- by the spread of His Kingdom through emphasizing the message of salvation (Matth.28,18-20/ Matth,16, 17-20)
- by the governing of the Kingdom through answered prayer, authority and guidance (1 Cor 9,21)
- by defending the Kingdom through overcoming of obstacles (Acts 5,19/ 12 7+23)

In Acts we see and experience the lordship of Jesus by His Holy Spirit.

The **Old Testament** only had an instructional function and equipped people for their office through the Holy Spirit.

- it empowered certain people to prophesy (1 Sam 10, 6/ 1 Pet 1. 11/ 2 Pet 1, 21)
- it empowered certain people to fight/ war (Judg g,34)
- it equipped certain people with all kinds of skills (Ex 28, 3/ 31, 3-5)

The meaning of the Pentecost events is that to this educational and charismatic function of the Holy Spirit the organic function is added, so that the Holy Spirit does not only work as the "**Spirit of God**" anymore but in particular as the "**Spirit of the Son**". In this meaning the Spirit did not exist before (Joh 7,39) and was thus prophesied in the old covenant as something to come. (Joel 3, 1-2/ Ez. 36, 27/ Zach. 12, 10). Therefore He is called "**the Spirit of Promise**" in Eph 1,13.

Chapter 1: Luke reports about the foundation and development of the first churches.

Here we see the works of the apostles and how God uses them as tools.

Here we see how Jesus operates through the apostles by the power of the Holy Spirit

We are shown how out of small beginnings 120 Jewish Jesus believers come together and experience Pentecost. And how out of this small beginnings they become the church, how she grows and spreads and gains width and freedom.

First of all there is a group of apostles (Acts 1,12-26)

They met in the **chamber of the tax collector** where they stayed permanently. (Acts 1,13)

They stayed there to persist in prayer in unity (Acts 1,14)

There they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2,1)

There the disciples went after their interrogation and torment of the Jews

In this house Jesus celebrated the **Lord's Supper/ Communion** (Luk 22,10-13), it was a large room on the upper floor

The owner of the house must have been John Mark. He could also have been the young man who sadly went away when Jesus told him to sell everything...

Acts 12,12 mentions that after he had been delivered from prison, Peter went to the house of Mary, John Mark's mother, where the church had gathered to pray.

That was also their "community center". Here they already loosed themselves from the temple, the official Jewish religion. In the house where they had gathered to celebrate communion, they then used to meet as a church.

This house was always a **"house of prayer"** and not a **"robber's den"**. Perhaps the tomb of King David was located under this house. (Acts 2,29)

Whenever you read about it they are praying

They prayed in the manner that Jesus taught them (Math 6,5) and had practiced with them. (Math 14,23)

Here we find the apostles breaking bread and praying together (Acts 2, 42+46/ 6, 4).

It is this place where the Holy Spirit was poured out

Chapter 2: The outpouring of the Holy Spirit

Before the Holy Spirit came, could come, the gap that Jude left when he betrayed Jesus was closed.

Matthew was chosen to be the 12th apostle (Acts 1,15-26). This choice was made by casting lots. It was not a choice made by the Holy Spirit. It was an ancient ritual to make a choice. (Ex 33,7)

Acts 2: **When "Pentecost" had come**

The Day of Pentecost was actually a feast of harvest. (Ex 23,14)

Now this became the Day of the New Covenant. God makes a new covenant with His people.

There were Jews of all nations on earth. (Acts 2, 5-11)

The list of the nations corresponds to those amongst whom the Jews were scattered since AD 4th century, after the destruction of the temple. At this time they were all gathered in Jerusalem. Just like the old prophets spoke about the remnant, the scattered ones of Israel that God would gather so that they would be in their homeland when the Messiah comes. It is here that the big gathering of Israel that was mentioned in the OT. And from this point the Word of God could go out to all the nations of the world (Luk 24,47).

The speaking of tongues is manifested at the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2,39)

Tongues like split by fire, in the image of flames (Is 5,24/ 6,6-7)

The speaking of tongues was the first sign of the Holy Spirit baptism. (Acts 10,46/ 11,15/ 19,6/ 1 Cor 12-14/ Mark 16, 17).

The pre-stage of tongue speaking can be found when we look at the prophets of the OT. (Num 11, 25-29/ 1 Sam. 10, 5-6+10-13/ 19, 20-24/ 1 Kin. 2, 10)

The promise of it can be found in Joel 3,1-5

Peter quotes him in his Pentecost message (Acts 2,17)

Luke considers the praise of God's works (Acts 2,11) in all languages of the world as a restoration of the unity that was lost in Babel. It is a sign and a wonderful anticipation / indication of the future worldwide proclamation of faith.

The Book of Acts reveals how the Kingdom of God was – step by step – taken away from the Jews.

Exactly how Jesus prophesied: “***The Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation that bears the fruit of it.***” (Matth 21,43). The fulfillment of this word can be seen in the message of Paul in Rome: “***Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles and they will hear it.***” (Acts 28,28) This way **the first Christian church** was established and app. 3000 people were added unto her. (Acts 2,41-47)

During Jesus' days on earth, the church in the sense of the NT **did not exist yet**. Jesus spoke about the future when He said: “I will build my church...” (Matth 16,18). It was not until Pentecost that the Saints were baptized “by one spirit into one body” (1 Cor 12,13). Therefore **Pentecost is the birthday of the church**.

The church was titled “**ecclesia**”, “the called”. In the beginning people among the **Jews** were called, then out of the **Samaritan** and eventually out of the **Gentiles**. (Matth.16,18/ Eph.1, 22/ 3, 10/ 2, 11-22/ Col. 1, 10).

In the new testament the word “Ecclesia” occurs about 100 times, in many verses it speaks about the “whole church”, the worldwide church. The ones far off have come close. (Eph 2,11-13)

The Gentile believers are equal to the Jewish believers.

They are **fellow heirs**, **part of the body** and **participators** of the promise (Eph 3,6)

Citizen among the saints (Eph2,19) and **take part** in their spiritual possessions (Rom 15,27)

In Jesus' church there is no difference between the Jews and the believers of the other nations.

No prophet of the Old Testament has ever seen this miraculous establishment. (1 Pet 1, 10-12/ Matth.13, 17), even though this was contained in the eternal plan of God (Eph 3,9) the establishment was yet hidden (Rom 16,25/ Eph 3,5/ 1 Cor 2,7). Therefore the church in her new testament character cannot be found in the Old Testament. Only indirect in role models like Eve, Rebekka, in the tabernacle, etc

The church exists since Pentecost (Acts 2)

Since the sending of Peter to Ceasarea (Acts 10) also the nations of the world are part of the church

Especially since the independently given Revelation of Paul (Gal. 1, 11, 12/ Eph. 3, 38) **the mystery of the composition of the church in the New Testament**, her calling, her position and her hope was revealed to the children of God. (Eph 3,5). The body of Christ, the church is now universal.

From this point on it is proclaimed in the prophetic texts (Rom 16,26) and it is being preached by **the ones who proclaimed the Gospel**, the stewards of God's mysteries. (1 Cor 4,1)

Based on Eph 5,32 Paul himself calls the church the “**big mystery**”. But the mystery that the apostle speaks of is not only the church but also the body-like relationship between the church and Christ which is pictured in the relationship within marriage as a human image. “Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother to cling to his wife, and...**the two will be one flesh.**” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Eph 5, 31-32

It is remarkable how important it is to Luke to emphasize again and again the **growth of the church in number**. (Acts 2,47/ 4,4/ 5,14/ 6,1+7/ 9, 31/ 11, 21+24/ 16, 5/ 12,24/ 13,48-49/ 19,20).

What Luke emphasizes about the first churches

● **They continued in the teachings of the apostles.**

(Acts 2.42) Within the treasures of faith that the apostles had testified. This is also a basic concern of Luke's double piece of literature (Luk 1,4) The basic content, the foundation of faith, is the broad account of testimonies and teachings of the apostles within the church.

But also the miracles the Lord worked through the apostles were regarded as God's confirmation of the believers' teachings. (Acts 5,12/ 4,33)

● **They remained steadfastly in fellowship.** (Acts 2.43)

The Greek word is “Koinonia” (1 Cor 1,9). This way of fellowship has its roots in the truth which is available for several people at the same time. No matter whether it deals with spiritual or material truth. In the first church it was never about **material goods** alone, but always about the common ownership of mental and spiritual goods. (Rom 15, 26-27/ 2 Cor. 8, 4/ 9, 13/ Gal. 6, 6/ Phil. 4, 15-15). Sometimes they talk about common actions or dispositions. (2 Cor. 1, 7/ 6, 14/ 1 Tim. 5, 22/ 2 Joh 11/ Rev. 1,9). The fellowship of which all others can actually be concluded is the **part-taking** in the goodly treasures. (1 Cor 1,9/ Phil 1,5)

● **It unites us** with the father and His Son Jesus (1 Cor 1,9/ 1 Joh 1,3+7)

● **It unites us with Jesus Himself** (1 Cor. 10, 16/ Phil. 3, 10/ 1 Pet 4, 13)

● **It unites us with the Holy Spirit** (2 Cor 13,13/ Phil 2,1)

● This fellowship grants us participation in the glory to come (1 Pet 5,1)

Based on the fact that Christ had **fellowship with our human nature** (Heb 2,14), we can have **fellowship with the Godly nature** (2 Pet 1,4)

Therefore the word **“fellowship”** characterizes the Christian church.

Luke gives us precious information about the life of the first church

- about the prayer life of the saints
- about the community of goods in the early church of Jerusalem (Acts 2, 43-47/ 4, 23-37)
- about the baptism with water and the Holy Spirit (Acts 1,5)
- about communion (Acts 2,42)
- about the approach of a church organization by the appointment of the 7 deacons (Acts 6,1-7)
- about the appointment of the teachers and prophets (Acts 13,1)
- about the appointment of elders (presbyter) who are the board of the church (Acts 11,30 – Peter was only one of the elders when he was in Jerusalem. Only when he left Jerusalem he was an apostle.
- and the elders that Paul appoints in the new established churches (Acts 14,23)

Everything is carried, guided and advanced by the invincible breath of the Holy Spirit. This spirit that Luke is already enhancing in his Gospel is so diligently at work during the spread of the church that you could call Acts the **Gospel of the Holy Spirit**.

Through this the whole piece maintains the atmosphere of a spirit-filled joy and the amazement over God's mighty works which only seems ridiculous to those who have no understanding for this unique event in this world, which is the birth of Christianity.

Chapter 3: The healing of the lame

It brings about the enmity of the High Council, which rejected the works of the apostles just as they rejected Jesus.

Peter and John go to the temple at the 9th hour, the hour of prayer. (Acts 3,1)

It was the hour of evening sacrifice. (Ex 29, 39-42/ Luk. 1, 8-10/ Acts 10, 3+30).

After the healing the message of Peter follows (Acts 3,11-26)

Peter acknowledges the healing as the glorification of Jesus. (Acts 3,13) He refers to the prophecies of the OT prophets, which proves God's resolution. (Acts 3, 18/ 4, 28/ 13, 29/ 8, 32-35/ 9, 22/ 10, 43/ 17, 2-3/ 18, 5+28/ 26, 22-23+27/ 28, 23/ Luk. 18, 31/ 22, 22/ 24, 25-27+44).

In Jerusalem everything that the prophets mentioned about the Son of Man is supposed to be fulfilled. (Luk 18,31) Luke repeatedly points to the prophets' prophecies of suffering. (Luk . 24, 25+27+44/ Acts 2, 23/ 3, 18+24/ 8, 32-35/ 13, 27/ 26, 22-23).

Chapter 4: The first persecution of the Christians

The Jews consciously rejected Jesus, the Christians and the Gospel.

In almost every account of the NT the situation can be discerned clearly. The disciples always had the end of the earth and the rejection of Jesus in mind when they proclaimed their message. Paul suffered inexpressibly of the Jews later (2 Cor 11,23-33) And always reckoned with his execution. (Phil 1,12-26)

All 4 Evangelists look upon a persecuted church, especially because of the Jews (Mar 13,13)

Jesus announced it: they will ban you, suspect you from the synagogues, etc. **The Sadducees tried to intimidate the apostles.** (Acts 4,3/ 5,30) They executed lynch law against the Christians (Acts 7,56) Outside of Palestine they always **agitated the crowd against the Christians.** (Acts 13,30) up to stoning (Acts 14,5/ 15,19), or they denounced the Christians and instigated the crowd. (Acts 19,23-40).

This is the beginning of the breach between the Christians and the Jews.

God confesses the church

- It is obvious that God is no longer with Israel, the traditional Judaism.
- There are signs and wonders – that nobody can deny or ignore.

In whose power or whose name did you do that? (Acts 4,7)

From the ancient point of view name and personality cannot be separated from each other (Acts 3,16)

Therefore when you call the name of Jesus you are evoking the power of Jesus. (Acts 2, 21+38/ 3, 6/ 4, 7+10+30/ 10, 43/ 16, 18/ 19, 13/ Luk. 9, 49/ 10, 17/ Joh. 14, 13+14/ 15, 16/ 16, 24, 26/ 20, 31)

To make such a calling effective, the one who calls needs to have faith. (Acts 19, 13-17/ Matth 8, 10)

The apostles suffer for the name of Jesus which they proclaim. (Acts , 41/ 21, 13/ 1 Pet 4, 14/ 3 Joh

7). **They suffer for the name they call upon.** (Acts 2, 21/ 4, 12/ 9, 14+21/ 22, 16) It is the name above all names. (Phil 2, 9-11)

While on the outside the church is growing, sin sneaks into the church.

Ananias and Sapphira lie to the church, to God and to the Holy Spirit. (Acts 5, 1-11)

The term "Church" originated in the old covenant, as description of the **Messianic church** that Jesus Himself wants to build (Math 16,18/ Acts 7,38).

The word "church" characterizes

- first of all the **first church** of Jerusalem (Acts 8,1/ 11,22)
- then the **single churches** in Judea (Gal 1, 22/ 1 Thes 2, 14/ Acts 9, 31)
- then the **churches of the Gentiles** (Acts 13, 1/ 14, 23/ 15, 41/ 16, 5/ Rom 16, 1, 4/ 1 Cor. 1, 2)
- but also the **assemblies** (1 Cor. 11, 18/ 14, 23+34/ Acts 19, 32)
- and the **gathering places** (Rom. 16, 5/ Col. 4, 15/ Philemon 2)
- finally **the whole church** in her theological unit (Acts 20, 28/ 1 Cor. 10, 32/ 12, 28)
- as well as in her image of a person as the **Body of the Lord** (Col 1,18/ Eph 5,23-32)
- and also her meaning for the cosmic sovereignty of Christ (Eph 1,23)

Because of Barnabas the Levite people in Jerusalem sold their land (Acts 4,36)

This started the movement "**community of goods**" within the first church (Acts 2, 42/ 4, 32). But this was not a law or a rule that had to be adhered. It was a free choice that many made driven by the love they had. That it could have been different can be seen in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. Peter holds against them that they could have kept all of their land to themselves. (Acts 5,4)

That the sale of ground is emphasized and mentioned in the Bible, proofs that this could not have been a common thing. **In Acts 12,12 it is stated that Mary owned her own house. The "community of goods"** was obviously only a movement out of the first love. The prosperous members of the church wanted to sell some of their properties to help the poor of which the church usually consisted.

Some assume that the poverty and need of Jerusalem's Christians which Paul tries to meet with and offering was caused by the noble zeal of love that caused the few prosperous members to also to become poor. As a matter of fact the "community of goods" ceased and was not continued.

Later we meet Barnabas as one of Paul's companions. (Acts 9, 27/ 11, 22-30/ 12, 25/ 13-15/ 1 Cor. 9, 6/ Gal. 2/ Col. 4, 10)

At first Barnabas was leading and his name always came before Paul's.

But soon Paul took the lead of the mission team. Barnabas even leaves Paul because of his nephew John Mark. (Acts 15, 36-38/ Col. 4, 10).

That this separation was not serious or long-lasting is confirmed in 1 Cor. 9,6 where Paul speaks highly of Barnabas. It is also assumed that Barnabas is the author of Hebrews.

Chapter 5: Ananias and Sapphira

Ananias and Sapphira sold their land and gave a part of the profit to the apostles. But they also took a part of it for themselves. For this reason Peter seriously criticizes them and accuses them of lying to God. Afterwards Ananias fell down and died and the same happened to Sapphira subsequently.

In this event the Holy Spirit is called to be **as God** and the **Godhead of the Holy Spirit** is established. In Acts 5,3 it says: Why did Satan fill your heart so that you would **lie to the Holy Spirit**. And Acts 5,4 says: **You did not lie to man but to God. And great fear came over the church.** (Acts 5, 11)

Chapter 6: The appointment of the 7 deacons

When the number of the deacons increased, **the Hellenists complained because their wives were neglected in the daily distribution.** (Acts 6,1)

This caused tension between the native and the foreign believers.

After the church in Jerusalem had grown the apostles had to fill two offices. They were responsible for the teachings and the welfare. There was too much work for them.

So the office of the deacon was the first "**church office**".

While instead of the apostles the office of "elders" and "bishops" was introduced, the office of the "**deacons**" remained until today.

Two deacons distinguish themselves in the Book of Acts, **Stephen and Philippe.**

The Hellenists (Greek Jews) had a higher level of education and read the bible in Greek.

The Hebrews, the native Jews, spoke Aramaic, and read their bible in the synagogue in Hebrew.

This difference is also carried into the early church.

The initiative to missions originated from the Hellenistic groups.

The church needs to be organized, had to prioritize.

Luke did not call the chosen men “deacon”, but he repeats the word “service”, Greek: “diakonia”. (Phil. 1,1/ Tit. 1,5).

All seven deacons carry Greek names, the last one is a Proselyte (Acts 2, 11).

Therefore the group of Hellenistic Christians obtains an organization which is separated from the Hebrew group. **Brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation!** (Acts 6,3)

12 was the number of the tribes of Israel. (Mark 3, 14)

Jesus chose 12 new leaders, an image of the chosen people, the tribes of Israel. The number 12 had to be completed again after the betrayal of Judas Ischariot. (Acts 1,26) It will be preserved in heaven forever. (Matth 19,28/ Rev 21, 12-14)

- This is a picture of the perfection of the new people
- According to the 12 tribes of Israel there are the 12 apostles (Rev 7, 4-8)

7 is the number of the Gentile tribes that lived in Canaan (Acts 13, 19/ Deut 7,1)

The deacons were chosen for the administration of the new churches.

And the word of God spread. (Acts 6,7) Here a new theme emerges (Acts 12, 24/ 19, 20/ Luk. 1, 80) which is added unto the former theme (Acts 2, 41)

Chapter 7: The persecution and stoning of Stephen

Stephen means “crown”. He had a special power of faith and of the spirit. (Acts 6, 3;8) He was a Hellenist. His fall from the Hellenistic synagogue and his activities for the Christian church was the reason for the argument.

The Libertines, offspring of the Jews that were brought from Pompeii to Rome AD 63 and were sold as slaves and were then enfranchised asked their former faith friends and companions. They could not resist his spirit and wisdom. (Acts 7,10) With the use of false witnesses they sued him before the high council. He could remedy the complaints, but was still stoned in a riot-like act of violence. This is where **Saul of Tarsus appears for the first time**. He contented to his death. (Acts 7,57/ 8,1)

The sermon of Stephen summarizes at first the story of Abraham and Joseph. (Acts 7, 2-16) and then describes the story of Moses. (Acts 7, 17-43) When Stephen speaks of Moses he thinks of Jesus. The attitude of the Jews against Jesus was the same as the attitude of the Israelites against Moses in the OT.

Stephen exposes that God is not limited to a people or a country, neither is He bound to temples that were build by men. (view his charge in Acts 6,13)

His speech ends with a passionate accusation against the listeners (Acts 7, 51-53).

In Acts 8, 1-4 notes from chapter 7 can be found

- the burial of Philippe
- the ending of the precedent workings

The scattering of the church and the works of the scattered

- the mission of Philippe (Acts 8, 5-40)
- the works of Peter (Acts 9,32 – 11,18)
- the conversion of Saul (Acts 9, 1-30)

Out of the persecuted and scattered grow new missionaries (Acts 11, 19-20)

The second part of the Book of Acts (Acts 8-12)

This second part includes a series of circumstances that God uses to prepare the way to establish the church amongst the Gentiles.

1) **The conversion of the Samaritan through the message of Philippe.** (Acts 8,5)

Because of their faith in their one god the Samaritans were close to the people of Israel, but because of their derivation they were counted to the Gentile people.

The foundation of the church amongst them was the first step to spread the Gospel in the Gentile areas (the Samaritans, a mixed people)

2) It is the same Philippe who preaches the Gospel to the **Ethiopian chamberlain** (Acts 8, 26)

Another wall between the nations and God is broken.

It is the Holy Spirit Himself who brought Philippe out of his blessed work and assigns him to go to the street to Gaza, hold on to the chariot and bring this man to faith. The Holy Spirit raptures him after the baptism, after his work was done.

Why the Ethiopians?

Solomon once had a connection to the kingdom of the south – the queen of Sheba.

Ps 68, 32 describes the orientation of Ethiopia (Kush) towards God. And God promised the upright to let them prosper in everything (Is 56, 3-7) The Ethiopians were historically very close to the Judaism.

More about Kush (Ethiopia) in Is 18, 1-7. In verse 7 the conversion of Ethiopia is mentioned. Here the fulfillment is taking place.

Chapter 8: The Gospel left Jerusalem and Judah and goes to Samaria and Ethiopia

Philippe goes to the capital of Samaria.

The **Samaritans** were brothers with regard to their Jewish ancestry and religion, but they were separated from the church of Israel and according to the Jewish understanding they had turned away from the right practice of faith and life. (Joh 4,9/ Matth 10, 5-6)

Usually the religious Jews did not associate with Samaritans, they even hated them (Joh. 8, 48/ Luk. 9, 52-55/ Matth.10, 5/ Luk. 10, 33/ 17, 16) and declared their origin to be a result of the forced settlement of the five Gentile tribes who partially remained faithful to their gods. (2 Kin 17, 24-41)

In Samaria Simon the sorcerer tries to sneak into the church by the use of “white magic”. (Acts 8, 9-25) He tries to buy the authority, the gift, or the office.

The missionary movement was a result of the persecution. (Acts 8,4)

The believers who were scattered moved from place to place and preached the word.

During the persecution that started because of Stephen the scattered came up to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch. But until that point they were only preaching the word to the Jews. (Acts 11, 19)

And therewith the 2nd phase of the spread of the church started.

Chapter 9: The Gospel makes its way to the Gentiles

The Gentile mission, the new work of God needed a new powerful tool. The former persecutor turns into one of the most diligent missionaries. Saul became Paul (Acts 9,1).

The conversion and the calling of Saul were highly important events for the church. Luke offers three descriptions of this turning point. They are a part of Paul's sermons (also look at Gal 1,12-17) The conversion of Saul cannot be dated. The earliest date that can be considered is 1,5 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the latest date would be AD 36, 12 years before the Apostle Council in Jerusalem (Gal 2,1/ Acts 15) which took place about AD 48/ 49)

Ananias visits Paul in Damascus (Acts 9, 10-19)

The Lord spoke to him: Go, because this man is my chosen vessel. He shall call my name before nations and kings and the sons of Israel. (Acts 9, 15)

Paul was supposed to become the apostle of the Gentiles. He was also supposed to testify before kings (Acts 26, 17-18). This also corresponds to the account of Paul in Gal 1,16 (also see Rom 1, 5/ 11, 13/ 15, 16-18/ Gal. 2, 2+8+9/ Eph. 3, 8/ Kol. 1, 27/ 1.Tim. 2, 7).

By the guidance of Peter God prepares the way for the Gentile mission.

The Lord gave Peter the authority of the keys. He has the permission to unlock the kingdom of God for the Jews, the Samaritans and also the Gentiles, for example the Gentile captain Cornelius.

After he starts preaching the Holy Spirit fell down. The listeners were filled with the Holy Spirit as the apostles at Pentecost. (Acts 9,32-10,48) **Therefore Peter has to justify himself in Jerusalem in front of the other apostles and elders.**

The main problem of the growing church should be the access of the Gentiles to the salvation of God. Acts offers an insight into this problem. The brethren who were followers of Jude in Jerusalem remained faithful to the Jewish law. (Acts 15, 1+5/ 21, 20)

The “Hellenists” tended to interpret the law more freely, and therefore it was them who were ready to also accept the Non-Jews in the fellowship of the Christ-believers. (Acts 11,20)

During the agreement in Jerusalem (Acts 15) they came into one accord that the faith in Jesus also grants

salvation without the Law of Moses. Therefore the Non-Jews are free from the Mosaic Law. Thus the initially sheer Jew-Christian church also had to open its doors to the Gentiles **according to the commandment and guidance of God.** (Acts 10, 1-23) It was an initiative of the Holy Spirit that also the non-Jews shall be filled with the Holy Spirit and be accepted from God. (Acts 10,44-48)

Therefore the church of Jesus can be called the people of God consisting of Jews and non-Jews. In the Book of Acts Paul **always goes to the Jews first** and preaches the Gospel to them (Acts 13, 14/ 14, 1/ 16, 13/ 17, 2+10+17/ 18, 4+19/ 19, 8/ 28, 17+23), and only if they did not receive the message he went to the Gentiles. (Acts 13, 46/ 18, 6/ 28, 28)

Paul preaches in Damascus and proves in the synagogues that Jesus is the "Son of God" (Acts 9, 19-25). **As the time went by the Jews determined to kill him.** (Acts 9,23)

Gal 1, 17-18 describes it in more detail: Paul stays in Arabia for 3 years. The Book of Acts simplifies the events. Here Paul has to draw back to escape Aretas. (2 Cor 11, 32-33)

Many things about the Gospel would have remained unknown if it was not for the Book of Acts. We would know nothing about the fight about the cutting of the cord of the Christian faith from the traditional Jewish religion and the Jewish cult. We would also not know much about the development of the New Testament and the church.

The Book of Acts shows how the Jews continue to reject Jesus forcefully and merciless. And here it can be seen who was separated and why and that there was no other option for the Christians but to go the way without the Jews. Apart from that it can be recognized that God/ the stubbornness of the Jews caused this radical, painful detachment.

If it was not for the Book of Acts until today we would not know about the Jew's counterfeit of the history: **That Christianity had stolen from the Judaism.**

But the Book of Acts shows clearly how the Jews themselves rejected Christ. They persecuted Christians everywhere and fought Christianity from the beginning. The biggest adversaries and agitators of the new faith were the religious Jews and their synagogues. Paul faced this war.

Chapter 10: God Himself ushered a new era and a new trend in the church

Now also the Gentiles were supposed to be partakers of salvation. Peter was called to the Roman captain Cornelius. This encounter was definitely a work of God (Acts 10, 1-48) From the point of Luke the conversion of Cornelius was not an individual case. In Acts 3, 19 Peter announces in his Pentecost message a **"time to breathe"** again through Jesus . It was the will of God that also the Gentiles can come to Him, because the redemption through Jesus was not supposed to be an exclusive affair of the Jews. (1 Thes. 1, 9/ Gal. 4, 9/ 1 Cor. 10, 7+14/ Acts. 14, 15/ 15, 19/ 26, 18+20).

But now the Jews also have to turn to the Lord, just like the Gentiles, when they wanted to be redeemed, and they also had to acknowledge the Lord just like the Gentiles.

There is no special way to salvation for the Jews.

After the destruction of the temple AD 70 and the subsequent abolishment of the altar, the bloody sacrifices, the reconciliation through the blood of animals, the priesthood, etc. they had no cultic possibilities of redemption before God.

When Jesus was crucified the curtain in the temple that separated the Holiest of Holies from the tabernacle was torn. Therefore there was no exclusive (additional) way to salvation for the Jews anymore. (2 Cor 3,16/ Acts 4, 11-12) When the religious Jews rejected Jesus they gave up themselves and their God-given birthright.

The Peter's experience at Cornelius' house will later be of much importance for the first apostle council in Jerusalem and its decisions. (Acts 15, 7-11+14)

Acts 10 shows it clearly:

God made it obvious that the Gentiles were supposed to be accepted in the church without forcing them to adhere to the conditions of the law. (Acts. 10, 34-35+44-48/ 11, 15-18/ 15,7-11+14/ Gal. 2, 1+10).

It was God who showed Peter that he was supposed to accept the hospitality of an uncircumcised. Here you can realize the problem in the relationship between the Christians that came out of the Judaism and the ones who came out of the Paganism. (Acts 10,10 bis 6, 28-29/ 11, 2-14/ Gal. 2, 11-21).

The Holy Spirit, which is the Lord Himself assigns Peter to go to the Gentile, the Roman captain. He did not choose to do so on his own. It was definitely the will of God. Peter received the **"first revelation"**

concerning this plan of God.

Philippe had no problems to climb into the chariot of the Ethiopian and to interpret the scriptures for him. (Acts 8,31) **To Peter it was more of a problem** to walk into the house of a Gentile. Luke receives the revelation that commands him to go there, out of the vision of Luke where the clean and the unclean things were addressed. (Acts 10,28)

Cornelius was a man who feared and adored God (Acts 10, 2+22+35/ 13, 16+26+43+50/ 16,14/ 17, 4+17/ 18, 7) People like him sympathized with the Judaism, it is only that they did not go so far to go along with the Jews and become circumcised and Proselytes or to make a commitment to keep the Jewish law. (like for ex. In Acts 2,11)

God delivered Peter of his lawful mindset about impurity. (Acts 10,15), especially of his concern about the lawful cleanness. (Acts 11,9/ Matth 15, 1-20/ Rom 14,14+17) The application follows in Acts 15,9. By faith God Himself has cleaned the hearts of the Gentiles, even though their body remains ritually unclean because they are not circumcised. The practical conclusion: **Peter should not be afraid to associate with the uncircumcised.**

In Acts 10, 34-35 Peter says: **Now I understand that God has no respect of the person, but everyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable before Him.**

This word "acceptable", is a cultic terminology. (Acts 10,4) It means a sacrifice "without blemish" or "one who sacrifices". (Lev 3/ 19, 5/ 22,19-27).

In Is. 56, 7 it has been announced that in the "last days" the sacrifices of the Gentiles shall be **acceptable** before Jehovah / Yahweh. (Mal. 1, 10-11/ Rom. 15, 16/ Phil. 4, 18/ 1 Pet 2, 5).

The verses 37-42 in Acts 10 are an **outline of the demonstration of the Gospel**, the good news. There is substantial information contained that Luke also emphasizes in his Gospel. For example in Acts 10:40: **"raised on the third day"**. This is a classic formulation of the Christian message and the Christian faith. It already appears in the sprouting credo of 1 Corinthians 15,4 with the amendment: **"according to the Scriptures"**. This formula composes an echo of Jonah 2,1 (Matth 12,40), also compare Hosea 6,2 and can be found again in Matth. 16, 21/ 17, 23/ 20, 19/ 27, 64/ Luk. 9, 22/ 18, 33/ 24, 7+46.

The resurrection of Jesus is the main, essential message of the apostles and the whole New-Testament proclamations. (Acts 2,24+32). The apostles are the God-chosen witnesses of the resurrected Christ. (Luk. 24, 48/ Acts 3, 13/ 4, 33/ 5, 32/ 13, 31/ 22, 15).

According to the understanding of Acts the knowledge out of own experience of Jesus' works in public is an indispensable requirement. (Acts 1,22/ Luk 1,2/ Joh 15,27)

Peter occurs as a witness of God (Acts 10,39)

"Witness" - this is also the key word of Acts

God Himself confirms the message of Peter (Apg.10.44), „in which the Spirit of God fell upon everyone“. This is the „**Pentecost of the Gentiles**“. It is comparable to the first Pentecost, how Peter also confirms in Acts 10, 47/ 11, 15/ 15, 8.

Chapter 11; Peter was attacked and had to justify himself

Peter received from God the „**keys to heaven**“ he was supposed to unlock the kingdom of God for the Jews, the Samaritans and also the Gentiles. And he did that. And because he was obedient to God and followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit and did what he was told, the **traditional Jewish Christians** – his own people- attack him severely. (Acts 11,3)

Peter does not respond to their complaints about accepting the hospitality of an uncircumcised. Even though this one (Cornelius) was a man who feared God. He speaks about the baptism which he accorded them (Acts 11,17) and therefore granted them the admission to the new people of God.

According to the Lucan conception Peter is therefore **the first one who was leading the Gentiles to the church**, no matter what the consequences of the baptism of the Ethiopian chamberlain were (Acts 8,26-39) and also the foundation of the church in Antioch, which took place during the same period of time. According to the accounts this report follows subsequently. (Acts 11,19)

The **council of Jerusalem** (Acts 15,5-29) picks up this set of problem.

Establishment of the church of Antioch (Acts 11.19-26)

The story/ the report is an amendment of Acts 8,1-4) The foundation of the church was a direct result of Stephen's martyrdom.

The center of the spread of faith is moved from Jerusalem to Antioch. Antioch near Orontes, the capital of the Roman province Syria, was after Rome and Alexandria the **3rd most important city** of the Roman Empire. From this point the **mission journeys of Paul** started, and to this place Paul always returns

to report to the church. This was his home church.

At this place the world-wide mission work started. (Acts 11,20)

Some proclaim the Gospel of Jesus to the Greeks, the Hellenists (Acts 9,29)

Jews usually called those Greeks who were in contrast to them uncircumcised and generally non-Jews.

The turning point of the proclamation of the Gospel is the interesting part.

Acts 11,20: They proclaim **the Gospel of Jesus, the Lord** to the Greek.

In the preachings of the Gentiles Jesus is less called "**Messiah or Christ**" which corresponds to the certain expectations of the Jews. Much more they called Him "**LORD**".

Acts 25,26: "**Lord**" - that was the title of the Roman emperor, as the possessor of absolute and universal royal power, who more or less enjoyed godly prerogative and was also adored as a divine being.

Jesus is the "Lord": Because of His exaltation to the "right hand of God", He holds the highest position of the kingdom of the last days. (Acts 2, 21+36/ 7, 59-60/ 10, 36/ 1 Thess. 4, 15-17/ 2 Thess. 1, 7-12/ Rom. 10, 9-33).

In Antioch the believers, which were formerly known as disciples, were also called "**Christians**". They were called "**followers of the Christ**". It was probably a mocking terminology (Acts 11,26). This also points out that this group now became independent and cut the cord.

A severe famine was announced by Agabus (Acts 11,28)

This serves also as a description of the office of the **prophets and prophecy** in the NT.

Under the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54) the Roman Empire indeed suffered from a severe famine, at first in Greece and later even in Rome. Joseph dates this desperate time more exactly during the time of the procurator Tiberius Alexander. (AD 46-48)

The story about Agabus is supposed to present how Christianity is in no way minor to the Old Testament or the Judaism. They have everything they used to have.

Just like the prophets of the OT (Deut 18, 18/ 2 Petr 1, 21/ Mat 5, 12) were charismatic, so were the prophets of the New testament (1 Cor 12,1) who speak under the anointing of His spirit.

This charisma is even poured out in abundance within the new covenant. (Acts 2,17-18), so that **all the believers can become partakers** and not only a few chosen ones like it used to be in the OT (Acts. 19, 6/ 1Cor. 11, 4+5/ 14, 26,29 bis 33, 37).

In the early church there was also the office of the **prophet** besides the office of the **apostle** (Apg. 1, 27/ 13, 1/ 15, 32/ 21, 9+10) According to the **rank of charisma** the prophets were usually counted 2nd place behind the apostles. (1 Cor. 12, 28+29/ Eph. 4, 11/ Rom. 12, 6/ Luk. 11, 49).

The prophets of the NT are the called "**witnesses of the spirit**" (Rev 1, 3/ 2, 7/ 1.Thess. 5, 19+20) and pass on his "revelations" (1 Cor 14, 6+26+30/ Eph. 3, 5/ Rev. 1, 1).

They were, just like the apostles, witnesses of the resurrected Christ or "witnesses of Jesus Christ". The apostles testify of the resurrected Jesus (Rom 1,1/ Acts 1,8) and proclaim Him (Acts 2,22).

The **assignments of the prophets** are not limited to

- foretell the future (Acts 11, 28/ 21,11)
- read the hearts of the people (1 Cor. 14, 24+25/ 1Tim. 1, 18/ 4, 14)
- but also to encourage, to build them up and to comfort them (1 Cor. 14, 3/ Acts 4, 36/ 11, 23+24) by spirit-given revelation. Therefore they are related to the **speakers of tongues** (Acts 2,4/ 19,6) but they have a higher position because their word can be understood. (1 Cor 14). The one who speaks in tongues only builds up himself, but whosoever prophesies or interprets tongues builds up the others.

The main assignment of the prophets used to be to interpret the prophecies of the Scriptures, especially of the old prophets, enlightened and inspired by the spirit (1 Pet 1,10-12) and therefore unveil the mystery of the Divine plan of salvation. (1.Kor. 13, 2/ Eph. 3, 5/ Röm. 16, 25).

The apostles laid the foundation of the church (Eph 2, 20). The Revelation of John is a typical example of the prophecies of the NT (Rev 1, 3/ 10, 11/ 19, 10/ 22, 7-10/ 22, 18+19).

Paul goes to the church of Jerusalem as an ambassador (Acts 11,30)

According to the accounts of Acts (Acts 9, 26/ 11, 29/ 15, 2) Paul journeyed to Jerusalem **3 times** before he went to Galatia two times. (Acts 16,6/ 18, 23) Paul himself only mentions **two journeys**. (Gal 1,18/ 2,1/ 4,13). This difference in the Book of Acts could be the result of the way Peter used his sources. It is possible that the journey of Acts 11,29 is identical with the one in 15,2. The "support" that Paul gives them at the end of the huge collection upon the plea of the church of Jerusalem (Gal. 2, 10/ 1 Cor. 16, 1-3/ 2 Cor. 8, 4/ 9, 2/

Rom. 15, 31) is the aim of his journey and therefore it needs to be distinguished (Acts 24,17)
The Christians of Jerusalem **needed support of other believers at a very early stage.**

This collection was very dear to Paul's heart. He saw in it the picture and the pledge of the unity among the churches he planted and the Jewish Christian churches. But above all the believers were very dear to his heart because he once used to persecute them severely. Now he felt guilty of their misfortune and their poverty since he had caused the scatter of the church there.

Chapter 12: The end of the dynasty of Herod

We need to notice that the theme of Acts is the **way of the Gospel to Jerusalem.**

The reported events (Acts 12,1-19) happened between AD 41 and 44. God also took revenge on on the **recent Jewish government.** It is the end of Herod's dynasty. Herod the Great wanted to kill Jesus. God kept Him from him by the flight to Egypt. Under Herod Antipas Jesus was killed. He also killed John the Baptist. And an offspring of Herod tries to assault the apostles.

James, the brother of John (Matth 20, 22-23) was one of Zebedaeus's sons, out of the twelve. The execution of James pleased the ancient clergy and especially the high court.

When Herod saw that it pleased the Jews he also arrested Peter (Acts 12,3)

At this point **the gates of hell** Jesus talked about broke loose. But they cannot overcome His church. The sudden death of the king is God's answer to this twofold crime and the prelude of the coming downfall of the Jewish nation.

The same angel that rescued Peter out of prison also slew Herod. He was eaten up by worms. (Acts 12,19-23)

Pauls' mission journeys

- **the first mission journey** (Acts 13, 1 bis 15, 35), with Barnabas (AD 49-50), they visited 17 cities
- **the second mission journey** (Acts. 15, 36 bis 18, 22), with Silas, later also with Timothy and Luke (51-54 AD) they visited 18 cities
- **the third mission journey** (Acts 18, 23 bis 21, 26), with Silas and Timothy (AD 55-57), they visited 15 cities
- **the Gospel in front of authority** (and the crossing over to Rome) (Acts 21, 27 bis 28, 31)

The first mission journey of Paul (Acts 13, 1 - 15, 35)

The journey of Paul are listed in the Book of Acts in detail.

In each big Gentile city where the apostle sojourned to preach the Gospel he strictly turns to the Jewish **synagogues first** and only after they rejected the offered salvation he goes to the Gentiles. Furthermore after each journey it is his primary concern to **return to Jerusalem** to tighten the cord that is supposed to connect the mother church with the sub-churches he plants.

The sending out of the first missionaries (Acts 13, 1-3)

They were sent by the Holy Spirit and the laying on of hands (Acts 13,3)

Laying on of hands, etc was practiced in the first church (Acts 14, 26/ 15, 40/ 1Tim. 1, 14).

It is the appointment for an office (Heb 6,2) It is something different than to pray for the sick and to lay hands on them.

Barnabas and Saul are back in Antioch (Acts 12,24+25)

Acts 6,7: **Barnabas** received his name from the apostles "**son of comfort**" or "**of exhortation**". He was a good a man, filled with the Holy Spirit and full of faith (Acts 11,24) His former name was Joseph and he originated from the tribe of Levi and was born in Cyprus. He sold his land and gave the money to the church (Levites were not supposed to own property!)

Barnabas was a sensitive man and introduced Paul - whom he might have known earlier – to the apostles after his conversion. After that the church of Jerusalem sends him to Antioch he was highly qualified being a Jewish educated Greek. He uses the opportunity to introduce Paul to the church in Antioch. (Acts 11, 22-26/ 15,35) When he and Paul returned to Jerusalem, together they presented the collections of Antioch to the Christian church of Judah which was threatened by famine.(Acts 11,30/12,25)

Without Barnabas Paul would never have become the man he was.

Barnabas looked for Paul in Tarsus, introduced him to the church and the service and also accompanied him for a while.

Acts 13, 1-13: **Paul and Barnabas received a special assignment from the Holy Spirit. They took John Mark along** (Acts 12,12) He was supposedly the rich young man. In his house they celebrated the Lord's supper and the church also gathered there later. His house was so to say the community center of

Jerusalem.

But Paul had to disconnect himself from Mark because he did not belong to them. The kingdom of God has nothing to do with fleshly bondage. Mark was the nephew of Barnabas. There was a special task to fulfill – to bring the Gospel to the heathens.

Mark is mentioned appreciatively for the work he did for the kingdom of God (Col 4,10-11) but he was not chosen from God for this special assignment.

The first mission journey of Paul targets Cyprus and Asia Minor. It was only a small, short journey.

Typical for the mission work was that the Christian churches could at first only be found in the cities. From the cities the message was carried to the villages.

The two missionaries Barnabas and Paul were sent by the **Holy Spirit** (Acts 13,4) and the **laying on of hands**. They go **to Cyprus**, the home of Barnabas (Acts 4,36) They go to the synagogues first and proclaim the Gospel to the Jews. There they immediately encounter the false Jewish sorcerer and false prophet **Elymas** (Acts 13,6), a mystic name that probably means something like **Elijah and Moses** (Acts 13,8) He also calls himself **Bar-Jesus** (Son of Jesus). He claims to be a “super religious” Jew and wants to turn the proconsul away from the faith in Jesus. Paul slays him with blindness for a period of time (Acts 13,11) which is a **hidden indicator** that the corrupted, fallen Judaism will be afflicted by blindness for a period of time. At this point the Gospel draws near to the Gentiles but away from the Judaism.

From there on Saul calls himself Paul (Acts 13,9) The apostle as a Roman citizen surely had a Latin name besides his Jewish name Saul. In his letters he always refers to himself as **Paul**. This name is obviously not a Christian or Apostolic name. The saying: **“Saul turned into Paul”** does therefore not apply.

In Pisidia Paul holds his entrance sermon in front of the Jews. (Acts 13)

This sermon consists of **two parts**:

- an outline of the story of salvation (Acts 13, 16-25), comparable to the speech of Stephen (Acts 7) amended by the testimony of John the Baptist
- then follows an explanation of Jesus the crucified and resurrected, that he truly is the expected Messiah (Acts 13, 26-39)

This message is very similar to the Pentecost preaching of Peter and also takes place at a Pentecostal event

- Acts 13, 14-15 – **Pisidia means destroy.**
- In Acts 13,17-22 Paul shows what God has done for his people.
- In Acts 13, 27-30 he points out what Israel has done against God
- He is not afraid to confront them with the great sin of Israel, the crucifixion of Jesus
- And then He repeats what God has done for Jesus and how He raised Him.

The proclamation in Pisidia took place on a Sabbath day (Pentecost).

It was the feast of tabernacles, a feast of collecting. Exactly on this day Paul and Barnabas arrived in Pisidia (Acts 13,44) **“the whole city was gathered”**. It was a tremendous collection. This caused the Jews to be very jealous. Paul announced boldly that he would now turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13,46-49)

This leads to a breach. The Jews were jealous/ became jealous and contradict the words of Paul (Acts 13, 35)

The unbelief and the rejection of the Jews are recurring themes of Acts (Acts 13,5). In the end Luke returns to this topic (Acts 28, 26-29)

„The salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles and they will hear it.“

When the Gentiles heard this they rejoiced. (Acts. 13, 48)

The apostles shake the dust off their feet and arrive at Iconium. (Acts 13, 51-52)

The wave of persecution hindered them to do their works in Antioch.

By the way: a distinction of the journeys does not emerge from the texts. It was assumedly made later. According to the Book of Acts the first mission journey took place **before** the apostle council.

Before Paul went on his second mission journey he was called to Jerusalem, some Pharisee Christians of Antioch sued Paul in Jerusalem.

Between the first and second mission journey he and Peter appeared at the apostle assembly to defend the freedom of the Gentile Christians (Acts 15,1)

Acts 14: Proclamation of the Gospel at Iconium. Here we notice the same pattern as in Acts 13

- Again the apostles go to the synagogue first
- Again the Jews instigate the crowd and provoke a riot

At this point the Jews were resisting immediately. (Acts 14,2) and this rejection of faith degenerated into a violent riot. From now on this is typical. (Acts 19, 9/ 28, 4/ 9, 23/ 13, 45-50/ 17, 5-8 / 18, 6). The missionaries had to flee. But the Gospel continues unhindered. (Acts 14,6) With every flight way a new sphere opens to both of them.

They arrive in Lystra (“free city”)

It was a Roman military colony and the home of Timothy (Acts 16, 1-2)

The healing of the lame caused excitement among the crowd, the people were listening to them.

- **The healing is a repetition of the healing of the lame in Acts 3**, just with a few differences.
- **The lame of Acts 3** was at the gates of the temple daily and could not get into the temple. He could not go further than to the gate. **This is an image of Israel.**
- But the **lame of Lystra** was set free indeed.
- His area was not even close to a synagogue, they did not even have one in this city. There seemed to be no hope for him.
- This is an image of the Gentiles that had no hope to become saved.
- **The lame in Acts 3 only begged Peter for alms.**
- The lame of Lystra listened to Paul and received the faith.
- In Lystra (“free city”) the lame needs no help to get up on his feet.
- Nobody had to help him up.

And again Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrive and agitate the crowd against Paul.

When they journeyed back they **encouraged the Saints, appointed elders** – church leaders, laid on hands and dedicated them to God (Acts 14, 21-26)

Acts 14, 11-13: The crowd in Lystra was thrilled, they were screaming: **„The Gods have come down to us”**

The inhabitants of Lystra knew nothing of the Scriptures, of the revelation of God to the Jews.

And again Jews of Antioch and Iconium came along (Acts 14, 19) and instigated the crowd to stone Paul.

Nevertheless Paul did not die.

Back **in Antioch, their home church**, they report that God opened a door for them. (Acts 14, 27)

Acts 15: The apostle council

Paul, Barnabas and Titus meet with the representatives James, John and Peter of the church of Jerusalem.

Who is this James? James came to the church later, he must have found his faith after the resurrection of Jesus.

James was the biological brother of Jesus. (Gal 1,19)

In the beginning James did not believe in Jesus.

The bible emphasizes that **his brothers did not believe in Him** (Mat. 12, 46-50/ 13, 55/ Joh. 7, 5).

In 1 Cor 15,7 Paul equates James with the apostles (Gal. 1, 18/ 1. Kor. 15, 7).

James was assumedly close to the Pharisees.

His theological approach is as a converted Pharisee.

Paul knew the biological brothers of Jesus (1 Cor 9,5). They were en route as wandering missionaries and played an important role in the first church.

Jesus appeared to James as an isolated phenomenon. (1 Cor 15,7) He must have been very important in the church at Jerusalem after Peter’s departure. (Acts 12,7)

After his deliverance Peter says: Tell James and the brothers. (Acts 12,17)

This might have been the release of James into the office of Peter. Obviously his claim within the church is contradicted because when Jesus was alive they did not believe in Him. (Joh. 7, 5/ Mark. 3, 31-35/ Luk. 11, 27). The Gospels mention their unbelief.

When the twelve departed there must have been a **fellowship of Presbytes** (elders) around him. At the apostle council and the receiving of the collection from Antioch they appear as a distinct group. (Acts 15, 4+6+22).

- James might have been the first man
- Just as Peter was the first of the twelve
- Just as Stephen was the first of the seven (Acts. 6, 1)
- Just as Barnabas was the first of the five (Acts. 13, 1)

James: Paul counts him a **respected** of the churches located in this area (Gal 2, 2+6) and mentions him before Peter and John and calls him one of the three pillars of the church (Gal 2,9)

- James can be found amongst the **elders** in the church of Jerusalem.
- He also has the last word at the apostle council
- In Acts 21 James name appears for the last time
- James occurs as the head of the church of Jerusalem

- According to the accounts he had the surname “the righteous”

After Josephus he suffered the death of a martyr before the destruction of the temple about AD 63. He is also the author of the Letter of James

At the Apostle Council Paul and Barnabas only speak about the wonder works of God. They don't make any further comments.

There they also debate about the **circumcision of the Gentile** Christians which is supported by several Pharisees who converted to Christianity.

James only demands in his sermon that the uncircumcised have to avoid meat that was offered to idols, fornication and the consumption of blood to be revered in the Christian church.

At the Apostle Council **James** and **Peter** hold speeches of which Peter's is one of the last published speeches.

The sermon of James is typically Semitic, even the names that he uses. He calls Peter intentionally “**Simon**” when he speaks of the story of Cornelius. Only an expert knows who he is referring to. James speaks through allusions and cites Amos 9,11.

Acts 15,7: “**Then Peter rose and spoke.**”

At this moment Peter again speaks of his God-given authority.

And then it says that **the whole assembly was silent** (Acts 15,12) This sermon is not followed by a discussion. It must have been a very powerful last sermon of Peter.

In the apostles decree solutions and decisions concerning the conflict were written down

James stops the debate by saying: *I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who turn to God* (Acts 15, 19)

James' viewpoint was adapted so far. The result of the Council was then supposed to be brought to Antioch by some men accompanied by Paul and Barnabas. The conflict/ event of Antioch (Gal 2,14) is not mentioned. **It is also not emphasized how seriously this resolution was executed.**

It was proclaimed (Acts 16,4). In Luke's account there is only an editorial remark that it was published.

This Apostolic decree did not contain anything particularly new, but all things that God commanded Noah (and therefore humanity)

Paul was, however, very determined about fighting against all the Jewish-Christian demands that the Gentile Christians were supposed to go through legal/religious ceremonies.

According to Acts 21, 18-25 the Jewish-Christian brothers finally succeeded to convince him and turn away from his convention and to return to the Judaism (to the temple) and to pay a vow for pretense. (tempted to pretend). **This did not pay off for Paul.** It ended in a riot and he was arrested. He had fallen into temptation.

In the End of Acts 15 the **second mission journey** of apostle Paul starts. This time he did not travel with Barnabas because they had an argument due to John Mark, which Barnabas wanted to take along again but Paul rejected this plan. Barnabas traveled to Cyprus with John.

During the second mission journey the churches of the **province Asia** were planted in its capital Ephesus and the provinces close by. The **riot in Ephesus** which was caused by the goldsmith Demetrius is the proof of how the Paganism was shaken by the works of Paul. (Acts 19)

Asia Minor – that was a Roman province with the blooming capital Ephesus. At the time of the apostles Asia Minor became the domicile of strong Christian churches(Acts.6.9./19.10 /1 Cor.16.19/ 2 Cor.1.8 /2 Tim.1.15 / 1Pet 1.1./ Rev 1,4,11).

The second mission journey of Paul (Acts 15,36 -18,22)

Paul travels with Silas.

The second journey carried them to **Lystra** where he gains Timothy as his additional companion. Timothy was the son of a faithful Jewish mother and a Greek father. He had an outstanding reputation among the brethren of Lystra.

Timothy – from there on he would stay connected to Paul (Acts 17, 14/ 18, 5/ 19, 22/ 20, 4/ 1 Thess. 3, 2+6/ 1 Cor. 4, 17/ 16, 10/ 2 Cor. 1, 19/ Rom.16, 21)

Inspired by Paul he became circumcised to ease the problems with the traditional Jews when he traveled. Other than that Paul opposed the demand that Gentiles should also be circumcised. (Gal 2,3/ 5,1-12)

But he still causes Timothy to become circumcised – why?

Because he was the son of a Jewish mother and therefore according to Jewish law an Israelite (1 Cor 9,20)

Together they traveled through Galatia heading towards Asia, but the Holy Spirit won't let them and leads

them to Macedonia.

In Galatia Paul gets sick, but continued to travel after his recovery (Gal 4,13-15).

Paul arrives at Philippi, the capital of the province Macedonia. It was a Roman military colony and a rather Latin city. Its government was build after the Roman government.

Because of a **dream** Paul was lead to Philippi through the Holy Spirit. (Acts 16, 9-10)

The oracles Paul saw in his dreams did not contain revelations about Christian truths but hints as to where he was supposed to go with his ministry

- The commission to go to Europe (Acts 16, 9)
- Encouragement to minister in Corinth with joy (Acts 18,9)
- Assurance to the prisoner that he will also testify the Gospel in Rome (Acts 23,11)
- Message of salvation during the shipwreck (Acts 27, 23)

In Philippi there were no synagogues, therefore they held their meetings close to water because of the ritual washing. There Paul also goes to the Jews first.

Luke reports and emphasizes that **also women were saved and became adequate part of the kingdom of God.** This is the contrary of the ancient religions where women were usually banished.

The Gospel revalues the woman in contrast to the Judaism and Paganism.(1Cor.1.11/ Col 4.15/ Phil 4-2-/ 2 Tim.4,21/ Philemon 2).

- the first saved soul was of a woman (Acts 16,14)
- In Thessalonich many of the aristocratic women believed (Acts 17,4)
- as well as in Berea (Acts 17,12)
- one of the few that become Christians in Athens was a woman (Acts 17,34)
- Rom 16 names 8 women next to 18 men

When Luke wrote "he and **his whole house** were baptised" he usually meant the whole family who listened to the Word and believed, men and women.

The admission into a Christian church always happened by baptism.

(Acts.2.4/ 8,36/ 10.48 /16,15,33/ 18.8). There is no talking about a preparing teaching. It were mostly people who **attended the synagogues regularly** or being Jews they had already gone through lessons about baptism, and whatever they lacked they could learn very quickly.

Paul approaches his ministry very organized.

God shows him the way through dreams, faces, etc. The apostle **does not conquer nations** outside of the cultural borderlines. He speaks of barbarians (Rom 1,14/ Col 3,11) who are also destined to receive the Gospel but he himself did not go to them. He ministered where the conditions were good to find understanding and used the advantage he had because of his Roman citizenship.

In Philippi Paul proselytized Lydia as the first female. This chapter is written in the **1st person plural,** which tells us that Luke was there.

When someone got saved, the whole house was saved (Acts 10, 44/ 16, 31+34/ 18, 8/ 1 Cor. 1, 16) Even later the Philippians still had a special connection to Paul and to his ministry (Phil4, 10-18) In Philippi where Paul and Silas were arrested the jailer converts.

And his whole house was baptized. And likewise it happened to Cornelius (Acts 10, 24;48), the jailer (Acts 16,33) and the maids and servants of Stephanas' house (1 Cor 1,16) They all used to be Gentile families. In the Gentile mission they preferred to baptize the whole families instead of individuals. Why: the single baptized would other wise become isolated and he cannot escape the conflicts within his own house. (1 Cor 7) When the father of the house was saved it was a matter of course that the rest of the family followed his example.

Acts 17: Paul is in Greece (Thessalonich, Berea, Athens, etc.)

Paul preaches in Athens, the intellectual center of the ancient world (Acts 17,16-32) This is the only Gentile preaching of the **Gentile apostle.** It is the climax of the book.

Paul the Gentile apostle. This was his special calling

Paul was a Gentile missionary, in accordance with the other apostles (Gal 2,7-10/ 15). He was given in a special way "to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3, 8/ 3, 1/ Kol. 1, 25-27/ 1Tim. 2, 7/ 2 Tim. 1, 11).

Paul was a pioneer missionary

He was commissioned to introduce the message of salvation to new countries and areas where the Gospel had never been preached (Rom 15,20). It was his assignment to create **centers of light**, which means to plant churches with a mission mentality in:

- Philippi, the first city in Macedonia (Acts 16,12)
- Corinth, the capital of Achaja
- Athens, the capital of Greece
- Ephesus, the capital of Asia
- Rome, the capital of the whole. Paul traveled about 25 000 km altogether. He never wanted to build on another one's foundation. (Rom 15,20)

Paul was a missionary of the large cities

The centers of his mission ministry were the Hellenistic culture centers. Names like **Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonich, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus**, etc. This explains his yearning for Rome, the "assembly of the globe", the metropolis of the world empire. (Rom 1, 11-13/ 15,23)

This is where his cultural picture language originated. Jesus held most of his speeches under open heaven to farmers and people who lived in villages and rather used agrarian images, while Paul employs **major city images.**

Paul does not only want to be a "Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greek" (1 Cor 9,20-21) but especially a city slicker to the city slickers.

Jesus speaks more about the birds of the air, the lilies in the field, the shepherds, the sower, the harvest field. Paul instead uses the images of a judge, the debtor, a creditor, the armor of a soldier (Eph 6, 13-17), the command of a military leader (1 Thess 4,16) and also uses parables of the sports and theater life (Phil 3,14)

Paul was no **dogmatist**, no unpractical **man of books**, no alienated **abstract theologian** who talks to his audience in a foreign sophisticated language or an anointing-filled preacher tone. But he was rather a very modern man, a man from the city Tarsus (Acts 21,39) a real person who united both: to be **sanctified and open**, connected with eternity but also close to the present.

Paul was a harbor missionary . If you take a closer look at the cities and especially their geographical position and importance you can notice that the apostles' mainly go where the wind of the sea blows.

The reason: harbor cities could be reached easier than cities in the province. By sea it is faster and more secure to travel than on the dangerous streets in the countryside. It took 4 days from Spain and 2 days from Africa to get to Rome-Ostia. Between Alexandria and Asia Minor there was a daily ship transfer. And the Greek language was practiced there more than anywhere else in the world.

In Acts 17 we find only one message of Paul that is exclusively for Gentiles. There was nobody who feared God at all. This is a testimony of the early Christian mission message before Gentiles and their threads of Gentile wisdom and philosophy.

After an introduction that refers to the current situation Paul exposes the proclamation of the real God in contrast to their Gentile ideology.

- God created the universe
- he needs no temples, he has no needs (Acts 17, 28-29)
- it must not be assumed that he lives in a temple
- and does not need the tradition (this also applies to all the Jews)
- God created man with the purpose that they shall seek him (Acts 17, 26-27)
- **God created man to bless him.** It makes no sense to picture him as a material object (idols)

It is a Monotheistic preaching and only its end turns it into a Christian one.

The sermon ends with a call to repentance in view of the judgment of God.

Both parts of the sermon have a tendency towards idol worship.

The message is influenced by threads which were usual in the Monotheistic advertising of Hellenistic Judaism and were adopted by the Christian mission as a requirement for the actual proclamation of Christ

Paul experiences the same accusation like Socrates.

"A proclaimer of foreign godheads" (Acts 17,18)

The resurrection of the dead...

Acts 17, 32 : ***“...and when they heard of the resurrection of the dead they mocked him”***

In the Greek world the prejudices against the message of resurrection could hardly be overcome with the Christians (1 Cor 15,12)

- The High Council of Jerusalem condemned and persecuted the belief in the resurrection of Jesus
- Areopagus was pleased just mocking the matter

Paul's preaching in Athens was almost a complete failure

Similar experiences probably caused Paul to be skeptical of human wisdom (1 Cor 2/ 3, 18-21). In Athens the audience lacked a Jewish background, people who were prepared to seek God. The audience there was not waiting for the answer to questions that were heavy on their soul. They were complacent, curious skeptics.

During the preaching of Paul in Athens about the resurrection of the dead the audience loses their patience. Because of the opponents Paul **could not finish his message** and bring it to an end. Just when he started to tell them about Jesus he was interrupted. Nevertheless some were saved in the end “several men” (Dionysius and Damaris)

Acts 18: The foundation of the church in Corinth

Corinth was the capital of the Roman province Achaia

- the Roman Latin influence prevailed here
- all the trade of the known world happened here
- there was an important Jewish colony
- because of its promiscuity Corinth had a bad reputation

In Corinth he encounters Aquilla and Priscilla.

The Jews had to leave Rome (Acts 18,2) and also Priscilla (Rom. 16, 3/ 1 Cor. 16, 19/ 2 Tim 4, 14).

On every sabbath Paul taught in the synagogue. (Acts 18,4)

They taught that Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus being the Messiah is the special matter of the proclamation to the Jews. (Acts 2, 36/ 3, 18-20/ 5, 42/ 8, 5-12/ 9, 22/ 17, 3/ 18, 28/ 24, 24/ 26, 33).

The third mission journey (Acts 18, 23-21, 26)

Paul meets Appollos (Acts 19, 1-7)

Paul reaches Ephesus, the **most important city of Asia Minor**. It was the main center of trade for all Asia Minor. Ephesus was especially popular because of the **temple of Artemis** or Diana. (Acts 19,35)

The performance of Appollos caused excitement in Corinth that even developed into admiration.

(1 Cor. 1, 12/ 3, 4-11+22/ Tit. 3, 13).

He was an outstanding teacher and a disciple of John the Baptist.

After Paul's departure he stayed in Corinth. Later he was in Ephesus with Paul. (1 Cor 16,12)

In Ephesus was the longest period of time he ministered. (Acts 19, 8-10/ 20, 31) From there he wrote his letters to the Corinthians and probably also the ones to the Philippians.

Paul's plans (Acts 19, 21-22)

Uproar in Ephesus (Acts 19, 23-40)

This account descended from a different source and distinguishes itself from the usual style of Luke.

Paul leaves Ephesus (Acts 20, 1-5)

- He goes to Troas where he raises a dead (Acts 20, 7-12)
- He goes from Troas to Miletus (Acts 20, 13-16)

The farewell of the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20, 17-36) **is the 3rd long traditional speech of Paul.**

- The first is the preaching before the Jews (Acts 14,3)
- The second is the preaching before the Gentiles in Athens (Acts 17)
- The third is before the church elders of Ephesus

Ephesus was the most important church that Paul planted

Acts 21: The journey to Jerusalem

Paul was warned not to go to Jerusalem but he did not give heed.

After a visit to Greece he goes to Jerusalem for the last time where his imprisonment begins (Acts 21)

The apostles were accused in the temple of desecrating the holy place and were sent to Ceasarea where Felix was in charge. He remained arrested for two years

The temple was a status symbol of the Israelites, a guarantor of the unity of the people.

Jesus prophesied the destruction of the temple (Mark. 13, 1+3/ 14, 58/ 15, 29)

There is no temple in the new Jerusalem.

Israel still wanted to forcefully hold on to their **theocratic monopoly** as the chosen people and especially hold on to **the temple** (the building). But through this they rejected their salvation, the redeemer. Jesus prophesied to the Jews that their **houses will be left to them desolate.** (Mat. 23, 38/ Luk. 13, 35/ Acts. 1, 20). The Jews made their decision and they chose darkness.

Finally Festus, the successor of Felix, sends Paul to Rome since Paul is a Roman citizen and he based himself on the Emperor.

Now the Gospel is on its way from Jerusalem to Rome.

Acts 22: Personal defense of Paul

This is the fulfillment of the purpose of his sending and his calling, that he could be a witness or a testimony of Jesus before the kings and sons of Israel (Acts 9,15-17)

- Acts 22: before the Jewish crowds of Jerusalem
- Acts 23: before the High Council
- Acts 24: before the procurator Felix
- Acts 26: before the king Agrippa

Each of these speeches was skillfully adjusted. Paul was very intelligent and truthful. He knew how and what and who to tell. In front of the crowd Paul presents himself as a holy Jew.

Again the theme of Acts is emphasized (Acts 22, 13-21)

- you shall be a witness before all (Acts 22,15)
- make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly (Acts 22, 18)
- for they will not receive your testimony (Acts 22,18)
- depart for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles (Acts 22, 21)

Paul himself interprets his encounter with the resurrected as a **calling to be an apostle.**(Gal. 1, 1/ 1 Cor. 9, 1/ 2. Kor. 12, 11-12), even though the Book of Acts applies another understanding of apostleship. Luke presents him as a man of the second descent. Paul himself, however, is eager to be called an apostle who did not adopt his faith from the **old apostles.**

The calling and sending of Paul was concerning **“all”** (Acts 9,15/ Jer 1,10) and is therefore the fulfillment of the assignment of Jesus: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...”** (Matth 28,19)

The **old apostles** only had been assigned to go to the children of Israel and not into the way of the Gentiles (Matth 10,1-6) The house of Israel was chosen to be the first to experience the inheritance of the promise and the offer of the Messianic salvation .

Paul goes to all nations

● especially to the Gentile nations (Acts 26, 17/ Gal. 1, 16/ Rom. 1, 5/ 11, 13/ 15, 16-18/ Gal. 2, 8+9/

Eph. 3, 8/ Col. 1, 27/ 1 Tim. 2, 7)

● to the sons of Israel

● but also to the kings (Apg. 26, 2)

The experience of Paul near Damascus determines his thinking and his message.

His Christ experience became a part of his message (Acts 9,20,22 / 13,23/17,3) **“I have found the**

Messiah” (Joh 1,45/ 4,29) Jesus exposed Himself as the promised one of the OT who was already expected of Israel. (Acts 28,23/ 13,16) This was the secret of his power.

It is grounded in his personal relationship with Jesus, the unshakable knowledge to be an ambassador of Christ with a commission in this world.

The ministry of the **former Pharisee** to the Gentiles as well as his conversion cannot be explained except by

the intervention of God in his life. A truly fanatic persecutor of the Christian faith worships the "false Messiah" Jesus, whom he hated earlier, as his Lord.

Once proud of his law the Pharisee forsakes all his Jewish prejudices, does not value the advantage of his own people but invites the Gentiles to become a part of the kingdom of God (Gal 1,15)

Only God's work near Damascus explains to us the ministry of Paul.

Paul did not become a missionary due to his empathy for the sufferings of the Gentiles, but due to his Divine calling (1Cor 9,16) And he emphasizes that his ministry is a way of obedience. (Acts 26.19 / Gal.1.16/ 2.Kor. 10.5).

The Book of Acts also speaks of signs, wonders and powers that God used to confess and confirm his "witnesses" the apostles:

- signs and wonders in Iconium (Acts.14,3 / 15:12)
- the works by the hands of Paul in Ephesus (Acts.19.11)
- healing of a lame in Lystra (Acts.14.9)
- reviving of a young man (Acts.20.9)
- healing of the sick in Malta (Acts 28.8)
- Paul himself speaks of the signs of an apostle (2 Cor.12,12 / Rom.15,19)

He regards these signs and wonders as a confirmation of God for his Gentile mission (Acts.15,12/ 21.19)

Acts 23: The sermon of defense before the council

In his sermon Paul enhances the "**good conscience**" (Acts 23,1), one of the most important terminologies of Paul's ethic. (1 Cor. 4, 4/ 2 Cor. 1, 12/ 1 Tim. 1, 5+19/ 3, 9/ 2 Tim. 1, 1/ Heb 13, 18)

Luke emphasizes the innocence of Paul: "*but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains*" (Acts. 23, 29/ Acts 25, 18+25/ 26, 31/ 28, 18).

Acts 24: Trial before Felix

Paul is in remand which actually has a maximum limit of **2 years**. At the end of this period they would have been obligated to release him if there was no conviction. If Felix still kept him in prison he was violating the law. Acts 24,5: The accusation of the Jews against Paul were "***this man is a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple.***"

The opponents of Christianity only see one party within the Judaism. (Acts 5,17)

The trial reveals that Christianity is **not a new, different religion**, but the Judaism reaching the fulfillment which they anticipated for centuries.

Because the Jews reject Jesus they deny their own religious tradition.

Paul confirms this before king Agrippa. - Acts 26

Acts 24, 14-21: Paul justifies himself and denies the accusation of being a creator of dissension and comments his attributes of a Nazarene, which hindered him not to be faithful to his Jewish religion. Then he justifies himself against the profaning the temple and finally reminds them that they could not convict him at the council.

Acts 25: Paul appeals against the judgment before the Emperor.

Paul withdraws himself from the Jews.

Festus realizes that this is a religious argument which was not his but the council's responsibility. But since Paul was a Roman citizen the apostle could only be taken before this court upon his own approval. The encourage Paul he promises to be present and take control of the trial.

Paul refuses to be delivered to the Jews, because he could not expect a righteous judgment. Therefore he refers to the Emperor. (Acts 25,21) Emperor Nero was in charge. (AD 54-68)

Acts 26: Paul before king Agrippa

Paul explains the perfect analogy of his Christian faith and the Pharisees' conviction of the resurrection. (Acts 26, 4-8/ 23, 6-10). He defends and explains his Messianic hope (Acts 26,7) and the faith in the resurrection of the righteous. (Dan 12, 1-3) The realization of this hope started for him with the resurrection of Christ which became the foundation of Christian hope. (1 Cor 15, 15-22/ Col. 1, 18).

Acts 27: Departure to Rome

Again we have “we reports”.

Acts 28: Stop at Malta and arrival in Rome

When Paul arrives in Rome the goal of his mission was fulfilled. (Luk. 24, 47/ Acts 1, 8).

In Rome Paul obtains permission to live outside the barracks . (Acts 28,16) He was allowed to live in his own apartment but had to remain chained to a guard all the time.

Also in Rome Paul devotes the message of salvation to the Jews first

The summary of his sermon before the Jews of Rome can be compared to his sermon in Antioch, Pisidia. (Acts 13, 15-41)

Acts 28, 30: Paul stayed in his **rented apartment for 2 years**, a typical terminology to describe his arrest. During this period of time there had to be a conviction of they had to let him go.

During this time when he was arrested he continued to preach the kingdom of God and continued with all boldness the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Lord (Acts 28,31) Some scriptures reveal the amendment : ***“This is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by whom the whole world will be judged.”*** (Acts Apg. 17, 30-31/ Ps. 9, 9/ 96, 13/ 98, 9/ 1 Thes. 1, 10)

He calls the reason for his arrest **“the hope of Israel”** (to the Messiah who came and will and wants to return Acts 28, 16-31)

Again the **spirits are divided** even though Paul does everything to convince them .He speaks for a whole day. At first they were ready to listen to him and it also bears fruit. New members are **added to the church** even from among the Jews. But many reject the message. When many turned away and did not want to believe the word stubbornness rises which also Jesus spoke of in his parables. (Mark.4,12 / Luk.8.10 / Joh.12.37).

Paul is a missionary, church planter, church care taker and teacher

- typical for his work was great simplicity of means
- Spirit and power are the signature of this mission period
- the Living God intervenes in the course of events with miraculous salvation, healing and the cutting effect of the Holy Spirit
- glorious gifts of grace are poured upon the young church
- leading men are reflecting the glory of Christ in a original way and therefore characterized centuries.

The vision created the zeal to evangelize. To bring the Gospel to the end of this world and to be obedient to the commands of the King Jesus without compromise. Paul came **out of Jerusalem** and always had **Rome in mind.**

Paul's “Christ experience was the breeding ground of his mission obedience.

The certainty to be a called vessel of God gives the missionary the authority to present himself with the confidence of a prophet before kings, philosophers, raging crowds, synagogues and to say: As His ambassadors we ask you in the name of Jesus... (Phil 2,10)

We learn from the Book of Acts: Where Jesus and the Holy Spirit find faith obedience His Divine glory is revealed. Who believes that God is personally guiding his or her life has no reason to doubt the accounts of Acts.

A fullness of power works in the life of Paul after he submitted his will under the Divine will of God.

The Book of Acts closes with few, simple and yet wonderful words:

- the kingdom of God is at hand
- Jesus is the Messiah of God
- His witnesses proclaim Him with joy
- This proclamation remained (and still remains legal)
- And carries the promise: the church of Jesus shall not be overcome. Her promise lasts for all time and eternally.

The next study lesson will be – The Gospel of Luke.

All who would like to obtain a **graduation certificate** by the end of the seminary should answer the test questions at the end of each lesson. Please mail or email it to us with your full name and address.

Please recommend this Bible School (Internet Bible School) to your friends and family. Thank you.

This Bible Study material is protected by copyright. Use, duplication, etc only upon permission of the author. Please inform me.

Pastor Joh. W. Matutis, Postfach 65 06 65, D-13306 Berlin, or pastor@matutis.de

Test questions

1. What was the small Book of Acts?
2. Which persons (names) appear in the Book of Acts?
3. Who and what does the Book of Acts imply?
4. If we did not have the Book of Acts we would not know about... ? (list the answers)
5. Which wonders does the Book of Acts refer to?
6. Name all the speeches of the Book of Acts!
7. List the speeches of the resurrected Jesus in the Book of Acts?
8. Why is Jesus' ascension to heaven so important?
9. Who was this Theophilus?
10. List the cities where Paul worked longer than a year!
11. Why did Paul always go to the Jews first?
12. List the cities that Paul visited on his mission journeys!
13. Why was Paul so successful as a missionary?
14. Why did Paul put so much effort in the collecting of money?
15. Describe the way of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Rome.
16. Briefly describe the difference between Judaism and Christianity.
17. Which teachings or guidelines can you learn from the Book of Acts and apply them for you, your faith and the church of Jesus nowadays?
18. What happened to the first church at Jerusalem?
19. Which word can also be used for "church"?
20. What did God reveal to Paul in his dreams?

Please send the answers to pastor@matutis.de

- or to Gemeinde-Bibel-Schule, Postfach 65 06 65, D-13306 Berlin