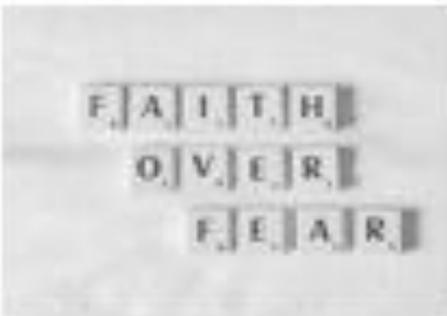




Faith in Challenging Times

St Luke's Connect Group Notes
Summer 2022



Summer Term 2022 at St Luke's – "Faith in challenging times"

Undoubtedly, the times are challenging - especially so for many people around the world. We may not experience the extreme situations that some are living through, but nevertheless we have our own tests and trials.

How do we as Christians face these challenging times? And what about our children? And our grandchildren?

Sunday themes for young and old – May to July

In Sunday morning sermons, we are focusing on two themes - our young people will also be looking at the same theme on that Sunday.

- (i) A short series of three sermons from the Gospel of St Luke, with regard to some sayings of Jesus on "faith"
- (ii) A longer series from the first half of Acts (i.e. chapters 1-12). Here we read of those early Christians living in challenging times and how their faith was strong, steady and alive. May their stories inspire us all!

Midweek themes for individuals and groups

The notes for Connect Groups (and they are also for individuals) are taken from the second half of Acts (i.e. chapters 13-28). There are ten studies – if your group does not meet every week, then you might like to choose themes which fit best with your group.

At the foot of each study, there is a section to "fill in." What will you do or remember as a result of the study? It might be interesting (remember in Hebrews 10, we are to encourage, and provoke one another to good works!) occasionally to ask group members "what did you put down and how's it going?"

Thy Kingdom come 2022

Thy Kingdom Come is a global prayer movement that invites Christians around the world to pray from Ascension to Pentecost for more people to come to know Jesus.

Since its start in May 2016, Thy Kingdom Come has grown from a dream of possibility into a movement. Christians from 172 countries have taken part in praying 'Come Holy Spirit', so that friends and family, neighbours and colleagues might come to faith in Jesus Christ.

This year the dates are May 26th - 5th June, and there are resources available through St Luke's

The Book of Acts – its significance

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance and value of the book of Acts: -

(i) As a link between the Gospels and the Epistles

It is easy to see that both Gospels and Epistles would not easily be understood if we did not have the Acts. When we take up the Epistles we find that they are apostolic letters addressed to various Christian churches in different parts of the Roman Empire. We naturally ask how these churches came into being. How are they formed and by whom? What do we know of their history, membership and organisation? The answer is supplied in the book of the Acts.

(ii) As a record of early church history

Acts is the only authentic record we possess of the first 30 years or so of the history of the Christian Church. Even from a purely secular point of view, the story of how a handful of followers became a world-wide church is full of interest. For Christians, who believe that the process was part of God's gracious purpose, it is uniquely inspiring.

Characteristics of the book of Acts

(i) Personal interest

Luke crowds his pages with an extraordinary variety of people. In Acts we come across one hundred and ten names, besides many other persons or groups whose names are not given. Often in quite a few words a character is vividly drawn.

(ii) Early Church life

Many of the incidents recorded show us: -

- (a) How the good news was spread
- (b) Some examples of what message was given: e.g. a sermon to Jews, an appeal to the unenlightened pagan, an address to philosophers, a defence before a Roman governor.
- (c) How Christian community life began to be shaped

(iii) The focus

Luke writes that in his Gospel he recorded "all that Jesus began both to do and teach." So, now in Acts we see the continuation of the Lord's activities from heaven, working now through His body the church, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes the book is more accurately called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." There are at least seventy references to the Spirit of God. Some writers see the lack of a definite conclusion at the end of Acts as a sign to us - the work still goes forward, **through us**, by the power of the Holy Spirit!

The world into which Christianity was born

The world of the first century was a mixture of conflicting cultures. Like the rivers which flow into the Mediterranean Sea from all sides, pouring into it their sediment and feeding its waters, so the many people comprised within the ever-expanding Roman Empire, brought into it all their cultural contributions.

Three great cultures prevailed in the Empire: Judaism, Hellenism and Roman Imperialism. Judaism provided the spiritual roots of Christianity, Hellenism the intellectual soil in which it grew, and Roman Imperialism the protection that opened the way for growth. In time, these three great cultures became harsh enemies of Christianity: Judaism regarded it as a dangerous heresy, Hellenism as philosophical nonsense, and Roman Imperialism as impractical weakness.

The Church was born into a world filled with competing religions. Numerous novel cults invaded the Empire from every quarter and became the fad of the rich and the refuge of the poor. More influential perhaps than any particular cult, was the general atmosphere of paganism. Emperor worship, mystery religions, local deities, occult practices: it was “pick and mix” – but the result was a hard place for a Christian to practise and witness.

Imagine yourself as a Christian in those days. The Roman mind was materialistic in outlook. There was the threat of economic persecution for a Christian who stepped out of line. There was sexual laxity in behaviour, drunkenness at the feasts, and much holiday-making in honour of the Emperor or one of the gods.

It was a hostile world into which came the glorious message of Jesus. Without doubt the first century has many parallels with our contemporary western culture. Our task is to be like those early Christians, whose faith brought a new joy and freedom to men and women, and whose motive was the glory of God.

A new challenge - Acts 13: 1-12

To start

Can you think (and share with the group) of a time in your life when you felt God calling you on to something new?

Background

Our first study focuses on one of the most significant turning points in the book of Acts. It records the beginning of Paul's missionary journeys into the Gentile world. To understand the significance of this, and other passages that we will be studying this term, it will be useful in this first study to spend some time looking at the background to Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

- The Great Commission of Christ was the gospel for the whole world (Matthew 28:18-20)
- Paul's personal commission from Christ was to carry the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15)
- At the start of the early church they assumed the gospel was for the Jews only (Acts 11:1-3)
- After his conversion Paul was not initially welcomed by the Jerusalem church but he was befriended by Barnabas (Acts 9:26-30)
- The first Greek church was established in Antioch (Acts 11:19-21)
- Barnabas is sent out to help in Antioch (Acts 11:22-24)
- Barnabas collects Paul to join him in ministry in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26)
- Paul and Barnabas are commissioned to start the work in the Gentile world (Acts 13:1-4)

Read Acts 13:1-4

Questions

1. Was the calling of Barnabas and Paul a "bolt out of the blue"? How had God been preparing them for this important commissioning?
2. How do you picture the church in Antioch? How do you think they felt about this leaving and commissioning?
3. The church in Antioch was clearly ready, willing and able to hear God's call and special word. How can we, at St Luke's, better prepare ourselves to hear God's call?

Read Acts 13:5-12

Question

1. What was it that particularly impressed the consul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus? What is his significance for Luke's story?

Something for me to do/ remember

Misunderstandings, yet encouragements - Acts 14:8-26

To start

Share with the group an experience of healing (through Christian prayer) you have been involved in or witnessed- and how you felt about it?

Background Notes

Since the last study, Paul and Barnabas had sailed to Perga and journeyed to Pisidian Antioch where Paul preached in the synagogue. Persecution stirred up by orthodox Jews led to Paul and Barnabas being expelled. Filled with the Spirit, they went on to Iconium, where again many came to believe. Again, there was opposition but they spent some time there before a plot against them caused to flee to Lystra and Derbe, where they continued to preach.

Questions

1. In verse 9 Paul is described as exercising not one but two gifts of the Spirit. He is, first of all, able to discern that the crippled man is open to be healed and he is then able, through the Spirit's power, to heal him. What relevance does this have today? (see also Mark 5:30-32 and Hebrews 11:39)
2. The reaction of the crowd was to want to worship Paul and Barnabas. While we would not describe great Christians, however gifted, as "gods," are we guilty of giving them, rather than God, the glory? Do we have a tendency to want the glory for ourselves when we are used in some way?
3. There was an ancient legend that told of a supposed visit to the area by Zeus and Hermes. No-one recognised them except an old couple and so, the people of Lystra were determined not to make the same mistake again – and Paul and Barnabas seemed to fit the bill. In what ways do we have preconceptions which can lead us to unhelpful conclusions? Does our cultural condition blind us to what God is doing? Does it affect the way we receive new people? (see also Luke 3:15 and Luke 10:33)
4. Who accepted the gospel who opposed them? What lessons can we learn from this today?
5. In verses 22-25 a number (7?) of key actions are described – all preparations for moving on. How should we prepare for moving on to God's next stage – personally or corporately? See also Acts 16:40; Acts 20:1; 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 Ephesians 4:16)

Something for me to do/ remember

Disagreement, Tradition and Guidance – Acts 15/ 16**To start**

Is there any difficulty in your life recently which God has helped you through, and which you would like to share with your group?

Read: Acts 15: 36-41**Background**

John Mark (see Acts 12:12), a cousin (or a nephew) of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10) had joined Paul and Barnabas on their previous journey. But now he had left them at Pamphylia (Acts 13:13). We are not told why – but perhaps you can guess at some reasons?

Questions

1. What do you think were the reasons behind the views of Paula and Barnabas about whether or not to take Mark with them? What was the outcome for the Kingdom of God?
2. Should Christians ever disagree? What guidelines can you give to help in such a situation?

Read Acts 16:1-5**Background**

There were both Jewish and Gentile Christians in the early church. Some Jews in Antioch began teaching that it was necessary for Gentiles to be circumcised (Acts 15:1) before they could be saved – so Paul and Barnabas were sent from Antioch to Jerusalem to ask the apostles and elders about this (Acts 15:7-9). After discussion it was decided that circumcision was not necessary, but they must keep certain laws (Acts 15:20). A letter was sent to the Gentile believers saying this.

Questions

1. Was Paul's action in having Timothy circumcised contrary to the decision made in Jerusalem – why do you think he did this?
2. Are there ways in which we are in danger of following tradition rather than the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Read Acts 16:6-10**Questions**

1. In what ways did Paul receive his guidance and what about visions etc today? Has anyone anything to share on recent guidance?
2. What was it about Paul that meant he immediately obeyed? Why do we sometimes hesitate when we receive guidance from God?

Something for me to do/ remember

God at work in unlikely settings – Acts 16

To start

Are there any encouragements to share with the group this week?

Acts 16:16-40

Background

Paul and his companions (now Luke, Timothy and Silas) arrive in Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony, occupied by many Italian settlers, and they were intensely loyal to Rome. The church there was founded around AD50 and it became a church that Paul seemed to have special love for, and he rejoiced over its progress in his subsequent letter to the Philippians, written around AD54.

Questions

1. Paul showed great discernment in perceiving the counterfeit encouragements of the servant girl (v 17). He was also clear in his disdain for involvement in fortune telling (vq16)
Can you think of counterfeit movements, people or philosophies that on the face of it appear OK – but have more sinister roots?
What is our reaction to these types of activities?
2. Despite a false trial, being stripped and beaten and thrown in jail, Paul and Silas are worshipping late into the night (v25)
Why do you think Paul and Silas were singing and praising?
What are we like under pressure – how do we react to tough times?
What practical hints can we share with one another for continuing to praise and thank God despite our circumstances? Share times when perhaps you have, and it worked?
Can you think of other examples and situations in the Bible where praise and prayer have unleashed a special act of God?
3. The humble beginnings of the Philippian church did not look on paper to be the makings of a wonderful church – an odd bunch of converts to say the least – a business woman and her household, a slave girl, and a gaoler and his family
The Holy Spirit seems to make a special work of bringing together unlikely relationships.
Can you think of other examples in the New Testament?
How can we take practical steps to allow the Holy Spirit to make us (a motley crew!) blend together as a church with a loving, joyous and friendly fellowship?

Something for me to do/ remember

Problems and Plans – Acts 18

To start

Can you recall when you made certain plans - they didn't work out- nevertheless God seemed "in it."

Read Acts 18:1-22

Background

Paul journeys from Athens to Corinth, whether by land or sea is not clear. Here he joins Priscilla and Aquilla, who appear to already be Christians, and who had left Rome when Emperor Claudia expelled all Jews. The passage sees Paul preaching effectively and, once more, the centre of controversy.

Questions

1. When the Jews refused to listen (v6) Paul announces that he has fulfilled his obligation to them and will now preach to the Gentiles. Do we know when to move on, and when to persevere? (see also Acts 13:46)
2. Paul is under the Lord's protection - both from physical danger, and when an attack in the courts is made, from more subtle dangers. The promise of protection is linked to the number of Christians in the city but Gallio, representing non Christian Rome, is also used to protect him. Can you identify modern day secular authorities who are used by God in this way?
3. Paul leaves Priscilla and Aquilla in Ephesus where they appear to have remained for some time, with a church meeting in their home. (Greetings from them are included in 1 Corinthians 16 written from Ephesus, and greetings are sent to them in Ephesus in 2 Timothy). They would have been in a good position to do much of the ground work in establishing the Church there. They appear to have have been open to serve in a number of ways – tent making with Paul, explaining the gospel to Apollos, hosting a Church in their home. Are we open to being used in different ways, or do we get hooked on what we think we do well?
4. In verse 19 Paul goes to the synagogue and reasons with the Jews – always his first port of call – and obedience to God's redemptive plan (Acts 13:46). Do we have a clear vision of His plan for us – and are we as obedient?
5. Verse 21 underlines Paul's submission to God's will. Are we equally submissive – as individuals and as a church?

Paul works, with Priscilla and Aquilla, as a tentmaker when first in Corinth. His other activities, such as preaching are limited to outside working hours. The group might like to consider whether we tend to leave too much to "full-timers" – and how we might get the right balance between our work, church family etc.

Something for me to do/ remember

The Holy Spirit, miracles and overcoming sin – Acts 19

Acts 19:1-22

To start

Is there any way in which you have realised that God has touched your life recently?

Read Acts 19:1-7

Background

See Mark 1:1-8 about what John says about baptism and the Holy Spirit – also John 20:22 and Acts 1:5 for the teaching of Jesus on this.

Questions

1. What part should the Holy Spirit play in the life of a Christian (see also John 3:16; 7:38-39; 14:16; and Luke 11:13)
2. What is the purpose of the gifts of the Spirit? (See 1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 12 and 22-25)

Read Acts 19:8-16

Background

It was the custom in the synagogue that certain men would be invited to read the scriptures and then speak on what they had read. See Luke 4:16-21 where Jesus did this.

Jesus had given His disciples authority over evil spirits, Luke 9:1-2 and 10:17

Questions

1. Paul taught for two years in a secular building. Is there something here which perhaps we should consider in our outreach?
2. What part did (a) teaching and (b) miracles play in the ministry of Paul and of Jesus – what about today?

Read Acts 19:17-22

Questions

1. What part did fear play in the experience of the Christians at Ephesus? What sort of fear is right for a Christian and when can it hinder the work of God's kingdom?
2. What is there to help us when we are trying to overcome sin in our lives?

Something for me to do/ remember

Leaving a lasting message – Acts 20

Acts 20:13-38

Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders

This passage is part of a jigsaw puzzle that is worth placing together to understand the context and subsequent fulfilment of Paul's warnings to the Ephesian elders: -

- After a successful ministry in Ephesus and in the surrounding areas for 2/3 years (see Acts 19:10) and a subsequent mission into Macedonia and Greece (Acts 20:1-12), Paul was keen to head back to Jerusalem.
- However, before doing this, he wanted to make one final stop off at Miletus (Acts 20:17) so he could meet the Ephesian elders – this was around AD58.
- Paul later arrived in Jerusalem and was then sent for trial in Rome (Acts 28:14) where, during his long imprisonment, he is thought to have penned this letter to the Ephesian church, which contains some of the same warnings and defence against heresy.
- It is also worth noting that the seven churches of Revelation (chapters 2-4) are the churches that Paul ministered to in the surrounding areas of Ephesus. In particular Revelation 2:1-7 contains some of the same warnings and concerns Paul had for Ephesus.

Read Acts 20:18-21 – Paul's example

1. What do these verses tell us about Paul, his ministry, and how he operated as a leader?
2. Why do you think Paul took the trouble to justify himself and establish his sincerity and credentials?

Read Acts 20:24 – Paul's commitment

(See also a similar passage in Philippians 1:21-26)

1. What is it that is more important to Paul than his personal survival and comfort?
2. Paul's commitment and willingness was 100% - how can we develop a strong commitment – and what holds us back sometimes?

Read Acts 20:28-31 – Paul's warnings

1. What does Paul urge the Ephesians' elders to watch out for?
2. What practical advice does he give the leaders?
3. If Paul was going to give the Christians in Poole/ Parkstone some warnings – what do you think would be the main issues/concerns on his list?

Read Acts 20:32-38 Paul's example and exhortation

1. What are the key points of Paul's final exhortation to the leaders?

Something for me to do/ remember

Knowing the right way – Acts 21

Acts 21:1-16

To start

Can you recall a time when you were clear exactly what the Lord wanted you to do?

Background

After an emotional farewell from the leaders of the Ephesian church, Paul sets off on the journey to Jerusalem, knowing that trouble and hardship lay ahead. Having decided to go, the journey must have seemed long and slow, with plenty of opportunities for turning back. This passage tells us how Paul presses on, intent on “finishing the race.”

Questions

1. Luke's love of detail leads him to record the precise route taken on the missionary journeys and this gives a useful picture of the spread of the early church. Could we benefit from reminding ourselves, from time to time, where we came from and how we go to where we are in our Christian lives?
2. In verse 4 and again in verse 7, we see Paul's companions and other believers trying to persuade him not to go on. In verse 4 the disciples are able, through the Spirit, to see something of what lies ahead – but Paul knows he must continue. Were they misguided or were their warnings a necessary preparation for Paul?
3. If we feel that God wants us to do something and our Christian friends try to dissuade us, it's always possible that we have got it wrong - we're not always the best of listeners. Paul appears to have had no doubts. How can we test what we believe we should do and – if we are still disagreeing with our friends – move ahead in humility?
4. Verse 5 describes the disciples, and their wives and children, seeing Paul's party off, and – importantly – praying them off. Do we involve children sufficiently in the ministry of prayer in our families and in the church?
5. Agabus gives us a graphic prophecy of Paul's future imprisonment and pressure is again put on Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul knew that this was a prophecy of what had to be borne and not a prophecy of what should be avoided (see also Matthew 20:19). How do we tell the difference?

There is a reference to the exercise of different gifts of the Spirit in this passage and some disagreement among the Christians about what future course of action is indicated. The group might like to consider whether there are lessons to be learned from the way in which they resolved these differences. In praying for the release of spiritual gifts, do we place enough emphasis on how the gifts are used and interpreted?

Something for me to do/ remember

Telling my story – Acts 25/ 26

To start

Have you had any opportunity recently to share something of your faith?

Background

In spite of the decision made in Jerusalem setting Gentile Christians free from keeping the Jewish law, there were still problems. Some of the Jews thought that Paul was teaching Jews, who lived amongst the Gentiles, that they too need not keep these laws, and so there was a riot in Jerusalem with an attempt to kill Paul. To keep the peace, the Romans arrested Paul and, on hearing he was a Roman citizen, made sure he was safe, and sent him to Caesar because of the threat on his life. The accusations against him were to do with the Jewish law and religion, and the Romans could not find anything to accuse him of, so later wanted to send him back to Jerusalem for trial. Paul knew of the plot to kill him if he returned there, so he appealed to the Emperor. Festus, the Roman Governor in Caesarea, knew that Agrippa, the Jewish king, would be familiar with Jewish law and religion.

There are three accounts of Paul's conversion in the book of Acts 9:1-19; 22:40-16 and 26:9-18 and it is this last one which we read in this study.

Read Acts 25:23-27

Questions

1. How did it come about that Paul was given this opportunity to witness to the King? What encouragement is this to us?

Read Acts 26:1-32

Questions

1. What are the three phases of his life which Paul describes and why is it so important in his defence?
2. What exactly was Paul sent to do? What does this mean?
3. What facts about Jesus does Paul manage to include in his speech of defence?
4. Group members might like to consider their own "faith story." Before coming to faith, coming to faith and after coming to faith. Can you describe your own story in 1 minute? Challenge each other!

Something for me to do/ remember

Imprisoned but still working – Acts 28

Read: Acts 28:11-30

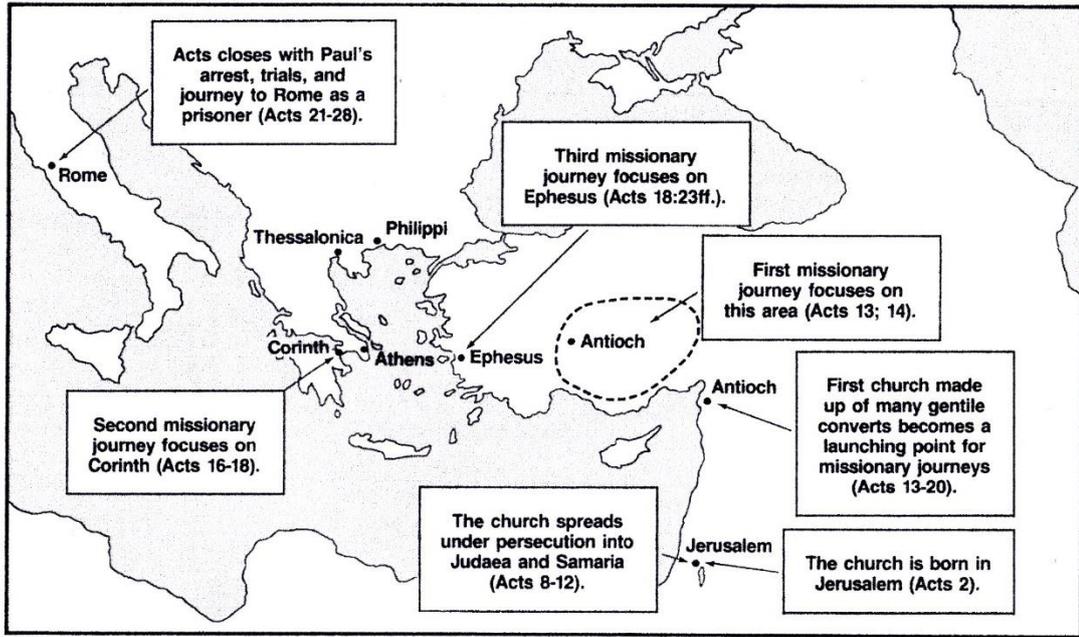
Background

Paul finally arrives in Rome (around AD 61-63) where he spent two years in free custody. His time, as always, was well spent – he spoke openly of his faith, and he is thought to have written at least some of his letters – probably Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians. It is not known exactly what happened to Paul after this time – however it is most probable that he was released, went to Spain as planned, and then back east before further imprisonment and execution in AD 67.

Questions

1. What did Paul concentrate on during his discussions with the Jews? Does this give us an example as to how we should share our faith?
2. Paul quotes Isaiah 6:9-10 to explain his hearers' unbelief in the face of his preaching. What do we understand by these verses?
3. How do we react to people who don't believe in spite of hearing the word? How might we react?
4. As you reflect on these studies in Acts
 - (a) What have been the main examples of the early church that have most encouraged you? And challenged you?
 - (b) What has struck you afresh of the life and ministry of St Paul?
 - (c) What practical steps do you as an individual (and as a group) wish to take with you from these studies?

What shall I/ we take from these studies?



A Plan of Acts

There are three main ways in which Bible commentators have divided the book: -

A. A twofold division

1. The Church of Palestine and Syria (Acts 1-12) – the acts of Peter – the Jewish period of the Church’s witness - progress from Jerusalem to Antioch – c . AD 30-47
2. The Church of the Nations (Acts 13-28) - the acts of Paul - the Gentile period of the Church’s witness - progress from Antioch to Rome – c. AD 47-61

B. A threefold division

A simple outline of Acts is suggested by 1:8 which is often regarded as the key verse: “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

1. The initial witness (Acts 1:1-8:3) – “Jerusalem” – this is the Jewish stage covering a period of about 5 years
2. The expanding vision (8:4-12:25) – “all Judea and Samaria” – the transitional stage, covering a period of ten years
3. The ultimate purpose (13:1-28:31) “the ends of the earth” – this is the Gentile stage covering a period of ten years

C. A sixfold division

Each “period” closes with a verse giving a general summary of the progress of the gospel so far: -

1. First period (1:1-6:7) The church in Jerusalem
“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” 6:7
2. Second period (6:8-9:31) Extension of the church throughout Palestine
“Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers” 9:31
3. Third period (9:32-12:24) Extension of the Church to Antioch
“But the word of God continued to spread and flourish” 12:24
4. Fourth period (12:25-16:5) Extension of the Church to Asia Minor
“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers” 16:5
5. Fifth period (16:6-19:20) Extension so the church to Europe
“In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” 19:20
6. Sixth period (19:21- 28:31) Extension of the Church to Rome
“He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” 28:31

What do we know about St Luke?

St Luke was the author of the book of Acts and of the Gospel that bears his name – but what do we know about him?

- He was a Greek-speaking Gentile, probably from Antioch
- The name “Luke” only appears 3 times in the New Testament
 - In Colossians 4:14, Paul writes of Luke as the “beloved physician”
 - In Philemon 24, he refers to Luke as a “fellow worker”
 - In 2 Timothy 4:11 – Paul writes from prison: “Luke alone is with me”

Some Bible writers think that Luke was put to death with Paul and that he had planned to write a third volume. This would explain why Acts ends without telling us the outcome of Paul’s appeal to Caesar.

Luke accompanied Paul during part of his missionary journeys. Some passages in Acts use “we” indicating that Luke was a fellow traveller.

An accurate writer

Back in those days, doctors underwent rigorous training and Luke’s stylish Greek shows that he was well educated.

The preface to the Gospel of Luke is really an introduction to both books. Luke claims that he had investigated carefully all the events concerning Jesus and His followers. It may be that while Paul was a prisoner in Caesarea (Acts 24:27) for about two years, then Luke was able to travel around Palestine and interview all the important eye-witnesses.

A careful diplomat

We do not know who “Theophilus” (for whom the Gospel and Acts was written) was but it is clear that Luke was showing that: -

- Christianity is not harmful to the state
- Its founder Jesus and His followers, though accused of many things, had not been found guilty in a Roman court

Perhaps too, Luke intended to show the unity of the Church: the focus is on Peter in the beginning chapter of Acts, and then on Paul.

A man with a message

“Salvation” is a key concept for Luke. His two volumes show how salvation comes from God, through Christ, and is offered to the whole world.

The first generation of Christians was about to pass away. A change was coming over the Roman Empire in relation to Christianity: formerly it had been tolerated as a sect of Judaism but in future it would be looked upon as a new religion – and new religions were banned.

Therefore, people must know how the Christian faith came into being, how it spread, and how it influenced all sorts of people, in all walks of life.