

XLII. Traveling Route 66: The Bible in Biblical Perspective
The Journey with Christ, the Promised One
“What Jesus Continues to Do and Teach”
The Book of Acts
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The book of Acts is where we are in our journey on Route 66. We have covered the first 39 books of the Bible which was our journey to Christ. Now we are on the journey with Christ, having looked at the biographies of Christ in the Gospels. Let's begin with prayer.

Prayer:

Father, we rejoice in the past grace of our salvation that You have saved us from our sins and brought us thus far. We thank You for the present grace where Your saving us from the practice of our sins and You are leading us onward. We rejoice with the sure anticipation of the blessed Hope and the future grace where we will be with You forever, saved from the presence of sin. We will be with You forever and You Father will be forever ours. Thank You for that in Christ. Thank You now for this His Word. Teach us and equip us as Your people to know, love and make You known in the redeeming love of Christ. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Let's look at Acts 1 which is the prologue. Acts 1:1-11 says [1] *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, [2] until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. [3] He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. [4] And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; [5] for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

[6] So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” [7] He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. [8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” [9] And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. [10] And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, [11] and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Let's look at that first verse in the book of Acts. This is the second book I'm writing to you O Theophilus. The audience is obviously a person named Theophilus. It is an interesting word that is actually two Greek words put together in a formal name. Theo means God and then a derivative of the verb phileo which means love or brotherly

love. So he is looking to him and saying “Theophilus” whose name means lover of God, a brother in whom there is love for God. Some people believe that this is actually not a person but the writer of this particular book in your Bible is actually addressing it to all believers as information that they are to have from the Lord God. Therefore believers would be lovers of God and so some think it is a generic term. I think that holds some merit. So is this a generic term or is it a person named Theophilus?

There is a third option. The third option is that it is a person but in the sovereign providence of God, it’s a person with whom you can identify with since you’re a lover of God. I choose the third route so that I get the benefit of both of the other routes as well. He is a person and it has application to us in God’s providence but the question is who is writing this. It doesn’t say. It’s anonymous.

So who is the author? From the second century on, mostly with the weight of the affirmation of church history in general and Irenaeus (the Bishop in Gaul) in person in particular it has been called the work of Luke and there is a reason. I don’t have time to trace it through but the reason why, is whoever the writer is it’s someone who is with Paul on his second and third missionary journeys. The reason we know that is the writer of this book begins to use the personal pronoun plural ‘we’. When he was speaking of Paul going to another city he would say “We are going...” So the writer would be someone numbered with the Apostle Paul’s company.

I don’t have the time to go into why some people fall by the wayside as potential candidates such as Silas, Timothy, Titus and various others who would have been in Paul’s company. You really get down to not many options but the chief option would be a good option who is mentioned as a part of Paul’s company three times in your Bible. In Philemon 24, Colossians 4:11 and II Timothy 4:11 you see this person as one who is identified as the physician, Luke. It is thought to be that one and affirmed by Irenaeus and other early church fathers as the writer of Acts, even though he doesn’t identify himself in the book. When you work through all of the options very few people would take issue as to whether it is Luke or not.

You’ll notice that it is his second volume. What was his first volume? The first volume is the Gospel of Luke. You have a clue to the first volume. By the way this book historically has been called the Acts of the Apostles. There are some who would say it really should be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostolic Church and I actually kind of lean in that direction. That’s the way I like to think of it as the Acts of the Holy Spirit who is promised in chapter 1 to empower the people of God for the Gospel to move out and throughout the world – from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world.

The clue to the first volume is in Acts 1:1 where it says it was what Jesus began to do and teach. There are a lot of great insights there. One thing is that we now know that the first volume was all that Jesus began to do and teach. Interestingly is that most of us would think of Jesus’ ministry as what He would teach and do but it seems as if the way He would evangelize and disciple was, do and teach. He would model and mentor. He would pray and they would say “Teach us to pray.” He would evangelize and then sit them down and show them what He had done. He would do ministry and then He would explain it. It was done time and time again that way. He modeled and mentored, modeled and mentored. There is a great profile, I think, for effective discipleship. Effective discipleship is relational and informational and the model opens the door for the

mentoring. Both of them are to be involved because we learn by imitation and instruction. So Jesus would do and teach.

Now if the first volume, the Gospel of Luke, was all that Jesus began to do and teach, what would the second volume be? It is all that Jesus continues to do and teach. Jesus came into the world 2000 years ago and took upon Himself a body. In that body He came to do and to teach in accordance with His Father's will – to seek and to save the lost and all whom the Father had given to Him. In that body He went to the cross and bore our sins. In that body He was buried and then that body was raised and glorified. Then in that body He ascended in that very sight of the Apostles after forty days and fifteen recorded witnesses of His post resurrection ministry in your Bible. Then He has promised that in the body He is at the right hand of the Father and interceded for us. In that body He will come again in like manner but until He comes again, while He is interceding for His people, the church is body number two. So Jesus is continuing to do and to teach through the body of Christ.

It's interesting that the Gospel of Luke covers thirty-three years. The book of Acts covers thirty-three years, after the ascension of Jesus. Those books cover what He did in body number one and body number two. It's interesting to note that as we get to the book of Acts, it just ends. There is no 'amen', why? It is because the ministry of the body of Christ is unending. That was the beginning of it. We are now carrying it on until Christ returns. So let's get into the book of Acts. From who we go to when.

So when was the book of Acts written? It was probably written in 62 A.D. I don't have time to cover all the reasoning for that but clearly it is written while Paul is still alive. He is still alive at the end of the book and he dies around 64 to 65 A.D. He also has this impact of the Gospel from Rome to Spain that is spoken of in the book of Romans that is not recorded. There are a number of other things that is yet to be done that is not recorded in the book of Acts that we pick up from the Epistles of Paul. So Acts is written before Paul dies and very likely while he is in prison at Rome. I believe volume number one has already been written at this time which is the Gospel of Luke. Luke was written while Paul was in prison in Jerusalem in Caesarea by the Sea before he was sent to Rome. That's when all the research and interviews were done that are referred to in the Gospel of Luke. Now volume two has been written for us.

Why did he write the book of Acts? I believe there are two key verses to give you in terms of the value of the book of Acts. Acts 1:8 says [8] *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.* That sets the stage for the book of Acts. It is when the Kingdom expands through what Jesus continued to do and teach through the Holy Spirit empowered body of Christ, to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria and then to the uttermost part of the world. The other key verse is Acts 17:6b which says [6b] *"These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also."* This was during Paul's second missionary journey. Who are these people? They are the Holy Spirit empowered body of Christ, His church and through its leadership they have now turned the world upside down. The person who said that was in Europe, less than twenty five years after the ascension of Jesus. He was a frustrated opponent of the Gospel and declared that these people had turned the world upside down, talking about the Holy Spirit empowered church and it was through the power of the Gospel. How did it happen? The book of Acts gives us great key on this.

Let me just stop and ask, do you believe Birmingham needs to be turned upside down? Do you think our country needs to be turned upside down? Do you want the world to be turned upside down for Christ? I believe the key is not in the exotic schemes of any amazing personality, pastor or leader, although God uses leaders and we'll see this. I believe the keys are right here in the book of Acts. I believe the only thing that will get the world right side up which is really what upside down is, is the Holy Spirit empowered church. We need revival. I believe the only thing that can turn the world upside down again is the power of the Gospel – Gospel evangelism and discipleship. I believe that simple commitment of a Holy Spirit empowered church, the power of the Gospel and it will only take place when we follow the very footsteps that have been recorded for us in sacred Scripture, as the profile and paradigm of how we're to move forward.

I want to outline a couple of those things but before I do that I want to give you a brief outline of the book of Acts. The prologue is in Acts 1:1-3. The opening part of the book is divided into three parts. There is the expansion of the Kingdom of God to Jerusalem, to the Jew first with a key leader. God uses leaders. The key leader is Peter. This takes place in Acts 1:4 to Acts 7:60. There is the Gospel empowered movement and the attack of Satan in terms of penetrating the leadership of the church with persecution, grumbling and all kinds of things but the Kingdom moved powerfully. Everyday people were being saved, 3,000, then 5,000 and that was just counting the heads of the household, the men. There is this powerful move of the Gospel in Acts 1:4 to Acts 7:60. God uses the church at Jerusalem.

Then the Gospel through the persecution of that church spilled over to Judea and Samaria and that's found in Acts 8 through 12. In those chapters the Apostle Paul, then Saul a religious terrorist, is converted and he is then trained and drawn into ministry in those days of the Gospel expanding to Judea and Samaria. So now Peter and Paul are lifted up as leaders through which God is using as well as other leaders like Phillip, Stephen, Barnabas and others, but Peter and Paul are the two key Apostolic leaders. The Gospel moves powerfully to Antioch and actually here is the first time that followers of Christ are called Christians. I wished I could tell you it was a badge of honor but it was meant to be a sneering put-down. It says that because they wanted to be like Jesus, you can almost hear the sneer that they called them Christians, little Christs, not realizing that was the greatest badge of honor that could have been given.

Then Gospel moves forward as Barnabas and Saul (who becomes the Apostle Paul) are sent out and the Kingdom expands to the world from Acts 13 all the way through Acts 28:29. There are a lot of churches being planted but the key church that is lifted up is the Ephesus church. There is a key leader who is Peter in the Gospel to Jerusalem, with the key epicenter church that is going to shake the world with a tsunami wave of the Gospel. Then there is another epicenter church in Judea and Samaria. It is the church at Antioch and two leaders are there, Peter and Paul that God is using in Judea and Samaria. The Gospel explodes again and it goes now to the whole world through the missionary journeys and the key leader now is the Apostle Paul with the new epicenter church at Ephesus that spawns off thirteen or fourteen other churches in Asia Minor. It becomes the jumping off point for the Gospel to go to Europe all the way to Greece and Thessalonica and all those places where the world is being shaken with the Gospel.

What are some things we can draw from this? I want to give you a couple of them. The first one is that I'd like to point out to you the Kingdom DNA. When the Kingdom expands there is a DNA in the body of Christ. The DNA of the body of Christ is found in Acts 1. The reason the world got turned upside down is because of the church of Jesus Christ in its embryonic form. There are eleven disciples and by the time Jesus is resurrected and ascended that group has now grown to 120, even His brothers and sisters are now converted. They find themselves back in the Upper Room with specific instructions – I've given you the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all the nations beginning in Jerusalem, then Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the world but don't go for this is impossible, until you're clothed with power from on high. He pours forth the Spirit of God upon the believer and His church.

Whenever there is a Spirit filled church there will always be the exaltation of Christ as preeminent. It is a Christ centered and exalting church. The Holy Spirit brings the fruit of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit and brings all kinds of blessings in His presence but His significant purpose is that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. What will be the result? You shall be My witnesses. That's how you know when the Holy Spirit is working. Christ is being exalted, the preeminent Christ as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. The DNA of a world shaking movement of the Kingdom from the church of Jesus Christ is empowered by the Spirit. If it's empowered by the Spirit it is lifting up Christ and if it is lifting up Christ then it will be drenched with the Gospel, driven by the Gospel and empowered by the Gospel of saving grace in Jesus Christ. O that the grace of Christ would fill us! The book of Acts is a constant record of the power of Spirit enabling the body of Christ to exalt Christ and proclaim the Gospel in evangelism and discipleship.

A second thing from the book of Acts is the Kingdom expansion DNA also has a Kingdom expansion profile. That profile is evident everywhere the Gospel goes so that we're not surprised by this. I want to give you just one snippet of this in Acts 16. When the Kingdom moves from city to city as it arrives initially in evangelism and discipleship through God's people (i.e Paul, Peter, Barnabas etc), there is initial expansion and success of the Kingdom of God making its foray into the world. The church is the colony of the Kingdom. Whenever we plant a colony in the kingdom of this world, it meets with immediate success with varying degrees but there is immediate effectiveness and success of the expansion of the Kingdom. Satan will immediately fold his tent, won't he? No, the evil empire strikes back.

If you go open your Bible and start with Jerusalem, then to Antioch, then follow Paul's missionary journey and in every city you'll see these four points. 1. Initial expansion and success, 2. The evil empire will strike back (the stoning of Paul, the jailing of Paul, the persecution of Stephen), 3. Divine deliverance/intervention in the Providence of God, sometimes with miracles protecting His people. (Peter in jail and they begin to pray and Peter gets out of jail to go where they're having the prayer meeting and they didn't believe he was standing at the door while they were just praying for him to get out. Then there is Silas and Paul with the Philippian jailer or Paul left for dead outside the city. What happens? They go back to work in the city and then what happens? 4. There is renewed and expanded expansion and success. You will see this pattern time and time again. Let me give you one example of this at the church at Philippi.

Acts 16:11-40 says [11] *So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis, [12] and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. (Now the colony of the Kingdom comes to a Roman colony.) We remained in this city some days. [13] And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. [14] One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. [15] And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.*

[16] *As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. [17] She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." [18] And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.*

[19] *But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas (the evil empire strikes back) and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers. [20] And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. [21] They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice." [22] The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. [23] And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. [24] Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

[25] *About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Little did they know the evil empire striking back only created a prison ministry), [26] and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. [27] When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. [28] But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." [29] And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. [30] Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" [31] And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." [32] And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. [33] And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. [34] Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.*

[35] *But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." [36] And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." [37] But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come*

themselves and take us out.” [38] The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. [39] So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. [40] So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

Do you see the pattern? They got there and had success with Lydia and her household. Then there was a demon possessed girl who was converted. Then the evil empire strikes back. They are beaten, persecuted and thrown into jail. The God intervenes and sets them free. As He sets them free the prisoners are evangelized. They had to be evangelized because no one ran when the doors cells opened up and the chains fell off. Paul said “We’re all here, don’t kill yourself.” The Philippian jailer and his household were converted. Later in an epistle to the Philippians they were the only church that Paul allowed to support him financially in his missionary ministry. He writes them a missionary letter to thank them, to rejoice in the Lord and commend them which is found in the book of Philippians. The core group of that church was a business woman (Lydia), a demon possessed teenage girl and a Roman jailer. You’ll find that adventure in city after city after city after city.

Now I’d like to give you the Kingdom expansion paradigm. I gave you the profile of what happened when they went to the city but what did they do? Here is what they did. The first thing they did when they went to a city was Gospel evangelism and discipleship. The next thing they did was plant a church or they went back and strengthened and revitalized the church that was there. The third thing they did was Gospel leadership multiplication and mobilization. The fourth thing they’d do was Gospel deeds of love, mercy and justice as they would take care of people with various needs. They would exhort those who needed to be freed from slavery and caring for those in need during famine. They cared for the widows and took up offerings. These Gospel deeds would open the door for Gospel words of evangelism and discipleship. I believe that’s the very paradigm that’s given to us. It’s the roadmap to turn the world upside down. It is Spirit filled, Christ centered, Gospel driven and wherever you go there will be the initial blessing, the empire will strike back, God will protect His people and He will use the striking of the empire as a base for expanded and renewed success of the work of the Gospel.

So that’s how we would move. Briarwood and every evangelical church that want to honor Christ ought to be committed to evangelism and discipleship, planting churches and revitalizing them, leadership multiplication and mobilization and Gospel deeds of love, mercy and justice.

One final thought is the Kingdom expansion lifelines. It is the ministry of prayer and the Word. In Acts 6 the people came with a complaint that the Apostles were taking care of the Hebrew widows but they weren’t taking care of the Hellenistic widows. They were accusing the Apostles of racism and partiality. The Apostles said “No, that’s not the problem. The problem is that this is too big for us so we need deacons.” The first seven deacons were put in place so the Apostles could maintain the focus of their spiritual oversight and leadership. This is what they said two times and I’m paraphrasing this. “This is a problem that must be solved but it’s not good for us to serve the tables and neglect prayer and the Word.”

What were they saying? They were saying that as important as stewardship is, administration is, mercy ministry is, it's downstream from prayer and the Word. If we enact a solution that robs the church of the lifelines to Jesus of prayer and the Word, then there will be no stewardship, no widows to care for, no heart for the needy and no desire to proclaim the Gospel. Prayer and the Word are the lifelines. Why would they have know that? This is what the Bible said about the early church at Jerusalem in Acts 2:42, [42] *And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* It is prayer and the Word.

In Acts 1 before this glorious movement starts what does Jesus say to do? Go back to the Upper Room and pray. So 120 people went to their knees in prayer waiting for the Spirit of God to fall upon them and then in Acts 2 they went out preaching the Word. The church at Ephesus came from Antioch, Antioch from Jerusalem, Jerusalem from the Upper Room where 120 were transformed to 3,000 and 5,000 and then went to Judea and Samaria and the then to the uttermost part of the world. Why? It was because that church was conceived in a prayer meeting according to Acts 1 and it was birthed in a sermon according to Acts 2.

The lifelines of Kingdom expansion are protracted, persistent intercessory prayer and the proclamation and propagation of the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing and the effective propagation of the Word is always preceded and bathed with the intercessory prayers of God's people. Do you want the world to be turned upside down? Then pray, proclaim and ask God to give us Christ centered, Spirit filled, Gospel driven churches. May it start with us, not because America needs to be reclaimed but because the Kingdom needs to advance, the King to be exalted for He is worthy of our praise. He is to be proclaimed to the world and we need to start right here. O God, bring the colony of the Kingdom to America again, for Your glory we pray. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together. Thank You Father for this glorious, wonderful, unfathomable book. I pray that You would encourage Your people in these few thoughts that have been derived from it. Dear Jesus, I thank You that You're continuing to do and teach. Please do and teach to us and through us, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.