

Sermon Title: Acts: The Saga Of Your Christian Family  
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1 (Acts #1)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 1-8-23

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Well, it's a new year, and we've passed the holidays now; and for the first time that *I* can remember, we are going to start something new today, in a new year.

If life is like a game, I think it is pretty obvious to most that I'm in the Second Half; it would not surprise me if the Fourth Quarter has already begun. But I want you to know: I am not battling for the Playoffs! I have a bye; when I'm done—straight to be with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23). And I look forward to that. I don't have it scheduled yet, but I do look forward to that.

And in this wonderful series of decades that it's been my privilege to open God's Word, I'm not the first one who has kind of had an intangible goal that I would like to preach through the whole New Testament, verse-by-verse. I've done *surveys* of the Old Testament, and I'm not quite there yet. And there is especially one guy that has gotten short shrift. There are four books of the New Testament that I have not yet preached, and two of them are by the same guy: Luke. And we are going to start fixing that today.

I didn't have anything *against* Luke; I *don't* have anything against Luke, and I'm going to love him all the more as we work our way through the Book of Acts. But I have done Matthew, I have done Mark, and I have done John; I have actually done a couple of them a couple of times. I have always tried to think about the needs of the congregation, and choose which book comes up next. But there's kind of this nagging thing of, "Are you going to get to *all* of them, or not?" And I can't wait for First and Second Timothy—maybe they'll come after the Book of Acts. But today, we are going to just dip our toe into the Book of Acts.

45 years ago this month—I actually looked it up to see when it was—Marsha and I joined with an unprecedented number of Americans to do something. About half of the U.S. population at that time watched a miniseries on television for eight consecutive nights. It was the film adaptation of a novel titled "Roots: The Saga of an American Family," by Alex Haley. Haley had researched his family's genealogy, and he claimed to have discovered and visited the village in Gambia where his ancestor, named "Kunta Kinte," was kidnapped in 1767; and he was eventually taken to Maryland, where he was sold as a slave. That series, and that book, traces the family of Kunta Kinte from the 1760s until after the Civil War—so about a hundred years.

If you aren't personally familiar with the culture of the United States prior to when Haley's book and that miniseries came on the scene, I have to say: It is difficult to describe the impact that that had. The images of slavery were difficult to watch, but no one could refute that they *did* portray many examples of things that really happened. And like many in my generation, I grew up in circles in which attitudes toward non-white people were, I think, approximately *terrible*; in some ways ignorant, and in some ways *knowingly* terrible. My parents held to beliefs in that part of things that I *completely repudiate*.

I lived through the part of that era that included forced integration of schools in the South. That was a bumpy road; it wasn't easy. And it happened during *my* tenure when I was a student in the Los Angeles school district—even way out there on the Left Coast.

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---

The battle raged, specifically during my Junior High and High School years, so I saw a little bit of it up close, but not from the perspective of those that had been on the harsh end of that. As a matter of fact, I had a cousin come to visit me from Kentucky, and wanted to see Southern California and see Los Angeles; and we had to completely change our itinerary because of the Watts Riots that took place.

And even if you weren't aware that people were getting shot at and burned and killed and looted and all of that, the television series pulled together many fragments of things that I knew, and it helped me understand what drove many people to desperate, and sometimes criminal actions. I was a pretty young believer at that time, and it certainly crystalized for me how *totally* Satanic and sinful racism is. Treating people based upon the amount of melanin in their skin is a work of Satan; *he* invented that idea, and we want nothing to do with that (cf. Acts 10:28, 34-35; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; Rev. 5:9).

Well, sadly, those accounts that were provided by Alex Haley were tarnished; it came to be known that he indulged in a little bit of plagiarism in writing his book, and some of the claims that he made about the historical precision regarding his heritage were generally discredited and proven to be fabrications—but he *did* say it was a novel.

But nevertheless, "Roots: The Saga of an American Family"—even though fiction and flawed, it was an eye-opening event for millions of people. Now, you have to be thinking: "It might be the Fourth Quarter; has this guy just run off the field? What are we doing here?"

Well, this is not a message about the problems of racism in our society. It's an introduction to the Book of Acts. But I *thought off* "Roots" because there is a parallel to the study that we are about to begin. Many in my generation, honestly, were not well educated about some of the history of our nation; and we rather naively assumed that the post-World-War-2 suburban, middle-class, white-picket-fence lifestyle that we enjoyed—well, that's *normal*; and we know there are some people that have been through other things, but that's normal, that's right, that's the way things really are.

Well, I would suggest to you that many in this generation of Evangelicals in America are not at all well-educated about Church History, and we rather naively assume that *we know best* how to live as Christians within this world system. And so it struck me that a good title for this would be: "Acts: The Saga Of Your *Christian* Family."

For me, as I said, the "Roots" TV series pulled together those things I knew, and it *definitely* disabused me of some misunderstandings that I had no idea I actually believed. And I *do* believe that studying the Book of Acts is going to serve a similar purpose for many 21st Century Christians, but for a *much more significant* purpose of learning who we are in the Body of Christ (Col. 1:18, 24).

Now, today: as I said, we are going to dip our toe in. The exposition will begin, Lord willing, next Sunday. But I want you to come with me, and we are just going to look at the introduction to this. I'll give you three points upon which we can hang our thoughts:

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---

Number 1—The Gospel of Luke: The Sequel.

Number 2—Who *Are* Those Guys?

and Number 3—The Great Transition.

Now, as I said, the full exposition is going to begin next time, but I want to start by reading you the first five verses of the Book of Acts. It goes like this: "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, 'Which,' He said, 'you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.' " (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

Why do I call this "The Gospel Of Luke: The Sequel"? Well, because this is Part 2 of the Gospel of Luke. Now, you can ask me, "What is your logic in doing Part 2 before you do Part 1?" I have none! I wanted us to study the Book of Acts, because I think it will be significant for us.

We know of no original official title for this book. Greek manuscripts typically just label it "Acts," and that was a common title for a book of remembrance of the deeds of great men. Some of them expand that to: "Acts Of The Apostles"; but because the big deal that kicks all of this off is the arrival of the Holy Spirit, many of them even say: "The Acts Of The Holy Spirit Through The Apostles"—because the Holy Spirit is mentioned more than fifty times in the Book of Acts.

Luke had already written a record of the ministry of Jesus Christ, from His birth through His ascension, and that we know as "The Gospel According To Luke." The Book of Acts continues the record of the work of God on Earth by the power of the Holy Spirit, but not through Jesus *in person*, through His *servants*, for about the first thirty years of the Church. And it was a *unique* period of time. More about that in a few minutes.

The connections that we will see right away in the Book of Acts will show just how tightly all of this is connected. And it is connected to the Old Testament. There is a pastor of a megachurch, who is the son of a pastor of a megachurch, and the son has famously said that we need to disconnect—"unhitch from the Old Testament." That is absolutely, completely, upside-down, on-its-head *wrong!* You *must* connect to the Old Testament, or you *won't understand* the Book of Acts; you *won't understand* the Gospel of Luke, or the [other] Gospels! This is *one* plan of God. (see Acts 26:22-23; cf. Matt. 5:17-18; 26:56; Lk. 24:44, 27; Jn. 5:39; Acts 3:18; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 3:2).

Now, if you would like to act like a know-it-all, and maybe start an argument at your next Bible Study, you could say that it might be technically correct to think of the four Gospels as the end of the Old Testament—the final details of the Old Testament, *showing* that Jesus is the promised "Messiah" (Dan. 9:25-26; Matt. 1:1, 16; Jn. 1:41; 4:25-26).

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---

And then you can think of the Book of Acts as the *beginning* of the New Testament, because it opens with the launch of the era when the Holy Spirit came to dwell in believers—which was prophesied by Jeremiah (31:31-34) and Ezekiel (36:25-27), and *very specifically* promised by Jesus (Jn. 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 13-14). This *is* the beginning of something new (cf. Lk. 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Heb. 8:7-13; 9:1, 11-15; 10:1, 19-20).

If you aren't aware of the connection between Luke and Acts—I just read to you the first five verses of Acts; look back at the first *four* verses of Luke: Luke 1:1-4—"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us"—that is, the Gospels: the life of Jesus; and Luke had almost certainly read Matthew and Mark by the time he assembled his Gospel—"just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."

So Luke said, "I did a lot of work on this, and I put the whole thing together." And then, as we saw at the beginning of Acts: "The first account I composed, *Theophilus*, about all that Jesus began to do and teach"—same author, same story, written to the same guy. This *is* the sequel to the Gospel of Luke.

Now, the next question: *Who Are Those Guys?* Specifically: Who are Luke and Theophilus?

Well, the *human* author is Luke (cf. 1 Pet. 1:21). If you compare Acts 1 with Luke 1, that makes it clear: same writer, same story, written to the same person. What we know about Luke is that he was a close associate of the Apostle Paul. We know he was Paul's personal physician, and we know that he was a very careful researcher.

There is an interesting tidbit about these two books. Luke is not mentioned by name in either his Gospel or the Book of Acts. Now, that's not completely strange; Matthew never mentions *his* own name, except in a list of the disciples. Mark doesn't mention *his* name, although there is probably an incident in the Gospel of Mark that describes him, but he leaves out who it was. John never mentions himself, except in the list of the Apostles; in the Gospel of John, he just calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). He never got over that! "He *loved me!* Wow!" Well, Luke did the same thing.

So, you might want to get out a couple of pieces of paper so you can take detailed notes on this. I want to give you all the mentions of Luke in the entire Bible. One is Colossians Chapter 4, Verse 14; Paul writes: "Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas." Then there's Philemon 23 and 24—"Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers." And there's Second Timothy 4:11—"Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service." Only three places that he is mentioned.

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---

Now, those three references have some things in common: They are all written by Paul, and they were all written while he was in prison in Rome. "Philemon" and "Colossians" were delivered together to the city of Colossae; they were written during Paul's first imprisonment. Then he was eventually released, travelled a little, and was re-imprisoned before he was martyred. Second Timothy was written during his second imprisonment, just before his death. Now, that tells us that Luke was *very* close to Paul, all the way to the end of his life. And though he never uses his name in either "Luke" or "Acts," the evidence is quite conclusive that Luke is the author if both of them.

When we talk about evidence for who wrote this and that, there are two categories of evidence: external evidence and internal evidence; "external" comes from outside the Bible, "internal" comes from within the Bible.

The external evidence is strong for Luke writing both Luke and Acts. The Early Church Fathers consistently attributed both books to Luke whenever they quoted from either one. And there is this wonderful discovery known as the "Muratorian Fragment"; it was a document from the Early Church, dated about 170 A.D.—one of the very earliest of any things we have from the Church Fathers. This one contains the oldest known list of books of the New Testament, and *it* attributes both of these books to the man, Luke.

But even *more* important is the *internal* evidence—the evidence within the Bible itself, and that is also very strong for Luke as the author. First of all, we know by comparing Luke 1 and Acts 1—you've already seen that—it is clear that both were addressed to the same person and written by the same person.

And as you work through them, it becomes clear that they are written in the same style, and they demonstrate a consistency of thought and logic that flows right from Luke into the Book of Acts. As you study New Testament Greek, you get a sense of the different personalities and different styles and different vocabularies and different ways of thinking of the different New Testament authors; these two [books] fit together.

Then, we have in Acts—and we will see these as we go along—the so-called "We Sections." That's a portion of Chapter 16, and then a lot of Chapters 20 and 21, and then 27 and 28, mostly in the last half of the book—places where the author writes in the First Person: "We did this," "We went there," "We did that," "We saw such-and-such." And these are the portions in which the author of Acts was present, along with some others. And we can deduce that it *had* to be Luke, even though he doesn't mention his name. Timothy was present in one place, but not the others. Silas was present in one place, but not the others—but he is written about in the third person in other places, so *he* can't be the author. Titus was with Paul through part of that, but not included after that time. Barnabas was not present in the first "we" section, but he was later.

So, only Luke fits all of the data, and that tells us that this relationship between Paul and Luke went on for several years before the times that they were together during Paul's imprisonment. Luke and Paul apparently got connected, team-wise, at least during the Second Missionary Journey—so, a number of years there.

Sermon Title: Acts: The Saga Of Your Christian Family  
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1 (Acts #1)

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Date: 1-8-23

---

Then there is corroborating evidence that comes from the abundant use of medical language in the Book of Acts, as with the Book of Luke. Now, this doesn't *prove* anything, but it fits with Paul calling him "the beloved physician." You can compare passages in the Gospels where Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John overlap; and Luke and somebody else mention the same healing, or any other kind of miracle. Luke almost always adds little medical tidbits here and there. You know, you can't tell your doctor that you had a blood-draw; you went to the hematologist—you have to use the lingo, and Luke did.

This is further attested by the little-known fact that in the original writings of these books, the handwriting was almost *impossible* to read, and it contained a bunch of acronyms in Latin—*it had to be a doctor*; couldn't be anybody else. Actually, Luke *is* a little bit harder to translate, but it's not because of bad handwriting; it's because of a more classical style of writing.

We know that before Luke became part of Paul's team, obviously he got his training as a physician before that; that comes from Colossians 4:14. But in the verses just prior to where Paul calls him "the beloved physician," Paul mentions which members of his team were Jews, and he sends greetings from them; and *then*, he sends "greetings" from "Luke, the beloved physician." So he distinguishes between the Jews on his team, and Luke—pretty strong evidence that Luke was a Gentile.

And from the "We Passages" we know that Luke and Paul, as I said, were together from the Second Missionary Journey, onward. We can't be absolutely sure that they were *never* apart during that time, because it doesn't always use "we"; but we know their friendship spanned a number of years, and went right up to Paul's death.

Most likely—and this would be where I would land, I guess, if it matters—Luke probably came to faith in Christ early in the ministry of Paul, perhaps during his First Missionary Journey, and so that's how he came to be part of it during the Second Missionary Journey; or, he came to Christ during the Second Missionary Journey, and joined the team.

And in Luke Chapter 1, Verses 2, that's where he mentions having done careful research into the details of the life of Jesus, "just as they were handed down to *us*"—that's First Person—"by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word." So he *met* Apostles, and he probably did a lot of interviews with Apostles and those others that were eyewitnesses (cf. Acts 1:21-22).

Now, what about the other guy? What about "Theophilus"? Remember, back at the beginning of Luke, he says: "It seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, *most excellent Theophilus*." Well, Theophilus certainly seems to be a proper name.

Now, you could *translate* that word, and the translation would be "lover of God," so some people wax spiritual about that and say, "Here's two books of the Bible that are written, specifically addressed to anybody and everybody who loves God." Well, absolutely they are—as are the other 64 books of the Bible (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22), but it does seem to be a proper name.

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---

And notice: he said "*most excellent* Theophilus." "Most excellent" is the title that was used by Paul to address governors named Felix and Festus in Acts 23, 24, and 26; so it is *likely* that by referring to him as "most excellent Theophilus" that we should draw the conclusion that this man was likely a governor of some region in the Roman Empire, and Paul and Luke had somehow gotten to know him. And so, it is a perfectly legitimate theory to say that he was writing to let this government official know about Christianity—that it operated within the law; that it was not a seditious, cultic faction that opposed Rome (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-14).

We can't be a hundred percent certain that Theophilus was a *believer*, but the fact that after having read about Jesus, Theophilus was still enough interested that Luke wrote Acts gives you an idea that Theophilus probably did come to faith; I do expect to meet him when I am with the Lord.

Now, in the wonderful providence of God, the Holy Spirit has ensured that the two books that Luke wrote—even if it took *me* a long time to get around to them—these books written initially to one man are now disseminated for the whole world. And there is also, of course, another thing that might have impacted a governor: the Jerusalem Council (Chapter 15)—letting him know that Christianity was one united movement, that it did not further separate Jews and Gentiles. Yes, Jews did believe, but now Jew and Gentile are "one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28), and there is not one way for Jews, another way for proselytes, another way for Samaritans, another way for Gentiles—they are all "one group" (Eph. 2:14). So Theophilus could be sure that Christianity was not going to further disrupt things that might affect the rule of Rome over the believers in Christ.

The best evidence indicates that Acts was probably written in the year A.D. 62, during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, when he was under house arrest; and we will see that the book ends in that way, in Acts Chapter 28. And this book was probably written shortly after the Gospel of Luke. If it was written later, it would be very hard to explain why it doesn't mention such momentous events as the burning of Rome, the later ministry and the death of Paul, or the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. So it fits there, toward about the end of when this book was concluded.

So, there's The Gospel Of Luke: The Sequel—that's the Book of Acts. Who Are These Guys? Luke, writing to a Roman dignitary of some kind named Theophilus.

And now, I want to give you a big picture of the book, and we'll take our last few minutes to do this; and we will dip back into this well many times along the way. I call it The Great Transition.

The Book of Acts is unique. It is the *only* true *historical* book in the New Testament. The Old Testament has about a dozen of them, tracing a lot longer history. The four Gospels are definitely historical books. You can also extract some history from comments that are made in the other books of the New Testament. But the Gospels are *highly* specialized; think of them more as biographies, specifically focusing on the life of Jesus, and showing that He is the Messiah.

Sermon Title: Acts: The Saga Of Your Christian Family  
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1 (Acts #1)

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Date: 1-8-23

---

The Book of Acts is the history of the first 30-plus years of the transition that took place—a *huge* transition: from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, from the Old Testament to the New Testament writings, from the Law of Moses to the Age of Grace, from the time of God working specifically through Israel to what Romans calls "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk. 21:24; cf. Rom. 11:25). *Big* changes, and several crucial transitions had to be made.

Jesus has now come. He was rejected by Israel. He died; He rose again (1 Cor. 15:3-4); He ascended to the Father (Rom. 8:34). The purpose of God was not thwarted by the unbelief of Israel and them rejecting their Messiah (cf. Rom. 11:11, 30-31), but God's work *shifted*—as Jesus said it would (Matt. 21:43)—from Israel to the Church, as His vehicle for reaching the world with His grace (2 Cor. 5:18-19). And several transitions need to be observed as we study through the Book of Acts.

As we work through Acts, you are going to see that there are some places where people disagree about the interpretation of it; there are some rather difficult passages there, but most of those difficulties come from failing to see the unique *timing* of the Book of Acts. Acts records accurately what actually happened—it is inerrant (Ps. 12:6; Prov. 30:5)—but the fact that something *happens* in history, especially during a transitional time, does not make it *normative* for today (cf. Acts 4:30 with 2 Tim. 4:20).

People say, "Well, we want to be like the Early Church." Okay, so: If you ever tell a fib about your offering, you're going to be struck dead in front of the church? (Acts 5:1-10) Let's go back *there!* I like that. We're going to need bigger, stronger deacons to bury the bodies. You see, the fact that something *happens* doesn't make it *normative*.

I've pointed out many times: People take Gideon and the way he laid out the fleeces, asking to confirm God's will, and I have seen whole books written about how that gives us the example of how we are supposed to pray—except that *that's the opposite* of what it teaches! That was a *lack of faith* on Gideon's part, not a *demonstration* of his faith! (cf. Jdg. 6:11-23)

So you have to know, when you're looking at something that *happened in history*: Is this *prescriptive* or only *descriptive*? It always *describes* what happened, but it takes some wisdom and it takes some discernment to figure out when it is telling you that this is what *should* happen. And that's where we have the epistles that tell us the doctrine, as we saw in the Book of Jude—"the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." That is spelled out in Romans through Revelation; Acts is the *transition* that got us to that time.

So, when it comes to doctrine, the epistles are superior to the Book of Acts, and we have to interpret the Book of Acts in light of other things that are said later.

Now, let me point out a few of these transitions; and as I said, we will draw on this material at any number of points during the Book of Acts.

First of all, there is that transition from the Gospels to the epistles. Acts records the extension of the Gospel from...well, how many *were* there at the end of the Gospels? When we start the Book of Acts, it's "one hundred and twenty" people (1:15). That's not



Sermon Title: Acts: The Saga Of Your Christian Family  
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1 (Acts #1)

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Date: 1-8-23

---

very many! And they believed prior to Jesus's Ascension, and by the time you're at the end of the Book of Acts, it's *thousands* who have believed, in *many* cities; and it explains the beginning of the churches all over the world.

Acts is the background to the epistles, which are then written to the people in those churches, wherever the Gospel went and people repented and put their faith in Christ. Acts is the bridge that connects that old era to the new.

The Church was first mentioned in Matthew Chapter 16, but it does not become fully *established* until the epistles are written and fully understood; the revelation isn't complete until then. Acts explains the *transition* in the *early* stages of the Church. It was the birth of the first churches everywhere.

One of the reasons that that program that I've been involved with for nearly 20 years now with the Slavic Gospel Association is called "The Antioch Initiative" is because it was in the town of Antioch where the first Gentile church was that ever trained and sent and supported missionaries to Gentiles (Acts 13:1-3). That's a transition. Nobody in Jerusalem was sitting around saying, "Where can we find a group of Gentiles who will take the Gospel to their own people?" Didn't happen. This is a transition.

There is also this massive transition from Judaism to Christianity. And you can take that one in two ways:

There is pure Old Testament Judaism. What would a person who truly believed God have believed and said and done and studied in the Old Testament?—and that all led to Christ (Deut. 18:15, 18-19; Is. 7:14; 9:6-7; 53:1-12); so all of the revelation of the Old Testament was the preparation and the foundation for Christianity (Lk. 24:27; Jn. 5:39; Acts 26:22). And the "shadow" gives way to the "substance," to use the terms from Colossians Chapter 2 (vs. 17); or Hebrews [Chapters] 8, 9, and 10—the pictures give way to the real thing. That is a huge transition.

There is *another* sense of transition, however, from Judaism to Christianity, because in the days of Jesus—remember, it was the most radical leaders of the Jews who most radically opposed Jesus; and the *perversion* of Judaism that was developed, primarily by "the Pharisees" (Matt. 23:2-12), gave way to the freedom and the forgiveness of new life "in Christ" as "a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17). And that "freedom" was a big deal, and it had to be maintained and defended (e.g., Col. 2:20-23)—beginning with the Book of Acts, and especially at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:5-11); and in our daily e-mails, we've been working through the Book of Galatians, where Paul says: "It was for freedom that Christ set us free" (5:1)—*don't be enslaved again!*

So there are two senses in which it is a transition from Judaism to Christianity: from the *real thing* to Christ, and from the *perverted thing* to Christ.

There's another one: The transition from the Mosaic Law to the Church Age. Do you know: Jesus never joined a church? It didn't exist! So the purpose of the Law of Moses—as we have learned from Galatians 3—was to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ (3:24).

Sermon Title: Acts: The Saga Of Your Christian Family  
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1 (Acts #1)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 1-8-23

---

Even for *true believers*, that transition required effort. Several aspects of the Law of Moses separated Jews from Gentiles, culturally (e.g., Ex. 12:43; 23:31-33; 34:12-16; Deut. 7:3-4; cf. 1 Kings 11:2; Neh. 13:25-26); and it required time, and a lot of teaching, a lot of patience, and a lot of effort to bring Jews and Gentiles together into "one" cohesive "body" (Eph. 2:16), which we know as the Church.

There was also the transition from the ministry of Christ...in the Gospels, He is the main figure, and He ministers and He teaches Himself; but in the Book of Acts, we have the transition that records what Jesus predicted in John Chapter 20, Verse 21—from *His own* ministry, where He says, "I was sent from the Father," to the ministry of the Apostles sent by Jesus, to those who *followed* the Apostles, who were sent from places like Antioch, and their ministry that is described in the epistles. And again, Acts is the bridge.

Jesus casually mentioned the Church for the first time in Matthew Chapter 16 (vs. 18); by the time you get to the Book of Revelation, He dictates seven personal letters to seven churches in seven cities—and most of those cities are mentioned in the Book of Acts. It is all connected, and it is all part of a transition.

Then there is the transition from Israel being the center of everything, to now the ministry goes to the entire world. Nearly all of the activity of God's plan of redemption through the Old Testament took place in the land of Israel—and it *explodes* from there in the Book of Acts. Yes, Acts begins "in Jerusalem," and it follows the spread of the Gospel to "Samaria," and then "to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8b).

Now, when Jesus comes again, He is going to establish His Kingdom (Rev, 20:4-6). Where will He be? In "Jerusalem," on "the throne of David" (Jer. 17:25; cf. Ps. 122:3-5; Lk. 1:32; Rev. 20:9)—but He is going to rule over the whole world (Zech. 14:8-9); and again, Jerusalem and Israel will be the focal point (Zech. 14:16-17).

But Acts describes the beginning of *this* era, when the King is not physically present, but the "word" of His "kingdom" (Matt. 13:19)—the Gospel—carries on through His servants to the whole world (Matt. 28:19). That's a *huge* transition!

And then, you have the Reasons For This Transition.

One reason is: The Gospel must go "to the Jew first." "For I am not ashamed of the gospel," Paul writes, "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, *to the Jew first* and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). It says that also in Acts 13:46.

And what John describes in John 1:11—that His people rejected Him—that had to be played out. The offer of salvation *had* to go to Israel; it was a genuine offer; but the *finality* of her rejection *also* had to be recorded, and Acts records that transition as well (cf. Matt. 23:34-38).

There is also the reason for this transition, that the Jews—even the *believing* Jews, *especially* the believing Jews—had to adjust to this new era in light of prophecy. I've shown you that the Jewish mindset was that the next big event was going to be the

Sermon Title: Acts: The Saga Of Your Christian Family  
Scripture Text: Acts 1:1 (Acts #1)

Speaker: Jim Harris  
Date: 1-8-23

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arrival of the Messiah, who would bring the Kingdom to Israel *right now*. The Church Age was not revealed in the Old Testament; it baffled them. How could this Messiah be this "suffering servant" (cf. Matt. 20:28) *and* this "glorious" King (Matt. 25:31)—*which is it?* Same guy—two comings (Lk. 24:25-26; cf. Is. 53:2-12; Dan. 9:26 and Dan. 7:13-14; Zech. 14:3-5). But they could not see that because that was a New Testament revelation (cf. Lk. 9:44-45; Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:4-5; Col. 1:26; 1 Tim. 3:16).

So this transition was necessary in order for the believing Jews to learn about *this* age, and how it relates to the prophecies for Israel that are not yet fulfilled. And interestingly, they are explained in quite some detail in Romans 9, 10, and 11. The Book of Acts explains how that worked out in the beginning of the Church.

Another reason: It takes time to overcome resistance to change. Nobody typically reacts immediately, gloriously, to change. If you are used to something and it gets upset, that's hard (cf. Lk. 5:39). It is normal for people to be uncomfortable with change, and the gradual unfolding of these *monumental* changes in the way God spread His Word needed time for adaptation (cf. Jn. 16:12).

Remember Peter? Peter, the Apostle with the foot-shaped mouth: always blurting things out, always getting in trouble, always saying stupid things—*denies* the Lord three times, then he gets restored at the end of the Gospel of John. You meet him in Acts—oh, you're going to fall in love with Peter when you see him in Acts. *He is dynamic!* He is *the man* for the first twelve chapters of the Book of Acts!

And in Acts Chapter 10—of course it was to Peter, God gave this vision, in verses 9 through 17, that *ended* the dietary laws (cf. Mk. 7:18-19), which was a big part of what separated Jews and Gentiles. Remember, He lowers the sheet with all of the clean and unclean animals, and He says, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!!" (vs. 13). And Peter says, "No way, Lord!"

It took *him* a while. Follow down the page a little ways, and he is preaching to a group of Gentiles, there with the believing Jews. Even for him to understand the meaning, and to accept Gentiles as *equals* in Christ (cf. Acts 11:2-3, 18)...and he had that bobble; remember, Paul had to confront him—it records that in Galatians Chapter 2. The transition could not happen all at once.

And finally, there was the need to reach different people without destructive division. How can you go to *so many different people, so many ethnicities, so many different places, so many different customs*, and bring about *one* unified body in Christ? You'll see how *massive* it was when the Gospel jumped the firebreak and went to the *Samaritans*, and then to the *Gentiles*—oh, my! (cf. Is. 49:6)

Well, how do you introduce a book like that, and find a stopping point? I don't see goose bumps on most of your arms right now, so that's all for now. A word from our sponsor... Next Lord's Day, we are going to begin to learn about the first generation in the family tree of your Christian family. Even before we have the Holy Spirit come in Acts Chapter 2, you're going to see astounding things in Chapter 1.

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Let's pray:

*Father, thank You for this book in the midst of Your great Book. We pray that as we begin this study, You will help us to know our roots, that we realize they are connected to our Anchor, which is our Lord; that You will help us to know our history, that we will respect it and not despise it. I pray that You will help us to better know and understand the power of the Holy Spirit whom You have sent to dwell in us. I pray that You will help us to not resist Your work today—because in many ways, there is still a transition. In every new place that the Gospel goes, the Body of Christ—with that same transforming power of Your Word—takes on a different look. Help us, Father, to know Your plan for the ages, so that we are not surprised as it continues to unfold in our lives. And Father, above all, please grant us the privilege to see souls transformed in this era, in this place, in this town, by Your Holy Spirit, working through Your Gospel, as You have entrusted it to us, to pass it on to those who come behind us. May they find us faithful, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*