

A Historical Reflection of Christianity as Seen in the Book of Acts (Bible)

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ABSTRACT

The Book of Acts, also known as "Acts of the Apostles," is an important part of the New Testament in the Bible. This book describes the development and spread of the early Christian church after the ascension of Jesus Christ. The book describes the establishment of the church in Jerusalem with the descent of the Holy Spirit, which occurred on the day of Pentecost. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles perform miracles and preach, leading many to convert to Christianity. Apostles Peter and Paul play significant roles, with Peter preaching to the Jewish community and Paul to the Gentiles. The book shows how early Christianity spread from Jerusalem to Antioch, Rome, and other regions. The apostles face opposition from Jewish religious leaders and Roman authorities. Despite this, they remain steadfast in their faith. The book illustrates that the message of Christianity is not just for Jews but for all of humanity. The life of the early Christian community was based on shared faith, prayer, and cooperation, creating an environment of unity and love. The book demonstrates the courage, faith, and perseverance of the apostles, serving as a source of inspiration for Christian followers today. Through the acts of the apostles, the book shows how God's plan advances for the salvation of humanity. The book explains in detail the spiritual transformations that occur in both individual and community life. Overall, the Book of Acts provides a vivid depiction of the early days of Christianity, illustrating the power of faith and the invisible plan of God. This book acquaints readers with the values, principles, and dedication of the early followers of Christianity.



(This chart shows how many people from different countries would have been saved in Jerusalem during the apostolic period)

How to cite this paper: Dr. Vishwas Valvi "A Historical Reflection of Christianity as Seen in the Book of Acts (Bible)" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-8 | Issue-4, August 2024, pp.824-833, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd67248.pdf



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KEYWORDS: Jesus Christ, Book of Acts, Apostle's, Church, Christianity, Historical Reflection, Judaism, Gospels, Religio Illicita, Roman Empire, Persecution, Apostolic Era, Early Church, Pentecost, Gentile Inclusion, Jerusalem Council, Persecution, Roman Empire, Jewish-Christian Relations, Martyrdom, Holy Spirit, Conversion, Evangelism, Missionary Journeys, House Churches

Research Objectives:- Based on the research paper "A Historical Reflection of Christianity As Seen in the Book of Acts," here are four objectives that can be inferred.

- To Analyze the Development and Spread of Early Christianity:-**The paper aims to examine how the early Christian church was established and expanded following the ascension of Jesus

Christ. It highlights the pivotal role of the apostles, particularly Peter and Paul, in preaching the gospel and converting individuals to Christianity.

2. **To Distinguish Between Christianity and Judaism:-** Another objective is to explore how Christianity emerged as a distinct religion separate from Judaism. The paper seeks to understand the theological and cultural shifts that led to this separation, including the increasing number of non-Jewish converts and the eventual recognition of Christianity as a distinct faith by Roman authorities. It was during this period that a group called Messianic Jews began to form. In modern times, many Jews who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Messiah adopt this name. In many ways, they are simply Christians or converted Gentiles with a Jewish background, but in other respects, they still maintain some aspects of Judaism (e. g. , feasts, celebrations, etc.). They consider the Old and New Testaments to be Scripture and believe Christ to be the Son of God.
3. **To Examine the Impact of Persecution on the Early Church:-** The research paper aims to investigate how persecution from Roman authorities and Jewish religious leaders affected the early Christian community. It seeks to demonstrate how these challenges, rather than hindering the spread of Christianity, actually contributed to its growth and dissemination as believers dispersed to new regions. *"there was a general enactment, precisely formulated and valid for the whole empire, which forbade the practice of the Christian religion. The origin of this is most commonly attributed to Nero, but sometimes to Domitian. an alien cult which induced 'national apostasy', and the abandonment of the traditional Roman religion. Others substituted for this a general aversion to the established order and disobedience to constituted authority. All of [this] school seem to envisage the procedure as a direct police action, or inquisition against notable malefactors, arrest, and punishment, without the ordinary forms of trial"*¹
4. **To Assess the Historical Significance of the Book of Acts:-** The paper seeks to assess the Book of Acts as a historical document that provides valuable insights into the beliefs, practices, and growth of the early Christian church. It aims to highlight the role of apostolic

testimony and historical figures in shaping the foundational period of Christianity and contributing to its transformation into a world religion. These objectives help guide the analysis and exploration of the early Christian church as documented in the Book of Acts.

Research Methodology:- The research paper "A Historical Reflection of Christianity As Seen in the Book of Acts" employs a combination of historical and theological methods to explore the establishment and growth of early Christianity. By analyzing the Book of Acts through these lenses, the paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the early Christian church's historical context, theological development, and lasting impact. These methods offer valuable insights into the challenges, transformations, and resilience of the early Christian community.

Introduction:-

Historian Sir William Ramsay says of the author of Acts: *"Luke is a historian of the first class; not only are his facts reliable, but he has a correct historical sense. In short, he must be placed with the greatest of historians."* Christianity began after the ascension of Jesus Christ. Initially, Christians lived their lives based on the teachings and doctrines of Jesus. The great commandment given by Jesus to His disciples before leaving became their scripture. Gradually, the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament were written, and the Bible began to take its expanded form. Early Christianity faced many challenges. On one side was the Roman authority, and on the other, Judaism. The Roman authority persecuted Christians with their state policies and tax systems, while Jewish religious leaders tried to pressure Christians with their traditional and rigid doctrines. As a result, Christianity and Judaism soon began to maintain separation from each other. Then gradually Jewish, Jewish Christian, non-Jewish Christian communities began to form.

This text offers a historical account of the nascent Christian church's formation, starting with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which marked a transformative moment for the apostles and early believers. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the apostles, particularly Peter and Paul, performed miracles and preached the gospel, leading to the conversion of many individuals to Christianity. The early Christian movement faced significant challenges, both from the Roman authorities, who perceived Christianity as a threat to their traditional religious and political systems, and from Jewish religious leaders, who resisted the new teachings that diverged from established Jewish doctrines. Despite these challenges, the apostles remained steadfast in

¹ Sherwin White, A.N.(1952). "The Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again, The Journal of Theological Studies, Vol.3, pp. 199-213.

their mission, spreading the message of Christianity from Jerusalem to Antioch, Rome, and beyond. The Book of Acts captures the evolving identity of Christianity as it distinguished itself from Judaism, emphasizing its universal appeal and inclusivity by reaching out to Gentile communities. This separation was pivotal in shaping Christianity as a distinct religion and was marked by the theological and cultural shifts within the early church. The text also highlights the persecution faced by early Christians, illustrating their resilience and unwavering faith in the face of adversity.

Differences Between Christianity and Judaism:-

Early Christianity gradually started to emerge as distinct from Judaism. Initially, the Romans considered Christianity as just a small sect of

Judaism. However, the number of non-Jews in Christianity began to increase, as initially, it was mainly Jews who were converting to Christianity. But eventually, the Romans realized that Christianity and Judaism had become two completely different religions. This marked the beginning of persecution against early Christians. It was during this period that a group called Messianic Jews began to emerge. In modern times, many Jews who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Messiah adopt this name. In many ways, they are simply Christians or converted Gentiles with a Jewish background, but in other respects, they still maintain some aspects of Judaism. They consider the Old and New Testaments to be Scripture and believe Christ to be the Son of God.

BOOK OF ACTS											
Author	Luke, the Doctor										
Time	2 yrs - 33-35 AD ca.			14 yrs - 35-48 AD ca.				17 or 19 yrs - 48-65 or 67 AD ca.			
Sections	FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH				FOUNDER OF CHURCHES						
	Spirit of the Church	Growth of the Church	Persecution of the Church	Expansion of the Church	First Journey of Paul	Second Journey of Paul	Third Journey of Paul	Arrest of Paul	Trials of Paul	Imprisonment of Paul	
Chapters	1	4 5	7 8	9 10 12	13 15	16 18	19 20	21 23	24 26	27 28	
Topics	Peter		Peter & Philip			Paul					
	To the Jews		To the Gentiles in/around Israel			To the Gentiles outside Israel					
Place	Jerusalem		Judea & Samaria			Uttermost Parts of the Roman Empire					

(This chart provides a historical overview of the Book of Acts)

Roman Empire and Restrictions on Christianity:-

As early Christians began to spread the teachings of Jesus Christ, many people started accepting Jesus as their Savior. When the Roman authority realized that Christianity and Judaism had become two distinct religions, they implemented rules that required Christian preachers to operate under the state’s control. Even so, the Roman Empire generally allowed people in its territories to live according to their religious practices and scriptures, as they did with the Jews in the province of Judesa. Historian Sherwin-White says “There was a general act, precisely formulated and valid for the whole empire, which prohibited the practice of Christianity. Its origin is usually attributed to Nero, but sometimes to Domitian. An alien cult which inspired a 'national apostasy', the abandonment of the traditional Roman religion. Others substituted for it a general hatred of the established order and defiance of constituted authority. Direct police action against Christians, or interrogation, arrest and punishment of notable offenders, was seen as a common denominator and punishment without trial.”²

Anti-Nationalist:-

The Roman Empire was a historical and global empire, stretching to the ends of the known world at the time. In Roman history, Julius Caesar was given a place among Roman deities, and from that time onward, all future emperors adopted the surname "Caesar. " As a result, emperor worship became a tradition. All provinces, religions, and officials under Roman rule were required to call the emperor "Lord" and bow down to him. Christians, however, recognized only Jesus Christ as their Lord and refused to call the emperor "Lord," bow down to him, or offer incense. Therefore, Christians were labeled as anti-nationalists.

² Sherwin White, A.N.(1952). "The Early Persecutions and Roman Law Again, The Journal of Theological Studies, Vol.3, pp. 199-213

The historian Bart D. Ehrman writes "Everyone in the ancient world, except for Jews, was "pagan" that is, they believed in many gods. These gods whether the state gods of Rome, the local municipal gods, the family gods, the gods of forests, mountains, streams and meadows were active in the world, involved with humans on every level. They ensured that crops would grow and livestock would reproduce; they brought rain and protected against storms; they warded off disease and restored the sick to health; they maintained social stability; and provided military victories for the troops. Unlike pagans, Christians claimed there was only one God and that he should be worshiped not by sacrifice but by proper belief. Anyone who didn't believe the right things would be considered a transgressor before God. And, most significant of all, rewards and punishments would be dispensed not only in this life, but in the life to come: either eternal bliss in heaven or everlasting torment in the fires of hell. Religion had never promoted such an idea before. Christians created a need for salvation that no one knew they had. They then argued that they alone could meet the need. And they succeeded massively"³

(Some Roman rulers who tried to destroy Christianity include)

1.	<i>Nero</i>	A. D. 37-68
2.	<i>Vespasian</i>	A. D. 69-79
3.	<i>Domitian</i>	A. D. 81-96
4.	<i>Trajan</i>	A. D. 98-117
5.	<i>Hadrian</i>	A. D. 37-68 117-138
6.	<i>Marcus Aurelius</i>	A. D. 161-180
7.	<i>Maximinus the Thracian</i>	A. D. 235-238
8.	<i>Decius</i>	A. D. 249-251

Religio Illicita:-

The Roman Empire declared Christianity an illicit religion, claiming that Christians said "eat flesh and drink blood." Consequently, the Roman authority banned Christian preaching at the time. "Religio Illicita" is a Latin phrase meaning "an unacceptable or illegal religion." Some scholars believe that after the great fire of Rome in AD 64, Nero declared Christianity religiously illegal. The Latin word "Religio" refers to obligation, bondage, or reverence and may be based on the Latin verb "Religare," meaning "to bind again." The English word "Religion" comes from the Middle English word "Religioun," which originated from the Old French word "Religion." It originally derived from the Latin word "Religio," meaning "good faith" or "ritual." *all religions under the Empire had a legal status as either licita or illicita, despite the absence of any ancient texts referring to these categories. The most extreme view has held that Tertullian's phrase means all foreign religions required a license from the Roman government. However, it was Roman custom to permit or even to encourage the subject peoples of the Roman province and foreign communities in Rome to maintain their ancestral religion unless specific practices were regarded as disruptive or subversive. A religio was licita for a particular group on the basis of tribe or nationality and traditional practices, coupled with the proviso that its rites were not offensive to the Roman people or its gods.* "⁴

Atheist Christianity:-

The Roman authority declared Christianity as atheist because Christians did not practice idolatry, did not have traditional rituals, did not participate in public celebrations, and did not attend circuses. Before circuses began, a parade of Greek deities would be held, and Christians refrained from participating in them. As a result The Romans frequently accused the early Christians of atheism because they refused to adore the pagan gods of ancient Rome. The Christians refused to frequent the Temples of Jupiter, Mars, Venus and the rest. The pagan populace thought such refusals might anger the gods and bring calamity down upon them. So plagues, famines, earthquakes, defeat in battle etc, might easily be blamed upon the Christians. Furthermore, in refusing to honour the reigning Caesar as a god, they were subverting the State's authority. So the "atheistic" Christians often became scapegoats for popular discontent.

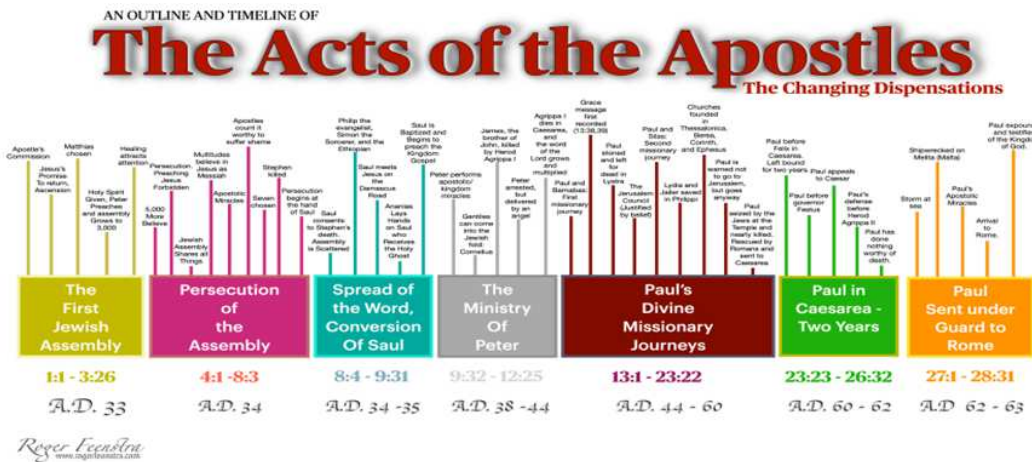
Book of Acts: The Beginning of Christianity and the Church:-

Most of the historical witnesses of this book are found in history. We get the evidence of these historians, Arenius, Alexandria, Clement, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome and Muratorian Canon. Christianity takes us to that period of history. From where the spiritual and social elements of Christianity can be understood. True Christianity and history are two sides of the same coin.

³ Bart D. Ehrman (2023) Inside the Conversion Tactics of the Early Christian Church, access Date And Time:-24/08/2023/19:31-PM /History.com

⁴ Benjamin Isaac (Mar 2006) The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity, Princeton University Press Blackwell p. 449

The book of Acts of the Apostles shows how the Savior continued to direct His Church through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to those who had the keys of the priesthood. The Holy Spirit revealed the truth to the apostles, who then led and taught the church. This book is a historical book telling about early Christianity and the beginning of the church. Acts of the Apostles is considered to be the fifth book of the New Testament. This book was written in Greek and was written by the Apostle Luke between 70 and 90 A. D. This book describes the beginning and expansion of the church. The book revolves around prominent people, important themes and events, major problems, and geographical progress.



(This chart provides information on church establishment, persecution, and evangelism in the Book of Acts)

The book of Acts can be divided into six historical parts:

- **Jesus Christ serves his disciples for 40 days after his resurrection and then ascends to heaven. Acts 1–2:-** By inspiration, the apostles call Matthias to fill the vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. The Holy Spirit is poured out on the day of Pentecost. Peter boldly testifies of the resurrected Savior, and about three thousand people are converted.
- **Peter and John heal a man who had been lame from birth. Acts 3–8:-** Peter and John are arrested for preaching and healing in the name of Jesus Christ and are released from prison. The apostles call seven men to assist them in their ministry; one of these men, Stephen, testifies before the Jewish council, and the council members condemn him to death. Philip preaches throughout Samaria.
- **Saul is converted and begins his ministry. Acts 9–12:-** Through a vision, Peter learns that the Gospel must be preached to the Gentiles. Herod Agrippa I has the apostle James (John's brother) killed and imprisons Peter.
- **Saul and Barnabas are called to become missionaries. Acts 13–15:-** They face opposition from Jews and are accepted by some Gentiles. Church leaders meet in Jerusalem and decide that Gentile converts do not need to be circumcised (or continue to follow the Law of Moses) if they join the church. Paul (as Saul is now called) sets out on his second missionary journey with Silas.
- **Paul and Silas strengthen the various churches they have already established. Acts 16–20:-** On Mars Hill in Athens, Paul preaches that "we are children of God" (Acts 17:29). Paul finishes his second mission and leaves on a third mission in Asia Minor. Paul decides to return to Jerusalem.
- **In Jerusalem, Paul is arrested and continues to testify of Jesus Christ. Acts 21–28:-** The Lord appears to Paul again. Several Jews plot to kill Paul. In Caesarea, he testifies before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. Paul is shipwrecked on his way to Rome. Paul preaches the gospel while under house arrest in Rome.

From Gospels to Epistles: The Beginning of Christian Historiography:-

The Book of Acts is also called the Book of Change. In the beginning, the four books of the New Testament were written based on the life of Jesus Christ, but the Book of Acts describes the transformation into epistles, meaning the method changed, yet the purpose and history continued to be written under the inspiration of God. "At first the followers of Jesus told each other about what happened to him. Paul wrote letters to several Christian communities that recalled aspects of his life. The earliest Christian historical writings are the accounts known as the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles that emerged out of and consolidated the recollections that people passed on after the death of Jesus. Christians ever since have looked to the Gospels as the source for their knowledge of Jesus and for his message of the coming of the kingdom of God. History came

to be seen as the repeated overcoming of the kingdom of darkness by God's kingdom of light. In the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Our father in heaven, holy be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."⁵

It is important to understand that the early Christians formed their views of history as part of living within the new community of the ekklesia, later called the church. Their views of history emerged as they engaged in their worship, read their scriptures, preached their sermons, produced their art, instructed their young, and uttered their confessions of faith in Jesus Christ. Over the centuries, it was largely through such tangible and close-to-home means that Christians taught, maintained, elaborated, revised, and unfolded their views of history into the wide variety of forms known in the history of Christianity. The writings on history by great thinkers such as Paul, Eusebius, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin and many sects of the Reformation era were affirmations of the Church's faith which emphasized the telling of the history of Jesus and the Christian version of world history. This gave rise to the Christian historiography.

(This chart provides information about apostles)

Matthew 10:2-4	Mark 3:16-19	Luke 6:12-16	Acts 1:13; 26
Peter Andrew James John	Peter James John Andrew	Peter Andrew James John	Peter John James Andrew
Philip Bartholomew Thomas Matthew	Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	Philip Bartholomew Matthew Thomas	Philip Thomas Bartholomew Matthew
James Thaddeus Simon the Zealot Judas Iscariot	James Thaddeus Simon the Zealot Judas Iscariot	James Simon the Zealot Judas the Son of James Judas Iscariot	James Simon the Zealot Judas - Son of James Matthias (vs. 26)

From Judaism to Christianity:-

As the number of non-Christians increased in Christianity, distinctions between Jews, Jewish Christians, and non-Jewish Christians began to emerge, and history started moving toward and witnessing the rise of Christianity. Jews practiced circumcision, but Christians were now uncircumcised. Jewish religious leaders strictly adhered to the law, while Christians followed the teachings and principles of Jesus Christ. Jews worshiped in the temple in Jerusalem and synagogues, while Christians began worshiping and preaching in open markets and homes, thus separating Christianity from Judaism and initiating a new spiritual era. Historian Rebecca I. Denova, in her book "The Origins of Christianity and the New Testament," writes "In the 1st century, Christians were essentially just one more sect of Judaism. A major turning point occurred when something unexpected happened. Gentiles (non-Jews) had often joined in synagogue activities and festivals in these cities. These individuals were designated as "God-fearers" in Acts; those who held respect for the God of Israel but continued to participate in their native cults. As the ancient synagogue in Israel and the diaspora was not a sacred space, there was no bar to their attendance, but synagogues did not actively recruit or seek to convert Gentiles. Some Gentiles would have a place in eschatological Israel (when the kingdom came), but not before that time. Scholars speculate that these Gentiles would have first heard the teachings of Jesus through their presence in synagogues. At the same time, non-God-fearing Gentiles began to show interest"⁶

Jewish Law and Gentile Law:-

In the early church we see that those who were Jewish Christians still kept their relations with the Gentile Christians according to their own traditions and customs and did not interact with the Gentiles. The Jewish Christians disagreed with the fact that it was possible for Gentiles to be followers of Christ without following the Law of Moses or being circumcised. Paul wrote letters to the Galatian churches he preached to and was trying to convince people that being a Christian is about "faith working through love" rather than circumcision. Paul writes "We must go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised" (Galatians 2:9). He goes on to write, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters, only faith working through love." (Galatians 5-

⁵ Macintyre.C.T, History: Christian perspective, www.encyclopedia.com/ access Date And Time:-10/08/2024/19:31-PM

⁶ Rebecca.I.Denova., The Separation of Christianity from Judaism, www.worldhistory.org/access Date And Time:-09/08/2024/11-00 AM

6). Since salvation is for the people of the whole world, there is no longer any Jew, Greek or Samaritan. The way of salvation has been opened for the whole human race.

The Great Commission:-

When Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, the disciples watched him go. At that time, they only had one thing the Great Commission because the Holy Spirit was yet to come. Jesus approached them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age. " (Gospel of Matthew 28:18-20). To fulfill this Great Commission, the help of the Holy Spirit was needed, which is why it is said in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 1, verse 8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. " The primary purpose of the disciples was now to spread the testimony of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

Structure of the Book of Acts						
Outline Acts 1.8	Witness in Jerusalem 1.1 6.7		To Judea/Samaria 6.8 9.31		Witness to all the Earth 9.32 28.31	
Major Sections	Founding Commissioning 1 Pentecost 2	Expansion Miracle 3-4 Fellowship 5-6	Stephen 6.8-8.1	Paul 9.1-31	Antioch 9.32-12.24	Aegean 16.6-19.20
			Philip 8.1-40	Asia Minor 12.25-16.5	Rome 19.21-28.31	
Focus	Jews		Samaritans Proselytes		Gentiles Antioch → Rome	
Key People	Jesus Apostles Spirit	Peter/John Barnabas	Stephen/Philip Saul		Paul Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke	
Dates	2 Years 33-35AD		13 Years 35-48AD		14 Years 48-62AD	

(The charts above detail the church's process of historical events in the Book of Acts)

The Book of Convincing Proofs:-

The Acts of the Apostles is a book that provides historical and convincing testimony of Jesus Christ, in which Jesus Christ himself gives evidence. Luke says, "Until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. " (Acts of the Apostles 1:2-3). Jesus Christ did not talk about forty days of fun with the disciples; these were serious and significant discussions about the kingdom that he taught them during those forty days.

The Beginning of the Work of the Holy Spirit:-

In the Greek language, the term "work" means "proxeias," which, when elaborated, refers to the history or biography of those who have worked through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus Christ had said, the disciples remained in Jerusalem, devoted to prayer until the Holy Spirit descended. Finally, on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God descended on about 120 people: "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. "7 The Jews who spoke in different languages heard the people of each language present, perceiving it as their own. This describes the historical importance of linguistics. This event seemed to declare that from now on, people of different languages and ethnicities would hear the gospel, including Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Jews, Cappadocians, Pontians, Asians, Phrygians, Egyptians, Libyans, Cretans, Arabs, and Pamphylions about fourteen languages. The history of Christianity was now revealed to people worldwide, led by the Spirit of God himself, who would open the door of salvation to the world in the name of Jesus.

⁷ Bible, Book of Acts, Chapter 2, Verses:1-4

The Twelve Apostles Once Again:-

With the absence of Judas Iscariot, a new apostle had to be chosen. The purpose of selecting the twelfth apostle was significant. It is written, *"Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."* (Acts:1:21-22). We see that the lot fell to Matthias, who was chosen as the twelfth apostle in place of Judas Iscariot (Acts:1:26). It was essential to become a historical witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I believe that the eleven disciples informed Matthias of the teachings Jesus imparted during those forty days after his resurrection, ensuring he became a historical witness to Jesus Christ's resurrection.

History Changes: The Repentance of the Jews:-

The history of Judaism was established two thousand years before the coming of Jesus Christ. There were numerous prophecies about Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, and the Jewish people awaited the Messiah for deliverance. However, when he came, the Jewish people did not recognize him. It is written, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him." (John 1:11). Even when Jesus was ascending to heaven, the disciples asked, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts:1:6). Their perspective on Jesus was political and materialistic, which is why they did not recognize him. When Peter preached, filled with the Holy Spirit, as described in Acts of the Apostles chapter 2, verses 14 to 41, the eyes of the Jewish people seemed to open. In conclusion, Peter said, *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."*⁸ In response, the reaction of the Jewish people was the result of the previous two thousand years: "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" This was the most significant event in Christianity after Jesus Christ's ascension.

The Structure of Christianity and the Church:-

We then see that after Peter's message, people began to repent, receiving baptism with water and the Holy Spirit. People started gathering, worshiping, praying, and reading the scriptures, and the domestic church began. Initially, three thousand, then five thousand, and thus the apostolic church grew. They began taking the Lord's Supper in their homes according to Jesus' teachings. Seven leaders were chosen to promote and oversee the church's growth. In this way, Christianity and the church's structure were established. (Acts:2:36-46).

The structure of the early church was based on six things:-

The Primacy of Christ:- The first church believed that God had done something unique through the person of Jesus Christ. Their absolute conviction was based in an unwavering insistence that God had raised Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection fuelled everything. They preached Christ, prayed to the God of Jesus Christ, believed that his resurrection proved He was the author of life, the Jewish Messiah, the judge of the living and the dead, the ruler of the nations and significantly that He was coming back. Their devotion to Christ was such that in Antioch his followers began to be called after the one they followed, Christians. (Acts 3:15; 4:12; 11:26)

Dependence on the Holy Spirit:- From the first sentence to the last paragraph the Holy Spirit's activity, influence, power & presence is unmistakable in Acts. It is like a gift received, a wind blowing, a jar being filled, a person being baptized, a fire coming down. Jesus baptises, sends, empowers, equips and prepares his people all through the work of the Holy Spirit. Being 'full of the Spirit' open doors for you (Acts 6:3-5, 7:55) but lying to the Holy Spirit can close the coffin lid. The early church was a church that depended on the Holy Spirit from first to last.

The call to repentance & baptism:- From the day of Pentecost, to the Ethiopian eunuch, to Ananias visiting Saul in Damascus, from the house of Cornelius, to Ephesus or Philippi – the message and accompanying sign was simple, powerful and straightforward: 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins'. (Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 8:22)

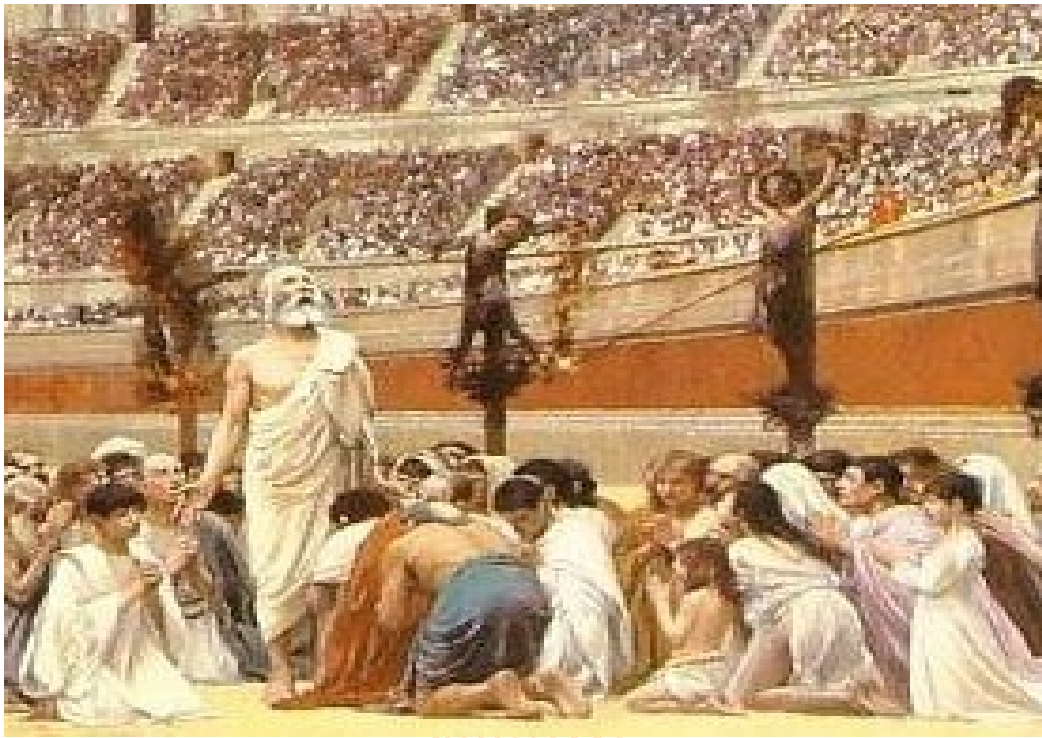
The centrality of breaking bread:- There aren't quite as many verses here but they are richly weighted. Acts 2:42-47 talks of how they were devoted to the breaking of bread (twice) in their homes and ate together. Breaking bread & eating together was central to the fellowship of believers. There is no stronger sign of the unity that the Jews & Gentiles had together than Peter eating with Cornelius & his household (Acts 11:3) for which he took a lot of heat. By the end (Acts 20:7) as Paul and his band are in Troas it says 'on the first day of

⁸ Bible, Book of Acts, Chapter 2, Verses-36

the week we came together to break bread. ' The early church ate together and broke bread together to remember who they were united, Christ, and who they were united with, each other.

A commitment to prayer:- Luke specifically says that the early church was devoted to prayer and you certainly see that throughout Acts. Peter & John went to the temple to pray (interesting), after their arrest they gather to pray, the apostles focused on prayer (Acts 6:4), we repeatedly find Peter praying, and when he is arrested the church is at prayer (Acts 12:12). Prayer accompanies everything they do, the visions, the missions, the healings, the preaching, the appointing of elders (Acts 14:23). Prayer, prayer and more prayer.

Care for the poor:- The first church was remarkably generous. Homes & possessions were shared, beggars healed, widows provided for, slaves seen & helped (Acts 16:18). They went so far as to be able to say 'there was no needy person among them' (Acts 4:34). This happened because from somewhere the believers found a radically new attitude towards their possessions and assets ('no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own'). This community of love & care certainly began to mark the church as different from the wider society in their care for the least, last and lost.



(The picture above shows the persecution of the first century church)

Persecution of Church Members and the Spread of the Gospel Worldwide:-

The work of Christianity was at its peak; the disciples of Jesus Christ had wholly dedicated themselves to Christ, and the church was growing. But soon, severe persecution fell upon the church members, and Stephen became the first Christian martyr in this persecution. It is written, "On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria."⁹ However, God used this persecution for the propagation of his kingdom, and the disciples began preaching the gospel worldwide. It is written, "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went." (Acts:- 8:4). The twelve apostles did not flee, and eventually, all apostles were martyred for the Lord,

⁹ Bible, Book of Acts, Chapter-8, Verses-1)

except John, who died on the island of Patmos after a long life in the Lord. The historian **Helmut Koester** writes, "Acts is the only biblical book that chronicles the history of the church immediately after Jesus's ascension. As such, it provides us with a valuable account of how the church was able to grow and spread out from Jerusalem into the rest of the Roman Empire. In only three decades, a small group of frightened believers in Jerusalem transformed into an empire-wide movement of people who had committed their lives to Jesus Christ, ending on a high note with Paul on the verge of taking the gospel to the highest government official in the land the Emperor of Rome."¹⁰ Looking ahead, then, From A. D. 30 to A. D. 311, a period in which 54 emperors ruled the

¹⁰ Koester Helmut, (1990) Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development , Harrisburg, Trinity Press International, pp-335

Empire, only about a dozen took the trouble to harass Christians. Furthermore, not until Decius (249–251) did any deliberately attempt an Empire-wide persecution. Until then, persecution came mainly at the instigation of local rulers, albeit with Rome's approval. Nonetheless, a few emperors did have direct and, for Christians, unpleasant dealings with this faith. Here are the most significant of those rulers.

Conclusion:-

The Book of Acts chronicles the foundation and rapid expansion of the early Christian church, emphasizing the role of key figures such as Peter and Paul in spreading the faith. The events of Pentecost marked a pivotal moment where the Holy Spirit empowered the apostles to preach the gospel, leading to the conversion of thousands and the establishment of Christian communities. Initially perceived as a sect of Judaism, Christianity gradually emerged as a distinct religion, marked by the inclusion of non-Jewish converts. This distinction led to theological and cultural shifts, where Christians began to separate themselves from Jewish customs and religious practices, leading to the formation of a new spiritual identity. Despite facing severe persecution from both Roman authorities and Jewish religious leaders, early Christians remained steadfast in their faith. The designation of Christianity as "Religio Illicita" by the Roman Empire and accusations of atheism due to Christians' refusal to worship Roman deities further fueled persecution. However, these challenges inadvertently contributed to the spread of Christianity as believers dispersed and shared their faith in new regions. The apostles played a crucial role in organizing the early church, establishing a structure based on shared faith, prayer, and communal living. The appointment of Matthias as the twelfth apostle highlights the importance of apostolic witness to Jesus' resurrection in maintaining the church's foundational teachings.

The transition from Judaism to Christianity involved significant theological shifts, such as the move away from adherence to Jewish law towards embracing the teachings of Jesus. Socially, Christianity emphasized inclusivity and the breaking down of ethnic and

cultural barriers, symbolized by the apostles' ability to speak in various tongues at Pentecost. The Great Commission given by Jesus to his disciples underscored the global mission of Christianity. The apostles' dedication to spreading the gospel "to the ends of the earth" laid the groundwork for Christianity's transformation into a world religion. The Book of Acts serves as a historical document that provides evidence of the early church's beliefs, practices, and growth. The testimonies of apostles and early Christian figures like Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria offer valuable insights into the foundational period of Christianity. The events of Pentecost and the spread of Christianity across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts highlight the adaptability and universality of the Christian message. The ability to communicate the gospel in multiple languages symbolized the breaking down of barriers and the inclusive nature of the Christian faith. These conclusions illustrate the dynamic and transformative nature of early Christianity as it navigated cultural, theological, and political challenges to establish itself as a major religious force in the ancient world.

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