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## PTABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page Numbers
Introduction	
Motivation and Purposes of the Study	1
 <u>Chapter 1</u>	
<b>A. An Old Testament perspective on the Church and Mission</b>	4
1. Interpreting the Old Testament	5
2. A Brief History of the Church	6
3. The Remnant Concept in the Old Testament	9
4. A Brief Survey of Mission from an Old Testament perspective	15
 <u>Chapter 2</u>	
<b>A. Towards an interpretation of Acts</b>	
1. Luke-Acts: One Volume	21
2. Understanding the Lukan view of History	22
3. Understanding narratives and speeches	23
4. The Question of Biblical Precedent	25
5. The Ministry of Stephen and the implications for Mission	28
6. The Jerusalem Council and the implications for Mission	30
7. The Movement of Luke's Writing	34
8. A Theological Framework for Church Growth	38
a. The Mission of Christ	39
b. The Kingdom of God	41

Chapter 3

<b>A. Definition of Church Growth</b>	
1. Textual Evidence and Definition	44
<b>B. Missiological Guidelines for Church Growth</b>	48

Chapter 4

<b>A. Missiological and Practical Guidelines for the Church</b>	79
<b>B. Conclusion</b>	108
<b>Bibliography</b>	112

## INTRODUCTION

### **Motivation and Purposes of the Study**

A lack of church growth in the first church I served prompted my study of the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts is critical to understanding the history and mission of the Christian church. If the book of Acts were not written we would know nothing of the earliest days of the Christian movement (Longenecker, 1981:207). Without the book of Acts it would be difficult to make sense of the New Testament. The gospels end with the resurrection and ascension of Christ while the Pauline epistles are largely doctrinal in nature.

As is evidenced there would be misunderstanding, questions and incoherency. The book of Acts explains Christian beginnings and provides a bridge between the gospels and the epistles. The book of Acts documents the growth of the church which is the focus of this thesis and one of the central features of the book. *The purpose of this thesis is to provide a possible theological framework for the growth of the Church and to draw from the text possible principles for this growth with relevant missiological and practical guidelines.*

From a small group of believers numbering one hundred and twenty in Acts 1 to growth of three thousand in Acts 2 and continued growth chapter by chapter. Humanly speaking the church had nothing going for it. It had no large sums of money, no proven leaders and no technological tools for propagating the gospel. The early believers faced enormous obstacles in the opposition from traditional Judaism, which resulted in persecution. Yet as Luke records it's growth in his document we find the gospel moving from Jerusalem to Rome all in one generation (Boice, 1997:10).

What was it that contributed to the growth in the church? A cursory answer may be the Holy Spirit but upon further investigation one may find other factors that contributed to this. These factors will be investigated. Other questions that need to be raised include whether there are paradigms we can draw from Acts that are still applicable today. How are we to interpret and apply certain principles and practices? Is what occurred then normal Christianity? This thesis will attempt to answer these and other questions.

This thesis will only focus on those chapters in Acts that are relevant to Church Growth. Luke lays the foundation for Christian mission in Acts with the departing words of Christ in Acts 1:6, 8. The fulfillment of the words of Christ came with the Pentecost event and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. This chapter is foundational to understanding much of what follows in the book of Acts. Here Luke documents the first Christian sermon and the very first response of the people. He focuses on the first Christian community in Acts 2:42-47 and what characterized them.

Luke addresses the common theme of resistance to the evangelistic ministry of the disciples in Acts 4. This theme of persecution recurs in chapter 5 with the imprisonment of Peter and John, continues in chapter 7 with the stoning of Stephen and the persecution that follows in chapter 8. In the midst of this persecution Luke chronicles the expansion of the early church from its Jerusalem boundaries to Samaria and the proclamation of the gospel there. In chapter 8 he also focuses on the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch and then the conversion of Saul, who will be the primary apostle to the Gentiles. In Acts 10 Luke discusses the conversion of Cornelius and his family. These people constitute the first fruits of a greater Gentile conversion.

Paul's first missionary journey is recorded in Acts 13:1-14:28. It is Barnabas, the Encourager, who assists Paul in this first mission. Churches are established in Asia Minor. The second missionary journey is recorded in Acts 15:36-18:22. On this occasion Paul is accompanied by Silas, Timothy and Luke.

Paul receives a vision of a man in Macedonia and also preaches in Athens. Acts 16 records the conversion of the Philippian jailer and Paul writes 1 and 2 Thessalonians. His third missionary journey is written in Acts 18:23-21:17 and on this trip Paul is joined by Luke, Timothy and others according to Acts 20:4 (Nichol, 1980:115, 117). I will focus on Paul's church planting strategy as I examine his missionary endeavors.

However, before I can focus on the book of Acts I need to address the subject of when exactly did the church begin. In this regard I will examine the redemptive purposes of God in the Old Testament and attempt to develop the notion of church from the Old Testament. I will also discuss the relationship between Israel and the church in the light of God's redemptive plan. This will form the first chapter of this thesis.

The second chapter of this thesis will attempt to articulate an appropriate interpretation of Acts. The central question here will be the one of biblical precedent. Is what happened in Acts to be considered "normal Christianity?" What is the general movement and flow of Luke's writing and the main features of his document? I will also examine the impact of Stephen's ministry and death and the Jerusalem council, in particular as it relates to Church Growth. I will also attempt to develop a theological framework from my study of the text itself. Here I will discuss the mission of Christ from a Lukan perspective and how this interrelates with the mission of the church.

In the third chapter I will attempt a definition of Church Growth and develop possible Church Growth principles that emerge from the text of Acts. Exegesis and exposition will be given of relevant passages that will give validity to the claims of this thesis as they relate to the subject of Church Growth.

Chapter four will discuss possible missiological and practical ministry guidelines and how these apply to the growth of the local church. I will also share my concluding statements and the unique contribution of this thesis to Church Growth.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **A. AN OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE ON THE CHURCH AND MISSION:**

I hold the view that “the church is not an interruption of God’s plan with Israel, but the divine realization of the eschatological remnant of Israel (La Rondelle, 1997:7). The aim of this chapter is to prove and verify why I hold to this view and to determine the beginnings of the church in the Old Testament. I will firstly present a brief Christocentric approach to interpreting the Old Testament. Secondly, I will develop the notion of “qahal” from the Old Testament and show the theological links between this notion and the one of “ekklesia” in the New Testament. Thirdly, I will discuss the concept of remnant and show how this concept runs through both the Old and New Testaments. In concluding this chapter I will attempt a brief exposition of Romans 11 to clarify the role of the Gentiles in the purposes of God as revealed in the Scriptures.

### 1. Interpreting the Old Testament:

On the road to Emmaus Christ spoke to the two disciples who were filled with doubt and uncertainty. “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in *all* the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27; emphasis added). After this time of study the disciples responded by saying that their hearts burned within them as Christ “opened the Scriptures to us” (Luke 24:32).

Christ “opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). From this we can conclude that Christ is the Center of the Old Testament and it’s Divine Interpreter (La Rondelle, 1983:5). He has the ability to open minds as well as to open the Scriptures. Christ saw Himself as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures and interpreted the Old Testament in that light. As the Messiah, Christ recapitulated, that is – He repeated and consummated – God’s plan with Israel. He purposefully went over the same ground as Israel in order to conquer where Israel had failed. After His baptism Christ was immediately led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (see Matt.4:1, Luke 4:1). Paul sees Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea as a kind of “baptism” (see 1 Cor.10: 2), after which God tested Israel for forty years in the wilderness before they entered the Promised Land (see Deut.8: 2). In the same manner Christ was tempted by the devil for forty days before beginning His mission. In fasting Christ reenacted the experience of Israel for exactly forty days manifesting complete obedience to the will of God. In the three temptations that Christ faced (see Matt.4:4, 7, 10) He quoted exclusively from Deuteronomy (see 6:13, 16; 8:3). Why didn’t Christ quote from other Scriptures? It is clear that Christ saw Himself as the New Israel.



Christ saw Himself as going through the same test that Israel went through, but while Israel failed, Christ triumphed. The New Testament sees “Christ incorporating the Israel of God as a whole and bringing the essential fulfillment of Israel’s history and prophecy in His own life” (La Rondelle, 64, 65). Not only did Christ interpret the Old Testament from a Messianic perspective but so did the writers of the New Testament. Paul sums up the whole Messianic hope in the following words:

“And now it is because of my hope in what God has *promised* our fathers that I am in trial today. This is the *promise* our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night” (Acts 26:6, 7). “We tell you the good news: What God has *promised* our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus” (Acts 13:32, 33, emphasis added). This “Messianic promise is the central focus of all God’s covenants with man from the beginning and relates to all divine predictions in the Old Testament.” “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). The key to the Old Testament is Christ as revealed in the New Testament (La Rondelle, 18, 19).

## 2. A Brief History of the Church:

This thesis is an attempt to understand the development and growth of the church, with particular reference to the book of Acts. However I need to ascertain when exactly did the church begin. In determining this I will examine the function of the Hebrew word “qahal” in the Old Testament. This is an important word that demonstrates the connection and continuity of the church in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In the Old Testament “qahal” is an assembly or gathering of Israel. At first this word had no religious connotation, in fact in Numbers 22:4 it means a “horde” of people. It was only from the Exile onwards that the word “qahal” took on a distinctly religious connotation (Metzger, 1962:1). It refers specifically to an assembly of Israelites gathered to hear God’s law and to worship Him (2 Chron.20:5; Ezra 10:12; Neh.5:13).

The word “qahal” functions in at least two ways. It refers firstly to “Qahal Yahweh” or the assembly of the Lord (see Num16:3; Deut.23:1-3, 8; 1 Chron.28:8; Neh 13:1; Mic.2:5). In this context it refers to the Lord as the originator and initiator of the covenant relationship with Israel. It refers secondly to “Qahal Israel” or the assembly of Israel. In this context it speaks of Israel as the chosen of God to reveal His purposes to the nations (see Ex.12:6; Lev.16:17; Num.14:5; Deut.31:30; Josh.8:35; 1 Chron.13:2; 2 Chron.6:3) (Dunn, 1998: 537). Having established the notion of “qahal” in the Old Testament I will now set out to show the connection between this word and the New Testament word “ekklesia.”

From the Scriptural evidence in Acts the church began with the calling of Abram. In Acts 7:38 Stephen states that Moses “was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, and he received living words to pass on to us.” The Greek word for assembly is “ekklesia.” This is a key word in understanding the meaning of the church in the New Testament and here it is used in connection with Israel. Abram was the progenitor of the nation of Israel and so it would be natural to conclude that the church as the “ekklesia” began with his call from God. I believe this is so when one examines the meaning of “ekklesia.”

The word “ekklesia” is taken from “kaleo” meaning “to call” and “ek” meaning “out from.” The verb would then be “to call out from” and the noun form would be “the called out ones.” According to Peters the New Testament has more the meaning of “called unto” (Peters, 1972:200). While Abram was then called out of idolatry, he was also called “unto” Yahweh, the Creator of heaven and earth, in faith and obedience. The call of Abram is therefore a call for a people to enter into covenant with God, to become His people. “Furthermore, “ekklesia” is a biblical term designating Israel as the congregation or assembly of Yahweh, rendering the Hebrew word “qahal” (see Deut.5:22; Ps.22:22; 107:32)(Ladd, 1974: 107). The textual evidence supports the understanding of this thesis that the church began from the time of Abraham and that Israel and the church must be seen in continuity in the purposes of God.

Longenecker points out that the word “church” takes on different meanings in Scripture. If we are to take it to mean an “instrument of service” used by God for his redemptive purposes, then the church was in existence before Pentecost (Longenecker, 271). This is so because God’s redemptive purpose is expressed in both the Old and New Testament. God called Abraham for the set purpose of making him a light to the surrounding nations to the truth of God (see Gen.12:1-3). I agree with Stott, when he says that the church did not begin on the Day of Pentecost, but goes back at least 4000 years, from the writing of Acts, to the time of Abraham (Stott, 1990: 81). Abraham was the Father of Israel and so the call was also extended to them. His name changed from Abram to Abraham when God ratified His covenant relationship with him in Genesis 17:5. With the call of Abraham, God set in motion a definite plan for bringing the Messiah into the world and for presenting the gospel to all nations.

In Abraham God found a man ready to yield unqualified obedience to God's will (see Gen.26: 5; Heb.11:8) and to cultivate a similar spirit in his posterity (see Gen.18:19). God entered into solemn covenant with Abraham (see Gen.15: 8; 17:2-7) and he became in a special sense the "friend of God" (see James 2: 23). In a similar manner God entered into covenant relationship with Israel at Mt. Sinai (see Exod.19:1-8; Deut.7:6-14) (Nichol, 26). Israel was to be God's covenant people, witnessing to his love and justice to the nations (see Isaiah 43:10). Their task was a missionary one, to witness in their life and practice to Yahweh as the only God. However, Israel had repeatedly rejected the messages of the prophets and the distinct call of God.

### 3. The Remnant Concept in the Old Testament:

There was a remnant in Israel that remained loyal to the commands of God and obeyed God especially during times of national crises. In the midst of various calamities that came upon Israel as a result of disobedience to the injunctions of God, there was always a faithful remnant, which constituted the true people of God. In some cases God postponed punishment and destruction for the sake of the remnant, while in other cases God would continue His redemptive activity through the remnant (see Isa.1:9; Zeph.2:3). This concept of the remnant points out a twofold aspect of the church: the true and the apostate. The struggles of Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau reflect contrasting religious attitudes in the history of Israel and Christianity.

In the story of Joseph one finds the notion of remnant renewed (Gen.45: 4, 7). When we come to the kingdom of Israel there is a reference to the remnant in the ninth century story of Elijah who spoke to King Ahab about impending judgment.

In his discouragement Elijah said to the Lord: "I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Kings 19:14). But God told him that a remnant was still left (see 1 Kings 19:18). The prophets Amos, Micah and Isaiah who predicted and proclaimed an imminent judgment, pointed to the remnant as survivors (see Amos 5:15, Micah 2:12). After the return of some Jews from Babylonian captivity in the fifth century before Christ Nehemiah speaks of the remnant who have survived the captivity (see Neh.1:2, 3).

A significant part of the history of Israel is a history of the remnant, who remain loyal to the covenant of God (Olsen, 1990: 12, 13, 15). My discussion of this notion of the remnant is by no means exhaustive. I have only wanted to demonstrate and prove that it is this theological motif that moves through the Old Testament and eventually into the New Testament and will provide an example of the theological links between Israel and the church.

By the time of Christ the nation was steeped in ritual and formalism. The coming of the Messiah was to be the final test for Israel in relation to the covenant of God. Christ was to be a "stumbling stone" and the "rock that makes them fall." (see Romans 9: 32, 33; 1 Peter 2:8). And so in his ministry Christ continually called Israel to repentance, to receive him and the blessings of fellowship with God (see Matthew 12:30, 18:20, 23:37). Christ's final decision regarding the Jewish nation came at the end of his ministry: "I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit" (Matthew 21:43).

On this basis and the Biblical evidence that will follow, Israel would no longer be God's covenant people. Which people did Christ have in mind "that will produce kingdom fruit?" The new people Christ had in mind would comprise individual Jews and individual Gentiles, making up the new Israel – the Body of Christ, the church. "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness ..." (Luke 13:28, 29).

Hence as I already stated, "the church is not an interruption of God's plan with Israel but the divine realization of the eschatological remnant of Israel (La Rondelle, 7). In agreement with La Rondelle, Bruce states "the new believing community was in fact the faithful remnant of the old Israel and at the same time the nucleus of the new Israel – the Christian church" (Bruce, 1977: 79). The disciples constitute the faithful remnant in the New Testament. In Christ choosing twelve disciples it pointed, in a symbolic sense, to a continuation of the twelve tribes of Israel. Christ informs them that they will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (see Luke 22:30; Matthew 19:28). Did Christ however, make explicit reference to the remnant concept? Christ once refers to the "little flock" (see Luke 12:32), which is according to Ladd an express reference to the Old Testament concept of Israel as the sheep of God's pasture. The disciples now embodied this faithful remnant (Ladd, 106, 107).

The notion of the remnant of Israel forming the nucleus of the Christian church, demonstrates what I call the "continuity/discontinuity paradigm" that exists with Israel. This continuity is seen in Romans 11 where Paul asks if God has rejected Israel and he responds, "by no means" (see Rom.11:1).

He further states that “at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace” (Rom.11:5). Paul maintains his position that God’s covenant promises have not failed by returning to this remnant motif from the prophets. “It is not as though God’s word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (Rom.9:6). Here he continues the Old Testament distinction of spiritual Israel within the nation Israel (La Rondelle, 129).

The continuity with Israel is seen in the olive tree that Paul uses to symbolize Israel. Perhaps Paul had borrowed this imagery from the Old Testament where Israel is pictured as an olive tree (see Jer.11:16; Hos.14:6) (Nichol, 607). The use of the olive tree is instructive in developing a clear theology of the relationship between Israel and the Gentiles.

First, Paul only uses one tree throughout this imagery. The Gentile branches that are grafted into the tree do not have a separate form of growth but “share in the nourishing sap from the olive root” (Rom.11:17). Second, he starts from a basic distinction – Israel as the olive tree and the Gentiles as the wild olive tree. Again, he states that the Gentiles only flourish because they are supported by the olive root (see Rom.11:18). Third, the main thrust of the allegory is to warn Gentile Christians against assuming that the roles have been reversed. While the Gentiles may say that the branches were broken off, Paul warns that in like manner God can also break them off (see Rom.11:21). In any case the line of dependence of all the branches is still the historic roots (Rom.11:18). Fourthly, the Gentile grafting in is by faith. The natural branches were broken off through unbelief. In a similar vein, unbelieving Gentiles can also be broken off again and new believing natural branches could be and will be re-engrafted (see Rom. 11:23, 24).

Fifth, behind the whole process stands God. It is God who did not spare the natural branches (11:19-21) and it is God who grafted in the branches of the wild olive “contrary to nature” (11:24). So to it is God who may not spare the Gentile branches (11:21) and it is God who is able to graft in the former branches once again (11:23) (Dunn, 525).

This is not a detailed exposition of Romans 11. I have sought to highlight only the centrality of Israel in God’s plans and the continuity that exists between Israel and the church.

The continuity with Israel and the church is seen in the imagery and concepts that run in the Old and New Testaments. An example is in the Old Testament relationship between Yahweh and Israel that is often depicted as a relationship between a husband and his wife (see Isa.54:5; Hos.1-3). In harmony with this imagery Christ referred to Himself as the Bridegroom and the circle of His disciples as the Messianic bride (see Mark2:18 ff; John 3:29). Paul uses the same metaphor of marriage in referring to a local church (see 2 Cor.11: 2) and to individual Christians (see Rom. 7:1-4).

This continuity is further seen in that Israel is in some sense present in the church in the New Testament. The many names that are applied to Israel are applied to the church. Examples are where the church is referred to as Israel (see Gal.6:16; Eph.2:12), where the church is called the chosen people of God and a royal priesthood (see 1 Pet.2:9), a term specifically applied to Israel.

Hints at the failure of the Jewish nation to fulfill its calling are given in the parables of Jesus and represent the discontinuity part of the paradigm I am proposing.



Using the Old Testament imagery, which likened Israel to a vineyard or a fig tree, Christ indicates that Israel is to be given one more opportunity of bringing forth fruit, but if it fails to do so, it is to be destroyed (see Luke 13:6-9). In the parable of the vineyard (see Mark 12:1-9), it is suggested that, because of the Jewish rejection of Jesus, the owner (God) will give the vineyard (His possession) to others. The strange story of Christ cursing the barren, though verdant fig tree (see Mark 11:13, 14, 20, 21) is of parabolic significance; Israel, though outwardly flourishing and pretentious, disappointed Him by not bearing fruit (Metzger, 2).

The discontinuity with Israel and the church is further seen in the fact that the church in the New Testament is the eschatological Israel, incorporated in Christ the Messiah and as such is a progression beyond historical Israel. What was promised to Israel is fulfilled in the church.

My point here is to demonstrate that the church is a continuation of God's plan with Israel and had therefore already begun in the time of Abraham. In terms of God's redemptive purpose what emerged in Acts 2 was a new relationship between the Holy Spirit and God's people; with the doing, dying and rising of Christ, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as a confirmation of the sacrifice of Christ, this same Spirit granting power for ministry and mission and the accomplishment of God's original purpose as taught, commanded and exemplified through the ministry of Christ and as outlined in the Old Testament. In this regard, Pentecost was the "birthday of the church" in that God had now constituted a new body – the Body of Christ - to continue the mission originally assigned to Israel (Longenecker, 271).

#### 4. A Brief Survey of Mission from an Old Testament Perspective:

There is the danger of seeing mission in the Old Testament as centripetal, meaning “to draw in” – and mission in the New Testament as centrifugal, meaning “to cast out.” This view sees a fundamental difference in approach in how God would deal with humanity. This view would hold that God’s plan in the Old Testament was to give the message of salvation exclusively to the Jews. It would argue that it was God’s plan for people to observe how well organized and progressive Israel was and then they would make a trip to Jerusalem to see all these good things and so be exposed to the God of Israel (see Deut.4: 5- 8). Appeal is made to the Queen of Sheba who made the trip to Israel because she “heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the name of the Lord (see 1 Kings 10).

While there is biblical evidence to support this view, I do not believe that this is the overarching theme of the Old Testament. I will present biblical evidence to show that mission in the Old Testament must be seen with no distinction between the two approaches. Rather we must recognize that the two aspects are part of the one active movement of the Triune God towards the coming of the kingdom of God (Pretorius, 1987:19). I will also demonstrate that God’s plan included all the nations of the earth from the beginnings of the Biblical Record.

I would now like to present four principles that will bring clarity to our understanding of mission from an Old Testament perspective and once again demonstrate the continuation of God’s missionary plans in both the Old and New Testaments.

Firstly, mission is the “divine activity of sending intermediaries whether supernatural or human to speak or do God’s will so that God’s purposes for judgment or redemption are furthered” (Larkin and Williams, 1996: 534). In the Old Testament it is God who is always commissioning and sending. Kaiser points out that it is this word “sending” that lexically links the Old Testament with the New Testament. The Hebrew word for “to send” is found over eight hundred times. Over two hundred times God is the subject of the verb in the Old Testament. The Greek New Testament word for “to send” is the word used to translate three-fourths of passages in the Greek Septuagint where God is the subject of this verb (Kaiser, 2000:11, 12). It is thus clear that God is the originator and initiator of mission. Hence we call mission the *missio Dei* – meaning the mission of God. This mission actually has origins in the Creation event. For the mission of the church to be effective and realistic one must realize that God is the Creator of the earth and all that live on it. This fact distinguished Israel from other religions, for while they worshipped gods that symbolized parts of creation, Israel worshipped the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Pretorius, 12).

Secondly, the Old Testament begins and continues in the context of God’s concern for the nations. Rather than being Israel orientated, Genesis 1 – 11 begins with the first couple, Adam and Eve, and moves on until the table of nations mentioned in Genesis 10. There is no mention of Jews or a reference to any culture (Dybdahl, 1997: 29). It may be helpful to differentiate between Israel and Jews at this stage. The term Jew is a geographical and ethnic identifier. “Ioudaioi,” or Jews, are the people who live or come from “Ioudaia,” or Judea.

As an identifier it lends itself to distinguishing Jews from other people groups. Israel, on the other hand, indicates a self-understanding, a covenant understanding. It is the understanding of a people who identify themselves as chosen by God, descendants of the patriarch Jacob (Dunn, 505, 506). Neither of these terms are mentioned in Genesis 1 – 11. At the end of the eleven chapters we find the earth filled with people and different nations. This is a result of the blessing of God. In fact, after each of the crises in Genesis – namely the Fall of humankind, the universal Flood and the Tower of Babel incident – God pronounces a word of blessing (see Gen.3:15, 9:27, 12:1-3). God's concern for the nations is not just evident in Genesis but in fact in all of the Old Testament. Large segments of the prophetic books of the Old Testament contain messages to the surrounding nations (see Isaiah 13 – 23, Jeremiah 46 –52, Ezekiel 25 – 32 and Amos 1 – 2). While these are messages of impending judgment, so was the message of Jonah that brought deliverance to Nineveh. "These same threats of divine judgment were wakeup calls from the prophets to turn to the Sovereign God of all nations" (Kaiser, 12).

In this regard the nations are judged on a totally different basis than Israel. Israel's judgment is for apostasy, spiritual adultery and abandoning the Torah. Contrastingly, the nations are judged against cruelty and injustice. While the basis of judgment is different, God's desired outcome is for the salvation of both Israel and the surrounding nations. Yahweh was also able to use Israel's captivity and dispersion for His greater purpose – that of the salvation of all the nations (Dybdahl, 46).

Daniel and the testimony of his friends while in Babylonian captivity and the slave girl, who told Naaman of the prophet Elisha, are examples of God using faithful individuals for His salvific purposes (see Daniel 1-3, 2 Kings 5: 1-15). Through these diaspora the word of God would eventually be disseminated to all the nations.

Thirdly, the Servant as mentioned in Isaiah 42 and 49 is especially mentioned as related to the nations. I would like to examine relevant texts of Scripture and develop my argument from that basis:

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I have put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations” (Isa.42:1).

“I, the Lord (Yahweh), have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the peoples and a light for the Gentiles” (Isa.42:6).

“It is too small for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that they may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa.49:6).

These texts raise a number of questions. Who is the Servant? What was the judgment or justice that this Servant was to bring? What does it mean to be a “light” to the Gentiles?

Kaiser points out that the singular form of servant is found in Isaiah 40-53 and the plural form is found in Isaiah 54-66. This demonstrates that the servant is to be seen in both an individual and corporate sense.

The servant refers to the whole nation in the following texts (see 41:8-10; 43:8-13; 44:6-8; 45:13), while the four great servant songs in Isaiah all present the servant as an individual who ministers to Israel (see Isa.42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). Historically the servant would refer to Isaiah himself. From an eschatological point of view the servant is Christ, the Messiah, who was promised in the Abrahamic and Davidic line that finally eventuates as the new David, who is also known as the Seed, God's Chosen One. But the servant is no less the nation Israel as well, an indissoluble reality in the promises and plans of Yahweh.

The servant was to bring "justice to the nations." The Hebrew word for "justice" has a judicial meaning. The same Hebrew word is used in 2 Kings 17:26 and Jeremiah 5:4 where it refers to the practice and manner of serving Yahweh. This task of bringing justice to the nations could only be accomplished through the Spirit, indicating that it would be a spiritual task (Kaiser, 56-58).

Clearly then, Christ is the Servant in the New Testament who ministers primarily to Israel. The fact that the Servant ministered to Israel is seen in the church also ministering to Jews first. The church is to continue the ministry of Christ. The task of becoming a light to the Gentiles was assigned to the disciples and through the Spirit they would accomplish their task.

Fourthly, the example of missionary endeavors supports this thesis' position that mission can also be viewed as centrifugal in the Old Testament. The entire book of Jonah validates my claim to this perspective. I will briefly go over the message, highlighting the valid points.

In chapter 1 Jonah receives the command to go to Nineveh. It is interesting that Jonah was sent to Nineveh when there was apostasy in Israel at that time. Why would God send Jonah on a mission to Nineveh when His own people were in need of counsel and correction? The answer lies in the fact that this special work being done by Jonah was a revelation of the mind of God to Israel. The people of Nineveh were of equal if not greater concern to God because they did not have the light and truth that Israel were blessed to have. Nineveh, in spite of not having the revelation that Israel was privileged with, responded in repentance to the message of Jonah. It was on this same point that Christ declared that the people of Nineveh would rise up in the judgment and condemn those who had greater access to the truth and evidence for the gospel (Kaiser, 70, 71). The Septuagint translation of Jonah uses the word “porettomai” in 1:2, 3 and again in 3:2, 3, the very same verb used by Jesus in His commission in Matthew 28. Jonah was to go to Nineveh, a wicked and brutal city.

Even though Jonah attempted to abnegate his duty, he ended up in the belly of a large fish and God still spared his life. He could not escape God’s missionary mandate. He is saved from the belly of the fish and is unwittingly the recipient of God’s mercy. After Jonah’s re-commissioning and the subsequent proclamation that followed, the entire city repented. Verkuyl points out that God spares and rescues. “Jerusalem’s God is also Nineveh’s God” (Winter, Hawthorne, 1992: 54, 57).

Beyond the book of Jonah there is the slave girl in 2 Kings 5 who witnessed to Naaman and the result was his conversion after being healed by God’s prophet. Jesus also understood the Old Testament as a missionary book when He challenged the disciples to go in His name to all the nations (see Luke 24:44-47).

## CHAPTER 2

### A. TOWARDS AN INTERPRETATION OF ACTS:

#### 1. Luke – Acts: One Volume

To gain a proper understanding of Acts one must recognize that the book is the second part of a two – volume work. There are certain literary, word usage and theological and connections one can establish between Luke and Acts.

One literary connection is between the unfolding of the mission of Christ and the mission of the Church. Christ's ministry unfolds from Galilee (Luke 4:14-9:50) and then his journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:40) and finally the events leading up to His passion in Jerusalem (Luke 19:40 to the end of his gospel). In Acts the Church's ministry unfolds according to the pattern of Acts 1:8, which in turn follows the pattern of Christ's ministry (Bosch, 1990:190).

This has led to Stott to conclude that the “contrasting parallels Luke draws between his two volumes was not between Christ and His church, but between two stages of the ministry of the same Christ” (Stott, 32).

A second literary connection is found in the preface the gospel and Acts. A number of scholars recognize that Luke's preface for his gospel was actually for both his volumes as this was the custom in antiquity (Bruce, 11; Stott, 22; MacArthur, 1994:3). Hence Luke 1:1-4 is the real preface for the Acts as well. In these verses he delineates five successive stages. “Things that have been fulfilled among us” are seen as historical events that took place in the light of Old Testament prophecy. Secondly, Luke refers to “those who from the beginning were eyewitness and servants of the Word.” He does not name the individual, but apparently he is speaking of the apostles.



The third stage was Luke's personal research. This is so because the text states that he looked into "everything from the beginning." Fourthly, Luke called his two volume work an "orderly account." Lastly, he informed Theophilus, the person he addressed his work to, that he could know with certainty those things he had been taught. From this I conclude that Luke developed accountability in the process of documenting his two volume work.

Luke, being a doctor, used similar words for healing and salvation in both his gospel and Acts. His observations are instinctively medical and add credibility to his writing (Stott, 22; see Luke 4:35, 9:38, 18:25; Acts 3:7, 8:7, 9:33). While his selection of words and writings style indicate a unity between his gospel and Acts, so does his theological preference.

Christ begins His ministry full of the Spirit (see Luke 4:1) and so does the church (see Acts 2:1-4). Christ is continually filled with the Spirit (see Luke 4:18) and so are the disciples in Acts (see Acts 4:18). Christ is continually in prayer (see Luke 5:16, 11:1) and so are the disciples (see Acts 1: 12, 4: 24). These are just a few of the examples of the theological unity between Luke's gospel and Acts.

## 2. Understanding the Lukan view of History:

While Luke wrote reliable history I believe that it was nonetheless selective. What guided Luke in his selectivity is his theological preference. An example is seen in Acts 14:21 where in the ministry at Derbe a large number become disciples of Christ, while there is only a single line about Paul's ministry there.

Contrastingly, the ministry in Athens yields a small harvest of converts according to Acts 17:34, but yet it contains nineteen verses (see Acts 17:16-34). This suggests that Luke was not governed by earthly measures of success but chose his material on the grounds of what he wanted to communicate. Fernando calls this approach “theological history” – a narrative of interrelated events from a given place and time, chosen to communicate theological truths. This view, which I endorse, sees God acting in the arena of history accomplishing His set purpose (Fernando, 23).

### 3. Understanding Narratives and Speeches:

This now leads me to another consideration, that of interpreting narratives, which Acts clearly is. Fee and Stuart have been helpful in this regard. They contend that all narratives must be seen on three levels.

The top level is the overall plan of redemption, the whole biblical message. Reference is made to the words of Christ in John 5:27-29, where Christ said the Scriptures “bear witness to me.” He was not talking about every passage of Scripture, but rather about the overall message, the top level, in which His atonement was the central act and the final consummation of His redemptive plan. Hence Christ taught that the Scriptures in their entirety bear witness to Him and focus toward His loving Lordship.

The middle level in terms of the Old Testament would focus on Israel. In the New Testament, it would be the church. Specifically, the middle level would be the book of Acts, which records the rise of the early community of believer, the growth that took place in converts from Judaism and the spread of the gospel, with the ensuing rejection and opposition that followed.

All these features would be regarded as the middle level. The bottom level would be those individual stories that make up the writing of Acts. This approach harmonizes with my earlier conclusions that Luke was selective in writing his material. Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, only included what he thought was important for his readers. This approach would see “the Holy Spirit as the ultimate hero in the book. Narratives then demonstrate God’s involvement in the world and illustrate His principles and calling” (Fee and Stuart, 1982:74, 79, 80).

A prominent feature of narratives is speeches. If one collectively assesses the speeches of Acts one can conclude that twenty five percent of Acts is made of speeches. It is necessary then that I mention a few brief comments on this matter.

Firstly, most scholars readily conclude that Luke did not quote verbatim everything that a speaker said. In Acts 2:40 Luke states that Peter exhorted the people “with many other words.” While this is so there is one main objection that has been raised. The objection is that the same literary style is used by Luke in both his gospel and Acts and that the speeches contain the same shape, theological bias and Old Testament references. The natural conclusion of this sameness is that it all comes from the thinking of Luke. This argument can be nullified with the following reasons.

Firstly, Luke claimed to have carefully researched his material in his preface and that his writing included both words and deeds. Secondly, Luke has shown his conscientiousness in the writing of his gospel. Here he uses his primary reference, i.e Mark, with care and reliability. One can conclude that the same care would be used in his writing of Acts. Thirdly, Luke actually heard a number of Paul’s speeches in person (Stott, 69, 70).

These three arguments demonstrate the historicity of the speeches of Acts. The Holy Spirit guided Luke in highlighting the essence of the speeches and we can recognize them as faithful records of the primitive community of believers.

#### 4. The Question of Biblical Precedent:

Is what took place in Acts normative for the church at all times? Are we to sell our possessions? Should we throw lots to elect people to church office? Should we expect to see fire on people's heads in a church meeting? What happened in the early community does not necessarily function as the norm for practice and experience in the contemporary church.

This is so because "unless Scripture explicitly tells us to do something, what is only narrated does not function in a normative way – unless it can be proved that the author intended for it to function in this way" (Fee and Stuart, 106). What is normative in Acts is therefore what Luke explicitly and intentionally wanted to teach. However, in the belief that "all Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16) one can ascertain practical truth for Christian life and practice from those passages that may have been incidental to the author's primary intent.

An example is found in Acts 8. In this chapter we find the mantle of leadership now passes to Philip, who begins the Gentile mission. The focus of Luke's thinking is now no longer Jerusalem, but the movement of the gospel in accordance with the missionary enterprise as outlined by Christ. It was bold of Philip to begin his ministry in Samaria, for there had been deep-seated hostility between Jews and Samaritans that had lasted at least a thousand years.

Philip would also have been more readily accepted among the Samaritans than any of the other disciples. Being a Hellenist he also had experienced to some degree the kind of alienation the Samaritans had experienced and so could identify with them. Philip's preaching was accompanied by miracles that served to confirm the gospel of the kingdom he preached (see Acts 8:6). There was great joy because of the spiritual and physical deliverance that took place there. In verses 14 to 16 Luke reports that Peter and John came to verify that the Samaritans had accepted the word of the Lord. They laid hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

What is significant about this passage is that Luke tells us that while they had been baptized into Christ they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. The question one must raise is whether it is God's normal purpose that the reception of the Spirit is a second experience subsequent to conversion and baptism?

This was an unusual experience, which God may allow to take place again because of His sovereign will, but which I maintain is not the norm for Christian life and practice. The following reasons will substantiate my view.

Firstly, what happened in Samaria is contrary to the plain teaching of the rest of Scripture. One must interpret difficult passages of Scripture by examining easier texts of Scripture on the same subject. In Peter's sermon in Acts 2 forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit are twin blessings that one receives upon repentance and baptism (see Acts 2:38). The following New Testament passages substantiate the above view (see Romans 8:9, 14-16; 1 Corinthians 6:19; Galatians 3:2, 14; 4:6).

Secondly, the apostles deviated from their normal practice. In earlier passages Luke does not mention the apostles inspecting the evangelism being done, neither in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch or in the preaching being done by the Hellenists in verses 1 to 4 (Stott, 156, 157).

Thirdly, the preaching of Philip was in no way defective. He preached Christ according to verse 5 and then preached the good news of the kingdom and the name of Christ according to verse 12. His preaching was attested to by miracles, which showed the blessing of God on his ministry.

Fourthly, as already mentioned there was resentment and hatred between Jews and Samaritans. This is why God sent Philip and not one of the other disciples. Because of this distinct feature, coupled with the fact that this was the first time the gospel was going out of the boundaries of Jerusalem, God delayed the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In His providence God withheld the gift of the Spirit, with the verification and confirmation from the apostles, to ensure “the acceptance of these converts by believers in Jerusalem” (Longenecker, 359). God worked in ways that were conducive not only for the reception of the gospel but also to promote the unity of the church. This occurrence in Acts 8 is an historical exception. This incident concludes with Peter and John preaching the gospel in other Samaritan towns. John was the disciple who had earlier in Luke 9:51-55 asked Christ to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans. He had now evidently undergone a change of heart and attitude toward them (Fernando, 274).

God was preparing Peter for his role in Acts 10 with Cornelius and his family, by already working with the Samaritans. The impact of this whole episode was not only for the benefit of the Samaritans, but also the apostles.

The question of biblical precedent must then be handled with careful exegesis and a consideration of the overall message of the Scriptures to determine Luke's or any other Bible writer's actual intent.

##### 5. The Ministry of Stephen and the implications for mission:

I will not go into great detail concerning Stephen's message before the Sanhedrin. The salient points I would like to focus on are his insistence that God cannot be limited to one geographical location or one local people. Stephen makes this point by referring to God having appeared to Abram while he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. The Genesis text says that God spoke to Abram while he was in Haran. Stephen would expound on this point when he would refer to God speaking to Moses in Midian, which was also Gentile territory. A clear rebuke to the Sanhedrin was the fact that Abram had not settled in Canaan, but remained a pilgrim. Having lost this pilgrim orientation, they similarly lacked the spiritual depth Abram had (Boice, 121). They had forgotten that God had called Abram to be a blessing to all nations on the earth. Stephen knew under inspiration that the time had come to preach the gospel to the Samaritans because of his reference to the tomb in Shechem that Abram had bought, which was in Samaria (see Acts 7:16). In Acts 7:37 he also quotes a reference to Deuteronomy, citing the promise of a prophet to come, which the Samaritans accepted (Wagner, 1994:203).

Another critical point made by Stephen concerned the rejection of both Joseph and Moses by their own people. Stephen was attempting to portray a pattern of consistent rejection throughout Jewish history. In rejecting Joseph and Moses, Stephen stated that they had rejected Christ.

Stephen also focuses on the fact that worship acceptable to a God is not confined to the Jerusalem temple. In Acts 7:48 Stephen states that “God does not dwell in houses made by human hands.” He wants to point out that God cannot be confined to a temple, but is far greater. By focusing on the law of Moses and the temple, which were the highest symbols of Jewish faith, Stephen was pointing out that it was not necessary to give up one’s culture or to become a Jew in order to be saved. Stephen also knew that the Samaritans would never accept worship in the Jerusalem temple, nor as a condition to salvation. As a result Stephen had to deabsolutize the temple and contextualize the gospel for the purpose of mission (Wagner, 201, 203).

In concluding his speech Stephen applied his teaching in prophetic fashion. “He made three accusations against the religious leaders. Firstly, they were resisting the Holy Spirit, as they had always done.

Secondly, they were persecuting and killing the prophets, as they had always done. Thirdly, they were breaking the law of Moses, as they had always done” (Boice, 125).

The Sanhedrin were so angry that they all rushed Stephen, took him outside and prepared to stone him. Stephen says in Acts 7:56, “Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” A theological truth that can be ascertained is that in Christ standing, Stephen caught a glimpse of the heavenly court in session. Christ said in Matthew 10:32, “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.” In view of this Christ stood specifically as Stephen’s advocate. Christ took the position of a defender before the Father’s throne (Boice, 126).



All the above lay the theological foundation for world mission. This speech marks the closing of the predominantly Jewish focus in mission, with its Jerusalem focus and is an indication of the opening of mission in the Gentile communities (Stott, 78). Stephen's death also brought about the scattering of the disciples, with the accompanying proclamation of the gospel in Samaria.

#### 6. The Jerusalem Council and the implications for mission:

The Jerusalem council was a watershed experience in the history of the early church. Some scholars contend that it forms the center of Acts, both structurally and theologically and that it rounds up and justifies the past developments of the book thus far (Fernando, 414; Stott, 241). Up until this time the growth of the church had been phenomenal. In Acts 10 we read of how Peter had preached the gospel to Cornelius and his family and their subsequent conversion. When Peter returns to Jerusalem to share the news of the Gentiles turning to the Lord, he is criticized by what Luke calls the "circumcised believers" for fellowshiping with them. From vv 4-17 Peter explains everything to them and in verse 18 they praise God for granting repentance to the Gentiles.

The next episode is in verse 20 where some disciples began preaching the gospel to Greeks also. Luke records that a "great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21). When those in Jerusalem heard this they sent Barnabas to investigate what was going on. After encouraging them to remain true to the Lord, he found Saul and together they taught the disciples there for a whole year.

As the chapters unfold in Luke's writing it is clear that "the Gentile mission was gaining momentum. What had begun as a trickle was now fast becoming a torrent." I will demonstrate this convincingly in the next section of this thesis. They had however expected the inclusion of Gentiles in the new community as foretold by the Old Testament Scriptures, but by now the central question was how God intended for them to be incorporated into the church? Gentiles had been baptized into the fellowship of the church and still maintained their identity. They had become Christians but not Jewish Christians. "Could conversion-without-circumcision continue to be allowed?" (Stott, 240, 241).

Some men eventually came down to Antioch, the center of Gentile Christianity, teaching that unless people were circumcised, as taught by Moses, they could not be saved. Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply with these men. My assumption is that the teachings of these men caused considerable confusion and uncertainty.

The Antioch church then sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to "see the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15: 2). The bone of contention in this council is that Gentiles cannot be saved without circumcision (see Acts 15:1). These Pharisees or the "circumcision party" were adding requirements for salvation, claiming that faith in Christ was insufficient. The issue was immense and the gospel was at stake. The church did not completely understand that the ceremonial laws pointing to Christ were fulfilled in Him and that the ethnic symbols characterizing Jews were also no longer necessary. Luke uses the testimony of Peter, Paul and Barnabas and finally James to bring the council to consensus and a recognition of the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Peter appeals to the Cornelius incident in which he was the chief human factor. His main point in this discussion is that God took the initiative in the salvation of Cornelius and his family. He states that God made no distinction between them and us (v.9). This was made evident in that God purified their hearts and gave them the Spirit. His argument is powerful. Why do those of the circumcision party put a “yoke” (the Mosaic Law) on the Gentiles necks that they themselves have not been able to bear?

Peter equates this with “testing” God, in that the circumcision party were adding requirements for salvation over and above those given by God, stretching His patience and inviting His judgment. In verse 9 Peter affirmed that Cornelius and his family had been saved by faith, while in verse 11 he affirms that salvation is through the grace of Christ (Fernando, 416). It is highly significant that he said “that we are saved, just as they are.” Boice states that it was gracious? “It is because Peter the Jew would of normally said it differently. He would of said, “We believe that they can be saved by grace through faith, just like us.” That is, they can be like us. However, Peter turned it around saying, “We believe that by grace even we Jews can be saved, just like the Gentiles” (Boice, 264, 265).

The second ones to speak are Barnabas and Paul. In chapter 4 I clarify why Paul is mentioned second in this passage and Barnabas first. The text states that “the whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them” (Acts 15:12).

These two missionary's share from their experience what God has done. They chose not to enter into debate or discussion. The Jews were accustomed to hearing of the mighty acts of God in the past and so they retold what God had been doing.

In later years it would be revealed to Paul that the reason for not observing the Mosaic rituals was because these were "shadows" pointing to Christ and His finished work (see Col.2:11-20). Other symbols that Judaism found meaningful also became obsolete as all people could equally find salvation in Christ without the need to identify in any way with the Jews (see Rom.10:11, 12; Col.3:10, 11) (Nichol, 310).

Finally James spoke and he began by referring to Peter, not using his Greek name which is "Petros" but rather his Jewish name, Simon. James also uses the most Jewish form of his name, which is Simeon. He was appealing to the circumcision party in their midst. James refers to the Gentiles as a people that God has taken for Himself (see Acts 15: 14). This designation was previously only used of Israel but now applied to the Gentiles by James.

In his use of Amos 9:11-12 James appealed to the authority of the Scriptures to bring clarity and guidance to their discussions. He shifted the focus away from proselytizing to eschatology. In essence James was saying that in the last days God's people would consist of two concentric groups. At the core would be the rebuilt house of Israel (David's rebuilt tent) and gathered around them would be the remnant of men, the Gentiles, who will share in the Messianic blessings. These Gentiles do not need to become Jewish in order to share in these blessings (Longenecker, 446). He concurred with Peter who had related how God had converted Cornelius and his household.

In conclusion James suggests that a letter be written to the Gentile churches telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from eating blood. The issues dealt with relate to the Levitical food laws.

What are the implications for mission from this council?

Firstly, mission is rooted in salvation by grace through faith alone. Without a proper understanding of salvation one cannot engage in mission in a responsible manner. Secondly, mission in the New Testament is rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures. By quoting from Amos James demonstrated the veracity of the Old Testament Scriptures for the redemptive purposes of God. This also shows that God's plans for mission in both the Old and New Testament is essentially the same. Thirdly, mission is always carried out in a particular context. Mission is verified and authenticated by personal testimony, experience and the Scriptures.

#### 7. The Movement of Luke's Writing:

The theme of Acts is found in Acts 1:8 which reads: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the world." This verse can certainly be seen as another rendition of the "Gospel Commission." Christ was redirecting the focus of the disciples to their present task. The Greek word for power is "dunamis" meaning supernatural strength and ability. We derive our English word "dynamite" from this word.

The correlation of the Spirit and power were notable in the ministry of Christ and this would now also be in the life of the disciples (see Luke 4:14; Acts 10:38). The Holy Spirit was given for the foremost purpose of empowering the disciples to witness.

This verse also gives an index of contents because of its geographical terms. Christ commands the disciples to begin witnessing in Jerusalem. Earlier on He had instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for “the promise of the Father.” Jerusalem was the focal point of Christ’s passion and consequent triumph and central to Lukan thinking.

In his gospel Luke devotes ten chapters to Christ making His way to Jerusalem, beginning in Luke 9:51 and ending in Luke 19:41. In Luke 24:47 Christ mentions that repentance and forgiveness will be proclaimed to all nations “beginning at Jerusalem.” Clearly Jerusalem is a “highly concentrated theological symbol” and of prophetic significance in Lukan thinking (Bosch, 93, 94). In the writing of Acts Luke grants the first seven chapters to the church in Jerusalem and the foundations that are laid there.

From Acts 8:1 to 11:18 he discusses the expansion of the work in Judea and Samaria. The remaining chapters of Acts trace the movement of the gospel to Rome. Rome must then be seen as synonymous with having taken the gospel to the ends of the earth.

This verse must also be seen as both prophecy and command. As prophecy it would be fulfilled through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and as commandment Christ had promised the enablement (Harrison, 1975:39).

Beyond this verse there are brief summary statements that Luke inserts that seem to move the document in a new direction of some kind. The statements are as follows:

- a. "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" Acts 6:7.
- b. "Then the church throughout Judea and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord" Acts 9:31.
- c. "But the word of God continued to increase and spread" Acts 12:24.
- d. "So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers" Acts 16:5.
- e. "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" Acts 19:20.

It is clear from the above texts that Luke makes use of the term "word of the Lord" to show the progress of the church, especially in the context of human opposition. At this juncture I would like to examine Acts 12:24 briefly as it pertains to persecution. I will discuss Acts 6:7 (see ch.4), 9:31,16:5 (see ch.3) and 19:20 (see ch.3) in later chapters.

Acts 12:24 is Luke's third summary of the Christian mission within the Jewish world. Acts 12 depicts the persecutor Herod Agrippa I, who was most effective in opposing the progress of the Church. He had been instrumental in killing James and imprisoning Peter. Verse 24 ends the chapter with Herod dead, Peter free and the Word of God triumphing. (Stott, 213). Luke only focuses on the Gentile mission from Acts 13:1. He then concludes his discussion of mission in the Jewish world with the words of verse 24. Longenecker has taken this to imply that God would still be working on behalf of the Jews and even among them the word of God would continue to increase and spread. This is evident in later chapters as Jews do respond to the ministry of Paul (Longenecker, 414).

The Word of the gospel according to Luke has life-giving power. The church is animated by this Word. The church finds its identity and cohesion in this Word and it is the Word that propels it forward. In this light Luke unconsciously interchanges the terms church and the Word (Larkin and Williams, 177).

Having submitted the textual evidence, which traces the movement of the gospel and briefly examined Acts 12:24, I also find it calculating that Luke seems to have no interest in the biographies of the apostles. From Acts 13 onward he focuses on Paul, to the exclusion of Peter, except in Acts 15. He is concerned with continuing to write his portrayal of this movement. Luke also seems to have no desire to clearly document the structure and government of the early Church. He gives no explanation on how leadership passed from Peter to James, or what happened to the seven men chosen in Acts 6. Luke furthermore seems only to document the movement of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome, with no reference to other geographical expansion.

With the above textual evidence and the reasons I have submitted I contend that the “key to understanding Acts seems to be in Luke’s interest in this movement, orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, of the gospel from its Jerusalem-based, Judaism-oriented beginnings to its becoming a world-wide, Gentile-predominant phenomenon” (Fee and Stuart, 99-101).



#### 8. A Theological Framework for Church Growth:

Luke opens his second volume work by mentioning that Christ taught the disciples about the kingdom of God over a forty-day period (see Acts 1:3). The next time Luke mentions the notion of the kingdom of God he does so when Philip is advancing the proclamation of the gospel in Samaria for the first time (see Acts 8:12). Luke mentions the “kingdom of God” next in Acts 19:8 where Paul is arguing persuasively about this truth. Paul refers only to the “kingdom” in Acts 20:25 when he addresses the Ephesian elders and makes a final reference to the “kingdom of God” in Acts 28:23, 31 where Luke seems to portray Paul as preaching about the “kingdom of God” boldly and without hindrance. The entire book is then to be seen within this context. *Church Growth must be seen in the theological framework of the kingdom of God.*

The concept of the kingdom of God had its beginnings in the New Testament with the preaching of John the Baptist who announced that the kingdom of God was near (Matthew 3:12). The fulfillment of his words were found in the mission of Christ.

The kingdom of God was central to the mission of Christ (see Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14,15; Luke 4:21) (Ladd, 1971:54). I hold to the view that one can only understand the concept of the kingdom of God once one understands the mission of Christ. It is the mission of Christ that heralds the notion of the kingdom of God. I will therefore first focus my attention on developing the mission of Christ from a Lukan perspective with an exposition of Luke 4: 16-21 and Luke 24:46-49 and then further develop the concept of the kingdom of God.

a. The Mission of Christ:

Luke opens Christ's ministry like no other gospel writer. Luke 4:16-30 describes Christ's understanding for the purpose for which He was sent and is a key programmatic narrative in Luke. Of the four infinitives from Isaiah three involve preaching. The poor are evangelized (euangelizomai); the prisoners have release and the blind have recovery of sight proclaimed (kerusso) to them and the year of the Lord's favor, the Jubilee, is proclaimed (kerusso). The primary activity of the ministry of Jesus for Luke is preaching. While other tasks are present, such as healing, exorcism and the death and resurrection of Christ, these either serve to validate or become the content of the gospel message. Luke then consistently summarizes the content of Jesus' preaching as the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:11; 16:16).

I am aware of various approaches to the text that could call for a liberation theology hermeneutic or a possible spiritualization of the text (Larkin and Williams, 158, 159). I will not enter the debate as it is of no relevance to my discussion on Church Growth. Rather I would raise the question: what does Luke intend to say about Jesus' ministry?

Firstly, Luke refers to the good news being proclaimed to the poor. The poor are the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed. Bosch points out that Luke has a disproportionate amount to say about the poor in comparison to the other gospel writers.

An example is the use of the word "ptochos" which appears ten times in Luke but only five times each in Matthew and John. It is apparent then that Luke's motif of the gospel as the good news to the poor is absolutely critical in understanding his gospel. This being the case one finds it strange then that this motif does not appear in Acts.

It is not mentioned in any of the sermons in Acts nor does the word “ptochos” even appear. The controlling theological motif found in Christ and His salvation in the book of Acts explains why the poor are no longer explicitly mentioned.

Rather the Gentiles, who are the recipients of Christ’s salvation in a more profound way, become the focus for Luke. Therefore the Gentiles are the poor in Luke’s view, those who are in prison, blind and oppressed.

In further developing this notion of “poor” one finds that a small, but significant section of Isaiah 61:1 comes from Isaiah 58:6, “to let the oppressed go free.” This has a distinctly social profile and is in the context of the rich exploiting the poor. The poor in this context are to be seen as the economically marginalized (Bosch, 98, 100-101, 104).

One aspect of mission for Luke is being in solidarity with the poor. The mission of Christ is continued in the mission of the church. In His life and ministry Christ was always in solidarity with the poor. In Luke 2 Christ is born in a stable and in His formative years lives in Nazareth, a town filled with vice. His father, Joseph, is a carpenter and no doubt Christ came from a poor home. In launching His ministry Christ chose twelve poor uneducated fishermen and in His ministry associated with the outcasts of society, the neglected and oppressed.

Secondly, the gospel in this context has a social and spiritual dimension. The arrival of the kingdom in the person of Christ brings the year of Jubilee. The concept of Jubilee further underscores this view. Christ consciously concludes the quotation from Isaiah 61 before the declaration of coming judgment. This year of the Lord’s favor is therefore one of reconciliation, healing and forgiveness.

I will now focus on what Bosch calls Luke's Great Commission in Luke 24:46-49. This passage reflects Luke's entire understanding of the Christian mission. Mission must be seen in the light of the promises of Scripture and only becomes possible with the death and resurrection of Christ. The central message of this commission is repentance and forgiveness intended for all nations. In obedience to the command of Christ the missionary sermons in Acts reverberate with the message of repentance (see Acts 2:38; 5:31; 8:22; 10:43). The early church was not only being obedient to the commands of Christ but also to His life and teaching. There are numerous links between this passage and the entire book of Acts. The death and resurrection were the central theme of the disciple's preaching. They began their mission in Jerusalem as Christ had instructed them here and in Acts 1:8. Christ calls them His witnesses, which again is a central theme in Acts. Of course the promise of the Spirit is fulfilled in Acts with the power of God "clothing" the disciples.

b. The Kingdom of God:

As already stated, one cannot understand the mission of Christ apart from the notion of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is an eschatological concept, referring to the "last things," when God will bring this age to a close. Eschatological fervor was at an all time high in the time of Christ. Fueled by Jewish apocalypticism, the Jews were awaiting the arrival of Messiah to set them free from political oppression. When John announced that the kingdom of God was near and the arrival of God's Messiah, the people were expectant. Within the Jewish psyche then, there was this realization of the "eschaton." The Old Testament painted a picture of the new age of God's rule.

It would be an age of righteousness (see Isa.11: 4, 5), and people would live in peace (Isa.2: 2-4). Sin and sickness would be done away with (see Zech.13:1; Isa.53:5), and even the physical creation would experience the effects of this new age (Isa.11: 6 -9). The New Testament believers were then an eschatological people, living between the age of promise and the age of fulfillment (Fee and Stuart, 132, 133).

As I have demonstrated the content of the preaching of Christ was the kingdom of God. Jesus sometimes spoke about the kingdom and sometimes He spoke about the gospel. The two terms are combined once in Matthew 24:14 as “this gospel of the kingdom...,” a construction in which “the kingdom” should be understood as standing in apposition to and, therefore, clarifying “the gospel.” This construction suggests that the gospel describes the character of the message, while the kingdom defines its content.

The kingdom has a dual dimension, that of “now” and “not yet.” Christ spoke often of the present dimension of the kingdom. “But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” With the arrival of Christ there was an unusual amount of demon activity. The liberation of those that were demon-possessed proved and demonstrated that Christ personified the kingdom of God in setting them free. The kingly power of God was then present in Jesus, attacking the dominion of Satan. “Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house” (Matt.12:29). The strong man is personified as Satan and Christ is the other man who is able to bind the strong man and take away his possessions. Interestingly, Christ makes no reference to Himself in calling Himself any

name. In the person of Christ, the kingdom of Satan has been invaded and is under attack (Ladd, 63).

On another occasion the Pharisees asked Christ when the kingdom of God would come and Christ responded by saying that the kingdom of God does not come by careful observation, but that the kingdom of God was among them (see Luke 17:20).

Furthermore, when John attempted to verify the personhood of Christ, Christ responded by telling him that the “blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (see Matthew 11:4, 5). Jesus connected His ministry to the fulfillment of the prophecies about the future kingdom found in Isaiah (see Isa.29:17-19; 35:5, 6; 42:6, 7). In the coming and person of Christ the kingdom of God had arrived. It is the arrival of a new order, a new reality, the present has been invaded by the future, the earthly by the divine (Larkin and Williams, 40).

Beyond this present dimension of the kingdom there is also a future aspect to the kingdom of God – the “not yet.” In this regard Christ spoke about a future time when He would sit down at the great banquet with people from the four corners of the earth (see Matt.8:11, 12). He also spoke about the consummation of the kingdom when the disciples would “see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (Matt.16:28). This is why Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “your kingdom come” (Matt.6:9-13).

My contribution to this discussion would be that the *reality of the kingdom of God is a certainty for the growth of the church*. The Scriptures testify that the arrival of the ministry of Christ was the arrival of the kingdom of God. The implication is *that the growth of the church is rooted and grounded in the mission of Christ*.

## CHAPTER 3

### A. DEFINITION OF CHURCH GROWTH:

#### 1. Textual Evidence and Definition:

The textual evidence supports the notion of this thesis that Luke not only documented the expansion of Christianity, but even more specifically the growth of local churches. Here are the following texts that will authenticate my view:

- \*The original nucleus was 120 (Acts 1:15)
- \*Three thousand people were converted on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41)
- \*People were being added to the church daily (Acts 2:47)
- \*5000 men, beside woman and children are added to the church (Acts 4:4)
- \*Multitudes were being saved (Act 5:14)
- \*Addition changed to multiplication in the growth of the disciples (Acts 6:1)
- \*The disciples kept increasing and priests were also converted (Acts 6:7)
- \*Samaritans start coming to Christ (Acts 8:12)
- \*An Ethiopian is baptized (Acts 8:38)
- \*Entire towns start coming to Christ (Acts 9:35)
- \*Cornelius an his family are baptized (Acts 10:48)
- \*Many Gentiles become Christians (Acts 11:21)
- \*A Roman consul believed (Acts 13:12)
- \*Large numbers of Jews and Greeks accepted the faith (Acts 14:1)
- \*Churches increased in number daily (Acts 16:5)
- \*Prominent women followed Christ (Acts 17:12)

\*A ruler of the synagogue became a Christian with his family (Acts 18:8)(Wagner, 1994: 26, 27).

\*Many thousands of Jews have turned to faith in Christ (Acts 21:20).

I would like to draw a number of conclusions from the above texts. Firstly, Luke is clearly interested in monitoring the progress of the church using numbers. On the Day of Pentecost three thousand people are converted. These people came from probably sixteen different language areas as Luke informs us that the gospel was preached that day to sixteen different people groups. Luke outlines these people groups in Acts 2:9-11. In naming them he begins with Palestine as the center and then moves east, then passes north, west and south in that order. The reference to “every nation under heaven (see Acts 2:5)” therefore seems justified (Nichol, 139). Many of them were pilgrims that had come for the Feast of Harvest in Jerusalem and would have returned to their homes after Pentecost. I would conclude then that the number three thousand is not for Jerusalem residents exclusively.

The reason we don’t hear of any evangelism going on in other areas is because Luke is only interested in the movement of the gospel along the lines of Acts 1:8 (Fee and Stuart, 100). Luke next mentions the number five thousand in Acts 4: 4. He opens the chapter discussing the arrest of the apostles and continues with the trial before the Sanhedrin the following morning. There is seemingly no literary reason to mention the number of men. This points to Luke’s concern in documenting the numerical growth of the church and as a means of encouraging his readers with the continued progress of the gospel despite persecution.



A third consideration that follows on from what I have stated is that Luke is possibly portraying both the qualitative and quantitative growth of the church. He records the qualitative growth in passages that depict the spiritual growth of the church (see Acts 4:31) and the quantitative growth in passages that show the numerical growth of the church (see Acts 4:4).

The definition I would then render, which harmonizes with my conclusions from Acts is the following: **“Church Growth is the effective evangelization of lost men and woman, effectively incorporating them into the body of Christ and enabling them to become mature, reproducing Christians.”**

Four kinds of growth are evidenced in Acts.

*Transfer Growth* occurred when people moved from Judaism to Christianity (see Acts 6:7).

*Conversion Growth* took place when Gentiles were converted to Christ, accepting Him as Lord and Savior (see Acts 8:38; 10:47, 48).

*Internal growth* is the spiritual growth of the members that took place in Acts (see Acts 2:42-47; 9:31; 11:26).

*Extension growth* is the numerical growth that Luke mentioned as the gospel moved from its Jerusalem boundaries and new churches were planted and established (see Acts 9:31).

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What were the causes of Church Growth? How did the effective evangelization of lost people take place? How were they incorporated into the body of Christ – the church, and eventually disciplined into mature, healthy Christians? In attempting to answer these questions I will now outline, from a missiological perspective, key principles that emerge from the text of Acts.

## **B. MISSIOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR CHURCH GROWTH:**

### **1. Church Growth is empowered by the Holy Spirit:**

Without the Holy Spirit, Church Growth would be inconceivable, even impossible. The key to unlocking this principle is to understand the significance of Pentecost. An important consideration in a discussion of Pentecost is the timing of the event. Time references in Acts are few and far between, but in introducing the events that occurred on the day of Pentecost, Luke says: “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place (Acts 2:1). Literally translated, the Greek verb “sumplerousthai” means “was being fulfilled.” Luke chose this verb to demonstrate that the momentous events of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred at the very time when the celebration of Pentecost was taking place, perhaps in the morning hours. Luke wants to make the point that the outpouring of the Spirit occurred on the very day of Pentecost. Bacchiocchi raises the following pertinent questions: “Why was Christ sacrificed as true Paschal Lamb on the very day when the Jews sacrificed their Passover lambs?

Also, why did God pour out the Spirit to harvest the first fruits of the spiritual harvest procured by Christ’s redemptive mission on the very day when the Jews celebrated Passover?”

The answer is that Christ, through His redemptive sacrifice, was the fulfillment of the feasts that were typified in the Old Testament. By timing Christ's vicarious death with the feasts that foreshadowed them, New Testament believers could realize the reality of salvation in Christ (Bacchiocchi, 2000: 1, 2).

I suggest that we look at Pentecost in at least six ways. Firstly, Pentecost celebrates not only the crowning of Christ's Paschal sacrifice, but also the inauguration of His heavenly ministry. The ascension is the link between the earthly and heavenly ministry of Christ. At His ascension Christ was exalted to a position of honor and dignity by being seated at the right of God (see Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55). The seating of Christ at the right hand of God represents His official enthronement. Christ predicted this exaltation in Luke 22:69, "But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God." Peter also explained in his Pentecost sermon that Christ had been "exalted to the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33).

This shows the dramatic paradigm shift that took place in the minds of the disciples, where in Acts 1:6 they still believed in the restoration of the Jewish kingdom. The meaning of "sitting" as intercessory ministry is explained especially in Hebrews 8:1, 2, where Christ is presented as the "a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven."

The intercessory ministry of Christ provides the following:

- sustenance for the church (Revelation 1:13, 20),
- mediation of repentance and forgiveness to believers (Acts 5:31; 1 John 2:1, 2, 9),
- the invisible and yet real assistance of the angels (Heb.1:14; Rev.5:6),

- makes our prayers acceptable to God (John 16:23, 24),
- grants the essential gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33).

The right hand is a symbol of the supreme honor, power and authority with which Christ was invested at His ascension (Bacchiocchi, 6).

Secondly, it was the final act of the saving ministry of Christ, while on this earth, before the Parousia. Because Pentecost is connected with the life, death and resurrection of Christ, it is in this regard an unrepeatable event.

Thirdly, Pentecost marks the beginning of the bestowal of spiritual gifts on all believers. This was in direct fulfillment of the words of Christ in Luke 24:47 and the promise He had made in Acts 1:8. This power came about when the Holy Spirit filled the disciples.

Fourthly, Pentecost was the inauguration of the new era of the Spirit. The Spirit would now be available to all believers to carry out the mission of Christ and would be the Chief Administrator of the Body of Christ. One can understand this more clearly when one looks at what Christ called the Holy Spirit.

In designating the Holy Spirit “another Paraclete” Christ was referring to the office and function of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). Ladd points out that this demonstrates that Christ has already been a “Paraclete” to His disciples and that the Spirit would come to take His place and continue His ministry. This is evident as one examines the Biblical evidence. For example the Paraclete will come, just as Christ came into the world (John 5:43, 16:28). The Paraclete came from the Father just as Jesus came from the Father (John 16:27, 28). The Paraclete is identified as the Spirit of truth (John 14:26), so Christ is also the Truth (John 14:6) (Ladd, 1978:330). The Paraclete means “one who is called in to help” and “one who stands beside.”

Sanders elaborates on this by stating that an advocate in olden times assumed a fourfold obligation. “He was his client’s representative, pleaded his cause, defended his name and guarded and administered his property” (Peters, 301, 302). The critical question one must raise is whose Advocate is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is not our advocate for 1 John 2:1 states that Christ is our advocate with the Father if we sin.

Therefore the Holy Spirit is Christ’s Advocate. His office is to represent Christ, plead His cause, defend His name and guard the interests of His kingdom. One can now further understand why the Holy Spirit played such an active role in Acts. While Christ was in heaven mediating the benefits of His substitutionary sacrifice, the Holy Spirit would be Christ’s Advocate on earth.

Fifthly, Pentecost reverses the effects of Babel, with the formation of a new humanity in Christ (Fernando, 90). In Acts 2:3 the Word states that “tongues of fire separated and rested on each of them.” Under the Old Covenant the divine presence rested on all of Israel as a corporate entity and only on individuals for specific ministry tasks, but now under the New Covenant the Spirit would rest on each believer. This signifies that believers would now be individually empowered for service and mission and that the Spirit would now write the Law on their hearts (see Jeremiah 31:33). Pentecost was then the launching pad for Christian mission and the resultant Church Growth.

It is clear then that Luke focuses more on the “Acts of the Holy Spirit” than on the “Acts of the Apostles.” The Holy Spirit takes center stage in Acts. The work of the Holy Spirit is manifested as He in-fills the disciples to witness and proclaim the gospel (see Acts 2:4, 37-41; 4:8, 13; 6:5, 10; 7:54, 57).

In Acts 5:32 Peter claims that when the gospel is preached it is the Spirit Himself that bears parallel witness to the individual or individuals concerned. The Spirit is then the motivator of witness. The filling of the Spirit is a continuous experience and is the same as being filled with the Word (see Eph.5:18 and Col.3:16). The Holy Spirit is also most active in guiding the church across cultural and geographical boundaries (see Acts 8:29, 39; 16:6, 7; 19:21)(Larkin and Williams, 176). However, while the Holy Spirit is the Chief Administrator of the church, this in no way excludes the ministry of the Father and the Son. The Lord adds daily to the church and it is Christ that appears to Saul on the road to Damascus (see Acts 2:47; 9:4-6).

Lastly, Pentecost was the first fruits of Christ's redemption. Pentecost was known as the Feast of the First Fruits because the first fruits of the spring wheat harvest were offered on the first and last day of the Feast as an expression of thanksgiving to God. In this regard Jesus is the First Fruits of Pentecost because He rose as the first fruits of redeemed humanity on the very day when the first sheaf of barley was presented at the Temple – the event that marked the beginning of Pentecost. Paul alludes to this in 1 Cor.15:20 where he states, "But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." The resurrection of Christ as the first fruits points to the harvest of believers to be resurrected at His coming. "But each in his own turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him" (1 Cor.15:23).

While Pentecost does have a future dimension, there is also the present privilege of believers to receive the first fruits of the Spirit while we await the resurrection harvest. "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom.8:23).

A further dimension of Pentecost is seen in those that respond to the gospel invitation. James sees new converts as the first fruits of God's creation (see James 1:18) and are also ultimately seen as "first fruits for God and the Lamb" (Rev.14: 4).

Pentecost is therefore centered in the Christ-event and has eschatological, soteriological and ecclesiological dimensions (Bacchiocchi, 11, 12). From the Scriptural evidence I have outlined it is clear that Pentecost is a rich and deep doctrine that sheds significance to Church Growth. The theological realities of Pentecost are translated into the practicalities of spiritual and numerical growth of the church in Acts.

## 2. Church Growth comes about through the process of evangelism:

Evangelism has traditionally been defined as the verbal proclamation of the good news of salvation. This definition of evangelism is too restrictive in my view. I concur with Maynard-Reid who states that "it fails to capture the richness of what Acts portrays as evangelism." From a Lukan perspective, Christ and the disciples are not merely seen as propositional evangelists, but rather as situational evangelistic missionaries. Their evangelism was not just the oral communication of some propositional truth, but situational activities that aimed to bring about wholeness (Maynard-Reid, 2000:20). The following reasons will underscore my view.

Firstly, this definition does not allow for the scope of evangelism that takes place in Acts. Acts allows for a far broader definition. Evangelism takes center stage in Acts with almost all the chapters mentioning something about evangelism. Two examples will demonstrate what I am saying.



The first example is found in chapter 4:32 where Luke states that “all the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them...” In the midst of discussing the community life of the early church Luke in verse 33 focuses on the priority of evangelism by stating that the apostles continued testifying of the resurrection. Because of the juxtaposition of verse 33 with verse 32 the “great power” Luke refers to is a manifestation of the new life in the church. Luke is then bridging evangelism and community and showing that community life is not an end in itself. They therefore enjoyed “much grace from the Lord” because they were a witnessing community.

Another example is found in chapter 5:12-16 where Luke mentions the miracles and wonders that were taking place. Verse 12 states that “the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon’s Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by.” Here we see verse 14 discussing evangelism in the middle of a discussion about the miracles the apostles were doing (Fernando, 181; Longnecker, 311). From these two examples one can conclude that the overwhelming burden of Luke’s writing and one of his chief concerns is evangelism. Also evangelism is always contextual. It is never done in an isolated fashion, within a vacuum.

Evangelism took place within the community, where pain and sickness were evident, and resulted in wholeness entering that community.

Secondly, the action words of Acts also necessitate a holistic approach to evangelism. I would like to examine four action words that broaden and deepen the meaning of evangelism. The first word is “witness.” Witnessing is a key theme in Acts. The word is mentioned thirteen times and is often used in reference to the preaching on the resurrection (see Acts 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39-41). A witness is someone who can give testimony based on knowledge. The implication is that one must know Christ in order to be His witness. The Greek word for “witness” is “martures” which means martyr. “Now a martyr is one who is convinced of truth, and manifests it in life and death. The fires of persecution do not make martyrs, they simply reveal them” (Froom, 1956:106; MacArthur, 56).

The second word is “didaskos.” Teaching is an integral part of the evangelistic focus of Luke. From the earliest days of the church in Acts (Acts 2:42) to the last verse of the book (28:31) teaching was an essential part of Christian ministry. In Acts 11:25, 26 Barnabas and Saul spent a whole year teaching the believers at Antioch. This teaching ministry brought about the believers being called “Christians. What did they teach for a whole year? Ogilvie states that “every message we teach ends up with the Man of Galilee, the Lamb of God, the resurrected Savior, the infilling Lord. What Christ said, what He did, and what He does are all part of teaching Jesus Christ” (Ogilvie, 1983: 152). Evangelism includes the nurture of new believers and is not a separate function or ministry.

The third word is prove. Acts 9:22 records how Paul attempted to prove that Jesus is the Christ. Because Paul's proofs were so convincing and overwhelming some of the people attempted to kill Paul. The fact that Paul would try to prove the gospel in a synagogue full of his Hebrew contemporaries was an act of great moral courage.

Paul had received his letters of credit for the destruction of the early church as an agent of the Sanhedrin and now Paul was proving that Jesus is the Christ. These proofs were no doubt sound Biblical evidence from the Old Testament, what I would call the "proof-text" method. The weight of the Biblical record is brought to bear on a particular subject, this time the Messiahship of Christ, with little room for debate. I think this is why they wanted to kill him.

The fourth word is found in Acts 17:2 and is "dialegomai." The word occurs ten times in Acts 17-24 with this being the first time. Fernando holds that this word is used here to indicate a change of style in response to a different environment. This environment was one which allowed for questions and discussion. Verse 3 clarifies the meaning of verse 2. The Greek word "dianoigo" literally means to "open" and the idea is well expressed in Luke 24:32, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" The subject expounded from the Scriptures was that "the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead" (Acts 17:3a). Luke adds the word proving, which is "paratithemi," which means he carefully answered questions posed to him, responded to their objections and demonstrated the validity of his claims (Fernando, 461).

My third reason necessitates that we move away from a narrow and merely forensic concept of salvation. The categories of justification, adoption and sanctification, to name a few, are crucial and indispensable. However we must not emphasize these aspects to the exclusion of such categories as social, economic and even political realities. Salvation, like evangelism, is multidimensional. It's basic meaning is redemption and exaltation. Thus the Greek word "sozein," meaning to save, can be used in both personal and social contexts. In Biblical salvation, there is therefore "no tension between saving from sin and saving from physical ailment, between spiritual and social" (Bosch, 33).

My fourth reason is the Lukan view of Christ's evangelism. The evangelistic ministry of Christ was holistic, multidimensional and all-encompassing. It included reaching the inner life of the individual while also extending beyond, into the society in which that person lived. Christ's evangelistic strategy functioned in two ways: in it there was both hope and challenge. Luke illustrates Christ's social evangelistic outreach best through His interest in the poor and marginalized. He gave hope to the outcast and poor by ministering a message of liberation and redemption. This same message challenged the powerful and wealthy to change their value system and their treatment of these poor and oppressed. Many consequently rejected His call to repentance. Instead of being the good news of salvation, it was the bad news of judgment for them. As a result of Christ's evangelistic strategy Luke portrays conversion as the total transformation of the individual and individuals – their attitudes and lifestyles (Maynard-Reid, 20, 21). Repentance hence has social implications in which a person's relationship with Christ and the world are transformed (see Luke 18:18-30; 19:1-10).

From the four reasons I have expounded upon I would contend that evangelism is then both personal and societal in it's effects, is concerned with both nurture of new believers and teaching older believers, has an inward and outward focus in the life of the church.

From the biblical evidence I have shared we can conclude that evangelism is simply what the early church did and was in fact *the framework of the life of the church*. I agree with Ellen White who stated that "the very life of the church depends on her faithfulness in fulfilling the Lord's commission." (White, 825). Beyond the evidence in Acts, the entire New Testament supports this conclusion.

The New Testament is more dynamic and varied in it's modes of expression than we are today. Our almost exclusive use of "preach" for all these synonyms is a sign, not merely of poverty of vocabulary, but a loss of something which was a living reality in primitive Christianity. Having reached these conclusions it is clear that evangelism must be seen as the totality of what the early church did. I would like to share seven biblical cognates from Acts that would convey my understanding of evangelism.

To evangelize is to:

1. Receive the Holy Spirit
2. Go into all the world
3. Minister to people in Jesus name
4. Proclaim the Good News of the gospel
5. Disciple people through the teachings of Christ
6. Baptize people into the fellowship of the church
7. Train people to become effective witnesses.

The social dimension of evangelism is seen in going into the world and ministering to people. As we go into the world Christ has called us to be the light and salt of the world (see Matthew 5:13 – 16). Light and salt are used in Scripture to speak of the transforming presence Christians should have in the community. In ministering to people we are to meet the needs (emotional, physical, educational, spiritual) they have, in Christ's name.

This holistic approach to evangelism results in the growth of the church. The growth of the church itself is balanced with both spiritual and numerical growth. As I have studied Acts I have seen various forms of evangelism take place. I would now like to focus on these different forms of evangelism.

a. Public Evangelism:

“Public evangelism reaches large groups of people through meetings in which they receive doctrinal instruction that will enable them to make responsible decisions to join the church” (Martin, 61).

As already stated, Acts 2 is foundational to understanding much of what follows in Acts. Public evangelism took place in Acts 2 with the preaching of Peter. I would like to provide some exposition of Acts 2 in determining the message that was preached and the kind of responses that arose.

Peter's entire message is Christo-centric. He begins by refuting the claims of the crowd that they were drunk, saying it was the third hour of the day. He then states in verse 15 that what has happened has been the fulfillment of Scripture, quoting the prophecy of Joel. Peter followed the practice of Christ in correlating prediction with event (see Luke 24:44-46) (Harrison, 57).

I will not focus extensively on this prophecy, except to say that understanding the term “last days” and “day of the Lord” are important in this prophecy. The term “last days” is a common Old Testament expression. (see Isaiah 2:2; Jer 23:20, 49:39; Ezek 38:16; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1). It refers to the time when Messiah would set up his kingdom. Scripture is clear that the “last days” began with the first coming of Christ (see 1John 2:18; 1 Pet 1:20; Heb 1:2).

The people were then witnessing the beginning of the “last days.” The “last days” would climax with the “day of the Lord.” The end of the “last days” would be characterized by cosmic signs as depicted in verses 19 and 20. In prophetic manner, however, Joel juxtaposed these two events so that the difference is not easily detectable. The prophecy is better understood when we take into consideration the term “day of the Lord.” The day of the Lord may refer to any time God acts in judgement (see Isa. 13:6; Eze. 30:2; Joel 1:15; Amos 5: 18-20), but here speaks of the ultimate day of the Lord associated with the second coming of the Lord (see 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2). This is clear in that the signs associated with the day of the Lord are elsewhere connected with the second coming (see Rev 16, Mt 24). Therefore between the beginning of the “last days” and the end of the “last days” would be a considerable length of time. During this time those who call on the name of the Lord would be saved.

Peter now shifts focus to the Lord Jesus Christ. He speaks of him in six stages, beginning with his life and ministry in verse 22. Christ was accredited to them by God through three supernatural works, namely: miracles, which was a demonstration of the power of God, wonders, which were to arouse astonishment and signs, which embodied spiritual truth (Stott, 75).

These things were fresh in the minds of the people. They demonstrated what Christ had said in Luke 11:20, "If I by the finger of God cast out demons then is the kingdom of God come upon you." In verse 23 Peter focuses on Christ's death. The message of the text is that it was God's set purpose and foreknowledge for Christ to die. In this we see the paradox between divine providence and human responsibility. While it was God's plan, that does not deny the role of the Jews and Romans involved.

Peter's presentation of the cross as a pre-planned redemptive act of God was the response of the early community to a crucified Messiah being a stumbling block to the Jews (Fernando, 103). While not mentioned now, but the cross would eventually be their means of forgiveness (Bruce, 70). From verses 24 to 32 Peter points to the victory of Christ in the resurrection. It was an act of God that was seen as the validation of the life and ministry of Christ. Christ was freed from the "agony of death," so that the resurrection is pictured as a regeneration, a new birth out of death into life (Stott, 76). Peter's use of Psalm 16 gives Old Testament authenticity to the resurrection of Christ. In using this Psalm they were following the exegetical practices of Christ, who had attributed Psalm 110, which has similar wording to Psalm 16, to Himself. His argument is that since David did not rise from the dead and his flesh underwent corruption, this passage must be referring to David's great Son, the Messiah (Bruce, 71). Peter clinches his argument in verse 32 with the reality that they were witnesses to this fact.

From the resurrection of Christ, Peter moves on to the exaltation of Christ in verses 33 to 36. This is the reality of what the people now hear and see for the Holy Spirit has been poured out on them by Christ Himself.



Peter now draws from Psalm 110 in verse 34 and 35 to find validation for the exaltation of Christ. With the resurrection and exaltation of Christ the disciples now fully understand that he is Lord and Christ. The term “Lord” is used of both God and Christ. Contextually in verse 36 Christ is called Lord and in verse 39 God is called Lord. Here we can see that the term is used interchangeably of both God and Christ. This is the earliest development of Trinitarian theology in the early community (Fernando, 105). The exaltation of Christ, with the titles of Lord and Christ, was a reflection of Him becoming in reality what He had always been.

Luke now focuses on the people’s response to Peter’s sermon in verse 37 to 39. “Cut to the heart,” meaning convicted of sin and conscience-stricken the people ask Peter what they must do. Certainly no guilt could be greater than having had a hand in the crucifixion of the Messiah. Yet Peter offers his listeners hope, in that repentance was available to them. Repentance would involve a change of mind regarding Jesus and their attitude towards him. Connected to repentance would be baptism. They were to submit to the humiliation of baptism, which the Jews regarded as only for Gentiles converts. This baptism would also be in the name of Jesus and would clearly demonstrate their commitment to the Christ Peter preached. Peter promised the people two gifts, one is the forgiveness of their sins and the other the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter makes it clear that these two gifts are for all those that God shall call, not just that present generation.

Finally, in verses 40 and 41 Luke makes mention of the new community that is established as a result of Peter’s preaching. His sermon continued with a plea for them to save themselves from their corrupt generation.

Christ himself had upbraided his hearers as a “faithless and perverse generation” (Luke 9:41) because of their repudiation of him as Israel’s anointed Savior (Luke 11:29, 17:25) (Bruce, 78). However, with the Holy Spirit having convicted them, the people received the message and were baptized. They had changed communities and transferred their loyalty and allegiance to Christ. I maintain that the power of this transformation cannot be fully realized and appreciated unless one were present in that situation.

Stott points out that Peter’s sermon can be divided into a four part message – “two events (Christ’s death and resurrection), as attested by two witnesses (prophets and apostles), on the basis of which God makes two promises (forgiveness and the Spirit), on two conditions (repentance and faith, with baptism)” (Stott, 81). The three thousand people that joined this new movement illustrates Jesus’ promise that with His going away and the Spirit’s coming, the disciples will do even greater works than He did (John 14:12). All the elements that are evident in Acts 2, the proclamation of the gospel with a response from the listeners resulting in conversion is what constitutes effective public evangelism.

I would like to provide exposition on sections of Acts 8 as there is some relevance to this focus of my thesis. “And Saul was there giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:1-4).

Stephen's death brought a "great persecution against the church at Jerusalem." I am certain the disciples remembered the teaching of Christ when He stated that they would be persecuted and killed by His enemies and they would think they were doing God a service (see Matthew 24:9). Saul, who had given approval to Stephen's death, was the leader of the persecution. The tense of the verb "destroy" in verse 3 is in the imperfect tense. It means then that Saul continually attempted to destroy the Church. This persecution led to a scattering of the primarily Hellenist believers throughout Judea and Samaria. The word "scattered" in Greek used here means "scattered in order to be planted." All the scattering did was then to plant the disciples in the places to which they were scattered and there they preached the word (Boice, 131, 133). This was personal evangelism at it's best. Firstly, this scattering was a vital turning point in Lukan thinking, for this word used for scattering also refers to the Jewish dispersion, while Luke was now conscious of a new dispersion involving the Church. "Preached the word" must not be seen as a formal task, but rather the means "to share the gospel" (Harrison, 139; Stott, 146).

Secondly, when Luke later refers to the gospel going to the Gentiles for the first time outside Palestine, he says that the ones who did this were "those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen" (Acts 11:19). I had shown earlier that it was the Hellenist Jews, introduced in Acts 6, who went out more as missionaries than refugees. It was because they were connected to Stephen that the Hellenist Jews would have been compelled to leave Jerusalem. Once again God uses suffering and persecution to advance the gospel and that by ordinary disciples.

b. Personal Evangelism:

“Personal evangelism is sharing the gospel with an individual or with small groups of people” (Martin, 57). The “early leaders were no less astute in personal evangelism than they were in formal preaching” (Coleman, 90). Philip in Acts 8, who shared the Scriptures with the Ethiopian Eunuch is an example of this.

Another example of personal evangelism is the sharing of one’s personal testimony.

“A personal testimony is an account of how you have experienced Christ’s power” (Martin, 58). It is relating how you have been converted and the gladness and joy you have found in Christ. Paul’s account of his life in Acts 22 can be divided into three essential elements of a testimony:

- i. My life before I became a Christian – Acts 22:3-5
- ii. How I became a Christian – Acts 22:6-13
- iii. What Jesus means to me now – Acts 22:14-21

The testimony of personal experience is an irrefutable argument of the power and love of Christ. It is the power of a life that has been changed that no cynic or unbeliever can withstand.

c. Network Evangelism:

“Even a casual reading of the New Testament will show that the gospel spread primarily through relationships” (Warren, 173). While we do not support a casual reading of the Scriptures, Warren’s point is that the evidence for relational evangelism is abundant in the New Testament.

Acts 16 demonstrates the manner in which this took place. In both verse 15 and verse 34 we find that entire households came to faith in Christ and were baptized. This is called “oikos evangelism.” The Greek word “oikos” means house but in the Bible often is used in a broader sense of “household.” It is a principle of evangelism found in the New Testament and recommended by Jesus (see Mark 5:39). This networking principle is one of the most effective strategies for evangelism.

Now this approach is not mass conversion, where individuals do not have a will of their own, but rather the conversion of an entire social unit. MacGravan referred to this as “people movements,” where “multi-individual, mutually interdependent conversion” takes place (MacGravan, 298). Instead of “fishing” with a hook, this kind of evangelism calls for “fishing” with a net. Oikos evangelism is effective because of the following:

- a. Oikos relationships provide natural networks for sharing the gospel
- b. Oikos relationships allow unhurried and natural sharing of God’s love and the gospel.
- c. This kind of approach tends to win whole families.
- d. Natural support and nurture is given to a new convert who joins the church.
- e. Oikos relationships provide a constantly enlarging source of contacts to reach with the gospel.

### 3. Church Growth is interested in the end product of making disciples:

One of the distinct features of the message of Christ was a challenge to make disciples (Matt.28:19). When Luke referred to the members of the church in Jerusalem he called them disciples.

What are the theological verities of discipleship? What did the word mean to the people of that time? What were the cultural understandings of this word and how did this relate to the early Christian church? It is imperative to fully understand what being a disciple is because I have contended that the end product of Church Growth is to “make disciples.” The English word “disciple” is a translation of the Greek word “mathetes.” It refers to a student who would attach himself to a teacher for the purpose of acquiring practical and theoretical knowledge.

Burrill says that discipleship is to be in a living relationship with the One who is discipling you. In this relationship one is to be constantly learning more about the person, while at the same time living in subjection to that person. The person being disciplined is never completely disciplined, but always in the process of being disciplined (Burrill, 29, 30).

The Jewish leaders of Christ’s day also had disciples. However the gospel writers saw fundamental differences between being a disciple of Christ and a Jewish Rabbi. In the Judaism of the first century it was the student who chose the rabbi he would follow. None of the disciple’s of Christ however chose Him of their own volition, but were rather chosen by Christ. Bosch also points out that Christ gave the call to the disciples expecting a positive response. Their immediate response in the gospels leads Bosch to conclude that they are the first to repent and believe. The call to be a disciple is then a call of grace.

Late Judaism centered it’s teaching on the Torah and a young “mathete” would be desirous to center his life on the Law. The authority a rabbi invoked was because of his vast knowledge of the Law. However, Christ called on His disciples to attach themselves to Him and to love Him above even father and mother (see Matt.10: 38).

In Christ's day if one was a disciple or student of the law meant one was simply in transition to becoming a rabbi. For the disciple of Jesus being a disciple was a fulfillment of his destiny. There was no promotion or graduation to a higher level. The person who followed Christ in discipleship also shared in the life of Christ and became His witness. In this regard, Bosch says the same Greek words are used for Jesus and the disciples in respect of preaching, teaching, evangelizing, exorcising and healing. Their witness is not only to certain historical realities but also to the future kingdom of glory that Christ has promised (Bosch, 37-39). Having examined the linguistic and cultural notions related to the meaning of disciple I would now like to examine the gospel evidence regarding the theological meaning of disciple. I will examine passages in Matthew, Luke and John. This needs to be done to understand the importance of the cardinal point of this thesis and to gain a proper biblical perspective on discipleship.

The first passage I would like to look at is Matthew 28:18-20. I need to look at this passage because for Matthew mission is disciple-making. Scholars are agreed that Matthew's entire gospel points to this final passage and that everything he says in his gospel comes together in this passage (Bosch, 57). Matthew did not record the ascension of Christ as it would of probably detracted from the focus of the commission that Christ would give the disciples. He wanted the Great Commission to linger in his reader's minds as they finished reading his gospel.

“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” (Matthew 28:18-20). “All” is a key word in the passage. It emphasizes the divine identity of Jesus who has all authority over all the nations because He has all things under His power.

Before issuing His commission Christ laid the foundation for the success of the disciples future ministry: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me ...” This was critically important. Without the Messiah’s authority the mission of the disciples would be doomed to failure. The grounds of mission are therefore rooted deeply in the divinity of Christ as Lord of heaven and earth. The universal scope of the commission can only be understood in the context of the risen Lord who has conquered death. Having declared Himself to be the sole possessor of ultimate authority Jesus now issues the divine commission: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” Matthew 28:19. The command is incredible. How could a band of eleven, uneducated, half-doubting people ever fulfill such an awesome task – making disciples of all the nations? The only way it could be done is through the power of the all-authoritative Jesus (Burrill, 14, 15). “Therefore” connects verse 19 with verse 18 as the reason the disciples must carry out the commission. In the original text, there is but one verb, “make disciples.” “Go,” “baptizing” and “teaching” are participles, which means that these activities do not stand alone, but rather derive their force from the leading verb. The central command, giving direction and validity to these final words of Christ is “make disciples” (Coleman, 52).



He commands us to make disciples, that is, to urge and move people to surrender to Christ's liberating authority and to volunteer to join Christ's army of followers.

There are therefore three participles here that are subordinate to the leading verb. Each of these clarifies the way in which Christ's disciples are to make disciples.

First, in the emphatic position, is the aorist participle "go." Verkuyl points out that the Greek word "poreuthentes" means "to depart, to leave, to cross boundaries." This refers to social, cultural, geographic and racial boundaries. (Winter, Hawthorne, 62).

It is best rendered "as you are going." Going is one of the three means by which to fulfill this central command. It indicates that disciples are not inert but actively engaged in fulfilling Christ's commission. The status quo is never maintained but rather disciples strive to continue breaking new ground in bringing people to Christ.

The second participle is "baptizing." Baptism is always closely associated with the decision of faith (see Acts 2:38; 8:36-38)). It is not a step to salvation, but rather an initial step of obedience that results in a believer trusting Christ for the forgiveness of sin. Believers identify with Christ in His death and resurrection and become part of the Body of Christ, the Church, through baptism. Christ specified that people were to be baptized in the "name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

The use of the singular "name" implies that the listing of the three persons should be thought of as one name. This is a clear affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity. The person who is baptized takes on the name of God and identifies with His new family.

The third participle is “teaching.” Bosch points out that Mathew frequently used the words preach and proclaim for Christ’s ministry to outsiders, while He always taught His disciples. The expression “proclaim the gospel of the kingdom” also referred to a future outreach to the Gentiles. Why would Matthew then omit this “overtly missionary terminology” from his “Great Commission?” He omitted it because teaching for Matthew is not merely an intellectual exercise, but rather an appeal to the will of those listening to submit to the rule of God’s authority. The authority and will of God is seen in the ministry and teaching of Jesus. People were to be taught all that Jesus commanded the disciples. These commands refer to the will of the Father, which in Matthew’s context is the Sermon on the Mount (Bosch, 66, 67).

I concur with Bruner who sees a need to distinguish between disciple-making that leads to baptism and the continuation of disciple-making after baptism. For Bruner “baptizing” and “teaching” are the two practical goals of discipleship. Discipling reaches it’s first goal when a person is baptized and is continued through the ongoing activity of teaching (Bruner, 1990:1097). It is hence an initial work and a continuing work in the life of a person being disciplined. The commission of Christ is then rooted in these three basic functions of mission: to disciple, baptize and teach. These functions are performed and carried out directly by the church and therefore relate to the subject of Church Growth. Church growth occurs only when these three functions are carried out. All three of these works must be carried out in the process of “going.” If the Church only does one or two of these functions to the exclusion of any of the other functions then it is being disobedient to the commission of Christ (Burrill, 20). The result may be numerical growth but not spiritual growth in the church.

In the final component of the commission Christ promises the disciples that He will be with them to the end of the age. This is so that they may have His presence as they disciple the nations. His presence is not an unconditional presence, but rather it is an assurance that He would be with the disciples in their fulfillment of this commission. It is only for “discipling disciples,” those involved in mission (Bruner, 1106). The point of the Great Commission is to make disciples. I would now like to outline a summary of what I believe constitutes the essence of Jesus’ teaching on being a disciple.

- a. A disciple is one who is willing to endure persecution for the sake of Christ. Such a disciple maintains the attitude of a learner with a teachable spirit (see Matt.10:24, 25).
- b. A disciple is one who lives in total allegiance to the Lordship of Christ, being willing to forsake all for the cause of Christ (see Luke 14: 26, 27, 33).
- c. A disciple is one who understands and keeps the basic teachings of Jesus (see John 8: 31, 32).
- d. A disciple is one who gives evidence of agape love in his/her life (see John 13:35).
- e. A disciple is one who is bearing fruit, which are other disciples for Christ (see John 15:8) (Burrill, 38, 39).

Luke constantly referred to the followers of Christ as disciples. He did this because the people met the criteria as set out by Jesus. They endured persecution, while maintaining a desire to learn more of Christ and His Word. The early Christians literally left everything for the sake of Christ and the gospel because they had made Jesus Lord of their lives.

Luke always refers to the unity that existed among the disciples and the love they shared in their ministry. Clearly it was ordinary disciples who were bringing other people to faith in Christ through the aid of the Holy Spirit.

#### 4. Church Planting: Advanced Church Growth

The most advanced form of church growth is that of church planting. “Church planting means proclaiming the gospel in a certain area and then gathering into fellowship groups those in that area who believe so they can worship, receive nurture and instruction and work for others in the extension of the kingdom of God” (Martin, 84). It is evident from the text that Luke progresses in his unfolding of the expansion of Christianity.

As early as Acts 9:31 Luke already begins to write about the churches growing in numbers. “Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.” Again in Acts 16:5 he records that the church continued to grow in number. “So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in number.” In documenting the establishment of new churches Luke focuses on the ministry of Paul. He was the first church planter in the New Testament and Luke records his efforts from Acts 13 onwards.

While Paul is the forerunner of church planters, we are not to slavishly follow his model, but we should examine it carefully just as modern architects study the works of master architects of the past even though they may not design and construct identical buildings. From my research of Acts 13-16 I would like to submit the following as a Church Planting Strategy:

a. Church-Planting is commissioned by the Holy Spirit:

Acts 13:1-4 is instructive in this regard. It forms the first basis of a missionary team being established and commissioned to a certain task. Up until this time the growth of the church has been limited to Palestine, Samaria and the Syrian mainland, with only Cyprus mentioned in Acts 11:19. The task that the Holy Spirit commissions this team to is international in scope and further fulfills the Lord's command in Acts 1:8 to take the gospel to the ends of the world (Stott, 215).

In the church at Antioch Luke mentions that there were prophets and teachers. This group of men were ethnically and culturally diverse, as reflected in the cosmopolitan make-up of the city. Barnabas was a Jew, Simeon was probably an African, Lucius was from Cyrene and Saul, also a Jew, is mentioned last.

The text raises some critical questions. To whom did the Holy Spirit reveal His will? To whom did the Spirit speak? Who are the "they" mentioned in verse 2? What was the nature of the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them? Who actually sent the disciples off, the prophets and teachers or the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit spoke to one of the prophets while the church was fasting and praying. This was not an outward voice but rather the inner witness of the Holy Spirit to the prophet. In my interpretation the "they" would be the church, gathered for fasting and praying. This demonstrates the spiritual character of the church and the church's desire to draw closer to God. One reason I contend it is the church and not just the prophets and teachers is because this was a major turning point in the mission of the church. The gospel would now be ministered internationally for the first time.

Another reason is that on every critical occasion, for example in Acts 6 and 15, Luke has the whole church involved in the decision making process. Why not now as well? A third reason is seen in Acts 14:27 when Paul and Barnabas return from their missionary trip, the whole church is gathered together to hear the report of God's blessing on their ministry.

In this vein it was the Holy Spirit that commissioned the disciples to this church-planting venture, through the sending agency of the church. This is correct, because verse 3 says "they placed their hands on them and sent them off," while verse 4 says they were "sent on their way by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit initiated and commissioned while the church obeyed under the Spirit's leading. It is clear that the Holy Spirit is not a power for us to use. He is a Person who is very God, possessing the insignia and prerogatives of Deity. We are therefore not to think of seizing the power of the Holy Spirit for our own use, but rather that the Spirit control us and use us for the glory of Christ. "Acts gives us this contrast. In Acts 8 we have Simon wanting to get and use the Spirit while here in Acts 13 it is the Spirit that gets hold of Barnabas and Paul" (Boice, 229).

In Acts 16 we find Paul's mission endeavors are again guided by the Holy Spirit. On two occasions they were refused by the Holy Spirit to enter a certain area (see Acts 16:6, 7). God reveals His will for Paul on this occasion through a vision of a man begging him to come to Macedonia. The Greek word for "help" used in verse 9 means "to run to the cry of those in danger." How were the people in Macedonia in danger? They were in danger of not hearing the gospel. This man was standing in Europe calling Paul to enter that continent with the gospel message. "This is one of the crucial moments in history. Much of Europe's future depends on Paul's response to his appeal" (Martin, 26; Nichol, 327).

Verse 10 says they got ready immediately to go to Macedonia. Under the prompting of the Holy Spirit Paul and his companions obey instantly.

b. Paul contacted receptive people:

On this first missionary trip Paul and Barnabas went to the synagogue at every turn (see Acts 13:5, 14, 44; 14:1). They ministered to the Jews first and upon their rejection of the gospel, Paul and Barnabas ministered to the Gentiles (see Acts 13:46). This pattern of going to those that are receptive to the gospel is an important missiological principle that in fact occurs frequently in Acts (see Acts 17:1, 2; 18:4, 7; 19:8). I will discuss this principle in greater detail in chapter 4.

c. Paul then sought to communicate the gospel to the receptive people:

The message is tailored to meet an audience with a knowledge of the Old Testament. His aim in this message is to demonstrate that the coming of Christ is the climax of God's activity in history. Thus he talks of God's dealings with Israel in Egypt and the Exodus that followed (Acts 13:17), the conquest of Canaan, the period of the judges and Israel's first two kings, Saul and David (vv 21-22). From there Paul introduces Christ as the fulfillment of Jewish aspirations in being a descendant of David (v.23). Following the Christ-event Paul makes an offer of forgiveness and justification (vv.38, 39).

He concludes his message with a quotation from Habbukuk 1:5 – a warning of judgment to those who reject God's offer of salvation. The themes of displacement of people and God's choice are keys to Paul's sermon.

God chose Israel resulting in the displacement of the other nations, the displacement of Saul and the choice of David, the displacement of John by Jesus and the displacement of the Jews and the choice of Jesus (Fernando, 386, 387). Why was this message tailored in this manner? Paul was demonstrating that individual Gentiles were now God's choice, which would result in displacement for the Jewish nation.

In Acts 16 Paul visits a river outside the city gate expecting to find a place of prayer (Acts 16:13). When they meet a group of woman there he shares the gospel with them. Evidently these women are "spiritually hungry" and they readily accept the message of Paul and Silas. While Luke does not emphatically state this, it is a reasonable conclusion for the people are eventually baptized, according to verse 15. One can also see the "oikos principle" at work here because Lydia's household is baptized.

d. Paul's hearers were converted to Christ:

After Paul's sermon there must have been much excitement and curiosity in Antioch. One week later, on the next Sabbath, "the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord" (Acts 13:44). Why did these people come? The text does not suggest that the attraction was in the eloquence of Paul and Barnabas, or in the dynamism of their sermons. The answer is that people were attracted to the Word of the Lord. The phrase "word of the Lord" is mentioned four times (Acts 13:44, 46, 48, 49). Clearly it was the Word of the Lord that brought the people back the following Sabbath. This is the first time in Acts so far that the gospel has had such an overwhelming response among the Gentiles (Boice, 244 - 246). It was the Word of the Lord that brought about so many conversions. The text says that the Gentiles received God's Word with gladness (v.48a).



The unusual expression “honoured (edoxazon) the word of the Lord” (v.48b) probably means that they gave glory to the Lord for the word they had heard. The result of Paul’s preaching is that God appointed those who believed to eternal life.

e. The new believers were organized into a church and established in the faith:

Acts 14:21, 22 says: “They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.” This was a return journey to the three towns Paul and Barnabas had just been through. They had been expelled from one of them (13:50) and fled from the other two (vv.6, 20). On this return trip they were involved in what I would call “follow-up” of the new converts.

It is evident that during the time that elapsed between chapter 13 and chapter 14 the church was established – in the sense that these new disciples were meeting together for worship, fellowship and instruction. Evidently leaders emerged from within these groups for Paul and Barnabas appointed elders according to verse 23. Luke designates these groups as “each church” in verse 23, suggesting that a number of churches had been meeting together.

f. Elders were set apart for each church to provide leadership:

The leaders are called “elders.” This Greek word “presbyteros” is found sixty-six times in the New Testament. It was used originally for the Jewish leaders and it occurs with this meaning in Acts (see 4:5, 8, 23; 6:12). Without explanation the word is used for the elders of the Jerusalem church in Acts 11:30.

The next reference to elders is the present passage. Clearly there is a connection between the notion of “elder” in Jewish thinking as well as in the new community of disciples. One cannot fully grasp the meaning of “elder” in the New Testament without the background of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the elder had a two-fold task of judging and discipline generally, and ruling and guiding the people in an orderly way. Without going into much detail these are some preliminary guidelines for the role of elder as seen from an Old Testament perspective, which is all the context will allow for.

h. Paul then left the elders in leadership and formed a sisterhood of churches:

Paul did not intend to stay indefinitely at a particular church. Paul saw the church eventually depending on itself and receiving the guidance and direction of the elders.

While this is true Paul did not envision neglecting the churches, but cared for them through his prayers, letters and contact and by being in a relationship with other churches.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **A. MISSIOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE CHURCH:**

*1. Growing Churches will seek revival in prayer through the Holy Spirit.*

The explosion of Pentecost was the validation of the sacrifice of Christ. Without the death of Christ there would be no Pentecost. I believe that Pentecost has all the elements of a genuine revival. The presence of God was manifest in a tangible manner with the tongues of fire settling on each disciple. They were now living sacrifices, consumed by the Holy Spirit. There was also the noise and the shaking of the building, which were public demonstrations of the power of God.

The disciples were then filled with the Holy Spirit and preached the Word of God with boldness. The result was the conversion of three thousand people and the birth of a new community. Two essentials are needed for revival. They are prayer and feeding of God's Word. Jesus spent forty days with the disciples teaching them about the kingdom of God and then they spent ten days in prayer. MacGravan states that there are three outcomes to a revival, namely, holy living, tremendous power to obey Christ and conquer sin and a new desire and willingness to proclaim the gospel (MacGravan, 134-138). Acts certainly has all these ingredients and the outcomes that MacGravan has mentioned. While Pentecost is a theological verity, I maintain however, that the disciples needed to prepare themselves for this historic event. How did they prepare? In my opinion they prepared in at least five different ways:

Firstly, they spent time in prayer during the ten-day period between the Ascension and Pentecost. This prayer meeting was a direct result of the command of Christ to wait for the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:6). The disciples prayed for a fitness to meet men and woman with the claims of Christ and His death for the salvation of humankind. The enormity of Christ's parting words weighed heavily on their hearts and the challenge of the task before them must have overwhelmed them.

Secondly, they humbled their hearts in repentance. I am certain as they recalled their lack of understanding as Christ taught them during His ministry that they saw their lack of faith and discernment. I would suggest that they repented of their sins anew in the light of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. The events of the last few days must have had a significant and profound effect on all the disciples.

The death of Christ on the Cross must have deepened their repentance as they realized the cost of salvation and the extent to which Christ had gone to save them.

Thirdly, they put things right with each other. The Gospel's repeatedly portray the struggles of the disciples with regard to the desire for the top position in Christ's kingdom. These differences were resolved and they came together in Christian fellowship.

Fourthly they repeated the truths that Christ had taught them. As they probably remembered the words of Christ they gained greater clarity and His words took on new meaning. I'm certain they reproached themselves for their misapprehension of the character of Christ (White, 36).

Fifthly, they meditated on the life of Christ. His holy life served as a witness to the power of the Holy Spirit. The loveliness of His character must have motivated them to lead holy lives and to bring others to know Christ (Gane, 1995: 45). As a result of this preparation and more importantly the plan of God, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:4). This is the most characteristic designation used by Luke. It is used ten times in Acts in a variety of situations with "the figure conveying the idea of one's personality being entirely pervaded by the Spirit's power and influence" (see Acts 2:4, 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 9:17; 11:24; 13:9, 52). Certainly this seems to be the norm for Christian experience in Acts. While all the believers did not have this experiential filling, it was nonetheless every believer's privilege (Coleman, 126, 127). I concur with the statement of White who states that "the Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who serve Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children. For the daily filling of the Spirit every member should pray (White, 50).

## *2. Growing Churches will make Scripture central to the Life of the Church*

I have already outlined the importance of the Word and church growth and have demonstrated that both go hand in hand (see Acts 12:24). The Word was the source of power in the evangelistic ministry of the disciples and it was for this Word that the people yearned. Luke repeatedly records how people received the Word with gladness (see Acts 2:41; 4:4; 8:44). Disciples themselves desired to study the Scriptures daily and align their lives to it's teachings (see Acts 17:11). The Word was central in the life and experience of the disciples. The disciples also taught the Scriptures with power and conviction. This was made possible because the disciples had a high regard for the ministry of the Word.

In their sermons the disciples quote, allude or refer to an Old Testament passage nearly two hundred times. Clearly they had memorized and internalized the Scriptures and preached with deep conviction (Coleman, 105). Preaching is a major factor in the proclamation of the gospel and takes center stage in Acts to a large extent. Preaching takes on the form of witnessing in Acts: "We cannot help but speak about what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20). The early disciples saw themselves as witnesses to the resurrection of Christ. Long refers to this New Testament image of "witness" for the role of apostolic preaching. It has a double meaning, that of witness and martyr. This brings one to the realization that the stakes for preaching the gospel are high and the risk is great. As witness, the preacher does not stand before the people with his/her own ideas or something that is self-generated. One's witness is always other-dependent. What is at stake in this image of witness is the truth. Witness is a legal term where one must go before the public and demonstrate the truthfulness of the gospel (Long, 2001:7).

There are four kinds of preaching that take place in Acts according to Barclay. There was “kerugma,” which are the plain facts of the Christian message about which there is no argument or debate. Dodd defined the apostolic message in the following manner:

- The age of fulfillment, the Messianic age has dawned;
- The ministry, death and resurrection of Christ brought this about;
- Christ has been exalted to the right hand of God as Lord of the church;
- The Holy Spirit’s activity in the church is the sign of Christ’s power and glory;
- The Messianic age will soon reach its consummation in the return of Christ in glory;
- Forgiveness and the Spirit are offered to those who repent (Stott, 79; Fernando, 181). The above is the essence of the gospel, the Christian message found in Christ.

Secondly, there was “didache,” which means teaching and elucidated the meaning of the facts which had been proclaimed. Thirdly, there was “paraklesis” which literally means exhortation. This kind of preaching called believers to live holy lives in harmony with the message of the “kerugama” and “didache.” Fourthly, there was “homilia” referring to treatment of any subject in the light of the Christian message (Barclay, 22, 23). While I do not want to go into much detail on this subject the scope of preaching in Acts necessitates that I mention the contexts in which preaching takes place. Preaching in context refers to the circumstances out of which preaching emerges.

Firstly, preaching takes place in the personal context. The disciples highlighted this in Acts 6:3, 4 where they stated, “We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.” Effective preaching begins with a spiritually prepared preacher.

Personal context requires that ministers do not preach what they have not experienced.

Experiential knowledge presupposes that pastors possess a vibrant spiritual life.

Secondly, preachers must be aware of the cultural context. In addressing the Jews in Acts 15 Paul spoke of the acts of God among the Gentiles. He recalled that the Jews were accustomed to rehearsing the acts of God in history and through worship. In Acts 17 when addressing the Greeks, Paul spoke of the “unknown God” to appeal to their worship of some form of deity. “Instead of beginning with an Old Testament text, he quoted one of their own poets to get their attention and to establish common ground” (Warren, 294). The point is obvious, Paul took the cultural context into consideration. What of the prevailing cultural mood? Larsen points out that modern culture is characterized by overstimulation, enervation, depersonalization, confusion and preference for the nonverbal.

How can the contemporary minister make a difference in his/her preaching? Larsen recommends preaching that is pictorial, personal, practical, participative and pointed. What does he mean? Pictorial preaching moves from being too analytical to appreciating the narrative genre. Personal preaching orientates sermons toward individuals. Practical preaching stresses application. Participative preaching encourages dialogue with the congregants. Of course, preaching must be to the point (Larsen, 1989:39, 40).

Thirdly, preaching takes place in the historical context. Stephen is an example of a preacher who took the historical context into account in Acts 7. He retraced the movement of God from the earliest patriarchs and outlined the history of Israel from a non-traditionalist approach.

The last context is the liturgical one. This has to do with the role of the sermon in worship. Worship is crucial to the life of the congregation.

It provides the occasion and atmosphere for preaching. Worship is in the structure of a kind of mock trial in which the charges are brought against God. The testimony is brought in and then the great acquittal, the announcement that in Jesus Christ there is no condemnation (Long, 9). As the Word is centralized in the life of the congregation, through study and proclamation, growth will be aided in the church.

### *3. Growing churches will have strong pastoral leadership*

The apostles seemed to provide the leadership in the very early growth of the church with Peter seemingly in charge. The first suggestion of local pastoral leadership is in Acts 11:29, 30. The elders mentioned in this passage seem to be the leaders in the local churches in Judea. The next mention of leadership is in Acts 12:17 where Peter tells the believers to report to James and the brothers what has happened. It seems appropriate to assume that James was the leader in Jerusalem. This argument is strengthened by the fact that James presides over the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Luke does not tell us how the transition from Peter to James took place. One textual possibility, which I would concur with, is that Peter was now involved in mission outside Jerusalem for Acts 12:17 says: "Peter...left for another place." James had now assumed leadership. Luke also focuses on others, like Stephen and Philip, in outlining the growth of the church and the specific roles they played. The point I want to make is that Luke saw individual's providing leadership at key periods in the growth of the church. I would now like to outline a New Testament perspective on leadership. This is in no way exhaustive but I only seek to provide clarity and exposition of a few texts on the subject of leadership. Secondly, I would like to outline what I see as Luke's key principles for leadership from Acts.



a. A Brief Overview of Leadership from a New Testament perspective:

One of the clearest descriptions of the Christian leader is found in 1 Peter 5:1-3: “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed; be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, not greedy for money, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” Another text that I would like to expound upon is found in Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28: “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock over which the Holy Spirit had made your overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.”

Two words are used in both Scriptures, that is, “presbuteros” and “episkopos.” “Presbuteros” refers to an “elder” focusing on the maturity of the individual. “Episkopos” means “overseer” which focuses on the function, which is to take care of the people. In the early church these two terms were used interchangeably for the same office. This is clear from Acts 20:17, 28 where the elders of Ephesus are called both elders and bishops or overseers. The same exchange is found in Titus 1:5-9 (Fowler, 1990:21, 22; Fernando, 533). The Christian leader is compared to a shepherd. Leaders are shepherds but we must be careful how we apply the analogy. Sheep have to follow the shepherd whether they like it or not. Sheep have to have no say in the decisions that the shepherd makes. Should a Christian leader expect people to obey him or her?

There is only one text in the New Testament that might suggest this and it is found in Hebrew 13:17: “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.

Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you.” The Greek word for “obey” here in Hebrews 13:17 is “peitho” which means “to persuade, to win over.” The obedience suggested is not by submission to authority but resulting from persuasion. The more common Greek word for obey is “hupakouo” which is used in reference to obeying God (see Heb.5:9; 11:8; Luke 17:6). It is significant that Paul did not use this word.

The second word used in the text is “submit.” The Greek word is “hupeiko” and means “to retire, to withdraw, to yield.” In classical Greek it described soft and yielding substances. The root idea is not “to give in” but “to be disposed to yielding.” Once again Paul does not use the more common word used in the New Testament for submitting which is “hupotasso.” It is a military word meaning “to rank under, to put in subjection to” (see Heb.2:8; Eph.5:21; James 4:7). This is an important verse for leaders. It can be translated this way concerning the church: “In your relationship with those who are your leaders and guides to godliness, be sure to maintain a yielding disposition and remain open to their persuasion.” The passage then goes on to say, “for they keep watch over you as men that must give an account. Be responsive to them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

With this insight the whole tone of obey changes. The “authority” of the Christian leader is seen not in the right to control, but only a right to influence the believers over whom the leader keeps watch. The leader is not a referee or umpire superintending people who make all the decisions. The leader has authority, which is given by God and the people.

The leader together with the believers, in consultation and prayer, establishes a vision that is in turn cast by the leader. The leader will then influence the body of believers in that direction. In this matter of leadership it is of utmost importance that the leader first keep watch over his/her own life. The leader's spiritual development is crucial to the growth and health of the church. His personal holiness is the greatest gift he can develop through the Holy Spirit to serve as an example and mentor in Christian living. Spirituality is a prerequisite for leadership and indispensable for the accomplishment of God's mission (Fowler, 75).

b. Leadership in Acts.

Firstly, Luke saw leadership as mission-driven. Leadership begins with mission. Without mission there is no need and no motivation to lead. Christ spent three and a half years training His disciples and left His mission for them to complete. This global mission as outlined by Christ in Acts 1:8. It was this mission that propelled and compelled the disciples forward. It was the mission that developed leadership. Because leadership was mission-driven it was an intensely spiritual process. The appointment of leaders was always bathed in prayer. On two occasions the prayer was accompanied by fasting (see Acts 13:2-3; 14:23). It was also during a time of prayer that God spoke about the mission of the leaders (see Acts 9:11; 10:9-15; 13:2). Luke mentioned this pattern of the early church as Christ also prayed before He chose His 12 disciples (see Luke 6:12). Prayer and mission are inseparable then in God appointing and commissioning leaders.

Secondly, Luke saw training and empowerment as a critical ingredient for leadership. A key model for developing leadership is Barnabas. In Acts 11:19 those who were scattered because of the persecution that resulted from the death of Stephen began evangelizing in Gentile areas. Verse 21 says that the Lord's hand was with them and a great number of people turned to the Lord. As a result, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to investigate. The Scripture records that upon his arrival and seeing the evidence of the grace of God, he encouraged the believers to remain true to the Lord. With his Spirit-filled ministry more people turned to the Lord. Rather than advance his own prominence and prestige in the church, Barnabas went to find Saul and brought him to Antioch.

Barnabas had already defended Saul in Acts 9:27, knowing of his dramatic conversion and also of his boldness for proclaiming the gospel of the Lord. Without Barnabas' foresight, perhaps there would have been no Paul to evangelize the Gentiles. For a whole year these two men worked together. I am certain a bond of brotherly love and friendship developed between them.

Thirdly, Luke saw leadership as a team effort. From this initial team ministry in Antioch, Barnabas and Paul continued ministry together. From Acts 13:13 Luke mentions a change in the missionary team. Paul now takes the prominent role. Those traveling with Paul, including Barnabas, are simply called his companions. This seems to me as Luke's way of saying that Paul now took over the leadership role of the missionary team.

Barnabas is only mentioned first at the Jerusalem council (see Acts 15:12, 25) which Luke does I'm certain because of Barnabas' seniority, the respect he had earned at the Jerusalem church (they had sent him on investigative ministry already) and also his affinities with the Gentiles up until this point.

Beyond the above example of team ministry I contend that this is a distinct paradigm for Luke. Peter and John visit the temple together in Acts 3 and once again appear before the Sanhedrin in chapter 4. Stephen and Philip appear together in ministry, while not physically, but certainly in the forward movement of the gospel. Thereafter it is the turn of Barnabas and Paul and then Paul and Silas and Barnabas and John Mark. It is clear from what I have outlined that team leadership is a distinct feature of Luke's view of growing the church.

*4. Growing Churches organize around and practice the dynamics of the church in Acts 2*  
Acts 2:42 - 47 describes the community life of the young Church. The verbal expression "they devoted themselves to" covers four activities. The word "devoting" in the Greek is the same word used in connection with the persistent devotion of the disciples in prayer in Acts 1:14 (translated "constantly" there). The word "proskartereo" means that they faithfully adhered to the newly formed community.

The first feature is "the apostles' teaching." Following the example of Christ in teaching his disciples, the early Church had a strong teaching ministry. From Luke's gospel and his writing so far, one may conclude that they taught the nature of salvation, the truths of the kingdom, the person and work of Christ, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies in Christ and the mission entrusted to them by Christ.

The second feature was fellowship. The Greek word used here is “koinonia.” It denotes sharing and intimacy. Of the nineteen occurrences of this word in the New Testament it seems to continually suggest the unique sharing that Christians have with God and with each other.

The “breaking of bread” is the third feature. I hold to the view that this was a referral to the Lord’s Supper. I will give three reasons for my view. Firstly, all the features of the verse in question are of a spiritual nature; teaching, fellowship and prayer. This would suggest that this one is also spiritual in nature. Secondly, it is the symbolism of the breaking of bread with the broken body of Christ that makes this action significant. This reason is further validated by the fact that there are twelve references in the New Testament to the breaking of bread (Fernando, p 121). Thirdly, as Paul’s traveling companion Luke would have known firsthand this matter of “breaking bread,” and would not have therefore mentioned it without it meaning the Lord’s Supper for then he would confuse his readers.

The fourth feature I would like to make reference to is in verse 42, which reads literally “and to the prayers.” This shows the dynamic spiritual growth that was taking place in the lives of the early community of believers. Of course Luke is demonstrating also that the early believers began their ministry as Christ began his, that is, in prayer. A key question that must be raised is whether these four features should characterize the contemporary Church? In my opinion they should. While Luke does not explicitly tell us to practice these four features, the fact that teaching, fellowship, worship and prayer continue through the book of Acts shows the importance and necessity he places on them and that they were the very fabric of the early believers experience. Many other passages in the

New Testament support these as the fundamentals of the church. Luke now mentions the fact that everyone was filled with awe in verse 43 and that many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. The Greek for awe is “phobos” which refers to fear or holy terror related to the sense of the divine presence, to the attitude of reverence. This feeling of awe was a result of the supernatural character of the church. This apostolic community experienced the wonders and miracles of God in great power.

Again I must raise the question whether this is to be considered normative? I believe it should, but in a delimited sense. I hold to this view because the signs gifts are still operative in the church today according to 1 Corinthians 14 and Romans 12. On the other hand what is important in this regard is what was taking place in Acts.

As I pointed out already, Acts introduces a new era, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church as primarily an instrument of service. I believe then that miracles were a necessary means of authenticating the message of the gospel. It seems to me that miracles are always juxtaposed with evangelism (see Acts 2: 42-47; 5: 14-16). Miracles were also a means of arousing the interest of the people so that the gospel could be proclaimed (see Acts 8: 6, 12). I believe my argument is strengthened by Luke’s use on thirteen occasions of the Greek word “semeion” which means “an event which is regarded as having some special meaning” (Fernando, 272). The miracles then served as a confirmation of the gospel. In another vein it is clear that Luke restricts miracles to Peter and Paul. In his writing Paul states that miracles are what mark an apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12). Stephen and Philip are also credited with performing miracles, but their roles were unique as they laid the foundation for the Gentile mission. What gains prominence in Acts is the preaching of the gospel, the ministry of the Word in the power

of the Spirit. Miracles should be present in the contemporary church, but not in the exact same manner and same extent to which they were in the early church.

Luke continues explaining the communal life of the early community saying that they met together having everything in common, giving generously as needs arose. Is this normal Christianity? Should we follow suit? Firstly, this selling of goods and possessions was voluntary and only for the specific needs of the people. Secondly, there were still people who owned homes for that is where the believers met for fellowship (see Acts 2:46).

On this matter I would conclude that this should be normal Christianity in the sense of caring for the needs of the believers and also being generous. That is the biblical principle that is still applicable.

In verses 46 and 47 Luke makes mention of their worship. It was formal and informal for they met in the temple courts and people's homes. They were together with glad and sincere hearts. The result of all this was praise for God and the people's favor. Luke then mentions that "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." This is evangelism. It was the result of the first four features taking place. Clearly the Lord added to their number daily but through what means? I would like to suggest that the impact of the public preaching and the miraculous signs by the transformation in the lives of ordinary people is the means God used to add daily to the Church. The purposes or features of the church that I have outlined above are what constitute a healthy church. When a church is healthy, it will grow automatically.



##### *5. Growing Churches will target receptive people to win to Christ*

Effective evangelism takes place when a specific audience is targeted with the purpose of communicating the gospel to that group. Targeting a specific group of people is a Biblical principle for evangelism. Christ targeted His ministry audience as the Jews (see Matt.15:24). He was not being exclusive or prejudice, but rather bringing the gospel to God's people as God had originally intended. Even in His teaching Christ called for a targeted evangelism. In Matthew 10:5, 6 Christ told the disciples only to go to the Jews and not to the Samaritans or Gentiles.

In Galations 2:7 Paul states that he was sent to the Gentiles and Peter was sent to the Jews. This concept of targeting is also found in Matthew 28:20, where Christ commissioned His followers to "make disciples" of all the nations. The Greek term "ta ethne," from which we derive the word "ethnic" refers to all people groups. As mentioned, in Acts Paul and his team constantly went to the synagogue to preach the Word to their target audience (Warren, 158, 159).

Further biblical justification for the principle of receptivity is also seen in what Wagner labels the "harvest principle," which is that the fundamental principle of farming is that of the harvest. It is the vision of fruit. The farmer's goal is to gather in a crop of whatever he has planted. Christ assumed this when He said: "Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for the harvest" (John 4:35). Christ mandated seeking a harvest and that would necessitate targeting those that were receptive. In Matthew 10:11-14 Christ instructed the disciples to test the receptivity of a town or city.

If the disciples were not received by the people, they were to depart from the place and shake the dust off their feet. “Shaking the dust off one’s feet was a culturally recognized sign of protest, in this case protesting resistance to the gospel” (Rainer, 250, 251).

Targeting is a biblical principle that one must employ for effective evangelism.

Closely connected to this is the fact that spiritual receptivity varies widely. Like the different kinds of soil Jesus spoke about in His parable (see Matt.13:3-23), so people respond differently to the gospel. For effective church growth to take place, the gospel seed needs to be planted in the good soil – the soil that will produce a bountiful harvest.

Warren identifies two groups of people that are highly receptive: people under transition and people under tension (Warren, 182). A growing church will therefore focus on reaching receptive people with the gospel.

#### *6. Growing Churches will reach people like themselves*

This principle states that “men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers” (MacGravan, 223). It is called the homogeneous unit principle. Is there biblical evidence to support this notion of evangelism along distinctly ethnic lines? I will demonstrate that the ministry of Christ provides ample support for this view. Jesus was mono-cultural. He was equipped and called to ministry to the lost house of Israel (see Matthew 15:24). At the beginning of His ministry Christ sought to establish a ministry team. The call for those to join His itinerant ministry went to Jews only who had been waiting for the promised Messiah. How did this “call” evolve in the lives of those that eventually followed Christ? To answer this question I will look at Andrew and how Christ called him.

He was a devout Jew, a disciple of John, who had been present at Jesus' baptism. After meeting Christ he immediately went to find his brother Peter and told him that he had found the Messiah (see John 1:41). John tells us that Andrew actually brought Peter to Jesus, having spent the day with Jesus and been overwhelmed that John the Baptist called Him the Lamb of God (see John 1:35, 39, 42). The same cycle is repeated the next day as Christ finds Philip and he in turn finds Nathaniel (see John 1:43-49). These two episodes demonstrate what MacGravan said, that whenever a person is invited to follow Christ without racial, linguistic or cultural barriers to contend with, effective evangelism takes place.

In Jesus' ministry He also focused on Israel. After He had healed the demon possessed man in Mark 5 the man wanted to join the ministry team of Christ, but Jesus forbid him and told him rather to go and minister to his family. When the Greeks came to see Christ in John 12 there is no mention of Christ granting their request of an interview. These are only some examples of Christ's intentional ministry. While this is true there are also a few isolated episodes where Christ interacts with Gentiles (see Matthew 8:5-13; 15:32-39; John 4:38-43). Evidently Christ saw the church going to the Gentiles and fulfilling the mission He had given them. At the end of His ministry Christ left behind a 120 Jewish disciples with the challenge of Acts 1:8 (Wagner, 43, 46, 50).

This principle however in no way does away with unity in the Body of Christ. The Scriptures teach that there is no separation between Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, "for you are all one in Christ" (Gal.3:28). Paul also says that Christ has broken the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles (see Eph. 2:12-14). MacGravan states "that people like to become Christians without crossing .... barriers."

My assumption is that these are new Christians from heathen or other religious persuasions. Once believers become mature in Christ they will involve themselves in mono and cross-cultural ministry/evangelism.

Having established the biblical basis for this principle I would like to turn to ministry practicalities. A church will attract the kind of people that already make up its membership. Warren states that "it is unlikely that a church will attract and keep many people who are very different from those who already attend."

On a pastoral level one will also best reach those who relate to you. God has shaped and called each of us in different ways so that we may reach different people (Warren, 175, 176).

#### *6. Growing Churches will develop an effective lay ministry.*

A vital ingredient of church growth is the "people power" that is required to implement it. The narrative of Scripture is eloquent witness to the fact that God uses His people to grow His church. The commission in Acts 1:8 clearly demonstrates that Christ would be relying on the disciples, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to propagate the gospel.

This thesis has shown that Church Growth took place in a large part to ordinary disciples carrying out the commission of Christ. The importance of developing a lay ministry for the local church, to begin witnessing initial church growth, cannot be overestimated.

The proper starting point for lay ministry is an appropriate biblical foundation that supports the ministry. The following four biblical concepts are in my opinion foundation stones for developing a lay ministry for Church Growth in the local church:

a. The Church – One Class of People

To develop a lay ministry one must have a biblical understanding of the members of the local church. They are commonly called the laity. This term goes back to the Greek word “laikos.” It designates those who belong to the “laos” or the chosen people of God. Thus all who profess faith in Christ as Lord are God’s chosen “laos.” They have been called out of the mass of mankind and have given allegiance to Christ.

Influenced by the Graeco-Roman political environment, the church began to divide the people into two classes. The “kleros” (the word from which we get the term “clergy”) were those who possessed wisdom, were trained and had power to act. The “laos” (the word from which we get the term “laity”) were those who were untrained and who were expected to submit to direction. This ecclesiastical development of dividing the church into two classes – clergy and laity- is a departure from the biblical concept of the whole church as the “laos.” “Kleros” refers to all those who share in the inheritance of God’s redemption, not a group in the church distinct from the “laos” (see Acts 26:18, Col.1:11, 12). Thus the two words “kleros” and “laos” refer to the same people in the New Testament.

b. Clergy and Laity – A Common Ministry

Luke shares an administrative challenge the apostles faced in Acts 6. I believe this passage is instructive in understanding the common role of the “kleros” and the “laos.” As a direct result of the growth of the number of disciples contention arose between the Grecian Jews and the Hebraic Jews “because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1).

The apostles called everyone together and proposed that they choose seven men from among them to handle this responsibility. Everyone was pleased with this proposal and seven men who were full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom were chosen. I do not believe that these men were appointed as deacons. Firstly, this was only a response to a temporary crisis. This is so for in Acts 11, when there is a famine in Jerusalem, the seven are not mentioned. Secondly, the seven are not called deacons. Thirdly, while they were given a specific role in chapter 6 we find Stephen doing the work of proclamation in chapter 7 and Philip the work of an evangelist in chapter 8.

It is deliberate on Luke's part to use the same word, "diakonia," for both the work of the apostles and the seven. In verse 1 it would refer to "the ministry of the Word" and in verse 4 it would refer to "the ministry of tables." This indicates that neither ministry is superior to the other, but that both are ways of serving God and His church.

As a direct result of the unleashing of this ministry the Word continued to spread. The number of disciples increased rapidly and a number of priests joined the faith. The two verbs in verse 4, "spread" and "increased" are in the imperfect tense, indicating that both the spread of the Word and the increase of the disciples were continuous (Stott, 122, 123). The implication from this passage means that both the so-called clergy and laity have a common ministry and that when this common ministry takes place in the local church there will be growth.

#### c. Pastor's will equip their members for ministry

The biblical role of the laity as ministers raises an important question. Who is responsible for training believers for their ministry? Acts, as well as the rest of the New Testament,

assigns that role to the pastor/elder. I have already shown in this thesis the training and empowerment of believers that took place under the teaching ministry of Paul and others. My purpose is now to integrate this into a model for the local church.

“It was he who gave some to be ...pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13). From this text we learn that the ministry is committed to the “laos,” the pastor who does the training and the members who do the ministry. This is clearly a reversal of the traditionally accepted roles of pastors and members. Re-education is therefore necessary of both pastors and members. The success of developing a lay ministry depends on the willingness of the pastor to train and equip the members and of the members to begin actual ministry. Also important is that the pastor give significant areas of ministry to trained lay ministers so that they can function in their new roles. The laity will be motivated only to the extent that these significant areas of ministry are given to their charge. The pastor who is emotionally secure and biblically aware will be the pastor most facilitative to equipping the laity for the work of ministry. “Christian ministers have a broader work than many have recognized. They are not only to minister to the people, but to teach them how to minister. They should not only give instruction in right principles , but educate their hearers to impart these principles. Every church member should be engaged in some line of service for the Master” (White, 148, 149). What is crucial is therefore the mutual understanding and enthusiastic acceptance of the biblical roles of laity and pastor.

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To provide greater clarity to this critical issue, I must ask what exactly “equipping” is? “Katartizo,” the Greek word for equip, expresses making something suitable or useful. According to Lawrence in classical Greek it meant “to put in order,” “restore,” “furnish,” “equip,” “to make suitable” or “fitting.”

It suggests making something work the way it was designed to function, to bring something from a place of ineffectiveness to effectiveness. Pastors equip the members when they make them ready for ministry, when they are effective in the body of Christ, utilizing their spiritual gifts leading them into maturity (Eph.4:14), spirituality (Eph.4:15), and unity (Eph.4:16) (Lawrence, 1999: 69-71). This is the central work of the pastor.

#### d. Christ’s Model of Ministry

A careful reading of the Gospels reveals an important strategy of Christ’s short three-year ministry. He devoted Himself to the training of His small group of laymen.

He might have reasoned that He did not have time to give to the twelve disciples when the multitudes could have had His full time and energies. The methodology of Christ is outlined by Don James as the J-Curve of Christianity. I have found this helpful in understanding the ministry of Christ and the growth of the church that took place in Acts.

He outlines it as follows:

##### *Begin by selecting and training a Core Group*

- i) After being filled with the Spirit, pray before you choose. This is what he calls preparation (see Luke 4:1, 2).
- ii) Select a core group of 10-12 individuals. This is invitation (see Mark 1:17; 3:14).



- iii) Teach and model for the core group. This is apprenticeship (see Mark 3:14).
- iv) Send the core group out to minister and begin their initial ministry (see Matthew 10).
- v) Receive the core group reports and give them rest (see Luke 9:10).

#### *Teach and Model for the Support Group*

- i) This is the multiplication process. Teaching and modeling needs to continue with the 12 disciples and they in turn minister to their groups. The 72 are the direct result and product of the ministry of the 12 disciples. The 12 disciples were sent out in twos (six groups) and each group disciplined 10 others in each group.
- ii) Send the support group out to minister and begin their core groups (see Luke 10:1).

#### *Teach and Model for the Base Congregation*

- i) This congregation is what James calls the critical mass. The vision is cast for this group (see John 14:12).
- ii) The commission is given, with training an important feature (see Matt.28:19).
- iii) The target areas and peoples are identified (see Acts 1:8).
- iv) Send the base congregation away to prayer (see Acts 1:4).

#### *Results: The J-Curve of Christianity*

This is simply the empowerment that is seen in Acts as the church grows first through addition and then multiplication (see Acts 2:47; 6:1) (James, 1999:56). This thesis has demonstrated the manner in which the disciples went about carrying out this task and the theological verities of discipleship. In this regard it is wise for the pastor to equip a small group of members in areas of ministry to which they are gifted and then to release them to carry out these ministries. This small group can serve as the “leaven” in the congregation, which can build up grass-roots enthusiasm for the work of the ministry.

The empowered laity can then in turn assist the pastor in equipping others for ministry. This is the Divine plan for the church and will result in the church being built up, strengthened in the faith and attaining to the full measure of Christian maturity.

*7. Growing churches will be passionate about God's mission*

“For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Mission begins and ends with God. Notice that Christ addresses Himself as the Son of Man. This title was first used in Daniel 7:14 and Christ takes this for Himself. He identifies Himself as a man. Mission must then be seen in the light of the incarnation. The incarnation highlights the fact that Christ came into a specific context, as a Jew among Jews. He identified with the struggles and issues of His day. While living within that culture He still challenged the thinking and practices of His day. The incarnation therefore takes the cultural and human situation seriously.

Mission is therefore never static but always adapting to the human situation within that context. I believe this is why Bosch stated that an exhaustive definition of mission can never be fully developed but at best we can develop approximations of what mission is all about (Bosch, 9). Furthermore, mission is specifically to the lost. In Luke 15 Christ outlines what He means by “lost.” It clearly has salvific overtones. The sheep refers to those that are lost but can do nothing to change the condition in which they find themselves. The coin refers to those that have no awareness that they are lost. The son knows that he is lost, but is initially rebellious. It is the drawing power of his father’s love that leads him to decide to go home. These three categories describe what Christ means by lost (Bascom, 1994:8). In this connection the over-arching theme of Scripture is that God calls His people to give themselves in loving ministry for the salvation of

humankind (see Matt.28:19, 20; John 17:18; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 2:9). The life of Christ is the pattern for all His followers. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

I believe that the health, strength and growth of the church is directly proportional to her obedience to God’s mission in the world. The biblical principles I have shared above clearly advocate that the heartbeat of the local church be equipping for ministry. When the laity are equipped for ministry then they are able to fulfill the mission of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit. Whenever the church expends itself for the sake of others it becomes healthy and grows. Everything the church does must then be measured against the yardstick of mission.

#### *8. Growing churches will plant new churches*

Wagner has stated that “the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches” (Burrill, 18). In the church planting strategy I have outlined it is clear that the new Christian community grew throughout the Roman Empire to a large extent through the means of church planting. Church planting in Acts was actually the reproduction of the body of Christ. An example is in an organism that reproduces cells to renew the body. In time the body will grow old and die. If internal growth is the only kind of growth that is taking place the church will eventually die. Organisms have to reproduce whole organisms to keep the species alive. Church planting is then crucial to the continued life of the church. I would now like to outline the reasons why I concur with the statement made by Wagner.

Firstly, new churches are needed for the new generation. Most older churches are hindered and stifled by tradition. In these churches it is mostly the older generation that have all the leadership positions and hence make all the decisions. These churches are resistant to change and at new innovative ways of “doing ministry.” A new church plant provides the younger committed generation opportunities for service and witness. New leadership is developed and equipped to do great things for the kingdom of God. The relevance of the church is maintained in an increasingly secular society.

Secondly, new churches will attract new people and will therefore grow better than old churches. New converts are the best potential soul-winners because they still have many contacts with non-church members. Most times new converts are also still passionate about sharing their faith in Christ and are not as hesitant to invite their un-churched friends to church.

Thirdly, new churches are needed because there are un-entered areas where there is no Christian presence. My own denomination is an example of this. The Seventh Day Adventist Church has adopted a strategy of going to an area where there is no Adventist or Christian church and proclaiming the gospel in a distinctly prophetic setting. This is a world-wide strategy that has been marked by success. The church employs “global missionary pioneers” who are culturally aware of the target area and are of the same ethnic background as the people there. These pioneers are trained and equipped by pastors and then sent into an area to evangelize that area. They work together with the local pastor, who in turn laises with the denominational leadership on the progress being made. The denomination maintains it’s focus on mission, ensures it’s growth and faithfulness to the Word of God.

Fourthly, planting new churches engenders faith and confidence in God. There are many challenges to planting a new church. Finances, location, time and effort, travel and the initial “start-up” are only some of the challenges. However, planting a church is to be on the cutting edge of one’s Christian experience. To overcome the evident challenges one will require faith in God and not simply in one’s resources.

*10. Growing churches will develop and integrate holistic small groups into church life*

As I have studied Acts I have found that the disciples often met in homes. In Acts 1:12-14 the disciples were in a room when Christ met with them and shared His parting commission. Ten days later the disciples are in a house praying, when the Holy Spirit falls on them. The new community, it states in Acts 2:47, met together in each other’s homes to break bread. Acts 5:42 states that the disciples went from house to house teaching and proclaiming the gospel. When Paul wanted to destroy the church in Acts 9 he went from house to house taking people to prison. In Acts 12 when Peter was unjustly jailed the church met in Mary’s home to pray for him. In Acts 16:40 Paul and Silas go to Lydia’s home to meet the brothers there to encourage them. In Acts 18:7 Luke seems to hint that the meeting moved from the synagogue to Titius home. In verse 8 he mentions that they were baptized and joined the faith. In Acts 20:20 Paul says that he never stopped teaching in people’s homes. Beyond the evidence from Acts the New Testament overwhelmingly supports this notion of the disciples meeting in the believers homes (see Col.4:15, Rom.16:15, Phil.4:22). What took place in these meetings in the believer’s homes?

The Scriptures make clear what the essentials were: teaching, prayer, fellowship and evangelism. The essentials of the corporate worship experience were evident in the disciples' homes. Churches who have this emphasis still do not grow because they see it as optional. They do not see it as the church in principle, power and purpose where the essentials of church life occur (teaching, worship, fellowship, evangelism). I would now like to outline from my pastoral experience what I see as the cardinal points of holistic small groups:

a. A place where Christ is the DNA - the essence - of the group.

The center of every group is the heart of its existence. If anything other than Christ is made the center of the group it will no longer have the vital energies needed to continue as a healthy group. The power source of the group is the Word, prayer and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ must always remain the main thing in a group if it is to function effectively.

b. A place where Biblical insights are applied to everyday life.

The goal is not to gain head knowledge, but to apply the Scriptures to daily life. Real issues that people are faced with can be discussed and focused on. Biblical principles and stories that are illustrative of the challenges people face can aid believers in their Christian experience.

c. A place where believers learn to love and serve others using their spiritual gifts.

Edification, or building one another up in the faith, is the lifestyle of holistic small groups. The Scriptures give 52 different admonitions concerning how we are to treat one another. Those that practice this ministry of edification will enter into a deeper sense of community.

d. A place where the multiplication of leaders takes place.

One of the greatest keys is to think in terms of multiplication of leaders and not multiplication of groups. If the focus is on multiplication of leaders then groups will also multiply as a simple by-product. As Christ looked at His group He saw the potential of leadership in each person and processed each of them into becoming a leader.

e. A place where life-transforming discipleship takes place

Discipleship becomes practical in the context of small groups. It is the transfer of life and not just rote learning of abstract concepts. Discipleship embraces the three phases of learning – cognitive, modeling and experience. The process continues until the person becomes a fully matured Christian.

## **B. CONCLUSION:**

The church in Acts grew at an alarming rate. Within the first thirty years the church grew from one hundred and twenty believers to tens of thousands of believers and multiplied congregations. The six directional statements that Luke makes cover a span of thirty years. They begin with the Lord adding to the church and then the disciples multiplying. Churches are then being added and increasing in numbers until in Acts 21 tens of thousands are being added to the church. This thesis has attempted to document and clarify the causes of that growth. Much of what was written in Acts is intended by Luke to serve as a model. The model however is not in the specifics but rather the overall picture in Acts. “The forward-moving expansion of the gospel into Gentile communities, empowered by the Holy Spirit and resulting in changed lives and local communities is God’s intent for the local church today” (Fee and Stuart, 101).

The triumphant movement of the gospel from Jerusalem could not be stopped by the Sanhedrin, persecution or dissension and resulted in the growth of the church. It is the passion and will of God that His church grow. The greatest expressions of joy in the New Testament are found when lost people are found by Christ and enter into a relationship with Him (see Luke 15:7; Matt.25:21; Luke 15:10; Luke 10:17; Acts 8:8; 13:52; 15:3; 1 Thess. 2:19). When one accepts in faith the death of Christ, turns from sin in repentance to God and is baptized, one enters the Body of Christ. Recognizing that the church is the Body of Christ makes one realize that the church cannot fail, because Christ cannot fail. He has ordained that His Body will triumph and that He will build His church (see Matt.16:18). The Bride, His church, is pictured in apocalyptic language in Revelation 19 as present at the marriage supper of the Lamb in triumph and victory. The church, the ransomed and redeemed of all the ages will join Christ in heaven for all eternity.

I have achieved the aim and purpose of this thesis, namely to develop a theological framework for Church Growth accompanied by missiological and practical guidelines from the text of Acts. In my exposition I have only gone as far as the text will permit and I believe that this is an essential ingredient of the contribution of this thesis.

Furthermore I have accomplished a comprehensive approach to Church Growth in Acts, demonstrating the theological framework of the kingdom of God and other missiological realities. The angle of incidence for the exposition of the text has been Church Growth. As a result there are passages that I have not reflected on and issues that I have not addressed. Many of the concepts I have shared have grown out of my own convictions as a Minister of the gospel and I have really outlined my own philosophy of ministry in this thesis.



A critical question I must raise is whether or not the principles and guidelines I have shared from the book of Acts are still relevant today? Is there current scholarship and research that will validate what I have shared from Acts? Christian Swartz, author of “Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches” did extensive research on what makes churches grow. After researching a thousand congregations on six continents he zeroed in on eight qualities that emerged as significant to both spiritual and numerical growth:

1. *“Empowering Leadership* – leading via vision casting, mentoring, equipping, delegation and change.
2. *Gift Oriented Ministry* – understanding and matching spiritual gifts to tasks for meaningful service.
3. *Passionate Spirituality* – Faith live out of a love relationship with Jesus Christ by practicing spiritual disciplines .
4. *Functional Structures* – Combining the life in the church with systems, goals and planning to move forward.
5. *Inspiring Worship Services* – God centered worship with transforming preaching that leaves the congregation edified and uplifted.
6. *Holistic Small Groups* – A spiritual atmosphere of transparency, trust and sharing with the application of biblical truths to daily living.
7. *Need Oriented Evangelism* – Connecting to already existing friendships by listening, meeting needs and connecting the gospel to personal situations.
8. *Loving Relationships* – a relational environment of affirmation, encouragement, joy and intentional conflict resolution” (Grys, 2001:8, 9).

As one examines my study of Acts one will find all eight qualities in the book of Acts. The principles and guidelines I have outlined are therefore still relevant for the contemporary church. The Book of Acts will therefore continue to provide clarity and guidance to the subject of Church Growth.

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