

THE BOOK OF ACTS
"GUIDELINES FOR CHURCH PLANTING"

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Christ the Lord has promised that He will build His church. And within the book of Acts one finds the establishment and growth of the church. It is in this particular book that several guidelines appear that enhanced the growth of the early church.

One of the first patterns to appear in the area of the church planting ministry involves a particular emphasis upon either an individual effort or a team effort. The major effort appears to be that of a team effort. From key passages (Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1) our Lord delighted in setting a precedent of a team effort in accomplishing His work. It appears from a study of Acts, that this very precedent was continued in the ministry of early church planting.

The second area of investigation involves the public areas into which the first missionaries entered. The was the most dominant area in presenting the gospel. From the synagogue the early church was soon expelled.

Another area of public ministry was in the realm of open-air preaching. The first disciples were soon to follow their Master in the art of public preaching. The public area most involved was the marketplace. From this center of public activity the missionaries found fertile hearts to plant the gospel.

Another sector that provided an area for the establishment of the early church was in the private sector of life. Basically this involved the home. In passages like Acts 11:14; 16:15; 16:31 and 18:8 the home (*οἶκος*) provides the atmosphere for the development of churches. The private sector has many advantages to offer in the realm of church planting.

The final area of study involves centers of population. The missionaries of the early church recognized the importance of proclaiming the gospel in those areas that influence the most people. In this study those cities under survey were cities of size and importance. And it was to these population centers that most missionary activity was directed.

It is the conclusion of this writer that Acts provides some very helpful guidelines in the mission of church planting.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
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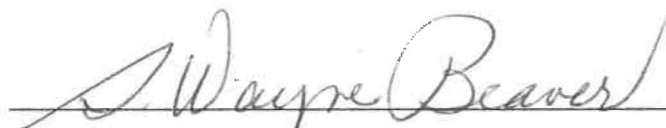

Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

The book of Acts stands between the Gospels and the Epistles and provides for the reader a historical and accurate account of the establishment of the church.

It is within this Biblical account that this writer has purposed to examine whether this narrative provides guidelines and methods that not only enabled the establishment of the first century church, but also may enable the establishment of churches in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER I

THE BASIC PATTERN OF MISSIONARY OUTREACH IN ACTS

The most ancient title of the book as given in the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Bezae is *Πραξεις Ἀποστόλων*; and properly rendered, both in the Authorized and the Revised Versions, "The Acts of the Apostles." Although probably not given to it by the author, Acts sufficiently expressed its general object, to give a faithful and authentic record of the doings of the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, after He had ascended into heaven, leaving them as His responsible agents to carry on the building of His church on earth.

The Scriptures provide an unique record of the proclamation of the establishment of the church as revealed in the Gospels; and the Epistles provide the record of the maturation of the church. But the book of Acts provides the necessary link between the Gospel and the Epistles. It is in this book that the student of the Bible learns of the expanse and development of the church.

It is this writer's opinion that the Biblical narrative provides not only historical information concerning the early church but also provides the foundation upon which one will build his ecclesiastical framework.

The book of the Acts provides therefore instruction and guidelines in the development of that foundation. It is on this foundation that the basic pattern of missionary outreach is observed. Mr. Gabriel Fackre has stated it this way:

Contemporary evangelism has much to learn from the first evangelists. We are afflicted today by partial perspectives that do an injustice to the full and apostolic practice traced out in the book of the Acts. A special kind of fragmentation is to be found in the prevailing verbal conception of getting the story out. The very title of the biblical character of evangelism should alert us to this danger. It is not the "Talks of the Evangelist" but the "Acts of the Apostles."¹

It is the opinion of this writer that the book of the Acts holds forth the basic pattern of missionary outreach. And this writer would like now to expand on the development of this basic pattern.

The Minor Emphasis is Upon an Individual Effort

It is agreed by most scholars that the book of the Acts lends itself to a threefold division. Chapters 1 through 7 reveals the establishment of the church, chapters 8 through 12 reveals the church being scattered and finally chapters 13 to 28 reveals the extension of the church.

The purpose of Luke in writing this account is to provide a co-ordinated account of Christian origins. In the Acts, Luke undertakes to trace the fulfillment of the

¹Gabriel Fackre. "An Acts Theology of Evangelism," Religion in Life. 44 (Spring 1975): p. 73.

earthly mission of Jesus in terms of the establishment of His church by men whom He had trained, and the spread of the movement under the impulsion of the Holy Spirit whom He had promised.²

The Lord by His very grace and mercy has chosen to use men to be the very messengers of His gospel. Here in the book of the Acts Luke records several occasions where the Lord chose to communicate His message solely through the instrument of one man.

The first example of an individual effort in the proclamation of the gospel is found in the ministry of Stephen. In Acts 6:8-7:60 Luke records this ministry.

Stephen was one of the seven appointed to look after the daily distribution to the poor in the early church (Acts 6:1-6). Stephen's ministry was not, however, limited to providing for the poor. He did "great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). While this probably brought him into great favor with the people generally, another aspect of his ministry engaged him in bitter conflict with the adherents of Judaism.

Acts 7 records Stephen's remarkable apology before the council. F. F. Bruce rightly points out that it was not

²Everett F. Harrison, Introduction to the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 238.

a speech for the defense in the forensic sense of the term. Such a speech as this was by no means calculated to secure an acquittal before the Sanhedrin. It is rather a defense of pure Christianity as God's appointed way of worship.³

In studying the entire narrative it is evident that Stephen alone is the sole individual involved. The unique setting is such that it lends itself not to a group of individuals that are responsive to the gospel, but to a group that is opposed to the gospel message. The apology by Stephen is not for the establishment of the church, but for the defense of Christianity.

The second example of an individual effort in the proclamation of the gospel is found in the ministry of Philip. In Acts 8:4-13, 26-40, he was one of the famous seven deacons, said to be "men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3). After the death of Stephen the persecutions scattered the Christians abroad.

In Acts 8 it is stated that Philip preached in Samaria with great success "And the multitudes with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip" (Acts 8:6). Philip's preaching to the Samaritans indicated a growing awareness in the church that the gospel was also

³F. F. Bruce. Commentary on the Book of Acts. (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954) p. 141.

intended for other people than the Jews only.⁴ Philip's preaching was accompanied by numerous supernatural signs as tokens that God's power was behind the new movement. As a result many of the Samaritans believed Philip as he announced the good news of Jesus Christ, and they demonstrated their faith by receiving Christian baptism.

When reports reached the apostles at Jerusalem regarding the Samaritans' response to the gospel, they immediately dispatched Peter and John to Samaria.

Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch is told in a style which is in some respects reminiscent of the Old Testament narratives of Elijah and Elisha. Philip received a divine command to go southward to the Jerusalem-Gaza road. And it was here that he met the Ethiopian eunuch and led him to the Lord. And it has been suggested that perhaps Philip was instrumental in introducing Christianity to Africa.⁵

⁴Homer A. Kent Jr. Jerusalem to Rome. (Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1972), p. 78.

⁵Lorman M. Peterson. "Philip the Evangelist," The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, ed. by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 649.

Major Emphasis is upon a Team Effort

Historical Precedent

Prior to the book of the Acts this writer believes historical precedent has been set in the team effort of missionary outreach. He would like to suggest that this precedent could possibly exist in the Old Testament in the relationships of Abraham and Lot, Moses and Aaron, and Joshua and Caleb. Also in Ecclesiastes 4:9,10 the following is found, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up." Delitzsch, in his commentary, suggests that these verses reveal a sorrowful spectacle of the endless labour and insatiable covetousness of the isolated man.⁶

Now coming to the New Testament, the Gospels provide a historical precedent in the very ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this particular precedent that this writer believes provides the capstone of the precedent set by Biblical history itself.

There are two key passages that speak directly to this matter, Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1. In the passage in Luke 10:1, Lenski sees *ἀνά* as being distributive, thus

⁶C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Vol. VI, trans. by James Martin, Commentary on the Old Testament. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949). p. 276.

dividing the group of 70 into 35 pairs which would enable the commission to be more quickly carried out.⁷

In the passage in Mark 6:7 the account is set forth of the mission of the twelve. Here again the twelve are sent forth by twos (ἀποστέλλειν δύο δύο) . A. Plummer states the following on this passage:

The advantages of pairs are obvious (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). The Baptist had adopted this method (Luke 7:19, John 1:37), and we find it repeatedly in the Apostolic Church; Barnabas and Saul, Judas and Silas, Barnabas and Mark, Paul and Silas, Timothy and Silas, Timothy and Erastus. Our Lord and the six pairs now made seven centers preaching and healing.⁸

Also it is of interest to point out that in Mark 14:13 the expression ἀποστέλλειν δύο is used. It appears that even as regarding trifling missions, the Lord seems to have adhered to His plan of sending the apostles out in pairs.

Follow-Through of the Precedent in the Book of the Acts

Now in coming to the book of the Acts, this writer believes the precedent of sending forth evangelists and apostles by twos was the major emphasis in church planting (See Appendix 1). As regards to the narrative of the

⁷R. C. H. Lenski. The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1946), p. 565.

⁸A. Plummer, The Gospel According to St. Mark. (Cambridge: University Press, 1914), p. 159.

missionary activity which developed from the church in Antioch, there is something to be learned from the fact that two servants of God were called by the Holy Spirit to go forth to the regions beyond. The Spirit of God was continuing the method set forth by Christ Himself.

He sent forth His twelve disciples by twos (Mark 6:7) and later on when appointing seventy others for similar work, He likewise sent them by two.

One cannot but be struck with the Lord's wisdom in all this. The companionship of two who are under the same divine control, energized by the same Spirit, and inspired by the same motives, is happy indeed.

There is a benefit in the exercise of submitting to another's judgment, and not being in a position where one has it all his own way. The discipline derived from being subject one to another provides an antidote to self-assertiveness. It is a counteractive against the domineering spirit, "Lording it over those allotted to your charge" (1 Peter 5:3), to such a tendency a missionary laboring alone is especially liable.

Again, where two are working together they are able to render help one to another by way of comfort in sorrow, counsel in perplexity, and sympathetic advice and warning in times of temptation.

It has sometimes been remarked that the case of a married couple carries out the mind of the Lord in this

respect. But this can scarcely be said to answer to the teaching of Scripture on the subject. It is true that much of what has been said applies to the circumstances of husband and wife together, but there is much in the joint service of two brothers or two sisters, that cannot be fulfilled in the case of husband and wife.

There are matters, for instance, in connection with church discipline where a missionary in virtue of his pastoral capacity has to act apart from the wife and needs the cooperation of a similar gifted brother.

One would not suggest, of course, that single-handed missionary work is always contrary to the mind of the Lord. There are no regulations in Scripture in this respect. Yet the instances given in the Word of God of the two-and-two arrangement and the intimations they contain are sufficient to cause servants of God to weigh the matter carefully before Him and to seek His mind as to whether they should not be accompanied by a yoke-fellow in their service.

There is another side to this subject of joint service, namely, the harmony of mind and action which it is the Holy Spirit's will to maintain.⁹ The adversary is ever on the alert to disunite those who are serving together.

⁹ W. E. Vine. The Divine Plan of Missions. (London: Pickering and Inglis LTD, 1946) p. 37.

Against this danger the Spirit of God has set up a warning signpost in the narrative of Acts 15:33-40, in the case of the very first two missionaries who were called to go as yoke-fellows to the regions beyond.

Throughout Acts the co-work is carried on in the absence of selfish individualism, in the spirit of mutual esteem, and in a constant recognition of what is involved in being God's fellow-workers.

The tranquillity of mind and the added strength derived from unity of heart and purpose, made not only for efficiencies, but for comfort in the trials and afflictions inevitable to it.

Conclusion

In concluding this chapter this writer believes it is worthwhile to note that the book of Acts provides important insight into the church planting ministry of the first century church. The primary insight of this chapter deals with the particular of missionary outreach.

It has been demonstrated that a minor emphasis of outreach was placed upon the ministry of several individual men. But it appears to this writer that the major emphasis of outreach in the early church was through a team effort. The major narrative dealing with the church planting ministry involves a team effort.

Every detail of the Word of God has a significance

demanding the earnest consideration of the reader. It is this writer's opinion that those desirous to involve themselves in the ministry of missionary outreach earnestly consider the examples set forth in the book of the Acts.

CHAPTER II

THE PUBLIC SECTOR INVOLVED IN CHURCH PLANTING IN THE ACTS

In this chapter this writer would like to examine several of the more predominant sectors in which the missionaries proclaimed the gospel message and out of which a nucleus of new believers formed a church.

Preaching in Synagogues

Probably the most dominant area of presenting the gospel was in the Jewish synagogue. Out of nineteen occurrences of the word *συναγωγή* thirteen have direct reference to the practice of Paul and the other apostles entering into the synagogues to preach the gospel.

As the gospel spread beyond Palestine the synagogue became the favorite starting place. It provided an audience of reverent people, worshippers of Jehovah. According to the depiction in Acts, synagogues were one of the most important factors in the history of primitive Christian missions. The network of synagogues laid down in advance the lines and centers of Christian propaganda.¹

¹Wolfgang Schrage. "*συναγωγή*" Theological Dictionary of The New Testament, Vol. VII, ed. by Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Gromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), p. 835.

It is hardly open to question historically that the synagogues provided Paul with excellent bases for his missionary work and that he often enough began his proclamation in them. Within the synagogue, Paul found not only Jews but also proselytes and God-fearers, who provided a suitable approach to the Gentiles.

Luke seems to have made almost a schema and theory of this connection with the synagogue, since almost always he has Paul take up the Gentile mission after being barred from the synagogue (Acts 13:45; 18:6; 19:9; 28:25). The suspicious regularity with which this occurs attracted attention long ago. The theological basis of the schema is given in Acts 13:46.

With differences in detail one finds the following elements in the schema: Contact with the synagogue, success of preaching there, envy of the Jews, persecution and expulsion (Acts 9:20; 13:44; 14:1).² An interesting point in this connection is that Luke mentions synagogue preaching only in the dispersion and says nothing about this link in relation to the Jewish mission in the stricter sense.

Here Luke states the continuity and connection in history between the church on the one hand, and Israel and its institutions on the other. By their hardness the Jews themselves drive Paul out of the synagogue to the Gentiles.

²Ibid. p. 835

It may be doubted whether the synagogue technique was a specific technique. Luke does not explicitly state that he preached only in places where there was a synagogue, not even where there is the mention of a Jewish population as in Derbe and Lystra, (Acts 14:6; 16:1,3.).

It seems that, sooner or later, the Christian community everywhere became independent and separated itself from the Jewish congregations and their places of assembly.³

Ephesus furnished a dramatic example. There Paul taught in the synagogue for three months. Opposition mounted and the apostle gathered together the group of disciples and withdrew to the lecture hall of Tyrannus and continued his teaching. His ministry in that city lasted two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the Word of the Lord both Jew and Greeks (Acts 19:8-10).

To describe Paul's work in the synagogue, Luke prefers other terms than those used in the gospel. In place of *κηρύσσω* and *ῥησίζω* he uses *παρησιάζομαι* in Acts 13:46; 18:26; 19:8; 14:3, and *διαλέγομαι* in Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 19:8; 24:12. Neither word is used in the gospel. It is possible that Luke wished to make a distinction between the synagogue preaching of Jesus and that of Paul.⁴

One may also see what elements Luke regarded as

³Ibid. p. 836.

⁴Ibid.

important and necessary in Christian preaching in the synagogues free, open and bold speech even in face of a hostile public and disputation. Paul's address in the synagogue at Antioch is an example of synagogue preaching as Luke understands it. Luke does not suggest that the real reason for the separation between Paul's community and the Jewish synagogue is that Paul preaches freedom from the Law.

The synagogue provided the seedbed for evangelism among the Jews.⁵ Wherever there were Jews, there were synagogues and all loyal Jews were expected to attend weekly. Furthermore they attracted a number of God-fearers among thoughtful Gentiles. Thus here was a ready-made congregation for Christian missionaries to address.

In review of the preaching ministry in Acts as it employed the use of synagogues, one can see several key factors. First, the synagogue provided an audience of people with interest in religious teaching. Second, the synagogue provided an opportunity for teaching. And finally, the synagogue provided a launching pad for a local church in that community.

With these factors in mind one must determine whether the synagogue today provides any of the advantages that it did in the book of Acts.

⁵Michael Green. Evangelism in the Early Church. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 194.

It is this writer's opinion that the synagogue does not lend itself today to the ministry of church planting as it did in the book of Acts. The reasons for this opinion is based on two facts, first, the Christian church now operates in a world basically composed of Gentiles, and second, those who preached in the synagogue had a strong Jewish background and thus were very familiar with the Judaism of their day.

Open-Air Preaching

Apart from working in and through the synagogue, the disciples followed their Master in preaching in the open-air. The Acts records many examples of this, in Jerusalem, Samaria, Lystra and Athens. Such impromptu meetings can only be effective in places where numbers of people naturally pass.

If the meeting attracted the unfavorable attention of the authorities, be they Jewish or Roman, this was no disaster. It gave an added significance to the preaching and facilitated the subsequent break-up into small groups for discussion and further instruction.

Open-air preaching was no innovation in Judaism. It had long been carried on both in Palestine and elsewhere in courtyards, open field, riverbanks and marketplaces.⁶

Much of the open-air preaching was done in the

⁶Ibid. p. 196

marketplace (ἀγορά). Arndt and Gingrich point out several concepts involved in the word ἀγορά. First, it involves a place for children to play; second, a place for men to seek work and for idlers; third, a place for public events and finally, a place of judicial procedures.⁷

There is little mention of marketplaces in the Old Testament and the character of them would resemble those described in the Gospels.

It is necessary to distinguish between the references in the Gospels and those in Acts. Although the primary meaning of the Greek term ἀγορά place of assembly is applicable. The marketplaces of the Gospels (Matthew 11:16; Mark 6:56) are typically Near Eastern rather than Greek.

The two marketplaces mentioned in Acts were in Greek cities and were typically Hellenistic: surrounded by colonnades, temples, and public buildings, and adorned with statues. They were centers of public life, lending themselves to such uses as the holding of trial (Acts 16:19) and as centers for public disputation (Acts 17:17).⁸

It is important to note that in the description of the marketplace whether it be Near Eastern or Greek, there

⁷William G. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich. A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 12.

⁸R. C. Stone. "Marketplace" The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, ed. by Merrill Tenney (5 Vols. : Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975) IV, pp. 91-2.

stand out two primary advantages to the missionary. First, both are involved in a large manner as being the center of public activity and second, both are in a section where a great mass of people pass through.

Conclusion

It is the conclusion of this writer that both of these ideas are key elements today in the realm of missions and church planting. Thus from the book of Acts one can glean several important guides to the church planting ministry.

CHAPTER III

THE PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVED IN CHURCH PLANTING IN THE ACTS

Background of the Private Sector Involvement

Throughout the book of Acts there is mention made of local church development which had its foundation in the private atmosphere of a home. From the second chapter of Acts one can trace the development of house churches throughout the book.

Early Christianity structured its congregations in families, groups, and houses. The house was both a fellowship and a place of meeting. One reads in the book of Acts of the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:14) the house of Lydia (Acts 16:15) and the house of the prison governor at Philippi (Acts 16:31,34). Acts 18:8 also refers to the faith of Crispus and his whole house.

The house of Onesiphorus in 2 Timothy 1:16; 4:19 was a house of fellowship. In this regard one reads expressly in Acts 2:46 that they broke bread by house ($\kappa\alpha\tau'\ \omicron\iota\kappa\omicron\nu$). Dr. Kent points out that the expression from house to house is the King James Version rendering of $\kappa\alpha\tau'\ \omicron\iota\kappa\omicron\nu$, which employs $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha$ in the distributive sense and is better understood when it is translated as in various

houses.¹

The summary in Acts 5:42 states that they taught and proclaimed the good news in the temple and in houses (Κατ' οἶκον). It is explicitly emphasized that the conversion of a man leads his whole family to the faith; this would include wife, children, servants and relatives living in the house.²

The use of house (οἶκος) is found elsewhere in early Christianity. This is especially evident in the fact that Christian life is lived in this kind of house. One has only to think of the directions in the Pastoral Epistles. Here the elder must rule his own house well (1 Timothy 3:4), for if he cannot do this, how can he take care of the whole congregation (1 Timothy 3:5)? Deacons, too, should take good care of their children and houses (1 Timothy 3:12). Therefore it is no surprise that in Titus 1:11 Paul complains of false teachers leading whole houses astray. The house and family are the smallest natural groups in the total structure of the congregation. There is an interesting observation in Acts 20:20 which states, "How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching

¹Homer A. Kent Jr. Jerusalem to Rome. (Winona Lake, BMH Books, 1972), p. 35.

²Otto Michel, "οἶκος" Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. V, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967) p. 130.

you publicly and from house to house" (δημοσίᾳ καὶ κατ' οἴκους). Along with public preaching the apostle also gave instruction in the house meetings of the community.

Examples of Private Sector Involvement

Keeping in mind that the book of Acts provides a historical account of the development of the church it is appropriate now to examine several examples of private sector involvement.

Acts 2:4

And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.

It is very remarkable that at this early age of the church's existence Christians did not deem themselves separated from their Jewish brethren and continued meeting at the temple, but κατ' οἶκον represents the private Christian place of meeting, as contrasted with the temple.³ The meaning is not that every disciple broke bread in his own house, but that they broke bread at the house where the Christian assemblies were held. By this time one has seen the early church gathered together in an upper room (Acts 1:13), in one place, in a house (Acts 2:1,2). It is seen

³A. C. Hervey, "The Acts of the Apostles" in Vol. XVIII of The Pulpit Commentary, ed. by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (23 Vols., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans) p. 55.

from the very outset of the church, that the house, a very private sector in the community, played an important part.

Acts 5:42

And everyday in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

The first consideration of this verse, as it relates to the private sector involvement, is revealed in the verb and participles of the verse. The verb ἐπαυόντο is a third person plural, imperfect, middle of the verb παύω. The participle διδάσκοντες is a nominative, plural, masculine, present active, and εὐαγγελιζόμενοι is a nominative, plural, masculine, present, middle. The tense of the verb thus provides the idea of viewing a process of pastime. And the participles yield the idea that this process was continuous. Thus the idea that Luke provides for one is that the early church in the temple and private sector (houses) was involved continuously in the teaching and preaching of the Word.

The words ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ καὶ κατ' οἶκον may mark a contrast between the public preaching which was not discontinued, and the teaching that continued at home in household assemblies. Dr. Kent assumes this position by stating that both in the temple and in various houses they continued their ministry of instruction and evangelizing.⁴

⁴Homer A. Kent, Jr. Jerusalem to Rome. p. 60.

From Pentecost in Acts to this point in Luke's narrative it is evident that the private sector provided an important aspect in the ministry of the church.

Acts 11:14

And he shall speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household.

According to this account, the angel informed Cornelius that Peter would speak words by which he and his household would receive salvation. As recorded in Acts 10:35 Cornelius was accepted by God as a man who feared Him and practiced righteousness. In the Bible, divine judgment is regularly pronounced in accordance with a man's work, but salvation is not of works but of grace, and salvation did not enter Cornelius' house until Peter came there with the gospel. The house included not only Cornelius' family in the modern sense, but all who were under his authority, slaves, attendants, and other.⁵

Acts 16:15

And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay."

Here in the description of the conversion of Lydia, one again must note that this conversion not only involved Lydia, but those who dwelt within her house. Of course it was not Lydia's faith that saved her household but the same

⁵F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts.
p. 233.

way to salvation was open to her household as it was to her.

The household provided that environment in which the ministry of the gospel was well received.

Acts 16:31,32

Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household. And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house.

The jailer was tremendously impressed by these events. Whether it was the earthquake, the previous preaching of Paul in the city, or the conduct of Paul and Silas in the jail or their cumulative effect, he desired salvation for himself. Paul lost no time in proclaiming his need for faith in the Lord. No household salvation on the strength of the faith of the head of the house is implied.⁶ The fact that the Word of God was proclaimed to the whole house (verse 32) shows that the belief required of the jailer was necessary for them too.

The key idea in this example is that the message of the gospel was proclaimed to the entire house. Paul and Silas made it their business to proclaim the gospel to all who lived under the same roof with the jailer.

⁶E. M. Blaiklock, "The Acts of The Apostles" in The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. by R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959) pp. 127-28.

Acts 18:8

And Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household.

This is the final example of private sector involvement in church planting. Luke shows us who this Crispus was, no less than the ruler of the synagogue which Paul had just left. This man and his family followed Paul on his departure from the synagogue and joined the new Christian community in Corinth.

The Value of Private Sector Involvement

It is the conclusion of this writer that one of the most important methods of spreading the gospel in antiquity was by the use of homes. It had positive advantages: the comparatively small numbers involved made real interchange of views and informed discussion among the participants possible, second, there was no artificial isolation of a preacher from his hearers, third, there was no temptation for either the speaker or the heckler to be involved in a conflict.

The sheer informality and relaxed atmosphere of the home, not to mention the hospitality, all helped to make this form of evangelism successful.

The house as a fundamental unit of society had a long history. Sociologically speaking the early Christians could not hit on a sounder basis. The word of Jeremias and

Stauffer among others has shown how fundamental to God's economy of salvation in Israel was the house.⁷

The family understood in the broad way, as consisting of blood relations, slaves under the same roof, was one of the key elements in the Greco-Roman society. Christian missionaries made a deliberate point of gaining whatever households they could. It has been suggested by some that there is almost a ritual *ὄικος* formula to be found in the New Testament. This goes a bit too far, but there is importance in stressing the centrality of the household for the Christian advance.

The household proved the crucial medium for evangelism within natural groupings. It was preferable if the father was converted first (Philippian jailer, Crispus).

Where there was a Christian home, the uses to which it was put were various. In the Acts there are examples of such homes being used for prayer meetings, breaking of bread, worship and instruction, and especially for evangelism.

Conclusion

This writer would like to suggest at the conclusion of this section several key factors that made this

⁷Michael Green. Evangelism in the Early Church. p. 208.

type of approach very advantageous.

First, the home sector provided more flexibility in the activity of the local church. The home provided a more open channel for the fellowship among believers. Second, the home sector provided a greater accessibility for others in the community to become a part of this particular fellowship. Third, not only here in the book of the Acts is the private sector of a home the nucleus of a local church, but in other New Testament passages this fact is stated. Finally, the house church development lessened the prejudice and enabled the ministry to grow among both Jews and Gentiles.

In summary the private sector which involves mainly the house church approach provides many advantages that greatly increased church growth during the period covered by Acts.

CHAPTER IV

CENTERS OF POPULATION PROVIDE
SEEDBEDS FOR LOCAL CHURCHES

In examining the various passages throughout the book of Acts one soon realizes that the ministry as it expanded out from Jerusalem was directed toward towns and cities. In preaching the gospel and establishing churches the early Christian leaders gave attention to the influential population centers.¹

This writer believes that the book of Acts provides fitting illustrations of the employment of this particular method.

Cities of Judea, Samaria and Syria

Jerusalem

Jerusalem dominates both Testaments as no other city of the Bible. The book of Acts opens with a group of followers of Jesus meeting together in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, waiting for the fulfillment of the promise of Christ, that they might be endued with power from on high.

¹Wayne Beaver. "New Testament Evangelism," Unpublished Class Syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary. Winona Lake, Ind. p. 3.

The church is born in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-5).

The early persecutions arose in this city toward these initial believers, and the Sanhedrin that condemned Christ was now confronted with the phenomenon of a growing company of the faithful of the crucified and risen Lord.

It was in this city that the first great crisis of the church was successfully faced in the first council.

It has been estimated that the population of Jerusalem at the time of Christ must have exceeded 100,000.² It was from this city that the church grew daily, and it was from here that the first missionaries set forth to proclaim the gospel.

Samaria

Acts 8:5 records the ministry of Philip in the city of Samaria. This was the Old Testament name. Herod the Great had rebuilt Samaria and it was ordinarily called Sebaste in New Testament times. There is some question as to whether this is a proper identification of this city. In manuscripts D and E the article is omitted and it could be rendered a city of Samaria. But in the better manuscripts of Aleph, A and B the article is included, and it is the opinion of this writer that the best rendering would

²Philip Schaff. History of the Christian Church
Vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914) p. 144.

be the city of Samaria.

Damascus

Damascus was a major inland junction on one of the roads which linked the river civilizations of the Nile and the Euphrates valleys. During New Testament days Damascus was an important center, ruled by Arabia under Aretas (2 Corinthians 11:32). And it was in this center that a strong Christian community had developed. It was to this thriving community that Saul was en route to arrest believers. But as recorded in Acts 9:1-18 Saul was converted.

It is unique to note that Saul chose Damascus, because of his belief that many there would be found in the way.

Antioch of Syria

In Acts 11:19-27 those who were scattered made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch. And it is recorded that believers were first called Christians in Antioch.

Antioch of Syria lies three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. The great Greek city is first mentioned in the list of deacons appointed to organize the charitable activities of the Christian community.

Barnabas was quick to see the strength and promise of the movement and he sought Saul in Tarsus and established him in Antioch (Acts 11:22,25).

The great Syrian city of half a million inhabitants

to which the harassed Christians fled was three and a half centuries old.³ From such a city the first organized missionary party set out to bring the gospel to the Roman world. After Jerusalem fell in A.D. 71 Antioch became the center of Eastern Christianity.

Cities in Asia

As the gospel continued to spread it extended out into a wider geographical area. In this section emphasis will be on several cities as they are related in Acts 12:25-16:5. It is not possible to provide background information on all the cities that were visited, but a selection has been made of those that receive the most Biblical narration.

Lystra

The city of Lystra first appears in the Acts narrative in Acts 14:6. It was a six hour journey southwest of Iconium and was another Roman colony. An undistinguished Lycaonian town, Lystra occupied a bold hill, a position of strength and vantage likely to attract a military eye.

Paul and Barnabus came to Lystra to escape trouble in Iconium. Lystra was a market town with streets crowded by the local people. It was to a city of this type that Paul and Barnabus preached the gospel.

³E. M. Blaiklock. Cities of the New Testament. (London: Pickering and Inglis LTD, 1965). p.10.

Derbe

This city is first mentioned in Acts 14:6. It was a city of Lycaonia, not far from Pisidia but its exact location is not known. It was located in the eastern part of the great upland plain of Lycaonia, which stretches from Iconium eastwards along the north side of the Taurus chain, near the pass called the Galician gates, which open a way from the low plain of Cilicia to the interior tableland.

The ministry at Derbe was blessed with many converts.⁴ And from the account it appears that it was more peaceful than the previous cities visited. Derbe was the home of Gaius who later became a companion of Paul (Acts 20:4).

Iconium

The first mention of Iconium appears in Acts 13:51. A city of Asia Minor, it was visited by Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey since they had been expelled from Antioch in Pisidia. On Paul's second missionary journey he and Silas stopped off at Iconium to read a letter sent out by the Jerusalem Council.

In the first century Iconium was one of the chief cities in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia. It was a city of immemorial antiquity and was situated near the western end of a vast, level plain, with mountains in

⁴Homer A. Kent Jr. Jerusalem to Rome. p. 118.

the west that provided streams that made it a veritable oasis.⁵ It was at this city that two important trade routes passed through; and it was along the road leading to Ephesus and Rome.

Macedonia and Greece

As the church continued to be extended, it entered into the regions of Macedonia and Greece. Again only a partial list of cities involved will be considered due to the size and extent of this project.

Philippi

First mentioned in Acts 16:12 the city of Philippi is described in the Biblical narrative as being a leading city of the district of Macedonia. Philippi was the first European city in which Paul preached. It was located on the Egnation Way, the Roman highway which connected the Aegean Sea with the Adriatic. Paul's choice of the locality throws light on the strategy of his evangelism.

It is to this city that a church was firmly established and later received a letter from the Apostle Paul. This letter was the epistle to the Philippians.

Berea

After leaving Philippi, Paul and his associates traveled along the Egnatian Way forty miles to the city of

⁵Steven Barabas, "Iconium" The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, pp. 367-68.

Thessalonica. After a ministry in that city they continued on fifty miles southwest of Thessalonica to the city of Berea (Acts 17:10-13).

Berea, lying at the foot of Mt. Berminas, was situated on a tributary of the Haliacmon, near Pella.⁶ Berea had a Jewish synagogue whose members eagerly listened to Paul's message and searched the Scriptures, thus testing the gospel by comparing the message with the Scripture. By doing this carefully, many became Christians. Mention is made later of Sopater, the son of Pyrrhas, who was a Berean Christian (Acts 20:4).

Corinth

The final city under consideration in this section, although it is not the last, is Corinth.

Corinth rests on the narrow isthmus between the Peloponnesus and the mainland. Corinth was the capital of the Roman province called by them, Achaia, and the most important city in the country. Land traffic between the north and south of Achaia had to pass the city, and much of the commerce between Rome and the East was brought to its harbors.

At the height of its power, Corinth probably had a free population of two hundred thousand, plus a half

⁶Charles F. Pfeiffer. Baker's Bible Atlas, revised ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 222.

million slaves.⁷

It was here in Corinth that Paul took up his trade as a tent maker (Acts 18:3) with Aquila and Priscilla. On weekends Paul proclaimed the gospel in the synagogue. Paul's synagogue ministry had many favorable results. One of the synagogue's rulers, Crispus, became a Christian along with his household.

Paul remained for a year and a half, and established a strong church.

Italy

The final city of consideration is the city of Rome. The last ten chapters of Acts from 19:21 to 28:31 relate the narrative of Paul's journey to Rome.

Rome was at the height of her imperial power when Paul came to Italy to make his appeal to Nero.

Like Corinth, Rome thus straddled the paths of commerce, and became inevitably the magnet for immigration, and a strong outward-looking community. It has been estimated that the population of Rome was one million during this time.⁸

It must be understood that Paul did not establish a church at Rome, for a church was already in existence

⁷Steven Barabas. "Corinth" The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, p. 183.

⁸E. M. Blaiklock. Cities of the New Testament, p. 87.

when he arrived. But in Acts 28:17-22 the account indicates that Paul continued his evangelistic ministry even though he was imprisoned there.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion it is hopeful that these facts will support the proposition that the missionary activity of the early church was highly directed toward cities and towns that extended beyond the borders of Palestine.

Today, it is important that the church recognize the Biblical guidelines of directing missionary activity toward the cities. As the saying goes, "Those who reach the cities will win the world."

APPENDIX

MAIN CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

| Reference | Character or Characters |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Acts 1:1-5:42 | Peter and John |
| Acts 6:1-7:58 | Stephen |
| Acts 7:58-8:3 | Paul |
| Acts 8:4-13 | Philip |
| Acts 8:14-25 | Peter and John |
| Acts 8:26-40 | Philip |
| Acts 9:1-30 | Paul and Barnabas |
| Acts 9:32-11:18 | Peter |
| Acts 11:22-30 | Paul and Barnabas |
| Acts 12:3-19 | Peter |
| Acts 12:25-15:36 | Paul and Barnabas |
| Acts 15:36-41 | Paul and Silas; Barnabas and Mark |
| Acts 16:1-17:14 | Paul and Silas |
| Acts 17:14-18:4 | Paul |
| Acts 18:4-28 | Paul, Silas, and Timothy |
| Acts 19:1-41 | Paul |
| Acts 20:6-21:18 | Paul and Luke |
| Acts 21:18-26:32 | Paul |
| Acts 27:1-28:16 | Paul and Luke |
| Acts 28:17-31 | Paul |

In surveying the main characters as they appear in the book of the Acts it is interesting to note from the above listing that much of the missionary work was done on a co-worker basis. It is the conclusion of this writer that this circumstance did not arise by chance, but that it was a continuance of the precedent set before them.

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