

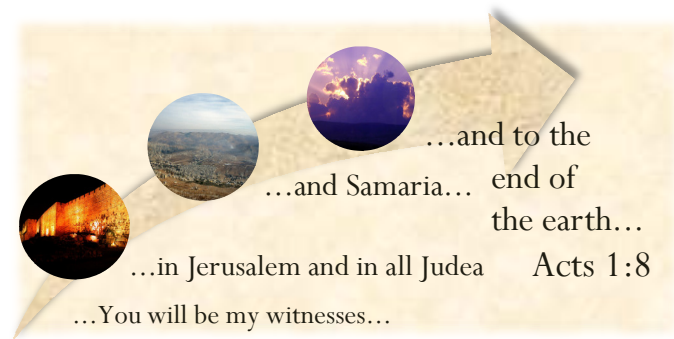
I Will Build My Church

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Matthew 16:17-18

The book of Acts records the history of the early Christian Church. In the Greek New Testament, the title of Acts is **PRAXEIS APOSTOLWN** (praxais apostolon), the Acts of the Apostles. In addition to authoring his Gospel to record what Jesus did and taught (Acts 1:1), Luke also authored Acts which is the sequel to the Gospel. Here we find “the acts” of the Apostles which is the spread

of the Gospel, beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). As you have seen in your reading, the spread of the Gospel means the spread of the church. In its early stages, we find a number of unique circumstances in the establishment of the church (speaking in tongues, miracles, etc...). As the New Testament unfolds, our understanding of the church becomes more solidified. In this lesson, we will survey the events up to Acts 8. Although there are 28 chapters to the book, this is generally understood to be the first half of the book because Peter is the prominent figure. Paul is the prominent figure in the second half of Acts.



Pentecost

After the eleven disciples had gathered and appointed Matthias as an apostle to replace Judas Iscariot, they were together on the day of Pentecost. The two years that most likely account for the death of Christ are AD 30 and AD 33. (Volume one of this curriculum assumes the AD 33 date). We can concluded that the apostles appear in the same year. As you

know, the Lord was crucified on Passover, which was in March or April. Pentecost (Feast of Weeks) was fifty days after Passover in May or June. This gives you an idea of how long it



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had been since the crucifixion. While the apostles were gathered together, what sounded like a wind rushed in and tongues of fire rested on each of the apostles. While this happened, they began to speak in different languages. There is much controversy surrounding this passage. Some believe that the men were speaking in some kind of “heavenly language,” that was not normally spoken. However, 2:6 tells us that men from different parts of the world were hearing their own language being spoken. These men from other countries and regions were amazed that men from Galilee could speak in recognizable foreign language. Some thought the apostles were drunk and started to mock them. But Peter corrected them, and showed how their experience was a fulfillment of the prophet Joel. He also showed how David’s words were fulfilled in Christ’s ascension. Jesus, who was crucified, is now seated on David’s throne at the right hand of the Father (2:25-35). Peter was now doing what he was supposed to be doing. Instead of fishing, he was proclaiming the Gospel from the Old Testament, just as Jesus had trained him to do. We can be sure that many of those who were crying for the crucifixion of Christ had now repented of their sin (see 2:36 and 2:41). On the day of Pentecost, three thousand people repented of their sin, and joined the church (2:41). As the days continued, the church gathered for teaching, fellowship, broke bread together, and prayed (2:42). The presence of the apostles in Jerusalem did not become a clear problem until Peter healed a man, and then preached in Solomon’s portico. Peter’s proclamation of the resurrection of Christ upset the Sadducees (4:1). As you recall, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Those Jewish leaders were also angered, and privately called in Peter and John. Unlike the days of Christ’s crucifixion, Annas and Caiaphas had considerably less control in this situation. We are told that their actions were limited because of the great number of people who had become Christians (4:21). At least 5,000 men believed, and probably more if women and children were counted (4:4). Annas and Caiaphas only warned the apostles not to preach, but the Peter and John firmly rejected the spineless imperative. Peter and John responded this way because they believed in God’s authority, not because of their ability to control the situation with a large number of people on their side. The church continued to gather together and testify to the resurrection. At this time, Barnabas was introduced, who we will encounter again in the next lesson.



Peter mentioned that David’s tomb was present in their day (Acts 2:29). A first century model is represented above. Dispute surrounds the authenticity for the only potential identification for David’s tomb today.



The Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:2)

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All Things in Common

People from the church had been selling their possessions, and the subsequent wealth was shared so that no one was in need (4:32-37). There have been some misunderstandings about this passage. First, some have thought that this teaches that having stuff is wrong. However, that would not make any sense since the physical needs of others was being met. People were not abandoning their stuff. They were sharing it with others. Secondly, some have taught that this passage teaches a type of “communism.” That is, no one permanently owned anything. A roommate of mine once said, “Dude, they were basically communists in the book of Acts.” He did not seem to push that point too far when I asked him for his wallet and car keys. First of all, “communism” is an entirely modern concept which was spawned from the teachings of Karl Marx. Secondly, while we are told that they had everything in common (4:32), we are also told that money was distributed to those who were needy (4:35). In other words, people were given money of their own. The stress of this passage does not teach that having stuff is bad. Rather, we find that it is good to give up what we have to meet the needs of others. When we encounter Ananias and Sapphira, they each died on the spot as a judgment. They were not judged for giving an insufficient amount, but for lying (5:4,8). This brought great fear upon everyone.

Suffering for the Name

The church continued to experience signs and wonders among the apostles to such an extent that it radically effected how the city of Jerusalem lived on a daily basis (5:14-16). Because there was no church building, people gathering in homes, and in the temple. Since the temple had been the focal point of the city, it was the most fitting place for large groups of people to meet. This had also created a ripe opportunity for the high priest to come up against the apostles. Out of jealousy, the high priest and the Sadducees had the apostles arrested and imprisoned. Notice that they did not resist arrest, or argue. As obedient servants of the Lord, they submitted to the local rulers. But the angel of the Lord released them, instructing them to go back and do the same thing (5:20). While the apostles did not resist arrest, they made it clear that they will obey God before their commands (5:29). Up to this point, the continually increasing number of Christians had intimidated the leaders. The number of those belonging to the church considerably exceeded 5,000 (5:14). However, the continued preaching of Christ increased the rage of the leaders. Had it not been for Gamaliel, who was not a Christian,



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some of the apostles would have been killed (5:33). While Gamaliel did correctly tell them that they might be opposing God, they beat the apostles anyway. They took the advice of Gamaliel only for their own protection (see 5:26). Take note of the fact that the apostles did not complain about their suffering, or feel sorry for themselves. They rejoiced in suffering for Christ's name (5:41).

Deacons

In chapter 6, we find that the church had grown so large that there was some internal organization necessary. Even among the people of God, a dispute rose between the Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews) and the Hebrews. The solution to this was for certain men to handle the distribution to the needy. Because of the size of the church, and demand of the problem, the priority of the apostles' preaching would have been compromised to give their time to this. Seven men were chosen who had a good reputation, and were full of the Spirit and of wisdom. The word "deacon" is not used here. However, because the role of these men is identical to the New Testament description of deacons (1 Timothy 3:8-13), it is reasonable to conclude that they were such. Even after these men were appointed, the church continued to grow (6:7).

The First Christian Martyr

Stephen was a prominent figure in the church. He was performing wonders and signs and was known for his teaching. Because of his remarkable teaching, some men from the synagogue of Freedmen, lied that he was teaching against Moses. Having been brought before the high priest, the council was fixed on him because his face had the appearance of an angel. We can consider this as a testimony to the fact that God had greatly blessed Stephen, and that his teaching was consistent with the Old Testament. In his defense, Stephen explained the Old Testament to the council. They were the one's needing correction. As they had accused Stephen of contradicting Moses, he spent most of his time speaking about him (7:20-44). When his speech was concluded, there was no formal response. No attempt to show his "error" was made. When Stephen "schooled" them, he used specific Old Testament language: "stiff-necked," and "uncircumcised" (7:51). The council's fury had risen to a new height. Although it would not be appropriate to compare the sufferings of Stephen with Christ, their actions against Stephen show a more intense hatred for Christ. When Jesus was crucified, no Jew attempted to kill him because the Romans prohibited Jewish execution. When they dragged Stephen out of the city and stoned him, they broke that prohibition. Additionally, they broke the Old Testament law for stoning. Stephen had done nothing blasphemous or illegal. Their fuming hatred for Christ was so intense, that they completely disregarded their own law, and the fear of the Romans. Here we are introduced to Saul. As you know, Saul later became the apostle Paul, when we learn about his advanced learning. We are told that he approved of this execution (8:1), yet he would have known that this was not scripturally permissible. The death of Stephen sparked a widespread persecution of the church, which in turn fulfilled Jesus' words. Because of the persecution, Christians dispersed throughout Judea and Samaria (8:1): "...And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria..." (1:8). From a human standpoint, this persecution would look like a bad thing. But this was the Lord's way of spreading his church.

Samaria

The first phase of the early church now begins to transition. We find the apostles Philip and Peter in Samaria doing great signs and casting out demons. We do not read much about demonic activity in Jerusalem, because the region of Samaria would have had more cultic paganism than organized religion in Jerusalem. One man who would have been very popular in a region like this was Simon the magician. In the ancient world, sorcerers would purchase magical powers from other sorcerers.

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When Simon saw the power of the Holy Spirit in Peter and Philip, he thought he could purchase this power in the same way. Peter's reply indicates the motives of Simon: "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!" (8:20). One commentator explains the statement in the following, "Peter zealously guards God's glory and honor and rebuffs the attacks of Satan, who, through Simon, seeks to pervert the truth. He utters a curse that has an Old Testament echo, for he tells Simon that he and his money are going to hell."¹ Not only were the magical powers of Simon put to shame, but the motives and thinking behind them were as well. Unlike the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira, Peter tells Simon to repent. Simon asked for prayer to be freed from impending judgment.

Philip

After the apostles had returned to Jerusalem, Philip traveled down to Gaza at the command of the Holy Spirit. There he met an Ethiopian who was reading from Isaiah. Philip explained to him how the Scripture speaks of the suffering of Christ. From there they traveled together and Philip baptized the eunuch when they reached water. After that, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away to Azotus. He proclaimed the Gospel all the way until he reached Caesarea. At this point we see that the Lord's words continued to be fulfilled. Gaza and Azotus (Ashdod) were old Philistine cities. Caesarea was built up by Herod, and named for Caesar. These locations were not identified with Judaism. Just on the brink of our introduction to the Apostle Paul, the Gospel stretches out to the borders of the land. As the Lord said, "You will be my witnesses...to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8). In the next lesson, we will continue to explore the acts of the Apostles, but it will be in the context of Paul's ministry.

Map 5

In the upper left-hand corner of the map, make a key with these two items: **Philip** and **Peter**. You will look at Philip's ministry now, and Peter's ministry in the next lesson using the same map. Use **orange** for Philip's route. Beginning in **Jerusalem**, travel up to **Sebaste** (Samaria), traveling through **Sychar**. In a box near the location write the following:

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. Acts 8:5

Without retracing your route down to **Jerusalem**, begin there again and go to **Gaza** through **Marisa** and **Lachish**. At Gaza, write the following in a box:

Do you understand what you are reading? Acts 8:30.

Do not trace your route to **Gaza**, but begin there. Label the location with the following in a box:

But Philip found himself at Azotus...

Travel up through **Jamnia**, **Lydda**, and **Anitpatris**. In-between Lydda and Antipatris label the following:

...and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns...

From **Antipatris**, go to **Caesarea**. At this location, label the following:

...until he came to Caesarea. Acts 8:40

¹ *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, Simon J. Kistemaker (Baker: 1990), 305.

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Reading Assignment

Acts 21-28

1 Timothy

Titus

1 Peter

Greek	Pronunciation	English	Part of Speech
apostellw	op-oss-tello	to send forth a messenger	verb
apostol o~	op-oss-toll-oss	apostle, messenger, agent	noun
lambanw	lam-banno	I take, receive	verb
upa	hoo-pa	by, under	preposition
aggel o~	aan-gell-oss*	messenger, angel	noun
ejsqiw	es-thi-o	I eat	verb

* Two gammas (gg) followed by a vowel are pronounced as “ng.” Hence, “aan-gell-oss.”