

# A Survey of the Bible

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" Psalm 119:105*

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## Lesson 9

### The Church Jesus Built Inspired History

Jesus came into the world to save the lost and to set up his kingdom, bringing light to a dark and dying world. He did each.

Jesus, the Son of God made a promised, *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"* (Mt 16:18). Jesus did build his church. The book of Acts is the inspired account of its establishment and growth through the first three decades of its existence. Acts does not cover every detail of the church but does provide an account of its spread through the Mediterranean world.

#### The Church Established.

The reference in Matthew is the first time the word church appears in the New Testament, but it is not the first time the church is considered in the scriptures. The church was in the mind of God before creation and is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Eph. 3:10,11).

Before his crucifixion Jesus promised to establish his church. He promised to build the church and give the apostles the keys of the kingdom (Mt. 16:16). In one breath he mentioned the church, in the next he promised the kingdom. The church and the kingdom are one and the same. Each of these words provides a different view of the same entity - the body of the saved ones (Eph. 5:23).

Let's trace some developments. First, Jesus was born to be king (Lk 1:32). Second, John and Jesus both preached that the kingdom was near (Mt. 3:2; Mk 1:15). Later Jesus promised that some who heard his voice would not 'taste' of death till they saw the kingdom come with power (Mk 9:1). Jesus planned to establish his kingdom, build his church.

On the eve of his crucifixion Jesus still planned his kingdom. He told Pilate that his kingdom is not of the world (Jn 18:36). His kingdom was different than the kingdom [empire] Pilate served. Many did not understand but it was still true. The crucifixion of Christ did not postpone the kingdom but was a part of God's plan (Acts 2:23).

At the close of Luke's gospel he records Jesus' instruction to the apostles to remain in Jerusalem till they were clothed with power from on high (Lk 24:49,50). In the sequel to his gospel, the book of Acts, Luke overlaps the two accounts - covering the time period between the resurrection and ascension in each, but providing details in Acts he did not include in his gospel. In Acts Jesus told them they would receive power when the Holy Spirit would come upon

them (Acts 1:5). This was the promised outpouring or baptism of the Holy Spirit promised earlier (Lk 3:16; Jn 16:13). Finally, in Acts 2 we see the fulfillment of those promises. The apostles were in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them [Holy Spirit baptism], they received power [speaking in tongues, foreign languages, and the ability to preach as directed by the Holy Spirit] and the kingdom was established. God's plan was fulfilled and the kingdom age, the 'church of Christ'

(Rom. 16:16) time period, had begun.

#### The Growth of the Kingdom.

The church began on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus. On that day three thousand souls were added to the church. Immediately the church made a difference. The influence of the church was a positive influence in the first century.

The gospel of Luke and the 'book' of Acts were both written to the same man, Theophilus, by the same author, Luke. While the gospel centers on the life of Jesus, from the announcement of his birth to his ascension into heaven, Acts is a record of many of the acts of some of the apostles. In this 'book' we have the pattern of New Testament Christianity illustrated. A study and application of Acts will instruct people in God's plan. You can become a Christian and be a faithful member of Jesus' kingdom by following this divine pattern.

In the first chapter of Acts, Luke gives an outline of the book. His history of the church follows the thought of Jesus' instructions to the apostles. *"But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."* (Acts 1:8) The book of Acts falls into the following outline.

- ▶ The church in Jerusalem. Acts 1-8
- ▶ The church in Judea and Samaria. Acts 9-12
- ▶ The church throughout the world. Acts 13-28

### **The Church in Jerusalem. Acts 1-8.**

The first chapter of Acts overlaps Luke's gospel. Jesus appeared to his disciples for forty days after his resurrection. He taught them about the kingdom, instructed them to stay in Jerusalem, prepared them for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and commissioned them to preach. He then ascended into heaven and, as Peter later explained, sat on his throne at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33).

Following the ascension the disciples stayed in Jerusalem and appointed Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot. It was Judas who betrayed Jesus and then killed himself. The disciples were with others during this time, the total number was one-hundred-twenty.

On the day of Pentecost the twelve apostles were in Jerusalem and received the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). The immediate effect was their ability to speak in languages they did not know, and was described as speaking in tongues. Those present heard them speak of wonderful things of God in their own languages. This drew their attention to the apostles. Peter and the apostles first explained that what had happened was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32) and then preached the first gospel sermon after Jesus' resurrection.

Peter reminded the multitude that they had known Jesus personally. They had also crucified him, but God raised him from the dead! This series of events was according to God's plan (2:23). Peter quoted the sixteenth Psalm to prove that Jesus' resurrection was spoken of by David. He explained that Jesus ascended and sat at the right hand of God, again to fulfill scripture (Acts 2:33-35). Peter and the other apostles were eye witnesses to these events. He concluded by declaring that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was made both Lord and Christ (2:36).

Many individuals **believed** this great news. They asked Peter and the apostles, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* (2:37). Then **Peter said** to them, **"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** (2:38). Peter's instructions were simple, were straight from God, and were understood. *"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them"* (2:41). These Christians continued in the fellowship and teaching of the apostles (2:42).

The church had begun. Souls had been added to the church by the Lord. Great change was taking place in the Mediterranean world, change which would revolutionize the world of Paul's day. This change began in Jerusalem and continued to affect Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders resisted the work of the apostles. The apostles healed a lame man and were arrested for preaching Christ on that occasion (Acts 3). The church of Christ was pressed upon by the Jews throughout this first century, and beyond.

The church also experienced problems within. A man and his wife fell down dead because they lied to God (5:1ff). Some of the widows in Jerusalem were neglected and needed care (6:1ff). These and other challenges were taken care of under the inspired guidance of the apostles and prophets in the early church. The apostles and prophets wrote the New Testament as the first century continued in order to guide the church of their day and reveal the whole counsel of God for our day.

Despite these problems the church in Jerusalem grew tremendously. The number of men came to be about 5,000 (4:4), multitudes of men and women were converted (5:14), and a great number of the priests became obedient to the faith (6:7). Christ's church, his kingdom, was growing in spite of the Jews' attempt to stop it. Stephen was the first martyr of the early church. His powerful preaching drove the Jews to stone him. A consenting witness to this event was a young man named Saul, who later became the apostle Paul.

### **The Church in Judea and Samaria. Acts 8-12.**

Through Acts 7 the gospel had been preached in Jerusalem. The gospel, however, was soon to begin its trek into all the world. With Stephen's stoning

came a great persecution against the church which caused Christians to leave Jerusalem and go everywhere preaching the word. Acts 8 records Philip preaching in Samaria. Many in Samaria obeyed the gospel of Jesus and became disciples. Simon, a sorcerer, also became a Christian. He soon sinned against God and was told by Peter to repent of his sin and pray for forgiveness. Peter's words to Simon describe God's law of pardon for a Christian who has sinned. Baptism is required of those who are not Christians, in order to receive forgiveness and be added to the Lord's church. Once "in Christ" the Christian, when he or she sins, needs to repent of the sin and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 Jn 1:9). God promises to forgive!

In Acts 8 we also read of Philip teaching the Eunuch of Ethiopia who was returning from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. The Holy Spirit instructed Philip to teach this man. Philip taught the Eunuch about Jesus, beginning with the passage the eunuch was reading - Isaiah 53. All we have of his teaching is that Philip, "*beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him*" (8:35). After hearing of Jesus the eunuch saw the body of water they had come to and asked what hindered him from being baptized. [Note: to preach Jesus one must preach baptism. Why? Read again Acts 2:38 and note the purpose of baptism.] Philip said if he believed with all his heart he could. When the eunuch confessed Jesus as the Christ he was baptized by Philip (8:38,39). After becoming a Christian the eunuch went on his way rejoicing! This is the most important step one can make in life - becoming a child of God! Joy is the natural response.

The ninth chapter of Acts is a pivotal chapter in Acts. In this chapter we read of Saul's conversion. Remember that Saul was the person tending the coats of those who stoned Stephen. He was a zealous young Jew and after Stephen's stoning was a zealous persecutor of Christians. Saul received a commission from the Jewish leaders to go to Damascus to take disciples from there to Jerusalem. On his way, however, his life changed. Outside the city of Damascus Saul saw a light brighter than the noon day sun. He heard a voice from this light. The voice was the voice of Jesus. He charged Saul, the persecutor of the church, with persecuting himself, Jesus. He told Saul to enter Damascus where he would be told what to do. So, Saul was led into Damascus [he was blind

from the light]. For three days he did not eat or drink. On the third day the Lord sent Ananias to Saul. Ananias healed Saul's blindness, told him of his commission from the Lord, and instructed him to be baptized to wash away his sin (Acts 22:16. Paul's later account of his meeting with Ananias). Saul did not argue, he was baptized immediately and began preaching Jesus as the Christ. The persecutor was converted and became the persecuted. After some time in Damascus Saul escaped the city because of a threat against him and returned to Jerusalem. After being persuaded by Barnabas the church in Jerusalem accepted Saul. His work in the kingdom continued. Saul was soon sent to his homeland, Tarsus, because of the threats of the Jews in Jerusalem.

Through Acts 9 those converted were of Jewish persuasion. In Acts 10 and 11 the conversion of Cornelius, a gentile, is recorded. Peter was selected by God to preach to Cornelius. He, however, had to be prepared. As a Jew he would not enter a Gentile's house. Peter saw a vision from God. This vision emphasized that what God cleansed he should not reject. Although the vision addressed clean and unclean animals [from the Jewish mind] the application was not to animals but to people. Peter understood and was prepared to preach to Cornelius by the time he was in Cornelius' presence. After preaching Jesus to Cornelius and his household Peter again learned that the gentiles were accepted by God. While he was speaking the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the Gentiles, just as it had been upon the apostles in Acts 2 [See Acts 11:15-18]. Peter could not, and did not reject these gentiles so he commanded them to be baptized. They obeyed the gospel and became children of God.

When Peter returned to Jerusalem he was confronted for preaching to Cornelius. Peter rehearsed all the events as they transpired and the brethren praised God for opening the door of the kingdom to the gentiles also.

The twelfth chapter of Acts records the martyrdom of James the apostle. His death pleased the Jews to such a degree that Herod also put Peter in prison intending to kill him also. God, however, had other plans and delivered Peter by the hands of an angel. The chapter ends with the church being strengthened but Herod was eaten by worms for his prideful spirit before God.

## To the Uttermost Parts of the World. Acts 13-28.

The gospel which had been preached in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria was to go to the whole world.

Acts thirteen opens with Barnabas and Saul in Antioch. The Holy Spirit set these two men aside to preach the gospel to the world. After fasting and praying, the church at Antioch sent Barnabas and Saul to preach. This began the first missionary journey. In the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Acts Barnabas and Saul went through Cyprus and parts of Asia Minor [modern Turkey] preaching. In Acts 15 they went to Jerusalem to handle a problem within the church which appeared to come out of Jerusalem. After this problem was solved they again prepared to go preach but disagreed about who should accompany them and where to go. So, they separated and went different directions but still preached the same pure gospel. Saul, now known as Paul, went with Silas through Asia Minor again. After picking up Timothy to help in the work they eventually went to Macedonia and Achaia establishing churches throughout those regions. They returned to Antioch again, then once more went on a preaching tour through Asia Minor and Macedonia. The gospel was preached and the church grew.

After his third missionary journey Paul went to Jerusalem to take assistance for the church in Judea which was given by the churches of Macedonia and Achaia. While there he was falsely accused by the Jews and arrested by the Romans. He was taken from Jerusalem to Caesarea for protection, but ultimately had to appeal to Caesar, his right as a Roman citizen, to avoid the plots of the Jews. Acts 27 records the tumultuous journey of Paul to Rome under guard as a prisoner. After arriving in Rome he spent two years in Rome, living in his own house and receiving guests but still under guard. The book of Acts closes with Paul still in Rome waiting to appear before Caesar.

This brief account of the books of Acts provides a partial view of the church of Christ in the first century A.D. The book of Acts is an inspired account of these happenings, but also allude to many other activities by the church of the first century. These activities led the Thessalonian Jews to describe Christians as those who were turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

Read the entire book of Acts. Follow closely what they preached and what they practiced. These are teachings and practices authorized by God.

## Review.

On a separate sheet of paper make a timeline of the fifteen periods of Bible history and put the following people in their proper time period and in their proper order.

David	Daniel	Isaac
Josiah	Jesus	Adam
Abraham	Moses	Solomon
Esther	Paul	King Saul
Joshua	Caleb	Ezra
Mary	Tower of Babel	Miriam
Ten Commandments given		Bathsheba
Tabernacle built	Rehoboam	Hezekiah
John the Baptist	Samson	Samuel
Deborah	Sarah	Eve

Give three things Peter said about Jesus in Acts 2.

What two things did Peter tell them to do in Acts 2, in answer to their question of verse 37.

At what point does God (give the answer and the reference where it is found).

grant "remission of sins"  
"wash away sins"

Who was the first gentile to become a Christian?

Read Acts 17 and give three facts about God.

### ***For Further Study***

*Searching the Scriptures.* A thirty lesson correspondence course covering the entire book of Acts.

J.W. McGarvey. *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company, nd).

J.W. McGarvey. *A Commentary on Acts of Apostles.* Also known as, *Original Commentary on Acts* (Bowling Green, KY: Guardian of Truth Foundation, nd).

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