

# Survey of Biblical History – Part 1: Creation to Christ

## #23 - THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

### The Church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:12-8:3)

#### 1. Preparation for the Church (Acts 1:12-26 - AD 30)

After Jesus ascended into heaven the disciples returned to Jerusalem to the upper room. There was uncertainty as to what would happen next, so they prayed. The group included the 11 disciples, the women who closely followed Jesus as well as His mother and his brothers who up until now had rejected Him. Now they have fully embraced Jesus as Lord and Messiah. The entire group consisted of 120 people. They chose Matthias to replace Judas among the 12.

#### 2. The Coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-39)

On Pentecost, suddenly a sound like rushing wind swept through the house. Above each person appeared flaming tongues of fire and each became filled with the Holy Spirit as Jesus foretold. Then they began to speak in tongues. Others in the city heard the sound and began to gather around the disciples. "Tongues" was the supernatural ability to speak so others understood what was said in their native language. Others mocked the disciples claiming they were drunk. But Peter stood up to say otherwise. Weeks earlier he had denied Jesus 3 times. Now Peter boldly stands before thousands and gives testimony to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Peter exhorted the crowd to repent and be baptized in the name of Christ (vs. 38).

#### 3. The Nature of the Early Church (Acts 2:40-47)

At the outset at least 120 people were undeniably committed to Christ. But through Peter's preaching 3000 people (i.e., men) responded positively to the gospel of Christ. Each was baptized, most likely place on the south side of the temple complex in a group of baths known as *mikvas* the Jews used for ritual purification rites in preparation for worship in the temple. The apostles began teaching the newly converted Christians forming the first fellowship of the newly established church. They united themselves together for meals and prayer. They sold many of their possessions and gave the proceeds to meet the needs of the less fortunate among them. Meanwhile, the apostles began performing miracles that amazed all those present.

#### 4. The Growth of the Early Church (Acts 3:1-8:3 - AD 31-33)

##### A. The Ministry of the Apostles (Acts 3:1-5:42)

After Peter and John healed a crippled man Peter used it as an occasion to preach again to the crowds at the temple. Both were arrested and placed in custody for 1 day. Yet, that did not stop 5000 additional men (not including women) from converting. The rulers questioned the apostles and realized they were uneducated and had been with Jesus. They tried to persuade them to stop preaching but they would not. Early trouble with the dishonesty of Ananias and Sapphira leading to their deaths caused the Church to fear the divine power that was wielded through the apostles. They were arrested once more, only to be released from jail by an angel to preach in the temple again. The Jewish leaders plotted to kill them, but Gamaliel, a respected Pharisee, wisely dissuaded the leaders (see Acts 5:38-39).

##### B. The Ministry of the Congregation (Acts 6:1-7:60)

As the Church grew so did the needs. The apostles urged the Church to appoint 7 godly men to help meet the needs of the church. Among these men stood out Stephen who boldly preached Christ before the Sanhedrin and so enraged them that he was stoned to death.

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## The Church in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-12:25)

### 1. The Church Moves beyond Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-40 - AD 33-34)

The growth of the Church began moving beyond Jerusalem. Philip, one of the 7 men chosen to serve the needs of the church, was emboldened to preach the gospel in Samaria. He was so effective that he later became known as “Philip the Evangelist” (Acts 21:8). A sorcerer known as Simon professed faith in Christ. However, when John and Peter came to impart the Holy Spirit to the Samaritan believers Simon sought to buy this power, revealing the insincerity of his profession. Meanwhile, an angel spoke to Philip and instructed him to go to Gaza and meet an Ethiopian governmental official in his chariot reading a scroll of Isaiah 53. Philip explained how the passage pointed to Christ and the official came to Christ and was baptized.

### 2. The Conversion of Paul (Acts 9:1-31 - AD 33-35)

A young Pharisee by the name of Saul (Paul) was present when Stephen was martyred. He helped instigate persecution against the Jerusalem believers which prompted them to move beyond Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-3). Saul followed as well. But while on the road to Damascus seeking to arrest believers he was assaulted by a blinding light and the voice of Christ calling him from heaven. Saul responded in both shock and belief. He was blinded for 3 days, neither eating nor drinking, but praying at the house of a man named Judas. Christ then spoke to Ananias in a vision. He laid his hands on Saul to receive his sight back and baptized him. God intended to use Saul to spread the gospel (see Acts 9:15-16). Saul in a dramatic turnaround defended the claims of Christ to the astonishment of everyone who knew his reputation for persecuting believers. Many attempted to kill him, but the Church soon trusted his new faith and protected him.

### 1. The Church Encompasses the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-11:30 - AD 36-39)

The ministry of Peter continued to expand, healing many while preaching the gospel. He brought back to life a woman named Dorcas in Joppa (Acts 10:36-43). Peter stayed in Joppa with Simon. Meanwhile, in Caesarea, Cornelius, a Gentile and centurion for the Roman army, received a vision from God in answer to his prayers. An angel instructed him to send for Peter at Joppa. As servants were in route for Peter, Peter saw his own vision of unclean animals (i.e. according to Jewish law) representing Gentiles. He was told to, “Rise, kill and eat” meaning preach the gospel to them and harvest souls for Christ. Peter came to the house of Cornelius and preached the gospel to those gathered. The Holy Spirit fell upon these Gentiles. They believed the message of Christ and were baptized. Although the Jewish believers in Jerusalem and Judea were perplexed by this turn of events, after Peter explained, they became convinced that “God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18).

### 2. The Church Experiences Persecution (Acts 12:1-25 - AD 41-44)

The growth of the Church corresponded with a growth in persecution. Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, persecuted the Church to gain favor with the Jews. He killed, James the brother of John (i.e., the sons of Zebedee). Herod then proceeded to arrest Peter and put him in prison. The intention was to bring Peter before the Jews after Passover, presumably to kill him as well. However, the believers prayed fervently for Peter and an angel delivered him from the prison in the middle of the night. He came to the house where the believers were gathered telling them what happened. He escaped further capture eventually making his way to Caesarea. Meanwhile, after a search for him failed, the guards of the prison were executed. Later, Herod’s arrogance against God led to his untimely death, being struck by an angel. But the Church continued to grow.