

# New Beginnings

## Chapter 28-Acts

### Introduction

- The book of Acts was written around 61 A.D. by **Luke**. Luke was the apostle Paul's personal physician (Colossians 4:14).
- Luke was also the author of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2). Historians are not sure about the identity of Theophilus. Some feel he was a prominent **Roman** official.

### Transition

- The book of Acts is an amazing historical narrative in that it:
  - Makes a transition from the Old Testament's **Laws** to the New Testament's **Church**.
  - Introduces the work and indwelling of the **Holy Spirit**.
  - Continues the historical narrative from the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).
  - Gives the historical setting for the rest of the New Testament (Paul's Epistles (letters) including the writings of James, Peter, John, and Jude).
- The four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John end with Christ's resurrection and Great **Commission**. Acts picks up these themes and details the working of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles and the Church for the next 30 years (30 A.D.-60 A.D). Acts ends with Paul's imprisonment in Rome (61-63 A.D).
- Most of Paul's Epistles (letters) to the churches were to **congregations** that he established during the Acts narrative.
- The Old Testament Laws were given to the Jews to make them aware of sin, their need for atonement through sacrifices, and to prepare them for ushering in the Messiah (Jesus Christ).
- The Jews **rejected** the Messiah; therefore, the Church Age was formed through the Holy Spirit. It is now the responsibility of the **Church** (the body of Christ; the collective body of all believers) to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- After Jesus' resurrection, He commissioned the believers to spread the Gospel until His return (Christ's second coming)-Matthew 28: 19-20.

### Timeline of Important Dates of Jewish History

- God told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved for 400 years in a foreign land (Genesis 15:13-16) 1875 B.C.-1445 B.C.=430 years generation=400 years).
- Numbers 14:33-34 The Israelites had 40 years to wander in the wilderness 1445-1446 B.C.

- Jeremiah 29:10 Israel will be in captivity for 70 years (605 B.C.-535 B.C.). Cyrus decreed the Jewish return in 535 B.C.
- Daniel 9:25-26 stated that 173,855 days would pass until Jesus would enter Jerusalem as Messiah (March 5, 444 B.C. to March 30, 33 A.D.)

## The Book of Acts

### Acts 1

#### Vs. 1-4-Introduction

- Jesus had given specific orders for the disciples not to leave **Jerusalem** until the Holy Spirit had fallen upon them (Acts 1:4-5).
- Jesus was resurrected on First Fruits (Sunday after His crucifixion). The Jews were to count **50** days after First Fruits and then celebrate Pentecost-which means 50.
- Jesus stayed 40 days before ascending into heaven (Acts 1:3). Thus, the disciples had waited 10 days for the **Holy Spirit** to arrive on Pentecost.
- On the 15 of Nisan, the Jews were to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Jews were to eat unleavened bread. Leaven was a symbol of sin. However, on Pentecost-the Jews were to eat leavened bread.
- The fact the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost symbolized that **all** people-Jews and Gentiles (Gentiles, who represented leaven were now joined with the Jews) were part of the same body of Christ.

### Chapter 2-Formation of the Early Church

#### Vs. 2-13-The Holy Spirit Appears

- “Rushing mighty wind” The Greek word for mighty is *biaios* which means “**violent**.” The disciples had no idea what to expect. All they understood was that they were to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus was given a physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the form of a **dove** after His baptism (Matthew 3:16). There is no indication that anyone other than Jesus and John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit as a dove (John 1:32-33). This physical manifestation was given partially so John would recognize Jesus as the Messiah.
- It appears that the physical manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire came upon the Disciples so they would know and **understand** what the Holy Spirit was doing.
- Peace was often a message by God to humanity. A dove often symbolized “**peace**” which is what Jesus came to bring. Jesus came to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29); The angel that appeared to the shepherds at Jesus’ birth said, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased (Luke 2:14).

- The tongues of fire appear to have symbolized, not only the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but also the **work** the Spirit was going to do. That work was to preach the “Good News” of Jesus Christ.
- God often used physical manifestations when implementing His work.
  - When God promised Noah that He would never destroy the earth by water, He provided a **rainbow**.
  - When the Law was given, God manifested Himself with thunder, lightning, a thick cloud, a very loud trumpet, a fireball, smoke, and a violent earth quake. This got the Jews’ attention and proved to them that God was at work.
  - God wrought signs and **wonders** through the judges and prophets to prove Himself to the Jews.
  - Jesus performed many miracles to prove His **identity**.
  - God performed mighty miracles through the apostles to authenticate the formation and foundation of the “Church.”
- While God performs miracles today, these signs and wonders were meant for a specific purpose and for a specific time. Paul stated the true signs of an apostle in 2 Corinthians 12:12. These were specific acts designed to **authenticate** the apostles’ teaching.
- Since the Holy Spirit had not been given, the apostles indwelling of the Holy Spirit and belief in Christ came at two separate times. They were infilled with the Holy Spirit because they believed in Christ. Today, the filling of the Holy Spirit and salvation by faith happen **simultaneously**.

### **Baptism of the Holy Spirit and Filling of the Holy Spirit**

- There is a difference between the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the filling of the Holy Spirit.
- Baptism of the Holy Spirit a one-time occurrence when one receives Jesus into their life (Matthew 3:11). At this time, we are sealed with the Spirit for all eternity (Ephesians 1:13).
- The filling of the Holy Spirit is the ultimate goal of spiritual maturity each believer strives to obtain (Ephesians 5:18).

### **Vs. 14-47-Peter’s Sermon**

- Peter stood up and delivered a powerful sermon explaining that these manifestations were predicted by **Joel** when he stated, “...And it shall be in the last days...that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind...”

- Peter went on to explain that Jesus was the Messiah and **3,000** came to believe in Jesus.
- Many signs and wonders were performed by the disciples authenticating the work of the Holy Spirit.
- All the believers were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and began **sharing** with those in need.
- The Lord was adding to their numbers daily.

## Chapter 6

### **Vs. 8-15-Stephen Brought Before the Jewish Council (The First Christian Martyr)**

- God empowered **Stephen** to perform great wonders and signs among the people.
- Verse 9 indicates that men, from perhaps various synagogues, began arguing with Stephen.
- The nonbelieving Jews fabricated accusations against Stephen and dragged him before the Council. The Council, also known as the **Sanhedrin**, was composed of 70 or 72 Jewish elders and teachers.
- The Holy Spirit's anointing must have been upon Stephen for his face looked like that of an **angel**.

## Chapter 7

### **Vs. 1-60-Stephen's Defense and His Stoning**

- Caiaphas was the high priest presiding over the trial. Jesus was brought to Caiaphas before His **crucifixion** (John 18:24). Caiaphas was the ruling high priest from 18-36 A.D. while Annas was high priest from 6-15 A.D. (Luke 3:1-2). Annas apparently held a high position during Caiaphas' reign.
- Stephen began his narrative of the Jewish **history** starting with Abraham.

### **Vs. 51-53-Stephen Denounces the Council**

- At this point, Stephen turned the narrative against the Council and stated how they had **rejected** God. They killed the Messiah, Jesus Christ, just as their forefathers had killed the prophets.

### **Vs. 54-60-Stephen is Stoned**

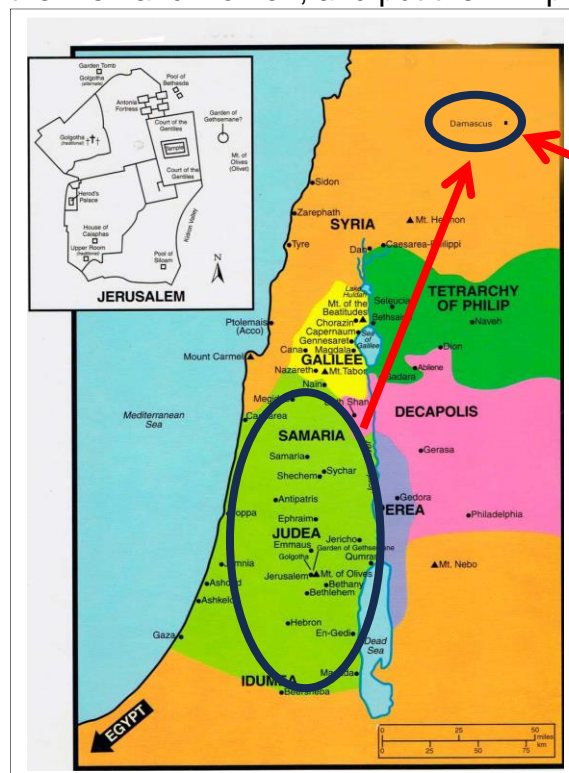
- The Council became enraged at Stephen.
- Stephen looked up into heaven and saw the glory of God and **Jesus** standing at His right hand. Stephen announced what he saw, and the Council rushed him out of the city and stoned him.

- As they were stoning Stephen, he cried out and asked the Lord to **receive** his spirit. Stephen also asked that the stoning would not be held against his executioners.
- At this point, Stephen died.

## Chapter 8

### Vs. 1-3-The Beginning of Saul's Persecutions

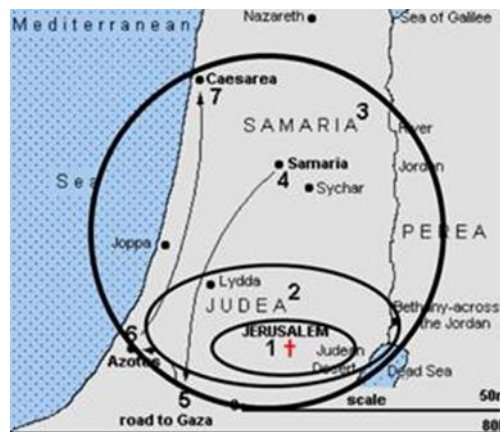
- Saul, who will later be called Paul, was in full agreement with Stephen's stoning.
- After Stephen's stoning, a great persecution fell upon the Christians at Jerusalem. Since Stephen was a Hellenistic Jew, it is possible that the **Hellenistic** Jews were the ones most severely punished and forced to flee Jerusalem. (Acts 11:19-20).
- The Jews were scattered throughout the regions of **Judea** and **Samaria**. This region was now the second phase of Jesus' commission (Acts 1:8). **Damascus**
- Saul began an intense persecution of the Christians. He went from house to house, arrested the men and women, and put them in prison.



Damascus

[minihttp://www.pinsdaddy.com/map-of-john-the-baptist-ministry\\_6kIrvA6boFL7y2lfyUDq59wxXpHuAWzaWjdKdgbg/stry\\_6kIrvA6boFL7y2lfyUDq59wxXpHuAWzaWjdKdgbg/](http://www.pinsdaddy.com/map-of-john-the-baptist-ministry_6kIrvA6boFL7y2lfyUDq59wxXpHuAWzaWjdKdgbg/stry_6kIrvA6boFL7y2lfyUDq59wxXpHuAWzaWjdKdgbg/)

## The Great Commission of Acts 1:8 Begins



<http://www.talentshare.org/~mm9n/articles/Paul/Paul3.htm>

## Chapter 9

### Vs. 1-2-Saul Goes to Damascus

- Saul was threatening the Christians with **imprisonment** and death. Going to the high priest (Caiaphas), he obtained permission and letters to bind the Christians—both men and women—and bring them to Jerusalem.
- Paul's zeal for persecuting the Christians was very severe. It is amazing how strong the Christians were during this time of **persecution**. They did not renounce their faith but continued to spread the Gospel throughout the region.



<http://www.centuryone.com/mmwr.html>

### Vs. 3-19-Saul's Conversion

- As Saul was nearing Damascus (see map above), a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. Falling to the ground, Saul heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Paul answered, "Who are You, Lord?" He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."
- Paul apparently saw Jesus within the bright light (Acts 26:16; Galatians 1:15; 1 Corinthians 15:8; Philippians 3:12).
- Paul used the word "Lord" in asking who He was. The Greek word for Lord is *kurios* which is the Greek equivalent for the Old Testament Hebrew word *Jehovah*. The Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting..."
- Paul identified the Lord **Yahweh** or (*Jehovah*) of the Old Testament with Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had so fiercely persecuted through the believers. It was because of this appearance that Paul considered himself to be an apostle (1 Corinthians 15:9; Acts 1:21-22).
- Jesus instructed Paul to go into **Damascus** and wait for further instructions. Paul gave a more detailed narrative in Acts 26:14-18.
- Vs. 7 states that the men heard the voice but did not see anyone. Acts 22:9 states that those with Saul saw the light but did not understand what the voice was saying.
- Saul was **blinded** by the experience. The men led Saul by hand into Damascus where he went 3 days and nights without eating or drinking.



<http://www.all-creatures.org/sermons98/map-07.html>

### **Vs. 10-18-Saul Receives His Sight**

- The Lord appeared to **Ananias** and told him to pray for Saul to receive his sight.
- Ananias was apparently a leader in the **Damascus** church (Acts 22:12).
- At first, Ananias was ready to answer the Lord's call until he learned of the mission.
- God assured Ananias that Saul was a chosen instrument of His and would be a testimony for Christ to the Gentiles, kings, and to the Jews. God also told Ananias that He would show Saul the **suffering** that he would have to endure for Christ.
- Ananias referred to Saul as **brother** which indicated his trust in God's word. Ananias prayed for Saul and he immediately regained his sight and was baptized.

### **Summary**

Never give up praying for the lost. They may be family members, loved ones, friends, neighbors, or people and rulers from countries around the world. Our prayers reach the throne room of heaven and are heard by our heavenly Father. God also knows about our physical needs. He wants us to come to Him while presenting our requests. Expect God to answer your prayer. It may not be in the way you asked but God will answer as He sees best. Trust for God's guidance, His peace, and know that He is very merciful.



## Discussion Questions

### Chapter 28

1. The book of Acts demonstrates the working of the Holy Spirit within the church.
  - a. How did the Holy Spirit's role differ in the New Testament from the Old Testament?
  - b. Why do you think Old Testament believers were so quick to turn from God?
  - c. Why were New Testament believers so dedicated to God's work?
2. Jesus commissioned the Church to spread the Gospel.
  - a. Discuss some effective ways in which the Church is spreading the Gospel of Christ?
  - b. List some cautions the Church could follow while spreading the Gospel of Christ?
  - c. When did you first hear of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ? Explain.
3. Jesus gave specific orders for the disciples not to leave Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit had fallen upon them?
  - a. Does God ever tell us to wait? Explain.
  - b. Have you ever felt spiritually stagnant while waiting for an answer? Explain.
  - c. What might we do during these periods of waiting?
  - d. What might God be telling us during these times of waiting?
4. In God's perfect timing, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the Disciples.
  - a. What do you think the Disciples were doing while they waited for the Holy Spirit?
  - b. What do you think the Disciples thought would happen when the Holy Spirit arrived?
  - c. Has God ever worked in your life in a way you never expected? Explain.
5. Both Peter and Stephen demonstrated incredible boldness and wisdom after they were filled with the Holy Spirit.
  - a. Did your life change after receiving Christ as your personal savior? Explain.
  - b. What keeps people from accepting Christ?
  - c. As a Christian, how should our lives reflect God's work?