

Church History: Getting Started

Acts Chapters 1-11

By Tim Hendricks

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I. Foundation and Mission of the Church

A. Jesus' Instructions

Matthew 16:13-21

In this passage Jesus declares that He will build His church with Himself as the foundation and corner stone and the Apostles, especially Peter, as the first building stones. Interestingly, at the same time Jesus tells the Twelve not to begin declaring him as the Christ at this time. He has other things to do before beginning to build the church.

Matthew 28:16-2

In the Matthew 16 passage Jesus told the Apostles not to tell anyone that He is the Christ, yet. Now he tells them how they are supposed to spread His Gospel to the whole world.

Acts 1:1-8

Here the Holy Spirit is promised to the Apostles. Jesus also tells them they are almost ready to begin their mission, but not until the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

B. The Apostles Didn't Wait Long

Acts 1:12-26

When Jesus ascended they immediately followed His instruction to wait, but how they waited is important.

- They returned to Jerusalem instead of their homes where they spent their time praying.
- They chose Matthias to replace Judas among the 12.
- They waited in Jerusalem for about one week before getting started on the day of Pentecost.

C. Pentecost

Leviticus 23:1-24 This passage describes the three major festivals the Israelites were supposed to celebrate, Feast of Unleavened Bread, Day of First Fruits and Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).

- The Festival of First Fruits was celebrated in Jerusalem on the day after the Sabbath following Passover at the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- From the day of the Day of First Fruits they were supposed to count forward seven weeks and one day, or fifty days to the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).
- It depends a little on who is doing the counting and when they start but from the day of Jesus' crucifixion to Pentecost was about fifty-one days according to the Jewish calendar three of those days were occupied between the Crucifixion and Resurrection, then Jesus taught the Disciples for forty more days. So now they have passed forty-three of the fifty-one days. So the time from when the Disciples return to the upper room after Jesus' final instructions until the events of Pentecost is only seven or, maybe, eight days.

II. Growth, Persecution and Fulfilling the "Great Commission"

A. Pentecost

Acts 1:3 & 2:1-12

- Pentecost connects the church to Moses' writings. The events that launched the church on Pentecost are more than sufficient to demonstrate that God ordained the church, but putting it on Pentecost is like an exclamation point showing that this had been the plan all along.

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- Pentecost begins demonstrating fulfillment of Jesus statement that He would build His church. It is likely that there were millions of people in Jerusalem for Passover and fewer but still a lot of people in Jerusalem for Pentecost. So while 3,000 is a large number it is far fewer than were in Jerusalem or present at Peter's first sermon. And there is no obvious reason for why these people saw a miraculous event that moved them to repentance and these people attributed this to simple drunkenness.
- Pentecost begins demonstrating to the Apostles the meaning of Jesus' instructions contained in the Great Commission and throughout his teachings that His Gospel is for the whole world. Although the Apostles still seem to think it is for the whole Israelite world.
- Along with beginning to recognize the significance of the mission to take this message to the whole world Peter had not missed the command to baptize people who received the Gospel right away.

B. From Pentecost to Persecution

Acts 4:4

- One event in the earliest days of the church where we see the number of disciples has grown. It might be that 5,000 men were converted this day although it seems more popular that the number of men among the disciples had swollen to 5,000 by this time.

Acts 5:11 - 14

- Acts 5:11 is the first time that the word "Church" is used in the book of Acts
- At this point everyone in Jerusalem was taking notice of this group and its significance to the point that outsiders feared being associated with the Church. We aren't specifically told what they feared just that they were afraid, but even fear can't stop Jesus from building His church. It is also at this point that they seem to have given up attempting to keep track of how many people were part of the Church.

Acts 6:1

- Luke simply says they were increasing in number, and in the notes in the MacArthur Study Bible for this verse John MacArthur estimates that there may have been as many as 20,000 disciples by this point.
- Also, in spite of the likelihood that some people were baptized in Jerusalem then returned to their home region for one reason or another, Luke comments that the Church increased greatly in Jerusalem, but he makes no comments about there being believers anywhere outside of Jerusalem at this time.

Acts 6 - 8

- By this time the Church has grown to the point that the Apostles need to delegate some tasks to trustworthy men. One of these men is Stephen who will be the first believer to lose his life because he refused to deny Christ when he is falsely accused of blasphemy and stoned.
- It is at this point that Luke introduces us to a man named Saul who seems to be very glad that the Jewish leadership is finally going to take serious action to destroy this sect which he seems as causing trouble. As beginning with Stephen he, and apparently others who agreed with him, beginning attempting to destroy the Church.

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C. The Gospel Spreads to the Gentiles

Acts 8:4 - 25

- It is possible that as people moved in and out through Jerusalem, and especially following Pentecost, then returned home that the Church had already begun to spread throughout the Roman Empire, but persecution definitely causes the Church to scatter and preach although initially only to Israelites.
- There is no explanation given for why only just the statement that Philip did go to Samaria and begin proclaiming the Gospel to the Samaritans and many of them placed their faith in Jesus and were baptized.
- It is a big leap that Philip offered baptism to Samaritans who were considered by Jews to be cutoff from worshipping God. Also in their first really strategic decision the Church welcomes Samaritans into full participation even sending Peter and John to help the Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit and get started well.

Acts 8:26 - 40

- Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, but Philip receives instructions from the Holy Spirit to head a different direction eventually the Holy Spirit leads Philip to preach to the Ethiopian eunuch. Again here the significance of baptism is emphasized and the expanding view of the Apostles on who the Gospel is meant for as a foreigner who also happens to be a eunuch is welcomed in as a disciple.
- Once again the Apostles are seeing the deeper meanings of Jesus words

like those recorded in **Matthew 19:10-12** where He addresses eunuchs or in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, and the Apostles now can see that He was not just using figures of speech, but He really meant that Samaritans and eunuchs were included in the Gospel plan.

Acts 9:31 - 11

- After Saul is converted and eventually sent home to Tarsus the persecution of the Church is greatly reduced Luke actually says there was peace in Judea, Galilee and Samaria.
- With this peace Peter begins traveling and reconnecting with the scattered believers, specifically Lydda, Sharon and Joppa.
- While he is on this journey the Holy Spirit causes the Roman centurion, Cornelius, to seek Peter out and prepares Peter to take the Gospel to Cornelius and his household.
- Unlike the Samaritans and as if to emphasize the point the Holy Spirit comes on this group of new believers while Peter is still in the process of preaching to them.
- As soon as he recognizes this Peter instructs the believers who had come with him to baptize the gentiles. He makes no mention on circumcision, but that is the issue that is raised when Peter relates the story of the new Gentile believers to the Church in Jerusalem. Eventually the Gentile believers are completely accepted. Although this issue of baptism with or without circumcission will continue to be an issue and even becomes a sticking point between Paul and Peter in later years.

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Map of the Regions Represented at Pentecost



[https://understandyourbible.org/sites/default/files/content-images/Nations%20at%20Pentecost%20\(3\)-min1_0.jpg](https://understandyourbible.org/sites/default/files/content-images/Nations%20at%20Pentecost%20(3)-min1_0.jpg)



The Ministry of Philip the Evangelist

c. A.D. 34?

Philip, a leader in the church in Jerusalem, began his evangelistic ministry in Sebaste (also called Samaria). God then led him south toward Gaza, where he explained the gospel to a God-fearing Ethiopian royal official. Afterwards Philip was transported by God to Azotus, where he preached and continued his ministry up to Caesarea.

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<http://prestonwood.org/images/default-source/site-images/map-44-3-the-ministry-of-philip-the-evangelist.jpg>