

# SESSION 2

## THE EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH

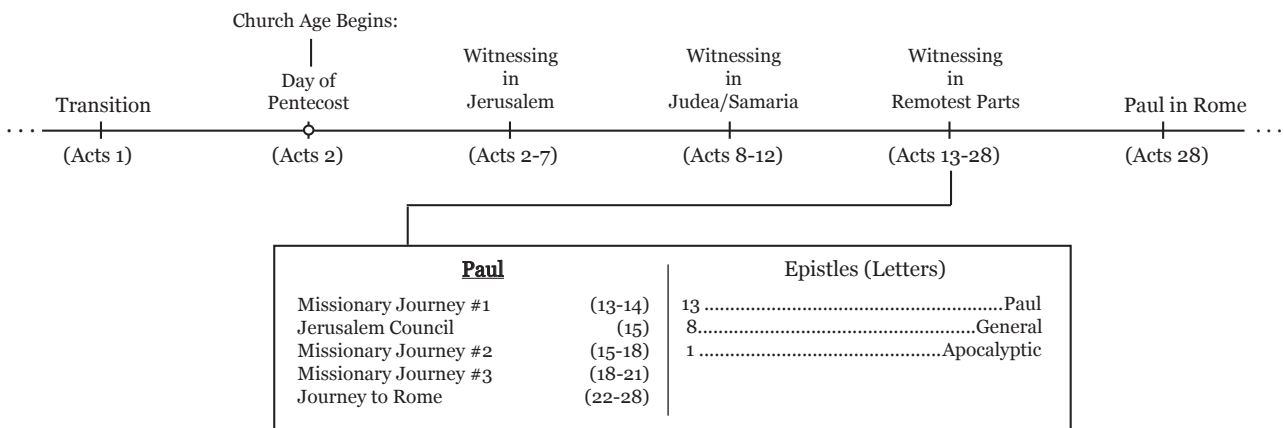
### I. PRAYER/REVIEW

### II. BOOK OF ACTS: CHARTED

BOOK OF ACTS			
Author: Luke Theme: Beginnings of the Church Key Verse: Acts 1:8			
Chapter 1	Chapters 2-7	Chapters 8-12	Chapters 13-28
Introduction	Witnessing in Jerusalem	Witnessing in Judea/Samaria	Witnessing to the Ends of the Earth
Focus: Jews		Jews + ½ Jews	Gentiles

### III. BOOK OF ACTS: TIMELINE

#### #11 CHURCH AGE (Acts, Epistles)



## IV. BOOK OF ACTS: OUTLINED

### A. Key Verse: Acts 1:8

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

### B. Key Points

1. Witnessing in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)
2. **Witnessing in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12)**
3. Witnessing to the Ends of the Earth (Acts 13-28)

## V. BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT: WITNESSING IN JUDEA/SAMARIA

Stephen's martyrdom led to a widespread persecution of the early church. Those who heard Stephen's message and condemnation were outraged.

Acts 7:51-52

*"You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! <sup>52</sup>Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him..."*

Laying their outer garments at the feet of a young man named Saul (Paul), the crowd stoned the Deacon-Evangelist. The story concludes, "And Saul was there, giving approval to his death" (Acts 8:1).

### A. The Persecution of the Church (Acts 8:1<sup>b</sup>-3)

Acts 8:1<sup>b</sup>-3

*and all except the apostles were scattered throughout **Judea and Samaria.** <sup>2</sup> Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.*

1. The persecution at Jerusalem caused many believers (except the Apostles) to scatter throughout Judea and Samaria.
2. The persecution marked the beginning of Saul's attempt "to destroy the church" (3).

### **Insight: Suffering for the Gospel**

As the persecution of the church heats up, the suffering that it brings comes to the surface. Later in time, the Apostle Paul addressed this kind of situation in the Roman letter (Ro 8:35-39).

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

*<sup>36</sup> As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

*<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,<sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Further, the Lord gave divine perspective to Paul concerning his personal suffering with these words, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

Even Peter and John, after being flogged for testifying about Christ (Acts 5:33-42), were described as "rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."

### **B. The Story of Philip (Acts 8:4-40)**

1. Evangelizing in Samaria (4-8)

Acts 8:4-8

*Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. <sup>5</sup> **Philip** went down to a city in **Samaria** and proclaimed the Messiah there. <sup>6</sup> When the crowds heard **Philip** and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. <sup>7</sup> For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> So there was great joy in that city.*

- a. Philip was a Deacon-Evangelist, first encountered in the Grecian-Hebraic Jewish women controversy (Acts 6:1-7). He had been chosen as one of seven men “full of the Spirit and wisdom.”
  - b. Philip (as a result of the persecution in Jerusalem) traveled to Samaria and proclaimed Christ. The Samaritans and the Jews were antagonistic toward one another. During the Assyrian Captivity (of the 8th century BC), certain Jews who were not deported intermarried with the foreigners relocated by the Assyrians. This development produced “half-Jews” who were rejected and disrespected by Judean Jews. In the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, the woman pointed this out to Jesus (Jn 4:9). Even the Gospel writer editorialized, “For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.”
  - c. Philip preached in an undetermined Samaritan city.
    - (1) He proclaimed Christ.
    - (2) He produced miraculous signs.
    - (3) Crowds (as a result of the above) “paid close attention to what he said” (6).
2. Encountering Simon the Sorcerer (9-25)
- a. Simon’s activities in the city: his resumé (9-11)
    - (1) He practiced sorcery (9).
    - (2) He amazed the people of Samaria (9).
    - (3) He boasted that he was someone great (9).
    - (4) He received acclamation and the reputation as “The Great Power” (10).
    - (5) He had followers who were amazed with his magic (11).
  - (“But”...) b. Philip’s activities in the city: his resumé (12)
    - (1) He preached the Good News of the Kingdom.
    - (2) He preached the name of Jesus Christ.
    - (3) He baptized men and women believers.

Acts 8:13

*Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.*

But was Simon's conversion real? Further, could it be true that any Samaritans could truly be saved? Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to Samaria to investigate. They prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit which then occurred (8:14-17). This was an authenticating sign.

Acts 8:18-23

*When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money <sup>19</sup>and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>20</sup> Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup>You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup>Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. <sup>23</sup>For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."*

**Insight:**

The door is now open. Jews and half-Jews have both responded to the Gospel. The reception of the Holy Spirit has authenticated the fact that the Gospel has bridged the gap from Jews to Samaritans. But what of Gentiles?

3. Engaging an Ethiopian eunuch (26-40)

Peter and John returned from Samaria back to Jerusalem. Along the way they preached in many Samaritan villages. Many were believing the Gospel message.

But what of a solitary God-fearer? Will the message be as effective for the one as it has been for the many? Enter the Ethiopian eunuch.

**Insight:**

Ethiopia (Cush in the Old Testament) corresponds to what is known as Nubia. It encompasses parts of what is now southern Egypt and northern Sudan. In ancient literature the Ethiopians were considered as living in the ends of the earth. In other words, with the gospel going to the Samaritans and then to the Ethiopian, it was going to the last two geographical spheres of the Great Commission as given in Acts 1:8. Luke does not mention the religious background of the Ethiopian. He had come to the Jerusalem temple to worship and had a copy of Isaiah with him—not something easy to obtain in those days. This suggests that he may have been a God-fearer or proselyte.

(From A. Fernando, *Acts: NIV Application Commentary*, 283)

a. The setting (26-29)

Acts 8:26-29

*Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."<sup>27</sup> So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,<sup>28</sup> and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.<sup>29</sup> The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."*

b. The encounter (30-35)

- (1) Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (30).
- (2) The eunuch replied, "How can I unless someone explains it to me?" (31).

**Insight:**

The eunuch was reading from the Messianic passage in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 known as "The Suffering Servant" passage. It foreshadows with amazing clarity the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah.

The specific passage that the eunuch was reading was Isaiah 53:7-8. This is recorded in Acts 8:32-33:

*This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:  
"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."*

Acts 8:34-35

*The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"<sup>35</sup> Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.*

c. The result (36-40)

- (1) The believing eunuch was baptized.
- (2) The deacon-evangelist was taken away by the Holy Spirit.

**C. The Conversion of Saul (Acts 9:1-31)**

There may be no greater conversion in all of Christendom than that of Saul of Tarsus. With this reversal of life the stage is set for the supreme articulator of the theological meaning of the Christian faith. He will write thirteen (13) of the twenty-seven (27) books (letters) of the New Testament. Barclay (71) calls it "not a sudden conversion; but it is a sudden surrender."

1. On the road to Damascus (1-9)

a. His intent (1-2)

Acts 9:1-2

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high*

priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

b. His experience (3-6)

Acts 9:3-6

*As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" <sup>5</sup>"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. <sup>6</sup>"Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

- (1) Jesus appears and questions Paul as to why Paul was persecuting Him (4). Since believers are the Body of Christ, to persecute the body was to persecute Christ.
- (2) Jesus answers Paul's question of identity: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (5).
- (3) Jesus instructs Paul to proceed to Damascus and await instructions (6).

c. His condition (7-9)

- (1) He was blind.
- (2) He was helpless.
- (3) He was without food or drink (3 days).

**Insight:**

Saul (Paul) was in an abject state of mental, emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual distress. The one who militantly set out to destroy the Church, to arrest "blasphemous" followers of the Way, has come to the end of himself. His personal world view has been shattered.



2. In the city of Damascus (10-19)

a. The vision of Ananias (10-19)

A disciple of Jesus (Ananias) received instructions by a vision to proceed to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for Saul of Tarsus.

b. The protest of Ananias (13-16)

Acts 9:13-16

*"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." <sup>15</sup>But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup>I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."*

c. The actions of Ananias (17)

(1) He addressed Saul as "Brother Saul."

(2) He explained his arrival (Jesus sent him), namely that Saul might see again (miraculous healing) and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

d. The response of Paul (18-19)

He could see again; he was baptized; he took food and regained his strength.

**Insight:**

This is the turning point in the life of an up and coming Pharisee. He had studied under the esteemed Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and was a zealous devotee of the God of the Jews. But then he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. His life ambition was halted. Now what? What is the next step of the converted Saul? One thing is certain, Jesus had told Ananias that He the Lord would "show him (Saul) how much he must suffer for my (Jesus') name" (Acts 9:16).

A new path has been set before Saul.

3. In Damascus and Jerusalem (9:20-31)

Immediately Saul begins to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God (20) to the amazement of those who knew his former reputation (21).

Acts 9:22

*Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.*

a. Plotting against Saul (23-25)

b. Escaping to Jerusalem (26-29)

Acts 9:26-29

*When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.<sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.<sup>29</sup> He talked and debated with the Hellenistic Jews, but they tried to kill him.*

c. Escaping to Tarsus (by way of Caesarea) (30)

**Insight:**

The Book of Acts notes several “summaries” where the broader perspective of the Church’s growth and development are chronicled. These are found at Acts 2:41; 2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; 9:31 (here in this account); 11:21; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20.

Acts 9:31

*Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.*

This concludes the account of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9 and the subsequent beginnings of his ministry. As noted previously, piecing together a reasonable, chronological flow of events is often difficult. Biblical writers can compress events, arbitrarily move events to create a more thematic flow (as opposed to linear, chronological flow) or leave out chronological markers altogether.

One point of interest is the five Jerusalem visits that Saul/ Paul made in his apostolic ministry life. The following chart harmonizes the Biblical data.

<b>Paul’s Five Recorded Visits to Jerusalem (Hoehner’s Chronology)</b>	
1. After leaving Damascus (Acts 9; Gal 1).....	37 AD
2. Famine visit (Acts 11; Gal 2) .....	47 AD
3. Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) .....	49 AD
4. After Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18) .....	52 AD
5. Final visit before Caesarean imprisonment .....	57 AD (Acts 21)

**D. The Ministry of Peter (Acts 9:32-11:18)**

The narrative in Acts shifts focus from Paul (Saul) to Peter. The account of Paul’s ministry will return in Acts 13. Not being confined to Jerusalem alone, Peter was moving about the country visiting believers (9:32) and preaching the Gospel (8:25).

1. Peter with Aeneas and Dorcas (9:32-43)

a. Miracle: Aeneas (32-35)

Acts: 9:32-34

*As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the Lord’s people who lived in Lydda. <sup>33</sup>There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years. <sup>34</sup>“Aeneas,” Peter said to him, “Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and roll up your mat.” Immediately Aeneas got up.*

- (1) Peter arrives in Lydda, a town some 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem.
- (2) Peter met a bed-ridden paralytic named Aeneas, one who had been in his condition for eight years.
- (3) Peter boldly declared, "Jesus Christ heals you" (34). Note that he did not say, "I heal you."
- (4) The result of the healing was widespread.

Acts 9:35

*All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.*

b. Miracle: Tabitha/Dorcas (36-42)

Acts 9:36-37

*In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. <sup>37</sup>About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.*

- (1) The tragedy of the passing of a good woman who did good affects a community.
- (2) Peter was in Lydda and was summoned to come to the coastal city of Joppa (only 10 miles away).

Acts 9:40-41

*Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. <sup>41</sup>He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive.*

- (1) Peter sent all out of the room (solitude before God).
- (2) Peter prayed; the apostle did not immediately command the lady to rise, but interceded for her.

**Insight:**

This is the first occurrence of the raising from the dead in the Book of Acts. The story is similar to Jesus' raising of the small girl (Mark 5) but distinct. Whereas Jesus commanded the girl to rise, Peter prays. Recall this important lesson on believing prayer:

1 John 5:14-15

*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. <sup>15</sup>And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.*

(3) The result of this miracle was predictable.

Acts 9:42

*This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.*

2. Peter with Cornelius (10:1-48)

a. The man: Cornelius (1-2)

Acts 10:1-2

*At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. <sup>2</sup> He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.*

(1) He (Cornelius) resided in Caesarea on the coast, about 30 miles north of Joppa. This seaport had been rebuilt by Herod the Great and named after Caesar Augustus. The population had more Gentiles than Jews.

(2) He was a Roman centurion in command of a hundred soldiers. His unit was a part of the Italian Regiment.

(3) He (and his family) were "devout and God-fearing." Though not a Jew, Cornelius was inclined to sympathize with the religion and ethics of Judaism. He gave generously and prayed to God regularly.

b. The vision of Cornelius (3-8)

An angel appeared before Cornelius and spoke.

Acts 10:4<sup>b</sup>-6

*The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. <sup>5</sup>Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. <sup>6</sup>He is staying with Simon the tanner, whose house is by the sea."*

c. The man: Peter (9-16)

Totally unaware that three men from Caesarea are traveling to Joppa to speak to him, Peter was praying at noon on the rooftop (10:7-9).

As food was being prepared, Peter "fell into a trance" and saw a vision of a sheet descending to earth with all manners of animals, reptiles, and birds. A voice commanded, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (10:13).

Peter protested that "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean" (10:14). The voice rebuked Peter, "Do not call anything impure that God has called clean" (10:14). This happened three different times, then the vision was over.

d. The three men and Peter (17-23)

Acts 10:22-23

*The men replied, "We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say."<sup>23</sup> Then Peter invited the men into the house to be his guests.*

- (1) Peter is still thinking about the unusual vision.
- (2) Peter is told by the Spirit that three men are looking for him. The intersection of the troubling vision and the purpose for three strangers seeking Peter has brought a dramatic tension to the meeting.

**Insight:**

This unfolding drama is about to be a defining moment for Peter. The vision has challenged Peter's notion of clean and unclean food, a distinguishing mark of a devout Jew. Then, Gentiles have appeared and want to speak with Peter. Conscientious Jews would not offer hospitality to non-Jews, yet the Spirit has clearly spoken, "Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them" (10:20).

The Gospel has been received by believing Jews, believing half-Jews (Samaritans), and now Gentiles are at the door. The first-time reader of this story would be asking, "Now what?"

(3) Peter "invited the men into the house to be his guests" (10:23<sup>a</sup>).

e. Peter to the house of Cornelius (10:23<sup>b</sup>-29)

(1) Cornelius greets Peter and kneels before him in reverence (25).

(2) Peter responds, "Stand up. I am only a man myself" (26).

(3) Peter shares his insightful understanding:

Acts 10:27-29

*While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. <sup>28</sup>He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. <sup>29</sup>So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"*

f. Cornelius' story (30-33)

While in prayer, "a man in shining clothes" appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for Simon (Peter). "Now we are all here in the presence of God **to listen** to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (10:33).

g. Peter's reply (34-43)

(1) The Jesus story

Acts 10:34-38

*Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism<sup>35</sup> but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.<sup>36</sup> You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.<sup>37</sup> You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—<sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

(2) The Gospel message

Acts 10:39-43

*"We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross,<sup>40</sup> but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.<sup>41</sup> He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen— by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.<sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.<sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."*

h. The miraculous result (44-48)

- (1) People believed the Gospel (44).
- (2) People spoke in tongues and praised God, giving clear authenticating evidence that even Gentiles can believe and be saved (45-46).
- (3) People were baptized with water (47-48).



3. Peter before circumcised believers in Jerusalem (11:1-18)

The words of Jesus are unfolding as He said just prior to His ascension. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This charge would not simply be a geographical spread of the Gospel, but it would encompass believing Jews, Samaritans, and now, with the conversion of the household of Cornelius, the Gentiles as well.

But this development was not readily accepted.

Acts 11:1-3

*The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.<sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him<sup>3</sup> and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."*

Peter replied by telling the story recorded in Acts 10 (11:4-14).

Then, as a dramatic close, he spoke:

Acts 11:15-17

*"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning.<sup>16</sup> Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'<sup>17</sup> So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"*

The result of this controversy was a theological "bombshell."

Acts 11:18

*When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life."*

(NOTE: this issue will arise again in the Jerusalem Council controversy in Acts 15)

## E. The Church at Antioch (Acts 11:19-30)

The narrative thus far has chronicled the move of the Gospel outward (Jerusalem → Judea → Samaria) as well as the movement racially (Jews → Half-Jews → Gentiles). The story of Antioch is a further demonstration that Gentiles are responding to the Good News of the Gospel.

Acts 11:19-21

*Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.<sup>20</sup> Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.<sup>21</sup> The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*

1. Birth of the Antioch church (11:20-21)
  - a. Antioch was the third largest city of the Roman Empire (next to Rome and Alexandria). It had a population of about 300,000 of which it is estimated that 22,000 to 65,000 were Jews. It was the seat of the Roman province of Syria, displayed a cosmopolitan flavor, and was known for lax morality (e.g. cult prostitution/worship of Daphne).
  - b. The Biblical text notes, "a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (21).
2. Barnabas sent from Jerusalem to observe (11:22-24).
  - a. His observation (22-23)

Barnabas "was glad and encouraged them all (Antiochian believers) to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts" (23).
  - b. His character (24)
    - (1) "Good man"
    - (2) "Full of the Holy Spirit"
    - (3) Full "of faith"
    - (4) Evangelistic ("a great number of people were brought to the Lord")

3. Barnabas seeks out Saul (11:25-26)

Acts 11:25-26

*Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul,<sup>26</sup> and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*

4. Arrival of prophets (11:27-30)

- a. One prophet (Agabus) predicted a severe famine (28).
- b. The disciples sent their collective gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

**F. Peter's Escape from Prison (Acts 12:1-25)**

Jerusalem was the "home base" of the developing Christian movement. When persecution broke out, many left the city, but the apostles remained (Acts 8:1).

Now, in a bold move against the church, King Herod Agrippa I (the grandson of Herod the Great) turned his wrath against the leadership of the church at Jerusalem.

1. James dies (1-2)

James, the brother of John and one of the Twelve, suffers a martyr's death.

2. Peter put in prison (3-5)

The death of James pleased the antagonistic Jews who opposed the message of the Gospel. With such a favorable result, Herod imprisoned Peter, the acknowledged leader of the Twelve (note: this is the 3rd recorded arrest of Peter: 4:3; 5:18; 12:3).

Acts 12:5

*So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.*

Note that prayer is the only "weapon" in the church's arsenal.

3. Peter delivered from prison (6-19<sup>a</sup>)

Acts 12:6-7

*The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. <sup>7</sup>Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.*

- (a) Peter is securely bound and guarded (6).
- (b) An angel appears (due to the prayers of the faithful?) and awakens Peter (7).
- (c) Peter is told to dress, wrap his cloak about himself, and follow the angel (8).
- (d) Peter thinks he is having a vision; led past the guards and out into the streets, Peter is left alone (as the angel left him) (9-10).

Acts 12:11

*Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen."*

(This miracle occurred during Passover, a celebration of deliverance from Egypt. Peter, an acknowledged leader of the early church, has also experienced deliverance.)

- (e) Peter goes to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (John Mark will later be the traveling companion of Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey) (12).
- (f) Peter knocks at the door, the servant girl Rhoda answers. Recognizing the voice at the door to be that of Peter, she rushes onto the prayer meeting (likely praying for Peter). The believers stop praying, rebuke the girl, and return to their praying (13-15).

Acts 12:16-17

*But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. <sup>17</sup>Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this," he said, and then he left for another place.*

4. Herod dies (19<sup>b</sup>-23)
  - (a) When Herod heard that Peter escaped, he conducted a thorough search but with no success (18-19<sup>a</sup>).
  - (b) After cross-examining the guards, he ordered them to be executed (19<sup>b</sup>).
  - (c) Later, Herod departs to Caesarea (the Roman capital of the area) to continue rancorous discussions with representatives of Tyre and Sidon.

Acts 12:21-23

*On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. <sup>22</sup>They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." <sup>23</sup>Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.*

5. The movement continues

Acts 12:24-25

*But the word of God continued to spread and flourish. <sup>25</sup>When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark.*

## **VI. TAKEAWAYS**

### **A. The Spread of the Gospel**

1. Acts 1:8  
*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

2. Matthew 28:19-20

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

**B. The Persecution of the Church**

1 Peter 4:12-16 (NLT)

*Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you.*

*<sup>13</sup>Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world.*

*<sup>14</sup>If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. <sup>15</sup>If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. <sup>16</sup>But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by his name!*

**C. Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility**

This portion of Acts (“Witnessing in Judea and Samaria”), as does the whole of the narrative, highlights the interplay of the Holy Spirit’s work and also the faithful witness of believers. God has chosen to accomplish His will through the yielded, obedient servants. He continues to do so today as well. Perhaps a key thought is this: God will accomplish His greater purposes through us or through someone else. So let’s not miss out on the movement of God—trust and obey.

**D. Ministries of Peter and Saul (Paul)**

Peter was a fisherman, Paul a highly-trained Rabbinical Pharisee. God chooses to work through all kinds of people. He can even work through you!—trust and obey.