

Week 47 Chronological

November 16: Acts 1-3

Acts was written by Luke to give insight into the development of the early church. The discipleship and evangelism practices that laid the foundation for the spreading of the Gospel are detailed in this work and these methods are still effective. I have taken several evangelism classes in my time and if I were to sum all of them up, I would just go back to Acts and look at what it has to say about it.

Jesus was with the disciples and told them to stay in Jerusalem until they get the gift that the Father had promised. The disciples are faithful and remain until the day of Pentecost. On Pentecost, the believers are gathered when suddenly flames that looked like tongues rested on the believers. They all began speaking in tongues, meaning that each person spoke in his native language, but everyone could understand one another. So, the folks speaking Hebrew were understood by the folks speaking Greek. The folks speaking Latin understood the people speaking Hebrew. Others observe what is going on and accuse this gathering of believers as being drunk. Peter simply responds that they cannot be drunk, it is way too early in the morning. He then explains that they have all received the Holy Spirit.

Now that they have the Holy Spirit, now they can go and make disciples. If they had left Jerusalem before receiving the Spirit, they would have failed. We cannot expect to do the things of God without Him. We can try, but we will fail. The disciples could have tried, but they would have failed. When Peter concludes his sermon, 3,000 people came to belief in Jesus. The church begins to grow exponentially.

Peter and John go to the temple complex. While they are there, they meet a man that had been lame since birth. They tell him to get up and walk. The man jumps up and begins to walk. Everyone sees this and begins praising God. Peter asks the crowd why they are amazed. He explains that the God of Abraham has glorified His servant Jesus. Peter reminds them that the prophets proclaimed that the Messiah would suffer, which Jesus did. He also explains that Jesus was sent to the Jews first to bless them by turning them from their evil ways.

November 17: Acts 4-6

As Peter and John are speaking, the priests, the commander of the temple police, and the Sadducees confront them and have them put into custody. They are upset that these men are proclaiming the name of Jesus. Peter and John are taken to the leadership the next day. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit and gives an excellent defense of Jesus. Jesus is “the stone rejected by you builders, which has become the cornerstone” (Acts 4:11).

These religious elites realize that neither Peter nor John were educated or trained. They could not fathom that these two men were speaking so eloquently about Jesus without any formal training. They have a conference amongst themselves. They decide the best way to stamp out the early church is to simply forbid anyone from speaking the name of Jesus. When they tell Peter and John it is now illegal to speak about Jesus, Peter and John refuse to follow the order.

When Peter and John are released, they immediately go to the other believers to let them know the danger they could face. Rather than fall in fear to this message, the crowd prays. God emboldens them in their faith. The believers are living in one accord, willfully giving to one another so that no one has need. Some folks sell their land and give it to the church's mission.

Ananias and Sapphira sell a piece of their property. Instead of being honest about keeping a portion of the profits for themselves, they tell everyone that they gave all of the money to the mission. That was stupid. All they had to do was be upfront and honest about it. No one would have cared if they kept a certain percentage for themselves. The problem was that they lied about it. Ananias is brought in first for questioning. He is called out for lying not to men, but to God. Ananias drops dead. Sapphira comes in three hours later and they ask her if she sold the land for that price. She responds that they sold it at that price, and she falls down dead. We cannot hide anything from God. God sees everything. Rather than lie to Him about what we are doing and what we are struggling with, it is better to go to Him and have a frank and honest conversation about our struggles and woes.

An issue of the Hellenistic Jewish widows not being given daily provision arises. It was not so much that they were intentionally overlooked, but because the apostles were already so busy doing the other work of the church. So they gather the people and tell them to select seven to give the daily distribution. Among the seven chosen is Stephen. Stephen is the first martyr in Acts. He is approached by the people of the Freedmen's synagogue. They lob the accusation that Stephen has been speaking blasphemies. Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin and interrogated. During the process, all who were sitting see that Stephen had a face like an angel.

November 18: Acts 7 and 8

In response to his interrogation, Stephen delivers a sermon to the Sanhedrin. He starts with Abraham, the first Israelite. Abraham was called by God to leave his father and go to the land God would show him. After several generations, Joseph's brothers become jealous of him and sell him into slavery. Joseph works hard in Egypt and becomes second in command over Pharaoh's household. A great famine hits Egypt and the surrounding territories. Joseph's brothers go to Egypt to purchase food. They remain in Egypt and become a great people.

However, after several generations, the new Pharaoh is threatened by the Israelites, so he begins to give them hard labor thinking that they will stop growing in number. Then he orders that the Hebrew midwives have any male Israelite babies killed when they are delivered. This plan does not work. Moses is born to an Israelite couple, but he is floated down the Nile where he is found by Pharaoh's daughter. Moses grows up and receive the best education someone could get in Egypt. However, he flees after he kills an Egyptian that abused a Hebrew man. Moses went to Midian where he married and tended to his father in law's sheep. While in the field, God calls Moses to the special task of going to Egypt and having the Israelites released from Pharaoh's grip. Stephen reminds them of the Exodus from Egypt and Israel's subsequent sin in the wilderness. Though they had the tabernacle with them in the wilderness, he reminds them that God does not live in a house. He cannot be contained. Stephen then severely insults them by calling them stiff necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears.

The mob grabs stones and begin killing Stephen. While he is dying, Stephen looks to heaven and sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Saul, the persecutor, is a witness to this. Saul begins a severe persecution of Christians throughout the land. He would enter a house and drag man and woman off to prison, just for being a follower of Jesus.

The church continues to grow. Simon, a former sorcerer, comes to know Christ as Savior and Lord. He went around with Philip and was astounded at the signs and wonders Philip could do. Simon realizes that there is power in the Holy Spirit and wants to have these same gifts as Philip. He sees that people receive the Holy Spirit when hands are laid on the new believer, so he offers them money to lay hands on him so he can receive the Spirit. This is terrible folly on his part. He did not want the Holy Spirit so that he could go and serve others. Instead, he wants to Holy Spirit so he can draw a crowd. What do we use our faith for? Do we use it to serve others or something else?

November 19: Acts 9 and 10

Saul, the chief persecutor, is on a rampage, seeking to destroy any disciples of The Lord. He received special permission from the high priest to have believers pulled out of homes and brought back to Jerusalem as prisoners. While on the way to Damascus, a light from heaven flashed around him and he is asked why he is persecuting The Lord. This shows us that when a Christian is persecuted, it is not just the individual that is persecuted, but also Christ. Saul loses his sight and is told to go on to Damascus.

God calls to Ananias in a vision to go to Saul. Ananias argues at first, reminding God that Saul is the one that has been persecuting the Christians. The Lord commands Ananias to go. God has chosen Saul to be His instrument in spreading the Gospel to the Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. God is in the business of changing people. Saul was a murderer and saw it as good when a Christian was killed. Now, God has Saul and he will become a force for evangelizing all of the world.

Ananias goes to Saul, he baptizes him, and Saul's sight is restored. Saul goes to Jerusalem and tries to spend time with the other disciples, but they will have nothing to do with him because of his past. Barnabas advocates for him and he is allowed to join them.

We read the curious account of Cornelius. Cornelius was a centurion, but he also feared God. He did charitable deeds and always prayed to God. One day, he receives a vision from God. Cornelius is informed that his acts of charity has risen to God as a memorial offering. We know that as believers we are not saved by works. However, from this passage we see that when we do charitable things, God sees it and it pleases Him.

Cornelius is directed to send men to Joppa looking for Peter. Peter receives a vision while in Joppa. A sheet comes down from heaven with all kinds of four legged animals on it. Peter is directed to get up, kill, and eat. Peter protests since these animals are considered unclean according to the Levitical law. Peter is told that whatever God has made clean he cannot call common.

Peter is perplexed by this vision. Cornelius's men find him and they explain that Cornelius feared God and sent them to find him. Peter gave them lodging for the night and the next day got up to go with them to Cornelius. When he arrives, Cornelius explains the vision he received. Peter now understands the vision of the sheet and the animals. Christ did not just come to save the Israelites, but He came to save all mankind. When anyone comes to know Him as Lord, they become holy and set apart. Peter was called to minister to everyone whether they were Jewish or Gentile.

November 20: Acts 11 and 12

The believers in Judea discover that Gentiles have been receiving baptism and following Christ. They have an issue with this, expressing frustration with Peter that he would dare visit "uncircumcised men". Peter explains in an orderly sequence how he came to visit with these men. God had called him to do it. He was supposed to go to these Gentiles and disciple them. How else would these people hear about Jesus? Peter defends his actions to these believers and after a bit of silence, their response is one of praise. God not only made a way of salvation for the Israelites, He also made one for the Gentiles.

King Herod attacks some members of the Christian community. He murders James, John's brother with the sword. Herod discovers that this murder pleased the people, so he seeks to gain their applause with more murder. He has Peter arrested. Peter is under a tight watch. He had four soldiers watching him all day long. The church prays for Peter and his release. The night before his murder was to take place, an angel appears to Peter and tells him to get up, get dressed, and get out. Peter does just that and runs back to his friends. He bangs on the door. Rhoda sees him at the door and is so excited that she leaves him there to go and tell everyone else. They tell her she is crazy. However, Peter was persistent and kept knocking until he was let in.

November 21: Acts 13 and 14

Saul and Barnabas are called to go into the mission field. They first set out to Cyprus. In their travels, they come across a false prophet named Bar-Jesus. Saul, now known as Paul, confronts the sorcerer, saying he is full of deceit, perverting the ways of the LORD. He pronounces a curse on the sorcerer, saying he will go blind. A darkness falls around the sorcerer and he is unable to see. This drives others in the area to believe what Paul was preaching and teaching about Jesus.

Paul continues in Antioch preaching and teaching. One Sabbath day, the whole town is assembled by Paul and Barnabas, wanting to hear about Jesus. The Jews see the crowd and are filled with jealousy. They begin speaking against Paul and Barnabas. However, they rebuke the Jews, saying it was necessary for them to hear God's message, but since they rejected it, they will turn their attention to the Gentiles. Many of the Gentiles come to have faith in Jesus that day.

In Iconium Paul and Barnabas entered the synagogues and spoke so well that many of the Jewish and Gentile people came to know Christ as Lord and Savior. However, there were Jews there

that refused to believe, so they stirred up opposition against the two. The crowd attempts to stone them, but they escape.

They move on to Lystra where a man that had been unable to walk is sitting near Paul. Paul commands that the man stand on his feet. The man jumps up and starts walking around and jumping. This miracle amazes the crowd. Unfortunately, they assume that Barnabas and Paul are gods. They think Barnabas is Zeus and Paul is Hermes. This makes sense because it was Paul who was speaking and told the man to stand up. Hermes was the messenger god in the pantheon of gods. The crowd assumed Paul was bringing Zeus's message.

When the crowd tries to make sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, they wail and mourn, tearing their robes. They explain to the crowd that they are men, just like they are. However, they follow the One true God. Some of the crowd is won over, but some Jews from Antioch and Iconium grabbed Paul stoned him, and dragged the body out of the city thinking he was dead. Paul gets up, brushes himself off, and heads out to plant more churches!

November 22: James 1-5

We read the book of James today. James is filled with instructions on how to live a godly life. He opens the letter encouraging the believers to rejoice in any trial or tribulation since these challenges test our faith and that testing produces endurance. These help us mature in Jesus. Rather than bemoan the problem before us, we can look at it from the vantage of an opportunity to grow. This, of course, is much easier said than done. When I am up against problems, I must remind myself to have the right attitude about it, instead of letting the flesh take over and react the way I want to.

James reminds us that God is not the One who tempts us. We are tested by God, but we are not tempted by Him. Instead, temptation comes from the devil. Tests are designed to help us grow closer to God. Temptations are given to draw us away from God.

We cannot just hear the word of God. Instead, we should also be doers of the Word. Talk is cheap. People are more interested in our behavior than how much we know. If we have the entire Bible memorized, it does us no good if it does not influence how we act. There should be no favoritism in the church. If a poor person is sent to sit on the floor, but a well-dressed person is placed in a seat of prominence during worship, the church is guilty of favoritism.

When we walk with Jesus, our faith in Him should be evident to the world around us. James makes the point that there should be works behind our faith. Our works do not save us. Jesus is the One who saves us. However, our faith in Him should make us a new creation and we should be driven to do God's work. James challenges us stating that we can say we are saved by our faith, but he will show us his faith by what he does. Do we show the world our faith through our actions? That is not to say that we should be out doing charity and making a big deal of the good things we are doing and receive praise from man. However, we should be compelled to do what is right because of the change Christ made within us.

James encourages us to control our tongues and our language. The tongue is a small thing, but it can do mighty things. We should be careful with it since it is “a world of unrighteousness”. The tongue can pollute the whole body. We must control it.

We should not take life for granted. We do not know what is going to happen tomorrow. We do not even know what is going to happen for the rest of this day. We can give an estimated guess, but we do not know for certain. So, we should not boast about tomorrow since it is not guaranteed. Instead, we should make plans, knowing that those plans could change based on what God does. We should approach our lives waiting on God and praying with fervency. We should refrain from vows. Instead, our “yes” must be “yes” and our “no” must be “no”. If we say we are going to do it, then we better do it. The world is watching. We might be the only Bible someone reads. Let’s make sure we give them an accurate translation!

November 23: Acts 15 and 16

Some new converts believed that all men must go through the circumcision process to be a true Christian. It was a covenantal sign between Abraham and God, since these people were now being added to the list of God’s people, it would make sense from a worldly standpoint that they would need to. However, Paul and Barnabas are quick to point out that these men do not have to be circumcised in order to be true believers. The point is further contested which leads to an assembly of the Jerusalem council. Paul and Barnabas argue that placing this requirement on Gentile believers would only serve as a stumbling block. Rather than be concerned about circumcision, they believe the people should be encouraged to abstain from things polluted by an idol, eating any animal that had been strangled, and from blood. This instruction is sent by letter. When the recipients read the letter, there was rejoicing because of its encouragement.

Though Paul and Barnabas had been quite the dynamic duo, something happens between the two. We do not know exactly what the disagreement was, but it was enough that the two decided to part ways. It was better for them to separate and continue preaching the message than to bicker with each other. Barnabas is not mentioned in Acts after this incident.

Paul travels on to Derbe and Lystra where he meets Timothy. Timothy was the son of a believing Jewish woman, but his father was Greek. It is interesting to note that Paul takes Timothy and circumcises him before they can go and preach the Gospel. This seems odd for two reasons. Timothy was technically fully Jewish because his mother was Jewish. He should have been circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. Presumably, his father would not allow it. It also seems odd that Timothy would need to be circumcised since the chapter prior to this deals with refuting the idea that true believers had to be circumcised to be fully in the law. So, I am sure you are asking, why did Paul circumcise him then? I am glad you asked. Paul had him go through it so that they would not offend any of the Jewish people they encountered. If Timothy had not been given this physical mark of the covenant God established with Abraham; he would have driven potential believers because he would be viewed as claiming something that he is not.

They travel on and through a series of events make their way to Macedonia. Timothy and Paul wind up in Philippi, “a leading city of that district of Macedonia (Acts 16:12). There were not many Jews in Philippi, so the few Jews would gather at the river by the city gate for prayer on

the Sabbath. That is where Paul meets Lydia. The LORD opens her heart and she and her entire family are baptized into the faith. It is disgusting that these men cared more about making money than they did the welfare of the girl.

Paul and Silas wind up in prison for healing a young girl with a demon. The demon allowed her to tell the future, so her owners made a great profit off her. When her owners see that their livelihood has been taken away, they seize Paul and Silas and take them to the chief magistrates. The two are beaten and put in prison. At midnight, they were praying, and a violent earthquake hit the prison. The doors were opened, and the chains came loose. When the guard saw this, he was ready to kill himself. This might seem extreme to us, but in those days if the prisoners had escaped, he would have either been tortured to death or forced to complete the prisoners' sentences.

Paul cries out to the guard not to harm himself. He explains that they are all still there. The guard then asks what he must do to be saved. The guard took them to his house where every one of his family was baptized.