



# Acts I

International Alpha Bible Course  
by Ralph V. Reynolds



# ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## PART I

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## INTERNATIONAL ALPHA BIBLE COURSE

**RALPH VINCENT REYNOLDS**

Writer

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# Acts I

LESSON 1

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

## A. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Book of Acts is the one historical book of the New Testament. This book is the chief source for information concerning the early apostolic church. It gives us an accurate record of the birth of the church and the growth of the church during a period of approximately thirty years.

The New Testament is divided into four divisions as follows:

1. The Gospels—The record of the life and ministry of Jesus while here upon earth
2. Acts—The history of the early church
3. The Epistles—Letters of instruction written to individuals or churches who were already Christians
4. Revelation—The one book of prophecy in the New Testament

It can readily be seen that if we desire to learn regarding the experience that the early church had, we must turn to the Book of Acts. We cannot expect to find the plan of salvation in the Epistles. It is in the Acts of the Apostles that we read about how a person can be saved.

This book also gives us the right principles for revival and missionary work. It gives us a pattern for church government and lays the foundation for doctrine later developed in the Epistles.

Someone has said that the four Gospels give F-A-C-T-S; the Book of Acts gives A-C-T-S.

## B. THE DATE OF THE BOOK

The date of this book is given to be AD 63. The reason for fixing the date here is simple: the apostle Paul arrived at Rome early in AD 61 and the book closes with a statement of “two whole years” of Paul’s first imprisonment. This places the book to be dated AD 63.

The book does not mention the burning of Rome in AD 64, the great persecution of Christians which followed, or the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in AD 70. Therefore, the book must have been written before these events.



## **C. THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK**

Luke, the physician, was the author of this book. The author was a companion of the apostle Paul and joined him at Troas. The personal pronoun *we* reveals the time Luke accompanied Paul (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21; 27:1-28). By the process of elimination, the author has to be Luke, for these “we” sections mention all of the other companions of Paul. Also, it is evident that this book was written by the same author as the Gospel of St. Luke.

Luke was a Greek and not a Jew, for in Colossians 4 he is distinguished from them who are said to be of the circumcision. Luke answered the Macedonian Call along with Paul and later was in charge of the church at Philippi for about six years. He was with Paul during his second imprisonment (II Timothy 4:11).

The “former treatise” refers to the Gospel of St. Luke. The Book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel and begins where the Gospel leaves off. Both books were addressed to Theophilus, who was undoubtedly a Roman or Greek officer with a Greek name. We know very little about Theophilus except he was addressed as “most excellent Theophilus,” which tells us that he was a man of high rank, possibly a governor of some province. He also must have been a friend of Luke to whom Luke had witnessed and possibly even won for the Lord.

Luke was able to write the latter part of this book through his own personal knowledge and experience. Very likely, he kept some sort of diary. For the Gospel of St. Luke and the first part of this book, he had access to the information that Paul and others such as Silas, James, Philip, and his daughters, etc., could give him.

## **D. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK**

The purpose of the book was the same as that in Luke’s Gospel. In the introduction of the Gospel, Luke stated that his purpose was to give a complete and orderly account of the life and ministry of our Lord. He stated that he had traced the record accurately and that it was his purpose to give an accurate historical record. This was still his purpose in writing the Book of Acts. We should note his reference to the Gospel where he gave an account of what Jesus began to do and teach. The Gospel gives the account of what Jesus began to do; the Book of Acts gives the account of what Jesus continues to do.

## **E. THE COMPOSITION OF THE BOOK**

### **1. Three Main Divisions**

There are three main divisions to this book:

## Lesson One

- a. Chapters 1-5—The Apostolic Church, giving the account of her birth. The main character at this time is Peter.
- b. Chapters 6-12—The Persecuted Church, showing how the church was scattered. The main character during this period is Stephen, the first martyr.
- c. Chapters 13-28—The Missionary Church, revealing how the gospel was taken throughout the world. The main character here is the apostle Paul.

### 2. Key Verse

The key verse of the entire book is Acts 1:8, *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”*

This single verse expresses the theme of the entire book.

## **Self Help Test: Acts I**

### **The Acts of the Apostles**

1. Who wrote Acts of the Apostles?
2. To whom was it written?
3. What is the key verse of Acts?
4. Why was the book written?
5. Why is this book important?
6. When did Luke join the company of Paul?
7. Who was Theophilus?
8. What are the three divisions of this book?
9. What other book had Luke written?
10. How do we know that Luke was not a Jew?



# Acts I

LESSON 2

## THE ASCENSION OF JESUS

**Text:** Acts 1

### A. INFALLIBLE PROOFS

The Acts of the Apostles might have been better named if the book had been called “The Acts of the Risen Christ.” The Gospel of St. Luke gives the acts of Jesus up to the resurrection. The Book of Acts simply continues the story, but now it is the story of the acts of the risen and ascended Jesus.

It is stated (Acts 1:3) that Jesus showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus showed Himself as the conqueror of Satan by decisively defeating the devil during the forty days of temptation in the wilderness. At the beginning of His heavenly ministry, Jesus again showed Himself as the conqueror of Satan by showing Himself alive on the earth for the same period of time—forty days.

We shall not attempt to list all of His appearances here, but we should note several of them:

1.	To Mary Magdalene	John 20:14-18
2.	To the women	Matthew 28:8-10
3.	To Peter	Luke 24:34
4.	To the Emmaus disciples	Luke 24:13-31
5.	To the apostles	Luke 24:36-43
6.	To the apostles except Thomas	John 20:19-24
7.	To the apostles on shores of Lake Galilee	John 21:1-23
8.	To the apostles on a mountain in Galilee	Matthew 28:16-20
9.	To about 500 people at once	I Corinthians 15:6

The key word in Acts 1:3 is *alive*. Jesus showed Himself alive. What were some of the infallible proofs that He was alive?

1. He was seen.
2. He spoke to them concerning the kingdom of God.
3. He walked with them.
4. He ate and drank with the disciples.
5. He blessed His disciples and ministered to them.
6. He restored Simon Peter.
7. He dried Mary’s tears.

## B. THE KINGDOM

In Acts 1:6, we read the last question the disciples asked Jesus before His ascension: “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” This shows that their minds were still groping between the natural expectations and the spiritual realizations. They still did not understand all that Jesus had taught them concerning the kingdom. Their hopes for a material, political kingdom had been dashed to the ground at Calvary, but now they knew that all things were possible to their Lord who had conquered death. They still thought that Christ’s greatest purpose would be to rid Israel of the Roman yoke and to establish David’s earthly kingdom in power.

The student should especially note the difference in their understanding of the kingdom as soon as they received the Holy Ghost. Even being a witness of Calvary and the Resurrection was not sufficient; they had to receive the Holy Ghost (I Corinthians 2:10-16).

## C. THE GREAT COMMISSION

In Acts 1:8, we have the commission given for the final time. It would seem that this was the theme of His conversations with His disciples during His forty-day ministry after His resurrection. He gave the commission at least upon three occasions:

- |    |   |                              |
|----|---|------------------------------|
| 1. | At meat in Jerusalem                        | Mark 16:14-18; John 20:22-23 |
| 2. | On a mountain in Galilee                    | Matthew 28:18-20             |
| 3. | On the Mount of Olives before His ascension | Luke 24:45-51; Acts 1:6-9    |

It is quite probable that He spoke it many times that are not recorded. During this period, His greatest concern was that His disciples should understand clearly their marching orders.

The commission gave the apostles their marching orders which were to be obeyed explicitly, without hesitation or questioning. It also gave them their authority to act on behalf of Jesus Christ. There were five commands included in the commission: go, preach, teach, baptize, and observe all things.

In Acts 1:8, there are three words we should note especially:

1. *Power*—The Greek word here is the same root word from which we get the word *dynamite*. It speaks of an explosive power which will cause the gospel message to literally explode around the world.
2. *Witnesses*—The Greek word here is the same root word from which we get the English word *martyr*. To be a witness, we must have the spirit of a martyr.



3. *Both*—This word simply means that the church was to witness in all the world. There was no choice given.

#### **D. THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER**

The promise of the Father (Acts 1:4) was, of course, the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

“Which ye have heard of me” refers back to the many promises Jesus gave them of the coming of the Comforter (John 14:16-26).

We should note that Jesus commanded them to remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Ghost came. This shows that they were given no choice in the matter. We are still commanded today; we must obey.

The early church had to tarry at Jerusalem (Luke 24:49). The reason for this was that the Day of Pentecost had not yet arrived. Today it is no longer necessary to tarry; anyone may receive the Spirit at any time as soon as he meets the conditions.

The question is sometimes asked regarding whether the disciples tarried seven days. However, according to Leviticus 23:15, Pentecost came fifty days after the wave offering, which corresponds to the resurrection. Therefore, they tarried in the upper room for a period of ten days.

#### **E. THE PROMISE OF CHRIST’S RETURN**

In Acts 1:11, we have the promise of Christ’s return given to the amazed disciples by two angels. This promise states clearly that “this same Jesus” shall come in “like manner.” It tells us that Jesus will come: visibly, in bodily form, and in the clouds.

#### **F. THE ASCENSION**

Four times it states that Jesus “was taken up” (Acts 1:2, 9, 11, 22). In Acts 1:10, we read that He went up. There is no question about the fact that Jesus ascended by His own power. Being “taken up” may refer to and suggest that Jesus was accompanied by a mighty host of angels. At any rate, His ascension was glorious, and it holds out the hope that the rapture of the church will also be glorious.

He ascended from the Mount of Olives which was about six-tenths of a mile (a Sabbath day’s journey) east of Jerusalem. When Jesus returns to establish His kingdom, He will once again stand on the same mountain (Zechariah 14:4).

## G. JUDAS ISCARIOT

In Acts 1, we are given the horrible end of Judas who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. This reveals the terrible remorse that Judas must have suffered before he committed suicide. Judas hanging himself, then falling with his bowels gushing out, is a true picture of the wages of sin.

## H. THE TWELVE

Acts 1:13 gives the list of the eleven apostles. This list is given in three of the Gospels as follows:

### Matthew 10:2-4

Simon Peter  
Andrew  
James  
John  
Philip  
Bartholomew  
Thomas  
Matthew  
James, son of Alphaeus  
Thaddaeus  
Simon, the Canaanite  
Judas Iscariot

### Mark 3:16-19

Simon Peter  
James  
John  
Andrew  
Philip  
Bartholomew  
Matthew  
Thomas  
James, son of Alphaeus  
Thaddaeus  
Simon, the Canaanite  
Judas Iscariot

### Luke 6:14-16

Simon Peter  
Andrew  
James  
John  
Philip  
Bartholomew  
Matthew  
Thomas  
James, son of Alphaeus  
Simon, called Zelotes  
Judas, brother of James  
Judas Iscariot

### Acts 1:13

Peter  
James  
John  
Andrew  
Philip  
Thomas  
Bartholomew  
Matthew  
James, the son of Alphaeus  
Simon Zelotes  
Judas, the brother of James

When Judas fell, it left only eleven apostles, and it was necessary to appoint a man to take his place. The early church nominated two candidates for the office, Joseph, called Barsabbas, and Matthias. Why were only two men considered?

Undoubtedly, the reason for this was that they were the only two present who met the qualifications necessary:

1. Must have been a disciple of our Lord from the very beginning of His ministry
2. Must have been a witness of Christ's resurrection

They placed the two names in an urn, and the first name which fell from the urn was taken to be the Lord's choice. After that, Matthias was numbered as one of the twelve and will be included in the fulfillment of such promises as Matthew 19:28 and Revelation 21:14.



## Self Help Test: Acts I

### The Ascension of Jesus

1. What is the Great Commission?
  
2. Name the three occasions when the commission was given.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
3. Give the five commands included in the commission.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
  
4. Name the twelve apostles.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
  - f.
  - g.
  - h.
  - i.
  - j.
  - k.
  - l.
  
5. What were the two qualifications necessary for apostleship?
  - a.
  - b.
  
6. Why was the choice limited to just Barsabas and Matthias?
  
7. Name at least four of the infallible proofs of the Resurrection.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.



# Acts I

LESSON 3

## THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH

**Text:** Acts 2

### A. JESUS PROMISED TO ESTABLISH THE CHURCH

#### **Scripture References:**

*“Upon this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18).*

*“It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you” (John 16:7).*

Jesus said, “I will build my church.” This shows that when Jesus spoke these words, the church was still future. Jesus had disciples and followers, but He still had no church. The rock that the church was to be built upon was the truth of the deity of Jesus as confessed by Peter. We must remember this as we study the second chapter of Acts.

The church was to be the mystical body of Christ upon earth, a spiritual body indwelt by Christ’s own Spirit, the Comforter. This could not be until Jesus ascended and the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost.

### B. PENTECOST

The events as recorded in the second chapter of Acts took place on the Day of Pentecost.

Pentecost was an event planned by God and prophesied in Leviticus 23. The annual feasts of Israel were the Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and then fifty days after the Firstfruits, the Feast of Pentecost. Firstfruits was a type of the resurrection of Christ (I Corinthians 15:23). Pentecost took place fifty days after the Resurrection which, of course, means that the 120 disciples were in the upper room for a period of ten days.

### C. THE UPPER ROOM

Acts 1:13 states that when they returned from the Mount of Olives, the disciples went up into an upper room. When our Lord instituted the Lord’s Supper, it was in an upper room. Whether or not it was the same upper room, we cannot be certain.



The “upper room” has a special meaning in a Christian’s experience. To have communion with God, we must be “up” and “above” the world and be “inside” a room with the world on the outside.

The 120 who obeyed the Lord by tarrying were rewarded by becoming the charter members of the New Testament church. The upper room speaks of unity. The 120 were in one place with one accord. Five times we have this expression:

1. Acts 1:14—“with one accord”
2. Acts 2:1—“with one accord in one place”
3. Acts 2:46—“with one accord in the temple”
4. Acts 4:32—“of one heart and of one soul”
5. Acts 5:12—“with one accord”

#### **D. THE PHENOMENA OF PENTECOST**

When the Holy Spirit came, He did three things:

1. Filled the house (verse 2)
2. Came upon each believer (verse 3)
3. Came into each of them to abide (verse 4)

He filled the entire house because the church is the “temple of the living God” (I Corinthians 3:16). He came upon each believer to endue with power (Luke 24:49). He filled each believer with Himself.

When the Holy Spirit came, there were three phenomena:

1. A rushing mighty wind was felt.
2. Tongues of fire were seen.
3. Different languages were heard.

In John 3, the wind is used as a type of the Spirit in the work of new birth. The Greek word for *spirit* is the same as that for *wind*. Fire is used in the Bible in connection with sanctification and purification. With tongues, the gospel is preached to the multitudes. At the tower of Babel, God used tongues to confound the languages and bring about disunity and division. At Pentecost, God used tongues to proclaim the gospel message and bring about unity and harmony.

#### **E. PETER’S SERMON**

Jesus had given Peter the keys to the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 16:19). Therefore, it was Peter who was to preach the gospel of the kingdom first and unlock the door of the kingdom to the Jews (Acts 2) and to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

The mighty phenomenon of Pentecost attracted a tremendous crowd. The people were amazed and perplexed, not understanding what was going on. Some began to ask, "What meaneth this?" Others began to mock and accuse the disciples of being drunk. The disciples were drunk, but not as the crowd supposed. They were drunk, not on spirits, but on the Spirit.

Peter began his sermon with the words, "Be this known unto you" (Acts 1:14). We might divide his sermon into three parts:

1. An explanation concerning "this" (verse 12)
2. A proclamation concerning Him (verses 22-36)
3. An application concerning "them" (verses 37-40)

Peter told the crowd that this phenomenon of Pentecost which they were witnessing had been foretold by the prophet Joel. The Spirit was to be poured forth upon all flesh. Both men and women of all ages, cultures, races, nationalities, and classes may now receive the Holy Spirit.

Peter stressed the sin of Israel in rejecting and crucifying their Messiah. He placed great emphasis upon the resurrection of our Lord. Why? The answer is quite evident. Many thousands had witnessed the death of Jesus. Everyone knew about His death, but few knew about the resurrection. Also, His death was not unusual, for all men die. But only He who is divine could arise from the grave. To believe in the resurrection of Christ is to believe in His deity. To believe in His deity is to accept the atoning value of His death. Therefore, Peter placed great emphasis upon the Resurrection.

## **F. ACTS 2:38**

What Peter actually preached on the Day of Pentecost was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the good news of what God did for man in providing salvation. This is the message that brought conviction upon the crowd assembled.

They were "pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37). This speaks of Holy Ghost conviction that is absolutely essential to salvation. A man must be brought under conviction; he must see his need and have his desire aroused. Then he will cry out, "What shall I do?"

As far as providing salvation, there is nothing that man can do, but there is much that he must do if he is to receive salvation. Here is where we are brought to the importance of Acts 2:38. Here are the keys that Peter used to unlock the door to the kingdom: repentance, water baptism in Jesus' name, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Actually, this is death, burial, and resurrection. It took these three to provide

salvation; it takes these three to become a recipient of salvation. A man must be identified with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection.

## **G. THE RESULTS OF PENTECOST**

Peter reminded them that the promise was for them, and he exhorted them to save themselves from this “untoward generation” (crooked, perverse generation). This shows again that there is something that a man must do if he is to be saved.

There were many marvelous results:

1. Three thousand souls were born again that very same day.
2. Every day after that souls were being saved (Acts 2:47).
3. The church continued steadfastly in (Acts 2:42):
  - a. The apostles’ doctrine (teaching)
  - b. Fellowship
  - c. Breaking of bread
  - d. Prayers
4. Many signs and wonders followed the ministry of the apostles (Acts 2:43).
5. Everyone feared God (Acts 2:43).
6. They sold their possessions and had all things common. (This matter of communal living will be studied when we come to the fifth chapter of Acts.)

## **Self Help Test: Acts I**

### **The Birth of the Church**

1. When was the church born?
  
2. Write a Scripture verse with its reference showing Jesus promised to build His church.
  
3. How many charter members were in the church?
  
4. State the three phenomena of Pentecost.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
5. How many days did the believers pray in the upper room? What is the proof of this?
  
6. State the three divisions of Peter's sermon.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
7. State five results of Pentecost as recorded in Acts.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.



# Acts I

LESSON 4

## THE APOSTOLIC GOSPEL

### A. DEFINITION OF THE APOSTOLIC GOSPEL

#### Scripture References:

*“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14).*

*“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).*

*“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts 2:42).*

The gospel is “good news” of salvation. The word *apostolic* simply refers to the apostles. Therefore, the term “apostolic gospel” means the good news of salvation which the apostles preached.

In Matthew 24:14, Jesus spoke of “this gospel of the kingdom” which shall be preached in all the world. Again, He said that “repentance and remission of sins” should be preached in His name among all nations. We may conclude the “gospel of the kingdom” is the message of “repentance and remission of sins” which must be preached in the name of Jesus. This is the message that the apostles preached and therefore is the apostolic gospel.

### B. THE KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

#### Scripture Reference:

*“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19).*

Some may think that the apostle Peter has literal keys and will stand at the gates of Heaven to open to those who enter. This is far from the truth. The keys spoken of here are gospel keys. To Peter was committed the trust of preaching the gospel which would unlock the door of salvation to the unsaved. He used these keys upon three occasions:

- |    |                   |              |
|----|-------------------|--------------|
| 1. | To the Jews       | Acts 2:38    |
| 2. | To the Samaritans | Acts 8:14-17 |
| 3. | To the Gentiles   | Acts 10      |



Since the apostle Peter had the gospel keys which would unlock the door of salvation to the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles, we should study closely the message that he preached.

### **C. THE JEWS ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST**

#### **Scripture Reference:**

*“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).*

On the Day of Pentecost the Jews were saved by believing and obeying the apostolic gospel.

In order for Jesus to provide salvation, it was necessary for Him:

1. To die
2. Be buried
3. To rise again

Death, burial, and resurrection were essential in providing salvation; death, burial, and resurrection are also essential in the receiving of salvation. In order to be saved, we must be identified with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. This is exactly what the message which Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost brought forth.

Death—Repentance  
 Burial—Water baptism in Jesus’ name  
 Resurrection—Baptism of the Holy Ghost

In Acts 2:38, the apostle Peter turned the key and opened the door of salvation to the Jews, and three thousand souls were saved. This is still the message that saves today.

### **D. THE SAMARITANS**

#### **Scripture Reference:**

*“(For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:16, 17).*

As we study chapter 8, we shall see clearly just how the Samaritans were saved:

## Lesson Four

Faith—verse 12

Baptism—verse 12

Receiving the Holy Ghost—verse 17

### **E. THE GENTILES**

#### **Scripture References:**

*“While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44).*

*“And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48).*

In the salvation of Cornelius and his household, there were the same three steps taken as the Jews (Acts 2) and the Samaritans (Acts 8):

Believed on Jesus—Acts 10: 43

Received the Holy Ghost—Acts 10: 44

Baptized in the name of the Lord—Acts 10: 48

Attention should be given to Acts 10:43 where Peter definitely stated that remission of sins would be received by whosoever believes in Him through His name. What is His name? There can be only one answer—Jesus. When can a person receive this benefit through His name? Again, there can be only one answer—when one is baptized in the name of Jesus.

### **F. THE ENTRANCE TO THE KINGDOM**

#### **Scripture References:**

*“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).*

*“Since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it” (Luke 16:16).*

*“God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).*

The kingdom of God, during the church dispensation, is not a material kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom. It is Jesus reigning in the hearts of His saints. Actually, when Jesus sits upon the throne of a man’s heart, He reigns far more effectively than if He were reigning in a material kingdom. As He reigns in a man’s heart, He has control over a man’s desires, ambitions, and emotions. Thus, He is able to reign fully and His will is obeyed completely.

It is evident that entrance to the kingdom of God is through the new birth, the work of regeneration, the act of being completely changed, transferred from one kingdom to another. We may understand the requirements of entrance when we study the gospel message preached by the apostle Peter, to whom was given the keys to the kingdom.

The apostolic gospel brings out clearly and emphatically that there is only one King who is Jesus, our Lord. The truths of the deity of Jesus and the power of His name are essentials in the message to be preached to a lost world.

## **G. THERE IS ONLY ONE CHURCH**

### **Scripture References:**

*“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:4-5).*

*“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free” (I Corinthians 12:13).*

There are hundreds of church organizations and denominations, but there is only one church.

The church is one as far as place, area, or distance is concerned. The church is one as far as race and nationality is concerned. The church is one as far as time is concerned. Members of the church living today are members of the same church as the apostles. It is the same and one church whether the members are living today on earth, or have died in the Lord; whether they lived in the days of the apostles, during the dark ages, in the days of the reformers, or in these closing days of time.

It is the one and same church. Therefore, it is the apostolic church which must be waiting to be raptured when Jesus comes. It is the apostolic gospel which we find preached throughout the Book of Acts and which still must be preached today.





# Acts I

LESSON 5

## THE NAME OF JESUS

**Text:** Acts 3 and 4

### A. SIGNS AND WONDERS

In Acts 2:43, we read that many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. In Acts 4:30, the church prayed that signs and wonders might be done by the name of Jesus. This would be according to what Jesus had stated as recorded in Mark 16:17, "These signs shall follow them that believe." It is still true that signs should follow the preaching of the apostolic gospel. We should never follow signs but rather signs should follow us.

One of the first miracles to be recorded following Pentecost was the healing of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful.

### B. THE GATE BEAUTIFUL

The lame man was laid each day at the gate of the Temple which is called Beautiful. This gate was furnished by Herod and was made of precious Corinthian brass. The gate was eighty feet high and sixty-five feet wide, and it took twenty men to close it.

The gate was a type of another gate which was far more beautiful, a gate which gave entrance not just into the Temple, but into the very presence of God. That gate is Jesus, who is the door.

### C. THE HOUR OF PRAYER

Peter and John went into the Temple at the hour of prayer. The apostles continued steadfastly in prayers (Acts 2:42). One of the reasons miracles followed their ministry was the fact that they continued in prayer.

There were three hours of the day set aside by the Jews as hours for public prayer: the third hour, which was 9:00 AM; 12:00 noon; and the ninth hour, which was 3:00 PM.

The ninth hour was the very hour that Jesus died upon the cross. It was through the value of the death of Christ that the healing came to the poor beggar.



## **D. THE HEALING OF THE LAME MAN**

The lame beggar had been a cripple from birth. He was now at least forty years old (Acts 4:22).

The miracle was unexpected. The man was begging for some money, and when the apostles spoke to him, he expected to receive some coin. However, it was healing he received. The healing was instantaneous and complete and performed in the name of Jesus.

Peter took him by the right hand. Undoubtedly, the beggar had held out his hand so that Peter might grasp it. Hands are used for receiving as well as giving. God's big hand reaches down to the sinner, and all the sinner need do is reach up a little hand to receive.

The healed man walked, leaped, entered the Temple, and praised God. Not only was he healed physically, but his soul was able to rejoice in the Lord.

Peter held the lame man by the hand (Acts 3:7) and then the beggar held Peter (Acts 3:11). He no longer needed support, but he held on to the apostles in joy and love. Likewise, when a sinner accepts Jesus Christ, he will cling to those who brought him the message of deliverance.

No longer on the outside, but now on the inside of the Temple, the beggar rejoiced in the Lord and attracted a large crowd.

## **E. THE NAME OF JESUS**

Name is found thirty-three times in the Book of Acts. Peter stated that "His name through faith in his name hath made this man strong" (Acts 3:16). Again, he stated that "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). These two statements of the apostle Peter show that:

1. There is healing in the name of Jesus.
2. There is salvation in the name of Jesus.

There are many, many blessings associated with the name of Jesus. Water baptism must be administered in the name of Jesus. The gospel must be preached in the name of Jesus. Remission of sins is in the name of Jesus. We are encouraged to ask what we will in the name of Jesus. We have the assurance of His presence when we meet in His name. The name of Jesus is a strong tower in which there is safety.

## **F. WITNESSES OF THE RESURRECTION**

When the miracle brought together a large crowd, Peter used the opportunity to preach to them the apostolic gospel. The change that had taken place in Peter was a great miracle in itself. A short time before he had denied the Lord and did not have the courage to confess the Lord. Now the rulers of Israel marveled at his boldness, knowing that in the estimation of the world he was an unlearned and ignorant man. They took knowledge that he had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

Peter placed great emphasis upon the resurrection of our Lord. In the four Gospels, it was the Pharisees who gave the greatest opposition to Jesus. In the Acts, it is the Sadducees who oppose the Christians. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection and became very angry when Peter preached that Jesus had risen from the dead. They had Peter and John arrested and put in prison overnight. The next morning, the two apostles were brought before the most powerful among the priests.

Annas, in the Jewish eyes, was the real power of the priesthood. Caiphas was the son-in-law of Annas and was appointed high priest by the Roman government. There were other rulers and elders present. Their question was clear (Acts 4:7): “By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?”

Peter did not hesitate to preach the truth before these rulers. He was able to do this because he was “filled with the Holy Ghost.”

## **G. THE RESULTS THAT FOLLOWED THE MIRACLE**

Let us mention just a few things that followed the healing of the lame man:

1. The persecution of the church began with Peter and John being arrested and placed in prison overnight.
2. The number of conversions increased until there were five thousand believers in Jerusalem (Acts 4:4). This is the last time any such numbering is mentioned.
3. The Christians loved one another and shared their material possessions and ministered to one another. This sharing was quite voluntary. This was an example of Christian love. The right of possession was not abolished.

## Self Help Test: Acts I

### The Name of Jesus

1. Explain why it was the Sadducees who gave the greatest persecution to the church rather than the Pharisees.
  
2. How old was the man who was healed at the Gate Beautiful?
  
3. At what time of day was he healed?
  
4. The expression *name* referring to Jesus is found how many times in the Book of Acts?
  
5. List three definite results that followed the miracles of the healing of the lame man.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  
6. What does this miracle teach about the name of Jesus?



# Acts I

LESSON 6

## ALL THINGS IN COMMON

**Text:** Acts 4:31-37; Acts 5:1-16

### A. BARNABAS

Barnabas is one of the noblest characters in the Bible. His name means “son of consolation,” and his name certainly expresses the true character of this fine Christian brother.

He was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, and apparently quite wealthy. In Acts 11:24, he is described as being a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith. He was the uncle of John Mark and the brother of Mark’s mother, Mary. Mary also was apparently quite prosperous, and it was in her home that the church met (Acts 12:12).

It was Barnabas who introduced Paul to the apostles (Acts 9:27). It was Barnabas who went to Tarsus to fetch Paul when they needed a teacher at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). Barnabas accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey. Barnabas was so determined that John Mark be given a second chance that he parted company with Paul.

Barnabas was a generous man who was completely dedicated to the work of God. He loved the Lord and saints to such a degree that he sold land and brought the money and laid it at the feet of the apostles.

### B. COMMUNAL LIVING

It is a mistake to believe that it was God’s plan that the early apostolic church have communal living. God did not plan that they should live in a commune, but rather God’s plan was that the early Christians should go everywhere and evangelize the world. This they could never do if they practiced communal living. In fact, God permitted persecution to come to break up this style of living.

Why then did they share their possessions and have everything in common? We have to remember that thousands had gathered from all over the Roman Empire and had received the Holy Ghost. It was like a great camp meeting. Their needs had to be met. It was the newfound love that caused the saints in Jerusalem to sell their possessions and bring the money to the apostles so that the material needs of everyone would be taken care of. It was an example of Christian love, hospitality, and generosity displayed at its best. But nowhere is it suggested that the right of possession was abolished.

### **C. ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA**

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, are examples of many Christians today who desire the blessing without paying the price.

Undoubtedly, the church had applauded Barnabas for his act of generosity and dedication. Also, it would be quite evident just how much Barnabas was blessed by God.

Ananias and Sapphira saw this and desired the same blessing from God and the same acclaim from the church. Therefore, they agreed to sell a property, but to give to the church only part of what they received. Peter told Ananias that it was Satan who placed the thought in their hearts (Acts 5:3). It was a sin of hypocrisy.

### **D. THE SIN OF LYING TO THE HOLY GHOST**

Judgment did not overtake Ananias and Sapphira because they kept back part of the price. Judgment overtook them because they said they brought all when they were keeping back part of the price. If they had been honest and had confessed that it was only part of the price, they would never have dropped dead. This was definitely an act of hypocrisy. Peter called it a sin of lying to the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:3).

This sin had to do with their consecration. They said that they were bringing all when they were not. The very same sin may be committed today when one professes to lay all upon the altar when they know that they are holding back. A person should never make a dedication to the Lord unless he is prepared to pay the price and go all the way. Otherwise, it is the same sin as committed by Ananias and Sapphira.

### **E. JUDGMENT BEGINS AT THE HOUSE OF GOD**

Persecution from the world cannot hurt the church. It is when the devil gets on the inside that the church suffers. Corruption from within is far more dangerous than opposition from without. It is possibly for this reason the Lord dealt so severely with this first evidence of corruption from within.

Judgment must begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). God does not judge sinners now, but He does judge His own people. This first act of judgment taught the church a great lesson which was never forgotten.

The name *Ananias* means “the Lord has shown grace.” This lesson teaches that grace is never license for sinning. The grace of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly (Titus 2:12). This Ananias did not do, and judgment was the result.



Judgment here teaches a few truths of which we should take note:

1. No sin is little; all sin will be judged.
2. God hates hypocrisy. Real love and a true spirit of sacrifice were being replaced by hypocritical pretense. This God hated.
3. Sin in the church is always far more serious than among the unsaved.
4. A pretended obedience is disobedience. In the life of King Saul, a partial obedience was disobedience (I Samuel 15:22).

#### **F. WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?**

There were three main results which followed this purging in the church:

1. The purity of the church was preserved.
2. A wholesome, godly fear came upon everyone (Acts 5:11).
3. New power was experienced by the believers. Signs and wonders were performed, and many believers were added to the Lord, "multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14).





# Acts I

LESSON 7

## DEACONS

**Text:** Acts 6:1-7

### A. THE GRECIANS

In Acts 6:1, we read the account of dissatisfaction arising among the Grecians who complained that their widows were being neglected. Who were these Grecians? It is necessary to have a clear understanding of just who they were.

First of all, they were not Greeks, but they were Jews of pure Jewish blood, just as the Hebrews. Second, the Grecian Jews were Jews who were living abroad and were visiting Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost, or they were Jews who had lived abroad and had now moved back to Jerusalem. They spoke Greek and were greatly influenced by Greek culture. For this reason, they were called Grecian Jews or Hellenists. They had been influenced by Greek customs and ideas. Undoubtedly, they were more prosperous and had been enjoying a higher standard of living. They were more open minded and less tied to tradition than the Palestinian Jews.

These Hellenists would be conscious of differences in language and culture. They would be very sensitive about any supposed difference that the apostles would be making in their administration of the affairs of the church. Whether or not the Grecian widows were neglected, we are not certain, but when some supposed unfairness seemed to arise, the Grecian Jews were quick to express their complaints. Possibly, this was the first incident that any nationalistic spirit ever affected the church.

### B. CHURCH GOVERNMENT

#### **Scripture Reference:**

*“God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets . . . governments, diversities of tongues” (I Corinthians 12:28).*

Here we read that God set governments in the church. The word *governments* refers to the power of ruling, the organized control that God has placed in the church for the maintenance of order among the saints. The Lord had placed certain offices and ministries in the church to govern it (Ephesians 4:11). When the problem arose of the dissatisfaction of the Grecian Christians, the apostles were quick to handle the matter and used great wisdom in this act of governing.

## C. THE DEACONS

The twelve apostles called the multitude unto them and said, “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables” (Acts 6:2). Their work was to give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. Ministers of the gospel need to always remember the wisdom of the apostles here. The first responsibility of the preacher is to give himself to prayer and the ministry of the Word and not get involved in secular work unless it is absolutely essential.

The apostles commanded the saints to look out from among themselves seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. This they did, and the apostles laid hands upon them and ordained them as deacons.

The names of these seven deacons were: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicolas, Nicanor, Timon, and Parmenas.

Let us note just how these men were appointed:

1. The apostles gave the qualifications.
2. The church did the choosing or electing.
3. The apostles appointed them or ordained them.

The method by which this was done made everyone happy. The people did the choosing, but the apostles kept the authority and the final decision clearly in their own hands.

It also should be noted that these men all had Greek names. It is quite probable that they all were Grecians. What a wonderful, gracious way the apostles used to settle this matter and restore unity! If the Grecians felt that they could not trust the Hebrew brethren, they now learned that their brethren were ready to trust them.

## D. QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS

In Acts 6:3, we read of the qualifications for these deacons:

1. Men—The Greek word used here is the specific one which meant males. Women could not be chosen.
2. Among you—They had to be in the church. No outsiders were to have part in the government of the church.
3. Of honest report—They had to have a good reputation.
4. Full of the Holy Ghost—
5. Full of wisdom—They had to be men of maturity.

In I Timothy 3:8-13, we have further qualifications stated:

## Lesson Seven

1. Must be grave
2. Must not be double tongued
3. Must not be given to much wine
4. Must not be greedy of filthy lucre
5. Must hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience
6. Must first be proven
7. Must be blameless
8. Must be husbands of one wife
9. Must rule their children and houses well

One can readily understand the importance of this office when he studies the above qualifications.

### **E. THE RESULTS OF THIS EVENT**

In Acts 6:7, we read that the Word of God increased, the number of disciples multiplied, and even a company of priests believed and were saved.

This revival took place because unity had been restored, everyone in the church now was happy, and the apostles were able to give the needed time to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

We must also note that at least two of the deacons became powerful evangelists: Stephen and Philip. This proves that a man may hold the office of a deacon in the church and at the same time be an effective minister of the Word. Although the office of deacon was primarily that of serving in the material things, yet this would not hinder him from also ministering in the spiritual.



## Self Help Test: Acts I Deacons

1. Name the five qualifications of deacons.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
  
2. Name the first seven deacons.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
  - f.
  - g.
  
3. Who were the "Grecians"?
  
  
4. What were the results of the appointment of the deacons?



# Acts I

LESSON 8

# THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

## A. PERSECUTION FORETOLD

### Scripture References:

*“But he shall receive . . . with persecutions”* (Mark 10:30).

*“They shall lay hands on you, and persecute you”* (Luke 21:12).

*“The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you”* (John 15:20).

Jesus had warned His disciples that they could expect to be persecuted. This persecution began almost at once with the arrest of Peter and John following the healing of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful. Five times in eleven years the church at Jerusalem encountered persecution:

1. By the Sadducees, elders, rulers, and scribes (Acts 4)
2. By the Sadducees for preaching of the resurrection (Acts 5)
3. At Stephen’s trial and martyrdom (Acts 6)
4. By intense persecution under Saul’s leadership (Acts 8:1-3)
5. By persecution instigated by Herod (Acts 12:1-25)

These persecutions were permitted by the Lord and undoubtedly accomplished a definite purpose in the growth of the church. The persecutions were some of the means God used in scattering the church so that the gospel message might be preached everywhere. The persecutions kept the church strong and developed strong faith as the saints prayed and witnessed the power of God manifested to deliver them.

## B. EARLY PERSECUTIONS

The first persecution was directed against Peter and John following the miraculous healing of the lame man. The apostles were thrown into prison overnight. When brought before the Council, Peter preached a marvelous sermon. Instead of being the accused, he became the accuser. The preachers were threatened with violence and dismissed.

The second persecution was directed against all the apostles (Acts 5:17-42). The religious leaders became indignant and took all the apostles and threw them into prison. God’s angel delivered them. The next morning when the Council was set for

trial, they found the apostles were gone. At that very moment, they were in the Temple preaching the Words of Life.

In the account of this persecution, the student should note the words of Peter (Acts 5:29, 32): “We ought to obey God rather than men” and “So is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.” In this latter statement, it makes it very clear that obedience is necessary in order to receive the Holy Ghost.

The wisdom of Gamaliel (Paul’s teacher) should also be noted. When the Council heard Peter, they were convicted deeply and began to plan how to kill the apostles. However, Gamaliel gave them splendid advice. “Let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God” (Acts 5:38, 39).

### **C. THE PERSECUTION BY KING HEROD**

**Scripture Reference:** Acts 12:1-25

This fifth persecution was brought upon the church by King Herod. This Herod was Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great who was the king when Jesus was born. He had cultivated the good will of the Jews by observing their customs.

In order to further win the favor of the Jews, Herod had James, the brother of John, killed. He had the head of James cut off, a similar death to that of John the Baptist. It should be noted that of the apostles, one of these brothers was the first to be killed; the other, John, was the last to die.

When Herod saw that the death of James pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter, planning to kill him. However, he did not want to kill him until after the rituals of Passover.

The church went to earnest prayer, and God delivered Peter the night before his planned execution. Although Peter was to be killed the next day, he was not lying awake worrying. He was sleeping. Herod had taken strict precautions, for Peter was held by two chains and four soldiers (two by his side and two at the door). In spite of this, an angel of the Lord delivered Peter.

Peter went to the house where the church was praying. This was the home of Mary, John Mark’s mother. Although the church was praying, it was difficult to believe that their prayers had been answered. It was so miraculous!

Why did God rescue Peter and allow James to be slain? We do not know, and we must never question the will of God in similar events.

Finally, we should note the death of Herod. The very thing which he desired, the applause and acclaim of the people, brought judgment and death. When the people shouted, “God’s voice, not a man’s!” (Acts 12:22), Herod accepted this acclaim and died a horrible death. History states that Herod immediately was seized with violent internal pains, and he lingered in agony for five days before he finally died.

#### **D. PETER’S DELIVERANCE**

The story of Peter’s deliverance is a wonderful illustration of what God does when He delivers a sinner from sin. This passage of Scripture makes a wonderful text for a gospel message.

1. The sinner’s condition is described by Peter’s condition, in prison bound by chains.
2. A light shone first.
3. Peter was smitten on the side next to the heart—this speaks of conviction.
4. He was told to arise—this he had to do first.
5. Then the chains fell off.
6. Then Peter was told:
  - a. Gird thyself.
  - b. Bind on thy sandals.
  - c. Put on thy garment.
  - d. Follow me.
7. The gate opened of its own accord.
8. Finally, Peter was able to say, “Now I know.”

In Acts 12:17, we read, “And he departed, and went into another place.” Apart from a brief mention of Peter appearing and speaking at the first church council (Acts 15), the above verse completes the record of Peter’s ministry. He went into another place, but nobody knows where he went.

He had used the keys and unlocked the door to the kingdom. This is all we need to know regarding the ministry of Peter.

## Self Help Test: Acts I

### The Persecuted Church

1. State the five periods of persecution of the early church.
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
2. Who was Gamaliel?
3. Who was John Mark's mother?
4. Who was Rhoda?
5. How did Herod die?
6. Who was the first apostle to be killed?
7. Who said the following quotations?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ "Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel."
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ "Thou art mad."
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_ "If it be God, ye cannot overthrow it."
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_ "We ought to obey God rather than man."
  - f. \_\_\_\_\_ "Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals."





# Acts I

LESSON 9

## THE FIRST CHURCH MARTYR

**Text:** Acts 6:8-15; Acts 7:1-60; Acts 8:1-2

### A. STEPHEN, THE FIRST CHURCH MARTYR

Stephen was a Grecian Jew. He was one of the first seven deacons. He is described as being full of faith and power (Act 6:8). God had given him the ministry of preaching the Word, and he preached under such anointing that none could resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke. Great wonders and miracles followed his ministry. His name means “crown.” His name certainly was appropriate, for he was the first to wear the martyr’s crown.

### B. THE SYNAGOGUES IN JERUSALEM

The Hellenistic Jews who had returned to Jerusalem to live had established at least five synagogues in Jerusalem. These synagogues were named after the places from which the Jews had returned. The synagogue of the Libertines was an exception. The Jews who assembled in this synagogue were Jews who had been taken prisoners by Roman generals, reduced to slavery, and then later emancipated and returned to their homeland.

Since Stephen was a Grecian, it was natural for him to go to the Grecians with the gospel message. Although these Jews had traveled widely and were possibly educated, they were unable to answer Stephen, for Stephen preached with such wisdom and power. This made them very angry, and they determined to get rid of this Holy Ghost preacher.

Therefore, they suborned men (hired men to give false witness) who accused him of speaking blasphemous words against God and against Moses (Acts 6:11).

### C. THE SANHEDRIN

Stephen was taken before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:12). This was the supreme council of the Jewish people. It had its origin with the seventy elders Moses appointed to help him govern Israel. At this particular time, it was to have seventy-one members—seventy members plus the president.

### D. THE CHARGE AGAINST STEPHEN

The charge that the false witnesses made against Stephen was twofold:

1. Stephen was speaking against the Temple.
2. He was changing the law of Moses.

The charge also accused him of being a blasphemer.

### **E. THE SERMON OF STEPHEN**

Stephen's sermon was not an apology; neither did he waste any time in attempting to defend himself. This sermon is the longest one recorded in the Book of Acts.

He began the sermon with a simple salutation, "Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken" (Acts 7:2), and he immediately began accusing the Jewish leaders themselves. He became their judge, passing sentence upon them.

In his sermon, Stephen dwelt in detail upon the past history of Israel. He proved that they ever rejected God's grace while failing to obey God's law. He referred to Abraham to prove that God's blessing was bestowed upon him entirely on the principle of faith. He gave examples of their persistent hatred of all that was good. He reminded them of their sale of Joseph into Egypt because of envy and of how they had refused and rejected Moses.

Stephen built his sermon up to a climax, showing that their past history prefigured Christ and their rejection of Him. Stephen charged the Sanhedrin with high treason against God. He rebuked them as being uncircumcised in heart and ears. He accused them of resisting the Holy Ghost and being the murderers of Jesus Christ.

### **F. THE STONING OF STEPHEN**

As the members of the Council listened to Stephen, they were convicted deeply. They grew so angry that they gnashed their teeth. They rushed upon him, cast him out of the city, and stoned him. The Sanhedrin had no power to sentence anyone to death, but they ignored this because of their anger and hatred.

Among the Council was Saul of Tarsus. Undoubtedly, Saul was one of the leaders who led the mob in killing Stephen. He consented to Stephen's death (Acts 8:1). By this statement we know that he approved of and was pleased with Stephen's death. He also was in charge of the clothes of those who had stripped in order to throw stones.

### **G. STEPHEN'S VISION**

Some try to prove the Trinitarian tradition by referring to the vision Stephen saw just before he died. However, this proves the Oneness. Stephen called upon God, saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). Therefore, when Stephen saw God, he knew that He was Jesus Christ. The expression "on the right hand of

God” (Acts 7:56) simply means the place of power and glory. There are many passages of Scripture which bring this out clearly.

*“And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power” (Mark 14:62).*

In many of the passages where it describes Jesus as being in the place of power and glory, it describes Him as sitting. However, in Acts 7:56, Stephen saw Him standing. Could it be that Jesus arose to welcome the first martyr? Or did He arise because of the keen interest He had in this scene of the death of the first martyr? It certainly is worthy of profound meditation.

## **H. SIMILARITY BETWEEN CALVARY AND THE DEATH OF STEPHEN**

Let us consider briefly some similarity between the martyrdom of Stephen and the death of our Lord:

1. In both cases, the people were stirred up.
2. Stephen was cast out of the city; Jesus was led out to be crucified.
3. Both prayed for their murderers.
4. Both committed themselves to God.
5. Both cried with a loud voice. In both cases, this was a cry of victory.

## **I. TWO FINAL TRUTHS**

Finally, there are two things that the student’s attention should be drawn to:

1. The manner of Stephen’s death: “Fell asleep” (Acts 7:60) speaks of a quiet, peaceful death. What a blessed thing it is to fall asleep in the arms of Jesus!
2. The effect of Stephen’s death upon Saul: Saul of Tarsus was never the same man after this scene. Although he did his best to drown out conviction by leading a persecution against the church, we are confident that he remembered this scene for his entire life, and many times later it became a great source of strength and courage to him.

## Self Help Test: Acts I The First Church Martyr

1. Explain the meaning of the following terms.
  - a. The synagogue of the Libertines
  - b. The Sanhedrin
  
2. What were the charges the false witnesses made against Stephen?
  - a.
  - b.
  
3. How does the vision of Stephen prove the oneness of the Godhead?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What part did Saul of Tarsus have in Stephen's death?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What effect did Stephen's death have upon Saul?





# Acts I

LESSON 10



## REVIVAL IN SAMARIA

**Text:** Acts 8

### A. PHILIP

Philip was one of the original seven deacons. He was not the same Philip who was an apostle. He was a different Philip, who apparently had his home in Caesarea (Acts 21:8-9). Therefore, he would be a Grecian Jew. Later, we read that he had four daughters who prophesied.

Although Philip was ordained a deacon, he became a powerful evangelist of the gospel. A revival followed his ministry in Samaria, and God confirmed his ministry with signs and miracles.

We can see just to what extent this man was yielded to the will of God when he left the revival in Samaria and traveled into the desert to preach to one man. What a lesson this should be to all of us!

### B. SAMARIA

In Acts 8:1 it states that great persecution at Jerusalem scattered the church throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. However, the apostles remained at Jerusalem.

Judea and Samaria were included in the commission. It was God's will that both of these provinces would receive the gospel message after Jerusalem.

The Samaritans were a mixed race. They were part Jewish and part Gentile. It was for this reason that the gospel had to be preached to them before being preached to the Gentiles.

The region of Samaria was located in the central part of Palestine. It lay south of Galilee and north of Judea. Once when Jesus was going from Judea to Galilee, He passed through the country of the Samaritans. He paused to rest near Sychar, which is not far from the city of Samaria. Because of His ministry to the woman at the well, many people accepted Him as the Christ. This may have opened the way in the hearts of the people for the gospel message.

### C. PHILIP'S MESSAGE

In Acts 8:4, we read that the saints went everywhere preaching the Word. Therefore, Philip preached the Word in Samaria.

What did he preach?

1. He preached Christ unto them (Acts 8:5).
2. He preached the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12).
3. He preached the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12).

This proves that when we preach the Word, we must preach Christ, the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus. It also verifies the close connection between the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus.

#### **D. THE RESULTS OF THE REVIVAL IN SAMARIA**

There were definite results which followed the preaching of the Word in Samaria:

1. The people with one accord gave heed (Acts 8:6).
2. There were miracles which they could hear (Acts 8:6).
3. There were miracles which they could see (Acts 8:6).
4. There was great joy in the city (Acts 8:8).
5. Men and women were baptized (Acts 8:12).
6. They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16).
7. They received the Holy Ghost with the laying on of hands of the apostles (Acts 8:17).

Here are two questions we should answer:

##### **1. How were the Samaritans saved?**

- a. They heard the gospel (Acts 8:6).
- b. They believed the gospel (Acts 8:12).
- c. They were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16).
- d. They received the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:17).

##### **2. Why did the apostles come from Jerusalem?**

- a. Peter had been given the keys to the kingdom. Since the Samaritans were part Gentile, it was necessary for Peter to unlock the door of the kingdom to them.
- b. If the apostles had not come, the Samaritans might have been inclined to think of themselves as being separate from the church in Jerusalem. Receiving the Holy Ghost under the ministry of the apostles showed them that they were part of the same church as in Jerusalem.

### 3. Why was there no tarrying?

The Holy Ghost came on the Day of Pentecost. Now that the Comforter has come, there is no longer any need for tarrying. A person only needs to believe, repent, be baptized, and receive.

#### E. SIMON THE SORCERER

Before Philip came with the gospel, the central figure of interest in Samaria was a sorcerer named Simon. He had bewitched the people and made them believe he was exercising the power of God. He was impressed with the miracles that took place, and he presented himself for baptism.

When he saw the people receiving the Holy Ghost, he tried to buy the gift of laying on of hands. He was severely rebuked by Peter, who told him that his heart was not right in the sight of God, that he was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.

Whether or not Simon was saved, we cannot be certain. Certainly the way in which he received the rebuke and prayed for help (Acts 8:24) would cause us to believe that he found forgiveness.

We see Peter using the gift of discernment here. This gift of the Spirit is just as important as any of the other eight gifts. We should desire to see this gift in operation as well as the others.

#### F. THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

From the revival in Samaria, Philip was suddenly called away by the angel of the Lord to travel south to Gaza, which was a desert area. This was a distance of about eighty miles. Jerusalem was about thirty miles closer. Why didn't the Lord call one of the apostles? The eunuch was returning from Jerusalem. Why did he not hear the gospel in Jerusalem? We do not have the answers to these questions. However, it does show the importance of never questioning God, but simply obeying in every detail what God commands. This Philip gladly did. He even ran and joined the eunuch in his chariot when the Spirit spoke to him.

One of the marvelous things about this story is the perfect timing. Philip and the eunuch met at a crossroads. Undoubtedly, Philip had traveled by foot while the eunuch was riding in a chariot. Philip had to travel some eighty miles, while the eunuch had to travel about fifty miles. If Philip had been just a few minutes late or early, this appointment would never have been kept.

The eunuch was the treasurer under Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians. He was a high government official.

Although he was a Gentile, we do not recognize that it was here where the gospel was taken to the Gentiles, for the eunuch was a proselyte to the Jewish religion. He had been up to Jerusalem to worship, and now he was returning home as empty and needy as he had gone. Undoubtedly, as a high government man, he had been entertained in Jerusalem by some of the rulers and officials. Although he was returning home empty spiritually and still unsaved, there was one thing he had gotten at Jerusalem, a scroll containing the prophecy of Isaiah. He was not returning empty handed, for he was returning with the Word of God.

The eunuch was reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. Philip needed no better text than this, and he preached Jesus. The eunuch cried out, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?" Philip replied, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." The inference is that if he did not have faith in Jesus, there would have been something to prevent baptism.

The eunuch was baptized and traveled on his way rejoicing. History tells us that he established a church in Ethiopia so that a nation was witnessed to by the obedience of one man.

#### **G. DID THEY SPEAK IN TONGUES IN SAMARIA?**

In every case except one when it states that they received the Holy Ghost, it also states that they spoke in tongues. The one exception is the revival in Samaria.

However, it is very evident that Simon the Sorcerer saw or heard something that caused him to want to buy the gift. The Samaritans had already been baptized in water; they had already had a demonstration of joy. There was something more that took place when they received the Holy Ghost. There can be only one answer: they spoke in tongues.

## **Self Help Test: Acts I**

### **Revival in Samaria**

1. How were the Samaritans saved?
2. What experience did the Ethiopian eunuch have?
3. Why did the apostles come to Samaria from Jerusalem?
4. How do we know that the Samaritans spoke in tongues?
5. What was the message that Philip preached in Samaria?



# Acts I

LESSON 11



## THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

**Text:** Acts 9:1-31; Acts 22:1-21

### A. SAUL OF TARSUS

Saul was a native of Tarsus in Asia Minor. Tarsus was the chief city of Cilicia. It was located about ten miles from the sea and was a provincial capital during Roman times. The district of Cilicia was famous for its cloth made of goat's hair.

Although Saul was a Grecian Jew, he was a strict Pharisee. Saul's father was a Roman citizen, and therefore, Saul was born a Roman citizen. Undoubtedly, he had attended the Jewish synagogue and the local colleges. Tarsus was famous for the colleges there, and so Saul received an excellent education. When he had received what education he could receive at Tarsus, he went to Jerusalem to study under the rabbis there. Saul studied under Gamaliel, who was a Pharisee and a celebrated doctor of the Law.

Very likely, Saul was named after King Saul, the first king of Israel. As King Saul stood head and shoulders above his fellow man physically, even so Saul of Tarsus stood head and shoulders above his fellow men morally, intellectually, and religiously. He could boast of being blameless as touching the righteousness of the Law, but this did not save him.

In Acts 13:9, we have him being called Paul. The name *Paul* means "little."

In Jerusalem, he bitterly opposed the church and became one of the leaders in the persecution against the Christians.

### B. SAUL'S CONVERSION

Saul went to the high priest and obtained letters from him authorizing him to go to Damascus, far to the north, to arrest the Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem to be condemned by the Sanhedrin.

It is evident from the Lord's words, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:5), that Saul's soul was under great conviction. He was trying to stifle the goading of his conscience by increasing the intensity of his persecution.

A light above the brightness of the midday sun shone upon him. He fell to the earth. He knew that God had crossed his path. Blinded and helpless, he lay on the ground asking for guidance from the Jesus whom he had so lately persecuted.

The question of our Lord to Saul, “Why persecutest thou me?” would teach us that what we do towards the saints, we do towards Jesus. Persecuting the saints meant persecuting Jesus. This is true, for the church is the mystical body of Christ.

Saul cried out, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” The Lord instructed him to go into the city and someone would tell him what to do. We should note that Jesus did not tell him how to be saved, but rather sent a preacher to him. This teaches us that God always uses men and women to carry the gospel message.

Saul’s conversion was thorough. He became a new creature in Christ Jesus. All things which he had formerly counted gain, he counted loss for Jesus’ sake. Saul, the persecutor, became Paul, the persecuted. His mouth was filled with blessings instead of blasphemies. His heart was filled with courage instead of curses.

Saul’s conversion shows how a man can be fearfully wrong and yet think that he is absolutely right. It also shows how no case is hopeless.

### **C. THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST TO SAUL**

We need no greater proof of the deity of Jesus than the conversation that took place between Jesus Christ and Saul at his conversion.

*“And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 9:4-5).*

Saul recognized the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and he knew that it was Jehovah who appeared to him. He actually asked, “Who art thou, Jehovah?”

This revelation of Jesus to Saul completely changed this fiery persecutor who a few moments before had been breathing out threatenings.

The personal pronouns *Thou* and *Me* are very significant. The relationship of a man to God is always a personal matter.

### **D. HOW WAS SAUL SAVED?**

Jesus did not tell Saul how to be saved, but rather told him to go into the city and he would be told what to do.

What a change now took place in this fiery, proud persecutor of the church! For three days he was without sight, without food, and without water. This man who had been plowing crooked furrows now was found in the street called “Straight.” He was in the house of Judas. The name *Judas* means “Praise.” Jesus called a disciple by the name of Ananias to go to Saul. *Ananias* means “the Lord has shown grace.”

Jesus told Ananias, “Behold, he prayeth.” What a difference! We now find Saul without sight, humbled, fasting, praying, praising and about to find the grace of God. Paul became a great preacher of the grace of God.

Saul was baptized in the name of Jesus, and he received the Holy Ghost. How do we know? The following verses make it plain:

*“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).*

*“I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all” (I Corinthians 14:18).*

*“That thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:17).*

### **E. A CHOSEN VESSEL**

What made this man a great missionary? What did the Lord see in this man that he should be a chosen vessel to bear the name of Jesus before kings (Acts 9:15)?

It was his complete dedication to the work of God; it was his utter abandonment to the perfect will of God. He served Jesus Christ with the same fiery zeal as he had previously persecuted Him.

### **F. PREPARATION FOR THE MINISTRY**

Although Paul had been taught by Gamaliel and had such an outstanding conversion, yet it was some twelve years before Paul became active in full-time ministry.

One might think that according to Acts 9:20 he immediately entered the ministry. However, three years took place between Acts 9:19 and Acts 9:20. After his conversion, he immediately went into Arabia (Galatians 1:17) and spent the time in prayer and meditation. He then returned to Damascus where he began to preach as stated in Acts 9:20. Escaping from the city in a basket after his life was threatened, he returned to Jerusalem where Barnabas interceded for him and introduced him to the apostles. According to Acts 9:30 the brethren took him to Caesarea and sent him home to Tarsus. He remained in Tarsus for eight or nine years and was still there when Barnabas found him and brought him to Antioch to become a teacher in the church (Acts 11:25-26).

From Antioch, Paul and Barnabas returned to Jerusalem to attend the first church council as stated in Acts 15. Paul stated in Galatians 2:1 that this was fourteen years since the time he left Jerusalem. This makes it about twelve years from the time of his conversion until the time he went to Antioch to enter full-time ministry.

## **G. A SUMMARY OF THREE CONVERSIONS**

A very profitable Bible study may be taken from the conversions of these three men:

Acts 8—Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 9—Saul of Tarsus

Acts 10—Cornelius

1. All three were moral, upright men but unsaved. All three had a special messenger sent to them.
2. They represented the entire human race:
  - a. A black man
  - b. A Jew
  - c. A Gentile

They were descendants of Ham, Shem, and Japheth.

3. They were of three classes hardest to reach:
  - a. A politician
  - b. A theologian
  - c. A soldier
4. This Bible study may be developed at considerable length:
  - a. Aroused by reading the Word
  - b. Aroused by seeing Jesus
  - c. Aroused by angelic vision, etc.

## **Self Help Test: Acts I**

### **The Conversion of Saul**

1. How does Saul's experience on the road to Damascus prove the deity of Jesus?
2. How was Saul of Tarsus saved?
3. Trace briefly the events in Saul's life between his conversion and his active ministry.
4. Write a character sketch of Saul of Tarsus.
5. What characteristic made Paul a great missionary?



# Acts I

LESSON 12



## THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES

**Text:** Acts 10 and 11

### A. THE GOSPEL TO THE UTTERMOST PARTS

In the commission Jesus had said that the disciples and believers would be witnesses to the uttermost part of the earth. This would take in the Gentiles.

The Lord had given Peter the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16). He had unlocked the door of the kingdom to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost. It was under his ministry that the Samaritans received the Holy Ghost. In Acts 10, we read the story of Peter being the minister to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Thus, he used the keys once again to unlock the door of the kingdom.

### B. WHO WAS CORNELIUS?

Cornelius was a Roman centurion. This meant that he was an officer in the Roman army over a company of one hundred men. He was a Gentile. He was a devout man who feared God and gave much alms. He also was a man of prayer.

Cornelius was stationed at Caesarea, a seaport which had been built by Herod the Great. It became the headquarters of the Roman authority in Palestine.

Although Cornelius was a man of good works, he was not saved. His prayers and good works went up to God as a memorial, but they did not save him.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, Cornelius had a vision. He was praying, for this was the hour of prayer. In the vision, the Lord sent an angel with explicit instructions where he could find a preacher who would tell him what to do.

This is a clear example that angels do not preach the gospel in this dispensation. Angels have never known the joys of sins forgiven. Angels have never been baptized in Jesus' name nor filled with the Holy Ghost. In this case, that man was Peter.

### C. PETER'S VISION

Peter was staying in the home of Simon the tanner in the city of Joppa, a seaport some thirty miles south of Caesarea.

The next day after Cornelius had seen his vision, Peter was on the flat roof of Simon's house praying. It was noon and he was hungry. While he was waiting for

something to eat, he fell into a trance. He saw a great sheet full of all kinds of ceremonially unclean animals being let down from Heaven. A voice commanded him, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." Peter recognized the order as from the Lord, but he did not acknowledge the Lord's right to command him to do what was forbidden by the law of Moses.

Peter said, "Not so, Lord." "Not so" and "Lord" are complete contradictions. If He is Lord, one cannot say to Him, "Not so," and if one says, "Not so," He cannot be Lord.

Peter said, "I have never eaten any thing common or unclean." The Lord replied, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." This was done three times. Peter had denied the Lord three times. Jesus had challenged his love three times (John 21) and now this lesson is repeated three times. At first Peter did not understand the meaning of the vision, but later he recognized what God was telling him (Acts 10:28).

#### **D. PETER'S AUDIENCE**

While Peter was considering the vision, the Holy Spirit spoke to him that three men were seeking him and that he was to go with them without questioning.

The next morning, Peter left for Caesarea with these three men accompanied by six brethren (Acts 11:12). This made a party of ten men who made the trip of thirty miles to Caesarea.

The morning of the following day after reaching Caesarea, Peter went to the home of Cornelius. He found the house filled with Gentiles. Cornelius had called in his relatives and friends.

As Peter entered the home of Cornelius, the centurion fell at his feet and worshiped him. To worship a human being is idolatry, and Peter would have none of it. "Stand up," said he, "I myself also am a man."

Peter found a crowd gathered which was a God-prepared audience ready to hear the gospel. Cornelius was in earnest, and he had filled the house with guests prepared to hear the Word of God. What a thrill to speak to a group like this!

#### **E. PETER'S SERMON**

Peter's sermon was very simple but yet comprehensive. He gave a brief summary of our Lord's ministry from His baptism by John up to the Crucifixion and Resurrection. He told them that whosoever believeth in Him shall through His name receive remission of sins.

The sermon was interrupted by the Holy Ghost. Peter never finished his sermon. Right in the middle of the sermon, the Holy Ghost fell on all who heard the Word.

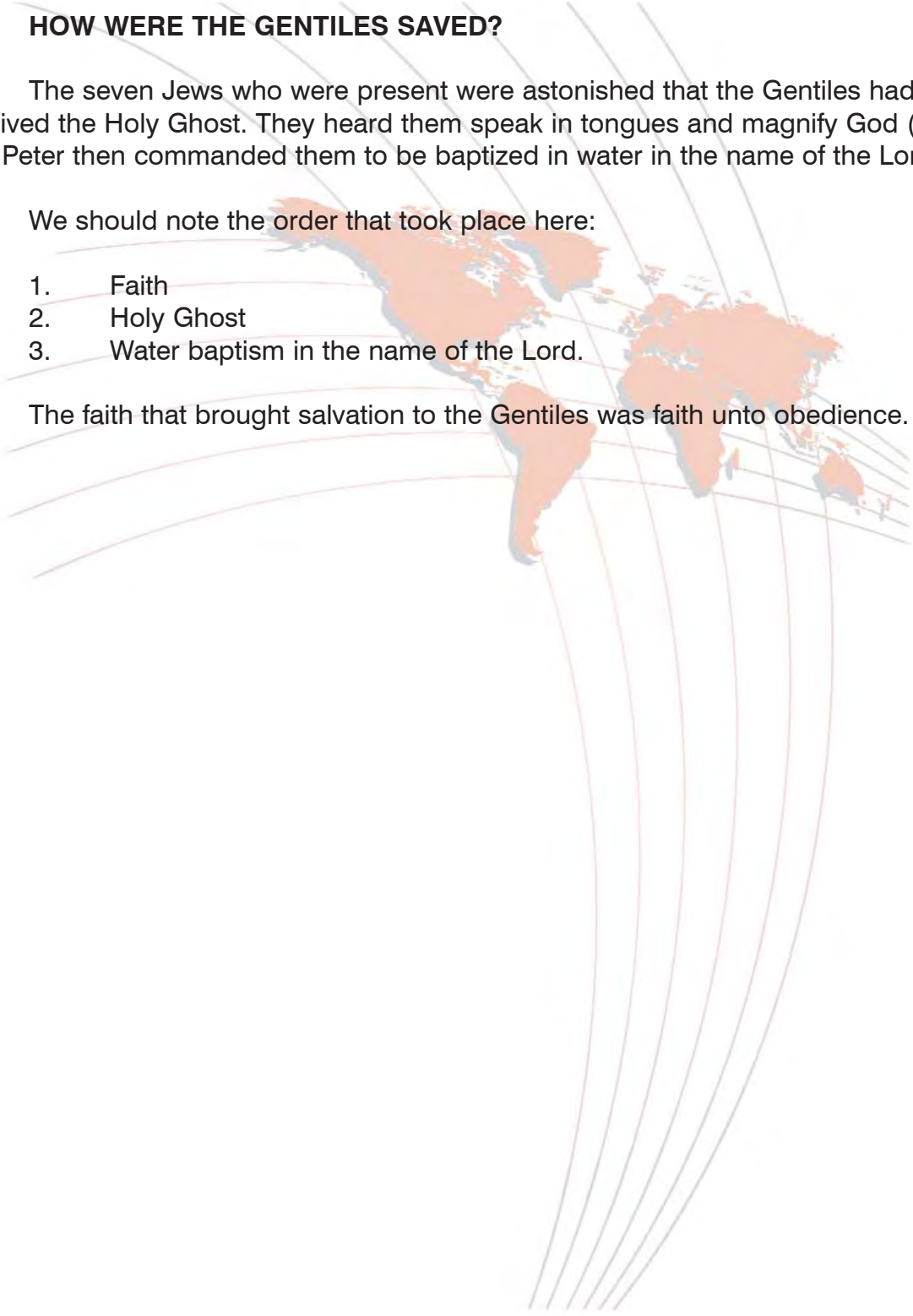
#### **F. HOW WERE THE GENTILES SAVED?**

The seven Jews who were present were astonished that the Gentiles had received the Holy Ghost. They heard them speak in tongues and magnify God (verse 46). Peter then commanded them to be baptized in water in the name of the Lord.

We should note the order that took place here:

1. Faith
2. Holy Ghost
3. Water baptism in the name of the Lord.

The faith that brought salvation to the Gentiles was faith unto obedience.



## **Self Help Test: Acts I**

### **The Conversion of the Gentiles**

1. Who was Cornelius?
2. In what city was Cornelius stationed?
3. At what time of the day did Cornelius have his vision?
4. In what city was Peter staying at this time?
5. At what time of day did Peter have his vision?
6. How many miles apart were Caesarea and Joppa?
7. How many men did Cornelius send to Joppa?
8. How many men were in the party that journeyed to Caesarea?
9. Why did the Lord use Peter to preach the gospel to Cornelius?
10. To whom did Peter preach at Caesarea?
11. How were the Gentiles saved?

## Missionary Spotlight: Ralph Vincent Reynolds



Ralph V. Reynolds began his ministry in 1936 by preaching in the schoolhouses, homes, and lumber camps of six communities during the closing years of “the Great Depression.” The Sunday before he went to sleep in the Lord, just a week short of his eighty-ninth birthday, he concluded preaching a four-week revival. In that revival, fourteen people received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. It concluded his sixty-six years of apostolic ministry.

He was born in Picton, Ontario, Canada, on March 13, 1913. He graduated from Picton Collegiate Institute and then attended Peterborough Normal School, from thence went into the teaching profession. For twelve and one-half years he taught science and mathematics in the provincial public schools of Ontario,

Manitoba, and British Columbia, Canada. He desired to become a civil engineer when God called him to the ministry. In 1936 he married his first wife, Helen Welsh, and for sixty-plus years they had no permanent dwelling place. He was always on the move preaching the “gospel of Jesus Christ.”

As a young boy, Ralph would stand on a chair, wave his arms, and shout at the top of his voice. His answer to the question of what he was doing was, “I am preaching!” However, as a young man he declared strongly that there were two things he would never do: preach or teach. From that time, Ralph V. Reynolds spent sixty-six years preaching and teaching. His ministry spanned six decades, touched two centuries, and influenced thousands of lives.

His new birth experience took place in February 1934, in “The Old Brick Church” in Picton. He held credentials with three church organizations: the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, the Apostolic Church, and the United Pentecostal Church International. After ministering for six years, he was first ordained in 1942 in Picton, Ontario, with the Apostolic Pentecostal Church, and in 1946 his ordination was transferred to the UPCI.

He served in many official capacities in the UPCI:

- Two years as the Northwest Regional Presbyter and an Executive Board member
- Twenty-four years as a member of the General Board

- Eighteen years as an honorary member of the General Board
- As district superintendent of two North American districts and one missionary district
- On five different district boards
- One year on the Foreign Missions Board
- Three years on the Board of Christian Education
- Eight years as a missionary under appointment to Jamaica and field superintendent

During his ministry, Ralph Reynolds founded four Bible schools—including the first one on a foreign missionary field—and pastored eighteen churches. He planted a church in the beautiful city of Cranbrook, British Columbia at the ripe old age of eighty-three. As soon as he raised the money and built the new sanctuary, he turned it over to a young man. He never lost the vision of opening one more church, literally up to the day he passed on to his reward.

For many years, Brother Reynolds was unsurpassed as a Oneness Pentecostal author. He wrote sixteen books; twenty-four units of the *International Alpha Bible Course*, which are used in many foreign Bible schools; and authored the *Spirit of Freedom Course* for the prison and drug dependent, now being used widely in the court system. In 1985 he was named “Writer of the Year.”

At eighty-six years of age, Ralph V. Reynolds was joined in marriage to Myrna Kelsey, who was a faithful helpmeet and friend to a great man with a failing body for the last two and one-half years.

For the better part of a century a giant walked among us. His sterling character, his strong but humble spirit, his transparent honesty, and his steady leadership

often challenged those of misguided minds and unethical practices. In his mind there was no question as to right or wrong, truth or error, righteousness or unrighteousness . . . and he lived it before all who knew him.

— *Order of the Faith, United Pentecostal Church International*