

**LESSON 1**  
**THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH**  
**CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**  
**SEMESTER 2**

**KEY VERSE:** Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1:11

**PRAYER FOCUS:** As you study this week, ask the Holy Spirit to become known to you in a greater way than you have known Him before. Pray that the Spirit's power would be released in your life that you might make a difference in your world as the disciples did in theirs!

**ACTS 1-11**  
**AD 30-41**

**SOURCES FOR STUDY:** David Padfield ([www.padfield.com](http://www.padfield.com)) for overview and questions, Frank Viola, *The Untold Story of the New Testament Church* for "Sharpening the Focus" and other historical data of writings; <http://newtestamenthistorytimeline.com/> for historical timeline. (see also <http://www.biblestudy.org/beginner/timelinent.html> for interactive timeline. Dates may vary)

### **The Community of Believers is Born**

Jesus Christ disappeared in a cloud and ascended into the heavens where He took His seat at the right hand of His Father. (Romans 8:34; Eph. 1:20) Jesus, the Messiah entered His present-day ministry of High Priest for His people. (Heb. 2:17-19:21). As the Twelve disciples strained their eyes to see Him vanish, two white-robed men stood before them and assured them that Jesus would return in the same way that He ascended.

Jesus Christ is now the crucified, risen, ascended, enthroned Lord of glory! His work on Calvary has paved the way for His "church" – the community that will express His nature – to be built on the earth.

The English word "church" appears 79 times in the New Testament. It is the English translation of the Greek word *Ekklesia*. The word means "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly." (New Thayer Greek-English Lexicon) The word congregation or community would be a more accurate translation of the word. In today's vernacular, we sometimes have a problem distinguishing between the church as a building and the church as the congregation. It is the "body of Christ." In our study of the letters of Paul, we will find many directives as to what this body is to look and act like!

As we have completed our study of the life of Christ from the Gospel of Luke, we continue with Luke's second book that he writes to Theophilus, the unknown recipient of both Luke's gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. Theophilus means "lover of God" in Greek and may, therefore, refer to an anonymous individual or someone who actually bore that good name. Effectively, the book is addressed to all of every age who love Jehovah and seek to understand the scheme of redemption and the pattern for the New Testament church.

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Originally the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles were one book in two volumes. They were separated when they were made part of the canon (collection) of the New Testament. It is difficult to set a date for the completion of the two volumes and estimates vary from A.D. 62 to 80.

Luke was a friend and companion of Paul, and those sections of Acts where the term “we” is used (16:10–17; 20:5–21:18; 27:1–28:16) probably reflect their travelling together. The Acts of the Apostles is not what we would call today a history of the early church. Certainly it has an historical form and its historical information is accurate, but its real purpose was theological. Had it been “straight history”, Luke would have told of the careers of those apostles of whom we hear nothing, and of the churches (e.g. in Galilee, 9:31) of which he supplied no information. In the light of the introductory sentences and the general plan of the book, it may be said that Luke intended to show how the Gospel was rejected by that people for whom it should have become their glory and accepted by many Gentiles even in the pagan city of Rome, the capital of the empire that subjugated the Jews. The Jewish leaders persecuted the churches, but the Roman officials treated the churches with justice.

Luke portrays the expansion of the work as the continuation of the work of Jesus in Palestine. The Holy Spirit who leads the apostles and churches is the Spirit sent by Jesus. A key word is “witness”. The apostles and disciples witness in Jerusalem and Judea, where they are persecuted; in Samaria, among a people despised by the Jews; and then to the Gentile nations. The witness was both in words and deeds. In his summaries of early proclamation of the gospel Luke supplies the words of witness, and by his description of the miracles of the Lord through his servants he supplies the deeds of witness.

This book is actually some of the acts of some of the apostles. The book could more accurately be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. The greater number of them were not with Luke and so their work is more obscure to us. Acts shows us the scheme of redemption at work as the preached gospel converts men to Jesus. It is also valuable in that it explains the nature, organization, work and worship of the church to which we claim to be a part. (<http://www.biblestudyguide.org/ebooks/jssmith/NT/NT02.pdf>)

To connect the two books of Luke and Acts, read Luke 24:36 through Acts 1 to set the scene of when the disciples last saw Jesus after his crucifixion at His ascension into heaven.

**DAY ONE: POWER OF THE CHURCH**

**Read Acts 2:1-47**

1. How did the Holy Spirit’s arrival become apparent to the apostles?

What new ability did the apostles suddenly possess? (2:1-4) \_\_\_\_\_

❖ **Describe a time that the Holy Spirit’s arrival has been apparent to you.**

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\_\_\_\_\_  
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2. What caused these devout Jews from all over the world to be confused and amazed? Were the apostles speaking an unrecognizable language or real human languages? (2:5-13)

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3. Whose prophecy did Peter claim this event was fulfilling? \_\_\_\_\_ (2:14-21)  
Is there anything in this passage that makes you think we are living in the last days? \_\_\_\_\_ Describe: \_\_\_\_\_

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4. How can we heed the words of Peter in Acts 2:40-41 in this generation? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. How did the disciples fill their days now? (2:42) \_\_\_\_\_

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How did these activities help them to “save them from this corrupt generation?”

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**DAY TWO: PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH**  
**READ ACTS 3-5:39**

1. What did Peter give to the lame man? \_\_\_\_\_  
How did the people react to what had happened? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How did Peter describe the healing of the lame man? \_\_\_\_\_

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❖ **Have you ever missed the supernatural by looking for the spectacular? (missed an ordinary miracle of God because you were looking for something more spectacular or impressive.)**

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3. What was it that “greatly disturbed ... the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees? (4:1-2) \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What did Peter affirm about Christ? (4:12) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Do you think Peter was exemplifying the victory that he realized after he had been "sifted as wheat?" \_\_\_\_\_

5. What did the council observe about Peter and John? \_\_\_\_\_  
What did the council forbid Peter and John from doing? \_\_\_\_\_  
How did Peter answer? \_\_\_\_\_  
(4:13-22)

6. How did Gamaliel advise the Sanhedrin regarding these disciples? (5:34-39)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**DAY THREE: PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH**  
**READ ACTS 5:40-8:3**

1. What was done to the disciples after they were released? \_\_\_\_\_  
(5:40) What was the disciples' attitude? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where did they go afterward? \_\_\_\_\_

2. How is Stephen described? \_\_\_\_\_  
What did some men accuse him of? \_\_\_\_\_

3. As Stephen begins his sermon, what does he remind the Jews of? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. At the end of the sermon what did Stephen accuse his audience of? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
How did the audience react? \_\_\_\_\_

5. What breaks out on that day against the church at Jerusalem? (8:1) \_\_\_\_\_

❖ **Describe a time that you felt persecution because you are a Christian.**

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**DAY FOUR: PREACHERS OF THE EARLY CHURCH**  
**READ ACTS 8:4-40 and 10-11 (We will read chapter 9 tomorrow.)**

1. How did the people of the city of Samaria react to the message of Philip?

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2. What great sin did Simon, the sorcerer try to commit? \_\_\_\_\_

What was he told? \_\_\_\_\_

How do people today try to buy the gift of God with money? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Who did the angel direct Philip to meet up with? \_\_\_\_\_

What do we know about the character of the Ethiopian nobleman? \_\_\_\_\_

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How did Philip fulfill his assignment given him by the angel? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What is Cornelius's title? \_\_\_\_\_

What was his relationship with God? \_\_\_\_\_

What is his role in this story? \_\_\_\_\_

(10:1-33)

5. What message did God want Peter to learn through his vision? (10:34-35) \_\_\_\_\_

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What was the result of this message? (10:44-48) \_\_\_\_\_

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❖ **Describe how you fit in to verse 34.**

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**DAY FIVE: PAUL'S CONVERSION**  
**READ ACTS 9:1-31**

1. Where was Saul and what was he doing during the stoning of Stephen? (8:1-3)

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2. What was Saul on his way to do in Damascus? \_\_\_\_\_  
How was his journey interrupted? \_\_\_\_\_  
What was his new assignment? \_\_\_\_\_

❖ **Has the Lord ever interrupted you on your journey to give you a new assignment?**

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3. How did Ananias view Saul? \_\_\_\_\_  
How did the Lord view Saul? \_\_\_\_\_

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What does that show us about how we view others? \_\_\_\_\_

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What does that show us about how God views us (and others that we wouldn't choose for a particular job)? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What were the various reactions to Saul/Paul's conversion? (9:20-30)

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Do you have a testimony about others' reaction to your conversion? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Who befriended Saul and took him to the apostles? \_\_\_\_\_  
Who has been that kind of friend in your life? \_\_\_\_\_

(For further understanding, read Chapter 7, *The Jerusalem Chronicle*, from **The Untold Story of the New Testament Church** by Frank Viola.)