

6. The New Testament Church

I. Acts

After his resurrection Jesus told his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and await baptism with the Holy Spirit. The disciples assumed the Messianic age had arrived:

Q: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

A: “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:6-8)

This three-fold expansion as witness to Jesus outlines the book:

1. Jerusalem (chs. 1-7)
2. Judea and Samaria (8-12)
3. ends of the earth (13-28)

A. Jerusalem (Acts 1-7)

1. Pentecost

The day of Pentecost (Gk. *pentēkostē* “fiftieth”) = the Feast of Weeks (שבועות Shavuot, “weeks,” Lev 23:15-21), 50 days after Passover, is celebrated on the 6th day of the 3rd month (Sivan). It became associated with the giving of the Torah on Mt Sinai (also in the 3rd month, Exod 19:1). It was also known as the Feast of the Harvest (Exod 23:16) and the day of the firstfruits (Num 28:26) to celebrate the Lord’s provision of the harvest.

With Passover and Tabernacles it was one of the three annual festivals in the Jewish calendar (Exod 23:14-17; Lev 23), when Jews would go up to Jerusalem to appear before the Lord. Jerusalem was filled with Jewish pilgrims from the diaspora: Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia; Judea; Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia; Egypt, Cyrene; Rome, Crete, Arabia (Acts 2:8-11).

Peter’s sermon:

- the last days: what was happening was what Joel said would happen “in the last days” (2:16-21, quoting Joel 2:28-32 [3:1-5]). The last days and the day of the Lord had arrived, marked by the gift of the Spirit. Note the apocalyptic language.
- David’s throne: God exalted Jesus, son of David to his right hand, enthroning him as Lord, in fulfillment of Ps 110:1.
- call to repentance: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (2:38-39).

The church was born that day: 3000 people. A new fellowship of Jews who had been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, centered in Jerusalem and the temple.

B. Judea and Samaria (Acts 8-12)

After the stoning of Stephen a great persecution arose against the church (*ekklēsia*, first use of term 8:1) in Jerusalem, so that all except the apostles were scattered (διασπείρω) throughout Judea and Samaria, where they went about

preaching the word (8:1-4).

1. Philip the deacon (8:5-40)

1. to Samaria (8:5-13). After hearing, the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to check (8:14-25).
2. sent by an angel to meet an Ethiopian eunuch on the Jerusalem–Gaza road (8:26-39). The Ethiopian was presumably a Gentile God-fearer; as a eunuch, excluded from the inner courts of the temple. Philip found him reading Isa 53:7-8; beginning with this Scripture told him the gospel about Jesus. The eunuch was baptized; cf. Isa 56:3-5, the foreigner and eunuch was now included.
3. carried by Spirit to Azotus (Ashdod), preaching in all the towns from there to Caesarea where he settled.

2. Interlude: Saul (9:1-31)

God converted the most ardent instrument of the great persecution, to be his own instrument.

The Lord's purpose for Saul: "he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (9:15).

Saul immediately proclaimed Jesus in the Damascus synagogues, proving Jesus was the Christ. Learning of a plot to kill him he was lowered over the city wall in a basket, escaping to Jerusalem. Here, too, he preached boldly and disputed with the Hellenists who sought to kill him. So the Jerusalem church sent him home to Tarsus, and peace came to the church

3. Peter

1. Lydda: healed Aeneas (9:32-35). Preached in Lydda and the Sharon plain.
2. Joppa: raised Tabitha/Dorcas, a disciple, stayed with Simon the tanner (9:36-43).
3. Caesarea: Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, a God-fearer, after a vision summoned Peter from Joppa. Meanwhile Peter, too, had seen a vision of animals let down in a sheet; he refused to eat anything common (κοινός) or unclean (ἀκάθαρτος ~~ἄκαθαρτος~~). Peter told Cornelius and those he had gathered in his house, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean" (10:28). The Holy Spirit came, even on the Gentiles to the amazement of the Jews (10:45). Peter stayed several days with Cornelius, implying he ate with him. When Peter returned to Jerusalem the circumcision party criticized him for eating with uncircumcised men (11:3). After Peter's explanation they concluded, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life" (11:18).

4. Antioch (11:19-29)

Other believers scattered from Jerusalem had preached to Jews in Phoenicia, Cyprus, Antioch. Some from Cyprus and Cyrene who had come to Antioch preached the Lord Jesus also to Hellenistic Gentiles, and a great number believed (11:20-21). On hearing, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to investigate; he fetched Saul from Tarsus. In Antioch the disciples were first called Christians (Χριστιανοί).

Conclusion:

- in the OT the scattering of God's people was judgment. But in Acts God scattered his people to preach Jesus, bringing blessing.
- This witness throughout Judea and Samaria was a haphazard ministry led by the Spirit. The apostles and deacons were not expecting the community of faith to expand to God-fearers and Gentiles.

C. The ends of the earth (13-28)

The church in Antioch became the base of outreach to the Gentiles beyond the Levant.

Prompted by the Spirit the leaders sent out Barnabas and Saul, assisted by John. They preached in synagogues:

- a. Cyprus: Salamis, Paphos. Saul (Hebrew name) becomes Paul (Roman name, 13:9), signifying start of Gentile ministry.
- b. Pisidian Antioch: initial enthusiasm on two sabbaths, but opposition arose. Paul announces that in face of Jewish rejection they are turning to the Gentiles in fulfillment of Isa 49:6. The Gentiles rejoice on hearing this.

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- c. Iconium: many Jews and Greeks believe; more Jewish opposition.
- d. Lystra: Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and stirred up trouble.
- e. Derbe

The Jerusalem Council (15)

Paul and Barnabas reported back to the Antioch church how God “had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (14:27). But some of the circumcision party in Judea came to Antioch, teaching, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (15:1). The Antioch church sent Paul, Barnabas and some others to discuss the matter with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

The issue: do Gentiles who have come to faith in Christ have to become Jewish (circumcision etc.) to be saved?

Peter and Barnabas & Paul reported on God’s work through them among the Gentiles.

James (Jesus’ brother), though himself scrupulous about keeping Torah (Josephus, Eusebius), declared the Gentiles did not have to become Jews. Their coming to faith was in accord with OT prophecy, Amos 9:11-12. God had started to rebuild David’s fallen tent. But, out of sensitivity to Jewish residents of their cities they should avoid four things: food offered to idols, blood (meat with blood in it), strangled meat (blood still in it), sexual immorality (*porneia*).

The Jerusalem leadership wrote this in a letter, sending it to Antioch with Silas when Paul, Barnabas returned. They read the letter to the Antioch church. Then Paul and Silas set off on the second missionary journey to read the letter to the churches established on the first journey: Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch.

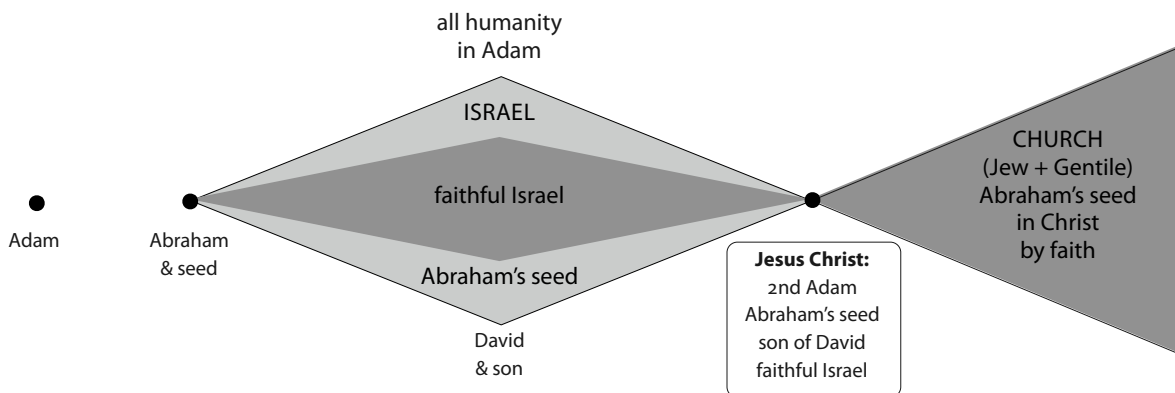
II. The Epistles

A. The Seed of Abraham

The Seed and the seed

God promised Abraham a seed (זֶרַע *zera*^c sing. or collective): a son and descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth, the stars in the sky. The seed singular was Isaac though whom was birthed the seed (collective), Israel (the sons of Israel).

Paul’s argument in Gal 3:15-29. The promises were made to Abraham and his seed (singular), referring to Christ (3:16, 19). The seed is Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham. But through him is birthed the seed (collective): those who belong to Christ, marked by faith: “if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (3:29)



Characterized by faith

It is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham, the man of faith (Gal 3:7, 9).

Jew-Gentile distinction abolished

The Gentiles were “alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise” (Eph 2:12). But in Christ God has broken down the dividing wall (μεσότοιχον middle wall, Eph 2:14), making two peoples into one new one. Two ways of considering this:

1. a new humanity, a third human race (after Jew, Gentile)
2. Gentile believers absorbed into believing Israel

B. The Torah

Torah came 430 years after the promise (Gal 3:17). The promise is of faith (it required faith to believe it), but the law is not of faith (Gal 3:12).

Torah brings curse (Gal 3:10).

Nevertheless the Torah had a good purpose as a tutor, guardian (παιδαγωγός pedagogue) for Israel:

1. guide for Israel's life
2. lead to Christ

C. The Temple

The church is God's temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21), a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph 2:22).

D. The Land