

# THE FIRST CHURCH IN THE WORLD

The Book of Acts

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October 28, 2018

**Note:** The following are the pastor's notes used in preaching this message. This is not a complete, word-for-word transcription of what was preached. These notes serve as a companion to the complete message, which is available by listening to the audio version. Bible quotes are primarily from NASB.

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My first church – West Hills – Hutch – Magnolia – Ministry

Where did it all begin? – what was the first church in the world? – Why? How? – Acts tells us – Acts is history – not doctrine – contains history of first three decades of the church – many call this the “Acts of the Apostles” – could be “Acts of the Holy Spirit” – book of transition – Jesus to disciples – Old Testament to New Testament – Israel to the church age – single culture to multi-cultural – local to world-wide – Jews to Gentiles – explains our position in the church age

Written by Luke – only mentioned three times in New Testament – all come from Paul when he was in prison and mention Luke's presence – he was a close friend and traveling companion of Paul – careful writer (Luke 1:1) – wrote “2 Acts” to “*most excellent Theophilus*” – important Roman official who had become a Christian

Date – persecution under Nero or the destruction of Jerusalem never mentioned – along with the abrupt end of Acts points to 60-62 A.D. as date of writing – before the end of Paul's first imprisonment waiting trial before Caesar

## I. JESUS LEAVES

### A. Context

Acts opens after the resurrection – Acts 1:3 – “*To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*” – gave command of Acts 1:7-8 then ascended to heaven in Acts 1:9-11

### B. Command

Disciples thought this was the beginning His earthly kingdom – Acts 1:6 – “*...Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?*” – still thought politically – Jesus sets the parameters for new age with a new command – Acts 1:7-8 – “*He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority . . .’*” – we would do well to remember this – obsession with Jesus' return is fruitless venture – Acts 1:8 – “*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*”

Many mistakes regarding this passage – emphasis only on the “*remotest part of the earth.*”

- Jewish evangelism – nearest – first priority
- Samaritan evangelism
- The rest of the world evangelism

## II. THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES

### A. The promise

Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit – John 14:16 – “*I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.*” – Holy Spirit is not merely an influence – third person of the Trinity – complements the work of the Father and the Son – same essence – “*another*” – “*allos*” – “another of the same kind” – not “*heteros*” – “another of a different kind”

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## B. The presentation

God moves quickly and dramatically – turning point in history – Old Testament to New Testament – ministry of the Son to the Holy Spirit – begins “time of the Gentiles” – first through the coming of Holy Spirit – Acts 2:1-4

- Day of Pentecost – “fiftieth” – refers to Harvest Feast celebrated 50 days after the Feast of Weeks (Harvest) – One of three annual feasts when all Jews were to come to Jerusalem – Leviticus 23:20 refers to offering of first fruits given – Holy Spirit was given on this day to picture first fruit of believer’s inheritance – Holy Spirit promised as a pledge in Ephesians 1:11
- Acts 2:2 – “*And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind...*” – “Spirit” and “wind” are the same word – dramatic picture of the active role of the Holy Spirit coming in the church age – Jesus promised this – John 14:26; 15:26
- Acts 2:3 – “*And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.*”

## C. The practice

Big question – Is this normative? – should we expect same kind of phenomenon? – Greatest problem in the church today – Promise Keepers – prayed for wind and fire – kicking old lady in the stomach to receive Holy Spirit – slaying in the Spirit – laughing revival

No – why? – Eight reasons:

1) Tongues were languages – Acts 2:6 – everyone listening to the disciples were hearing “*...in his own language...*” – not ecstatic utterance – no biblical basis for unrecognizable speech uttered in devotion to God – 1 Corinthians 14:6 – “*...if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?*” – language! – 1 Corinthians 14:9 – “*...unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.*” – 1 Corinthians 14:11 – “*If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me.*” – 1 Corinthians 14:12 – so we are to “*...seek to abound for the edification of the church.*”

2) Confirmed the words of the Apostles – This was for a particular time and a particular reason – Hebrews 2:3-4 – the gospel was given – then “*...After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*” – 2 Corinthians 12:12 – “*The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles.*” – the phenomenon of tongues and gifts that occurred in Jerusalem on and around the day of Pentecost was to affirm the spoken word of the Apostles – 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 gives the order and practice of “sign” gifts – “*And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?*” – “sign” gifts were confined to the apostles to authenticate their ministry – 1 Corinthians 12:31 – “*But earnestly desire the greater gifts.*”

3) Sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel – 1 Corinthians 14:21 – Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11-12 – “*...By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me,’ says the Lord.*” – Romans 11:11-14 indicates the disbelief of the Jews opened the way for salvation for Gentiles to make Israel jealous – tongues were the first institutional sign that the gospel was for Gentiles too – Acts 2:9-11 – “*Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.*” – these were all Gentile nations

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4) Not a second experience after salvation – Romans 7 – all believers have all of the Holy Spirit all the time – if you don’t have the Holy Spirit you are not a Christian – we are to seek the “*filling of the Spirit*” but this is not tongues or an emotional experience – “*filling*” refers to boldness in proclamation – Acts 2:4 – the disciples were already believers – “*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.*” – same thing in Luke 1:15, 16 – unique case – angel Gabriel tells Zacharias that the baby in his wife’s womb “*...will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother’s womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.*” – Luke 1:41 – “*When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.*” – Luke 1:42 – Then she “*...cried out with a loud voice...*” in a song of praise – Luke 1:67 – Zacharias “*...was filled with the Holy Spirit...*” and began to preach – every place where the “*filling of the Holy Spirit*” is used in the New Testament it is accompanied by bold proclamation of God’s Word – it is never seen as a personal emotional experience

5) Further expressions of tongues in Acts was to authenticate the gospel – Acts 10 – Cornelius received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues – first Gentile – Acts 19:1-7 – 12 disciples of John received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues when Paul explained who Jesus was to them

6) No further commands – Paul wrote 13 gospels – Galatians (49 A.D.) – 1 and 2 Corinthians (55 or 56 A.D.) – the other ten epistles were all written after 1 and 2 Corinthians – if tongues were so important, why weren’t they mentioned in any of his later epistles? – even the pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus in 62-64 A.D.), which laid out specific instructions for the order of the church, contained no mention of “sign” gifts

7) Tongues ceased on their own – 1 Corinthians 13:8 – “*...but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease...*” – middle indicative – on their own!

8) No further expression of sign gifts for 1900 years until the abusive use of Azusa Street in 1906

The point – we need the Holy Spirit – not tongues!

### **III. THE BIRTH OF THE CHURCH – Acts 2:14-47**

#### **A. The anticipation of the church – Acts 1:9-26**

Acts 1:9 – Jesus ascends to heaven – disciples return to upper room – group of 120 made up of disciples, women who were devoted to Jesus – His mother and brothers and other followers of Jesus – select Matthias to succeed Judas – and wait! – God’s move

#### **B. The founding of the church – Acts 2:1-47**

With the coming of the Holy Spirit everything kicking into a new gear:

- Acts 2:14-41 – Peter preached first sermon of church age – 3,000 saved
- Acts 2:42 – “*They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*” – everything changed – didn’t become less Jewish – Acts 2:46 – “*...continuing with one mind in the temple...*” – went there to praise God, teach, and tell others – they became whole new group – Christians – took over their lives – apostles did many “*wonders and signs*” – took meals together – ministered to physical needs
- Acts 2:47 – they were “*praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*”

#### **C. The growth of the church – Acts 3:1-8:3**

The church exploded –

- Acts 3:1-10 – lame beggar healed – Acts 3:8 – “*...he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.*”
- Acts 3:11-4:37 – Peter’s second sermon – Peter and John arrested, threatened, and released

- Acts 5 – church purified – first case of church discipline – Ananias and Sapphira killed – lied to Holy Spirit about property they sold and said they were giving proceeds to the church – Acts 5:11 – “...*great fear came over the whole church...*” – first time “church” is used
- Acts 6 – priorities of leadership – Hellenistic (Greek oriented) Jewish widows were overlooked in benevolent needs – pick seven men – Acts 6:4 – “...*we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*”
- Acts 7 – One of the seven begins to preach – explains God’s story from Abraham to children of Israel in captivity to Moses to David to the prophets – Acts 7:51 – “...*You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.*” – Became first martyr
- Acts 8 – Saul comes on the scene – persecutes the church
- Acts 9 – Saul miraculously converted – began to preach – church grew
- Acts 10 – Peter receives vision sheet coming down out of sky with all kinds of animals – no more dietary laws – gospel is to go to Gentiles – Cornelius converted and receives Holy Spirit just like Jews did – Acts 10:43 – Peter preaches “...*everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.*”
- Acts 11 – unwieldy growth – apostles gather and hear reports of what God is doing among Gentiles – Acts 11:18 – “...*When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, ‘Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.’*”
- Church persecuted – scattered – grows
- Acts 12 – Herod Agrippa “...*had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.*” – arrested Peter – miraculously freed – Acts 12:23 Herod “...*did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died.*” – Acts 12:24 – “...*But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.*”

Dave’s dedication – thinking back on ours – very emotional – not the building! – now I’m just an attender – see its importance

#### IV. THE MISSIONARY CHURCH

The role of the church and the role of missions is intertwined in Acts – church is formed then the church is extended – pattern of Paul – evangelize (preach) – edify (disciple) – appoint elders – move on – this is the pattern for missions

##### A. Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–14:28)

Change in Acts from local to regional – Acts 13:1-3 – first missionaries – the extension of the church – Acts 11:26 – Antioch church was started by Barnabas and Paul – first time *Christians* was used:

- Missions is the natural extension of the work of the church – missions is not humanitarian aid, educational enterprise, or business venture – evangelism and discipleship is the work of the church – same with missions – presumes they have common language and the Bible in their language
- Missions flows from the leadership of the church – not mission agencies
- Missionaries are “*set apart*” by the call of the Holy Spirit – they were already ministering – not everyone goes – some want to make everyone a missionary – New Testament missionaries are foreign pastors – sent to evangelize, plant churches, train leaders
- Missionaries are “*sent . . . away*” – Acts 13:4 – “...*when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*” – they sent Paul and Barnabas – their very best

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## Paul's first missionary journey:



- Started with local, familiar people – synagogue in Salamis
- Encountered persecution – Elymas the magician
- Acts 13:16 – Paul always preached – explained flow of God's working from familiar to the gospel
- Acts 13:43 – great response but stirs up jealousy from Jews
- Acts 13:48 – *"When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."*
- Same pattern in Iconium, Lystra – Paul preached, some believed, stoned and left for dead
- Acts 14:23 – *"When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."*
- Went on to Pisidia, Perga, Pamphylia, Attalia – reversed field and went back to check on churches

### B. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–35)

For anyone who says that doctrine is not important, they need to read Acts 15 – Jerusalem Council – model for doctrinal discernment – Acts 15:1 – key issue – *"Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.'"* – Do you have to keep Old Testament law – obey dietary laws – make sacrifices, etc. – or do you repent and believe in Jesus?

3 speeches given to defend the gospel:

1) Peter – Acts 15:7-11 – *"...God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. . . And God . . . made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith . . . we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."* – not by the law, not by works, not by merit – grace alone

2) Paul and Barnabas – Acts 15:12 – *"...related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles."*

3) James – Jesus' brother – formerly non-believer – Acts 15:13-21 – quotes Amos 9:11-12 – speaks of Gentiles in the millennial kingdom – they did not become Jewish proselytes – no need for rituals



Conclusion – rituals of Old Testament law were not necessary for salvation – hard doctrine! – I am amazed some say we don't need doctrine! – There is no Christian faith in the absence of “sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:9), “sound instruction” (1 Timothy 6:3), or the “pattern of sound teaching” (2 Timothy 1:13-14) – some pastors say this! – Titus 1:9 – pastors are to “...exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” – If a pastor can't do this he should resign – if the Jerusalem Council were held today most American pastors would be regarded as heretics!

Mission kid – “Kids here know more about pop culture.” – Do you ever read any theological book – or just stare at your phone!!

### C. Paul's Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36–18:22)

Paul's second missionary journey:

- Acts 15:36 – Paul said “...Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.”
- Problem of partnerships – Acts 15:37-41 – Barnabas wanted to take his cousin Mark – Paul said no – he had been with them on first trip – defected in Acts 13:13 – Paul and Barnabas split – but in Acts 16:1-3 Paul found Timothy – trusted companion and pastor of Ephesus
- Closed doors – Acts 16:6 – they were “...forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them...” – don't know why – some places are closed by God – many “closed access” countries today – we still go – don't talk about some – Keith – “wouldn't be here for one second . . .”
- Open doors – Acts 16:9 – man in a vision said, “...Come over to Macedonia and help us.” – Mangel – Acts 16:10 – concluded that “God had called us to preach the gospel to them.”
- Acts 16:14 – Lydia becomes first convert of millions in Europe!
- Paul and Silas imprisoned – Philippian jailer converted
- Founded church in Thessalonica – fled to Berea
- Acts 17 – Sermon on Mars Hill in Athens – Acts 17:30 “...God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent.” – last year in Athens our guide asked about this – still the same for him
- Acts 18 – preached for one and a half years in Corinth



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## D. Paul's Third Missionary Journey (Acts 18:23–21:16)

Paul felt the need to return to Jerusalem – took Aquila and Priscilla with him – other leaders had developed in Corinth – Acts 19 – ended up in Ephesus:

Paul's third missionary journey:



Paul's time in Ephesus was significant:

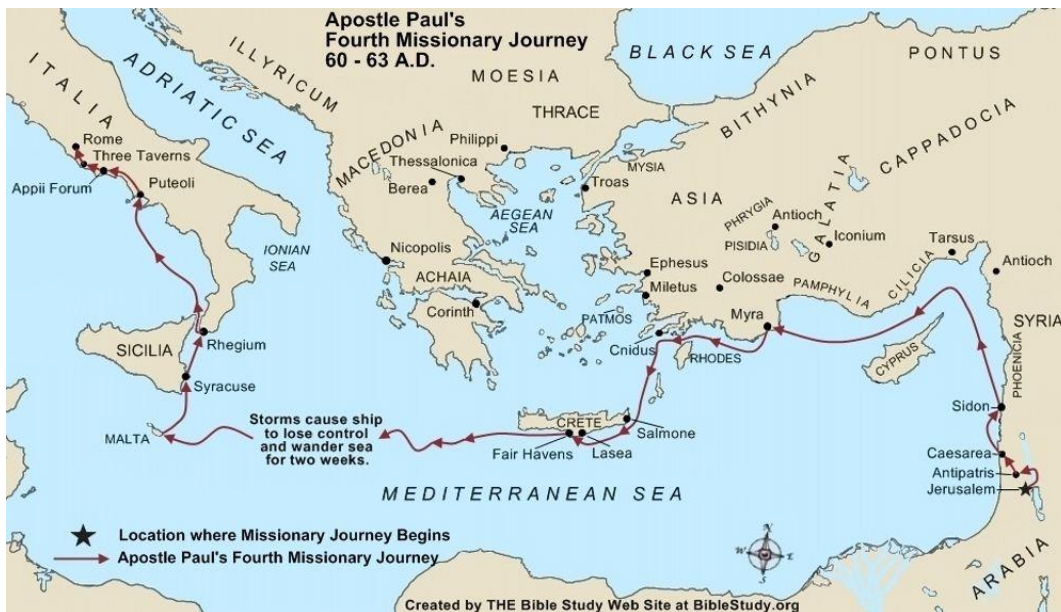
- Acts 19:9 – established “*school of Tyrannus*” – committed to training future pastors – first seminary
- Acts 19:11 – miracles of healing and cleansing of evil spirits turned many to Christ – affected the economy of the city when people gave up religious trinkets of silver honoring Diana – multi-breasted goddess they said fell from the sky – silver shrines made to her – the result of paganism – leads cultures captive
- Acts 19:28 – caused riot – thousands rushed into amphitheater chanting “...*Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.*” – for two hours (Acts 19:34)
- Acts 20:1 – Paul leaves – goes to Macedonia and Greece – on to Philippi – visited Troas and Miletus
- Acts 20:17 – sent for elders of Ephesus – gave clear warning – Acts 20:28-30 – “*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.*” – breaks the heart of any pastor to see people led astray from the faith – to see parents more concerned about little league, soccer, college, etc. than the church – to see men and women grow cold because they won't enter into growth in a local church

## E. Paul's journey to Rome (Acts 21:17-28:31)

Paul returns to Jerusalem – arrested – Acts 22:1-21 – told story of his conversion – they listened until he got to the part about going to the Gentiles – Acts 22:22 – “...*Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!*” – stretched him out to beat him – Acts 22:25 – “...*Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?*”

- Acts 23:1 – brought before Sanhedrin

- Acts 23:11 – God’s purpose in missions – *“But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, ‘Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.’”* – God had plans for the gospel to be spread to Rome – through Paul the prisoner!
- Acts 23:23 – moved to Caesarea – Acts 23:24 – to Felix, governor of Judea
- Two years passed in jail – abandoned? – gospel stopped?
- Acts 25 – Felix succeeded by Festus – Paul made his defense – demanded trial before Caesar – Acts 25:12 – *“...to Caesar you will go.”*
- Acts 25:13 – Herod Agrippa arrived in Caesarea – same one who killed James, brother of John – Acts 25:23 – entered the auditorium and heard Paul’s defense
- Acts 26:2-23 – Paul’s defense of the gospel – Acts 26:24 – *“...Your great learning is driving you mad.”* – Acts 26:25, 26 – *“...I am not out of my mind . . . the king knows about these matters . . . for this had not been done in a corner.”* – Agrippa replied *“...In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”*
- Acts 26:31 – pronounced Paul “not guilty” – but honored his request as Roman citizen – sent to Rome
- Acts 27-28 – Paul set sail for Rome, shipwrecked on Malta
- Acts 28:11 – arrived in Rome – house arrest – Acts 28:24 – *“Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.”* – Acts 28:31 – ends with Paul *“preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.”*



Acts 1:8 – *“...you shall be My witnesses . . .”* – through the church – it grieves me to see a callous attitude toward the church – also grieves me to see churches who foster that attitude – the lax attitude of the 21<sup>st</sup> century church undoes the work of the Holy Spirit in Acts by unchecked heresies and lack of commitment to the church – Francis Schaeffer **“One cannot explain the explosive dynamite, the dunamis, of the early church apart from the fact that they practiced two things simultaneously: orthodoxy of doctrine and orthodoxy of community in the midst of the visible church, a community which the world can see.”**<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Al R. Mohler, Jr., “Church Discipline: The Missing Mark” in John Armstrong, *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 183.



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## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How did the first church get started?
2. What are the implications of Acts 1:7-8?
3. What happened in Acts 2:1-13? Is this normative for today?
4. What was the pattern of the early church according to Acts 2:42-47?
5. What was the main issue of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1-12, and what was their conclusion in Acts 15:13-21?
6. How do you regard the church?