



Lesson 1: TESTAMENT

The First Generation & The New Testament Historical Record



Foretelling the Church: God's Grafting In

- While the focus of most of the Old Testament is on Israel as God's chosen people, the focus begins to shift more with the coming fall of Israel and Judah, and the proclamations of the prophets, particularly Isaiah, to the inclusion of the Gentiles—non-Jews, and people of a multitude of nations—in God's redemptive work.
- This is not to the exclusion of Jewish believers who accept Christ as the promised Messiah and themselves become Christians, but in addition to—"grafted in"
- **Isaiah 2:2-4**
- **Isaiah 49:6**
- **Isaiah 56:6-8**
- **Isaiah 60:3**
- **Hosea 2:23**
- **Micah 4:1-5**

Laying the Groundwork for the Church

- **Matthew 16:18**

- Here we read clearly of the building of Christ's church.
- In the future, the Catholic Church (and later the Roman Catholic Church) would claim this verse legitimizes Peter as the first pope; however, deeper reading holds that it is not Peter who is the Rock, but the faithful confession of Christ by believers as the solid rock—Christ, the firm foundation, and faith in Him, on which the church is built.
- In teaching His disciples, as recorded throughout Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Jesus is training them to be the teachers and leaders of the Church following His death, resurrection, and ascension.
- He also foretells hatred by the world and persecution (i.e. **Luke 21:10-19; John 15:18-27**)
- **John 17:20-26:** After praying for Himself and his disciples in the “high priestly prayer”, Jesus prays for all believers who will come to know Him through the disciples’ teaching.
- **Matthew 28:19-20:** The Great Commission—make disciples, baptize, teach—in other words, grow and build up the church.

The New Testament Church Established

- **c. 33 A.D.**
- **Acts 2: The pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost:** the followers of Jesus had been regularly meeting together and awaiting the arrival. The Spirit causes those who it is poured onto to speak in different languages that others can hear and in some cases understand.
- **Acts 2:42ff; 4:32-37: The church established in Jerusalem:** The body of believers continues to meet together, having all things in common, breaking bread together, and meeting together in homes and other places.
- **Acts 6:** In addition to the disciples who were leading the church in Jerusalem (basically fulfilling the function of church elders), 7 helpers are appointed; these are regarded as the first deacons. (Qualifications described in **1 Timothy 3:8-13**)
- **Acts 11:30:** The first time elders are specifically mentioned (Qualifications for elders are described more thoroughly in **1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:2-3**)

The Church Grows in Judea & Persecution Arises

- Ongoing growth is described on multiple occasions, starting with **Acts 2:47**
- Early on, conversion was centred on Jews in Judea, particularly in and around Jerusalem. Already at this time, we clearly see evangelism, baptism of new believers, discipleship and teaching, and a form of the Lord's table together.
- Preaching and teaching by the disciples in the name of Jesus, proclaiming Him as the promised Messiah was met with opposition and growing persecution by Jewish zealots and their leaders:
 - **Acts 4:1-22:** First arrests of Peter & John, forced appearance before the Jewish Council, and threats
 - **Acts 5:17-42:** Second arrests, miraculous escape, detained again and appear before the Council again, beaten, warned again not to continue. (This passage also includes the prophetic proclamation of Gamaliel in **v. 38-39**. ***(Gamaliel was certainly right; Christ's church could not be stopped!)***)
 - **Acts 7:** Stephen is stoned following his powerful sermon, with Saul in attendance.
 - **Acts 8:1-3:** Saul leads aggressive persecution of the church

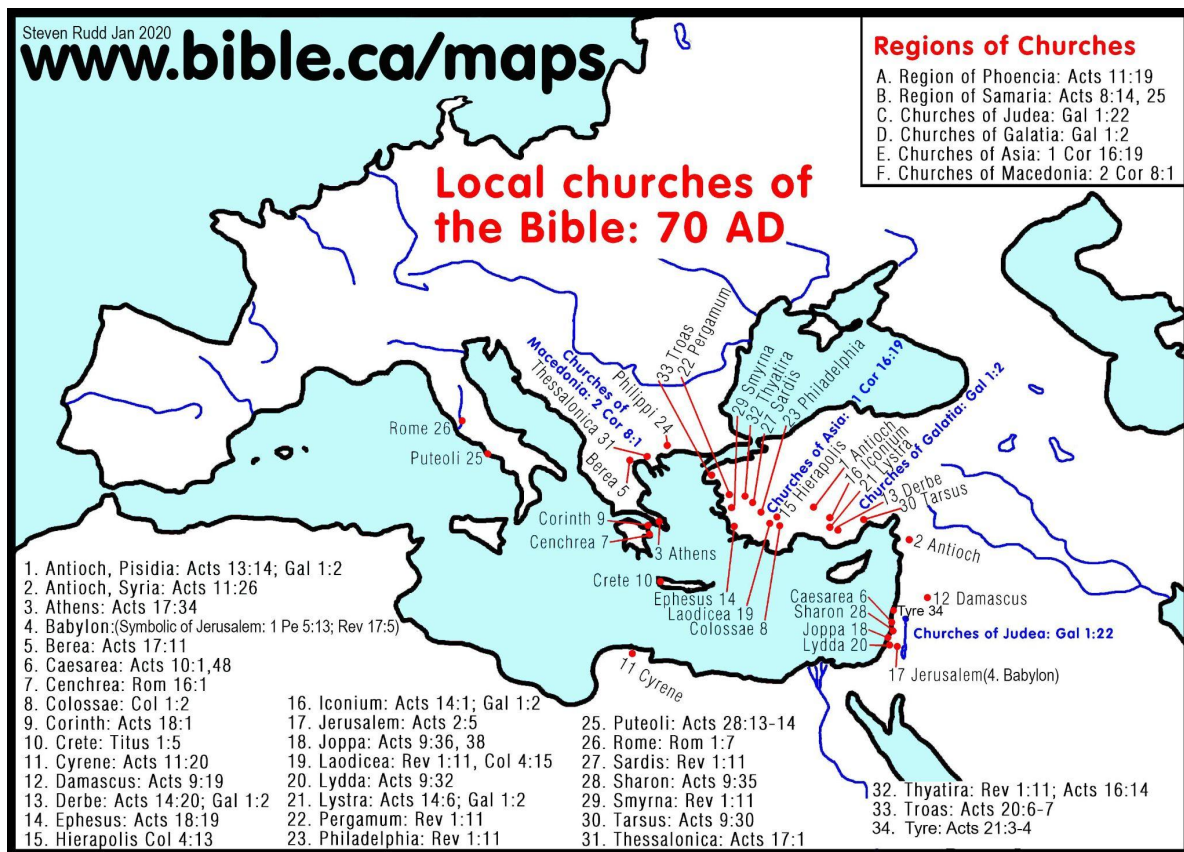
Gentile Conversion

- As persecution ravages the Judean church, the Gospel spreads and we read of the first recorded Gentile conversions.
- Some consider the Ethiopian eunuch in **Acts 8:26ff** to be the first recorded Gentile convert. We are told he was a foreign “God fearer”, but was himself not a Jew by lineage, so he may be considered the first recorded Gentile convert of the church.
- In **Acts 10**, we read of the conversion of Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, and his household.
- And following this, many more Gentile conversions are recorded as the Gospel spreads through Peter, the converted Saul (now called Paul), and other disciples and apostles.
 - More Gentiles in Caesarea (**Acts 10:44-48**)
 - Gentiles throughout Paul’s ministry, who rejoice to receive the Gospel (**Acts 13:47-49**)
 - Lydia & The Philippian Jailer (**Acts 16**)

The Church Grows & Spreads

- Ongoing growth is described on multiple occasions, starting with **Acts 2:47**
- Directly out of the New Testament church at **Jerusalem**, three new churches were established: **Samaria, Caesarea, and Antioch**.
- **Acts 13:1-4** describes the church at **Antioch** sending off Paul on his first missionary journey, along with Barnabas.
- From this and subsequent journeys undertaken by Paul, numerous churches would be established at such places as **Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe** (all in **Galatia**); **Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus**.
- While he wrote what is widely argued to be his most important and famous letter to the Romans, Paul did not establish the church in **Rome**; however, the church in Rome was born early on in Christian history.
- The following map helps to show the location of churches mentioned in the New Testament, c. 70 AD

The Church Grows & Spreads



The Church Grows & Spreads

- Beyond those described in the 23 books of the New Testament canon that follow the Gospels, many more churches were established widely.
- Extrabiblical sources describe the Gospel being preached widely throughout the world by the apostles and bodies of believers being established in such places as:
- **Spain** (James, son of Alphaeus)
- **India** (Thomas)
- **Scythia and other areas of Greece** (Andrew)
- **Phrygia and Hierapolis** (Philip...*who also played a role in the Good News reaching Ethiopia via the Ethiopian eunuch*)
- **Armenia and India** (Bartholomew)
- **Mesopotamia and Persia** (Thaddeus)
- As the church grew and the Good News spread, it was carried far and wide into Asia, Africa, and Europe, some of which is recorded in various written records, and some of which survives in numerous oral traditions.

Some Key Issues & Concerns in the Early Church

Accepting Gentile Converts & Determining Requirements for Them in the Church

- Early on, there was hesitation, resistance, or even resentment by some Jews and Jewish converts to Christianity to Gentile converts who were coming into the church.
- Peter appeared to struggle with this and truly accepting them as equals early on in his ministry as recorded on multiple occasions (i.e. early in **Acts 10**, before his vision and witnessing of the conversion and receiving of the Holy Spirit by Cornelius and the Gentiles in Caesarea; when Paul rebukes him as recorded in **Galatians 2:11-15**)
- In **Acts 15**, we read of the first recorded church council in history, the Jerusalem Council, at which the church fathers deal with questions regarding requirements for Gentile converts after some confusing teaching by some of the brothers. They affirm a very short list that Gentile converts should adhere to, and do not require them to be circumcised or keep the whole law of Moses. **This is important in placing focus on salvation and identity in Christ—not the Jewish law—for all believers.**

Some Key Issues & Concerns in the Early Church

Inadequately Trained and False Teachers

- Similar to the brothers who were teaching the corrected misconceptions addressed at the Jerusalem Council, there was wider concern about both unfit and false teachers—those teaching in error unintentionally, due to inadequate understanding or training, and those who may have been teaching falsely deliberately, out of personal motivation or even desire for power or personal gain.
- **Acts 18:26ff:** Apollos, though a believer, and a gifted and powerful teacher for the Lord, was pulled aside and taught more accurately about the Way, particularly baptism.
- There are numerous warnings, from the Gospels, to Acts, to the epistles, that warn of the dangers of false teachers and not being led astray. False teaching was a real and pressing concern, and why it was so important to have accurate teaching and discipleship, as well as properly affirmed leadership in the churches.

Some Key Issues & Concerns in the Early Church

Persecution

- We will certainly look at this more in future lessons, but already there were multiple persecutions of the church and its leadership.
- The Jewish Council continued to desire to silence the Way, spreading false stories about the body of Jesus being stolen by His disciples to create a resurrection myth (**Matthew 28:11-15**), launching great persecution led by Saul (before his conversion) and others.
- Devout Jews in other places made false accusations about Paul and his fellow workers to stir up crowds against them and get the attention of authorities, leading to their arrests, or persecuted them outright themselves (**Acts 13:50; 14:2; 17:5ff**)
- Gentiles also opposed and attacked Paul and fellow workers (i.e. Ephesus— **Acts 19:23ff**)
- Accusations against Paul ultimately saw him appeal to Caesar to Rome. And as we know (and will examine further) the Roman Empire experienced waves of persecution against Christians, and Paul would be one of many leaders and believers to be martyred.

Deaths of the Apostles—First Generation Church Fathers

- By approximately 95 A.D., after the canon books had been completed, the first generation church fathers had all died. While there are varying accounts in early church tradition, some approximate proposed dates and means found across sources include:
 - James, son of Zebedee (44) Killed with a sword, recorded in **Acts 12**
 - Philip (54) Executed; method not certain but possibly crucifixion
 - Andrew (60) Crucified or “hung from an olive tree”
 - James, son of Alphaeus (62) Thrown from the temple and possibly stoned as well
 - Peter (64) Crucified upside down
 - Matthew (60-65) Beheaded or stabbed to death with a halberd
 - Simon the Zealot (65) Crucified or sawn in half
 - Paul (67) Beheaded
 - Matthias (70) Some sources say burned; others stoned on a cross
 - Bartholomew (70) Crucified
 - Thomas (72) Killed with spears
 - Thaddeus (72) Violently attacked and beaten
 - John (95) Was boiled in oil earlier but survived; later died a natural death

Key Takeaways for Lesson 1

- By the time of the end of the writing of the books of the Bible and the death of the final first generation church father, John c. 95 A.D., the church had grown and spread dramatically from the disciples and first believers in Jerusalem to many established churches across the Roman Empire, and beyond.
- The early church held to the teachings of Christ and His Great Commission—proclaiming the Gospel near and far to all nations, baptizing new believers, teaching and discipling them, and breaking bread together.
- The early church faced issues of unifying Jewish and Gentile converts in orthodox belief, correcting and rebuking false teachers, and persevering amidst persecution from Jews and Gentiles alike—all which had been foretold and taught about by Christ.
- With the deaths of the first generation church fathers, it now falls to the next generation to lead and shepherd the church as it marches forward in history.
- **NEXT WEEK: TRUTH: Next Generations, Controversies, & Orthodoxy in the Early Church**