

THE EARLY CHURCH: APOSTOLIC ACTION

(ACTS)

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. At A Time In History When There Are So Many Denominations, Individuals Grow Up Accepting Religious Division As A Normal Practice Pleasing To God.
- B. When We Return To The Fountainhead Of Religion, However, And Study The Early Church And Apostolic Action, It Becomes Apparent That The Lord Established His Church And The Spread Of The Church In No Way Resembled Denominational Division.
- C. Concerning Apostolic Action In The Early Church As Historically Revealed In The Book Of *Acts*, We Can Easily Divide The Book Into Two Parts:
 1. Chapters 1 - 12 feature the work in which the apostle Peter primarily took the lead in the church.
 2. Chapters 13 - 28 feature the work in which the apostle Paul primarily took the lead in the church.

II. AIM.

- A. To Show The Beginning And Development Of The Church In Jerusalem And Its Expansion To Judea, Samaria And Beyond.
- B. To Reach Some Understanding Of Spiritual Priorities As Seen In The Action Of The Apostles.

III. OUTLINE.

- A. INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF *ACTS*, IDENTIFYING LUKE AS THE ONE INSPIRED TO WRITE THIS HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF THE CHURCH. (1:1-5 cf *Luke* 1:1-4)
- B. THE LORD'S STATEMENT OF WHERE THE CHURCH (KINGDOM) WAS TO BEGIN; HOW IT WAS TO GROW; THE ASCENSION AND PROMISED RETURN OF CHRIST. (1:6-11)
 1. The church (kingdom) to begin in Jerusalem, spread to Judea, Samaria and then to the uttermost part of the earth. (1:8)

2. Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father to receive His kingdom (*cf. Dan. 7:13-14*) and await the appointed time of His second coming. (*1:9-11 cf. 17:31*)
- C. THE APOSTLES RETURNED TO THE CITY OF JERUSALEM TO A-WAIT THE PROMISED POWER. (*1:12-14 cf. Luke 24:49-53; Acts 1:8*)
1. Assembling with the other disciples, Peter took the lead in encouraging that one be appointed to take the place of Judas. (*1:15-25*)
 2. Matthias chosen and numbered with the eleven apostles. (*1:26*)
- D. THE PROMISED COMING KINGDOM (CHURCH) BECAME A REALITY. (*Acts 2*)
1. The coming of promised power, i.e. Holy Spirit. (*2:1-4 cf. 1:8*)
 2. Peter's sermon and result. (*2:14-37*)
 3. The church became a reality when about 3,000 obeyed the terms of entrance. (*2:38-42*)
 4. The unity of the church; a perpetual addition of those who are being saved. (*2:43-47*)
- E. PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH BEGAN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY.
1. Peter and John encountered a man lame from birth whom they healed through the power of Christ. (*3:1-11*)
 2. The miracle of healing afforded an opportunity for preaching Christ. (*3:12-26*)
 - a. Peter and John were imprisoned for preaching the resurrection from the dead through Jesus. (*4:1-4*)
 - b. Peter and John were tried before the Sanhedrin. (*4:5-22*)
 - 1) Those who assembled with the Sanhedrin. (*4:5-7*)
 - 2) Peter took the occasion of his defense to preach salvation in Christ. (*4:8-12*)

- 3) The Sanhedrin was silenced by the presence of the lame man who was standing in their midst completely cured. (4:13-17)
 - 4) The unjustified threats of the Sanhedrin revealed a dishonest heart. (4:18-22)
- c. Peter and John returned to their own company and prayed for courage to continue teaching amid the danger of persecution. (4:23-31)
 - d. The church continued to grow and unify as the apostles taught with great power the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. (4:32-36)
- F. THE FIRST RECORDED DISCIPLINE IN THE CHURCH. (5:1-16)
1. Ananias and Sapphira disciplined for hypocrisy and lying. (5:1-11)
 2. The church continued to increase in number of believers (members) as a result of this discipline. (5:12-16)
- G. A SECOND ARREST AND FURTHER PERSECUTION OF THE APOSTLES. (5:17-42)
1. The miraculous release and renewed teaching. (5:19-21a)
 2. The confusion in the council as a result of the disappearance of the apostles from prison. (5:21b-24)
 3. The apostles continued preaching/teaching in the temple and were arrested for the third time. (5:25-28)
 4. The defense and message of the apostles. (5:29-32)
 5. Death desire of the council restrained by Gamaliel's address. (5:33-39)
 6. An unjust beating: a "last-ditch" effort to stop the apostles from teaching. (5:40)
 7. The apostles counted the knowledge of Christ worth suffering for, and ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ daily. (5:41-42)
- H. AN INTERNAL PROBLEM IN THE CHURCH WAS AVOIDED BY APPOINTING SEVEN DEACONS (SERVANTS).

1. The apostles' primary responsibility to the Word of God and prayer was not diverted. (6:1-7)
 2. The debate, unjust arrest and death of Stephen was used by God to plant His church outside Jerusalem. (Chapter 6 - 8:1a)
- I. THE SPREAD OF THE CHURCH OUTSIDE JUDEA.
1. The apostles remained in Jerusalem while persecuted members scattered and carried the Word (seed). (8:1b-3)
 2. The church was established in Samaria and the apostles were summoned to impart gifts of the Holy Spirit. (8:4-25)
 3. The conversion of the Eunuch, who could carry the seed to Ethiopia. (8:26-40)
- J. THE CONVERSION OF SAUL AND THE EFFECT IT HAD UPON THE CHURCH. (9:1-31)
- K. GENTILES (ALL NATIONS) WERE BROUGHT INTO THE CHURCH THROUGH PETER PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO THEM. (Chapter 10 - 11:18)
1. The character of Cornelius, a Gentile. (10:1-2)
 2. Instructed to send for Peter. (10:3-8)
 3. Peter's vision was preparing him to accept the Gentiles. (10:9-16)
 4. Arrival of the servants and the Spirit's instruction for Peter to accompany them. (10:17-22)
 5. Peter journeyed to the house of Cornelius and heard the explanation for Cornelius sending for him. (10:23-33)
 6. Peter preached Christ to the Gentiles and commanded the house of Cornelius to be baptized into Christ. (10:34-48)
 7. Peter defended his action in going to the Gentiles to the apostles and brethren at Jerusalem. (11:1-18)
- L. CONDITIONS HAVE NOW BEEN MADE READY FOR THE CHURCH TO BE ESTABLISHED IN THE UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH. (11:19 - 12:25)

1. The church which was first established outside Jerusalem as a result of the persecution consisted of converted Jews, but now the gospel was preached to Grecians. (11:19-21)
2. Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to assist the brethren, and he secured the assistance of Saul. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. (11:22-26)
3. Barnabas and Saul were sent to Jerusalem with assistance for the brethren of Judea. (11:27-30)

M. RENEWED, VIOLENT PERSECUTION AGAINST THE CHURCH.

1. James was beheaded and Peter imprisoned again. (12:1-5)
2. Peter was delivered before his execution by an angel of the Lord, and after conferring with the disciples, departed for another place. (12:6-17)
3. Herod moved to Caesarea and died at the hand of an angel of the Lord because of pride. (12:18-23)
4. The Word of God continued to multiply. (12:24)
5. Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch from taking the contribution to Jerusalem. (12:25)

N. THE CHURCH INTO THE UTTERMOST PART OF THE WORLD: PAUL'S WORK AMONG THE GENTILES. (Chapters 13 - 28)

1. The church selects its first recorded "missionaries." (13:1-3)
2. The first missionary tour:
 - a. Preaching on Cyprus. (13:4-12)
 - 1) Preaching to Sergius Paulus and the encounter with a false prophet, Elymas (Bar-Jesus).
 - 2) The miracle of blindness, combined with doctrine of the Lord, produced faith in Sergius Paulus
 - b. Preaching at Antioch of Pisidia. (13:13-52)

- 1) John Mark returned to Jerusalem from Perga in Pamphylia, which later caused trouble between Paul and Barnabus. (13:13 cf. 15:36-40)
 - 2) Preached to the Jews first when they arrived at Antioch. (13:14-43)
 - 3) The jealousy of the Jews turned Paul to the Gentiles. (13:44-52)
- c. Preaching at Iconium resulted in many believers of both Greeks and Jews, but the unbelieving Jews caused such persecution, they had to leave. (14:1-7)
- d. Preaching at Lystra. (14:8-19)
- 1) The miracle. (14:8-19)
 - 2) The initial reaction of the people to Paul and Barnabus. (14:11-13)
 - 3) Paul and Barnabus refused any self-honor and used the occasion to teach and exalt Christ. (14:14-18)
 - 4) The disbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium caused persecution to the extent that Paul was stoned and left for dead. (14:19-20)
- e. Preaching at Derbe and the return to the former places where they had established a congregation of the Lord's church. (14:21-22)
- f. The first recorded appointment of elders: a plurality of elders in each congregation. (14:23)
- g. Paul and Barnabus returned to their home congregation to report on their work. (14:14-28)
3. The dispute over circumcision as a condition of salvation settled. (15:1-35)
 - a. The question raised. (15:1)
 - b. The judgment to settle the question before the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. (15:2-5)

- c. The matter considered.
 - 1) General discussion. (15:6-7a)
 - 2) Peter's statement concerning how God had used him to preach to the Gentiles in the beginning. (15:7b-11)
 - 3) Barnabas and Paul reported God's work among the Gentiles by them. (15:12)
 - 4) The final argument was settled with scripture: James quoted *Amos 9:11-12* as proof that the Gentiles were to be accepted without circumcision, but they were to abstain from: (15:13-21)
 - a) Pollutions of idols.
 - b) Fornication.
 - c) Things strangled.
 - d) Blood.
 - d. Letter written, witnesses chosen and assembly dismissed. (15:22-29)
 - e. Report of outcome given to church at Antioch. (15:30-35)
- 4. Paul and Barnabus separate over John Mark before leaving for second missionary tour. (15:36-41)
- 5. The second missionary journey:
 - a. Paul, Silas and Luke visit some of the congregations established on the first journey and Timothy joins them at Lystra. (16:1-5)
 - b. The vision at Troas. (16:6-10)
 - 1) The need of the gospel in Macedonia.
 - 2) The gospel must be preached to man by man.
 - c. The church established in Philippi. (16:11-40)
 - 1) The conversion of Lydia, the first fruits of Macedonia. (16:11-15)

- 2) Paul and Silas unjustly imprisoned, resulting in the conversion of the jailor and his family. (16:16-34)
 - 3) The release of Paul and Silas and their departure to Thessalonica. (16:35-40)
 - d. The church is established in Thessalonica and Beroea. (17:1-15)
 - e. Paul's preaching at Athens: Sermon on Mars' hill. (17:16-34)
 - f. The church established in Corinth. (18:1-17)
 - g. Paul began his return trip to Antioch via Jerusalem. (18:18-23)
6. Paul returned to Antioch and began his third missionary journey. (18:22-23)
- a. Apollos at Ephesus was instructed more perfectly by Aquila and Priscilla and was given a letter by the church to commend him to others. (18:24-28)
 - b. Paul at Ephesus.
 - 1) Instructing and baptizing the twelve who knew only the baptism of John. (19:1-7)
 - 2) Being rejected by the Jews after three months, Paul sounded out the gospel throughout Asia from the school of Tyrannus. (19:8-22)
 - 3) The uproar caused by Demetrius, the silversmith, because his craft was endangered from so many turning from Diana (Artemis) to Christ. (19:23-41)
 - 4) Paul again visited Greece, and returned to Asia on his return to Jerusalem. (20:1-16)
 - 5) Paul charged the Ephesian elders from Miletus. (20:17-38)
 - 6) The trip to Jerusalem. (21:1-16)
- O. PAUL, THE PRISONER FOR THE LORD. (21:17 - 28:31)

1. Arrived and was well received by the church at Jerusalem. (21:20-26)
 - a. Paul was ill-advised to be at charges for four men who had vows. (21:20-26)
 - b. False charge brought against Paul by Jews, resulting in an uproar endangering Paul's life. (21:27-32)
 - c. Paul was arrested, permitted to address his accusers, but was held in prison because of the reaction to his address. (21:33 - 22:30)
 - d. The trial and plot to kill Paul. (Chapter 23)
2. Paul transferred to Caesarea for safety. (24:1 - 26:32)
 - a. Paul's defense before Felix and Festus. (24:1 - 25:9)
 - b. Paul appealed to Caesar. (25:10-12)
 - c. Paul's defense before Agrippa. (25:13 - 26:32)
3. Voyage to Rome. (27:1 - 28:16)
4. Two years of preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ. (28:17-31)

IV. CONCLUSION.

- A. From Our Study Of The Book Of *Acts*, We Have Seen:
 1. The church established in Jerusalem as Christ had promised.
 2. The church grew from Jerusalem To Judea, Samaria And Then To The Uttermost Part Of The World As The Word (Seed) Was Preached.
- B. The Unity Of The Church Is Stressed In *Acts*, In Sharp Contrast To The Division In Religion Which Is Seen Today.
- C. The Apostolic Action Throughout *Acts* Was To Preach And Teach Things Concerning The Kingdom Of God And Jesus As Lord.