

## Message #28

### “THE EARLY CHURCH – A TIMELY REVIEW”

#### Various Acts verses

In the first 12 chapters, we encounter some of the major themes of Acts and, indeed, God's salvation story. Importantly, we see the establishment of the early Christian church and we track through the early stages of internal “growing pains” and external persecution. From Acts 13:1, we see a major development as the first organized and intentional “missionary” outreach is commenced. So, at this point, it is timely and relevant to review the early church and, in so doing, see what important lessons there are for the modern-day church. In order to do this review we will quickly look at a key verse from each of the first 12 chapters of Acts.

As has been mentioned before, the key verse to the whole book of Acts is **Acts 1:8....** *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

It could be said that everything else that happens in Acts is a developing fulfilment of this command of Jesus. So, let's quickly look at, and contemplate, 12 of the key verses.....

#### ACTS 1:14

Why is praying together so important for the church (then and now)?

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#### ACTS 2:42

What are the four key elements of the church in this verse, and how do they help us grow together?

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#### ACTS 3:19

What does repentance mean to you? Why is it such a necessary part of the Christian experience?

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#### ACTS 4:12

Salvation is only found in Jesus Christ and what He has done for us. What does Jesus mean to you?

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#### ACTS 5:19-20

How can you know when God presents opportunities of service? Why is it important to be obedient?

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#### ACTS 6:15

Have you ever experienced peace, even during a time of stress, persecution, and trial? Explain.

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#### ACTS 7:51

Why do you think God is more interested in our hearts than our actions?

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#### ACTS 8:4

Do you find it harder to share Jesus with others when you are going through a hard time? Why?

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#### ACTS 9:31

How do these marks of a healthy church compare with the way people view churches today?

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#### ACTS 10:15

The Jews had trouble seeing God's love and grace being for the Gentiles, too. Do you struggle with thinking any particular person, or group, could also be a recipient of God's love? Why?

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#### ACTS 11:26

The name “Christian” means “belonging to Christ”. What does that really mean for you?

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#### ACTS 12:5

Do you expect God to answer your prayers, or are you surprised when He does?

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# The Good News Travels

After the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the believers in Jerusalem began to preach boldly and increased in numbers daily (Acts 2:1-47). The Jewish leaders tried to stop them,

but in fact helped the young movement to spread (Acts 4:1-31).

**Stephen**, a leader of the church in Jerusalem, was accused of blasphemy and the Jews had him

stoned to death (Acts 6:1-8:2). Believers in Jerusalem were persecuted, and many fled – south into Judea, north to Samaria, and west to the coast and even as far as Cyprus (Acts 8:1-3, 11:19). Many of the apostles also left Jerusalem and preached elsewhere. Philip, Peter and John all made conversions in Samaria (Acts 8), a 'no-go' area for religious (or 'strict') Jews.

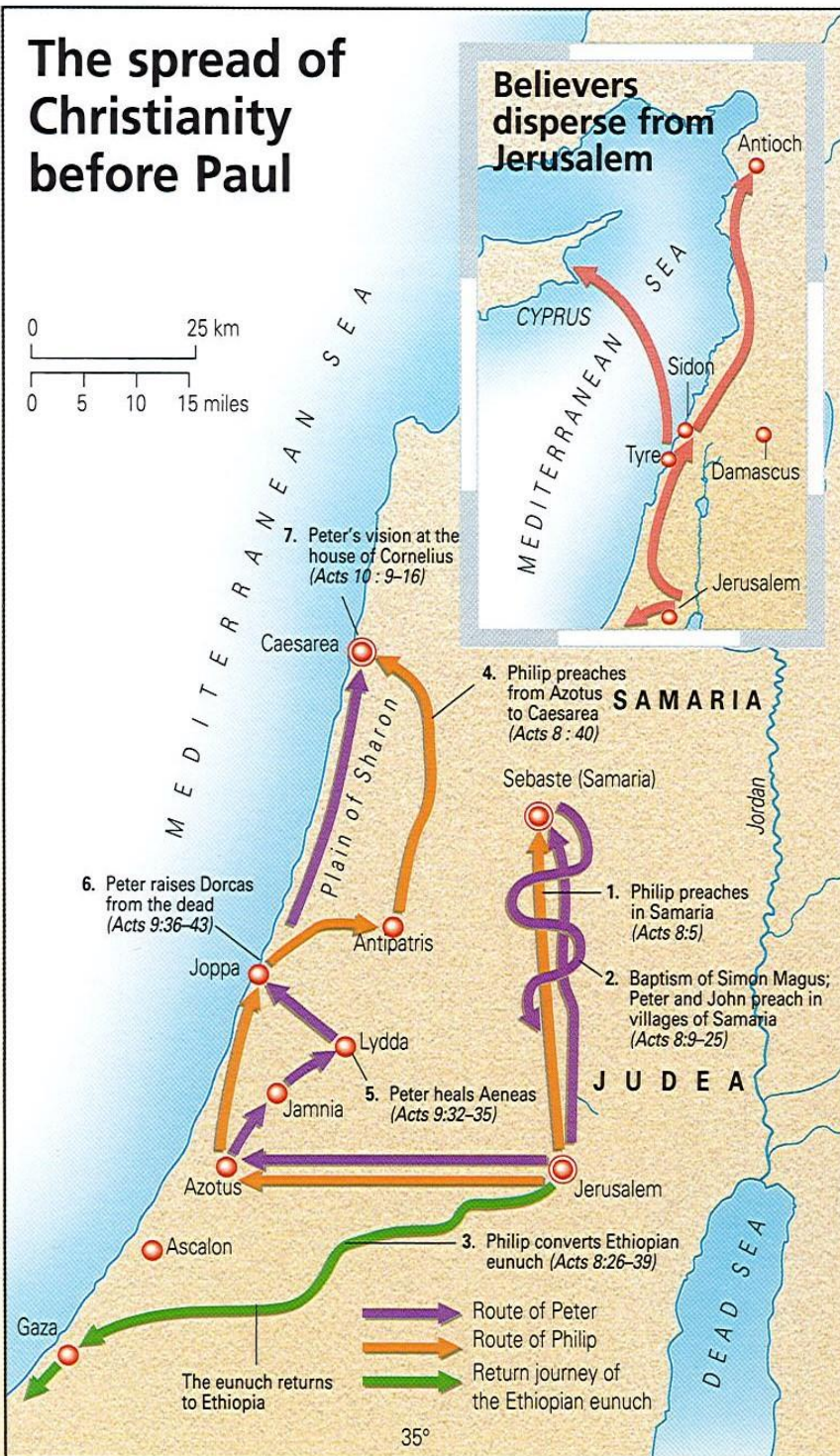
**Philip** set out for Gaza, baptizing an official from Ethiopia, before moving on to preach in the coastal towns (Acts 8:26-40).

**Peter** travelled to Caesarea, where he was shown in a vision that he should take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:1-48). As the persecution of Christians by Jews in Jerusalem became more evident so Jewish Christians dispersed northwards. They had reached as far as Antioch, third largest city in the Roman Empire, by the time Paul embarked on his missionary journeys (Acts 13).

## Paul's Journey to Damascus

Some time after Stephen's death, while Paul (then Saul) was still a Pharisee, he got permission from the Temple authorities to go to Damascus to search out Christians (Acts 9:1-2). It was on the way there that he received his blinding vision of the risen Christ. After regaining his sight in Damascus with the help of Ananias in Straight Street, Paul became a Christian and was himself forced to flee for his life back to Jerusalem (Acts 9:23-26). He was soon in danger again, from Hellenist Jews, and departed for his home town of Tarsus via Caesarea.

## The spread of Christianity before Paul



So, the next section of Acts will see the church focus on its missional commitment. We have seen how the church has been "better together" in its early years and the establishment of its early principles and practices. Now we will start to see that the church is also "better together" as it reaches out in one heart and mind and purpose with the good news of the Gospel.