

LESSON 3

PROBLEMS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

ACTS 4:1-6:7

Introduction

Most scholars say the Church began on the Day of Pentecost. Others say she originated at the time of the Confession at Caesarea Philippi by Peter. A third view holds that the Church came into existence with the association of Jesus and the disciples. Perhaps the germination of the Church occurred at the great Confession in the new relation of faith of the disciples to Jesus as Messiah, but the Church continued in an embryonic stage until the Day of Pentecost. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Church was born and began the process of rapid growth. The early months were filled with joy, harmony, and victory. Many Jews were added to the Church, after the Holy Spirit convicted them of their error in condemning Jesus and they accepted Him as the Messiah.

To accept Jesus as Messiah meant to embrace a new concept of the Kingdom. No longer was the Kingdom expressed in terms of military and political power which would defeat other nations, but it was the power of God that would overcome the forces of Satan. The Kingdom was not to be identified with national boundaries. It did not promise superiority of the Jewish nation over the Gentiles; however, a new life of power and joy in fellowship with God and other believers was offered. The power was adequate to defeat the forces of Satan by bringing healing to afflicted bodies and by delivering souls from the bondage of sin. It was adequate to bring about conquest through witnessing. Those who responded to the message and repented were born again and entered the Kingdom of God. They received the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is difficult to understand the Kingdom of God apart from using the analogy of an earthly kingdom or nation. However, there is always the danger of reducing its nature to the level of an earthly empire.

The Kingdom and the Church are related closely but they are not identical. The Kingdom of God is the rule of God in the hearts and lives of people without geographical or spacial limitations. The Church is composed of Kingdom citizens who assemble together to give organic expression to the Kingdom of God and to carry out the Commission of the Lord. Very little distinction can be made between the universal Church composed of all believers and the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was a Jewish concept and appears to have been used more frequently in speaking to Jews than to Gentiles. The word church comes from a Greek word which means "assembly," and the concept it conveyed was more familiar to the Gentiles. The word was used to translate the concept of "the congregation of Israel" when the Hebrew Old Testament was put into Greek.

The disciples experienced peace, harmony, and victory at first, but they soon were opposed by the threatened Jews who had not believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Problems were not limited to those outside the Church. Soon problems arose within. Although the first sermon of Peter had a universalistic note, the application of its principles to include the Gentiles resulted in a struggle for the Church. Stephen's sermon revealed the new theological precept of universalism which had to be accepted before the Kingdom of God could cross national boundaries. Stephen gave his life for his beliefs.

List three views concerning when the Church actually came into existence.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(on the Day of Pentecost, at the Confession of Peter, with the association of Jesus and the disciples)

Those who responded to the message and repented were born again and entered the _____ of _____. They received the gift of the _____.

(Kingdom, God, Holy Spirit)

READ THE PARAGRAPH THEN MATCH THE WORDS WITH THEIR MEANINGS.

- a. Kingdom b. Church

- ____1. The organic assembly for the purpose of carrying out the Great Commission.
- ____2. The rule of God in the hearts and lives of people.

(1-b, 2-a)

Opposition from the Sadducees

Acts 4:1-22

The rapid growth of Christianity alarmed the Sanhedrin which had to bear the responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus. The Sanhedrin was the chief judicial council of the Jews, but under the Romans its jurisdiction was limited to matters of religion. It was composed of leaders from both parties of the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sadducees were of the aristocratic priestly class. By courting the favour of the Romans, the Sadducees secured their economic and political ambitions. They became fearful that the rapidly growing Christian movement would threaten their relation to Rome if a revolution broke out. Much of their wealth was property which the Romans would seize in the event of a revolution. The Christians were preaching that Jesus, their King, was alive and the Kingdom of God was coming on earth.

The arrest of Peter and John (vv. 1-4)

The Council had control of the Temple police force. Luke mentions that the priests and captains of the Temple and the Sadducees came to arrest Peter and John. Members of the Council were annoyed because Peter and John had assumed the role of religious teachers and had proclaimed that Jesus arose from the dead. Only the Sanhedrin had the authority to recognize official teachers and interpreters of the Mosaic Law.

The preaching of Peter and John not only threatened the position of the Sadducees with Rome, but it challenged the authority of the Jewish leaders over the people. Many people were recognizing Jesus as Lord; this had resulted in less respect for the authority of the Sanhedrin. If Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God, the Sanhedrin had been in error to have judged Him worthy of death. It either had to admit its guilt or stop the preaching of the disciples. The leaders attempted the latter by arresting Peter and John and placing them in prison. Luke notes that the arrest did not prevent many people from believing: the number of men came to about 5,000 (v. 4).

The Sadducees rejected the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead. Since the Pharisees supported this doctrine, its proclamation by the disciples was not sufficient reason to put them in jail. The injured pride of the leaders and the threats to their positions precipitated the action of arresting the disciples.

Five thousand seems to be a large number of believers for such a short time of witnessing. When the total population of Palestine is considered, however, five thousand would comprise only a fraction of a percentage point of the four million population.

The trial of Peter and John (vv. 5-22)

In order to cultivate the good will of the Romans by maintaining order among the Jews, the Sadducees brought Peter and John to trial. The Pharisees welcomed the support of the disciples in the belief concerning the resurrection. The miracle performed by Peter and John in the name of Jesus had excited the people. The leaders decided to crush the movement before it spread further. The two disciples were brought before the Council.

The Sanhedrin was composed of rulers, elders, and scribes. Members of the high priestly family were the rulers. Elders were leading citizens, and the scribes were students of the Law, primarily Pharisees. Caiaphas was the High Priest. His father-in-law Annas had served as High Priest from A.D. 6 to 15 and continued to be considered by some to be the legal High Priest. Although Caiaphas was the official High Priest, Annas continued to exercise great power.

The Sanhedrin was the chief judicial council of the _____ and was composed of _____ and _____. The Sadducees courted the favour of the _____ and opposed the Christians because the Christian movement threatened their _____ and _____ positions.

(Jews, Pharisees, Sadducees, Romans, economic, political)

The Sadducees rejected the doctrine of the _____ of the _____.
(resurrection, dead)

The rulers were members of the high _____.
_____. The elders were _____.
_____. Scribes were students of the _____, primarily _____.
(priestly family, leading citizens, law, Pharisees)

The inquiry began with the challenge of their authority to preach. Peter and John were common men who had not had rabbinical training. The Sanhedrin reserved the right to recognize the official interpreters of the Law. Yet these two men had assumed the role of Rabbis without receiving an official appointment to that office.

The lame man, who had been healed, gave evidence that some miracle had been performed, indicating that God approved the work of the disciples. Peter did not take credit for the miracle. He explained that the power was from Jesus whom the Sanhedrin had rejected and crucified but God had approved by raising Him from the dead. The theology of the Council would not permit them to deny God's hand in the healing of the lame man. Since the lame man stood before them whole, they could not deny that the miracle had taken place. Although the Sanhedrin claimed ultimate religious authority, their decisions were contradicted by God who demonstrated His will in the healing of the lame man. In essence, Peter was saying that his authority came from God rather than from a judicial body which made mistakes.

The Sanhedrin could not rebuke Peter and John for their answer. They had claimed infallible teaching authority and the knowledge of truth. Their lack of formal rabbinical training caused them to be considered as uneducated and common men. They, like their Master Jesus, had been able to refute their accusers. The Sanhedrin could not deny the miracle because the healed man stood before them. Also, such action would have endangered their relation to the people who had become excited about the miracle and the presence of the Kingdom of God. After conferring in private, the Council concluded that it would exercise its authority and prohibit further preaching in the name of Jesus. When its verdict was given to the disciples, Peter and John challenged the Council's authority by questioning whether they were obligated to listen to the Sanhedrin or to God.

Peter and John claimed that their experience in Christ was superior to the teaching of officially approved Rabbis. They understood their task to be giving witness to their visible and audible experiences. A witness is one who shares what he has experienced. A teacher relates what he has learnt from others. Christians can be good witnesses only if they have experienced the reality of God's presence and power. Peter and John experienced these; therefore, they could not refrain from witnessing. Since the Sanhedrin could not deny that their authority came from God, it could only threaten them and let them go. It could not afford to antagonize the people who praised God for the healing of the 40-year-old man.

The Joy of the Church Acts 4:23-31

After their release, Peter and John reported to their friends what the chief priests and elders had said to them. The people rejoiced and praised God because the incident gave evidence that their activities were protected and supported by the Lord who created the heaven and the earth. Although the Sanhedrin was a powerful body, it could not defeat the purpose and plan of God. It had already attempted to crush the movement of Jesus by putting Him to death. Even the death of God's Son could not defeat His purpose. The Kingdom grew more rapidly after the death of Jesus than before. The reference to Psalm 2:1 and 2 expresses the faith of the Christians that all of the wisdom and strength of the enemies could not stand before the Lord and against His Christ (anointed). The Jews and Gentiles (Romans), under the leadership of Caiaphas, Herod, and Pontius Pilate, had attempted to defeat the work of God in Christ, but they had failed. The dis-

Peter and John were accused of preaching without _____
(authorization)

Peter answered the charge by saying his authority came from _____
(God)

The Council told Peter and John not to preach any more in the name of _____. Peter and John questioned whether they should obey the _____ or _____.
(Jesus, Sanhedrin, God)

The Christians rejoiced because God's _____ and _____ could not be defeated.
(purpose, power)

ciples were confident that the opposition would continue to fail; therefore, they did not heed the threats of the Sanhedrin. Instead, they requested the Lord to fill them with boldness to speak His Word and with power to perform miracles in order that Jesus would be honoured. The Lord gave evidence that He answered their prayers. The place was shaken as a manifestation of the filling with the Holy Spirit. The disciples spoke the Word of God with boldness.

It is evident in the first section of Acts that the filling with the Holy Spirit is not a once-for-all experience. The disciples were filled on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:4). This was the fulfilment of the "promise of the Father" and the prediction by John the Baptist that Jesus would baptize His disciples with the Holy Spirit. Peter was among those who were filled on that occasion; however, he needed another filling when he stood before the Sanhedrin (cf. Acts 4:8). Peter was also numbered with those who were filled after the prayer for boldness and power (cf. Acts 4:31).

The filling with the Spirit does not cause a loss of rationality nor is it primarily an emotional experience. The experience gives confidence and boldness to speak the Word of God. The filling with the Holy Spirit brought joy to the new Christians and a desire to share with the unconverted that they were experiencing in the Lord. The experience seems to have enabled them to grasp a deeper understanding of the meaning of the Resurrection and the power of the Kingdom of God. Unfortunately, many times emotionalism or irrationality are substituted for the genuine experience of filling with the Spirit. Peter was never more rational and controlled than when he was filled with the Spirit and spoke before the Sanhedrin. The experience gave him boldness and the assurance that God was present in power to establish His words and to bring about results.

**A Summary of the Circumstances of the Believers
and the Example of Barnabas
Acts 4:32-37**

Luke affirms again the unity of the believers. Opposition from the Sanhedrin had not divided them nor hindered their work. Often churches are defeated because the members are divided as a result of jealousy and selfishness. The power of the Spirit delivered the disciples from these destroying attitudes. Instead, they possessed a concern and love for one another which caused them to share voluntarily their possessions. The Apostles continued to share their testimony in the power of the Holy Spirit. Their new life in the Kingdom was characterized by joy and abundance as they continued to experience the grace of God.

It appears that poverty soon overtook the Christians of Jerusalem. Perhaps those who opposed the spread of Christianity applied economic pressure to them. The embracing of Christianity frequently results in the breaking of social ties and the exclusion from the economic system. Non-Christians may have refused to employ Christians or to trade with them. The needy persons in the early Church were not neglected since those who possessed lands or houses sold them and gave the revenue to the Apostles for distribution to those who had need.

Luke introduces a disciple of extraordinary devotion whose name was Joseph and who was surnamed Barnabas by the Apostles. The name means "son of encouragement." Barnabas played an important role in the early Church; however, he was overshadowed by his more illustrious companion Paul. It should not be overlooked that Barnabas stood by Paul when other disciples were fearful of him and rejected him. He also gave encouragement to John Mark.

TRUE OR FALSE? According to Acts, the filling of the Holy Spirit is a once-for-all experience. _____

List three times when Peter was filled with the Spirit.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Day of Pentecost, before the Sanhedrin, after praying for boldness and power)

The filling of the Spirit gives _____ and _____ to speak the Word of God.

(confidence, boldness)

The early Christians had a _____ and _____ for one another which caused them to share their _____ voluntarily.

(concern, love, possessions)

Perhaps the name Barnabas was given to Joseph because his sale of land and gift of money to the poor were a great consolation to those in need. He was a wealthy man from Cyprus who placed at the disposal of the Apostles the revenue from property he sold. His generosity was not motivated by a desire for honour and recognition; all evidence indicates that he was a man who was guided by pure motives of love and concern and a desire to honour his Lord. Barnabas was aware of the needs of others, and his unselfish nature responded by attempting to meet those needs. The contemporary Church is in need of many more Barnabases.

The Deception of Ananias and Sapphira Acts 5:1-11

Ananias and Sapphira were impressed by the piety of Barnabas and the praise given him. Coveting the same recognition and honour which Barnabas had received, they too sold a piece of property, but they deposited only part of the revenue with the Apostles for distribution to the poor. They pretended to give the full sale price.

It was customary for one to be buried on the day of his death, but it was unusual that Ananias was buried without his wife's knowledge (v. 7). Three hours after the burial of Ananias, Sapphira appeared before Peter. He inquired of her whether the land had been sold for the price indicated by Ananias. She confirmed the statement. Peter's response contained three shocking truths:

1. Her deception which implicated the Holy Spirit was exposed.
2. The death and burial of her husband was made known to her.
3. She was informed that she likewise would be carried out and buried.

Sapphira died immediately and was buried beside her husband.

The deaths of Ananias and Sapphira may have resulted from the shock of being exposed. The fact that both died suddenly indicates their deaths cannot be explained simply by natural causes; however, God is able to use the natural to accomplish His purpose. The incident does emphasize the danger of hindering the Church and implicating the character of the Holy Spirit in unrighteous acts. Jesus warned that the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven. The lies of Ananias and Sapphira are the reverse of the sin of the Pharisees who attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to the devil. Ananias and Sapphira were attributing the work of Satan to the Holy Spirit. In either event, the attempt to misuse divine power is dangerous.

Peter explained that Ananias and Sapphira were not required to sell the property and to make the revenue available to the poor. Even after it was sold, there was no obligation to give the full amount for distribution. They could have decided to give only a portion to the Church; that would have been a noble act. Their great sin was hypocrisy—pretending to give more than they did. They were living a lie. Peter further pointed out they lied to the Holy Spirit. Apparently they had claimed that the Holy Spirit had inspired them to sell the property and to give the sale price to the poor. He said that their lie was not to men but to God. They had attempted to make the Holy Spirit a party to their own crime.

Verse 11 contains the first reference in the Book of Acts to the new community of believers as a church. The Authorized Version uses "churches" in Acts 2:47; however, the Greek word *ekklesia* is not used. It states that the Lord was adding to the "saved group" daily those who were being saved. In the Greek

Barnabas was a wealthy man from _____ who sold his property and gave the money to the Apostles for distribution to the poor.

His motives were _____ and _____

(Cyprus, love, concern)

List three facts which Peter told Sapphira.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Ananias' and Sapphira's great sin was _____

(pretending to give more than they did)

translation of the Old Testament, *ekklesia* is used to translate the Hebrew word *qahal* which means the "congregation" of Israel. Luke may have used the term church to designate those being saved as the new congregation of Israel. It was becoming apparent that the new fellowship could no longer be identified as a sect of Judaism.

The Continued Power of the Church Acts 5:12-16

The early Church continued to experience the miraculous grace of God. Signs and wonders gave continued evidence that the New Age of the Kingdom had arrived. God's power was expressed through the hands of His servants, the Apostles.

The Christian Church had been threatened from without, but she did not go into hiding. Her meeting place was in the open—Solomon's Portico. The group to whom "the rest" in verse 13 refers is uncertain. Perhaps they were unbelieving Jews who were careful not to interfere with the work of the Apostles after they heard of the fate of Ananias and Sapphira. "The people," perhaps those who came to the Temple daily, held the Apostles in high esteem. Many believers continued to be added to the Lord. The healing of the sick and the exorcism of evil spirits revealed that the divine power of the movement had not waned.

Renewed Opposition from the Sadducees Acts 5:17-42

The command of the Council for the disciples to cease preaching Jesus as the Christ was not heeded. The number of believers increased rapidly. The movement was no longer insignificant; it had become a serious threat to the position of the Sadducees and the traditions of Judaism. A second arrest of the Apostles was inevitable since they had publicly disregarded the injunction of the Sanhedrin. To the Jewish leaders, the Apostles were—

1. heretics who continued to proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah in contradiction to the decision of the Council that the Messianic claims of Jesus were blasphemous and deserving of death;
2. potential disturbers of the peace.

Jewish national pride reacted strongly to the presence of Roman conquerors in the land of Palestine. During the Maccabean wars, Judah had gained partial freedom from Greek domination. The people were confident that under a leader like David or Judas Maccabaeus, the country could once again be free. The Sadducees feared that the popular Christian movement would result in a revolt of the masses which would be defeated and would lead to the confiscation of their property by the Romans. The Sadducees were filled with jealousy. If their authority was flouted, the respect and honour of their position would diminish.

The Apostles knew that if they returned to the Temple area and continued to proclaim Christ they would be arrested. The disciples had not prayed that the Lord would release them from the responsibility of publicly proclaiming Christ, but they had prayed that the Lord would give them boldness to speak the Word with confidence. The second arrest had some similarities to the first, but there were also a number of differences. Only Peter and John were arrested previously, but all of the Apostles were imprisoned on the second occasion. The Sadducees had become so violent in the second episode that they attempted to kill the Apostles. The Pharisees were more directly involved in the second

Where is the first reference located which calls the new community of believers a church? _____

(Acts 5:11)

TRUE OR FALSE? The disciples did not obey the command of the Council to cease preaching. _____

(true)

At the second arrest, not only Peter and John but all of the _____ were imprisoned.

(Apostles)

decision of the Council. The Apostles received the customary 39 lashes and were again ordered to speak no more in the name of Jesus.

The Apostles were released from prison during the night by an angel or messenger of the Lord. They were commissioned to return to the Temple area and to proclaim the whole message of the new life in Christ.

Confusion ensued within the Sanhedrin the next morning after the prison guards returned to report that the prison house was securely locked but the Apostles were missing. The report came that they were again in the Temple area proclaiming the Gospel. The captain and officers of the Temple guard escorted the Apostles from the Temple area to the chamber of the Council. During the arrest, the guards were careful to avoid violence lest they should be stoned by the people.

The Apostles were questioned by the High Priest who apparently served as president of the Council. He recognized that the teaching of the Apostles maintained that Jesus was righteous; therefore, the Jewish leaders were guilty of causing the death of a righteous and innocent man. If the people accepted the teaching of the Apostles, the Council would be discredited. Again Peter spoke for his group and stated, "We must obey God rather than man." He boldly affirmed the teaching that God reversed the act of the Sanhedrin which put Jesus to death. Peter had experienced the joy and power of the new life through faith in Jesus, and he boldly proclaimed that God had exalted Jesus as Prince and Saviour through whom Israel could receive the forgiveness of sins by repenting. Peter again emphasized that the Apostles must obey God rather than men. Does this mean that Christians may become disobedient to civil law in order to obey God? Peter affirmed that loyalty to country, family, and social and political groups is superseded by loyalty to God.

The bold assertion of Peter that the leaders were guilty of murder was too much for them to accept. They decided to put the Apostles to death, but the wise council of Gamaliel prevented this drastic action. Gamaliel of the school of Hillel was the leading spokesman for the Pharisees. He was probably a grandson of Hillel, who followed a more liberal interpretation of the Law than his rival teacher. Gamaliel was also Paul's teacher (cf. Acts 22:3).

Gamaliel reminded the Sanhedrin that God has the power to bring His will to pass. Men often make mistakes by becoming over-anxious to do God's work for Him. If the Christians were heretical, Gamaliel pointed out that they would be working against God and would be defeated by Him. If they were within the will of God, those who opposed and persecuted them would be fighting against God. Gamaliel used two examples to support his argument. A band of insurrectionists led by Theudas had been unsuccessful (cf. *Antiq.* XX. v. 1). Theudas led a multitude of followers to the Jordan River, and he promised to divide the waters as Joshua did. The insurrection was put down by Fadus, the Roman procurator, whose soldiers beheaded Theudas and killed many of his followers. Luke's accuracy as a historian has been challenged because the Theudas referred to by Josephus was defeated sometime after A.D. 44 by Fadus who came to rule as procurator in that year. The speech of Gamaliel would have occurred some ten years earlier. The problem remains unsolved.

Gamaliel also made reference to Judas of Galilee who led in a revolt against the Romans in A.D. 6 when Quirinius tried to take a census of Palestine. Judas and his forces were suppressed by Herod the Great, and they were overpowered promptly by the Romans. Josephus states that the Zealot party originated in this movement led by Judas.

Churches today would do well to heed the logic of Gamaliel.

Other differences in the second arrest were:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

The Apostles were released by an _____ and commissioned to continue _____.

(angel, preaching)

The message of the Apostles that God raised Jesus from the dead offended the Jewish leaders because they had put *Him* to death in the name of _____ and the resurrection of Jesus proved them _____.

(God, wrong)

Gamaliel's advice was if the Apostles were wrong, _____ would bring about their _____. If the Sanhedrin opposed them and was wrong, it would be working against _____.

(God, defeat, God)

God and His work are not threatened by mere men. He does not need men to defend Him nor rescue His work from the power of Satan. God needs men who are available to be used in carrying out His work instead of protecting it.

Equal Treatment within the Fellowship Acts 6:1-7

The Jews were divided into two general groups:

1. The Hebrews who conserved the traditions of the Fathers and refused to associate with foreigners; and,
2. The Grecians (Hellenists) who were tolerant towards the Gentiles and accepted some Gentile customs.

The Apostles were more closely identified with the conservative traditionalists; however, they were not as narrow as the Pharisees.

The Apostles were obviously the leaders of the early Church. They were responsible for distributing the provisions to meet the needs of the poor, they taught the Gospel, they preached the Word of God, and they spent much time in prayer. As the Church increased in number, the administrative responsibilities of distributing food to the needy became a heavy burden. It is understandable that the Hellenistic widows who were not as closely related to the Apostles as the Hebrew widows were frequently neglected. The Twelve requested the disciples (learners) to select seven brethren who would be responsible servants in the daily distribution and the sharing of the Word of God.

The seven men who were selected are usually referred to as the first deacons; however, they are not so called. They were to be men of high qualifications:

1. They were to have a good reputation in the community.
2. They were to be full of the Spirit.
3. They were to be men of practical wisdom.

It should be noted also that the seven men did not assume the responsibility of determining the Church's business but of carrying out the activities which the Church decided. It should also be noted that the leaders of the Church did not make the selection. The men were selected by the disciples or members of the Church. The leaders suggested to the membership that seven men be appointed to carry out the daily distribution and to share in spreading the Gospel. The suggestion "pleased the whole *multitude*: and *they* chose" the men. The men selected by the Church were brought before the leaders, and "they" prayed and laid hands upon them. It is uncertain whether "they" refers to the Apostles or to the members. Frank Stagg believes that the grammatical antecedent of "they" is "the whole multitude," not merely the Apostles.¹ This means that the entire Church participated in the ordination of laying on of hands.

The Seven all had Greek names which implies that they were Hellenists. Their particular responsibility was to see that the Hellenistic widows were neglected no longer in the daily distribution of food; however, their activities were not limited to serving tables. Two, Stephen and Philip became great evangelists and

¹ *The Book of Acts*, p. 91.

Name the two general groups of Jews.

(Hebrews, Grecians or Hellenists)

Why were the Seven chosen? _____

(To relieve the Apostles in the daily distribution and to share in the spreading of the Word of God)

Give the three qualifications required of the Seven.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Compare your answer with the text.)

Who selected the seven men? _____

(disciples or members of the Church)

Two of the Seven became great evangelists and preachers. Name them.

(Stephen, Philip)

preachers. Luke gives the special notice that Stephen was a man "full of faith and the Holy Spirit." Nicolas was a proselyte from Antioch; that is, he was a Gentile convert to Judaism. With the selection of the Seven, the Gospel began to move out from its Hebrew centre in Jerusalem to Samaria and to the "uttermost part of the earth."

Conclusion
(6:7)

In this verse, Luke gives a general summary which indicates that he has concluded a section of the Acts. He has shown how the Church grew in Jerusalem. Many Jews received Jesus Christ as Messiah and Saviour. Luke notes that even many priests became obedient to the faith. Opposition did not deter the Gospel. Satan, with all of his devices, cannot prevent the growth of the Kingdom of God if the disciples appropriate God's power through faith and make themselves available as faithful witnesses.

The first six chapters of Acts reveal that the problem which hinders Jews from becoming Christians is not at the point of believing that Jesus is the Messiah. The Church experienced phenomenal growth among the Jews during her early stages. Even priests and members of the Sanhedrin entered the faith. In later chapters, Luke shows that the hindrance to Jewish faith was the Gentile response to the Gospel.

TRUE OR FALSE? According to the first six chapters of Acts, the problem which hinders Jews from becoming Christians is at the point of believing Jesus is the Messiah. _____

(false)

Home Study Assignment

Basic study (Levels 1, 2, and 3). After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. When did the Church actually come into existence? _____

2. Distinguish between the Kingdom and the Church. _____

3. Give three reasons the Sadducees opposed the Christians.
(1) _____
(2) _____
(3) _____
4. What was the first accusation brought against Peter and John by the Council? _____

How did Peter answer the charge? _____

5. Why could the Christians rejoice in the midst of persecution? _____

6. Is the filling of the Spirit a one-time experience? _____ Support your answer.
7. Why was it wrong for Ananias and Sapphira to keep part of the money from the sale of the land for themselves? _____

8. List the shocking information Peter related to Sapphira: (1) _____
_____ (2) _____
_____ (3) _____
9. List three differences in the first and second arrests of the Apostles.
(1) _____
(2) _____
(3) _____

10. Why did the message of the Apostles that God raised Jesus from the dead offend the Jewish leaders? —

11. What was Gamaliel's advice? _____

12. Why were the Seven chosen and ordained? _____

13. Who chose and ordained the Seven? _____

14. List the qualifications of the Seven: (1) _____

(2) _____ (3) _____

Supplementary activities (Levels 2 and 3):

1. List the internal and external problems faced by the early Church and explain how each one was faced.

2. Distinguish between Hebrews and Grecians (Hellenists).

Advanced Activities (Level 3):

1. Read pages 73-92 in *The Book of Acts* by Frank Stagg.

2. What does Acts 6:1-7 imply about the organization of the early Church?

3. List the facts, according to Stagg, which show the unity of the early Church.

Seminar Discussion

1. What external and internal problems were faced by the early Church? Which was the most dangerous?

2. What principles with regard to leading a church can a contemporary pastor learn from this lesson?

3. Why did discrimination arise in the early Church, and how was the problem solved?

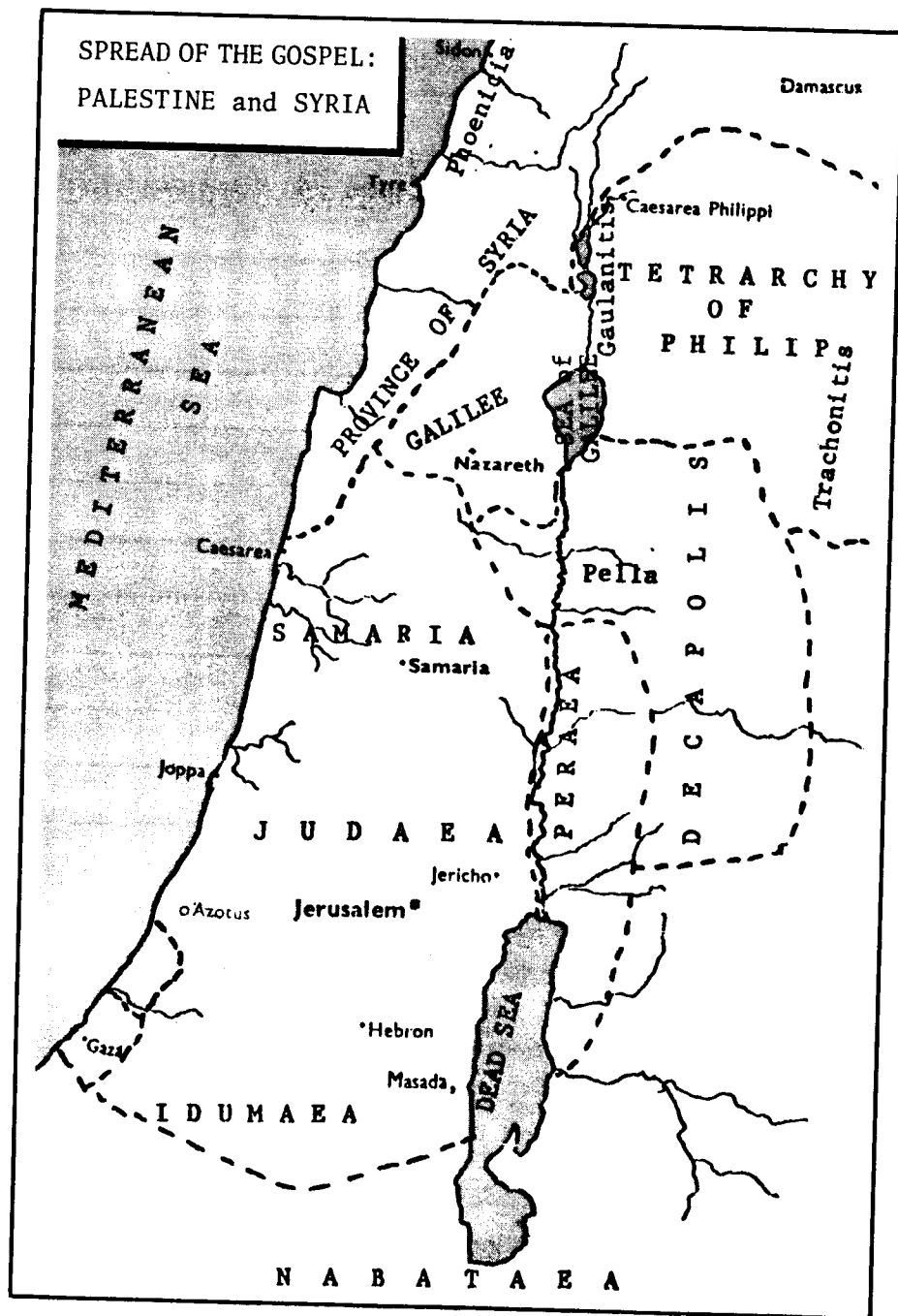
ACTS 9:1-2: "And Saul . . . went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to DAMASCUS to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way . . . he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

ACTS 8:5: "Then Philip went down to the city of SAMARIA, and preached Christ unto them."

ACTS 8:25:b " . . .and preached the gospel in many VILLAGES of the SAMARITANS."

ACTS 8:26: "And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the WAY that goeth down from JERUSALEM UNTO GAZA, which is desert."

ACTS 8:40: "But Philip was found at AZOTUS: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to CAESAREA."



ACTS 8:1b "And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the REGIONS of JUDAEA and SAMARIA, except the apostles."