

## Church History

### Lesson 2 - From Jerusalem to Rome and Beyond

#### 1. Introduction - The Call To Ever Expanding Vision and Mission

- 1.1. Jesus clearly proclaimed an ever expanding vision and mission for the Church
  - 1.1.1. Matthew 28:19–20 - “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
  - 1.1.2. Mark 16:15–16 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.<sup>16</sup> Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”
  - 1.1.3. Luke 24:46–47 - He told them, “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,<sup>47</sup> and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”
  - 1.1.4. John 10:14–16 - “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me —<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep.<sup>16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”
    - 1.1.4.1. Note that these verses indicate the Gospel going forth to all nations.
    - 1.1.4.2. Note that these verses all envision a church comprised not just of Jews, but of people from all nations.
- 1.2. The entire book of Acts shows the spread of Christianity from its beginnings in Jerusalem until it reaches Rome and beyond.
  - 1.2.1. The structure of Acts is meant to show this expansion
    - 1.2.1.1. 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.
      - 1.2.1.1.1. This is the theme verse for the whole book. The entire book may be broken down into the following sections:

Acts 1-7	Jerusalem
Acts 8-10	Judea and Samaria
Acts 11-28	The ends of the earth
      - 1.2.1.1.2. Thus the whole story of Acts is meant to show how Christianity grew from a few Jewish disciples in Jerusalem into a world wide movement comprised mainly of Gentiles.

- 1.2.2.** The outpouring of the Spirit shows this expansion throughout the book of Acts
  - 1.2.2.1.** Acts 2:7–11 - Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? <sup>8</sup> Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome <sup>11</sup> (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs — we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”
    - 1.2.2.1.1.** Note how Luke specifically records people from all over the Mediterranean world as having been there.
    - 1.2.2.1.2.** This means that undoubtedly many of them were converted and carried the seeds of the Gospel back to these widespread lands.
  - 1.2.2.2.** Luke records the baptism of the Spirit four times - indicating not only geographic expansion, but also cultural expansion:
    - Acts 2 - ethnic and cultural Jews
    - Acts 8 - Samaritans - “half Jews” - ethnically and culturally
    - Acts 10 - God fearing Gentiles within Judea
    - Acts 19 - Gentiles geographically and culturally removed from Judea and Judaism
- 1.2.3.** As the story progresses in Acts, there is movement from Jerusalem to Rome
  - 1.2.3.1.** The early chapters are almost entirely focused on Jerusalem and the Jewish church there.
  - 1.2.3.2.** As the book moves on the focus shifts from Jerusalem to Antioch and then ever from Jerusalem.
  - 1.2.3.3.** The book ends with Paul in Rome - far removed from Jerusalem but at the heart of the Empire.
- 1.3.** Conclusion - there is a clear theological impetus coming from Jesus Himself that propelled the church to spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

## 2. The beginnings of the Church at Jerusalem - A New Segment Within Judaism?

2.1. The early church existed within Jerusalem, and was comprised entirely of the Jewish disciples of Jesus.

2.1.1. Acts 1:1–5 - In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit **to the apostles he had chosen**. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, **he showed himself to these men** and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating **with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem**, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

2.1.2. Acts 1:12–14 - **Then they returned to Jerusalem** from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. <sup>13</sup> When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. **Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.** <sup>14</sup> **They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.**

2.2. This early church believed and submitted to the Jewish Scriptures.

2.2.1. Acts 1:15–17 - In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) <sup>16</sup> and said, **“Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David** concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus — <sup>17</sup> he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.”

2.2.2. Acts 2:14–16 - Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. <sup>15</sup>These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! <sup>16</sup> **No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel....”**

2.2.2.1. Notice the community is guided in their thought, practices and preaching by the Scriptures.

2.2.2.2. Although they certainly interpreted the Scriptures differently in light of the coming of Jesus, they still embraced the Jewish Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God.

2.2.3. Core Jewish beliefs remained at the basis of the faith of the early disciples: the one God who had revealed himself in the Hebrew Scriptures, this God as the creator and sustainer of the universe, a chosen people called into covenant relationship with God, and a hope for end-time blessings. (Everett Ferguson, *Church History*, location 706).

- 2.2.4.** Although the Old Testament Scriptures received from Judaism were treated in different ways, there was a common acceptance of them as the Word of God and commitment to interpret them in the light of the new revelation in Jesus Christ. (Ferguson, location 894).
- 2.2.5.** The earliest Christians did not consider themselves followers of a new religion. All their lives they had been Jews, and they still were. This was true of Peter and the twelve, of the seven, and of Paul. Their faith was not a denial of Judaism, but was rather the conviction that the Messianic age had finally arrived. Paul would say that he was persecuted “because of the hope of Israel” (Acts 28:20). The earliest Christians did not reject Judaism, but were convinced that their faith was the fulfillment of the age-long expectation of a Messiah. (Gonzales, location 742).
- 2.3.** Furthermore, they continued to observe Jewish practices such as going to the Temple.
- 2.3.1.** Acts 2:46 - **Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.** They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,
- 2.3.2.** Acts 3:1 - One day **Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer** — at three in the afternoon.
- 2.3.3.** Acts 5:21 - At daybreak **they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.**
- 2.3.4.** Acts 5:42 - Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.
- 2.3.5.** However, in addition to the Jewish rituals, they added some that were distinctly Christian - most notably meeting on Sunday as well as Saturday (a new Sabbath), and the regular observation of the Lord’s Supper (instead of merely observing the Passover yearly). Furthermore, they began to form their own communities which met not only with the other Jews, but as specifically Christian gatherings.
- 2.3.6.** There was initially no radical break with Jewish institutions. The early Jerusalem church frequented the temple and observed Jewish customs. It constituted a “synagogue” with some distinctive rites and beliefs, but there were other such groups in the broad spectrum of Judaism. (Everett Ferguson, *Church History*, location 704)
- 2.3.7.** This was why Christians in Jerusalem continued keeping the Sabbath and attending worship at the Temple. To this they added the observance of the first day of the week, in which they gathered in celebration of the resurrection of Jesus. (Gonzales, location 746).
- 2.3.8.** Since the whole company was devoutly Jewish, they remained loyal, for a time, to their Jewish law and continued to worship in synagogues and at the temple. In all outward respects their life-style resembled any other Jewish sect of the time. (Shelley, location 462).
- 2.4.** However, the new church clearly had beliefs which marked them off as distinct from the rest of Judaism in their day.

**2.4.1.** Obviously, the new church believed and proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, that He had been crucified for our sins, and was risen from the dead.

**2.4.1.1.** Acts 1:6–8 - So when they met together, they asked him, “**Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?**” <sup>7</sup> He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> **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.**”

**2.4.1.1.1.** Notice that even after the resurrection the apostles are thinking in very old covenant, Jewish centric terms - ‘when will the kingdom be restored to Israel.? And notice Jesus brushes aside their question and speaks of the new covenant reality - the coming of the Spirit.

**2.4.1.2.** Acts 2:22–24, 36 - “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup> **This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. <sup>24</sup> But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.... <sup>36</sup> “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”**

**2.4.1.2.1.** Notice the centrality of Jesus in Peter’s proclamation.

**2.4.1.2.2.** The central facets are how Jesus is the center of Scripture, how He was put to death, and how God overruled and raised Him from the dead. We see this pattern throughout apostolic preaching to Jews.

**2.4.1.3.** Acts 3:13–23 - The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. <sup>14</sup> You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. <sup>15</sup> **You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this.** <sup>16</sup> By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. <sup>17</sup> Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. <sup>18</sup> **But this is how**

God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. <sup>19</sup> Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, <sup>20</sup> and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you — even Jesus.

<sup>21</sup>He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. <sup>22</sup> For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'

**2.4.1.3.1.** Note the growing realization here - not only is Jesus the Messiah of the Jews, but if Jews do not respond to Him, they will be cut off from Israel.

**2.4.2.** These beliefs were obviously eventually going to create separation from the rest of Judaism, though how clearly this was recognized by the apostles at first is doubtful.

### **3. Growing Strains Within the Early Church - Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews**

**3.1.** The first signs of difficulty in the Jerusalem church were because of differences between Hebraic Jews (Jews who were not only ethnically but also culturally Jewish) and Hellenistic Jews (those who were ethnically Jewish but had adopted much of the culture of the Greeks.)

**3.1.1.** Acts 6:1 - In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, **the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews** because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

**3.1.2.** These last words do not refer to a conflict between Jews and Gentiles, for Acts makes clear that at that time there were still no Gentiles in the church. It was rather a conflict between two groups of Jews, those who kept the customs and language of their ancestors, and those who showed more openness to Hellenistic influences. In Acts, the first are called "Hebrews," and the others are the "Hellenists." (Gonzales, *Story of Christianity*, location 716).

**3.1.3.** The church early drew adherents from strict Law-observant Jews, from faithful Jews who were not so strict in keeping the Law, from Gentile proselytes, and from those more Hellenized in their attitudes. Internal tension soon manifested itself between those designated by the culturally descriptive terms Hebrews (Hebraic Jews) and Hellenists (Grecian Jews). (Everett Ferguson, *Church History*, location 713).

**3.2.** In resolving this difficulty, which was rooted in cultural differences, the apostles appointed seven deacons - all of whom came from the marginalized Hellenistic Jews.

- 3.2.1.** Acts 6:1–6 - In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup> So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup> Brothers, **choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them** <sup>4</sup> and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” <sup>5</sup> This proposal pleased the whole group. **They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.** <sup>6</sup> They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.
- 3.2.1.1.** Notice that the Hellenistic Jews were allowed to choose their own representatives.
- 3.2.1.2.** Notice that the seven men chosen were all from within the Hellenistic Jewish community. We know this from verses 3 and 5, and also from their names which were Greek names rather than Hebrew.
- 3.2.1.3.** Thus, the naming of the seven would appear as an attempt to give greater voice in the affairs of the church to the Hellenistic party, while the twelve, all “Hebrews,” would continue being the main teachers and preachers. (Gonzales, location 702).
- 3.2.2.** Yet this does not mean that the church was fully Hellenized by any stretch of the imagination. Many of the believers were drawn from very strict adherents to the Old Testament law - including priests.
- 3.2.2.1.** Acts 6:7 - So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and **a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.**
- 3.2.2.2.** Notice that this verse immediately follows the note on the Hellenistic Jews and the seven!

#### **4. A Growing Separation from Judaism**

- 4.1.** Many of these Hellenistic Jews brought with them, not only their Jewish roots, but their Greek ones as well. They spoke Greek as their native tongue, used the Septuagint as their main Bible, and were comfortable in Greek culture. Consequently, they were the most likely candidates to serve as a “bridge” to the wider Greek and Roman worlds.
- 4.2.** Additionally, they were more likely to understand the universalizing passages in the Old Testament, and to recognize the distinctions between the Old and New Covenant, and that the types and shadows of the Old Covenant - including the whole sacrificial system, the Temple, the central place of Israel - were fulfilled in Jesus and were passing away.

- 4.3. When these tendencies and understandings were mixed with their proclamation that Jesus was the Messiah and the only way of salvation - conflict with their fellow Hellenistic Jews and then with the Hebraic Jews was inevitable.
- 4.4. This growing understanding came to a head in Stephen's confrontation with Jewish leaders as recorded in Acts 6-7.
- 4.4.1. Acts 6:8–10 - Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. <sup>9</sup> **Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) — Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia.** These men began to argue with Stephen, <sup>10</sup> but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.
- 4.5. This conflict with the Hellenistic Jews centered, not on culture, but on Stephen's understanding of the fulfillment of the Old Covenant in Jesus, and consequently how those types and shadows were now obsolete.
- 4.5.1. Acts 6:11–14 - Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak **words of blasphemy against Moses and against God.**" <sup>12</sup> So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. <sup>13</sup> They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking **against this holy place and against the law.** <sup>14</sup> **For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.**"
- 4.5.1.1. Notice the charges - he speaks against the Temple, the law, and says that Jesus will destroy the Temple and change our Jewish customs.
- 4.5.1.2. They do not fully understand what Stephen is saying (just like they misunderstood Jesus and later Paul), but they got the core point - the coming of Jesus has changed the status of the Temple, the Law, and Israel itself.
- 4.5.2. Acts 7:48–53 - "However, **the Most High does not live in houses made by men.** As the prophet says: <sup>49</sup> "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? <sup>50</sup> Has not my hand made all these things?" <sup>51</sup> **You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!** <sup>52</sup> Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him — <sup>53</sup> **you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.**"
- 4.5.2.1. Notice how Stephen concludes his recount of the history of Israel:
- 4.5.2.1.1. God does not live in buildings - even the Temple

**4.5.2.1.2.** Even though you are circumcised Jews, your hearts are uncircumcised and you resist the Spirit. You may outwardly keep the Law, but you resist God Himself.

**4.5.2.1.3.** All of this resulted in killing the Messiah.

**4.5.2.2.** Stephen, however, disagreed—and said so. He insisted that the institutions of Jewish life, the law and the temple, were temporary. God intended them to point beyond themselves to the coming Messiah, who would fulfill all righteousness for all people. The Old Testament's central purpose was to promise the Messiah. (Shelley, location 419).

**4.6.** Stephen's martyrdom is put in terms purposefully reminiscent of Jesus' crucifixion

**4.6.1.** Acts 7:59–60 - While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, **receive my spirit.**"<sup>60</sup> Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, **do not hold this sin against them.**" When he had said this, he fell asleep.

**4.6.1.1.** Stephen commits his spirit to God and asks God to forgive his persecutors - just as Jesus had done on the cross.

**4.6.1.2.** This link shows that Stephen is following in the steps of Christ, and that his teaching has communicated the purpose of Jesus - a new day has dawned, and the centrality of Israel, the Temple, and the Law are now obsolete.

## **5. The Church Reaches Out to non-Jews**

**5.1.** Following the martyrdom of Stephen, a persecution breaks out which spreads Christian, especially Hellenistic Jews, out of Jerusalem to the rest of Judea - including Samaria.

**5.1.1.** Acts 8:1–3 - On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.<sup>2</sup> Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.<sup>3</sup> But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

**5.1.1.1.** Although Acts 8:1 says only the apostles were left, this is obviously hyperbole, and the next two verses tell us that some people buried and mourned for Stephen, and that Paul was persecuting the church - which means there were still believers left in Jerusalem other than the apostles.

**5.1.1.2.** Obviously, many believers were forced to flee, especially as the persecution grew.

**5.1.1.3.** In particular, it would seem that the Hellenistic Jews were forced to flee. The real conflict had begun with them, and the stories that follow focus on their actions.

- 5.1.1.4. All of this would seem to indicate that the earliest persecution was aimed mostly at the “Hellenistic” Christians, and that the “Hebrews” had much less difficulty. (Gonzales, location 728).
- 5.1.1.5. This first Christian bloodletting, in about A.D. 36, marked the widening chasm between Judaism and Christianity and turned the young faith into a missionary movement. Though the Hebrew apostles were not molested, the Hellenist disciples were forced to flee Jerusalem. (Shelley, location 499).
- 5.1.2. This means that those most likely to reach out beyond the bounds of ethnic Jews faithful to the Old Testament law, were now spreading out into contact with these groups.
  - 5.1.2.1. The Hellenistic Jews were faithful to their religion, but in the world beyond Palestine—Egypt, Asia Minor, Europe—they had long been exposed to Greek culture. They mixed more easily with Gentiles and were more responsive to new ideas than were their Palestinian cousins. (Shelley, location 490).
- 5.1.3. Furthermore, as they came into contact with these groups, the institutions which they maintained were now obsolete - the sacrificial system, the Temple, etc. - were not even present.
- 5.2. The first group we see hearing and responding to the Gospel is the Samaritans. The Samaritans were people considered by Jews to be “half-breeds” who had been unfaithful to God, intermarried with Gentiles, and had altered the Scripture to create their own false form of the worship of Yahweh.
  - 5.2.1. This group had their own version of the Pentateuch (Genesis - Deuteronomy) which changed key passages regarding the centrality of the Temple at Jerusalem and other uniquely Jewish items.
  - 5.2.2. You can see the animosity and some of the key questions in the exchange with Jesus and the woman at the well in John 4 - Jews have nothing to do with Samaritans, they argued over where true worship was to be conducted, etc.
- 5.3. Philip takes the Gospel to the Samaritans
  - 5.3.1. Acts 8:4–5,12 - Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. <sup>5</sup> Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.... But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.
    - 5.3.1.1. The Samaritans receive the Gospel and are baptized. This is the first time non-Jews are being accepted into the Church without becoming proselytes to Judaism.

- 5.3.2.** Acts 8:14–17 - When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. <sup>15</sup>When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup> because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.
- 5.3.2.1.** When the apostles hear of this, they send two of the chief apostles - Peter and John to see what is happening.
- 5.3.2.2.** The Samaritans are not given the Spirit until the apostles come. This prevents the old schism between Jew and Samaritan from continuing into the church. There will not be a separate church for Jews and Samaritans. The Samaritans are grafted into the vine of Israel - the Church.
- 5.3.2.3.** We will see this process repeated when the Gospel goes to the Gentiles.
- 5.3.2.4.** Immediately after the death of Stephen, Acts turns to another of the seven, Philip, who founded a church in Samaria. Peter and John are then sent to supervise the life of that new community. Thus, a church is being born beyond the confines of Judea, and that church, although not founded by the apostles, still acknowledges their authority. This is a pattern that would often be repeated as the church extended to new areas. (Gonzales, location 733.)

## **6. The Gospel Goes to the Gentiles**

- 6.1.** After the Samaritans, who were at least partially Jew, the Gospel is taken to the Gentiles, initially through the hand of Peter
- 6.1.1.** This is recounted in the story of Cornelius in Acts 10.
- 6.1.2.** Once again note that an apostle has to go to confirm that this is really God's work and will, and to show that there is not a separate church for Gentiles. All believers are grafted on to the Vine of Israel - the Church.
- 6.1.3.** This time the baptism of the Spirit is given before the apostle even does anything. This is likely because Peter was not really expecting Gentiles to respond and become part of the Church.
- 6.1.3.1.** This was the purpose of the vision given to Peter. He thought the Gentiles were 'unclean' but God tells him not to call unclean anything God has accepted.
- 6.1.4.** When Peter recognizes that Gentiles are being grafted into the Church, he orders that they be baptized in water.
- 6.1.5.** Unlike the grafting in of the Samaritans, the inclusion of the Gentiles causes a controversy in the church in Jerusalem.

**6.1.5.1.** Acts 11:1–3 - The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, **the circumcised believers criticized him <sup>3</sup> and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”**

**6.1.5.1.1.** Note there is a controversy over Old Testament ceremonial law and distinctions. It is ok for Gentiles to become Christians - as long as they become Jews first!

**6.1.5.1.2.** The real complain is about the final phrase in Acts 10 - “Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.” A Jew had taken an uncircumcised Gentile into full fellowship.

**6.1.5.2.** Acts 11:17–18 - So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” <sup>18</sup> When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.”

**6.1.5.2.1.** When Peter tells them that God had sovereignly given the Spirit, they accept this as the work of God, and the controversy abates - for a while.

**6.2.** However, the real spread to the Gentiles occurred through the Hellenic Jewish believers who were spread abroad by the persecution following the martyrdom of Stephen. Initially this group had only reached out to Jews, but eventually some of them began to purposefully reach out to Gentiles, especially at Antioch.

**6.2.1.** Acts 11:19–21 - Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. <sup>20</sup> Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

**6.2.1.1.** This is important because the group is purposefully reaching out to the Gentiles rather than being asked by Gentiles.

**6.2.1.2.** It is also important because of where it happened. With a population of approximately half a million, Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman empire (after Rome and Alexandria), and became one of the most important centers in early Christianity.

**6.2.1.3.** It is here that the believers in Jesus were first called “Christians” (see Acts 11:26).

- 6.2.2.** Acts 11:22–24 - News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup> He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.
- 6.2.2.1.** Once again, the new church is linked with the mother church and the apostles in Jerusalem.
- 6.2.2.2.** This time Barnabas was sent, and he was greatly encouraged by what he saw and remained in Antioch.
- 6.2.2.3.** These various events show that, while the earliest Christian expansion was mostly the result of the witness of those Jewish Christians of Hellenistic tendencies who had to flee Jerusalem, the mother church approved of their work, both among Hellenistic Jews and among Gentiles. (Gonzales, location 806).
- 6.2.3.** Barnabas eventually decides to go and find Saul of Tarsus, the former persecutor now turned believer, and bring him to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).
- 6.2.4.** Paul was uniquely called and gifted by God for his days. He was a Jew raised in the strictest traditions of Judaism as a Pharisee, but he spoke Greek fluently and was immersed in Greek culture, and was also a Roman citizen. Thus, the three great segments of the world of the early Church - Judaism, Greek language and culture, and Roman political control all merged in Paul! He thus had access to places no other early leader had - and he used them to full effect!

## **7. The Missionary Trips of Paul and Barnabas**

- 7.1.** Eventually, the Holy Spirit directed the disciples at Antioch to send our Paul and Barnabas on mission to take the Gospel to those who have not heard (see Acts 13:1-3).
- 7.2.** Initially Paul and Barnabas go to Jews in the areas they visit.
- 7.2.1.** Acts 13:5 - When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.
- 7.2.2.** Acts 13:14 - From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down.
- 7.2.3.** Most of their original converts were therefore either Jews or God-fearing Gentiles who regularly attended the synagogue.
- 7.2.3.1.** Acts 13:43 - When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.
- 7.3.** But eventually Paul and Barnabas take the Gospel directly to Gentiles as well.

7.3.1. Acts 13:46–47 - Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.<sup>47</sup> For this is what the Lord has commanded us: “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.””

7.3.2. The mission to the Gentiles is now in full swing in its own right.

7.4. In the first 15 years after Jesus, the church had spread from Jerusalem throughout Judea and Samaria, and made inroads as far as Damascus and Antioch - a distance of 450 miles, and the church was still mainly Jewish.

7.5. Over the next 15 years or so, the Gospel went all the way to Rome and beyond - more than 1400 miles! And by the time Paul reached Rome, the church was predominately Gentile.

7.5.1. What was happening was that the “Hellenistic” Jewish Christians were serving as a bridge to the Gentile world, and that Gentiles were joining the church in such numbers that they soon overshadowed the earlier Jewish Christian community. (Gonzales, location 738).



## **8. The Church at Jerusalem**

- 8.1.** All the while the Gospel was spreading throughout the Gentile Mediterranean world, the church at Jerusalem had continued. Over time, the church had become even more pronounced in its “Jewish” expression. This was due to several factors:
  - 8.1.1.** Many of the Hellenistic Christians had been forced to flee during the persecution following Stephen.
  - 8.1.2.** The Hebraic believers still had access to all of the external rites of Judaism - especially the Temple.
- 8.2.** After the death of James the brother of John (see Acts 12), leadership of the Jerusalem church seems to have mainly fallen to James, the brother of Jesus. This leadership was solidified as many of the other apostles eventually apparently left Jerusalem to work in other locations.
  - 8.2.1.** We know that Peter often travelled from Jerusalem, and eventually apparently went to Rome. Furthermore it appears the Apostle John settled in Asia Minor, probably Ephesus. Although we do not know for certain regarding the other apostles, there are traditions for several of them which have them far removed from Jerusalem. Thus, leadership of the Jerusalem church fell largely to James.
  - 8.2.2.** We see James listed as wielding great authority in the Jerusalem church in passages such as Acts 15, Acts 21:17-18, and Galatians 2.

## **9. Jewish-Gentile Relational Strains in the Early Church**

- 9.1.** As the Jerusalem church continued to grow with a Jewish practice and the rest of the Church became predominately Gentile - and other than acceptance of the Old Testament had virtually no Jewish practices - it was inevitable that there would develop relational strains which had to be worked out.
- 9.2.** The strains included both theological disputes and practical disputes (which were tied back to the theological disputes.)
- 9.3.** These disputes centered on the place of the Law in the Christian life, and the importance of the Old Testament Jewish ceremonies of circumcision and dietary rules (including table fellowship).
  - 9.3.1.** The most significant controversy in the early church concerned the terms of acceptance of Gentiles into the Christian community: Must they come as full proselytes, receiving circumcision and an obligation to follow the Law, or was faith in Jesus and baptism sufficient to bring them under the covenant? (Ferguson, location 738).
- 9.4.** These questions were not merely academic. Many of the Gentiles flooding the church came from sordid pasts full of idolatry and immorality. How were they to enter the Church - and how would they find the power necessary to shake free of their past and walk in holiness?

- 9.4.1.** Paul's converts were a mixed lot. A few of them were from honorable backgrounds, but the majority were pagans with sordid pasts.... What was the best way to instill Christian principles of morality in these churches? That question was at the heart of the continuing tensions between Jewish and Gentile believers in first-century Christianity. (Shelley, locations 534, 538).
- 9.5.** This conflict came to a head on two separate occasions: in Antioch in the incident reported in Galatians 2, and at the council recorded in Acts 15.
- 9.5.1.** In Antioch, Peter had eaten with Gentile believers, but when "certain men from James" came to Antioch, he withdrew - as did Barnabas. This infuriated Paul, who said nothing less than the free nature of the Gospel was at stake. He rebuked Peter in front of everyone, and apparently won the day. (See Galatians 2).
- 9.5.1.1.** There is a major question as to whether the events recorded in Galatians 2 (and indeed the letter to the Galatians) precedes or follows the Acts 15 council. Both positions are taken by evangelical scholars.
- 9.5.1.2.** Personally, I believe the events in Galatians 2 and the letter to the Galatians both precede the Acts 15 council. My primary reasons for this are:
- 9.5.1.2.1.** Paul mentions two trips to Jerusalem prior to this (1:18/Acts 9:26-27; 2:1-10/Acts 11:28-30)
- 9.5.1.2.2.** Paul never mentions Timothy in Galatians, and he does not join Paul until Acts 16.
- 9.5.1.2.3.** Paul prominently mentions Barnabas in Galatians, and he and Paul part company at the end of Acts 15.
- 9.5.1.2.4.** It would be strange for Peter and Barnabas to act like they did after the Acts 15 council.
- 9.5.1.2.5.** Paul does not resolve the problem in Galatia by mentioning the decision of the Acts 15 council.
- 9.5.2.** In the Acts 15 council we read about a controversy that broke out when some people came from Judea to Antioch and proclaimed that one had to be circumcised to be saved. When Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem, some believers who were also Pharisees declared Gentiles had to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses. Eventually, however, the decision was reached that this wrong - the Gentiles are saved by grace, not law - and so are Jews! (Verse 11).
- 9.5.2.1.** However, the council did write that Gentile converts, while not under the Law, should do four things - abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.

- 9.5.2.1.1. It appears that this decision represented a “half-way” measure of trying to please both sides. The Spirit would later declare that it did not matter if meat was sacrificed to an idol (1 Corinthians 8-10), and no further mention is ever made of “meat of strangled animals.”
- 9.5.2.1.2. Since Acts is recording what happened, we do not know if the decision was really correct in whole or in part. It appears to me that some of it was later changed.

9.6. These struggles obviously continued through the time of the New Testament church. We see evidence of this in Paul’s letters (see Galatians, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Colossians, Hebrews, etc.), and also in Acts 21 - which led to Paul’s imprisonment.

9.6.1. Acts 21:17–26 - When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers received us warmly. <sup>18</sup> The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup> Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. <sup>20</sup>When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. <sup>21</sup> They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. <sup>22</sup> What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, <sup>23</sup> so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. <sup>24</sup> Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. <sup>25</sup> As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.” <sup>26</sup> The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

9.6.1.1. Clearly, the church in Jerusalem has continued with outward observance to the Law - not only the moral Law, but to the ceremonial Law as well.

9.6.1.2. Somewhat surprisingly, Paul goes along with this plan. He clearly wants to appease the Jerusalem church!

9.6.1.2.1. This does not mean that Paul thought these rituals were efficacious in any way. He probably thought they were neutral - there was no benefit in doing them - but no harm either. Consequently he was willing to go along with

this plan. This would seem to be the principle in 1 Corinthians 9:19-27.

**9.6.1.3.** In any event, the end result is a riot in the Temple and the arrest of Paul. This led to his trip to Rome - and the writing of much of the New Testament as he was en route to Rome!

**9.7.** Thus by the time Paul arrived in Rome in the early 60's AD, the difference in the practice of the faith between the essentially Jewish church in Palestine and the predominately Gentile church in the rest of the Roman world was fairly pronounced. Although both accepted the Old Testament writings as Scripture, and followed similar moral rules, there were great differences in how those Scriptures were interpreted, Christians were accepting a new body of growing literature (what would become the New Testament), and they practiced their faith differently.

**9.7.1.** Thus Paul came at last to the capital of the empire, Rome. He spent the final years of his life awaiting trial. Allowed to continue his preaching, he probably won other converts. But after the Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians (A.D. 64) we never hear from Paul again. By that time the breach with traditional Judaism was almost complete. Gentile believers were not circumcised, they neither knew nor practiced Jewish dietary laws, and in most areas the Sabbath (seventh day) observance had given way to worship on the first day of the week, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. (Shelley, location 567).

## **10. The destruction of Jerusalem**

**10.1.** The church in Jerusalem suffered two major difficulties in the years between 62 and 70 AD: the martyrdom of James and the destruction of Jerusalem. Neither of the events are directly mentioned in the Scripture, but we have ample records of both in a number of early sources, including Josephus.

**10.2.** The martyrdom of James

**10.2.1.** James, who was well known throughout Jerusalem, and regarded as a very pious and godly man - even by non-Christians, was martyred in 62 AD, apparently by order of the high priest. This was a very hard blow for the Jerusalem church, who continued to look back to James as the model leader.

**10.2.1.1.** In A.D. 62 the other James, the brother of Jesus, was killed by orders of the high priest, even against the desire and advice of some of the Pharisees. (Gonzales, location 768).

**10.2.1.2.** The leadership of the Jerusalem church rested first in the hands of James, "the brother of the Lord." A devout, law-abiding Jew, he was revered by his followers, but in A.D. 62 he was murdered by command of the Jewish high priest. His death left the Jerusalem church leaderless and demoralized. (Shelley, location 579).

**10.2.1.3.** James's execution by Jewish leaders in AD 62, of which there are differing accounts in the Jewish historian Josephus, in Hegesippus (preserved by the church historian Eusebius), and the Second Apocalypse of James (from the Nag Hammadi library), left the most conservative Jewish Christians without a respected and moderate leader. Jewish Christianity continued to look back to him as their ideal and representative. (Ferguson, location 731).

**10.3.** The destruction of Jerusalem

**10.3.1.** One of the reasons for the martyrdom of James was the growing unrest within Jerusalem and Judea. The factions wanting to throw off Roman rule were growing in strength. Furthermore, the Temple was completed in 64 AD. This had two major effects. First, it gave impetus to those who were looking for the Old Covenant theocracy to be restored - they now had a completed Temple. Second, it left many people out of work, which created great unrest and discontent.

**10.3.1.1.** Meanwhile, tensions between the Jews and their Roman overlords were growing ever stronger. The completion of the Jewish temple in A.D. 64 put thousands of laborers out of work, adding to the general discontent. Finally in A.D. 66 the Jews revolted, signaling their intent by refusing to perform the daily sacrifice for the emperor. (Shelley, location 581).

**10.3.2.** These tensions finally broke out into open revolt in 66AD when the Jews refused to offer daily sacrifices for the emperor. Jerusalem fell in 70 AD, and the Temple was utterly destroyed - thus effectively ending a number of the Jewish parties we looked at last time.

**10.3.2.1.** In A.D. 70 Emperor Vespasian's forces, led by Titus, broke through the walls of Jerusalem, looted and burned the temple, and carried off the spoils to Rome. The Holy City was totally destroyed. In the reprisals that followed, every synagogue in Palestine was burned to the ground. (Shelley, location 585).

**10.3.3.** Most Christians fled Jerusalem before its fall to avoid the Roman army, and thus were spared the slaughter - during which almost 1,000,000 people died according to some estimates.

**10.3.3.1.** "At the start of the revolt, the leaders of the Jerusalem church were advised in a vision to flee the city." Pious Jews considered the Christian flight an act of treason, and it sealed the fate of the church in the Jewish world. With the decision to bar Christian Jews from synagogue services some years later, the break was complete. Any Jew who wished to remain faithful to his religion could not also be a Christian. The new faith had become and would remain a gentile movement. The old wineskin was irreparably torn. (Shelley, location 588).

**10.3.3.2.** Soon thereafter, the leaders of the Christian community in Jerusalem decided to move to Pella, a city beyond the Jordan whose population was mostly Gentile. This move seems to have been prompted, not only by persecution at the hands of the Jews, but also by Roman suspicion as to the exact nature of the new religious sect. At that time Jewish nationalism had reached the boiling point, and in A.D. 66 a rebellion broke out that would lead, four years later, to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. (Gonzales, location 770).

**10.3.4.** It is hard to overstate the effect of the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Dispersion of most Jews had on the church. No longer was there benefit for Christianity to be under the umbrella of Judaism (which had failed to afford protection by the early 60's anyway), nor was there any real way to practice many of the tenets of Judaism. There was no temple, and the synagogues in Palestine had been destroyed. This sealed the final separation between Judaism and Christianity.

**10.3.5.** Furthermore, this meant the Jerusalem church could no longer really serve as the central power center within Christianity - a role that increasingly moved to Rome.

**10.3.5.1.** The apostles, who were the real center of power, had all either been martyred or left Jerusalem before the events leading to its destruction.

**10.3.5.2.** The church at Jerusalem had lost its major leader James.

**10.3.5.3.** The church at Jerusalem had to regroup after the catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem.

**10.3.5.4.** The two most important apostles by this point - Peter and Paul - both appear to have been in Rome during the period after 60 AD, and so naturally it came to be viewed as the most important Church, in a way similar to the way Jerusalem had been viewed.

## **11. The Final Years of the Apostolic Age**

**11.1.** The New Testament gives very little information about the years after 62 AD. It does not even record the fall of Jerusalem.

**11.1.1.** This is actually a very strong argument for the early dating of most of the books of the New Testament. If they were written after the fall of Jerusalem, it would have surely been used to argue for the truth of Christianity as opposed to Judaism. This is especially true of Acts, the Synoptic Gospels, and the book of Hebrews.

**11.2.** Therefore much of the material for the final years of the apostles come from other sources, and is only aided by inference from Scripture.

### **11.3. Paul's final years**

**11.3.1.** We have the most information in Scripture about Paul's later years. We also have external information to help fill out the picture. From these things, it appears that the story of Paul ended by martyrdom in Rome during the reign of Nero.

**11.3.1.1.** We know Paul arrived in Rome from the book of Acts. An early tradition however states that Paul was released after that first imprisonment, travelled west to Spain, and then was eventually martyred under Nero later in the decade.

**11.3.1.2.** Extra-canonical sources relate Paul's execution by beheading in Rome under the emperor Nero in the mid-sixties. His death in Rome linked him in the church's memory with Peter—the common experience of the martyrdom of the apostle to the uncircumcision and the apostle to the circumcision in the same city served as a symbol of the unity of the faith. (Ferguson, location 790).

**11.3.1.3.** Clement of Rome (c. 96) and Ignatius of Antioch (c. 116), writing to Rome, associated both Peter and Paul with the church in Rome, and Clement implied their martyrdoms there. (Ferguson, location 804).

**11.3.1.4.** By reason of jealousy and strife Paul by his example pointed out the prize of patient endurance. After that he had been seven times in bonds, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, had preached in the East and in the West, he won the noble renown which was the reward of his faith, having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having reached the farthest bounds of the West; and when he had borne his testimony before the rulers, so he departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a notable pattern of patient endurance. (1 Clement 5:5-6).

**11.3.2.** There appears to be a strong tradition linking Peter and Paul as both being at Rome in their final days, so it appears that Paul must have eventually been martyred there. This will be discussed a bit more under the section on Peter.

### **11.4. Peter's final years**

**11.4.1.** The Scripture does not give much indication of Peter's later years. However, there is a strong tradition that Peter eventually went to Rome, and stayed there until his death by crucifixion at the hands of Nero. And there are hints in the Scripture that Peter did in fact go to Rome.

**11.4.1.1.** Of all these traditions, the most trustworthy is the one that affirms that Peter was in Rome, and that he suffered martyrdom in that city during the Neronian persecution. On these points, several writers of the first and second centuries agree. (Gonzales, location 849).

- 11.4.1.2.** It is impossible to trace Peter's journeys after his departure from Jerusalem, but his presence in Antioch is attested by Paul, a ministry in parts of Asia Minor is implied by 1 Peter, and the presence of a "Peter party" in Corinth suggests his activity there at some point. (Ferguson, location 800).
  - 11.4.1.3.** Second-century sources offer strong evidence for the presence of both Paul and Peter in Rome and their martyrdom there, and the reference to the church in "Babylon" in 1 Peter 5:13 is probably to be taken as a veiled reference to Rome as the place from which this Petrine letter was written. (Ferguson, location 802).
  - 11.4.1.4.** Dionysius of Corinth (c. 170) is the earliest explicit declaration of Peter's martyrdom in Rome, but his testimony is weakened somewhat by the erroneous declaration, if pressed too strictly, that Peter and Paul "were martyred at the same time. (Ferguson, location 805).
  - 11.4.1.5.** Not long after, the Acts of Peter relates an eventful ministry of Peter in Rome and concludes with the story of Peter being crucified head downward at his request (a manner of death that is referred to also by Origen). (Ferguson, location 810).
  - 11.4.1.6.** The earliest literary and inscriptional sources link the names of Peter and Paul together, and this involvement of both men in Rome seems to be true to the historical situation. (Ferguson, location 818).
  - 11.4.1.7.** The traditions that Paul was beheaded (a swifter and so more merciful death applied to citizens) and Peter was crucified agree with the punishments inflicted on those of their respective social ranks. (Ferguson, location 820).
  - 11.4.1.8.** The testimony, therefore, is quite strong that Peter as well as Paul was in Rome late in his ministry; and it is quite probable that Peter was martyred there (less likely that he was crucified upside down), and possible that he held some official position in addition to his apostolic prestige in the church (cf. 1 Peter 5:1, "fellow elder"). This situation would provide the historical core around which grew the later claims made by the Roman church on behalf of Peter as its first bishop and of its relationship to him. (Ferguson, location 821).
- 11.4.2.** If true, the double martyrdom of Peter and Paul at Rome gave strong impetus to make Rome the leading Church in later years.

## **11.5. John's last years**

**11.5.1.** Once again, the Scripture only gives fragments regarding John's final years. However, what we do know seems to place him in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), and this agrees with the tradition of the early Church. In particular, there is a strong tradition regarding John's presence in Ephesus, which along with a number of other factors, also made Ephesus an important Church in the early years of Christianity.

**11.5.1.1.** By the end of the apostolic age the Roman church was already a numerous and important community, but the church in Ephesus in the closing years of the first century appears to have been the larger as well as being in the center of the most influential region of Christians. (Ferguson, location 830).

**11.5.1.2.** Paul's longest recorded stay at one locality—over two years—was in Ephesus in the early fifties. From there he apparently supervised the work of other evangelists who carried the Christian message throughout the province of Asia (western Turkey). (Ferguson, location 836).

**11.5.1.3.** Other New Testament books were written to Ephesus: Ephesians (which may have been a circular letter intended for other churches as well), 1 and 2 Timothy (tradition went further and made Timothy the first bishop of Ephesus), and the first of the seven letters in Revelation. (Ferguson, location 843).

**11.5.1.4.** Early tradition, furthermore, associated the Johannine literature with Ephesus. The strong testimony of early church writers identified the apostle John, son of Zebedee, as the source of this literature. (Ferguson, location 845).

**11.5.1.4.1.** There was, however, another report of a second John, "the elder," buried at Ephesus from whom some or most of the Johannine literature may have derived. A minority of ancient scholars and a large number of modern scholars attribute the Revelation to yet a different person in the same circle. (Ferguson, location 847).

**11.5.1.4.2.** A second-century Christian writer—Papias of Hierapolis—affirms that there were indeed two persons by the name of John in the early church: one the apostle, and another an elder at Ephesus, who received the visions of Patmos. In any case, there was indeed towards the end of the first century, in the city of Ephesus, a Christian teacher named John, whose authority was great in all the churches of Asia Minor. (Gonzales, location 864).

**11.5.1.5.** Most scholars do agree that John (or some more liberal scholars would say a school deriving from the teachings of John - I think it was John himself) produced some of the latest writings of the New Testament.

**11.5.1.6.** Tradition indicates that John was eventually martyred and was probably the last living apostle.

## **12. The Spread of Christianity**

**12.1.** There was a definite desire and tendency for various areas and churches to claim one or other of the Apostles as their founder. This gave importance to the church. While some of the traditions may be true, we have no certain data by which to claim many of these claims, and some of them appear to be fanciful rather than factual.

**12.1.1.** What became of Paul, Peter, and the other apostles? From an early date, traditions began to appear claiming that one or another of them had preached in a particular region, or had suffered martyrdom in one way or another. Most of these traditions are no more than the result of the desire of a church in a particular city to claim an apostolic origin. Others are more worthy of credit. (Gonzales, location 846).

**12.1.2.** What happened was that the churches in every important city began claiming apostolic origins. In her rivalry with Rome and Antioch, the church in Alexandria felt constrained to have an apostolic founder, and thus the tradition appeared according to which Saint Mark had founded the church there. (Gonzales, location 868).

**12.1.3.** Thus, although it is highly unlikely that James ever gave any thought to Spain, the legends regarding his visit were very influential in the later history of that country. (Gonzales, location 884).

**12.1.4.** In any case, it is significant that from a relatively early date there was a church in India, and that this church has repeatedly claimed Thomas as its founder. (Gonzales, location 897).

**12.1.5.** Syriac-speaking Christianity preserved traditions of an association with the apostle Thomas.... These traditions, if they are not to be wholly discounted, at the least reflect that the gospel was spread to these regions from Syria and was carried by Christians who revered the name of Thomas.... Syriac Christianity was wider than the Thomas tradition but like it preserved elements from the Semitic heritage of the early church. This included a spirituality shaped by wisdom speculations. Another feature of early Syriac-speaking Christianity, notable in the Acts of Thomas, is a decided asceticism, especially in sexual matters. (Ferguson, location 873, 880, 881).

- 12.2.** It should be remembered, however, that much of the spread of the faith in the early years happened through little known or completely unknown believers. Some of these were co-workers with the apostles, but many were those who took the faith with them as they travelled doing business and other ventures.
- 12.2.1.** The missionary task itself was undertaken, not only by Paul and others whose names are known—Barnabas, Mark, et al.—but also by countless and nameless Christians who went from place to place taking with them their faith and their witness. Some of these, like Paul, traveled as missionaries, impelled by their faith. But mostly these nameless Christians were merchants, slaves, and others who traveled for various reasons, but whose travel provided the opportunity for the expansion of the Christian message. (Gonzales, location 835).
- 12.2.2.** In truth, most of the missionary work was not carried out by the apostles, but rather by the countless and nameless Christians who for different reasons—persecution, business, or missionary calling—traveled from place to place taking the news of the Gospel with them. (Gonzales, location 903).