

- I. The history of the ancient churches is much obscured. There are several reasons for this:
  - A. Much of the early recorded church history was lost or destroyed.
  - B. A great part of that history which remains was changed to suit the interests of Roman Catholicism.
  - C. All of church history has been in much controversy and was subject to the whims and fancies of each particular age.
- II. World conditions at the time of the establishment of the church.
  - A. What we know today as Christianity had its beginning with Christ in 25-30 A.D. in the days and within the bounds of the Roman Empire.
  - B. The Jewish people, at that period, no longer a separate nation, were scattered throughout the Roman Empire.
  - C. In this period, Christ established the first church.
- III. The first church was organized in Jerusalem approximately 30 A.D. This church, during the ministry of Christ, was small. Read Matthew 16:18

***<sup>17</sup>And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. <sup>18</sup>And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup>And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.***

- A. After the ascension of Christ, there were 120 members. Read Acts 1:15  
*<sup>15</sup>And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)*
- B. Three thousand were added to this number on the Day of Pentecost. Read Acts 2:41 *<sup>41</sup>Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup>And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*
- C. We have a record of 5,000 more being added to this church. Read Acts 4:4 *<sup>1</sup>And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, <sup>2</sup>being grieved*

*that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. <sup>3</sup>And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. <sup>4</sup>Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.*

- D. Various estimates have placed the membership of this first church in Jerusalem from 25,000 to 50,000 – a very large church.
- E. We can assume from the account in the Book of Acts that James the Less was probably the pastor of this church. Read Acts 1:13 *<sup>13</sup>And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, **James the son of Alphæus**, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.*

#### IV. The first persecution, approximately 33 A.D.

- A. At this time, nearly all the converts to Christ remained in Jerusalem and were all part of this one church.
- B. As the number of believers increased, the Pharisees and priests took alarm and began efforts to destroy this church.
- C. Peter and John were arrested and forbidden to preach in the name of Jesus.

#### Read Acts 4 - **Peter and John Imprisoned**

*1And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, 2being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. 4Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.*

*5And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, 6and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?*

#### **Peter's Defence**

*8Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. 11This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

13Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. 14And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. 15But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. 17But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. 18And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

19But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. 21So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. 22For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed. 23And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. 24And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: 25Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, And the people imagine vain things? 26The kings of the earth stood up, And the rulers were gathered together Against the Lord, and against his Christ. 27For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. 29And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, 30by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

31And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. 32And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. 33And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. 34Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, 35and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 37having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

D. Having failed to silence Peter and John, the persecutions continued.

### **Read Acts 5:17-42 The Apostles Imprisoned**

17Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, 18and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. 19But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 20Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. 21And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 23saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. 24Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. 25Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. 26Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. 27And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, 28saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. 29Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. 30The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. 31Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. 33When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

### **Gamaliel's Speech**

34Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; 35and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. 36For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. 37After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. 38And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: 39but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. 40And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

41And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. 42And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

1. Peter was arrested but received deliverance at the hand of an angel.
2. The apostles were severely beaten. Read Acts 5:40 *40And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.*

- V. The first martyr. In response to a brilliant sermon by Stephen exalting the name of Christ, the infuriated listeners dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death.

Read Acts 7:54-60 - **Death of Stephen**

*54When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. 55But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. 57Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, 58and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. 59And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

- VI. Because of the persecutions, the Christians of Jerusalem fled to the other cities.

Read Acts 8:1,4 **1And Saul was consenting unto his death. 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 Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles.**

<sup>2</sup>And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

<sup>3</sup>As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

**4Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.**

- A. As a result of the persecution in Jerusalem, and in the faithfulness of those that fled, new churches were started in other cities.
- B. These were the first missionaries.