

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

ACTS LESSON 2

The Gospel in Jerusalem—Part 2 (Acts 5-8)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Welcome to our study of the Book of Acts. Here, we are going to see the Gospel as it continues to spread throughout the areas of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and eventually to the uttermost parts of the world. The Book of Acts tells us about the actions of the church, actions of first-century Christians as they were spreading the Gospel, and the effects that all of this had on a lost world. In Acts 1-4 we saw the first Gospel sermon and the establishment of the church. Peter told the people to whom he spoke that they needed to change their lives and be baptized for the remission of their sins. Then, in Acts 3 a wonderful miracle happened. Peter and John caused a man who had been lame from his mother’s womb to rise up, walk, and leap—which created a great stir. As a result, Peter and John were questioned by the high priest and the Pharisees, who wanted to know by what power or authority Peter and John had done such things. Peter and John responded by saying that they had acted by the authority of Jesus, the chief cornerstone Whom they had omitted from their spiritual superstructure, and Who was the only One Who could provide salvation. The Jews realized that Peter and John had been with Jesus, and it created a great stir. Persecution, as a result, was soon to come.

In Acts 5, we pick up with the same theme. But before we get into that persecution, there is one thing that happens that caused great fear to fall upon first-century Christians. In Acts 5 we are introduced, in verses 1-11, to a man and his wife—Ananias and Sapphira, who will eternally be known as the two people who tried to trick God, and the two who lied to the apostles. Ananias had sold some land. He brought the proceeds to lay at the apostles’ feet. There was only one problem: Ananias and his wife seemed to have been greedy. They decided to lie to God and keep back some of the money for themselves. They brought some money, suggesting that it was all they had received. They laid it at the apostles’ feet. And Ananias dropped dead right on the spot. Peter said to Ananias, “While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:4). Ananias drops dead, and men carry off his body. Three hours later his wife Sapphira walks in. Peter gives her a chance to make things right, so it seems. He asks her if she and her husband had sold the land for so much money. She said that they had. Peter then asks her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out” (vs. 9). And Sapphira dropped dead on the spot, too. The Bible then tells us, “So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things” (vs. 11). But it was not a bad type of fear; it was a good kind of fear, because people were experiencing a godly fear that caused them to want to do right. They saw what had happened, and experienced the example of Ananias and Sapphira, and they went out and fulfilled the Lord’s will.

In fact, in Acts 5 we see the Christians teaching the people “the words of this life” (vs. 20). Some of the apostles were put in prison for doing that. The high priest and the Pharisees did not like what was happening, so they put them in prison. But prison could not contain them. An angel opened the door to the prison and told them, “Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.” Later, they were found in the temple doing exactly that. The leaders arrested them again and said, “Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us!” But Peter said, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Here, we learn a powerful lesson that our first responsibility is to obey God. I am not saying that we ought to disobey the laws of the land. If the laws of the land are in accordance with the laws of God, Romans 13 teaches that we are obligated to obey them. Whoever does not obey the laws of the land is actually in violation of the will of God. So I certainly am not teaching disobedience to the laws of the land—as long as those laws are in accordance with a higher law—the law of God. However, if the law of God is contradicted by the laws of men, we must obey God rather than men. There are several areas in which this is very practical. For example, abortion has been legalized in the United States. But God still values the life of the innocent. Proverbs 6:6-9 says that it is a wicked thing to shed innocent blood. God wants children to survive, thrive, and live. He does not want them put to death in the womb. That was never God’s will. So, when our country says that abortion is legal, Christians need to rise up and say, “No, there is a higher law. We ought to obey God rather than men.” When it comes to things like gambling or alcohol use, although our land’s law may allow those things as being legal, the Scriptures do not support them. Alcohol consumption is condemned in the Bible. Ephesians 5:18 says, “Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation.” Gambling, in the Bible, is never viewed in a good light. It is not a way to make money. Such things might be legal, but they are not godly. God’s law must reign over human law. Another example that is quite pertinent to our time today is homosexuality. Is it right or godly? Let’s say that America legalizes homosexual unions. Should we go along with the times? Should we simply say, “Well, the country has accepted it, so it must be OK”? No, we say instead, “Yes, it may be the law of the land, but there is a higher law—the law of God, which we must obey rather than men.” Romans 1:26-29 says that homosexuality is vile, unnatural, and ungodly. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, we learn that homosexuals, along with idolaters, murderers, and fornicators will not go to Heaven. The Bible said long ago in Leviticus 18:22, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.” So, if the laws of the land are in accordance with the law of God, then we must obey them. We are obliged to. But where the two disagree, we must always obey God rather than men.

Another powerful lesson that we see in Acts 5 is the example of the apostles’ evangelism, even in the face of persecution. They had spoken boldly, and had been put in prison. The Jewish leaders are now going to decide what they will do with these men. Gamaliel rises up and says, “If this is from God, there is nothing we can do about it.” The Jewish leaders agree, and they decide to beat the apostles. In Acts 5:40-42 records that beating for us. The apostles are beaten on Christ’s behalf, and the Bible says that they received the beating “with joy.” They were glad that they could suffer shame for the name of Jesus. Acts 5:42 records, “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” These men had just had stripes laid on their backs, and had just suffered greatly for the cause of Christ. Yet they did not let that stop them from spreading the message. In fact, it seems to have inspired them. They were glad to have been able to suffer as Jesus had. It was a joy for them to take part in His suffering on behalf of the greatest cause ever! That is the way we ought to think today. If we suffer for Christ, in view of all He has done for us, it should be a joy to endure such suffering.

Today, we ought to want to spread the Gospel even under dire circumstances. Christians in the first-century church preached the Word. Three thousand obeyed the Gospel on the Day of Pentecost alone. They continued preaching the Word. Five thousand more obeyed. A little later in the Book of Acts we read that multitudes obeyed the Gospel. The church grew and flourished. Acts 8:4 tells us that “those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” People were obeying the Gospel. Under dire circumstances, Christians did what they had to do—and the church flourished. Under comfortable circumstances, when we often do not do what we ought to do, the church seems to not be flourishing, but in fact appears to be going in the other direction. Maybe if we had a little more persecution as encouragement (a wake-up call, so to speak, to what is really important in this life), it would help us to see that evangelism ought to be our main goal. In Colossians 1:28, Paul said of Christ, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” We have been called into this marvelous light in order to “proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). Like the apostles, we need a zeal—an unstoppable zeal—for spreading the message of Jesus Christ.

As we turn our attention to Acts 6, we are going to see the church in action in a benevolent way. In Acts 6, there are certain Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists) who are being neglected in the daily distributions. These people are members of the church, but they are not being provided for adequately. As a result, seven men are chosen to help these people with their physical needs. No doubt that physical need led to a greater spiritual need (of spreading the Gospel and preparing people to spread the Word of God). So, seven men are chosen. And as a result, some are able to do more spiritual work. Notice especially the comment made in Acts 6:7—“Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.” That is one of the most powerful statements ever about the New Testament plan of salvation. These priests had been at the altars. They had been sacrificing animals. They had been attending to the people and their needs. They were the ones who knew the Law, who had read the prophecies, and who were looking for the Messiah. So, when the Gospel was preached, many of the priests were obedient to the faith. “The faith” is a system of faith that is based on faith. As Paul wrote in Roman 1:17, “From faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” The faith system is the Gospel system. Jude 3 says that we are to contend earnestly for “the faith.” So, here are priests who were obedient to the Gospel. What power the preaching of the Gospel had in the first century.

In Acts 6 we also are introduced to one of the greatest men in the first-century church—Stephen, the first martyr. In Acts 6 we are told that Stephen was a man of great faith who was full of the Holy Spirit. The people could not resist the words by which he spoke. His face shone like an angel’s face when he spoke. He was a man of great faith and power who valiantly proclaimed the message of Jesus Christ. Oh, how we need more men like Stephen today. We need men of great faith. Romans 10:17 teaches us how we obtain faith when it says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Faith is not some “leap into the dark.” Rather, it is based upon evidence and substance (Heb. 11:1). We need more men like Paul who said in Acts 27:25, “Take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.” We need more men today like Stephen who, even when they know that people will not like what they have to say, out of love will preach the Gospel. In 1 Peter 4:11 we are told to speak “as the oracles of God.” Whatever God says, that is what we are to say. We are to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2). Even when people do not like it, we must remember that we do not become a person’s enemy by teaching the truth (Gal. 4:16). So, like Paul (Acts 27:25), we need to say, “Take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.”

In Acts 7, we see the sermon that Stephen preached on that occasion. He preached to the Jews a sermon that basically had four main points. His sermon was an overview of the Old Testament scheme of redemption—the Old Testament plan working up to Christ. It begins with Abraham and the promises in Genesis 12 that had been made to him. Abraham was told to leave his country and to go to a new place where God would lead him. God said that He would bless Abraham and make a great nation of him. Abraham did what he was told. He followed God. His son did that, too. Isaac continued to follow God. Stephen mentioned Joseph in his sermon—a man who was used providentially by God for His own purposes. Joseph was thrown into a pit and left for dead as his brothers tried to kill him. But he was removed from the pit and sold as a slave, after which he was taken to Egypt where eventually he became second in command to Pharaoh himself. Stephen showed God's great providence in taking care of Joseph. Stephen also mentioned Moses, who at first tried to make excuses to God. But ultimately he became a leader and judge of God's people. Pharaoh saw the miracles that God performed at Moses' hand. Moses led the Israelites through the Red Sea and through the wilderness wanderings. He took care of God's people all the way up to the Promised Land. Joseph, they rejected. Moses, they also rejected. Many of the Israelites were disobedient to Moses. Then Stephen discusses Jesus Who, Stephen pointed out, was sent just like Joseph and Moses. He was a deliverer, yet the people refused to listen to and obey Him. Rather, they were stiff necked and hard hearted. Stephen said, "You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you" (Acts 7:51). It was this kind of preaching that caused Stephen trouble. He knew that the people to whom he was preaching did not have the right kind of heart. They wanted to trust in the outward symbols of their religion instead of changing their hearts. So, Stephen was going to tell them something very important, and something that relates to us today as well. In Acts 7:48-50 Stephen said, "

"However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me?' says the Lord, 'Or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?'"

The people of Israel were trusting in the physical temple. They were trusting more in it than they were in God. So Stephen tells them, "God does not dwell in temples made with hands." That would really have bothered the Jews, because their whole religion had been built around that. Their whole idea of serving God was based on the temple. Yet God does not dwell in temples? In Jeremiah 7:4, Jeremiah said, "Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.'" The problem with the temple of Israel was that the people's **sanctuary** had become their **cemetery**! They had put so much trust in the temple that they had stopped trusting God. Their temple had become as it were a talisman—a good-luck charm. They thought that if they went to the temple to sacrifice, and if they looked to the temple, regardless of what else they did, everything else would be all right. But God said, "**No**, I do **not** dwell in temples made with hands. The temple is not your good-luck charm. It is not something in which you can place your faith. Your faith needs to be in **Me!**" There is a very practical lesson here for the religious world today: God does not dwell in temples made with hands. The church building is not where God dwells. Buildings are not holy, and God does not dwell in them. Buildings are nothing more than boards, walls, and pews. God does not dwell in temples today either. God dwells in His people. In fact, what is the church? Is it the church the building? Often when we talk about the church, we talk about it as if it is the building. We say that we are "**going to church.**" No, we are going to **worship with the church at the building.** The text of 1 Corinthians 12:27 tells us exactly what the church is. Paul said, "You are the body of Christ, and members individually." The church is not the building; it is the people. The building is only a place of worship. In fact, in New Testament times the people

met in houses or out in the open. Buildings are not even necessary in order for us to serve and worship God properly. Sometimes they are accommodative, to be sure. But they are an optional matter. They are not something that is commanded by God because God does not dwell in temples made with hands.

Stephen preached boldly, and was not afraid to “make it plain.” In fact, Stephen told the people in very plain words exactly why, for a long time, they had not been right with God. He talked about their kinfolks, and he talked about them. And eventually it led to Stephen being put to death. In Acts 7:51-53 Stephen brought his sermon to a climax by saying,

“You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”

Stephen said several things that were true, and that the people needed to hear. But it incensed them. He told them that their forefathers had slain the prophets, and that they had slain the Messiah. He told them that the Law had been given to them, but they had failed to keep it. These people had just been horribly insulted, so far as they saw it. They therefore were ready to take up stones to stone Stephen to death. I am thankful for people like Stephen. I believe that there may have been someone in Stephen’s audience in Acts 6 and 7 who began to have his heart opened. That man’s name was Saul. Saul was there, and heard the plain preaching of Stephen. He heard the message about how the Jews’ forefathers had killed the prophets, about how the people had failed to keep the Law, and about how they had slain the Just One. Perhaps a spark occurred in Saul’s heart. Plain preaching always creates results. The results may not be what we had expected, but it always creates results. In Habakkuk 2:2, the prophet was told, “Make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it.” Stephen did exactly that. Plain preaching always brings a God-glorifying result. In Acts 7, the people got angry. And it was evident that many of them did not have hearts that were right. But some people, no doubt, heard and obeyed the message. Preaching that glorifies God is very plain and very simple. And it is something that anyone can understand.

In Acts 7, Stephen is stoned, and Saul is holding the coats of those who are doing the stoning. As we begin Acts 8, we see that Saul is still breathing threats against the church. Saul is wreaking havoc on God’s people, and is preparing to drag men and women into prison. He is doing everything he can to destroy the church. In Acts 8:5, we learn that the Gospel is about to go into the region of Samaria. Philip goes down to Samaria where he “preaches Jesus” (vs. 35). What does it mean to “preach Jesus”? “Preaching Jesus” means that we also preach about the church for which Jesus died. In Acts 8:12 the text says that Philip “preached the things concerning the kingdom of God.” Philip went and “preached Jesus.” But we then learn that he preached about “the kingdom.” So, if we are going to tell someone about Jesus, we must not teach him just about the five steps in the plan of salvation. We also must tell him about the church of which he will become a part. We need to tell him what God expects him to do, and how God expects him to live in this life.

One of those who is going to hear this message is a man by the name of Simon. Simon was a sorcerer—a magician. In this context, Simon hears the Gospel, obeys it, and is converted. He is baptized by the apostles, but then he sees them perform a miracle. That miracle intrigues him, and he says, “I will give you money to buy this gift from you.” As a result, Simon finds himself in sin once more. We need to see clearly from this text that a person **can** so sin after being converted that he can be lost. In our world, people will say,

“Once you are saved, you are **always** saved.” Acts 8:20 proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that that is not true! Simon has sinned. Peter then says to him, “Your money perish with you because you thought the gift of God could be purchased with money.” Simon was going to perish and be lost. That was the exact point that Peter was making. “Your money will **perish with you.**” The money was going to be lost. But more important, Simon was going to be lost, too. This text shows that it **is** possible, after becoming a Christian, for a person to so sin as to be lost. The idea of “once saved, always saved” is not found within Scripture. Some refer to this concept as “the impossibility of falling from God’s grace.” Yet God used the very language of false teachers to show that such is not true. In Galatians 5:4, Paul said, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” **Paul was writing to Christians**, as Galatians 1:1-2 makes clear. Some of those Christians were trying to go back to the Old Law. As a result, Paul said, “You have been cut off from Christ, and you have fallen from grace.” That’s odd, because people today say that today a Christian **cannot** fall from grace. Yet the Bible uses the exact language of false teachers to say that, yes, a person **can** fall from grace. Over and over again the Scriptures teach that, as a Christian, a person can so sin as to be lost. Why would 2 Peter 1:10 say, “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure,” if that person could never be lost? In 2 Peter 2:20-21, we are taught that it is worse for people who have become Christians when they leave the truth than if they had never known the truth at all. Peter said that it was like a dog returning to its own vomit or a sow that had been washed returning the mire. Their latter end was worse than the beginning. Why? If they had never known the way of truth, at least they would never have known the love and joy of having God in their lives. But now, having known it and having fallen away, it will be worse. How can it be worse? It couldn’t be worse—unless that person could be lost. In Revelation 3:4-5 certain people were told that they would have their names removed from the Book of Life. Christians in the church having their names removed from the Book of Life?! That certainly teaches that a person can so sin as to be lost. That is why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:12, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” Just like those people who fell in the wilderness, Paul urged Christians to take heed, lest they fall, too. A Christian can fall into sin, fall away from God, and be lost. The Bible teaches that. Such a thing shouldn’t happen. God does not want it to happen. And we have what we need to ensure that it does not happen. But if sin gets into our lives, and if we let the devil have his way with us, it can happen.

As we look at the rest of Acts 8, we see the Gospel being preached to the Ethiopian nobleman. Philip is traveling down the road when the Holy Spirit tells him to overtake the Ethiopian’s chariot. Philip goes to the chariot, and the Ethiopian nobleman (a man serving under Queen Candace—a very powerful man) was reading from the Old Testament Scriptures. Philip asked him if he understood what he was reading. The man said, “How can I unless some man teaches me?” Philip then got up in the chariot with him. The nobleman had been reading from Isaiah 53 where it speaks of “a lamb led to the slaughter” (a reference to Jesus). From that point, the Bible tells us, Philip “preached Jesus” to the nobleman. As they were traveling down the road and as Philip was preaching to him, they come to a body of water. The nobleman then asks, “Here is water; what hinders me from being baptized?” Listen to what Philip said in reply: “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The nobleman responded by saying, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” He then commanded the chariot to stand still, and “both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him” (Acts 8:38). What did this man in the first century do? He heard the Word. He believed in Jesus as the Son of God. No doubt he was willing to change his life and repent. He made the good confession that Jesus is God’s Son. And he was baptized in water—just like in every case we see. People hear the Word, believe in Jesus, re-

pent, confess Christ's name, and are baptized. Have you done that in order to become a Christian? Are you a New Testament Christian? If not, I want to encourage you today to listen to the Word of God. Believe that Jesus is God's Son. Repent. Confess His name. And be baptized in water so that you can conform your will to the Gospel of Christ.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today's broadcast, please write to:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

607 McLish Ave.

Ardmore, OK 73401

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at www.thegospelofchrist.com. We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where "the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached."

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE GOSPEL IN JERUSALEM—PART 2” (ACTS 1:5-8)

1. What important statement did Peter make to the Jewish leaders in Acts 5:29?
2. What husband and wife team are discussed in Acts 5?
3. What did this husband and wife team do that merited their inclusion in the Book of Acts?
4. What happened to this husband and wife team as a result of their actions in Acts 5?
5. According to Acts 5:11, what result did the actions taken against the husband and wife team in Acts 5 have on the church as a whole?
6. In Acts 5:19-20, an angel appeared to some of the apostles who had been imprisoned. What was the angel’s message to the apostles on this occasion?
7. In Acts 5:41, we are told that the Christians who had been beaten rejoiced. According to the information contained in this verse, why did they rejoice?
8. In Acts 5:42, we are told the end result of the beatings that the Christians received. What was the end result?
9. According to Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:28, what is the desired end-result of our preaching the Gospel message?
10. According to 1 Peter 2:9, what have Christians been called to do?
11. Acts 6:7 records two things that happened as a direct result of the Gospel having been preached. What were those two things?
12. To whom are we introduced in Acts 6?
13. What happened to the person being discussed in question #12 above?
14. According to Acts 7:51, what did the person mentioned in question #12 above say to the people to whom he was speaking?
15. As a result of his message, what action was taken against the person mentioned in question #12 above?
16. Who, according to Acts 8:3, was “laying waste the church”?
17. In Acts 8:4, we see the end result of a persecution that arose against the church. What was that end result?
18. Who is mentioned in Acts 8 as a person who sinned after becoming a Christian?
19. According to Acts 8:20, what would have been that person’s fate if he had not repented of his sin?