

THE ACTS OF JESUS

AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Acts 9:19-13:3

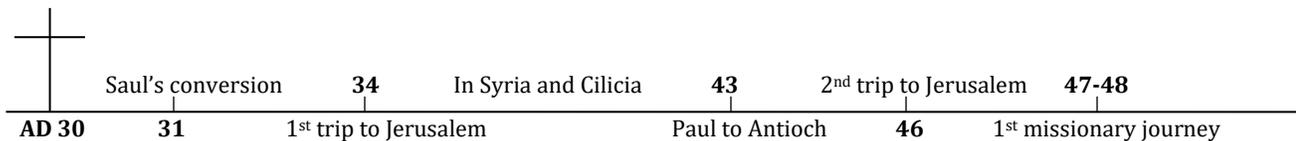
Extension of the church

Introduction

Where the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached, there is bound to be persecution. On the other hand, where the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached, there the Holy Spirit is at work to make his Church grow. As the early church continues to grow, the Holy Spirit is at work in the hearts and lives of each individual Christian. He is at work to create faith, and he is at work to strengthen faith. The Holy Spirit's work of creating faith is described in the Bible as "giving sight to the blind." Being brought to faith is certainly an eye-opening experience because we can now see the truth of the gospel. The strengthening of faith can also be an eye-opening experience as we grow in knowledge and understanding.

In Acts chapters 9 through 11, we encounter two eye-opening experiences. Saul's eyes are opened (literally and figuratively) to the truth about the One he formerly persecuted. Peter's eyes are opened to truth that God's grace is just as much for Gentiles as it is for the Jews.

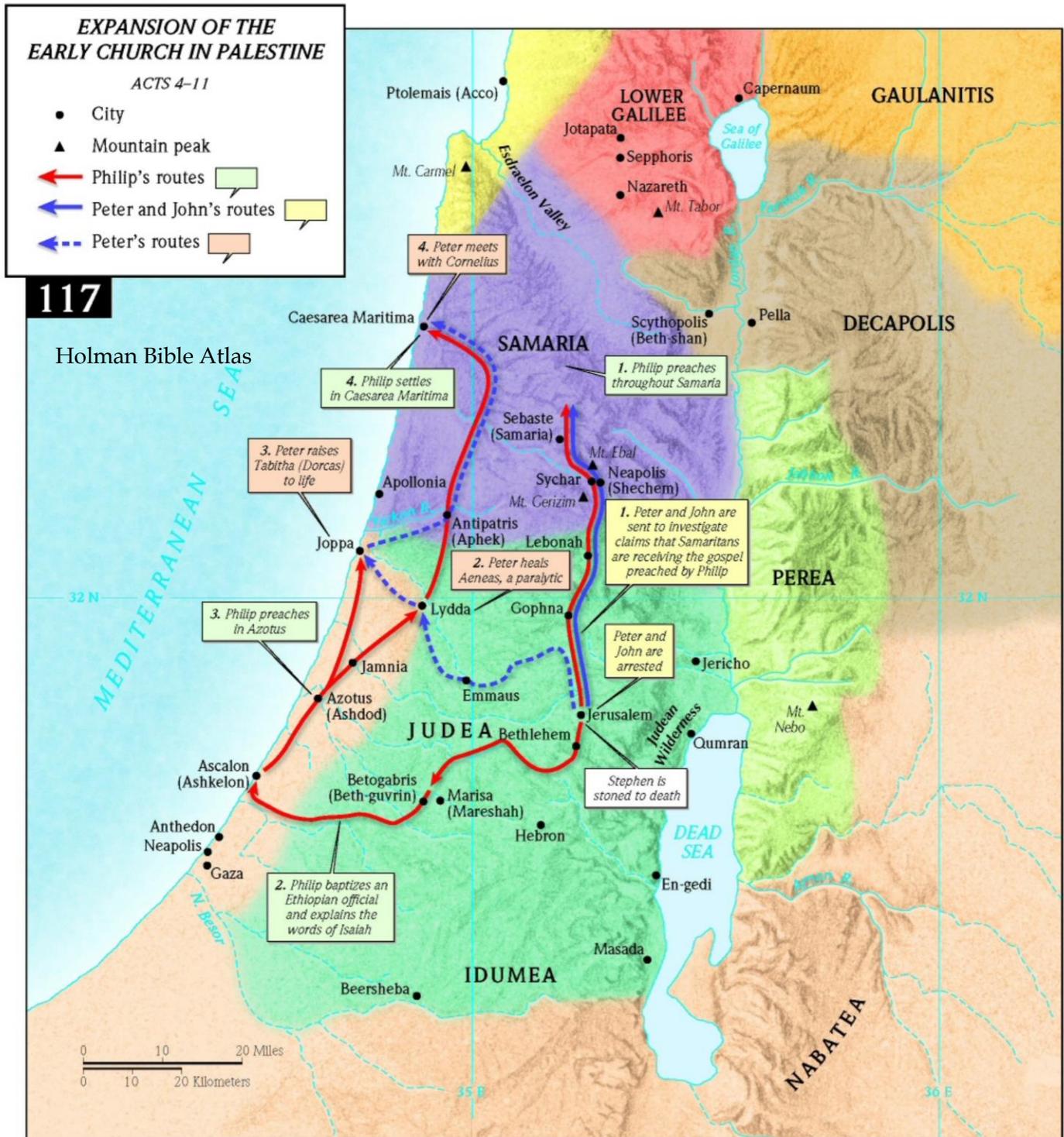
Timeline



Read Acts 9:19-31.

1. How did certain groups and individuals react to news about Saul after his conversion? What does this teach us about one's reputation?
2. Who vouched for Saul when he came to Jerusalem? (*This is the visit Paul refers to when he writes Galatians 1:18. He met with Peter and James. Then he went to Syria and Cilicia. See timeline above.*)
3. Paul later pointed back to this eye-opening experience in Acts 26 when he is on trial before King Agrippa (Acts 25:23-26:32). Why would Paul refer back to this event regularly throughout his life?

Summary of Acts 9:32-10:8. Luke now gives us a snapshot of Peter's ministry as he travels from Jerusalem and works his way up to the Mediterranean coast (see map below). In the town of Lydda he encounters a paralytic man named Aeneas and heals him. People in Lydda and the nearby town turned to the Lord. From there Peter goes up to Joppa and raises Tabitha from the dead. For some time, Peter stays in Joppa at the home of Simon the tanner. Meanwhile in Caesarea, an angel of the Lord appears to Cornelius, a Roman centurion described as devout and God-fearing man. The angel tells Cornelius to send men to Joppa in order to bring back Peter. What follows is Peter's vision and subsequent visit to Cornelius' House.



Read Acts 10:9-23.

1. Why did Peter not want to “kill and eat” the animals he saw in his vision?
2. How did “the voice” respond?

Read Acts 10:24-48.

1. Peter and some of the brothers from Joppa go on an important fieldtrip to Caesarea. How does Peter’s understanding of his vision develop as he interacts with Cornelius and his family? (Verses 28; 34-35).
2. Verses 34-43 record Peter’s message to Cornelius and all his friends and family. What are the key points of his message?
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3. When you are blessed with a similar opportunity to share your faith with anyone you might encounter, what is the content of your message?
4. This is now the third instance where Luke highlights the Holy Spirit being poured out on all who heard the message. Quickly review the other two instances. What is different about this one?

Summary of Acts 11:1-18. News about Peter’s visit to Cornelius’s house spread throughout the church in Judea. Peter got some flak from circumcised believers when he went to Jerusalem. According to Old Testament law, Jews were not to associate with Gentiles. Peter, however, boldly meets this criticism simply by recounting the vision he receives from the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit at work. The objection is stifled and the church in Jerusalem praises God.

1. *Discuss:* Today in the 21st Century, we are not faced with the same challenge as the early church when it comes to the question of Old Testament practices. However, what biases or attitudes may exist in a congregation that could potentially downplay the message of salvation for *all* people?

Summary of Acts 11:19-12:24. After the stoning of Stephen, Jews scattered to the north (Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch). They began sharing the message of Jesus with the Greeks. God blessed their witness. News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas (remember him from Acts 4:36?) to Antioch to check things out. Barnabas was overjoyed. He went to Tarsus in order to look for Saul. Barnabas and Saul spent a year serving the community in Antioch.

All misunderstandings about the necessity of Jewish customs in the early church, however, were not fully resolved at this time. The apostles would continue to combat the idea that Gentiles had to become Jews in order to be Christians. Peter himself would slip back into his practice of Old Testament ceremonial laws. This sent an unclear message to gentile believers at the church in Antioch, so Saul (Paul) had to publically set him straight (Galatians 2:11-21).

Fourteen years after his first visit to Jerusalem (look at the timeline), Paul made a second journey to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus (Galatians 2:1). He went in a response to a revelation (most likely the one from Agabus in Acts 11:28 that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world) and set before them the gospel that he preached among the Gentiles (Galatians 2:2).

Since Luke is shifting the storyline to what takes place in Jerusalem, he wants to update Theophilus (and his readers) of what happened in Jerusalem. Acts 12:1-24 is more of a flashback in the storyline. James, the brother of John, was put to death approximately 10 years after Jesus' death and resurrection (likely A.D. 40). Therefore, the events of Acts 12 most likely happened before Peter went to Antioch and Paul had to publicly correct him. An angel of the Lord struck Herod down because he did not give praise to God. He died in A.D. 44. (Look at the timeline.) Luke then transitions to Barnabas and Saul returning to Antioch from Jerusalem. They also take John Mark with them.

Read Acts 12:25-13:3.

1. What is the significance of placing or laying hands on Saul and Barnabas as they are set apart?

2. Do we have a similar practice today?

Reflection on this lesson

1. The church in Jerusalem was concerned about the church in Antioch and vice versa. What blessings were there in having that kind of partnership with other churches near or far?

2. What are some benefits of being part of a synod?