



## SESSION 3: APOSTLES & FALL OF JERUSALEM – CONTENT

In the last session (#2) we reviewed the Herodian dynasty, the development of Pharisaism that Christ scorned, and aspects that our Lord gave as foundations upon which His Church would be built. In this session we begin with Pentecost, review the Apostles, and end with the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman legions.

### I. Pentecost.

- A. The Biblical historian Bruce Metzger tells us that, “**It was the inauguration of the Church by the Spirit of God.**” About 120 disciples were present.
- B. This group was closely knit, observed Jewish Law and fasts and declared the Spirit could be received upon repentance and baptism. They were well-regarded and included some Pharisees. Christianity began to spread rapidly upon their return to their regions. Disciples soon numbered around 3,000.

### II. Stoning of Stephen.

- A. The first opposition to Christianity was from Sadducees, who feared a threat to their influence. Stephen, who was probably a former Sadducee, was preaching to Hellenists (i.e. Sadducees). He was accused of blasphemy against Moses and God. The end of his defense before the Sanhedrin says that, as having killed Jesus, they proved themselves as heirs of the murderers of the prophets, **clearly differentiating between Judaism and Christianity** (Acts 7:51-53).
- B. His martyrdom is recorded in Acts 7:57-60 & 8:1. Metzger says, “Stephen represents a Christianity that was beginning to see its wider purpose, and that it must either absorb Judaism or break away from it.”
- C. Stephen’s murder began the spreading of Christianity out from Jerusalem. It is especially significant that this led to the establishment of a Church at Antioch as it was to separate from Judaism. Antioch became the ‘Jerusalem of Christendom’. This created the first occasion for Gentiles to become Christians without becoming Jewish.

### III. Early Christian Practices.

The early Christians in Jerusalem considered themselves Hebrews living in a Messianic age. They changed fast days from Monday and Thursday to Wednesday and Friday. They called themselves ‘ekklesia’, that is ‘assembly’. They realized that to live in view of the coming kingdom was costly and demanding, that it entailed willingness to relinquish all lesser goods, to transcend normal moral demands of the Law, and to practice unlimited forgiveness toward others.

### IV. Simony, the first heresy (~40AD).

- A. Simon Magus of Gitta, a Samaritan, was a magician who developed a large following. He had been baptized by Philip, but wanted to buy the ability to perform the miracles of the

Apostles. To Christians he became known as the “father of all heresies”, and a founder of gnosticism.

- B. He said that in the beginning God’s first thought was female, who created the angels. Rebellious angels created the world as her prison. She reincarnated many times, once as Helen of Troy, and finally as a slave prostitute in Tyre. God descended as Simon Magus to rescue her and to confer salvation on men.
- C. He was strongly opposed by Simon Peter (Acts 8:9-13, 20-24) and later by Hippolytus, Justin Martyr and Irenaeus.

IV. Gnostic Heresy (~50AD).

- A. Actually predated Christ in some of its many forms. Was later supported by Tertullian (110-172AD). Strongly opposed by the Church, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyons and others.
- B. Generally included the ideas that: 1) gnostic believers possess higher, secret insight, 2) matter is evil, 3) Old Testament and Judaism are rejected, 4) the world was created by the Demiurge, an imperfect god, and 5) Christ’s body is an illusion.

V. The Apostles and their journeys (see included table).

VI. 51AD, Rome.

Open conflict between Christian Jews and non-Christian Jews was building; the former were inviting Gentiles to become children of Abraham by faith, and Jews considered this heretical. Because of the growing conflict, Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome.

VII. 54AD, Jerusalem.

At Passover in Jerusalem, a conflict between the high priests and the Jewish populace erupts into riot around the Temple. 30,000 are trampled to death. Nero succeeds Claudius in Rome.

VIII. 62AD, Jerusalem.

Bishop James the Righteous, brother of Christ, is killed by order of the high priest. Many Christians move from Jerusalem to Pella. The seed for the siege of Jerusalem is sown.

IX. 63AD, Developing Christian practices.

By now the churches were developing a practice - for which there is no ancient parallel – of writing each other letters of rebuke, advice, exhortation and encouragement – promoting a sense of unity. It was understood that Christians did not enter into second marriages, did not commit abortion, and stayed away from pagan festivals. By now there are Christian movements in every major city in Asia Minor, Italy and Greece. The historian Pliny notes: 1) Christians gather at dawn to sing to Christ and to join in an oath – the ‘Lord’s prayer’, 2) there is a failing economy of the sale of animals for sacrifice, due to Christian growth, and 3) “The contagion of that superstition has penetrated not only the cities but also the villages and country places.”

X. June 18, 64AD, Rome.

Ten of fourteen sections of Rome burn for six days. Nero selects a scapegoat – Christians.

XI. 66AD, Caesarea and Jerusalem.

Greek-speaking settlers in Caesarea attack Jews there. When the news reaches Jerusalem, Jews attack the Roman garrison and stop ritual sacrifices to Rome.

XII. 68AD, Rome.

General Vespasian starts towards Jerusalem with four legions. Nero is deposed and commits suicide. Vespasian is recalled to succeed Nero, turning over command of the legions to his son Titus.

XIII. 70AD, the Siege of Jerusalem.

Many Christian leaders escape to Pella. Titus sacks Jerusalem, burns the Temple while it is full of Jews seeking refuge, and Christianity all but disappears in Jerusalem for a time.

