

The Mission of Early Christianity to Preach the Gospel

1. The movement Jesus began had *always* been evangelistic.
 - A. Jesus began his ministry (after John the Baptist was arrested) by preaching the same gospel of the kingdom that John preached (compare Matthew 3.2 to Matthew 4.17 and Mark 1.15).
 - B. Jesus traveled from town to town preaching the gospel of the kingdom, teaching, and healing people (Matthew 4.23–25; 9.35–36)
 - C. Once the people of the town came to Jesus “and tried to keep Him from going away from them,” but he replied, “I **must** preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4.42–43). This interchange crystallizes Jesus’ own self understanding of his mission. He must preach the kingdom to the *other* cities also. He cannot just settle down and become the resident Rabbi or healer, he must go on. Luke 4.44 says, “So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.”
 - D. Jesus sent out the twelve in order to extend his own evangelization program—they were gospel preachers who operated in the same manner as Jesus (Matthew 10.1–42; Mark 3.14–19; 6.7–13, 30–32; Luke 9.1–6, 10)
 - E. Furthermore, Jesus sent out the seventy just like he had the twelve. (Luke 10.1–24)
 - i. “And He was saying to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Luke 10:2)
 - F. Jesus indicated that “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world...and then the end will come” (Mat 24.14). Thus, he envisioned that this gospel work would never stop until the end came.
 - G. The end of each Gospel includes a section where Jesus commissions his followers to carry on the work of preaching the gospel
 - i. Matthew 28.19–20 ¹⁹ “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
 - ii. Mark 16.15–16 ¹⁵ And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ “He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.
 - iii. Luke 24.46–48 ⁴⁶ and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ “You are witnesses of these things.
 - iv. John 20.21 So Jesus said to them again, “Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”

- H. Right before Jesus ascended to heaven he gave an outline of the missionary efforts that would soon follow (Acts 1.8).
2. The disciples took this commission seriously and witnessed to the resurrection of Jesus as they preached the gospel from town to town throughout the known world.
 - A. Acts 1.22; 2.32; 3.15; 4.33; 5.30–32; 10.39–41; 13.29–31; 26.22–23
 - B. To witness in the book of Acts means to testify (like in a court of law) that Jesus was raised from the dead. This the apostles all did including Paul who had seen Jesus on the road to Damascus.
 - C. Why is it so important to testify that Jesus was raised from the dead? How does that tie into the gospel Jesus preached about the kingdom of God?
 3. Evangelism in the Jerusalem church
 - A. [Acts 2] On Pentecost Peter acts as spokesman for the 12 – 3,000 received his word and were baptized (Acts 2.41)
 - B. [Acts 3] Peter and John healed a lame man after which Peter preached – 5,000 who had heard the message believed (Acts 4.4)
 - C. [Acts 4] Peter and John get arrested and stand before the Sanhedrin and testify about Jesus to them as well (Acts 4.8–12)
 - D. [Acts 5] After the Ananias and Sapphira incident many feared and through the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders were taking place among the people (Acts 5.12). Multitudes of men and women were constantly being added to their number (Acts 4.14). Sick people were even carried to the streets in order that Peter’s shadow might fall on any of them (Acts 5.15). Furthermore, the sick from the cities in the surrounding area of Jerusalem were brought and they were all healed (Acts 5.16). As a result of this popularity the high priest and the Sadducees arrested the twelve but an angel broke them out and said, “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this life” (Acts 5.20). The twelve are rearrested and brought before the Sanhedrin and again they testify of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 5.27–32). The twelve were flogged and then told “not to speak in the name of Jesus” (Acts 5.40). They went home rejoicing that they were “considered worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5.41), “and every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”
 - E. [Acts 6] Because of the increase in number some of the widows were being overlooked so the twelve appointed seven to take care of the issue. Meanwhile, “the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (Acts 6.7).
 - F. [Acts 6–7] Stephen (one of the seven appointed to care for the widows), a bold man full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people (Acts 6.8). Certain men of the Synagogue of the Freedmen started accusing Stephen of saying blasphemous words against Moses and God (Acts 6.11). Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin and defends himself as someone who believes in God and the story of his dealings with Israel including the building of the temple. Then he accuses them of murdering the righteous one (i.e. the Messiah). Unlike Pentecost and the healing of the lame man, this group of people does not repent but instead

murder Stephen by stoning. Even so he has a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God confirming that Stephen was doing God's will.

- G. [Acts 8a] The Jerusalem persecution begins the day Stephen was stoned. This resulted in the scattering of many disciples to the regions of Judea and Samaria though the apostles stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 8.1). Saul (later known as Paul) was "ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women" whom he then imprisoned (Acts 8.3). The result of this persecution is that "those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" everywhere (Acts 8.4)
4. Evangelism in Samaria
- A. [Acts 8b] Philip goes to Samaria and performs great signs and miracles and "preaches the gospel about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" which results in the baptism of many men and women (Acts 8.12). When word got back to Jerusalem of this new movement among the Samaritans they sent Peter and John who came and "prayed for them that they might receive the holy spirit" (Acts 8.15) "then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the holy spirit" (Acts 8.17). This opened up a new field for evangelism. On the way back to Jerusalem Peter and John preached "the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans."
 - B. [Acts 8c] Philip is instructed by an angel to evangelize an Ethiopian Treasurer who believes and is then baptized (Acts 8.36). Miraculously, Philip is snatched away and then found himself in Azotus from which he continued preaching the gospel until he came to Caesarea (Acts 8.40).
5. Saul converts to belief in Jesus as Messiah which ends the persecution temporarily
- A. [Acts 9a] Saul was "still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples...asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9.1-2). Suddenly he encountered the risen Jesus. [more on Paul in the next class] Suffice it to say he was miraculously converted which resulted in him proclaiming "Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'he is the son of God'" (Acts 9.20). He confounded "the Jews living in Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9.22). A plot was hatched to kill Saul so he was let down from the city wall in a large basket from which he made his way back to Jerusalem (Acts 9.24-25). When Paul arrived in Jerusalem he spent time with the disciples there, moving about freely, and "speaking out boldly in the name of the lord" (Acts 9.28). Then as Paul was "talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews...they were attempting to put him to death" so the brethren "brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus" (Acts 9.29-30). All of this results in the church "throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria" enjoying "peace, being built up...continued to increase" (Acts 9.31).



6. Peter's missionary journey

- A. [Acts 9b] Peter traveled "through all those regions and came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda" (Acts 9.32). At Lydda Peter healed a man named Aeneas who had been bedridden for eight years due to the fact that he was paralyzed. As a result of this miracle "all who lived at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord" (Acts 9.35). Then Peter went to Joppa (about 10 miles from Lydda) and raised from the dead a disciple named Tabitha who was a kind person who continually performed acts of mercy (Acts 9.36). As a result of this "it became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord" (Acts 9.42). Peter stayed many days in Joppa.
- B. [Acts 10–11] Cornelius, a Gentile centurion, received a vision of an angel who instructed him to send men to contact Peter in Joppa (Acts 10.1, 3, 5). Meanwhile in Joppa Peter sees a vision three times of a sheet with all kinds of animals on it being lowered down from heaven. A voice commands peter to kill and eat but Peter says, "by no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean" (Acts 10.14). The voice responds, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." As Peter was musing over what this vision could mean the men from Cornelius' house showed up and the spirit said to Peter, "behold three men are looking for you; but get up, go downstairs and accompany them without misgivings for I have sent them myself" (Acts 10.19–20). Peter went to Cornelius' house (which is against Jewish tradition because Cornelius is a Gentile) and preaches the gospel to them. In the middle of Peter's preaching the people break out into tongues because the spirit had fallen "upon all of those who were listening to the message" (Acts 10.44). This shocked the Jewish believers (Peter and his companions) because the gift of the holy spirit had been poured out on Gentiles signifying that God had accepted these people as members of the community. Therefore, Peter commanded that they all be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 10.48). As a result of this those in Jerusalem took issue with Peter (Acts 11.2). Peter told them the entire story about what happened and "when they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God,

saying, 'well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life'" (Acts 10.18).

- C. [Acts 11b] "So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word" to the Jews (Acts 11.19).
 - D. [Acts 11c] the Church at Antioch (Acts 11.20–30) to be covered next class
7. Persecution from Herod Agrippa
- A. [Acts 12] Peter had made his way back to Jerusalem and was there when James the brother of John was put to death with the sword by Herod (Acts 12.2). Since this act pleased the Jews so much, Herod "proceeded to arrest Peter also" (Acts 12.3). Peter was kept in prison while the church made fervent prayer to God on his behalf (Acts 12.5). "On the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards in front of the door were watching over the prison" (Acts 12.6). Then an angel came, struck Peter's side and instructed him to get up. As he stood, his chains fell from his hands. Peter dressed himself and the angel escorted him out of the prison. After they passed through the last gate (which had opened by itself) and gone along on the street for a little while, the angel departed from him. Peter immediately went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, and after some convincing delighted their prayer service with his presence. Then he left and went to another place.
8. extra-biblical missionary work of the twelve (Note: much of this information cannot be confirmed with certainty. Source for information: *The Search for the Twelve Apostles* by Dr. William McBirnie, Tyndale House, 1979, website: <http://www.biblepath.com/apostles.html>)
- A. After being imprisoned several times in Jerusalem because of his faith, **Peter** left with his wife and possibly others. It is believed that he ministered in Babylon to the Jewish colonists there and it is, also, believed to be his location when he wrote his first epistle (1 Peter). Peter eventually went to Rome and while there, it is believed that Mark (the writer of the Gospel of Mark) served as his translator as he preached. Peter died in Rome under Nero's persecution.
 - B. **Andrew** went to the foothills of the Caucasus mountains (present day Georgia in Russia) and while there he preached to the Scythians as far as the Caspian Sea. He also went to Byzantium which is present day Istanbul in Turkey and from there, to Greece. In fact he traveled to Thrace and Macedonia, down through the Corinthian Gulf to Patros and it was in Patros that Andrew was martyred.
 - C. Not much is known of the ministry of **James** the son of Zebedee after the Lord's resurrection, but it is believed that he lived another 14 years before his martyrdom. In fact, the apostle James was the first apostle to suffer martyrdom. By order of Herod Agrippa I, James was beheaded in Jerusalem about the feast of Easter, 44 AD. It is believed that within this 14 year period, James visited the Jewish colonist and slaves in Spain to preach the Gospel.
 - D. The apostle **John** rose to a position of influence within world-wide Christianity and shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, he moved to Ephesus. He became the pastor of the church in Ephesus and had a special relationship to other churches in the area, as we know from the letters to the Seven

Churches in Asia, in the book of Revelation. When he was released from exile, he returned to Ephesus and lived till the time of the Roman emperor Trajan. It is said that John, "Founded and built churches throughout all Asia, and worn out by old age, died in the sixty-eight year after our Lord's passion and was buried near the same city (Ephesus)."

- E. Most of **Philip's** latter ministry took place in Galatia (in Turkey) and it's believed that at the age of 87, he suffered martyrdom in Hierapolis.
- F. In the company of the apostle Philip, the apostle **Bartholomew** went to Asia Minor and labored in Hierapolis, near Laodicea and Colosse, in what is modern day Turkey. From there, Bartholomew went eastward to India and then to greater Armenia. Bartholomew is reported to have labored in the area around the south end of the Caspian Sea, in the section that was then called Armenia. The modern name of the district where he died is Azerbaijan and the place of his death, called in New Testament times Albanopolis, is now Derbend which is on the west coast of the Caspian Sea.
- G. After the resurrection of the Lord Christ Jesus, **Thomas** went to Babylon. It is believed that he established the first Christian church there. He is also known to have gone to Persia and from there he went to India and preached the Gospel making many converts. It is also believed that the apostle Thomas evangelized as far as China, and while in India, he suffered martyrdom; being killed with a lance (he was buried in Mylapore, India, which is now a suburb of Madras.)
- H. **Matthew** probably remained in the Holy Land, as tradition says, for 15 years and after this, encouraged by the reports of the success of other Christian leaders among the Jews (the Diaspora) and also among the Gentiles, he went forth on several missionary journeys. It is certain that he went to Persia and the mysterious area in Persia known as "Ethiopia." It is also possible that he traveled to the Ethiopia in Africa as the Roman Catholic tradition indicates and there is also a belief that Matthew was martyred in Egypt upon his return from Ethiopia in Africa but this is not certain. There is a tradition which says that Matthew was martyred in Parthia.
- I. Not much is known about the later ministry of **James** the son of Alphaeus. This apostle, however, Aziz S. Atiya, in his "History of Eastern Christianity" says, "The seeds of Syrian Christianity had been sown in Jerusalem during the Apostolic age and the contention has been made that the first bishop of the Syrian church was none other than St. James of the Twelve Apostles, identified as 'St. James the Less'."
- J. **Jude** is believed to have evangelized the area of Armenia associated with the city of Edessa, in company perhaps of the apostle Bartholomew, and for a brief time, with the apostle Thomas. One can, also, believe that Jude spent his years of evangelization in Syria and northern Persia. It is likely that he was martyred there and buried in Kara Kalisa near the Caspian Sea, about 40 miles from Tabriz, in modern day Iran.
- K. **Simon** the Zealot was believed to have preached the Gospel throughout North Africa, from Egypt to Mauritania, and even into Britain. There is a church tradition which says that he was crucified by the Romans in Caistor, Lincolnshire, Britain and subsequently buried there on May 10, circa 61 A.D. This cannot be confirmed,

however, as there is also a strong tradition which says, that having left Britain, Simon, at some point, went to Persia and was martyred there by being sawn into.

- L. It is believed that **Matthias** evangelized in regions of Armenia and great peril befell him in the cities of Colchis, Sebastopol and elsewhere. It is also believed that he at one time, was aided by the apostle Andrew. He along with the apostles Jude (Thaddaeus), Bartholomew, Simon the Zealot and Andrew are credited by Armenian tradition as the apostles who evangelized Armenia.