

*The Early Church***Beginning in Jerusalem**❖ **LESSON TEXT****Acts 1:1-12**

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

❖ **VERSE****Acts 1:8**

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

❖ **THOUGHT**

The Lord Jesus gave birth to a church that He designed to grow and emerge as a dynamic, proactive, mission-minded, consecrated, passionate, and powerful organism.

❖ LESSON OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

I. PREPARATION FOR JERUSALEM

- A. Jesus' Life and Ministry Culminated in Jerusalem
- B. Reasons against Jerusalem
- C. Reasons for Jerusalem

II. JESUS GAVE THE COMMISSION IN ACTS 1:8

III. JESUS GAVE LIFE TO THE CHURCH

- A. Jesus Gave Birth to the Church
- B. Jesus Builds the Church
- C. The Church Lives in Victory

CONCLUSION

❖ INTRODUCTION

Jerusalem—what is there about this city that so captivates the minds and hearts of mankind? People regard numerous sites all over the globe as sacred. Two such religious centers are Rome and Mecca, where millions gather to pay homage to their deities. However, Jerusalem is unique, for no other place exists on earth that three monotheistic religions proclaim to be their “holy city.”

Transparency
Transparency 1 points out the fact that Jerusalem is the center for various world religions and the birthplace of the church.

For centuries, Jerusalem has been pivotal in the thinking of the religious Jew. Mount Zion is associated with the land of Moriah, where God revealed Himself to Abraham. David conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital city, and Solomon built the magnificent Temple there to enshrine the presence of the Almighty. Hebrew prophets declared Jerusalem's destiny as blessed above all cities of the world.

For Muslims, Jerusalem is the place to which they believe the angel Gabriel escorted Muhammad and from which he supposedly ascended to the seven heavens. Dominating the Temple Mount, the Dome of the Rock remains a focal point for Islamic worship.

Although various religions claim Jerusalem as their center, Jerusalem greatly appeals to Christians, and especially to apostolic believers. Looking beyond the man-made shrines or even the traditional tourist sites, the genuine Christian feels drawn to Jerusalem because it was where Jesus Christ walked and taught.

Jerusalem is where He instituted the Last Supper with His twelve disciples and stood in Pilate's judgment hall to be condemned. It was where He died on a Roman cross and triumphantly rose from death on the third day. In the future, it will be from the Mount of Olives at Jerusalem that Christ will someday rule over all the earth. (See Zechariah 14.)

Finally, Jerusalem was the place where the Lord Jesus gave birth to the church. God initiated His incredibly wonderful plan by filling 120 believers with the Holy Ghost in the upper room. Those who had gathered with one accord bathed the room with prayer and supplication, and God bathed them all with His Spirit.

“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4).

I. PREPARATION FOR JERUSALEM

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51).

With determination, Jesus followed the difficult path chosen for His life by the Almighty. He knew that the consequences—or the conclusion—of this course would fulfill the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27). Without question, He knew that the purpose of His coming was to suffer. “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

A. Jesus' Life and Ministry Culminated in Jerusalem

It must have been glorious. Following John the Baptist's imprisonment and Jesus' temptation, “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel” (Mark 1:14). Speaking of a new and wonderful kingdom, Jesus the Christ came manifesting the eternal, invisible God. He demonstrated magnificent power as He brought great light to those who sat in spiritual darkness. Like many others, Jesus came to John to be baptized, but afterwards He “returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Luke 4:14).

Christ's ministry shook the area of Galilee to its core, and those who lived there soon felt the effects. The news resounded with wave

after powerful wave: “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23).

What a remarkable ministry, this ministry of Jesus! The Lord called twelve men to be His special disciples, and all but one was from Galilee. They noted that the Master continually ministered to the blind, the deaf, and everyone in need. These Twelve watched as He touched lepers, the untouchables of the day, and saw these outcasts healed.

Their eyes beheld the Lord quell the storms on the Sea of Galilee as well as the storms that raged in the hearts of the demon-possessed. They witnessed the dead restored to life and saw thousands fed with what seemed to be next to nothing.

Listening with rapt attention along with the multitudes, they heard Jesus teach great kingdom principles using homespun stories and simple parables. It was all so new, but so refreshing. The disciples could never seem to anticipate what the Master might do next. They soon learned, however, that whatever He did would uplift all mankind.

What could Jesus have been thinking? What was in His mind as He ministered to the sick and needy in Galilee, Judea, Samaria, and in the coasts of heathen Phoenicia? Without question, thoughts of Jerusalem must have cast an ever-deepening shadow over His life. Knowing that time was passing so swiftly, He knew that He soon must leave His disciples. Thus, He began emphasizing in private conversations the teachings that He knew were essential for them to understand.

The retreat into the area of Caesarea Philippi, a town in northern Israel, was a turning point in the ministry of our Lord. Matthew recorded, “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matthew 16:21). For nearly three years, Jesus had taught His disciples stirring truths about the kingdom. Suddenly, He began to teach them stark realities about the Cross, which soon He would endure.

How deeply the jagged edge of rejection can cut! Jesus had seen the huge crowds and had heard them proclaim Him a wonderful prophet. They had followed Him en masse “from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan” (Matthew 4:25).

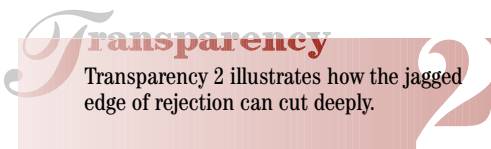
At Capernaum, a throng had marveled and glorified God when He had forgiven a paralytic of his sins and also had healed the man of his disease. In the area of Decapolis, “great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them” (Matthew 15:30).

Yet, for all this, Jesus was well aware that the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes would reject Him. (See Mark 8:31.) Viewed from a human perspective, it must have been agonizing. These religious groups constantly harassed Him about His teachings, criticized Him for healing on the Sabbath, demeaned Him for speaking of His heavenly Father, and demonized Him for casting out devils.

Many of those who had followed Him had done so only for natural gain, and eventually they left Him. The Gadarenes rejected Him and urged Him to leave their area. The Nazarenes, His own townspeople, also rejected Him and tried to throw Him down a steep hill. Ultimately, the Jews as a nation rejected Him and turned Him over to the Romans to be crucified.

The very popularity of the Lord spawned the Pharisees’ hatred toward Him. Jesus ministered to those with whom the scribes and Pharisees would not associate, and by exerting His authority, He challenged their own. When He healed a man’s withered hand on the Sabbath day, the Pharisees “were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus” (Luke 6:11). Perhaps many of them were among those who plotted His death. (See Matthew 26:4.)

Yes, God was in Christ, but the sandaled feet of our Lord were very much like our own—flesh and blood. As He made His way to Calvary, Jesus literally felt the heavy weight of the cross upon His lacerated back. He felt the excruciating pain of the crown of thorns that cut deeply into His brow and temples. While the nails of the soldiers pierced His hands, the taunts of His enemies tore at His heart. His own people, who openly despised Him, thought God had smitten Him.



“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

Teaching tip

To add variety to the presentation, use a team-teaching method and assign the following section to a capable person. A different voice presenting this historical data will serve to accent the remaining material.

B. Reasons against Jerusalem

The Lord had every reason to reject the people of Jerusalem. Like an unfaithful wife, they had broken all their vows to God and often had played the harlot, offering their love to the heathen gods of other nations. (See Ezekiel 16:15-34.) The Lord used this and other allegorical images of Jerusalem to address the failures of His people, Israel.

Ezekiel 16 paints a picture of Jerusalem’s rejected state, which really was directed at her inhabitants. Before Jehovah found her, Jerusalem was “cast out in the open field” (Ezekiel 16:5) and was still in her “natal blood” (Ezekiel 16:6, *The Amplified Bible*).

However, when God said, “Live” (Ezekiel 16:6), Jerusalem matured and grew beautiful in His eyes. Although she had been naked, the Lord spread His skirt over her. Although she had been forsaken, He pledged Himself to her and claimed her as His own.

The allegories are heartrending because Jerusalem proved to be entirely faithless. She had given herself to other lovers (the images of nations such as Egypt and Assyria). Jerusalem heedlessly used Jehovah’s gifts to her in the practice of idolatrous worship. She had sacrificed her sons and daughters in the flames of pagan altars.

The history of Jerusalem is the story of prophetic warning, tragic failure, occasional revival, and terrible destruction. Jehovah faithfully called the people of Israel to repentance, and they faithlessly disregarded His calls. Before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, Isaiah prophesied, “Upon the land of my people shall come up thorns and briers; yea, upon all the houses of joy in the joyous city” (Isaiah 32:13). Jerusalem then endured

the desecration of Antiochus Epiphanes and the destruction of the Romans because of disobedience.

By the end of the third century BC, a subtle change began to occur throughout the Near East. The Greeks were affecting the Jews along with that entire region by Hellenizing them. Some Jews were turning to Greek education and even giving their children Greek names. The Greek lifestyle, particularly with its athletic emphasis, appealed to the young people of Judah. When Jason—the liberal-minded high priest who had gained his position through bribery—came to office, the Gentile influence became even greater. With the establishment of a gymnasium in Jerusalem, Jewish youth could now study Homer, Greek philosophy, and music.

Corrupting Hebrew traditions at their very base, the aspects of sports and entertainment within Grecian culture were just too much for many of those who lived in Jerusalem. Moreover, the drift toward Grecian culture became even more pronounced under another high priest, Menelaus.

At first, Jerusalem accepted the leadership of Antiochus Epiphanes, the ruler from Antioch who had appointed Menelaus. Later, when Antiochus felt threatened by an uprising, he turned in fury against any Jew that he suspected of taking part in the rebellion. He massacred approximately 80,000 of them and sold that many more into slavery.

Ransacked and desecrated, the Temple housed an abomination—perhaps a standing stone—erected near the brazen altar. (See Daniel 11:29-31.) What was a Greek idol doing in the Temple at Jerusalem? This was more than many Jews felt they could tolerate, and they rallied behind the heroic Maccabees to make Jerusalem, for a period, the center of traditional Jewish values.

By the time of Jesus Christ, the Roman Empire had reached its greatest prominence. There was considerable stability in the conquered territories around the Mediterranean, but volatility still existed in the city of Jerusalem. Herod governed the turbulent territory of Galilee where various religious and political sects vied for control. However, these groups formed a strange union in open opposition to the Lord Jesus.

Knowing the city’s history of wickedness and hypocrisy, Jesus declared, “It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem” (Luke 13:33). By now the Temple had become a den of thieves, and the scribes and Pharisees,

religious leaders of the day, were men pleasers. These religious leaders were more concerned with their inflexible traditions and their pretentious piety than with the justice and love of God. Jesus called them white-washed tombs that looked impressive on the outside, but they were putrid on the inside and full of dead men's bones.

Jesus was the rejected "stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious" (I Peter 2:4). No place on earth should have received Him with greater eagerness; but during His triumphant entry into the holy city, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He saw the grim future of a city that would be desolate and utterly destroyed. Jerusalem would spurn and reject her long-expected Redeemer, but not one of her stones would remain upon another.

C. Reasons for Jerusalem

King David had desired to build a house for the Almighty, but God answered that He would build a house (a dynasty) for David. "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (II Samuel 7:16). God fulfilled His promise to David both in the relatively near future as well as "for a great while to come" (II Samuel 7:19).

Not only would Solomon and his descendants sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem, but there also would be One coming whose reign would continue into eternity. This prophesied "righteous Branch" was none other than Jesus Christ, who first would purify and then eventually would glorify Jerusalem. (See Isaiah 4:2-6; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12.) He who descended through the lineage of David would fulfill the promises of God.

"But I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there; and have chosen David to be over my people Israel" (II Chronicles 6:6).

The place where God chooses to put His name is "the place where the Lord would dwell" (Charles J. Ellicott). The pagans chose such locations as the high places in the mountains and tree groves in the valleys as sites of idol worship. The worship of Jehovah, however, was to be distinctively different. Moses had declared that there would be one location, ordained of the Lord, where Israel would bring their tithes and offerings. It would be a hallowed, happy place (Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 11-12) that the Lord

desired for His habitation (Psalm 132:13), and a place that He loved (Psalm 78:68).

Although God loves Jerusalem, He also desires a people who sincerely repent of their sins to serve Him. Nothing moves God like genuine repentance. When the wicked people in the city of Nineveh repented, the Lord "revoked His [sentence of] evil that He had said that He would do to them" (Jonah 3:10, *The Amplified Bible*). Likewise, He will freely forgive His chosen city's transgressions when the people repent. The heathen may come up against Jerusalem, but the "LORD also shall roar out of Zion" (Joel 3:16). The forgiven city will at last be free from foreign oppression, and beginning in that yet future day, Israel will be at peace forever. (See Zechariah 14:21; Luke 21:24.)

"So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more" (Joel 3:17).

Although it may seem strange that the Lord chose Jerusalem, we remember that He often chooses the obscure and unrenowned to fulfill His purposes. Rather than glorifying mankind's accomplishments, He chooses to glorify His own. Most Bible-believing churches are not begun in stately buildings in well-to-do areas of cities. God builds His church in the most unlikely places—in remote villages of a steaming jungle, in off-the-road spots near insignificant towns, or in downtrodden, red-light districts of bustling cities. It is the Lord's doing. If He so chooses, He can even work in a mental institution or in a maximum-security prison.

Jesus Christ chose to begin His church in Jerusalem, the city that had rejected, beaten, and crucified Him. This, a sovereign act of God's mercy, superseded all that mankind could have imagined. No fanfare or public display existed to gain people's attention. One hundred twenty believers who had gathered in an obscure room in the city waited prayerfully and expectantly. They united in heart and purpose, awaiting something wonderful.

II. JESUS GAVE THE COMMISSION IN ACTS 1:8

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come

upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

John had baptized people with water unto repentance, but Jesus would baptize them with the Spirit and with fire. John’s message had cleansed the cup of people’s lives, but Christ’s kingdom would fill the vessel. John had come merely as a *friend* of the Bridegroom, but Christ Himself *was* the Bridegroom.

Many of Jesus’ disciples had witnessed the sweeping influence of John the Baptist as he preached in the wilderness. The crowds flocked to him from Jerusalem, Judea, and the entire Jordan River region. John’s message was that the time of the messianic age was about to dawn and that they should turn their hearts toward God. He then baptized with water those who confessed their sins. (See Matthew 3:6; Acts 1:5.)

Now Jesus was preparing His disciples for something more. He was about to usher in the kingdom of God. John had preached that the kingdom was at hand, but he had not personally experienced it. Jesus’ reply to the Pharisees’ question regarding the coming of the kingdom of God apparently startled them, for they believed it would come with pomp and splendor. (See Luke 17:20-21.) He informed His disciples that He held all power and authority, and that they would act as His representatives after His ascension. Moreover, the message would begin at Jerusalem and spread throughout the world like flames from an inextinguishable fire.

III. JESUS GAVE LIFE TO THE CHURCH

A. Jesus Gave Birth to the Church

“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5).

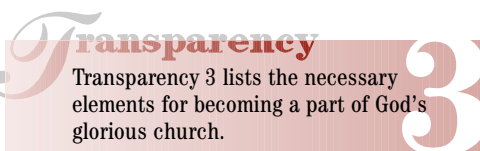
The Spirit of Christ gave birth to the church. No human ingenuity or planning could have caused the transformation that took place in the upper room. Jesus had explained to Nicodemus, “Unless a person is born again (anew, from above), he cannot ever see (know, be acquainted with, and experience) the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, *The*

Amplified Bible). Those who waited in the upper room until they received this infusion of power from on high experienced rivers of living water flowing out of their innermost beings. (See John 7:38-39; Acts 2:1-4.)

B. Jesus Builds the Church

Little more than six months before His death, Jesus asked His disciples, “Whom say ye that I am?” (Matthew 16:15). Like many today, they had some idea of Jesus’ identity, yet their comprehension was imperfect. Now it became imperative that they fully understand. The Twelve must recognize Him as more than a miracle worker, and they should view Him as more than their Messiah. They must know Him as the Son of the Highest. In this secluded area, Peter grasped the truth as He saw the Lord as more than a magnificent prophet such as Elijah or Jeremiah. He proclaimed with certainty, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

The revelation of His divinity was the sure foundation upon which Jesus would build His church. This is the *petra*, the massive rock that cannot be moved. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11).



To be a part of the Lord’s glorious church, we must know Him in the power of Jesus Name baptism (Acts 2:38; 4:12; 19:5) and be filled and led by His sanctifying Spirit (Romans 8:14).

C. The Church Lives in Victory

Born miraculously on the Day of Pentecost through an outpouring of God’s Spirit, the church has survived all the determined efforts of those who would have stamped it out. Neither the heresies of mankind nor the doctrines of devils have succeeded in destroying its influence. The force of Christ’s army threw the demonic princes of this world into a state of disarray. Moreover, Jesus declared, “And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Certainly, God’s people are destined for victory. The church has won battles in the past and has cast down strongholds, but the greatest victories for the church still lie ahead.

“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

❖ CONCLUSION

Jerusalem was privileged and chosen, but the people were hardhearted. With great sorrow, our Lord lamented over the disobedience and defiance of the people of this chosen city.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matthew 23:37).

Although Jerusalem has suffered for centuries as the Gentile nations have trampled

her down, God has not forgotten her. The inhabitants of Jerusalem crucified the Savior, but He arose and sent the Comforter to those who waited on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. In fulfillment of Scripture, the exalted Christ will bless the nations of the world from this city of His chosen people—the city of Jerusalem.

❖ REFLECTIONS

- Was Jesus aware of the sufferings that awaited Him in Jerusalem? Discuss.
- Discuss several reasons why God could have rightfully rejected the city of Jerusalem.
- Discuss the meaning of Hellenization and what effect it had on the Jews.
- Discuss reasons for the Lord's choice to place His name upon Jerusalem.
- Discuss what Jesus meant by the words “upon this rock I will build my church” and why this is so important.