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## THE TWO WAYS OF THE FIRST CENTURY CHURCH

### CHAPTER 3

## GROWTH UNPRECEDENTED

*"And that same day there were added about three thousand souls.....and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved....howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.....and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.....neither was there any among them that lacked.....and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.....and in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied....and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."*

Acts 2:41,47,4:4,32,34,5:14,6:1,7

**O**n the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God undid the effect of the division of languages He had caused over two thousand years earlier during the time of Nimrod (see Genesis 10:8-11:9). The apostles were all filled with the gift of pneuma hagion- holy spirit- and began to speak in languages that they had never learned. They spoke as God gave them utterance and although they did not understand the languages in which they spoke, the "multitude" (Acts 2:6) heard them speak "the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11).

### **They All Spoke In Tongues**

As the division of languages during Nimrod's time prevented or at least inhibited the spread of ungodliness, so now the new language- the tongues of men and of angels (I Cor. 13:1)- would cement the spread of godliness throughout the world. The apostles spoke in tongues.

Gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost were devout Jews out of every nation under heaven. Many would have stayed in and around Jerusalem since the Passover fifty days before and would have witnessed the crucifixion. Both Passover and Pentecost were required feasts for every Jewish male over thirteen years of age to attend. Only the disabled and infirm were excused from this requirement.

The devout were all there. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Libya, Cyrene, Rome- all understood the words spoken. Jews, proselytes, Cretes and Arabians all heard the apostles speak in their own languages **THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD!**

They witnessed an unprecedented miracle in the history of the world and in witnessing that miracle they had undeniable proof that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. They heard in their own languages, from unlearned Galileans, the wonderful works of God. And, although we are not told the words that were spoken, the most wonderful work of all was bound to have been spoken- Jesus Christ had risen from the dead!

Such was the start of the new age. Some tried to dismiss the miracle by saying that the apostles were drunk. But, those who heard the wonderful works of God in languages that they understood, but which they knew the apostles did not understand, would not buy that line. The miracle was undeniable. What a

great day in the history of the world!

Jesus' promise that they would be endued with power from on high was delivered! The era of the new nature had begun! The church of the body of Christ was created. The age of grace, kept secret since before the world began, was now made manifest. And, on that same day, Jesus Christ poured out God's spirit on about three thousand souls and as Peter pointed out in Acts 2:33, Jesus Christ "hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear."

Did all three thousand speak in tongues so that everyone heard from them also the wonderful works of God? I do not know. But, God did a pretty good job of confounding the people during Nimrod's time by causing them to speak in languages that their neighbors did not understand. That work is still obvious as there are many languages in the world today. It would be in character for God to unconfound to the same degree now that the new age had begun. It took two thousand years, but the commotion caused at the Tower in Babylon finally gave way to a new order in the Temple in Jerusalem.

There is a hint of evidence in Acts 5:32 that speaking in tongues was common in that the apostles on trial state that the holy spirit was God's witness of the resurrection as well as the apostles themselves. Since the apostles were on trial before the Sanhedrin, what they said must have been clearly understood by the members of the Sanhedrin. If the apostles were not referring to speaking in tongues, what other manifestation of the spirit they could have been referring to is not clear. Certainly speaking in tongues was a witness of the resurrection (as is clear from the account in Acts 2 of the day of Pentecost and also from the account of the "pouring out of the gift of holy spirit" on the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10:44-46 where Peter and the six Jews with him were astonished because the Gentiles also spoke in tongues) and may well have been "the witness" spoken about in Acts 5:32.

There is ample evidence in the rest of Acts and in Paul's epistles that speaking in tongues was common throughout the Christian community. There is ample evidence today that speaking in tongues is common throughout the Christian community. What Jesus Christ poured out on the first day of the church age, He continues to pour out as men and women believe. "Jesus Christ the same, yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

### The Effect of the First Day of the Church

The effect of that single day in Jerusalem on the history of the world cannot be overestimated. Jesus Christ began pouring out the spirit and continues to pour it out down to this very day. As Peter told the multitude that day, "the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39) And, Jesus Christ did not merely dole out the spirit and then leave the recipients on their own. He kept pouring out to them wisdom and knowledge and enlightenment, and correction and power and all the things that are needed by a lively body from an active head. (see Eph. 1:17-23).

No longer did man have to pursue the impossible task of building a sufficient ladder on which to climb into the presence of God. He could now accept the finished work of Jesus Christ. He could accept the immediate leadership of Jesus Christ and by so doing, he could receive a new nature as a free, unearned gift. In that nature, Jesus Christ made him righteous! This righteousness was not earned. It did not come because of any merit on the part of the recipient. It was a gift from God. It was due to God's divine favor, God's grace. And, in this new nature, the Christian received an ability unknown to him before. He could relate to God as a Father instead of as an exacting and all powerful Stranger. He could approach Him as a son approaches a father, without thought of inadequacy, inferiority, or a sense of condemnation. In this new nature, timidity would give way to boldness and fear to love.

In short, those who came to God by Jesus Christ were in much the same position as Adam and Eve were before the fall. The great difference being that man now had a mediator, a defender, a protector and advocate- Jesus Christ, The Righteous One. Unlike Adam and Eve, whose spiritual nature was given upon a condition, those who received the new nature given by Jesus Christ were given it unconditionally. It would never be taken away from those who received it. It could not be lost. God's gift was eternal. God's

gift was life. God's gift was eternal life!

Adam and Eve were created with a spiritual nature upon a condition. They did not meet the condition and therefore lost their spiritual nature. When Jesus Christ came, man was dead in his trespasses and sins. But, those who believed in Jesus Christ were quickened, were made alive, and were given a new nature. And, that gift was unconditional (see Eph. 2:4-9). Adam and Eve's choice was to obey God or die. After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, man's choice was, and still is, to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and live or not accept Him and stay dead in trespasses and sins.

After receiving God's gift of holy spirit, those who chose to believe in Jesus Christ still had a choice regarding how they would live. The "believer" now had two natures, an old nature and a new nature. Which nature would be exercised and which nature ignored, was the choice of the believer. Neither nature dominated him. He was still in control of his actions. He could choose to walk by the new nature. He could choose to walk by the old nature. He could be deceived by his old nature if he allowed himself to be. He could be tricked if he wearied of being "in Christ". But, he could overcome such deceit and trickery, if he wanted to, by the power of God inherent in his new nature.

The "two natures" are clearly revealed after the day of Pentecost in the behavior of those who were "born again". Some chose to return to "the weak and beggarly elements" (Gal. 4:9) and desired to again be in bondage. They saw strength in "the law of sin and death", the law that governed the old nature. And so they focused on sin rather than the savior from sin, Jesus Christ. In so doing, their focus was turned from life to death, for "the sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law" (I. Cor. 15:56). They wanted "wages" for their "work" and did not continue in the reality that "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" had made them free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2). Instead of "speaking the truth in love" as Paul did when he said, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23), they left off the second part of the verse and simply said, "the wages of sin is death".

What these people saw as strength was not strength at all. For the law was not strong. The law was weak (Rom. 8:3) because it could only deal with the old nature. In contrast, grace was strong because a new nature was available to man and grace could deal with this new nature. However, the strength of grace could only be appreciated by those walking in and by the new nature. The old nature knew only carnal strength. As Paul wrote, "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the laws of God, neither indeed can be... because they are spiritually discerned" (Rom.8:7 and I Cor.2:14). Only the new nature could understand the instruction, "be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good"(Rom.12:21).

The old nature said that evil was stronger than good. The new nature knew that good was stronger than evil. The righteous (at least those among the righteous who were walking by the power of the new nature) did good because it was their nature to do so. The unrighteous, those who had only the old nature, and those who had a new nature but "returned to the weak and beggarly elements", did good in order to improve their nature. They invariably failed in their efforts and therefore concluded that evil was stronger than good.

### **The Size of the Church**

With the outpouring of holy spirit described in Acts, chapter two, a dramatic change occurred- a change unparalleled in the history of the world. The spreading of the Good News took hold like a forest fire out of control. And, on an individual level, it has continued to spread down through history to this very day.

After hearing the wonderful works of God in their own languages as the apostles spoke in tongues on the first day of the church age, the devout Jews who were gathered from all over the world believed Jesus was The Christ and about three thousand souls were saved on that day alone. After that first day, the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved (Acts 2:47).

Some people take longer to make up their minds than do others. However, often times, when they do

decide, they are more durable in their convictions than those who change quickly. If there were an additional three thousand saved on the second day of the church age, they could well have been more deeply convinced than the three thousand that believed the first day. And, if three thousand were saved the first day, as we are told in Acts 2, it is more likely that the number of converts grew the second day, the third day, and thereafter, rather than dropping off to a trickle. A mighty miracle had been witnessed on the day of Pentecost and the effects of it would hardly have died off in a day.

Consider also the reality that just fifty days earlier, Israel had been shaken by the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Luke (Luke 23:44) tells us that there was darkness over all the earth the day Jesus Christ died and it lasted from noon until 3 o'clock P.M.. Such an event would have shaken the world. And, it would not be soon forgotten. From facts such as this, the picture that develops is one of three thousand converts a day being typical of the new order of things rather than being exceptional.

The next event we learn about, in Acts, chapter three, is Peter healing the lame man at the gate of the Temple. Consequent to that miracle, "many of them which heard the Word believed; and the number of men was about five thousand (Acts 4:4). Notice the words "many of them which heard the Word believed." The indication is that a majority of those who heard the Word, or a large minority, if not an overwhelming majority believed rather than only a few of them believing after many hearing God's Word spoken.

The conclusion to which we are drawn is one of an eager acceptance of the Word of God rather than a reluctant admission that a miracle may have been done and Peter may have been right in what he told them after the man was healed. This was a mighty moving of the spirit of God, not a parochial event that soon fizzled. The number of men who were converted was about five thousand. Add to that number the women and children. This means perhaps ten or fifteen thousand converts consequent to Peter's healing the man lame from his birth. This event included a mighty miracle following closely on the heels of the miracle of Pentecost. These were only two of many miracles witnessed in Jerusalem for we are told that "many wonders and signs were done by the apostles" (Acts 2:43).

Some translators picture the statement recorded in Acts 4:4 as a summary of the number of believers up to that point in time and therefore translate the verse "and the number of men became about five thousand" or "bringing up their number to about five thousand." However, such a picture does not do justice to what was happening in Jerusalem. Luke, the writer of the "family history" of Acts, is not here giving a head count of the number of children born into the family up to that time. If so, he would have fixed some kind of date on which the head count was done. He didn't. We do not know from the account whether the man was healed within days, or weeks, or perhaps even a couple of years of the first day of the church age.

Also, there is ample evidence in the Old Testament that God's people were not to take a census or rely on numbers to indicate their strength. God was their strength. Luke uses numbers throughout his gospel and the book of Acts to signify the magnitude of events, for example, the feeding of the five thousand in Luke 9:14, and it seems much more likely that in Acts 4:4 Luke is indicating the magnitude of the event surrounding the healing of the man lame from his birth rather than the overall size of the church.

Another point to consider is that if Luke was giving a count of the number of believers to that time, he would have kept up the method throughout his history. He does not do so in any other passage in Acts. On the contrary, he records a multitude here, a multitude there, a whole city here, a great number of priests there. He indicates the magnitude of events without ever numbering the church.

Finally, the statements of the High Priest indicate that the growth of the church was not slowing down but rather increasing. The High Priest says, "for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it" (Acts 4:16), and "ye have filled all Jerusalem with your doctrine." (Acts 5:28).

For all these reasons, I am confident that the phrase "and the number of men was about five thousand" (Acts 4:4), refers not to the total number of men in the church up to that time, but rather to those who

believed after seeing the man healed and hearing Peter's explanation of the event.

### **The Change in Jerusalem Caused By the Church**

A comparison of the record of the man healed by Peter, who was lame from his birth (Acts 4), to that of the man healed by Jesus, who was born blind (Jn 9), shows that Jerusalem had changed dramatically in the time between the two events. In the gospel account, Jesus healed the man born blind and the religious leaders did their best to deny that the miracle had happened. In John 9:9, "some said this is he, others said, he is like him, but he said, I am he." This gave the religious leaders an opening to deny the miracle. But, in the Acts account, the man healed by Peter was a far more difficult matter for the religious leaders to handle. Jerusalem had indeed changed. You can bet your last dollar that the High Priest and his cronies on the Sanhedrin tried their best to find a way to deny the miracle. They could not! It was known to everyone in Jerusalem!

Acts 4:21 tells us that after Peter and John were interrogated they were let go, the rulers of Israel "finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed."

Stop for a moment and consider just how different this Jerusalem was from the Jerusalem of only a short time prior. The man that was healed had been born lame only a few years before Jesus was born. We are told that he was brought daily to the gate Beautiful of the Temple to ask alms of them who went into the Temple. Unlike healthy men who had much to do with their lives and places to go, this man who was more than forty years old, could go nowhere without being carried. And so, he was set there each day, perhaps for most of his life, and was a known man.

Jesus would have passed him many times going in and out of the Temple and there may not have been another single man in all of Israel who knew so much of what went on in the Temple each day for so many years. He may even have been there while Jesus, as a twelve year old child, was teaching in the Temple. The man would have been perhaps twenty years old at the time.

When Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," and then took him by the right hand and lifted him up, the man had to have in mind all the incredible things that had been happening in Jerusalem in recent months. And, when his feet and ankle bones received strength, what thrill must have gone through the man. What joy must have permeated Jerusalem at news of his deliverance. Jesus Christ had healed him!

I can imagine people hurrying home with the good news and when asked by their spouses, "What has Jesus Christ been doing today?" answering, "Why, He healed that man at the gate Beautiful! The one who has been there all these years." "How wonderful!" would have been the reply.

Another telling verse regarding the first months and years of the church age is Acts 2:47. In it we see that the saved, the born again, had "favor with all the people." They were not considered as outcasts or oddballs or fanatics. They were welcomed by those who had not yet been saved. Jerusalem was a different place indeed!

Acts 4:32 mentions "the multitude of them that believed". Acts 5:14 records, "and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women." Acts 6:7 declares that the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. Notice that multiplied is used, not added. (ten added to ten equals twenty; ten multiplied by ten equals one hundred) And, in the same verse we are told that a "great company of priests were obedient to the faith."

And so, in the first six chapters of Acts, which covers a period of about five years, how many people were there in Jerusalem and around the world that had a new nature? There were three thousand the first day. Then the Lord added daily such as were being saved. Then there was another five thousand men, plus women and children. Add to that a multitude. Add to that another multitude. Add to that a great company of priests. Then multiply that number by some number. How many? Fifty thousand? Five hundred

thousand? Five million?

The point is simply this: Within five years of the time of the ascension of Jesus Christ, a massive number of people in Jerusalem believed in Jesus Christ, saw great miracles, great deliverance, great rejoicing. And, an equally massive number of people would have heard the "Good News" around the Mediterranean Sea and throughout the empires of Rome and Persia. Five years is a long time. To think that such wonderful things happening in Jerusalem could have been kept secret from the rest of the world is unrealistic. The ranks of Judiasm must have swelled dramatically as devout Jews went from their homes to the feasts in Jerusalem each year and then came home to tell their friends, neighbors and associates of all the healing and deliverance they had seen. The Messiah had come! Proselytes and "God-fearers" must have been added to the Jewish cause in a way hard to appreciate without historical numbers to go by.

Many of the pilgrims would have gone home after the various feasts, and it is not possible to judge the effects they had on their local communities. But, the residents of Jerusalem certainly had all heard the gospel message by the end of the first five years of the church age. Those who did not hear were only those who refused to hear. Many, many of Jerusalem's residents believed.

Many of them would have remembered Herod having all the male children under two years of age in and around Bethlehem murdered when the wise men from the East did not return. Many would have lost sons at that time. Many would have remembered John the Baptist being beheaded because he condemned Herod Antipas' marriage to his brother's wife. Many remembered Jesus Christ being crucified. Surely, each had heard, by experience or at least from their neighbors, of the many miracles that Jesus did. Those who refused to believe chose not to believe. They were not innocent people who had never had the opportunity to believe. They certainly had had the opportunity to hear. Their unbelief was of a different kind than those elsewhere who had never had a chance to hear up until that time.

### **The Size and Nature of Jerusalem**

In short, all Jerusalem was well aware of what Jesus Christ came to do and what He stood for by the time that the first few years of the church age had passed. It was filled with men and women who believed.

How big a city was Jerusalem? The evidence outside the general picture painted in the book of Acts is sketchy and conflicting. Josephus says about two hundred thousand people lived in Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. Tacitus says six hundred thousand. Some recent writers say about fifty thousand.

The city was about four miles in circumference and some say its population was limited by the water supply to it. But, it had an elaborate water supply and the amount of water that could be stored in the various pools and cisterns (not to mention springs and other sources of running water) probably exceeded ten million gallons. It is hard to imagine that only fifty thousand people lived in the city in view of this and in view of the numbers and "multitudes" mentioned in Acts.

As a comparison, evidently about one million people lived in Rome (among them 60,000 to 80,000 Jews) and fifty four million people lived in Roman lands at the time Christ was born. According to Chrysostom, about two hundred thousand people lived in Syrian Antioch in the fourth century (probably excluding slaves), and Antioch rivaled Damascus as a trade and political center. Antioch was the intersection of north, south, east and west trade routes and could be called the "Rome East" of the Roman empire. Chrysostom also tells us that Antioch had about one hundred thousand Christians at the time of Theodosius (350- 400 A.D.). In Alexandria, the second largest city in the Roman Empire, two of the seven sections of town were entirely Jewish. With so many Jews living in Rome, Alexandria, and other cities of the Mediterranean world, it is hard to imagine that only 50,000 Jews lived in Jerusalem.

In any event, since Tacitus was a Roman historian and Josephus a Jewish historian, Josephus' numbers are probably more accurate when talking about Jerusalem. Also, Tacitus wrote around 100 A.D., after the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, and was therefore removed from the events that Josephus would have observed, being a priest and living in or around Jerusalem from his birth in 37 A. D. until its destruction in 70 A. D.. Therefore, a normal population of two hundred thousand people seems as reasonable an

estimate as can be obtained. If we accept the fact that Rome was six per cent Jewish, and assume that the Roman Empire contained the same percentage of Jews, then there were about 3.25 million Jews in the Roman Empire in the first century. If we assume that there were an equal number living in the Persian Empire and other areas of the world, then the total Jewish population was about 6.5 million. If 200,000 of them lived in Jerusalem, this would represent three per cent of the Jewish population, not an unreasonable number.

Along these lines, it should be mentioned that Josephus gives an account that Cestius requested the High Priest to make a census, in order to convince Nero of the importance of Jerusalem (Nero was emperor from 54 A.D. to 68 A.D.). The High Priest did so by counting the number of lambs slain at Passover. He counted 256,500 lambs and at a ratio of ten people fed for each lamb slain, the number of people in Jerusalem during the feast of Passover that year would have been about two and a half million. Again, not an unreasonable number for a feast that was "required attendance" for 6.5 million people.

It should also be noted that the pilgrims were not required to stay within the city but could reside within a "Sabbath Day's Journey" of the city, or about three quarters of a mile away. If the normal population was two hundred thousand, Jerusalem would have been packed with visitors sleeping on roofs and in the countryside outside the walls.

Also, to prevent the reader from being overwhelmed by the prospect of 256,500 lambs being killed in the Temple, it should be pointed out that the Temple area occupied roughly a square whose sides were about one thousand feet, or about twenty three acres. In the Temple, twenty four courses of priests and twenty four courses of levites each served a week at a time during the normal course of the year, but all served together during passover. There were evidently about five thousand priests and seven thousand levites living in and around Jerusalem during the time covered by the book of Acts.

With the above facts and estimates in mind, it should be clear that the impact of the pouring out of holy spirit on the day of Pentecost and the growth of the church in the first few years following, were dramatic, not only as regards Jerusalem but among the millions of people of the dispersion as well.

That being the case, why did not Jerusalem far surpass all the rest of the nations of the world in power and prestige? What checked the growth?

We see throughout the scriptures that "righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34), and "when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn"(Prov. 29:2). What sin and wickedness crept back into Jerusalem and brought it down?

It is true that about twelve years after Jesus Christ's death, in 41 A.D., Jerusalem was again a Royal City and King Agrippa I reigned. Not since 161 B.C. under Judas Maccabaeus had Israel achieved its independence as a separate (though subordinate) nation. But, Israel's independence was short lived- a mere three years. King Agrippa died in 44 A.D. (see Acts 11:20-23) and the nation was again parceled out by the Roman authority. Not only did Israel lose its autonomy, but by 46 A.D., severe famine was in the land.

What happened in Jerusalem? What cancerous growth stole the life from that city so that forty years after the outpouring of holy spirit, it was reduced to ashes. It was destroyed physically, politically, religiously, and economically. Israel as a nation disappeared from the face of the map. It would not revive for almost nineteen hundred years.

### **The Rulers in Jerusalem Cannot Stop the Church**

What can we discover from the first eight chapters of Acts that might begin to explain such a tragic demise? We have seen that a vast multitude in Jerusalem believed. Certainly, such a number of believing people could not be persecuted out of existence by those outside their number. At least, it is highly unlikely.

In Acts, chapter four, the leaders of the Jewish nation had the apostles arrested and thrown into jail. But, they could not do anything except threaten them because of their popularity with the people. They could not deny the notable miracle that was done to the man who was lame from his birth and was healed after living with his handicap forty years or more.

The response of the church to this threat was to pray for more boldness to preach The Word. They asked for God's support by healings, signs and miracles. Chapter five records God's response to their prayers and in that response He gives to Israel the most marvelous period in its history!

Never was there a time when healing was so wide spread. It was unprecedented, exciting, thrilling, awe inspiring. In short, the period could be summed up by saying that grace held sway in Jerusalem. The Word of God prevailed. Jesus Christ reigned over the city of Jerusalem. Acts 5:16 says, "There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits; AND THEY WERE HEALED- EVERY ONE!"

Never before had Israel experienced such deliverance. It was a deliverance even greater than the exodus from Egypt! Jerusalem had reached its high water mark, the pinnacle of its history. Had there been an election in the city of Jerusalem, the apostles could have run for any office and won overwhelmingly. Peter was so popular that people laid their sick by the side of the road in the hopes that just his shadow would pass over them and they would be healed.

The Chief Priest and all his support group were indignant with all this and forcibly threw the apostles in prison. But, even this action was turned around by God to make the Chief Priest and his power look foolish in the sight of the people when the angel of the Lord delivered the apostles from prison and they went right back to the Temple and taught.

Among the best testimony as to the state of affairs in Jerusalem at this time is that of the High Priest himself. In Acts 5:28 he declares accusingly, "ye have filled all Jerusalem with your doctrine!" To what doctrine was he referring? Verse seventeen says that the power base of the High Priest was the Saducees and one of the Saducees central beliefs was that there was no resurrection from the dead. They denied any supernatural intervention in the affairs of men. The apostles had filled Jerusalem with not only the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also with all the implications of that fact, miracles, deliverance, healing, joy, etc.. All those implications would undoubtedly point to the Chief Priest and the Saducees as being impostors. For, Jesus had said after His resurrection, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18).

During the ministry of Jesus Christ, he was harassed mainly by the Pharasees over points of law. But now, the apostles are harassed by the Saducees because they preached that Jesus Christ had been raised from the dead. The evidence points to the fact that the Pharasees finally believed in Jesus Christ. (see Acts 5:34, 15:5, 23:9).

What angered the Chief Priest and the Saducees was that they were losing their power base. And, if they lost their power base, they would loose their money! Then, as now, the love of money was the root of all evil. The Temple income was huge and they controlled it all. They refused to be brought under the doctrine of Christ and administer their offices by its precepts. They wanted a firm hold on the peoples lives and considered themselves the supreme authorities. They were the law!

For our purposes, the account shows conclusively that the people now knew of the resurrection and all that it implied, and no one in Jerusalem could later say that he had never had the opportunity to hear.

Acts 5:26 tells us that the Chief Priest and his followers were concerned to the point that they were convinced that they themselves would be stoned by the people if they did violence to the apostles. They feared the people! Imagine the state of affairs in Jerusalem.

### **The Church in Jerusalem Prevails**



The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ was accepted by the people with all that those events implied. The rulers were well aware of this and faced the choice of either complying, (which would mean losing face and perhaps their positions), or finding a way to regain authority over the people without losing face. This was a Jerusalem that had never been seen before. And, as we shall see, would never be seen again. Imagine the people so solidly behind the apostles that they would have stoned their own leaders if those leaders had harmed the apostles.

With all this evidence, it is very doubtful that the believers in Jerusalem could have been persecuted out of existence by those outside their number. Therefore, we must look within the group of believers to see if we can find a cause for the decline in godliness which became so evident as the years went by. What breaching of the dike occurred that allowed in the forces of evil?

How did the believers relate to each other? How did they organize? In the first five years of the Christian church, who were the principal characters? Remember, Paul had not yet arrived on the scene. His conversion on the road to Damascus occurs in the ninth chapter of Acts. So, Paul was not yet in the picture. Who was?

In Acts 1:2 we see "the apostles whom He had chosen." They were with Jesus Christ at His ascension. In verse thirteen we find these apostles named -except Judas who had hanged himself. In verse fourteen we find additional people- some women not named, and Mary the mother of Jesus and Jesus' brothers. The apostles "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" with these others. Verse fifteen mentions that there were about one hundred twenty people present. (There were obviously many more people who believed in Jesus Christ at that time, but these were the only ones gathered together in Jerusalem between the day of the Ascension and the day of Pentecost, ten days later. For example, Jesus was seen by over five hundred people at one time after his resurrection as stated in I Cor. 15:6.) From these, Matthias was chosen to fill the place of Judas.

In the first five chapters of Acts, the only recorded miracles are done by the apostles. (This by no means implies that the rest of the church did no miracles or that no other miracles were done than the ones recorded). The apostles are the ones in the forefront of the church. In Acts 2:43, "and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles." Note also that in verses forty four and forty five, all that believed sold their plurality and gave to others as the others had need. The individual believer not only sold his excess goods, for he now had a life that transcended mere worldly abundance, he also decided where the proceeds were to go.

Chapter three shows Peter healing the lame man at the Temple. Acts 4:33 says, "and with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them." The people brought the money from the things they sold and laid it at the feet of the apostles. The apostles distributed to every man as he had need. Verse thirty four states that there were none that lacked! Everyone had their needs met. Both direct giving to those who had need and indirect giving, through the apostles, is seen.

### **The Rulers Try to Stop the Popularity of the Apostles**

**Acts 5:12 says, "and by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people". The story continues to unfold as the apostles are again arrested. This time, not only are Peter and John arrested. All the other apostles are arrested as well.**

**Acts 5:26 shows the political power of the believing community that was now beginning to prevail in Jerusalem. The apostles were brought without violence, for the Captain of the Temple (the second most powerful man in Jerusalem next to the High Priest) and his officers feared the people. They fully expected that the people would stone them if they did any violence to the apostles.**

**Again we see a different state of affairs in Jerusalem than existed at the time of Jesus crucifixion. There is no evidence that the Captain of the Temple and his officers were afraid of the people when Jesus was arrested.**

**It should also be noted that at this time, the Saducee party controlled the Sanhedrin and the Pharasee party was well in the minority. This helps explain why Gamaliel, a Pharasee, spoke for the defense of the apostles and why, in verse seventeen, only the Saducees were responsible for putting the apostles in jail.**

**It also explains why the High Priest did not listen to Gamaliel and had the apostles beaten. In verse forty, they said they agreed with his argument, although it is clear that they feared for their own lives, and this was their major motivation. Verse thirty three tells us that after the apostles gave their defense, the members of the Sanhedrin were cut to the heart and took council to slay them. They realized that they could not do so because of the popularity of the apostles and therefore only had them beaten instead of having them put to death.**

**It must be stated emphatically that this entire dialogue between Gamaliel and the other members of the Sanhedrin was political in nature and a beating was as far as they dared to go because of the popularity of the apostles. There is a major difference between the imprisonment of Peter and John in Acts 4 and the imprisonment of all the apostles in Acts 5. In the first event, the rulers, elders, scribes, Annas the High Priest, Caiaphas (the previous High Priest), John, Alexander and all the kindred of the High Priest (Acts 4:5-6) formed a council to discover any possible accusation to use against Peter and John. They could find no accusation to make against them. Peter and John were put in prison and held for trial. But with no accusation, the only thing the council could do was to release them and command them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and John were too popular among the people of Jerusalem to allow a false accusation to be made (Acts 4:21). And, the High Priest, together with his Saducee family and friends, dared not accuse them of committing a crime in teaching about the implications of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

**In the second event, the council was able to accuse the apostles of insubordination (Acts 5:28). But, when they heard the apostles say that they were witnesses to the resurrection and that the holy spirit was also a witness and was given to them that obey God (Acts 5:32), the council could not help but understand the implications. Not only did the apostles clearly state that the council had killed Jesus Christ (Acts 5:30), but they were also implying that the council did not receive holy spirit and were not obeying God. This insubordination gave the council cause to have them beaten. They wanted to kill them (Acts 5:33). But, they dared go no further than a beating.**

**Nothing could more clearly show the extensiveness of Christianity in Jerusalem than the record of these imprisonments. Acts 5:31 shows the apostles proclaiming Jesus Christ as a Prince and Saviour exalted by God, and proclaiming Him to the "Princes" of Israel while on trial and in the face of those "Princes" wanting to kill them. That those "Princes" could not kill them is an amazing thing to consider and reflect upon.**

**This is certainly a different Jerusalem from the one at Jesus Trial. Even after being faced with insubordination and clear defiance, the council could not do away with the apostles. What a change from the bogus trial of Jesus! In Jesus case, they didn't even finish the trial but rather "railroaded" Him to the cross. Now, the apostles are openly defiant and yet are only beaten- and the beating was accomplished at great risk to the Sanhedrin because of the popularity of the apostles (the extensiveness of the risk is seen in Acts 5:26).**

### **Summary of the First Years of Christianity**

**And so, through the first five chapters of Acts, which covers perhaps the first four years of Christianity in Jerusalem, there is no evidence of any division within the church or any hierarchy. If the apostles were the hierarchy, then our conception of hierarchy does not fit. For, the apostles were the ones doing the work, taking the beatings, etc.. And, there is no evidence of any special privileges they assumed. If anything, they performed more service and suffered more abuse than any of the other believers.**

**There is no evidence that they in any way regimented the believers through a chain of command. There is no evidence of a split between those who were saved and those who were unsaved among**

**the population. The believers had "favor with all the people" (Acts2:47). The High Priest and Sanhedrin were clearly against God and the pouring out of holy spirit in the early church, but the people were clearly for God and the apostles.**

**The giving done by the believers and apostles appears to be spread throughout the Jerusalem community and not confined within an exclusive Christian community. There is no evidence in the first five chapters of Acts to suggest an exclusive community. The evidence points to all Jerusalem being filled with the doctrine of Christ. The believers continued in the Temple, ate their meals from house to house, met in the synagogues (see Acts 22:19) and had favor with all the people.**



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