

The Age of the Apostles

The Apostle Paul

After Pentecost, the Jewish leaders of the church were concerned about the numbers of people converting to what they thought was a new religion. A time of persecution resulted. Stephen, the first martyr, willingly died for his Savior. As the leaders of the established religion stoned him, Stephen prayed for those who were killing him. One of those responsible was a man named Saul.

Later, Saul traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute followers of Jesus living there. But God had other plans. Jesus appeared to Saul in a vision and converted him. In Damascus, Saul, also called Paul, was baptized. After the calling of Jesus, Paul the persecutor of believers became Paul the apostle to the Gentiles (those not of Jewish origin).

God also told the apostle Peter to reach out to the Gentiles with the Gospel. Peter became the first apostle to enter a Gentile home and baptize a non-Jewish household.

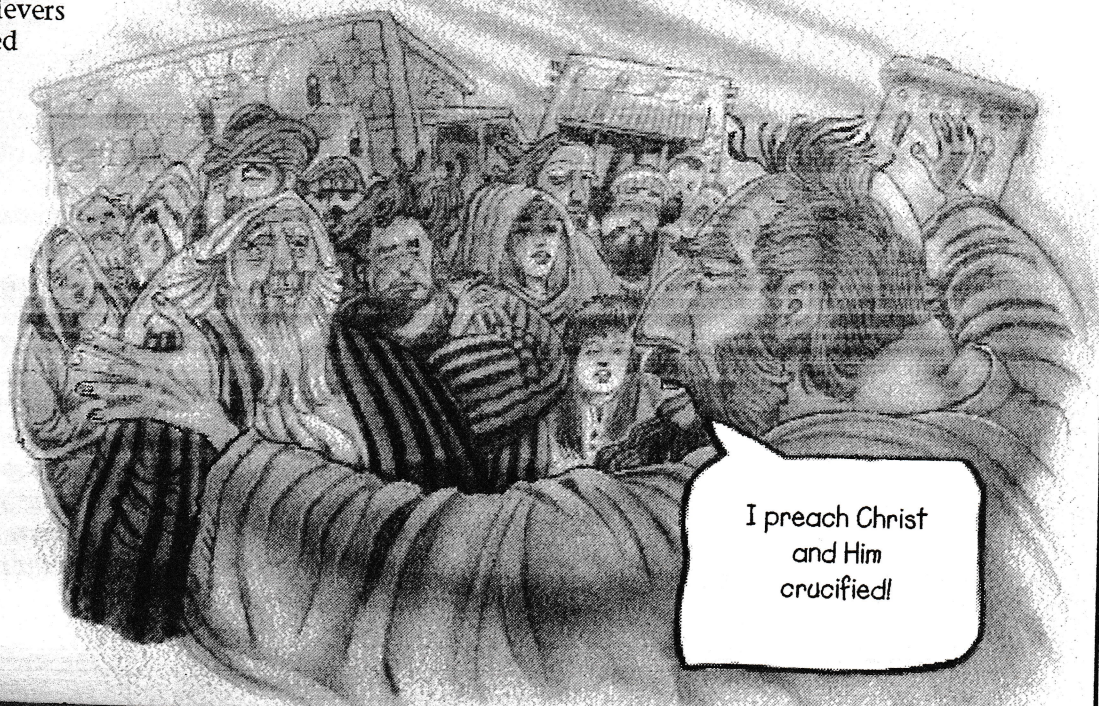
Two Centers of Christianity

During the first years of persecution, believers in Jerusalem worked to bring the Good News mostly to Jewish people. But because of persecution, those believing in Jesus fled to other cities, where the numbers of those confessing Jesus as their Savior grew. One of these cities was Antioch, the capital of the

Roman province of Syria. Here believers spoke about Jesus to Jews and Gentiles alike. The church in Antioch was made up of Jews and Gentiles. Followers of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch. These first Christians raised funds to aid Paul and his coworker Barnabas in their work with the poor in Jerusalem. In this way, the new believers showed their love in Christ to the believers in Jerusalem.

Into All the World

Paul and his coworkers, such as Barnabas and Silas, traveled on several missionary journeys, preaching the Good News and establishing congregations in the regions of Asia Minor. Responding to a vision of a man from Macedonia asking for help, Paul also led a missionary expedition to the continent of Europe. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote letters to the young congregations he helped to start. He sent these letters, or epistles, to the congregations at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. The letters are included in the New



Testament. Paul suffered many hardships at the hands of the enemies of the Gospel. Most likely, he died a martyr's death in Rome.

After Pentecost, Peter and the other apostles continued to tell others about Jesus and His gift of salvation. Peter traveled to Antioch and on to Joppa, where he raised Tabitha to life. Bold and courageous in preaching the Gospel, an ancient account records that Peter died a martyr's death. He is said to have asked to be crucified head downward, because he regarded himself unworthy to die in the same way as his Lord.

James, the brother of John, was the first of the apostles to die for his faith. King Herod arrested James and had him killed by sword. James' brother John worked with Peter and the younger James in the congregation at Jerusalem. He later carried the Gospel to Asia Minor and became pastor at Ephesus. Later, John was sent to the island of Patmos as a Roman prisoner. When freed, he returned to Ephesus, where he died of natural causes when he was about 100 years old. John was the only apostle to die a natural death.

Andrew is said to have carried the Gospel to the Russians and to have been crucified on a cross resembling the letter x. James the younger, a leader of the church in Jerusalem, is said to have been thrown from the top of the temple tower for refusing to deny Jesus as His Savior. Historians believe Philip became a missionary in Phrygia, and Bartholomew is said to have taken the Gospel to India, where he was stoned, tortured, and executed. Thomas reputedly also preached the Good News of Jesus in India, where he was killed with a lance.

Matthew is believed to have been a missionary in Ethiopia and Persia. Simon and Jude are said to have lost their lives in Persia. Whereas very little is known about Matthias, the apostle who replaced Judas, it is assumed that he also proclaimed the Good News to others.

I Confess

Through God's Word, the Holy Spirit empowers us to confess our faith in Jesus Christ.

1. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told the disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). When did we receive the same power Jesus gave to His disciples at Pentecost?

2. What opportunities do we have to share the Good News in our "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"?

3. Write a brief confession of faith to share with a friend or relative who does not know Jesus as Savior.

To Review and Remember

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38