

Unpacking the Book

Lesson #23: The Early Church

I. The Beginning: Pentecost (Acts 2)

- A. Partial fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2:28-32
- B. Ministry of Peter
 - 1. Note the substance of his message
 - 2. Note the result of his message (Acts 2:41)

II. The Birth of the First Church in Jerusalem

- A. Introduction
 - 1. This was not the start of a new “religion” but rather a “sect” or grouping within Judaism. The early church was primarily made up of Jews who embraced Jesus as the longed for Messiah.
 - 2. They referred to themselves as:
 - a. The “poor”: Gal. 2:10
 - b. The “saints”: Rom. 15:25
 - c. The “assembly”: Acts 2:46
 - Ekklesia – called out assembly (see Acts 7:38, 19:32)
 - 3. The founding members:
 - a. 12 Apostles (minus Judas Iscariot, plus Matthias – Acts 1:4-26)
 - b. 3000 added on the day of the Pentecost
 - 1) “Men of Israel” (Acts 2:22)
 - 2) Parthians, Medes, Elamites... visitors to Rome (Acts 2:9-11)
- B. Characteristics of that first church:
 - 1. Leadership
 - a. Peter (and John)
 - b. “Deacons”

- 1) The need arose to more effectively meet the needs of the early church (Acts 6:1-4)
- c. “Elders”
 - Ultimately Paul set up elders in the churches he established (Acts 14:23)
- d. James (the brother of Jesus) became the leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17, 15:13, Gal. 1:19 and 1 Cor. 15:7)
2. The People... (from Exploring Acts, Vol. 1, p. 60-65)
 - a. A saved people (Acts 2:41a)
 - Their salvation was rooted in their faith: “they gladly received His Word”
 - b. A separated people (2:41b)
 - Their baptism set them apart. See 1 Peter 3:21
 - c. A steadfast people (2:42)
 - 1) Focused on truth, bound together and rooted in a meaningful tradition (communion together)
 - 2) Communion: 1 Cor. 11:17-33
 - d. A sanctified people (2:43a)
 - “Sanctified” or set apart. Set apart by godly fear. Consider the role of “fear” in the church: Look at Prov. 1:7 and 1 Peter 1:16
 - e. A spectacular people (2:43b)
 - This early church had power: wonders and signs were done by the apostles.
 - f. A single minded people. (2:44)
 - They held all things in common. This was an answer to Christ’s prayer in John 17:20-23
 - g. A sacrificial people (2:45)
 - The body of Christ provided for the body of Christ. Note the examples of Acts 4:32-5:1-10.
 - h. A spiritual people (2:46)
 - Note the connection between the temple (Solomon’s Colonnade Luke 24:53) and their mutual participation at each other’s individual tables.
3. Their growth:
 - a. See 2:41, 47; 4:4 and 6:7. Note that the Lord Himself reserves the right to add new members into His community – believers receive those He received (See Rom. 15:7).

III. Persecution of the First Church

- A. Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1-31)
- B. Apostles persecuted (Acts 5:17-42)
- C. Stephen before the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:8-7:60)
- D. The Church is scattered (Acts 8:1)
- E. Herod Agrippa 1 instigates severe persecution (around 44 AD)

James, the brother of John, (the son of Zebedee) is beheaded (Acts 12:2)

IV. So what?

Consider your own church experience... how does it compare to the early church in Jerusalem?