

Episode: Acts Series No. 2

Narrator: Peter

Primary Scriptures: Acts 2-5, 10-12

Story Summary: Coming of Holy Spirit, growth of Church, activities of Peter

Location: Roman Empire; Tetrarchy of Judea; Jerusalem, Caesarea

Time: 30 AD Death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Pentecost.

40 AD (?) Cornelius becomes a Christian

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Acts 2:2-4, 38-39, 42, 47; 4:11-12, 19-20, 29; 5:32, 38-39; 10:34-35, 47-48; 12:23

On the first Pentecost after his death and resurrection, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to Earth to empower his followers. The account of that event is one of the most thrilling stories in the entire Bible. It is no wonder that Jesus was so excited to send Holy Spirit back to his followers.

That Pentecost day was a day of innumerable firsts. The first indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Christians, the first presentation of the entire Gospel in sermon form, the first conversion to Christianity, and many others. That day was the start of explosive growth of the early Church.

The early Christians followed the commands of Jesus, but they also continued to follow Judaism as best they could. Among other things, this allowed them continued access to the Temple and the synagogues so they could preach to the Jews.

The rapid growth of the Church became a threat to the Jewish leaders, so they threatened Peter and the other Christians; eventually, this persecution became so great that most of the Christians left Jerusalem, which had the unintended effect of spreading Christianity, because the Christians had the express mission of making disciples.

Christianity was the first religious movement in the Roman Empire intent on making new members from other communities. This evangelical motive confounded, threatened and angered leaders of other cultures and communities.

It is not made clear in the Bible, but it was up to ten years after Pentecost before the conversion of Cornelius by Peter. That event marked a turning point in the growth of the Church, because it signaled the beginning of major evangelism efforts to non-Jews (Gentiles). This was such a radical change for the church that even Peter's personal testimony was not enough. After the testimony of other witnesses, the church accepted the fact that non-Jews could become Christians, but just how and when that would occur would not be made clear until it actually happened.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to be filled by the Holy Spirit? How does it feel?
 2. How did the Holy Spirit confirm the work of the apostles?
 3. Who was specifically named as giving money to help fund the early Church?
 4. Does it affect your understanding of God that Holy Spirit killed Ananias and Sapphira?
 5. About how long after Pentecost was Peter's encounter with Cornelius? Does that time period change how you envision the growth of the early Church?
 6. If Peter was such an authoritative figure in the early church, why did the early church members feel like they could question his actions with Cornelius?
2. Miracles, healings, gave words to teach. 3. Barnabas 5. No exact date is known, maybe up to ten years. 6. It was such a radical change in their understanding of the very nature of their belief.

Application Questions:

1. The followers of Jesus prayed as a group for 50 days as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit. When the waiting started, they had no idea how long it would take. How long are you willing to wait for God to fulfill his promises in your life? What are you willing to do while you wait?
2. In the video, Peter wonders why Jesus would invest love into him. Can you relate? Why or why not?
3. When the crowd asked how they could be saved, Peter gave them a simple, clear answer. If somebody asks you that question, what would your simple, clear answer be? Is it different than Peter's answer in Acts 2:38?
4. Peter resisted the idea of having non-Jews become Gentiles because it did not fit his idea of who "should" be a Christian. Do you have any similar resistances in your life?

Application Questions for Teens:

1. Sometimes it seems like Christianity is difficult to understand. If somebody asked you to explain how to receive salvation, how would your answer differ from Peter's words in Acts 2:38?
2. Some people point to Acts 2:44 as being the model for how churches should behave. Which is more important in that understanding Acts 2:44 or Acts 2:42? How many years do you think Acts 2:44 described how churches behaved? [there is no exact answer to this last question, but this instance does not seem to be the norm for future churches]
3. Peter did not want to go to Cornelius because he wasn't a Jew. Are there people groups you resist sharing the Gospel with, such as poor people, Muslims, unpopular peers, strangers, relatives, etc.?