

# The Spread of the Church

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## The Spread of the Church

In Matthew 16:18, we saw the birth of and the plan for the church. As we further studied the church, we noticed how God empowered this church. Now that the church is enabled and empowered, let us notice how the Lord expands the church of the living God.

The Lord started His church and now He intends for it to spread *“unto the uttermost part of the earth.”* Accordingly, the Saviour will add to and multiply this great organism, the church. Notice, through the book of Acts, how the Lord makes His additions to the local church.

1. Acts 2:41- *“the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”*
2. Acts 2:47- *“the Lord added to the church daily”*
3. Acts 4:4- *“the number of the men was about five thousand”*
4. Acts 5:14- *“the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women”*
5. Acts 6:7- *“the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly”*
6. Acts 9:31- *“were multiplied”*
7. Acts 9:42- *“many believed”*
8. Acts 11:21- *“a great number believed”*
9. Acts 11:24- *“much people was added unto the Lord”*

One of the ways that the Lord spreads His church is found in Acts 8:4. *“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”* The reason that they were scattered was because of a persecution on the church, headed up by Saul. Seemingly, the church at Jerusalem had grown complacent and forgot about the great command (Matthew 28:19-20) and the grand charge (Acts 1:8). Although the believers at Jerusalem did not obey God’s plan for the church (spreading), the Lord knew how to get the saints on the move. As a result, several churches were

planted. In this study of the church, we will look at some churches that were established out of the church at Jerusalem. A simple outline of these is:

- I. The Church at Jerusalem
- II. The Church at Antioch Acts 11:19-26, 13:1-4

*Paul's First Missionary Journey—Acts 13:4-14:28  
(Churches in Galatia Acts 16:6)*

- III. The Church at Iconium Acts 13:51-14:1 (3<sup>rd</sup> journey—18:23)
- IV. The Church at Lystra Acts 14:6-7 (2<sup>nd</sup> journey—16:1-5) (3<sup>rd</sup> journey—18:23)
- V. The Church at Derbe Acts 14:6-7 (2<sup>nd</sup> journey—16:1-5) (3<sup>rd</sup> journey—18:23)

*Paul's Second Missionary Journey—Acts 15:40-18:22 (Churches in Syria, Cilicia, Phrygia, Galatia, Asia, Mysia, Macedonia, and Achaia)*

- VI. The Church at Philippi Acts 16:12, 40 (3<sup>rd</sup> journey—20:6)
- VII. The Church at Thessalonica Acts 17:1
- VIII. The Church at Corinth Acts 18:1, 4, 7-8, 11, 18
- IX. The Church at Ephesus Acts 18:19 (3<sup>rd</sup> journey—19:1, 8) (3<sup>rd</sup> journey—20:17)

*Paul's Third Missionary Journey—Acts 18:23-21:19 (Churches in Syria, Cilicia, Phrygia, Galatia, Asia, Mysia, and Macedonia)*

- 1. A Visit To Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe Acts 18:23
- 2. A Visit To Ephesus Acts 19:1, 8

3. A Visit To Philippi Acts 20:6
4. A Final Visit To Ephesus Acts 20:17

*The Seven Churches, Which Are In Asia—  
Revelation 1:11, 2:1-3:22*

- X. Smyrna Revelation 2:8-11
- XI. Pergamos Revelation 2:12-17
- XII. Thyatira Revelation 2:18-29
- XIII. Sardis Revelation 3:1-6
- XIV. Philadelphia Revelation 3:7-13
- XV. Laodicea Revelation 3:14-22

These churches are the ones that we will concern ourselves with in this reading. Amazingly, the church that the Lord spread through the book of Acts is the same church that is being extended today! There must be an unbroken line of the church or Matthew 16:18 is not correct. Praise God for church perpetuity!

The first church we come to is the one at Jerusalem. We already saw, in Matthew 16:18, how the Lord presented this church to the world. It was at this church that the Lord commanded His disciples to tarry until they were endued with power (Luke 24:49). “*And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*” What accomplishments could this church make apart from the power of God? This was God’s purpose in telling them to tarry. So many times congregations try to operate in their own power instead of the power of God.

This power was the promise from the Father as seen in Acts 1:4-5.

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

Luke is writing to Theophilus concerning this local assembly. The promise is seen in verse five of the text.

In Acts 1:8, we see the purpose of the congregation at Jerusalem, and any other church. *“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.”* Their main obligation was to be a witness to this unregenerate world. We need to fill in the gap, as Robert T. Boyd expressed, and tell sinners everywhere about the good news from glory!

“Just as Christ is the mediator between man and God (I Timothy 2:5), so redeemed man is the ‘gap’ between the lost and Christ. With Christ in heaven and the Holy Spirit in the believer, the believer is the only person on earth to represent God before others. This is our responsibility—our calling as ‘ambassadors of Christ’ (II Corinthians 5:20). But, alas, too few respond to their calling. With the Psalmist the world cries, ‘I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul.’ (142:4). With Ezekiel we must be the man in the ‘gap’.” (1)

Prayer was important at the church at Jerusalem. They realized that if they were to keep this power of God, they must spend time with God. Understanding that the way to prevail with men was to prevail with God, the Jerusalem saints made it a daily routine to pray in the closet, with their families, and in the temple.

Preaching was always in order at Jerusalem. Their style of preaching was to stand up (Acts 2:14- *“But Peter, standing up with the eleven...”*), speak up (Acts 2:14- *“...lifted up his voice...”*), and after a while, shut up (Acts 2:40- *“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”*).

One final thought about the church at Jerusalem is their persecution. This maltreatment of the Jerusalem saints was lead by

Saul and his army as found in Acts 8:1. *“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.”* He made havock of the church (Acts 8:3- *“As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.”*). Even cruelty was in the breath of Saul (Acts 9:1- *“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,”*). This may seem unusual, but it was the means God chose to get the saints at Jerusalem to fulfill what God told them to do in Acts 1:8.

Persecution is an element that seems to linger around genuine saints of God. Several saints of the New Testament faced afflictions. A brief list of this is:

- I. Peter Acts 4:3, 17-18, 21, 12:3-9
- II. Apostles Acts 5:18, 25-29, 33, 40
- III. Stephen Acts 6:12-13, 7:1-2, 54-60, 8:2
- IV. James Acts 12:1-2
- V. Paul Acts 9:15-16, 23-25, 29, 15:26, 20:19, II Cor. 11:23-28
  - A. At Antioch in Pisidia Acts 13:45, 50
  - B. At Iconium Acts 14:2, 4-5
  - C. At Lystra Acts 14:19- “stoned Paul”
  - D. At Philippi Acts 16:19-24- “beat...many stripes...prison”
  - E. At Thessalonica Acts 17:5-6, 10
  - F. At Berea Acts 17:13-14
  - G. At Athens Acts 17:19
  - H. At Corinth Acts 18:12-13
  - I. At Ephesus Acts 19:23-24, 28-30, 34, 41
  - J. At Jerusalem Acts 21:10-17, 27-28, 30-34- “beating of Paul”
  - K. At Rome Acts 28:16-17, II Timothy 4:6

Not only did saints suffer in the times of the apostles, but also throughout time, believers faced martyrdom, imprisonment,

banishment, and death. During the Dark Ages Christians faced tremendous persecution. It is estimated that the Roman Catholic Organization killed more than 50 million Christians during this time of the Dark Ages. (2) Carroll, in relation to the times of the apostles, further states,

“Following their Savior in rapid succession fell many other martyred heroes: Stephen was stoned, Matthew was slain in Ethiopia, Mark dragged through the streets until dead, Luke hanged, Peter and Simeon were crucified, Andrew tied to a cross, James beheaded, Philip crucified and stoned, Bartholomew flayed alive, Thomas pierced with lances, James, the less, thrown from the temple and beaten to death, Jude shot to death with arrows, Matthias stoned to death and Paul beheaded.” (3)

Tremendous was the persecutions that the saints of the early churches went through. Certainly, there was a trail of blood that they left behind.

The first church planted out of the church at Jerusalem was the one at Antioch. This is recorded in Acts 11. Due to the persecution, they traveled as far as Antioch (Acts 11:19- *“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.”*). Because of this journey, one of the greatest churches the world has ever known was established.

Jerusalem sent Barnabas to the church at Antioch for the purpose of assisting the new work. Shortly, Barnabas sent for Paul to come help with this ministry. For one year, they assembled with this congregation and taught the people. They grew so much in the Lord that sinners titled them Christians. James Strong defines “Christian” as “a follower of Christ”. (4) Mighty was their testimony that even unbelievers noticed they walked, talked, and acted as Christ would.

God’s design for missions would be exemplified at Antioch. This mighty missionary effort took place in Acts 13:1-4.

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.”

When the Holy Ghost began to move in the midst of the congregation, missionaries were called out. Think what could be accomplished in our churches if only we would let the Lord work!

From this point, the missionary journeys would begin out of the ministry of Antioch. The first church to be established under the direction of the church at Antioch would be the one at Iconium (Acts 13:51-14:1). Shortly after their arrival at Iconium, the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost. This would enable them to enter into the synagogue and preach to a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks. This led to a division in the city, but not before there were converts. Paul would later visit this church in his third journey (Acts 18:23).

After fleeing the city of Iconium, the disciples went in the city of Lystra. In this city, they began to preach. However, because of the irritation at Iconium, the disturbed crowd followed them to Lystra. This stirred up crowd began to rouse up the people at Lystra and stoned Paul leaving him for dead. Paul would later visit this church in his second (Acts 16:1-5) and third journeys (Acts 18:23).

Fleeing to Derbe, the disciples found another field that was ready to harvest. At Derbe, they preached the gospel and taught many people. Although it is not recorded in Acts 14, the author believes that sinners were converted and a church was birthed at

Derbe. Paul would later visit this church in his second (Acts 16:1-5) and third journeys (Acts 18:23).

After the ministry at Derbe, the disciples went in reverse order to the places where churches were planted. Doing so, they began to confirm the souls of the new converts and exhort them to continue in the faith. It was a priority that they ordain elders in these churches and commend them to the Lord. They warned them that through much tribulation we would enter into the kingdom of God.

Therefore, after Paul's first missionary journey, three churches were planted out of Antioch. These were Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, cities of Galatia. The spreading of the church began to take place, as the western world would begin to hear the gospel under the ministry of Paul the apostle.

Now we come to Paul's second missionary journey. This expedition would cover Syria, Cilicia, Phrygia, Galatia, Asia, Mysia, Macedonia, and Achaia. Four more churches would be planted which were Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus. This totals nine churches in all in the book of Acts (Jerusalem, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus). From these churches sprang others such as Hierapolis, Colosse, and Laodicea, which derived from the revival at Ephesus.

As Paul (in his second journey) came to Philippi, which is the chief city of Macedonia, God began to move as He did in Paul's first journey. While abiding there certain days, they went to have prayer by a river on the Sabbath. After arriving at the river, they met a woman, which resorted thither. This certain woman was named Lydia, which was of the city of Thyatira. She began to listen to the disciples, and the Lord began to open her heart. Amazingly, she believed in God and was baptized the same day. Lydia was so excited about her new conversion that she constrained the disciples to come into her house.

Later, Paul and Silas were placed in prison. While in the prison, the Lord wrought a mighty deliverance, not the liberty of Paul and Silas, but the liberation of the jailor and his family. They were able to baptize these new converts and after being released from prison, returned to the house of Lydia. From this, we may conclude that the church at Philippi was in the house of Lydia and it is possible

that the jailor (with his family) attended there also. Paul would visit Philippi again in his third journey (Acts 20:6).

This is an amazing illustration of how the Lord saves people and forms a church. The Lord added to His church, not from splits or from other works, but simply by converting sinners in the city. Many times, because of manly efforts, churches are formed from proselyte people. This results in a zoo type atmosphere. Robert T. Boyd expresses this idea in his article, “The Church Zoo”.

1. “Some folks are like wolves; in sheep’s clothing, spreading false doctrines
2. Some are like chameleons, changing colors with the crowd
3. Many are like bugs, who seek darkness because their deeds are evil
4. Some are like buzzards; you don’t see them in church unless a member is dead
5. Still others are like snails; no backbone
6. Some are like pigs; greedy to get all for self
7. Others are like roosters; always crowing about something
8. Some are like goats; always butting the other fellow
9. Some are like porcupines; always needling somebody else
10. Some are like frogs; leaping from church to church
11. Some are like gnats; nothing but pests
12. Some are like geese; fair-weather church-goers
13. Some are like bumble bees; they’ll sting you every time
14. Some Board members are like lions; always roaring about something
15. Some are like donkeys; just plain stubborn
16. Many are like mules; the extent of their joy is shown by their long faces
17. There are those like owls; always ‘hooting’ about some folks when they’re not around

18. Some are like cats and dogs; just can't get along together
  19. There are those like hawks; preying on others
  20. Some folks are like elephants; a long memory that always remembers the wrong someone did years ago
  21. Some are like leopards; with spots in their lives which hinder spiritual growth
  22. Some are like monkeys. Watch how they act if you don't believe it
  23. Some are like beavers; eager
  24. Some are like ants; real workers
  25. Some are like canaries; singing along life's way
  26. Some are like eagles; soaring above the clouds of circumstances and living in the heavenlies
  27. Then there are those who are just like sheep; they follow their Shepherd wherever He leads"
- (5)

The second church to be planted in Paul's second missionary journey is the one at Thessalonica. As it was the manner of Paul, he waited until the Sabbath to enter into the synagogue. For three Sabbaths the great apostle reasoned with them from the Scriptures. He told them about the sufferings of Christ and preached unto them Jesus. Some of the devout Greeks and chief women believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and was converted.

These conversions made the Jews envious to the point that they set the city in an uproar. They even took Jason into custody. Therefore, Paul and Silas escaped by night, but not before a church formed.

Corinth would be the next city where a church was birthed. After some time in Athens, Paul arrived at Corinth. In that city were Aquila and Priscilla, which offered Paul a job at tent making. Immediately Paul went to the synagogues every Sabbath and reasoned with them from the Scriptures. He was able to persuade both Jews and Gentiles about the Saviour, Jesus Christ. However, some did not like the message Paul was preaching. Did this stop the apostle Paul?

When opposition came, Paul went next door to the house of Justus (his house joined hard to the synagogue). God so moved that the chief ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of the Corinthians began to come and hear the gospel proclaimed from the lips of Paul. As a result, many believed and were baptized. Paul spent one year and six months there teaching and preaching the Word of God.

Ephesus would be the ninth church established in the New Testament and the fourth church in Paul's second missionary journey. Paul came to Ephesus after coming from Syria. Again, Paul entered into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews from the Word of God. God used Paul to influence the people at Ephesus. It came time for Paul to leave because he desired to keep a feast at Jerusalem. They desired for Paul to stay longer but he consented not. However, he left them a promise that he would return.

Paul did return to Ephesus on his third missionary journey. When he arrived at Ephesus, he found certain disciples. This gives us the idea that there were converts at Ephesus in Paul's second journey. Paul's conversation with these believers was over a doctrinal transition. After further explanation of the Scriptures, they were baptized in the name of Christ Jesus.

For three months, Paul would enter into the synagogues and speak boldly the Word of God. He disputed and persuaded the congregation concerning the kingdom of God. This led to some hardening of their hearts, not believing Paul's report, and speaking evil of the way. Therefore, Paul departed from them and began to dispute daily in the school of Tyrannus.

The school of Tyrannus would be the place, for two years, which Paul chose to dispute the Scriptures. His popularity increased to the point that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the Word of God, both Jews and Greeks. In this city, God used Paul to preach, teach, and work special miracles. By doing so, the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified in that region. So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed that sinners would bring their curious arts and books, and burn them before all men. Paul persuaded men and women to turn from their wicked ways and turn to the Lord throughout the entire area of Asia.

Because of the uproar, Paul had to leave the city of Ephesus. However, while still on his third journey, Paul returned close to Ephesus to give the elders one last admonition before returning to Jerusalem. During this session, Paul reflected over the prosperous ministry at Ephesus that lasted three years. Precious memories began to fill everyone's mind as warm tears began to stream down their face. Paul told them to take heed unto themselves because grievous wolves would try to enter into the flock. These wolves would attempt to disperse the flock, speak perverse things, and draw away disciples after them. In conclusion, Paul commended them to God and trusted the Lord to take care of them. He knelt in prayer with the saints, as they wept sore. After their prayer meeting ended, they fell on Paul and kissed him, sorrowing that they would not see him again until they were reunited in heaven. Following Paul to his ship, they wiped away the tears from their eyes. As the ship began to sail farther and farther away, they waved toward one another. Finally, when the ship seemed to be just a small dot in the horizon, the disciples turned and proceeded to walk back to the work God called them. Paul retired to his room in the ship, and, with a burning heart, began to pray for the saints at Ephesus.

There are also seven churches mentioned in Revelation chapters two through three. Five of the seven did not occur as a direct result of Paul's ministry. Where did they come from and who was the preacher God used to plant them? The answer to this question is found in Deuteronomy 29:29.

The seven churches that are mentioned in Revelation chapters two through three are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. John reveals to us the location of these churches in Revelation 1:4. "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;" He also mentions this in Revelation 1:11.

*"Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and*

*unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.”*

From these passages, we realize that they were cities in the region of Asia. Since God used Paul mightily in this area, it may be concluded that the other five churches mentioned may have some times to the ministry at Ephesus. Could it be possible that Ephesus caught on to the church planting mentality? Having already covered the ministry at the church at Ephesus, let us look at the church at Smyrna.

The church at Smyrna faced tribulation, poverty, and false disciples from the synagogue of Satan. Jesus instructed them not to fear the tribulation, imprisonments, and suffering. He only admonished them to be faithful unto death and they would receive a crown of life. Overcomers would not be hurt by the second death.

Pergamos was a church, in spite of Satan's attack, held fast the name of Jesus and did not deny the faith once delivered unto them. Even during times of martyrdom, they remained faithful. However, they had within their congregation those that held to the doctrine of Balaam and that of the Nicolaitans. Jesus instructed them to repent and then He would bless them.

Thyatira was guilty of allowing the doctrine of Jezebel to be taught amongst the assembly. There was a strong warning conveyed to the church concerning this matter. Nevertheless, there were some in the congregation that had good works, charity, service, faith, and patience.

Sardis had a name that they were alive, but in reality, they were dead. They were living off precious memories and did not have their hand to the plough. There is a danger in looking back. When you begin to look back, you lose track of where you should be heading. This was the instance at Sardis. Jesus informed them to strengthen the things that remain, remember, and repent. Like the church at Thyatira, Sardis had some in the congregation that were walking worthy.

Philadelphia seemed to be the most blessed church when it came to revival. The Lord opened a door for Philadelphia that no man could shut. Philadelphians kept the Word of God and would not deny the name of Jesus.

Laodicea was the most liberal of all the churches. Even the name reveals that the people ruled the church. Probably the problem that led to their wicked condition was their lukewarmness. This half-hearted lifestyle led them to think they had need of nothing, even God. However, they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. They needed to repent or the Lord would chasten them.

Yet another church that was in existence without the influence of Paul was the one John mentioned in II John and III John. There was a church in the elect lady's house. The epistles of II John and III John record the intimate conversation between John and his "children".

From this study, we see several churches just in the New Testament. These are Jerusalem, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, Hierapolis, Colosse, Laodicea, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and the church in the elect lady's house. It is clear to see that the Lord, not only built His church spiritually, but also physically. As people were converted, the Lord placed a church for them to attend. Certainly, it is hard to avoid the fact that God expects believers to be part of a local New Testament church (Hebrews 10:25- *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."*). As we go into further studies, we will see how the western churches developed from these churches. Definitely, there is an unbroken line of the succession and perpetuity of the church that Jesus said He would build in Matthew 16:18.

## END NOTES

1. Robert T. Boyd, World's Bible Handbook, page 304.
2. J.M. Carroll, The Trail of Blood, page 14.
3. J.M. Carroll, The Trail of Blood, page 11.
4. James Strong, The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, page unknown.
5. Robert T. Boyd, World's Bible Handbook, page 398.

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