

# The Development and Spread of Christianity

See "Lesson" Content

## Learning Objectives

1. The children will explore how the congregation in Jerusalem developed through the courageous testifying of the first Apostles and Christians.
2. The children will examine how too much "noise" in our lives can affect our relationship with God and other fellow believers.

**Memory Verse:** *"The believers studied what the apostles taught. They shared life together. They broke bread and ate together. And they prayed." --Acts 2:42*

## Getting Started

Choose One Activity

### Guest Speaker

Ask a minister or someone in a ministry (Youth/Children/Music) to attend class with you – at least in the beginning. For maximum effectiveness a district or regional leader would be best (of course, this depends on their schedule). You will need to talk with the minister ahead of time to discuss how technology has helped him in God's work, to be a better minister, to communicate better, to stay organized, etc. If you have someone in mind that heavily relies on technology to function (iPhone, Google, internet, texting) then, if possible, have them join your class. Also, if he/she could bring in their technological devices or samples of work, this would carry a lot of impact. The objective is to make the point that technology has opened more opportunities for us to serve in a greater capacity today.

### "The Perfect Church" Activity

See: [www.teensundayschool.com](http://www.teensundayschool.com) → Activities → "The Perfect Church"

Give each student an index card or piece of paper. The assignment is to write down one thing that would make a perfect church. It can be anything about the church that they want. The only requirement is that it is something that they think would make the greatest, best, most perfect church ever.

After each student has written one thing, collect all the cards. Read what each person has written. Give each student an opportunity to explain why they wrote what they did. Then have the students attempt to prioritize these things to make their own "perfect church."

This should help the children to start thinking about what "their Church" ought to be.

## Bible Lesson with Discussion Questions

**Message:** *Each congregation must work toward Health, Growth, and Completion.*

### The Development of the Congregation in Jerusalem (Taken from *God's Ways* Vol 2)

Apostle Peter's Pentecost sermon was so powerful that 3000 people decided to have themselves baptized (cf Acts 2:41). These were added to the approximately 120 faithful upon whom the Holy Spirit had previously been poured out (cf. Acts 1:15; 2:1-4) In connection with this a few exceptional features of congregational life at that time are emphasized. This account ends with the phrase, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). A little later, already about 5000 believing men belong to the congregation (cf. Act 4:4).

## **Bible Lesson with Discussion Questions – continued**

In Acts 6:7, it says further, “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly...”

The congregation in Jerusalem consisted of Semitic-speaking Jews from Palestine, and Hellenists (i.e. one who used the Greek language but was not Greek and who had lived in Diaspora<sup>1</sup>.)

The differences between the two groups were not only confined to language. Due to varied cultural backgrounds, their religious thinking and practice had also been formed differently. At times, this resulted in tension among the faithful. That is why the Hellenistic Jews, for example, complained that their widows had not been adequately considered at the distribution of food, clothing, and money.

Tackling these kinds of problems would have taken time away from the Apostles’ main task of proclaiming the gospel. That is why they appointed seven Deacons to assist them. They were to lend a helping hand with commonplace matters in the congregation.

*Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;<sup>4</sup> but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” Acts 6:2-4.*

One of these seven men was Stephen, a man “full of faith and power,” who performed great wonders and miracles (cf Acts 6:8).

Stephen’s critical words about the temple and the law evidently aroused the hatred of the Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem. At first, they tried to refute him. Then they falsely accused him. Stephen was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin (cf Acts 6:9-15).

There he made a speech in his own defense, which turned more and more into a harsh reprimand. This enraged his listeners. And when he still had the cheek to exclaim, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God,” they were so incensed that they drove him out of the city and stoned him. His last words were, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” (Acts 7: 56, 60)

Stephen’s murder was the signal to persecute the faithful in Jerusalem, and many fled the city. Since the refugees talked about their faith when they resettled, their flight led to the spreading of the gospel, also outside of Jerusalem. With it, what Jesus Christ had said to the Apostles began to fulfill itself, “...you shall be witnesses to Me<sup>[a]</sup> in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (cf Acts 1:8)

### **A Brief History of Rome and the Roman Empire**

According to legend, Rome was founded in the year 753 BC, and ruled by kings. In 510 BC – a date, which also has not been verified historically – the kingdom was transformed into a republic which now was governed by two annually elected consuls, a Senate and popular assemblies.

## **Bible Lesson with Discussion Questions – continued**

The Romans waged numerous wars on their neighbors, until all of central and southern Italy was under their control in 270 BC. During the centuries that followed, the Romans took possession of the entire Mediterranean coast, and all European countries west of the Rhine River and south of the Danube River. At the beginning of the second century BC, the Roman Empire reached its greatest expansion.

The continuing expansion of the empire made it necessary to construct a road system branching out in all directions. Already in 312 BC, construction of the first of the great Roman roads, the Via Appia (Appian Way), commenced. It ran southeast from Rome in a perfectly straight line.

In the year 44 BC, General Gaius Julius Caesar had himself proclaimed dictator. Following his assassination one month later and battles that lasted for years, Octavian, who had been honored with the title Augustus (i.e. the exalted, the venerable) since 27 BC, established the Roman Empire. During his reign from 30 BC to 14 AD the Roman Empire experienced a period of peace and prosperity called Pax Augusta and the Golden Age of Rome. At the borders of this great empire, though, there were constant clashes with neighboring peoples, also during this time.

Caesar Augustus had many public buildings, magnificent temples and numerous statues of gods erected (“I found a city made of brick and turned it into a city made of marble”). The Romans expected the population of the conquered areas to worship their emperor as a deity, but otherwise brought no influence to bear on the various religions in the Provinces.

The Romans settled retired soldiers (i.e. veterans) in the conquered areas. These settlements were called colonies, and later received the right to self-government, whose seat became the quasi district capital of the area.

A Roman citizen enjoyed special privileges throughout the empire – above all, civil rights in the city of Rome. Without having been sentenced he could be neither bound nor scourged, could not be crucified, and, during legal proceedings, could appeal to the emperor, who then made the final decision. Apostle Paul, for example, had special legal protection because he had inherited the right to Roman citizenship from his father.

After Caesar Augustus, many other emperors followed. Under Diocletian (284-304 AD), stabilization of the political and military structures was achieved. The decline of the Roman Empire began during the 4<sup>th</sup> century, in the course of peoples’ migrations. In the year 395, the Roman Empire split into the Western and Eastern Roman Empires.

### Discussion Questions:

1. How many were sealed on Pentecost? (3000)
2. Did the congregation grow after that day? Cite two references in your reading. (Yes, “And the Lord added to the church daily...” (Acts 2:47) and “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly...” Acts 6:7. NOTE: If the children don’t know – tell them the verses and have them look them up and read them aloud in class.)
3. The congregation grew fast and large so that ethnic differences soon became obvious. What two groups are mentioned in the reading? (Hellenistic Jews and Palestinian Jews.)
4. What do you think were some of the characteristics of the people in the congregation? (Ready to have fellowship, prayed continually, praised God, firm in the Apostles’ doctrine, celebrated Holy Communion together, testified of the Lord’s resurrection and Christ’s gospel.)

## **Bible Lesson with Discussion Questions – continued**

5. Explain the history behind why Deacons like Stephen were ordained? (*Hellenists complained that their widows were not considered properly when food and money were distributed. The Apostles couldn't serve the people spiritually and see to daily tasks. To this end, the Apostles made Deacons to take care of daily tasks in the congregation*)
6. Explain how the false accusation of Stephen and his eventual murder lead to the spread of Christianity. (See Acts 8:2-4.)
7. What did the Romans build that helped the spread of Christianity? (*Roads.*)
8. How do you think the roads helped the spread of Christianity? (*They made it easier to travel, communication in the form of messages could be sent more efficiently.*)
9. Could the Jewish people and eventually the new Christian congregation worship freely? (*Yes, they had to recognize that the emperor was a deity but otherwise did not influence any particular religion on anyone.*)
10. What special rights did Romans have? (*They could travel anywhere they wanted in the empire and could not be bound, whipped, or killed without being sentenced first – and he/she could appeal to the emperor personally.*)
11. What advantage did these rights give to Apostle Paul? (*He was a Roman citizen because his father was Roman.*)
12. Read Isaiah 55: 8-9. Reflect on how God allowed several things to happen to make sure that His word began to travel around Mediterranean and Middle Eastern areas. Discuss Together.

## **Application to Real Life**

The students will need to pair up. They can remain together for both parts of the activity.

Part 1:

Explain to the children that they should talk to one another, at the same time, for one minute. They can talk about anything they like, but both partners must be talking simultaneously and continuously for the full minute. Use a stopwatch if needed. After one minute ask the following questions:

### Discussion Questions:

1. What was your partner talking about?
2. Was it hard to hear?
3. Was it hard to concentrate on what you were saying?

Part 2:

With the same pairs of students, have one person talk for 30 seconds while the other waits in silence and listens. After 30 seconds, switch roles and do it again. Then ask the following questions:

### Discussion Questions:

1. Now, what did your partner say that time?
2. Was it hard or easy to hear?
3. Was it easier to communicate what you were saying? Why?

This activity shows us how noise can affect our ability to understand fully what others are saying, which can in turn affect our relationships. The same is true for our relationship with God. Sometimes, we need to go off to a quiet place, away from distractions, so we can forget about us and focus completely on Him and talk to Him. This is where your strength will come from and it will help you stay focused and stand firm in your faith.

## **Application to Real Life – continued**

### Gifts of Ministry - Faith

The gift of faith is the divine enablement to live with untiring certainty in God’s desire and ability to fulfill His promises. Individuals with the gift of faith contribute confidence.

In Acts 6 and 7, we read about Deacon Stephen. He was a disciple who was chosen to care for widows because he was full of faith and the Holy Spirit. Eventually, he began preaching to the people in Jerusalem. One group of people had a problem with Stephen, and they accused him of speaking against God, bringing him to the council to hold a trial. Stephen then tells those gathered about Abraham and Moses, and how God’s plan of salvation for Israel was carried out through these men. He then accuses the group of resisting the Holy Spirit, having a part in the betrayal and murder of Jesus Christ, and not keeping the laws of God. Because of Stephen’s speech, the group stones him to death.

Stephen demonstrates the gift of faith by boldly telling the people about God and their errors against Him. Even though the people accused him, and were angry with him, and eventually stoned him, Stephen was committed to God and continued to trust Him.

## **Memory Work Suggestions**

*5 minutes*

1. Recite the memory verse.
2. Practice finding the memory verse and/or Bible text in their Bible!
3. Play a game to review an article of faith (toss the bean bag/stuffed animal, the person who catches it says the next word...try to go faster and faster).
4. Allow a volunteer (child) to lead the class in an opening/closing prayer.

## **Activity Ideas**

*Choose One Activity*

### **“The Perfect Congregation”**

Objective: describe/develop the characteristics of the “perfect” congregation. **NOTE:** Please be sure that parents and children understand that this exercise is for “hypothetical” purposes only in order to help the children realize that in order to make a congregation great WE all need to take responsibility in order to make it that way.

Materials: Whiteboard or poster board or some other creative means to organize thoughts, markers.

Use the following question prompts to help the students develop some thoughts:

- Who will lead the congregation?
- What will the leader be like?
- What will the people be like?
- How often will services be?
- What kind of music would there be?
- How many people will be there?
- What will the services be like?
- How long will the services be?
- Will there be any spiritual education? (Sunday School, Bible Study)
- Will the people have fun? How?
- What kind of support groups will the church provide?

Gather as many thoughts as you can. Then, type up the results (or the furthest progress) and send it to the students via email or Google documents. Type in some thoughts or further question prompts to finalize the outline. Have the students develop these thoughts over the week. This will be their homework. Note: Teachers please present this activity carefully – the intent is not to dwell on the negative but the possibilities of unlimited grace in resources, people, willingness, and love. Focus on the student’s thought processes and how a “perfect congregation” is the responsibility of everyone, including the students.

**Discussion/Food for thought**

The quote below from District Apostle Kolb could be used in a few different ways, for example:

- Use it as inspiration to develop a description of your congregation.
- Develop a symbolic icon of the perfect blend of people in a congregation.

*“The artist’s palette is the tool whereby very different colors are combined with the intent to create a work of great beauty. Each work of art is a unique combination of these colors and the artist’s interpretation, style and inspiration. Likewise, every congregation is unique. Each has its own colors, personalities, characteristics, talents and gifts. A healthy congregation will have enlightened leadership that can embrace the diversity and uniqueness of each member and weave them into a masterpiece of Christian love and fellowship. Therefore, let us not be distressed when congregations look different from the outside, but rather seek an inner oneness with Christ that will be clearly evident on His day.”* From “Perspectives: Writings from Our District Apostle”

**Journal**

What kind of “things” has God provided for us to allow us to spread the gospel? Have you ever looked at it this way? Write about it.

What would you do to start making a change in your congregation? Would you start with yourself or start a program/activity or give advice? Why? Write about it.

**Homework Ideas**

- Read the lesson: **“The Apostles of Jesus Christ”** (Luke 6:12-16; Acts 1:25-26; 13:1-4 & 14:14; Romans 16:7; Galatians 1:19) at [www. www.nac-usa.org](http://www.nac-usa.org).
- Learn the Memory Verse: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*  
--Matthew 28:19
- Learn the \_\_\_\_\_ Article of Faith
- Finalize **“The Perfect Congregation”** outline from this week’s lesson.



## Take Home Page: The Development and Spread of Christianity

### Today I learned...

Today your child was reminded that **each congregation must work toward health, growth and completion.** The children explored how the congregation in Jerusalem developed through the courageous testifying of the first Apostles and Christians. They also examined how too much “noise” in our lives can affect our relationship with God and other fellow believers.

### Help me learn my memory verse...

*“The believers studied what the apostles taught. They shared life together.  
They broke bread and ate together. And they prayed.” --Acts 2:42*

### Ask me...

1. What was so special about the first Pentecost? What happened?
2. Do you think it is important for the work of God to continue to grow? Why or why not?
3. What could YOU do to help God’s work to grow in your community?

### Live Your Faith...

*Set aside some time this week to gather as a family. Talk about the ways in which you were able to see or feel God’s presence throughout your week. Then if possible, play some soft reflective music and spend time quietly focusing on God, talking to Him, reading the Bible, and “listening” to Him. Set a timer for 10 minutes and challenge everyone to just spend that time focusing completely on God in some way. Try to do this once a week for at least a month.*

