

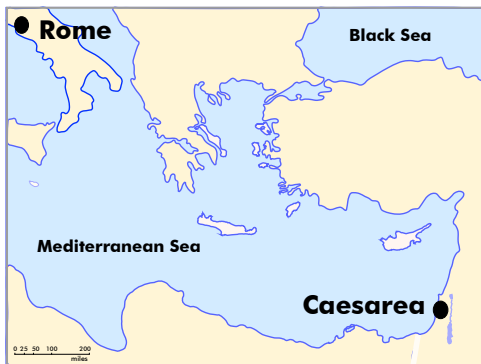
## Lesson #2 – Acts 1-12 2019

Before starting this lesson, read **Acts 1 - 12**.

The Gospels end with the death and resurrection of Jesus in 31 AD. Some 25 years later, around 56 AD, a Greek man named Theophilus believes in Jesus. He writes his friend, Dr. Luke, asking him about the many stories of Jesus - which are fact and which are fiction. Luke is Greek. He had not lived in the land of Israel at the time of Jesus, so he does not have all the facts.

However at the moment, he **is** living in Israel, in the coastal city of Caesarea. He has come with the apostle Paul to serve as his doctor while Paul is in prison. This is a perfect opportunity for Luke.

He can go to the provinces of Galilee and Judea to interview all the people who had known Jesus and had seen His ministry. He can also learn what happened to the apostles and Jewish believers after His ascension. For 2 years - 56-58 AD, Luke gathers information.



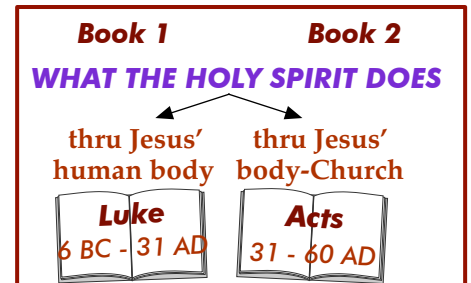
Later in 58 AD, the Romans take Paul from their prison in Caesarea and send him to Rome to be under house arrest. Luke goes with Paul, to continue serving as his doctor.

It is during the years in Rome, 58 - 60 AD, that Luke organizes all the information he had collected. There is so much material, he has to write 2 books. One is about the ministry of Jesus and the other about the ministry of the apostles. Luke has seen a common thread going thru both - it is the Holy Spirit who gives them power and effectiveness.

So in book one, Luke describes what the Holy Spirit does thru Jesus in His **human** body while He was here on earth. It becomes the gospel of **Luke** covering events from c. 6 BC to 31 AD.

In book two, he tells what the Holy Spirit continues to do thru Jesus' **other** Body, the Church. It continues the story from 31 to 60 AD. He calls this book **Acts** because 54 times he refers to the actions of the Holy Spirit.

Chapters 1-12, which we are studying in this lesson, cover from 31 to 45 AD, a period of some 15 years.



Luke ended his gospel with Jesus' ascension. As he begins his second book, he backs up and reviews what happened between Jesus' resurrection and ascension. Over a period of 40 days, Jesus continues to teach the apostles. He tells them there will be changes in **what** God will do and **how** He will do it.

But all the apostles can think about are God's promises to the Jews. The Old Testament said they would live in a perfect, physical kingdom and Jesus would be King. Jesus had told them they would have power in His kingdom. So they ask, *Now are we going to have national independence? Now are You going to set up Your kingdom?*

Jesus replies,

*My physical kingdom will eventually come. But for the time being, it is delayed. You are not going to have power to rule. When I get to heaven, I will send the Holy Spirit. Then you will have power to tell others what you have seen, what you have heard and what you know about Me. You are to do this here in Jerusalem, in the surrounding areas and even outside the land of Israel.*

Luke uses this answer as the outline of his second book.

In chapters 1-7 he tells how they give the message of Jesus in **Jerusalem**.

In chapters 8-12, witnesses in **Judea and Samaria**

Chapters 13-28, witnesses to the ends of the earth, meaning **outside the land of Israel**.



Jesus then tells the apostles to wait in Jerusalem **until** they receive the Holy Spirit.

This does not mean the Holy Spirit was missing from their lives. But in the Old Testament and in the days of Jesus, the Holy Spirit only came over a person for special ministry. As soon as their ministry was finished, the Holy Spirit left. If a person willfully disobeyed during their time of ministry, the Holy Spirit was taken from them. The disciples had the Holy Spirit **over** them in their ministry. But when they deserted Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Holy Spirit was taken from them. This is why on the day of His resurrection, Jesus meets with the apostles in the upper room and says, “receive the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit was once again **over** them.

Once Jesus returns to heaven, there will be a change – they will have a new relationship with the Holy Spirit.

1. Jesus will send the Holy Spirit not to just be **over** them, but to live **inside** of them.
2. Another change is that the Holy Spirit will be inside of **all** believers - not just people with ministry.
3. In addition, the Holy Spirit will live inside all believers **permanently**. He will never be taken from them.

In *our* day, when we accept Jesus’ payment for our sin, the Holy Spirit comes immediately to live inside of us. Yes, He does give us ability in ministry. But what is even more important, He gives us the power to make right choices so that we can say *yes* to God and *no* to Satan. If we willfully disobey, the Spirit becomes inactive, but He will never be taken from us. This is how the Holy Spirit works in our day.

But in the days of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was only **over** them. This is why He tells the apostles to wait in Jerusalem and not begin any ministry until the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of them. With this instruction, Jesus ascends into heaven and the apostles along with the other disciples spend the next 10 days together in Jerusalem.

During this time, the city is filled with the *Diáspora*. This is a Greek term referring to all the Jews who had been dispersed and lived outside the land of Israel. Some 1-2 million of these Jews had come several weeks earlier to celebrate the Jewish holy days. It started with Passover.

Many had travelled hundreds of miles to get to Jerusalem. It was only logical for them to stay in the province of Judea until the next holy days which came **7 weeks and 1 day** later.

Because the time is determined by the number of weeks, in Hebrew it is called the **Feast of Weeks** - Shavuot. That is the Hebrew name.

The Greek name is based on the number of *days*. Seven weeks and 1 day is 50 days. So in the Greek, it was called **Pentecost**, which means *50*.



It is the beginning of *this* celebration that we read about in Acts 2.

The apostles and believers have gathered in an upstairs meeting room either on or next to the temple grounds. Below, in the temple courtyard, both the local and *Diáspora* Jews are gathering to begin this week-long celebration. Obviously, with 1-2 million, they will have to take turns getting into the temple area - going on different days and different times of the day.

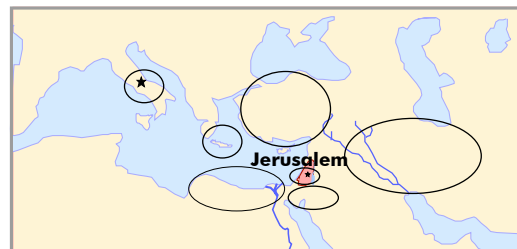
Acts 2:9-11 tell us Jews representing 15 languages and places are there.

The first 4 groups mentioned in verse 9 - Parthians, Medes, Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, are from east of Jerusalem. Everything east and north of the Euphrates River is included in these 4 language groups. These Jews have travelled over 600 miles.

The next place mentioned in verse 9 is Judea. This is the southern province in the land of the Jews, with Jerusalem as its capital. In other words, the local area.

Verses 9-10 mention Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia. These are major provinces in Asia Minor or the country we know today as Turkey.

Verse 10 also mentions Egypt and parts of Libya, near Cyrene. These are in Northern Africa. Rome, of course, is the capital of Italy and the capital of the Roman empire.



Crete is an island just south of Greece. The last group to be mentioned are the Arabs. This means Jews living in what we know today as Saudi Arabia and the Sinai Peninsula.

As all these Jews are gathering in the courtyard, the 120 disciples of Jesus are praying in an upstairs room. It is at this time Jesus fulfills His promise and sends the Holy Spirit. So they know He has come, God sends a sound like wind. Hebrew word for *Spirit* is *ruach*. The Greek word is *pneuma*. Both words mean *spirit*. They also mean *wind*. It is God's way to let them know the Holy Spirit has come. For the first time in history He will permanently live inside of human beings. All 120 believers now have the Holy Spirit inside of them. They begin to talk in languages they never learned. This miracle is not for their benefit. It is for the Jews in the temple courtyard. They are waiting for the celebration which begins at 10 o'clock that morning.

The 120 believers leave the room and go down to the courtyard, talking about the wonderful works of God. They are speaking in languages they never learned. That obviously is a miracle. But the greater miracle is that when 120 are all talking at the same time in 15 different languages, the thousands of Jews listening, do not hear chaos. Each one clearly hears in his or her own language.

It is why they start asking, *what is the spiritual meaning of this miracle?* Others make fun of them saying, they *must be drunk*.

Peter says, *that is impossible, it is only 9 o'clock in the morning*. This does not mean it is too early to be drunk. Peter is reminding them it is a Jewish holy day. This means everyone has to fast until 10:00 o'clock that morning. So of course they have not had any wine.

The Jews in the Temple courtyard first hear about the wonderful works of God in their **own** languages from the 120 believers. Then Peter begins to speak. He uses the language common to all of them - the Koiné or common Greek.

Peter starts his message by telling the Jews that their leaders, in cooperation with the Romans, crucified Jesus. But that was not the end. *God the Father raised Him from the dead*. King David had predicted this 1000 years earlier. Peter now quotes David from the Psalms.

*Because You, God the Father, will not abandon me (David) in the grave.* Acts 2:27 In the Psalms, David is talking about himself. He believes that even tho his body would be put in a tomb, some day God would raise his body so that He could live in God's presence.

In the next phrase, David writes, *...nor will You let your Holy One undergo decay*. It should be obvious that David could never refer to himself as God's Holy One. And David's body *had* decayed in his tomb that was just ½ mile away from where Peter is speaking. In verse 31, Peter tells us what David is talking about.

*He, David, spoke of the resurrection of Christ.*

Jewish belief said the body did not begin to decay until 4 days after death. Since Jesus died and was in the grave only 3 days, *His* body did not decay. Using Jewish beliefs, David had predicted that Jesus would be resurrected within 3 days.

To summarize all of Peter's sermon, he tells the Jews,

Jesus *claimed* to be deity. Your leaders said that was a lie. God the Father says it is true. He has validated Jesus by producing 2 events predicted in the Old Testament that would be connected to Jesus ...

First - His resurrection - written about by David in the Psalms.

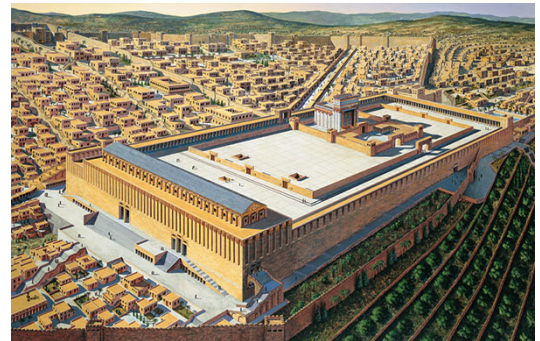
Second - the coming of the Holy Spirit, written about by the prophet Joel.

The Jews understand the logic. The Messiah they were looking for, **had** come, but their leaders had crucified Him. They ask, *what should we do?* Peter replies in verse 38, *repent and be baptized*.

*Repent* - change how you think about Jesus. Agree with the Father that He is your promised Messiah.

*Be baptized* - identify yourselves publicly with Jesus and His claims.

Baptism was not invented or started by the church. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, all religions used baptism - the Jews, Romans, Greeks and even the pagans. It was always done in a river where everyone could see. The purpose was to let the outside world know you were identifying yourself with a specific religion or belief.



Peter tells the Jews to use this ceremony that is common to everyone. They should be baptized to let the world know they have changed their mind. They now identify themselves with Jesus as their Messiah. They believe He is deity. They have accepted His payment to forgive their sin. They want to obey what He has said.

According to verse 41, three thousand Jews identify themselves with Jesus. This is the beginning of the Church, the Body of Christ. Historic Christianity gets some of its basic beliefs from this first message of Peter: Jesus is deity. He made payment for our sin; He was resurrected with a physical, visible body and is now at the right hand of God the Father.

The Church begins with over 3,000 Jewish believers. One or two months go by. Then one day Peter and John go to the temple courtyard to pray. Seeing a crippled man asking for help, they heal him. This draws a huge crowd so Peter uses the opportunity to tell them about Jesus and His resurrection. Jesus has the power to change their lives. With this, even more Jews believe.

According to Acts 4:4, in just 2 months after the Church begins, the number who have put their faith in Jesus has now grown to about 5000 men. When counting large crowds, the Jews just counted the men and then assumed the number of women and children would be equal. So by saying 5000 *men* have believed, it is understood that at least 5000 women and children are also in the crowd and have believed. To use our way of counting, just 2 months after Pentecost, there are some 10,000 believers in the Church, the body of Christ. And all of them are Jewish.

The Jewish Sanhedrin are shocked. They thought if Jesus was crucified, there would be no more disciples. How wrong they were. So they bring Peter, John and the healed man to their Sanhedrin court.

Peter tells them they may have tried to get rid of Jesus, but they have not succeeded. Jesus is alive. In fact, He is now the **only** way Jews can be right with God and have their sin forgiven. This is a radical statement. For 2000 years God had told the Jews it was thru animal sacrifices. But from Pentecost onward, animal sacrifices could never again forgive people's sin. Now it is only thru Jesus - the Lamb of *God* who takes away the sin of the world.

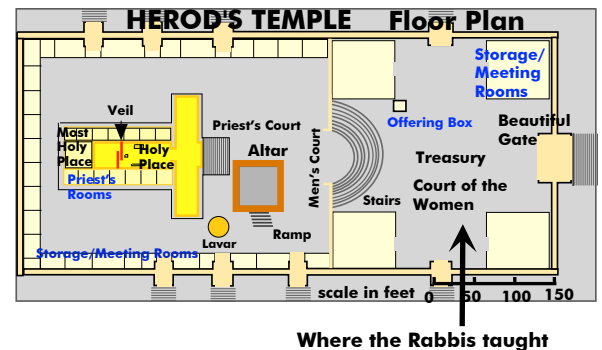
The religious leaders do not believe the apostles, but they also realize there is nothing they can do to prove them wrong. There is no body of Jesus to disprove the resurrection. The man standing in front of them has obviously been healed. So after commanding the apostles not to teach about Jesus any more, they let them go.

The apostles leave and teach even more. The church continues to grow. When financial needs arise, the Holy Spirit leads people to give. Sometimes they sell property and donate the money to the church. The leaders then distribute it to believers in need. No one was making pleas. This was all voluntary on the part of those who had extra resources.

We are now told about a couple who decided to sell some property - Ananias and Sapphira. After selling it, they give part of the money to the local church and keep the rest for themselves. When they give the money to Peter, they make a big deal of it to draw everyone's attention. First Ananias and later his wife tell Peter they are giving all the money to the church. In each case, when they make the statement, they fall over dead.

At first this punishment does not seem fair. It seems too extreme. Where is God's love and mercy? For just telling a lie, He strikes 2 people dead? But this is more than just a lie. No one had commanded or forced them to sell their property. They had been free to give nothing, part, or all of the money. By secretly keeping some and yet saying they gave all, they revealed their true motive. They were not interested in the needs of the local church. They gave the money to get attention and glory for themselves instead of God getting the glory. If they get all this glory and attention, a lot of other people will do the same.

At its very beginning, the local church could lose its purpose and meaning. It could become just another hypocritical social organization. Sin must be punished. People need to realize the **HOLY** Spirit is present. Unless they want to be holy and begin a *new* life thru faith in Jesus, they should be **afraid** to join the local church. Even in the New Testament, the love of God never becomes more important than the holiness of God.





In the Jerusalem church, there are 2 kinds of Jewish believers.

1. There are Jews who have always lived in the land of Israel. They speak Aramaic.
2. There are Jews who have been born and raised outside the land of Israel who speak Greek plus their mother tongue from the land where they were born. They are called Hellenist Jews.

As the local church develops, there are widows in the congregation who have no one else to care for them. Some of the donated money is then used to provide food, clothing and housing for them. There are Aramaic-speaking Jewish widows and Greek-speaking Jewish widows.

After awhile, the apostles discover a problem. Some Greek-speaking believers complain their widows are not getting the same amount of help as the Aramaic speaking widows. To solve the problem, the apostles choose 7 men to oversee the distribution of food and clothing. They are called *deacons*. All 7 are Greek-speaking Jews. We know this by their Greek names. From now on, there will be Greek-speaking deacons looking out for both the Greek and Aramaic-speaking widows. What wisdom in handling the problem. According to Acts 6:4, the apostles have delegated this work, so they can use their time to pray and teach God's Word which at that time was the Old Testament. This also is wisdom. Even work that is good could keep them from doing the real ministry God had given them.

One of the 7 deacons is named Stephen. He begins with his responsibility of taking care of the widows. But then the Holy Spirit uses him to perform miracles. As a Greek-speaking Jew, he begins to debate with other Greek-speaking Jews in *their* synagogue.

In those days, the temple in Jerusalem is the only place for offering animal sacrifices. However in every neighborhood, there are synagogues where Jews meet for prayer and teaching. Many times Jews would attend a synagogue where they had something in common with the others. It might be the country they were born in, the language they grew up with or some common experience. In Jerusalem, there is a Hellenist synagogue where all the Jews who attend were born outside the land of Israel and they all prefer to speak Greek. There are Jews from Egypt, Libya, the province of Asia and the province of Cilicia. The capital of Cilicia province is Tarsus.



Some years earlier a teenager had come from Tarsus, south to Jerusalem, to train as a rabbi and theologian in the seminary. After finishing his training, he had gone back to Tarsus. Now he is in Jerusalem once again. He is one of the rabbi's in this Greek-speaking synagogue. He is one of the men debating with Stephen. The rabbi's name is Saul - Saul of Tarsus.

In spite of Saul's training and ability as a Jewish rabbi, in spite of the education of the others, they are not able to win their debates with Stephen. So, to stop his influence, the Jews accuse him of blasphemy against the temple and law of Moses. As punishment, they stone him to death with rabbi Saul holding their coats.

Two years have now gone by since Pentecost. The local church as well as the Church, the Body of Christ has been centered in Jerusalem. Jesus said they were to give His message in Jerusalem and then go to Judea and Samaria as well as outside the land of Israel. But no one has left Jerusalem because the support and strength within the believing community has been so wonderful.

This is why God now allows persecution to come. When they are forced out of Jerusalem, notice where they go.

*On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem and all except the apostles were scattered thruout Judea and Samaria.* Acts 8:1 This is exactly where God had wanted them to go.



Among those scattered, is Philip, one of the other deacons. He goes to Samaria. As he preaches, many of the people believe. But these Samaritans are a mixture - part Jewish, part Gentile. They have some Jewish beliefs and some pagan beliefs. They have their own temple and rituals.

In the Old Testament, God said people like these had to convert to Judaism to be right with God. Now for the Church, what is God going to require? Do Samaritans still have to convert to Judaism or just have faith in Jesus? At this point in the development of the Church, no one knows. Philip is a layman so he sends word to the apostles in Jerusalem. They send their leaders, Peter and John.

On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to live inside **Jewish** believers for the **first** time, they had a special experience to know they had been given the Holy Spirit. Now **Samaritan** believers are about to receive the Holy Spirit for the **first** time.

When Peter lays hands on them and prays, *they* have a special experience. This is so Peter knows they also have been given the Holy Spirit. It is evidence that God no longer requires Samaritans to convert to Judaism. To be eligible to receive the Holy Spirit, all they need is faith in Jesus.

After the *first* time the Holy Spirit was given to the Jews, from then on, the moment any Jewish person believed in Jesus, the Holy Spirit entered their life immediately. They did not have to do anything special and they had no special experience.

Now as Philip continues his ministry in Samaria, many more Samaritans believe. Like the Jews, the Holy Spirit now enters *their* life the moment they believe. They do not have any special experiences or require anyone to take special action. To put it another way, the pattern God followed with the Jews, He now follows with the Samaritans.

Chapter 9 is about the conversion of rabbi Saul. We will look at this chapter in the next lesson when we look at Saul's life in detail.

The apostles have been giving the message of Jesus to the Jews and the Samaritans, but as yet have not reached out to any Gentiles. It is Peter who takes the message to them.

Caesarea is a major city in Samaria province. In that city is a Gentile military man named Cornelius. According to Acts 10:2, *He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.*

This sounds like they are wonderful believers. But the angel tells him to send for Peter to **find out** how to be right with God. 11:14 Cornelius had responded to God based on what he had learned from the Jews is the past. He now worships the God of the Jews and follows the schedule of Jewish prayers. But as yet, he has not heard about Jesus. Because he is living up to the knowledge he has, God makes sure he gets more information by sending an angel to give him instruction - *send for Peter*.

Peter is in a home 30 miles to the south in the city of Joppa. It is around noontime and he is waiting for lunch. He decides to use the time for prayer. Suddenly he has a vision where something like a large sheet comes down from heaven. Inside the sheet are all the animals that God said the Jews were not to eat. Peter hears a voice telling him to eat some of them. Peter replies, *but I have never eaten these kind of animals. They are unclean. They are not acceptable.*

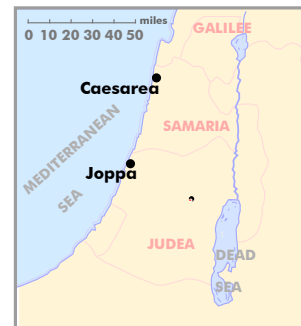
God says, *do not call unacceptable what I say is acceptable,*

This happens 3 times and then disappears. Peter is Jewish and understands picture language. But he has no idea what this means. Since he is waiting for lunch, he assumes it has something to do with the noon meal. But then servants come from the house of Cornelius, the Gentile. Up to this time Peter has **never** set foot in the house of a Gentile. It was against Jewish man-made laws - against the Mishnah. Peter suddenly understands the vision. Gentiles, whom he considers to be unclean, *are* accepted by God.

Peter goes with 6 other Jewish believers to the house of Cornelius. He tells him, his family and friends about Jesus. But Peter still has doubts and questions because of his Jewish background. In the Old Testament God always required Gentiles to convert to Judaism. Now in the Church, what is God going to require? Once again, the only way he can know is if God gives **Gentiles** the Holy Spirit - if He gives **them** a "Pentecost" like He gave the Jews that first time.

As he is preaching, the Gentiles believe and God gives them the Holy Spirit. They speak in languages they never learned. Peter is now sure that God is working in a brand-new way. The only thing He requires of Gentiles is to have faith in Jesus.

The Jews divided all humanity into 3 groups  
those who were **Jews**  
those who were part Jews - **Samaritans**  
those who had no Jewishness - **Gentiles**



In the Gospels Jesus had told Peter he would be given keys to the kingdom. In the book of Acts we see how Peter used these keys.

He opens the door for **Jews** to become part of the Church on the day of Pentecost.

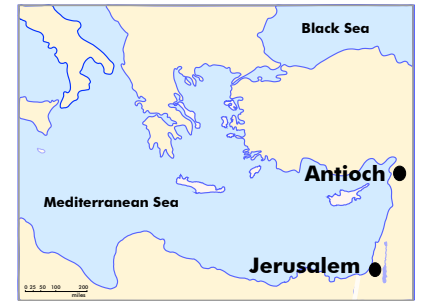
He opens the door to the **Samaritans** when he prays and lays hands on them.

He opens the door to the **Gentiles** when he preaches in the home of Cornelius.

Peter understands, whether it is Jews, Samaritans or Gentiles, they are all right with God and are given the Holy Spirit in the same way - thru faith in Jesus.

For the first 12 years, the Church is basically Jewish because it only involves those living in Israel. It takes even more persecution for believers to complete the last of Jesus' command - to take His message to the world around them. Even then, most Jewish believers only reach out to other Jews. However, in Antioch of Syria, they give the message of Jesus to the Gentiles. Soon a local church is formed. Because it is a Gentile church, with no knowledge of the Old Testament, the apostles in Jerusalem want to be sure they have a good foundation and spiritual background. They send Barnabas, one of their leaders to give them in-depth teaching.

By 44 AD, just 13 years after Pentecost, it is in this *Gentile* church that believers are first called Christians - ones who belong to Christ.



When reading these chapters, it is easy to focus on the spiritual experiences and spectacular healings. They did have an impact on the people. But the greatest impact came from the lives of the apostles themselves.

From the Gospels we know they had been selfish and egotistical, arguing about which of them was the greatest.

Now they are humble, willing to share.

John's nickname had been *son of thunder*. Now he is known as the apostle of love.

Peter is changed from a coward to a fearless proclaimer of Jesus.

People realized if Jesus can make **that** much difference, there really **must** be something to the message of Jesus.

Today, people will be convinced about Jesus, by what they see in our life.

They see we are now dealing with problems instead of avoiding them like we did in the past.

We have developed more balance instead of always going to extremes.

We have learned to accept responsibility instead of blaming others.

Instead of being dogmatic and demanding we have become reasonable and considerate.

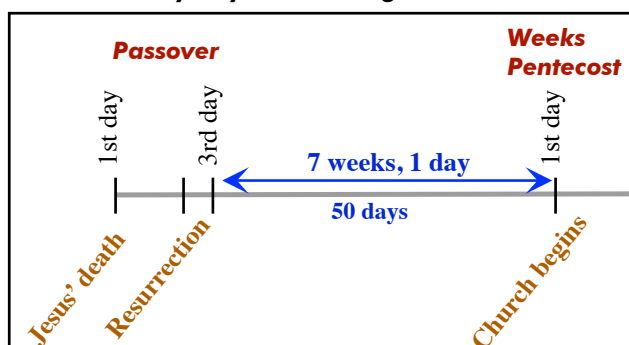
***God is still in the business of miracles.***

It is the changes we allow Him to make in **our** lives that are the **greatest** miracles of all.

**See next page for more information**

## EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE

### Chronology of the First Holy Days in the Religious Year



**Chronology of Acts 1-12** is approximately 15 yrs. from 31 - 45 AD

- 31 - 33 AD..... Jesus' Ascension, Pentecost, Ananias and Sapphira, Stephen, Philip, persecution
- 33 AD ..... Conversion of Saul of Tarsus
- 33 - 43 ..... Peter's Ministry; Saul in Arabia, Damascus, Jerusalem and Tarsus
- 43 - 44 ..... Antioch church is formed; it is the first local church outside the land of Israel  
it is the first place the name "Christian" is used
- 44 AD ..... James martyred; Peter imprisoned; Herod Agrippa I dies
- 45 AD ..... Famine relief sent from Gentile Christians in Antioch to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem