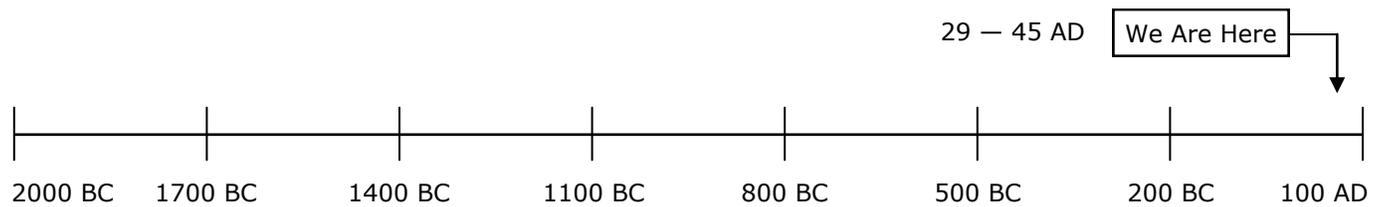


Pillars of the Church

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Week 45: November 5-11 — *The Gospels; Acts 1-12*

86% Complete — 50 Days to Go



Helpful Resources

Map of Palestine in the Time of Christ (p.119)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

After weeks of reading about Christ, it is time to switch gears and watch the early church. In His ministry, Christ laid the foundation — His vision and mission, His goals and purposes, His message of eternal life, His teaching on godly living, His ministry to the poor, and His healing of the hurting. Most of all, Christ afforded redemption for the Church. His followers would now have peace with and intimate access to God through His substitutionary death. Because of all that Christ did, the Church is able to do what it does, which, in fact, should be to carry on the ministry of Christ as if He never left. However, though Christ laid the foundation for the Church, there were still several pillars that were set in those early days.

1. **The Resurrection:** It was essential for Jesus to defeat the grave, for how could He extend eternal life to His followers if He Himself could not overcome death? His resurrection ensured believers that they too would live again with Him. We do not serve or share the message of a dead leader. Christianity worships a risen Lord!
2. **The Holy Spirit** (*Acts 2:1-13*): As was promised, fifty days after the resurrection (Pentecost), God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell believers. It would be the Spirit who would empower Christians to live a self-governed, godly life, to perform many miracles, and to have the courage to carry the message of Christ to the world.
3. **The Ministry of Peter:** No doubt one of the biggest surprises was the dramatic change in Peter's life. Once intimidated by men, he was now an unstoppable voice for the Gospel; thousands were saved because of his courage. He lived the rest of his life in selfless abandonment to the Lord's will and ultimately laid down his life for the cause.
4. **The First Church** (*Acts 2:3-47; 4:23-31*): For decades, all eyes were on the first church in Jerusalem, to see how it handled the major issues of the day. Thus, many of the apostles ministered there to make sure that it stayed on course and did not break away from true Christian faith. James, the brother of Jesus, became one of the first pastors there.
5. **Gentiles Saved** (*Acts 10:9-48*): Although the Jews were the original recipients of the Gospel, after their rejection of Christ, God extended salvation to everyone. He made clear His impartiality in a vision to Peter and by His giving of the Holy Spirit to those Gentiles who were saved. Today, the New Testament Church is predominantly Gentile.

6. **Persecution** (*Acts 8:1b-5*): Though meant to cause harm, persecution really fed the fire rather than extinguished it. When Saul and others began harassing believers, they fled to other cities and carried the Gospel with them. The prosperity of the Church in the midst of persecution proves that Christianity was and still is a supernatural religion.
7. **Saul's Conversion** (*Acts 9:1-19a*): God changed His greatest adversary and made him His greatest ambassador. No doubt Paul became the greatest promoter of the Christian faith and the Church's most accomplished missionary. As a result of his life's work, we have dozens of churches, thousands of believers, thirteen New Testament books of our Bible, and the most godly example of the Christian life to follow.

- Personal Application

As a follower of Christ and a member of His universal Church, we have a wonderful heritage. Church history is full of individuals who surrendered themselves for the cause of Christ and even gave their lives for its advancement. That heritage now rests on us. What will we contribute? What will we do with what we've been given?

1. **Our Mandate:** The Church is God's precious gift to us, which He bought with the blood of His Son. We must be careful how we treat it, how we teach it, and how we speak of it. We were not redeemed to sit and watch others do the work. We must get involved.
2. **Our Mission:** Our mission is Christ's mission. We are to carry on what He started and exemplified — to encourage, to heal, to help, to teach, to disciple, and to seek and save the lost. We are the hands and feet of Christ. Reflections of His ministry should be seen in us. We are His salt and light in this world, to be the voice of morality and truth and to shine as brightly as we can, so that those who live in darkness can find their way to God.
3. **Our Message:** "Jesus sent them out with the sacred and unfailing message of salvation that gives eternal life" (*Mark 16:8*). Our message is one of hope, and peace, and good news of forgiveness of sins, and helpless, hopeless, peaceless people need to hear it. It is our calling and duty to share that message with others through our words and lives.
4. **Our Ministry:** The true ministry of the Church can only be executed if everyone does his part (*Acts 2:3-47; 4:23-31*). Its efficiency and effectiveness rely upon the active participation of its members and that includes you. You have been included in God's family for a reason, and you have been gifted by the Holy Spirit for a purpose. Don't waste your chance to be of service to God by helping others. Find your place and get to work!

The Bottom Line

The *Church* is God's *primary instrument* through which He works, to carry on the *ministry of Jesus*.

Questions to Consider

1. In your opinion, which of the pillars of the early Church was most significant? Why?
2. Why do you think the majority of believers today are apathetic about the Church?
3. What should be our attitude concerning what Christ has called us to do?
4. How has your understanding of the Church's mission, and your ministry in it, changed?
5. You may not be a pillar of the Church, but you can be a pillar for your church. How so?