

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

SOUL-SAVING LESSONS

“The ‘Genesis’ of the New Testament”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The Book of Genesis is a book that is all about beginnings. Chapter 1 tells us that God created the whole world, all life, and all that exists. In chapter 2 we have the beginning of marriage and the home. Then, in chapter 3, we have the beginning of sin. Throughout the Book of Genesis, there are a number of “beginnings” that occur. But just as Genesis the book of beginnings for the Old Testament, there is in the New Testament a book of beginnings. The Book of Acts is a book of beginnings for the New Testament. No book is of greater value than the Book of Acts in learning how one can be saved and for understanding the work of the church. Someone has rightly referred to Acts 2 as “the hub of the Bible.” Everything before it is looking forward to it, and everything that happens after Acts 2 is predicated on the events of that chapter regarding the preaching of the Gospel. Today, then, we want to examine the “beginnings” that occur in the Book of Acts.

Some of these events are found in Acts 11:2 where we learn of the genesis, or beginning, of a new name. One of the most significant beginnings we find in the New Testament is where God’s people are referred to as “Christians.” The word Christian occurs three times in the New Testament. In 1 Peter 4:16, the Bible says, “If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.” As Christians, we ought to glorify God because of the wonderful name we have been given. In Acts 26:28, as Paul preached the Gospel to King Agrippa, Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” Probably one of the best-known passages is found in Acts 11:26, where the Bible says, “And when he [Barnabas] had found him [Paul], he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” This is the beginning of a new group of people—those who were followers of Christ, and of whom the Old Testament had prophesied. God said in the great long ago, “The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord will name” (Is. 62:2). When did the Gentiles see God’s righteousness? We learn of the first Gentile convert in Acts 10. Peter takes the Gospel to Cornelius, and toward the close of Acts 10 Cornelius and his household receive the Holy Spirit, are baptized, and become children of God. As a result, Acts 11:26 says that they “were first called Christians in Antioch.” What name did they wear? It was the name “Christian”—the name that gave Christ honor and glory. This is a very important principle as it relates to wearing someone’s name. What does it mean when you wear someone’s name? It means that you give them the glory and honor that they rightly deserve. Christians should wear the name of Christ because He is the only One Who is worthy of our praise and all the glory that we can give Him. As we think about wearing the name of Christ, we need to think about giving Him glory in all that we do.

Wearing someone's name means that you are joined to that person. It is like what you find in a marriage when the wife takes the last name of her husband. Today, we have been married to Christ. Romans 7:1-4 teaches us that our relationship to Christ and the church is like unto a marriage. Galatians 3:27 teaches us that we become part of the body of Jesus Christ. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12:27 that we are the body of Christ, and members individually one of another. When you wear someone's name, it suggests that you want to be like that person. Small children often like to wear the name of their favorite superhero—such as Spiderman, Superman, or the Incredible Hulk—because they want to be like that hero. Today when we wear the name of Christ, it means that we want to emulate Him and that we want to be like Him in every way. The Scriptures teach us that we should follow Jesus. The text of 1 Peter 2:21 teaches us that we ought to walk in the footsteps of the Savior. Revelation 14:4 tells us that he redeemed of old were “the ones who followed the Lamb wherever He went.” I am reminded of a wonderful text in Acts 4:13 where, as the Jewish leaders realized that because Peter and John spoke with great boldness, “they had been with Jesus.” We often sing the song, “Oh, to be like Him.” Do we really mean that? When we wear the name “Christian,” it means that we are to be like Christ. We are going to give Him honor and glory, and in everything we do we are going to magnify and praise His name.

If we wear someone's name, it means that we are a follower of that person. Joshua said in Joshua 24:15, “As for me and my house, we will follow the Lord.” As we follow Christ and wear His name, we must walk in His footsteps, just as 1 Peter 2:21 teaches us. To be a follower of someone means that we must follow their teaching. In John 6:66-68, Jesus had made some very critical statements. The text says that some of the disciples “walked with Him no more.” He then turned to His followers who remained and asked, “Will you also go away?” Peter responded by saying, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Does the religious name that you wear say that you are a follower of Christ or some other person? If you wear the name of someone else—whether it is Martin Luther, John Calvin, or any other Reformation leader—to whom are you giving honor and glory? It cannot be Jesus, or you would call yourself simply “a Christian.” To wear the name Christian means that we are trying to honor Christ—whose name we wear. A Christian's duty is to give God the glory in everything. Remember 1 Peter 4:16? In that passage, the Bible teaches us that it is our duty to give Christ the glory. Peter said, “If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.” As I wear the name “Christian,” everything I do (even if it causes me to suffer) should bring glory to the Savior. This is a Christian's whole duty in life. The Bible says in Isaiah 43:7 that everyone who is called by His name has been created for His glory. Paul made it clear in 1 Corinthians 10:31 concerning the realm of this when he wrote, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” As Christians, we must ask ourselves, “Is everything we do in life bringing glory to God? Does our speech live up the name of Jesus? Do my actions give Christ the glory? Is my very nature (or the way that I carry myself) bringing Christ the glory and the honor?” We need to be sure that the only name that we ever wear is the name of Jesus—which is the only name that can bring us salvation.

In Acts 4, Peter and John were asked, “By what name, authority, or power have you done these things?” Peter responded as follows: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (vs. 12). We must follow only Christ, His name, and His teaching because He is the One Who provides us with salvation. He is the foundation of the church today, and we must give Him the honor. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:11, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Jesus is the foundation of the church, and His is the only name that we should follow. This would imply that we should not follow names or sects of men. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots were famous for following the

great leaders of their day. Many today have the same problem. They follow men and their teachings more than God. But the Scriptures make it clear that we should not wear the names of men. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, Paul said, "Let there be no division among you." He wrote:

"For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas, or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

His point is clear. We must not follow the teaching of men. We must follow only Jesus and His plan of salvation for us today.

There is another beginning in the Book of Acts—the beginning of Gospel sermons. The word "Gospel" means "good news," implying that we have hope, not condemnation like under the Old Testament. Christians can have hope today. Under the Old Testament, there were not a lot of Gospel sermons. In fact, there weren't any that brought good news to the people. But when we turn in our Bibles to Acts 2, we learn about the first Gospel sermon. The climax of that sermon is found in Acts 2:36 when Peter said, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." This was the people's hope—that Jesus was the Messiah. And even though they had just crucified Him, they still could be saved through His name. Peter makes four points in his sermon.

First, he says that Jesus was approved by God (vs. 22) and that God had placed His sign of approval on Him. Throughout the Scriptures, this is true. In Matthew 17:5, at the Mount of Transfiguration, God's voice boomed from Heaven to say, "This is My beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" We learn that Jesus was predetermined by God to be a sacrifice for our sins. The text of 1 Peter 1:20 says that "He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world." Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:8-10 that Jesus was established as a sacrifice in the mind of God "before time began." Paul said in Titus 1:2 that we live "in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began." So God not only approved of Jesus and placed His stamp of approval upon Him, but this was done even before time began so that we could have the hope of going to Heaven.

Second, Peter then discusses Christ's death and resurrection. He explains how Jesus died and was resurrected from the grave, and how this proves that He is the Son of God. Acts 17:30-31 says,

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

Today, we know that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died on the cross, and that He was resurrected.

Third, Peter makes the point that Jesus has now ascended and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He has ascended on high to be with God. This clearly teaches us that Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the Great Potentate of whom Paul spoke in 1 Timothy 6:15.

Fourth, as Peter brings his sermon to an end, he tells the people, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). At this conclusion, notice the response of the people. The Bible says that they were cut to the heart and cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (vs. 37). The answer that Peter gave was so clear, and is what makes this a Gos-

pel sermon. Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The Bible tells us that the people gladly received his word and were baptized. Then, verse 47 says, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” This marks the beginning of Gospel (“good news”) sermons.

The Book of Acts also represents another beginning—the beginning of immediate forgiveness. This does not mean, of course, that there was no forgiveness under the Old Testament. There was forgiveness under the Old Testament. But Hebrews 9:15 teaches us that such forgiveness was predicated upon the blood of Jesus and His sacrifice. The animals that were sacrificed in the Old Testament—whether it was a lamb or a goat—could not really take away sins. Hebrews 10:3-4 teaches us that the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. “But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.” What did those sacrifices do? They reminded the people of their sins. They never actually took the sins away—except through the fact that forgiveness was predicated on Jesus’ blood and His sacrifice. Under the New Testament, however, we can have immediate forgiveness of our sins as we obey the Gospel. This is the blessing associated with forgiveness today. Think about the words of Hebrews 8:12 as the writer of Hebrews reminds us of forgiveness. God said, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” What does it mean to have immediate forgiveness? How is that such a blessing to us today?

When we obey the Gospel as they did in the Book of Acts, we do not have to worry about our past sins. We do not have to worry about the things that we did in the past. The Bible says that they have been put behind me. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” The prerequisites to pardon and forgiveness are given quite clearly in the New Testament. In Acts 2:38, the people were told to repent and be baptized in order to receive the forgiveness of their sins. These types of prerequisites are given throughout the Book of Acts. In Acts 3:19, Peter told the people, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” Being immersed in water was something that they did in the Book of Acts for the forgiveness of their sins. In Acts 9:6, Saul asked the question, “Lord, what would You have me to do?” In Acts 22:16, he was given the answer when he was told, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” The genesis of immediate forgiveness is one of the great beginnings that we find within the Book of Acts.

Another beginning that is found within the Book of Acts is the genesis of the church. Oh, how wonderful it is to be a part of the church of the New Testament! Today, we can know that we are a part of the church and that we are Christians just as the people were in the first century. If we will simply do what they did, then we can become a member of the church of which they were a part. What did they do in the first century to become a Christian? And of what church did they become a member? In Acts 2:47 we read, “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Those people were not “voted into” the church. Nor did they “join” the church. God **added** to the church those who (as in verse 38) obeyed the Gospel. They then became a part of the New Testament church. In the Book of Acts we learn about the church and about when it began.

In Daniel 2:44, Daniel prophesied about an “everlasting kingdom” that would be set up during the time of one of the four kingdoms he mentioned in his prophecy. He spoke about the Babylonian kingdom, the Assyrian kingdom, the Greek kingdom, and the Roman king-

dom. During the first three of those, no “everlasting kingdom” was set up. But during the time of the Roman kingdom, the kingdom of Christ was established. Jesus said in Mark 9:1, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.” What kingdom was Jesus discussing? He was referring to the new “everlasting kingdom” that He was sent to establish. It was the new kingdom of which He had been prophesied to be the King. In Luke 1:32-33, we are told that Jesus is the King of an everlasting kingdom—a kingdom like unto that of David, but one that will last forever. Revelation 11:14 prophesies that this kingdom will outlast all other kingdoms. It is in Acts 2 where we see this kingdom become a reality—during the time of the first century as people obeyed the Gospel and became Christians. We also learn where this kingdom was set up. In Isaiah 2:1-4, we learn that the word of the Lord was prophesied to go out from Jerusalem, and that all nations would flow into the new kingdom. When did that happen? In Acts 2, we learn that there were people present in Jerusalem from all nations. It was at that point that the church of Jesus Christ was established. It is the “temple of God” of which Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 2:1-4. Paul referred to the church as “the house of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15). Who established the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? We are told in 2 Samuel 7:12-14 that someone “of the seed of David” would sit on David’s throne and that he would reign forever. The fulfillment of that prophecy is Christ reigning in the kingdom of God today. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church.” Jesus established the church. He set it up, and it is His kingdom. How was the church established according to the Book of Acts? Christ established the church by dying on the cross to purchase the church. Acts 20:28 says that Jesus purchased the church with His own precious blood. He made the ultimate sacrifice so that we could be a part of the New Testament church.

Does the church of which **you** are a member meet these criteria? Was it established in Jerusalem in the first century? Did Jesus set it up as its Founder? Did Jesus purchase it with His own blood? If the church of which you are a member does not give Him the honor and glory in every one of these criteria, then it is not the church of which you read in the New Testament.

There is another beginning in the Book of Acts that is so important—the beginning salvation in Jesus Christ. Remember that salvation can be found only in Christ. The text of 2 Timothy 2:1 teaches us that salvation is found “in Christ.” As the apostles preached the Gospel in the first century, they said to those who inquired about the authority behind their preaching, “This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Peter made it clear that salvation was found only in Christ. This was the beginning of salvation in Christ. This was the salvation about which the prophets had prophesied, and that they themselves did not fully understand (1 Pet. 1:10). This was the “new covenant” of which Jeremiah had spoken in Jeremiah 31:31-34. This was the salvation spoken of by Isaiah in Isaiah 53:4-6 where the “suffering servant” would be bruised for our iniquities. “The chastisement for our peace was placed upon him,” Isaiah said, “and by His stripes we are healed.” Today, we have the blessing of having salvation in Christ. Titus 3:5 teaches that it is through the Lord’s mercy that we are saved. This is the Gospel that is discussed in Romans 1:16, which is “God’s power unto salvation.” It is indeed a wonderful blessing today to have the privilege of salvation in Christ. Hebrews 2:9-10 teaches that Jesus “tasted of death for every man.” Hebrews 5:8-9 explains that Jesus is “the Author of eternal salvation for all who obey Him.” Hebrews 2:3 asks the question, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” What do we have to escape in the first place? We are escaping the wrath of God to come.

The Bible teaches us in Hebrews 10:31 and in Hebrews 12:29 that it is a “fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Why? Because “our God is a consuming fire.” The God Who has given us the plan of salvation also has promised that for those who do not obey the Gospel, Jesus will come “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7-10). What we learn from the Book of Acts today is that it is the beginning of hope. It is the beginning of the “good news” of the Gospel. It is the beginning of the church of which we can be a part. We can be forgiven of our sins today, and we can have the salvation that is provided for us only in Jesus Christ.

The question for you today, then, is this: Are **you** a part of the body of Christ? Do you possess the salvation that Jesus came to provide for you? If not, you can possess it today by becoming a New Testament Christian. It was not difficult in the first century to become a Christian. Nor is it difficult today. People—like those in Acts 2—heard the message and believed it. They were cut to the heart, wanted to make things right, and were willing to change their lives. They confessed Jesus as their Lord, and then they were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins so they could have the hope of eternal life (Acts 2:38). The wonderful thing today is that if you will do what they did, then you can become what they were—simply a Christian and nothing more. The Bible makes it clear that in order to become a Christian, you must obey God in His plan of salvation. In Acts 22:16, we see how to do this. Ananias said to Saul, “Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Today, we want to encourage you to obey the Gospel by being baptized for the remission of your sins so that you can have the hope of going to Heaven.

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Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE ‘GENESIS’ OF THE NEW TESTAMENT”

1. To what book in the New Testament can a person turn to learn the most about what to do to become a Christian?
2. What “beginning” do we find in Acts 11 2?
3. How many times is the word “Christian” found in the New Testament?
4. What was prophesied in Isaiah 62:2?
5. Where in the New Testament do we find the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 62:2?
6. What does 1 Peter 2:21 teach us to do?
7. According to John 6:66-68, who has “the words of life”?
8. For what purpose did Isaiah say that we were created by God (Is. 43:7)?
9. In 1 Corinthians 3:11, what did the apostle Paul say that Christ was?
10. What is the meaning of the word “Gospel”?
11. According to Titus 1:2, when did God plan man’s salvation?
12. What is the message for us today from Matthew 17:5?
13. According to 1 Peter 1:20, when did God determine to send Christ to Earth to save humanity?
14. According to 1 Timothy 6:15, who, exactly, is Christ?
15. What is the message of Hebrews 10:3-4?
16. What is the message of Hebrews 10:31 and Hebrews 12:29?
17. The text of 2 Corinthians 5:17 explains that once we become a Christian, something happens. What is it?
18. The Old Testament prophet Daniel prophesied (Dan. 2:44) about something that would take place in the days after he wrote. What was it?
19. What does Revelation 11:14 have to say about Christ’s kingdom?
20. According to 2 Timothy 2:1, where is salvation found?
21. According to Paul’s discussion in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, what will happen to those who spurn God’s offer of salvation?
22. According to Hebrews 5:8-9, for whom is Jesus the Author of eternal salvation?