



THE APOSTLES PREACH THE GOSPEL AFTER THE ASCENSION OF JESUS CHRIST

Reading: Acts 1&2

Mark records the last commandment of Jesus to his disciples before he ascended to heaven: “And he said unto them, **Go ye into all the world**, and **preach the gospel** to every creature. **He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved**; but he that believeth not shall be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16).

The message is simple to understand but powerful in its scope and significance.

“Go ye into all the world” The gospel—good news—of salvation was now to be preached throughout the entire world. The details of how the apostles did this are recorded in The Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:8).

“preach the gospel” The disciples were to teach that same message which Jesus had been teaching—the “good news” of the Kingdom of God. Now that Jesus had been raised from the dead, they added that essential element—salvation through the Name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; 8:12; Mark 1:14).

“He that believeth” Here is the first prerequisite for salvation. Belief is the conviction that the gospel is the only way of salvation. Such a belief (or, “faith”) becomes the motivating force in the life of anyone who wants to please God (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:1-2, 6).

“and is baptised” Baptism is God’s appointed way for a person to demonstrate that he acknowledges he is a sinner, worthy of death and wishes to repent and obey God. Through baptism past sins are blotted out and a new way of life is commenced, following in the steps of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-8).

“shall be saved” All men sin, and the wages of sin is death. However, God has graciously provided a way of salvation. Through the Lord Jesus Christ God offers forgiveness from sin and therefore salvation from the consequences of sin and death (Romans 5:12, 21; 6:23).

Jesus’ Ascension to Heaven

Jesus remained with his disciples for a period of forty days after his resurrection, during which time he spoke to them particularly about the “*kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3). After this, when he ascended into heaven before their very eyes, the angels spoke these comforting words to the amazed disciples: “*Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*” (v11). With the confident knowledge that their Lord would certainly return, the disciples set about the work that he had given them to do—to preach the gospel of the Kingdom.

The Acts of the Apostles

The Acts records how the Gospel spread from Jerusalem and radiated out into all the Roman world. **The key to Acts** is found in chapter 1:8, which records Jesus’ last instruction to the eleven disciples: “*Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*” Throughout *Acts* we have the evidence of this systematic spreading of the Gospel with its message of salvation.

Preaching in Jerusalem (Acts 2-7)

Preaching commenced on the Day of Pentecost, the great Jewish feast celebrated 50 days after Passover—in this case 50 days after the crucifixion of the Lord and but a few days after his ascension into heaven. Jews from all over the Roman world gathered in Jerusalem for this feast, as we see from Acts 2:5-11. It was on this occasion that the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles, which enabled them to speak in the different languages of all those people who were attending the feast. This, of course, was a work of God, for what a wonderful opportunity it was to proclaim the gospel to the Jews who had just witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. The main thrust of the disciples’ message was that this same Jesus was in fact the Christ, the promised Messiah that they all knew from the Scriptures should come. The great proof rested in the fact that he had



been raised from the dead and was now sitting at the right hand of God in heaven (Acts 2:22–36). Peter, who was the main speaker, used the words of the prophets copiously to prove his point.

Many of those present were convinced of the truth of Peter's argument. Appalled by the terrible mistake they had made, they asked: "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" Peter's answer was clear: "*Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:37-38).

We must try to grasp the impact of what had happened. There were about 3000 who "*gladly received his word and were baptised*" (Acts 2:41). On one day the gospel was preached in Jerusalem and many believed. So began the spread of the gospel into the Roman world, for those who had travelled from distant places returned home after the feast, taking with them their newfound faith in Jesus Christ.

After this incident Peter and James healed a lame man, a familiar figure at the Temple (Acts 3). The effect of this miracle was immediate and many more believed, this time about 5000 (Acts 4:4). Numbers continued to grow through their preaching and the added witness of miracles performed by the apostles, so that "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14-16).

However, the success of the spread of the gospel was not without its difficulties. The chief priests and rulers remained antagonistic and persecuted the believers. As a result they scattered, taking the gospel with them (Acts 8:1).

The Gospel is Preached in Samaria (Acts 8:1-12)

In this chapter we have the account of Philip going to Samaria, an area north of Jerusalem, and "*preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ*" (v12). The effect was that those who heard believed and "*were baptised, both men and women*" (v12).

The Ethiopian Eunuch is Baptised (Acts 8:26-40)

Here we read of an Ethiopian eunuch, who had been to Jerusalem and was now returning to his home. As he journeyed, he was concentrating on reading a portion of the prophets, but was having difficulty understanding who was being spoken of. Philip was sent by God to unfold the true significance of the text this man was considering. It was the very passage which spoke of the sacrifice of Messiah. So Philip explained the things concerning Jesus Christ, upon which the eunuch asked to be baptised. Philip said, "*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest*" (v36-39). The eunuch answered, "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*", and so Philip baptised him. The gospel message was now on its way into Ethiopia!

Paul is Converted (Acts 9)

In this chapter we have the amazing account of the conversion of Saul (who later was called 'Paul' in Acts 13:9). He had bitterly opposed the new teaching about Jesus of Nazareth, and had vigorously persecuted those who believed it. In the very act of pursuing disciples of Jesus, he was converted on the way to Damascus, Jesus Christ himself appearing to him as he journeyed. Stunned by this revelation, Saul became a completely changed man and now that he believed, he was baptised (v18). The work that God had in store for him is summarised in Christ's words: "*He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel*" (v15). The later chapters of Acts are given over to the amazing work of Paul the apostle as he spread the gospel throughout the Roman empire (Acts 13-28).

Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, Believes the Gospel (Acts 10)

The apostle Peter was instructed to take the message of salvation to Cornelius, a Roman Centurion stationed at Caesarea. It was traditionally unlawful for Jews to keep company with Gentiles (v28), for they believed that they were ceremonially defiled by such contact. In this incident such a false perception was swept aside by the Lord, and Peter himself was the first to learn that "*God is no respecter of persons*", but offers salvation to all men on the same terms. So Peter was instructed to take the gospel to this Gentile and his household. The result was that both Cornelius and his household believed and were baptised (v47-48)



“He that believeth and is baptised”

Apart from the fact that we have seen the gradual spread of the gospel in the chapters we have considered, we also note that the apostles baptised all those who believed. It is clear that they were following in exact detail the commission that Jesus gave to them when he commanded them to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Only those who believed and were baptised could be saved (Mark 16:15).

Is Christening Baptism?

In all the incidents recorded in *Acts* we have seen that **belief** is essential for salvation. After careful instruction in the gospel, the motivating force that caused a person to seek baptism was their conviction that the things they heard were true. In every case it was those who were mature enough to understand what they were doing who were baptised.

What of ‘christening’ then? Christening of babies or children is not taught in the Bible. It is another one of those false teachings which has become popular in Christian churches, but is contrary to Bible teaching. Christening commenced as a practice in the Christian Church about 1000 years after Christ.

Even immersion in water is not true baptism unless it is preceded by belief in the two elements of the Gospel, as defined in Acts 8:12, and a confession of sins. It is absolutely essential that a person who desires to be baptised understands that he or she is entering into a new relationship with God.

Baptism—Full Immersion in Water

As we have followed through the teaching of baptism from the days of John the Baptist through to the *Acts* of the apostles, we have observed that those who were baptised “*went down into the water*” and came “*up out of the water*” (Acts 8:38-39). This is why John baptised “*in the Jordan*” river (Matthew 3:6), and at Aenon, “*because there was much water there*” (John 3:23). We read of Jesus “*coming up out of the water*” after he was baptised (Mark 1:10).

Baptism is a full immersion in water because, as we have seen, it symbolises burial. It is the means God has chosen for us to identify first with the death and then with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So Paul writes: “*We are buried with him (Christ) by baptism into death*”. In the act of baptism we demonstrate to God that the “*old man*”—a figure for our old way of life—has been put to death and we rise up out of the water to walk in newness of life in Christ (Romans 6:3-6).

Summary Points

1. After his resurrection Jesus commanded his disciples to “*go into all the world and preach the gospel... he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved*” (**Mark 16:15-16**). It was in obedience to this command that the disciples went throughout the Roman world, spreading the gospel message and baptising those who believed.
2. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels assured the disciples that he would most certainly return (**Acts 1:9-11**).
3. *The Acts of the Apostles* tells of the spread of the Gospel throughout the Roman world. It continually emphasises that those who believed were baptised:
4. After Peter’s speech at Pentecost in Jerusalem three thousand were baptised (**Acts 2:37-38, 41**).
5. In response to Philip’s preaching in Samaria many were baptised (**Acts 8:12**).
6. The Ethiopian eunuch was baptised (**Acts 8:26-40**).
7. Paul was baptised after his conversion (**Acts 9:18; cp Acts 22:12-16**).
8. Cornelius and his household were baptised (**Acts 10:47-48**).
9. Baptism is full immersion in water (**Acts 8:38-39**).



10. Christening is not baptism and has no Bible basis. It was first practised in the Christian Church about 1000 years after Christ.

Lesson 22 - Questions

1. What was the command that Jesus gave to his disciples before he ascended into heaven?
2. Without belief and baptism, can a person be saved?
3. What did the angels tell the disciples as Jesus ascended into heaven?
4. At Pentecost, when the people asked what they should do, what was Peter's reply?
5. What did those who "*gladly received his word*" do?
6. What did Philip preach in Samaria?
7. What did those people do who believed Philip?
8. What is baptism?
9. Is christening a Bible based teaching?
10. What is necessary for immersion to become true baptism?