

WAYLAND BAPTIST CHURCH
BIBLE STUDY – CHRISTIANITY 101

TUESDAY, September 17, 2025

Stan Campbell, *Bible to Go: Genesis to Revelation in One Hour*, (New York: Faith Words, 2006)

Spirit-Powered People

The Holy Spirit continues to make His presence known. Empowered by the Spirit, the once timid and unsure disciples begin to stand strong and defend their beliefs when opposed. In addition, they are given great power for healing. Jesus had once told them, “Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12).

Peter, for example, heals a crippled beggar (Acts 3:1-10), stands up to the Sanhedrin (a sort of religious Supreme Court), has a vision that convinces him to include Gentiles as believers (Acts 10), and experiences a miraculous release from prison (Acts 12:1-19). It gets to the point where people bring sick friends and relatives into the street on mats, hoping that Peter’s shadow will fall on them (Acts 5:15-16).

As the number of believers grows, the original apostles keep teaching and preaching as they bring on new leaders (deacons) to attend to the needs of the people. And even those deacons are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do great things. One of them, Philip, follows the prompting of the Spirit into the desert, where he finds an Ethiopian struggling to understand a passage in Isaiah. Philip helps the man understand and believe what he was reading and perhaps introduces the gospel to Africa by doing so (Acts 8).

Another deacon is Stephen, “a man full of God’s grace and power, who does great wonders and miraculous signs among the people” (Acts 6:1-8). He is so influential that those who oppose him provide false witnesses, arrest him, and have him stoned to death. Even then, Stephen delivers a powerful final statement about Jesus, telling the hostile crowd, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). As the stones strike him, Stephen prays for forgiveness for his attackers.

Persecution from Without

Attending the stoning of Stephen (and giving his approval) is a young man named Saul, who later becomes the apostle Paul. But first he will become an active opponent of the spread of the new Jesus... (gospel). Eventually Jesus’ followers are called Christians, although this may have started as a derogatory term (Acts 11:26).

Saul isn’t the only persecutor of the believers. They are beset by opposition from numerous sources. Many experience beatings and imprisonment. James, one of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples, is beheaded by

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Herod, who see that “this pleased the Jews” (Acts 12:3). But Herod soon learns that he isn’t in total control, as he had thought. When a group of people praise him as a god, and he doesn’t correct them, immediately “an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died (Acts 12:21-23). But his death does nothing to reduce the persecution felt by the Christians.

Persecution from Within

As might be expected with any rapidly growing movement, there is no guarantee that all members of the early church are as committed as they should be. For example, one couple sells some property and say, they have donated the entire proceeds to the church, when in fact they keep some of the money for themselves. It is certainly their prerogative to donate only a portion, but their intentional and sneaky cover-up is exposes as lying to God (Acts 5:4).

Confronted by Peter, the husband drops dead where he stands. Three hours later, unaware of what has happened to her husband, the wife also insists that they have given the Church everything they received from the sale of their property. She, too, dies immediately. This was a clear example that “nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). And as a result, “great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events (Acts 5:1-10).

Another man, a sorcerer, sees the power of the Holy Spirit at work and offers the disciples money to receive it. He is severely rebuked (Acts 8:9-25). Yet another sorcerer tries to oppose Paul (after his remarkable conversion) and is blinded for a length of time (Acts 13:4-12).

As time passes, various doctrines and teachings begin to drift into the church that aren’t completely grounded in truth. Some of those problems will become more damaging to the church than external persecution. Yet the Holy Spirit, working through Jesus’ committed followers, provides power and wisdom for the early church to continue to persevere and grow.

Next Week’s Focus:

Paul – His Life and Ministry (As outlined in the Holy Scriptures)

Note: My prayer is that our study time will help each of us strengthen our knowledge of God’s Word.