

Foreword

There is a Tamil proverb that says that “what is learnt is a handful and what needs to be learnt is as vast as the sea”. Knowledge like an ocean is so wide and deep. Knowledge of our God too is immense as Paul declares in Rom. 11:33 – ‘Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God’.

The Children’s Bible Explorer’s series is such a source of knowledge. It is a timely gift to the Body of Christ. It is indeed an excellent tool to build our children in the faith, inculcate Christian values and cause them to be rooted and founded in the Word of God.

In this latest installment of the series, Epics of the Apostles, the establishment of the church and its onward march is portrayed in a very vivid, attractive and profound way. I’m certain that children will find this volume very exciting and the interactive quizzes challenging. The stories are presented in an interesting and creative way.

D.L.Moody once said, “the Bible was not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives’. I believe this Volume is a great life changing instrument. Knowledge has to be put into practice and this book facilitates it. Thanks to Mr.Peter Lim and his team for their laborious and faithful toil. ‘You are a blessing’ to the church at large. It is my prayer that this book will always produce fruit and accomplish His purposes.

Isaiah 55:11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Today’s NIV)

In His gracious service,



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Epic of the Apostles Vol.1
- Peter and the Jerusalem Church
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1. Birth of the New Testament Church in Jerusalem

Acts 1 & 2 Coming of the Holy Spirit and Fellowship of the Believers

Timeline: Around AD 30.

[Acts: 1:1 – 11, 26 Introduction to Acts](#)

The Gospel Story ended with Jesus Christ giving His disciples the Great Commission before His ascension to heaven. The apostles were to go forth, preach the gospel and make disciples of people from all nations; baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then Jesus promised them that He would send them the Holy Spirit to teach, encourage and empower them with all that they needed to complete this task. Meanwhile, the Jewish leaders were determined to put a stop to this 'Nazarene' or Jesus movement and so were on the lookout to arrest any of His followers.

The Epic of the Apostles is the story of how the disciples of Jesus took the Gospel, the good news that forgiveness of sins was now available through faith in Jesus Christ, from Jerusalem to many parts of the Roman Empire and eventually to the capital city Rome itself. Along the way they faced opposition from Jews and pagans who saw the Gospel as a threat to their respective religions and traditions.

The story is based mainly on the New Testament Book, Acts of the Apostles, but will also draw portions of the narrative from some of the Letters of Paul and the other apostles. We begin the story from Acts chapter one.

The apostles witness Jesus' ascension to heaven.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, He showed Himself to His followers and proved to them that He was actually alive. He taught them about the kingdom of God.

Then at the end of forty days, Jesus was taken to heaven from the Mount of Olives. Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus said to His disciples: Acts 1:8 "... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

After He said this, Jesus was taken up to heaven. As the people were straining to see Him, He soon disappeared behind the clouds. Suddenly they noticed two men dressed in shining white robes standing amongst them. These two men were not from their group and they looked different. Then they spoke: 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!" (NLT)

Then the disciples realized they were angels and returned to Jerusalem. The eleven apostles, Mary the mother of Jesus and the other believers were constantly in prayer in an upper room

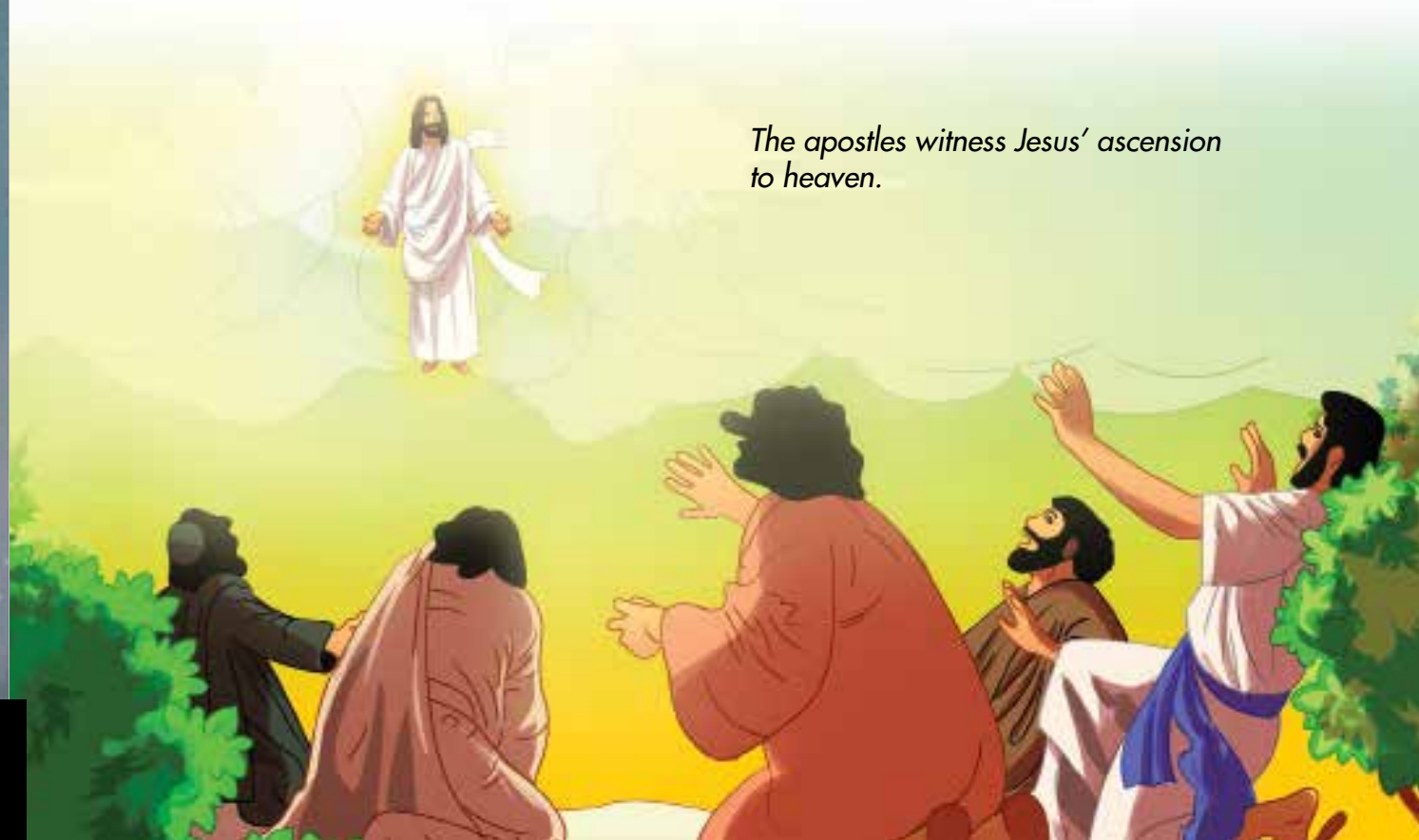
of the house they were staying. Later, another close follower of Jesus, Matthias, was chosen to replace Judas so he was added to the eleven apostles.



Angels appear in their midst.



The angels tell them that Jesus will return.





The disciples pray while waiting for the promised Holy Spirit.



There is a strong wind.



Tongues of fire enter the room and rest on top of the heads of the disciples.

Acts 2 The Coming of the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1 When the day of **Pentecost** came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.

³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were many God-fearing Jews present who heard them speaking in different languages. These Jews had traveled from **the surrounding countries** to Jerusalem to celebrate the Pentecost. They stared in amazement as they listened to the apostles and followers of Christ speak and praise God, each in their own native language.

Acts 2:12 The people were all amazed and confused. They asked each other, "What is happening?"

¹³ But others were laughing at the apostles, saying they were drunk from too much wine. (ERV)

Acts 2:14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.

¹⁵ These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

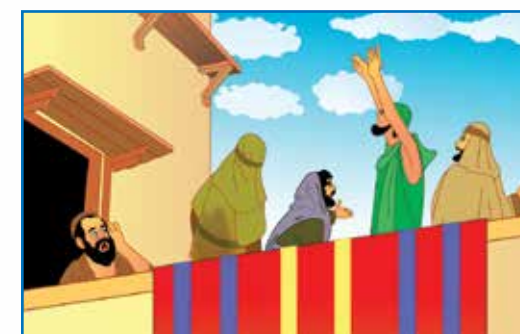
¹⁷ 'In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams...'

²¹ "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

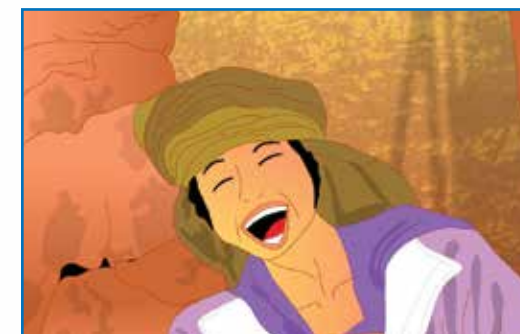
Then Peter began to tell them about Jesus of Nazareth. He said, "Men of Israel, listen to me. Jesus of Nazareth was sent by God to live among us.

"He performed many miracles, wonders and signs, as many of you saw with your own eyes, proving that He was indeed sent by God. But with the help of wicked men, you put him to death on the cross.

"But on the third day, this same Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God."



The disciples speak in foreign languages.



Some in the crowd laugh at the disciples thinking they are drunk.



Peter explains to the disciples what has happened.





Peter quotes from the Old Testament.



Many in the crowd are convicted.



They ask Peter what they must do. Peter tells them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus.

Then Peter went on to prove to the people that Jesus' death and resurrection was prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. And that Jesus was therefore the Messiah promised from ancient times and that one day He would indeed be Lord and ruler of the whole world.

When the people heard this they felt deeply sorry for what they had done to Jesus. They said to Peter: "If this is true then we have done a terrible sin against God. What shall we do? Is there any hope for us?"

Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."

⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number on that day.

Thus the New Testament Church began. The believers devoted themselves to the teachings of the Apostles. They spent time together, taking part in the Lord's Supper and praying.

Understanding the Story

1. The Holy Spirit empowers the apostles to boldly carry out the task for which they have been trained by their Lord. Now they begin to be witnesses in Jerusalem and as a result the New Testament Church is born with many being added into their numbers.
2. The Holy Spirit gives the apostles the gift of tongues to speak and be understood in the native language of people from so many countries. Jewish believers, not just from Judea, but from all nations put their faith in Christ and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament Church was now off to an international growth path, although it still consisted mostly of Jewish believers.

Questions for Discussion

1. Summarise in your own words what Jesus commanded His disciples to do before He was taken to heaven.

2. Describe in your own words what happened when the Holy Spirit came and rested on each of the disciples.

3. Summarise in your own words the message that Peter preached in front of the crowd.

4. What is your own response to the message given by Peter?

Interesting Information

His ascension

View of Mt of Olives from Jerusalem. The building with the spire at the top of the picture is The Tower of Ascension marking the traditional site of the ascension of Christ.



Photo by Author © PCTL

Eleven apostles

Acts 1:20 – 26 tells us that the eleven apostles prayed and chose Matthias, another of the close followers of Jesus, to replace Judas Iscariot the betrayer who had killed himself. This was to fulfill Psalms 109:8.

Upper room

This upper room is traditionally believed to be part of the home of Mary the mother of John Mark, who was later to become a companion of Peter and Paul, and the writer of Mark's Gospel.

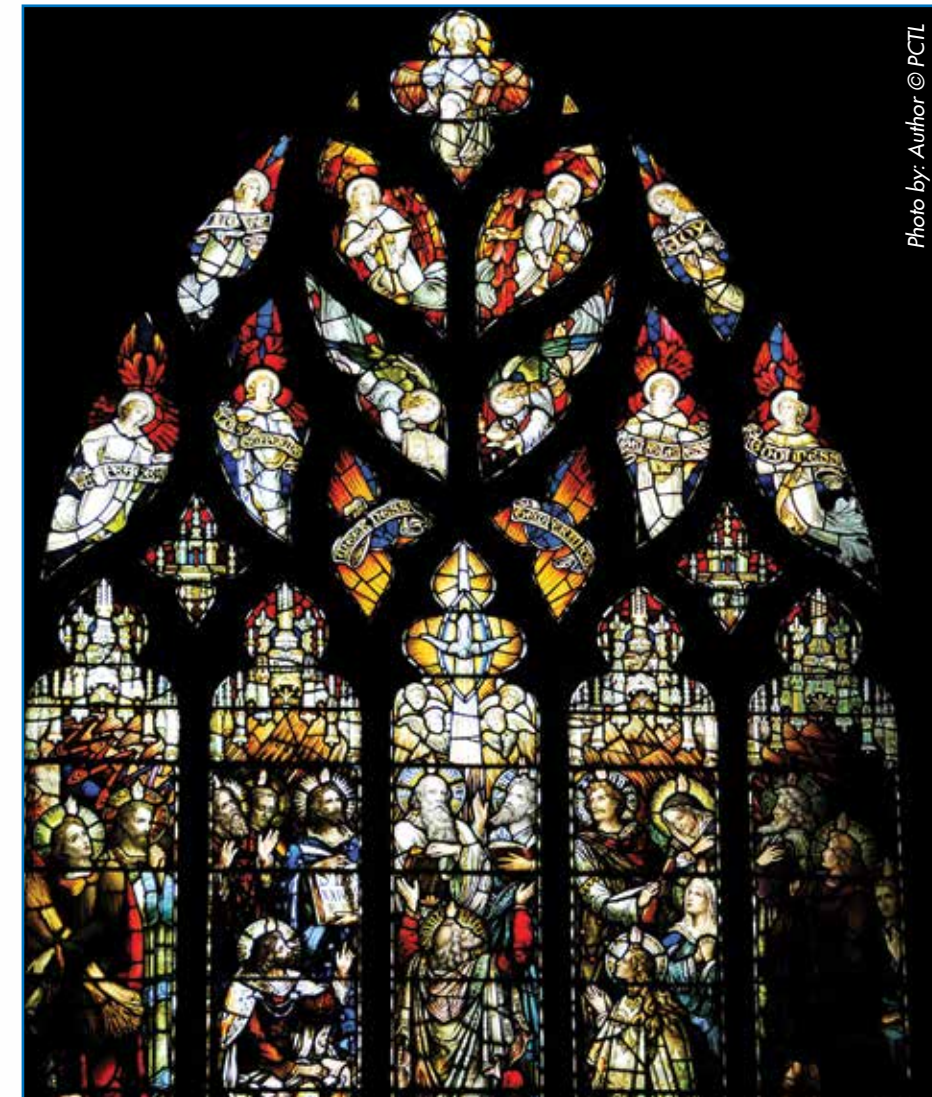
Traditional site of the Upper Room in Jerusalem today.



Pentecost

Ancient Israel was predominantly an agricultural society that had a spring harvest of grain and a fall harvest of fruit. The harvesting of grain in the spring always began with the barley harvest during the Feast of Unleavened Bread and ended with the much larger wheat harvest 50 days later: *"Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the first-fruits of the Wheat harvest . . . Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord, the God of Israel"* (Ex.34:22-23 NIV).

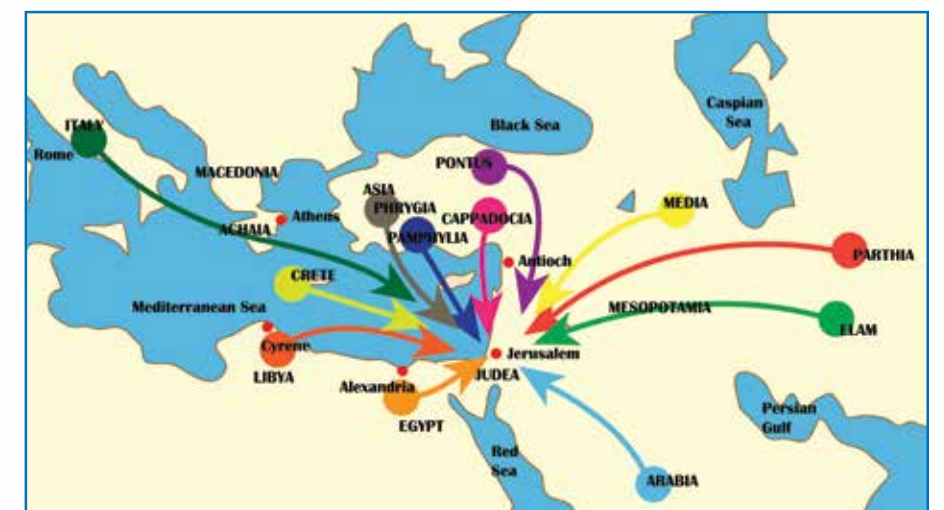
The Feast of Weeks is observed exactly fifty days from the day after the first weekly Sabbath that falls during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Refer to Leviticus 23:15-20. Pentecost was the second of three annual festivals when the men of Israel were obliged to present the offerings to God at the Temple. Many Bible scholars agree that this festival of First Fruits is a very symbolic date because the first fruits of the New Covenant were harvested with the coming of the Holy Spirit on this first Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.



Stained glass window art from St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh Scotland, depicting the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. At the top is Christ and below are the disciples with the tongues of fire resting on their heads. Above them are angels carrying the 'Fruit of the Spirit'. Can you read each of the Fruit of the Spirit?

The surrounding countries

Acts 2:9-11 tells us that the names of these countries. Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs.



Refer to Map of the surrounding countries above.