

New Testament 29
The Number of the Disciples Was Multiplied
(Acts 6-9)
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(Here is inspirational background to bring greater testimony to your scriptural study. It identifies important reasons why the early Church grew).

- I. The growing number of disciples came in because of the witness of the Holy Ghost.
 - A. Continual references to the Holy Ghost show its influence among the leaders and among converts. [Some are Acts 6:5, 8, 10; 7:55; 8:14-17; 9:17, 31].
 - B. The Gift of the Holy Ghost was bestowed through the laying on of hands **by the those leaders who now held the priesthood** (Acts 8:14- 25).
 1. Joseph Smith said “Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half – that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost” (*Teachings*, p. 314).
 2. Furthermore, when Joseph Smith was asked by President Martin Van Buren what the major difference was between The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and other churches *in our day*, he indicated it was the Holy Ghost. “We considered that all other considerations were contained in the gift of the Holy Ghost” (*Documentary History of the Church, Vol. IV*, p. 42).
 3. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said “**One of the evidences of the great apostasy is that in the main the churches of Christendom do not so much as claim the power to give a present bestowal of the Holy Ghost**, to say nothing of having that divine Being respond to such a conferral” (*Doctrinal New Testament commentary*, p. 83).
 4. The lack of the “Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost” is a sign of loss of true priesthood authority.
- II. Furthermore, Christ’s new leaders now understood the true meaning of the Old Testament and used that understanding to gather new disciples.
 - A. Immediately after His Resurrection Jesus began to clarify to His disciples how all things in the Old Testament had witnessed of His Coming and sufferings (See Luke 24:25-27). Thereafter they taught, using this new understanding.
 - B. Stephen’s powerful testimony was based on how ancient events had witnessed of Jesus Christ and what He would suffer (Acts 7:2-53).
 1. The Pharisees and Sadducees had rejected Jesus, relying on their ancestral connections to Abraham and Moses (Luke 3:8; John 8:39; Acts 6:14).
 2. But Stephen showed them **Abraham’s and Moses’ lives had actually taught of Jesus Christ and of how we would be slain at their hands!**
 3. Stephen’s discourse is difficult to follow, probably because it is not translated correctly. But basically he told the Sanhedrin the following:
 - a. A covenant had been made to Abraham of a promised land (Acts 7:1-4).
 - b. Neither Abraham nor his immediate seed realized that covenant in their mortal lives (Acts 7:5-19).
 - c. **But God finally sent Moses to lead ancient Israel from bondage into that Covenanted Land** (Acts 7:20-23).

- d. However, when Moses came to lead them to this land, some in ancient Israel **rejected him as their deliverer** (Acts 7:24-29, 34-36).
- e. Moses had himself taught there would be one greater than him who would come and make a greater delivery from bondage than he did (Acts 7:37-40).
- f. The point was: **Israel's rejection of Moses foreshadowed how Israel would reject their ultimate and true Savior, who had now come to deliver them** (Acts 7:40-41, then especially verses 51-53).
- g. It is also important to remember the **true covenanted land Jesus came to lead them into is Eternal Life**, and the true freedom from bondage was freedom from death and sin. His apostles now understood this truth.

- C. Philip also used the Old Testament to testify that ancient prophecies in the Old Testament were now fulfilled through Jesus Christ (Acts 8:26-40).
 - 1. He did so by helping the Ethiopian understand that Isaiah bore witness of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. We will also see how Paul used the witnesses of the Old Testament repeatedly to teach others of how they had prophesied of Jesus the Christ. **Unless we understand this basic premise of Paul's, we will have trouble understanding most of Paul's writings.**

III. The Early Church leaders were empowered by continuing revelation.

A. Stephen's Vision contained vital revelation.

- 1. His vision **taught that the Father and Son remain as separate, glorified persons.**
 - a. "But he being full of the Holy Ghost looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold. I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56).
- 2. Stephen laid down his life as a testimony of this revelation.
 - a. For while they had "gnashed upon him with their teeth" after his discourse, **it was only after he testified of his revelation that they "cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord. And cast him out of the city, and stoned him"** (verses 57-58).
- 3. Stephen further testified the Father and Son are *embodied*, glorified men.
 - a. Stephen, who sees Jesus in Heaven, realizes something very profound. He sees that God the Father is an embodied, glorified man. So he realizes and testifies that Jesus is the *Son of Man* (i.e., glorified Son of an embodied, glorified Man.).
 - b. Thus he referred to Jesus as the "Son of Man" (Acts 7:56).
 - c. Unfortunately, translators of the Bible wrote of Jesus as "Son of **man**," not capitalizing "man," assuming this refers to Jesus' mortal lineage.
 - d. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explains, "In the pure Adamic language, the name of Elohim, the Father, is *Man of Holiness* (signifying that God is a Holy Man), and the name of Christ, the Son, is *Son of Man of Holiness or Son of Man*" (See Moses 6:57 and Elder Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed., pp. 467, 742-743).
 - e. Furthermore, we should realize it is not likely that **Stephen would be thinking of**

Jesus' *human* lineage when he is seeing him in the heavens standing next to His true Father, God Himself.

4. We should also realize that if God and Christ were only Spirit, there would be no need for distinction of the third party of the Godhead, as the Holy Ghost. It would be strange to uniquely refer to the Holy Ghost as the "Holy Spirit," if both the Father and Son were also only Spirit.

IV. The Early Church were led to gather disciples from many nations, thus giving a wider strength to Christ's church.

- A. Saul, a former persecutor of Christians, is called by God to be a mighty instrument in bringing souls of all nations to Christ (Acts 9:1-31).
 1. Because Paul came to realize the great burden of His sins, and because He experienced the great mercy of Jesus Christ, he became willing to suffer very greatly in the Savior's behalf.
 2. Furthermore, because of his own wickedness, he was able to have great and merciful feelings for the Gentiles, who prior to this time were considered by the Jews as forever forsaken by God. Thus out of his own experience he was willing and able to bear powerful personal witness of Jesus' love and mercy to all mankind.
 3. Furthermore, because he had been a persecutor of Christians, people could not easily ignore his conversion and testimony.
 4. Note that a similar pattern occurred in the Americas, with Alma the Younger and the sons of Mosiah who were also called from paths of wickedness. Thus they felt the same kinds of great indebtedness to the Lord, and felt the same great desire to take Jesus' message of mercy to those previously considered too wicked to receive the gospel.
 5. All these servants became great missionaries due to the deep feelings of indebtedness they felt to God.
 - a. This does not mean it is desirable to sin to make oneself a good missionary. The danger of sin is that most people get trapped in it and cannot extricate themselves.
 - b. But the similar experiences and then powerful witnesses coming from all these servants demonstrate strongly the great mercies of the Father and the Son to all of God's children: both to these repentant missionaries, and also to all the peoples whom they bring into God's fold.