

Open Bible Stories — The Church Begins

Introduction

Key Idea

The story of the beginning of the church teaches us that the Holy Spirit empowers Jesus' followers to preach the gospel and forms Jesus' followers into the community of believers called the church.

Core Belief Verse

"For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body---Jews or Greeks, slaves or free---and all were made to drink of one Spirit." 1 Corinthians 12:13

God's Big Story

The eternal God created all things in six days.

He made a good and perfect world.

He made humans in his image to fill the earth and rule over creation.

But humans rebelled against God and ruined God's creation.

God set to restore his world through his promise.

God made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to bless all nations through Abraham.

God kept his promises across the generations.

God provided Abraham with a promised child, Isaac.

God gave Isaac a wife, and she bore twins Jacob and Esau.

God blessed Jacob and his sons, and the blessing continued to the next generation.

God rescued Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, and used him to rescue his family.

God caused his people, the Israelites, to multiply in the land of Egypt; eventually, they became slaves.

But God raised up a deliverer, Moses, to deliver his people from slavery.

God judged the Egyptians with harsh plagues; in the final judgment, he passed over his people, who covered their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb.

Then, God delivered the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry land.

God made a covenant with the Israelites and made them his people.

God tested Israel in a series of wilderness wanderings and eventually brought his people into the promised land of Canaan.

God raised up deliverers to lead Israel and rescue them from their enemies.

God formed Israel into a kingdom. He made a covenant with King David and promised to send a king that would rule his people forever.

Many of Israel's kings were evil, and the kingdom of Israel was divided into two kingdoms.

God sent prophets to warn his people of God's judgment and call them to repent.

When Israel did not repent, God sent his people into exile. After many years, he brought them back to the land.

Throughout the Old Testament, God promised to send his Messiah to deliver his people from their sin.

After many years, the prophet John was born. He would prepare people for the coming Messiah.

At the perfect time, God sent his Son, Jesus, to be born of a virgin Mary.

When John and Jesus grew up, John baptized Jesus as a sign that Jesus was God's beloved Son.

Jesus endured all manner of temptation without ever sinning.

When he was thirty years old, he launched a public ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing.

He taught his disciples about the life of compassion, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

Jesus performed many miracles: he fed a crowd of five thousand, he walked on water, he healed the sick, and he cast out demons.

He proclaimed to people the nature of real faith, God's kingdom, and how fallen humans can be restored in relationship with God.

Toward the end of his ministry, Jesus revealed his power and glory to his disciples.

He raised a dead man to life.

Jesus was betrayed by one of his disciples and put on trial before a Roman governor.

Jesus was sentenced to death and crucified on a cross

Three days later, Jesus rose again from the dead.

After meeting with many of his disciples, Jesus went back to heaven.

The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus' followers and formed them into his church.

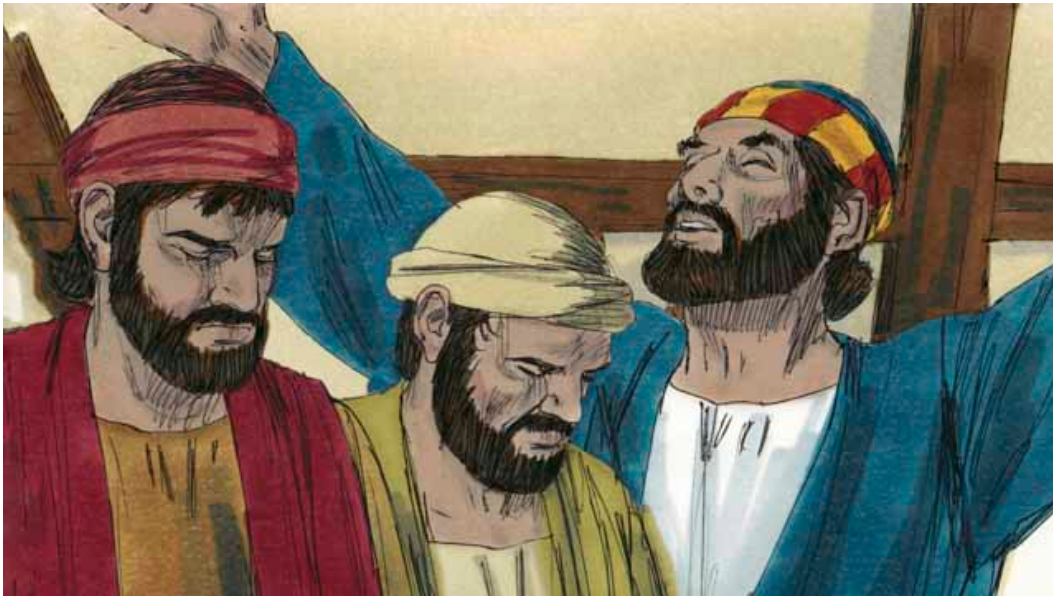
The Story: The Church Begins

43-01



After Jesus returned to heaven, the disciples stayed in Jerusalem as Jesus had commanded them to do. The believers there constantly gathered together to pray.

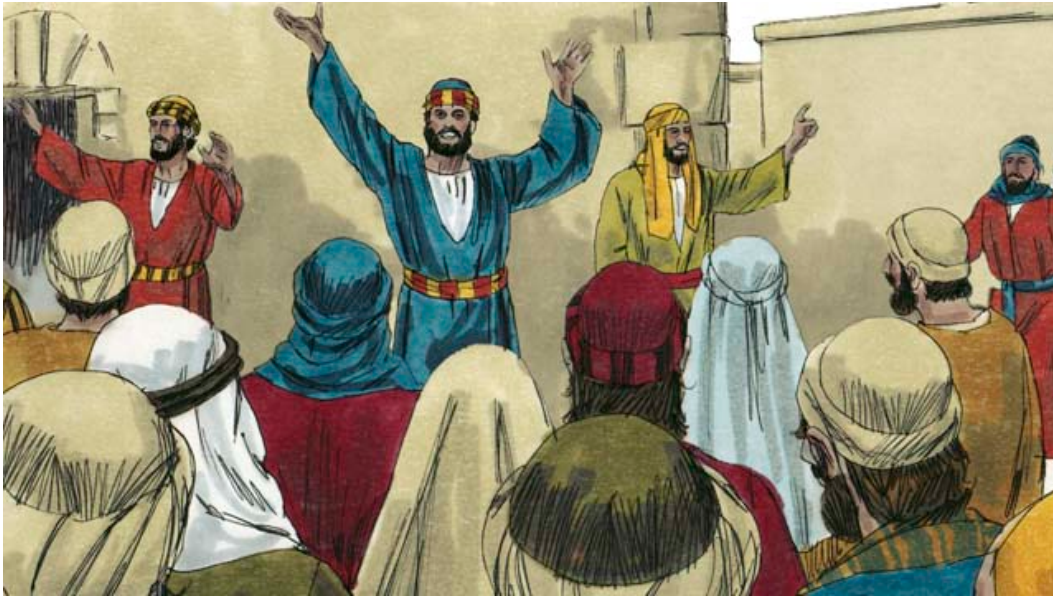
43-02



Every year, fifty days after the Passover, the Jews celebrated an important day called Pentecost. Pentecost was a time when the Jews celebrated the wheat harvest. Jews came from all over the world to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost together. This year the time for Pentecost came about a week after Jesus had gone back to heaven.

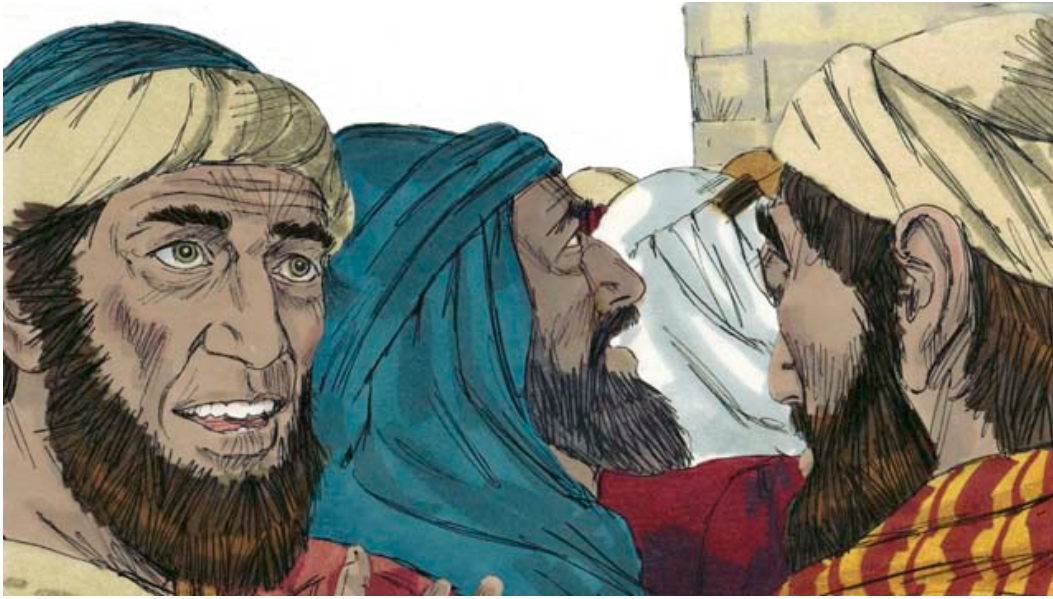


While the believers were all together, suddenly, the house where they had gathered was filled with a sound like a strong wind. Then something that looked like flames of fire appeared over the heads of all the believers. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they praised God in other languages. They did not know these languages, but these were languages that the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak.



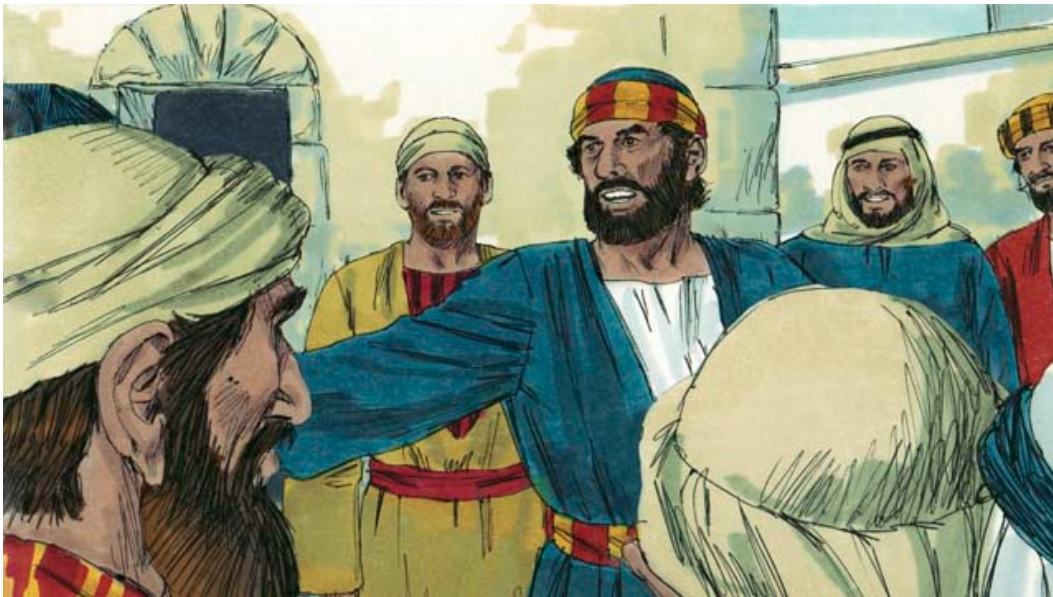
When the people in Jerusalem heard this noise, they came together in a crowd to see what was happening. They heard the believers proclaiming the great things God had done. They were astonished because they could understand even though they were from many different countries and spoke many different languages. The disciples were from Israel and spoke Aramaic, Hebrew, or Greek, but the people were each hearing what God had done in their own native language.

43-05



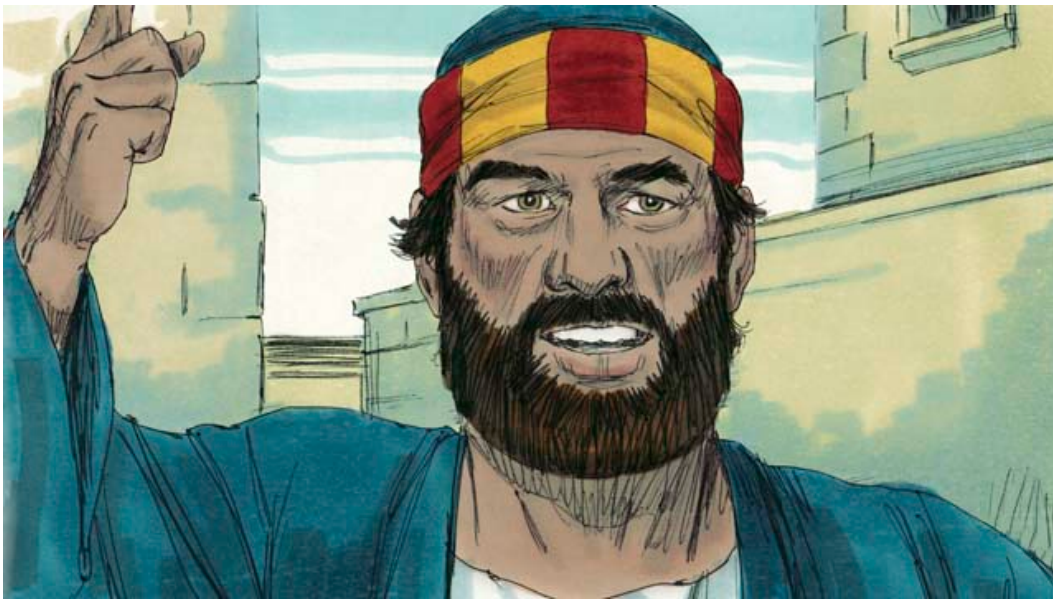
Some of these people said that the disciples were drunk. But Peter stood up and said to them, "Listen to me! These people are not drunk! Instead, what you see is what the prophet Joel said would happen: God said, 'In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit.'"

43-06



"Men of Israel, Jesus was a man who did many wonderful things to show who he was. He did many amazing things by God's power. You know this because you saw these things. But you crucified him!"

43-07



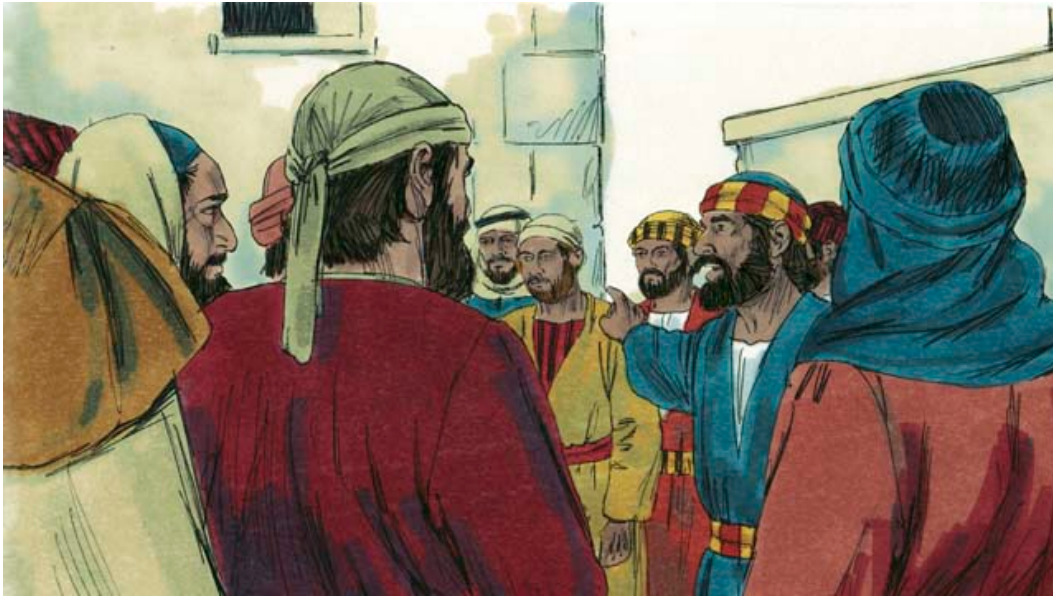
"Jesus died, but God raised him from the dead. This made come true what a prophet wrote: 'You will not let your Holy One rot in the grave.' We are witnesses that God raised Jesus to life again."

43-08



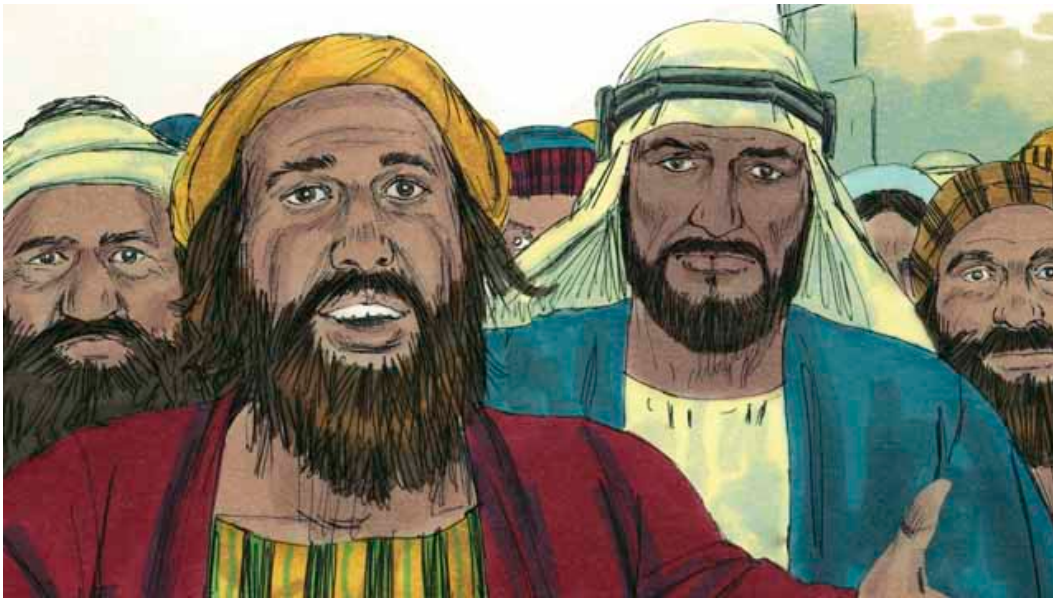
"God the Father has now honored Jesus by making him sit at his right hand. And Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to us just as he promised he would do. The Holy Spirit is causing the things that you are now seeing and hearing."

43-09



"You crucified this man, Jesus. But know for certain that God has caused Jesus to become both the Lord of everything and the Messiah!"

43-10



The people listening to Peter were deeply moved by the things that he said. So they asked Peter and the disciples, "Brothers, what should we do?"

43-11

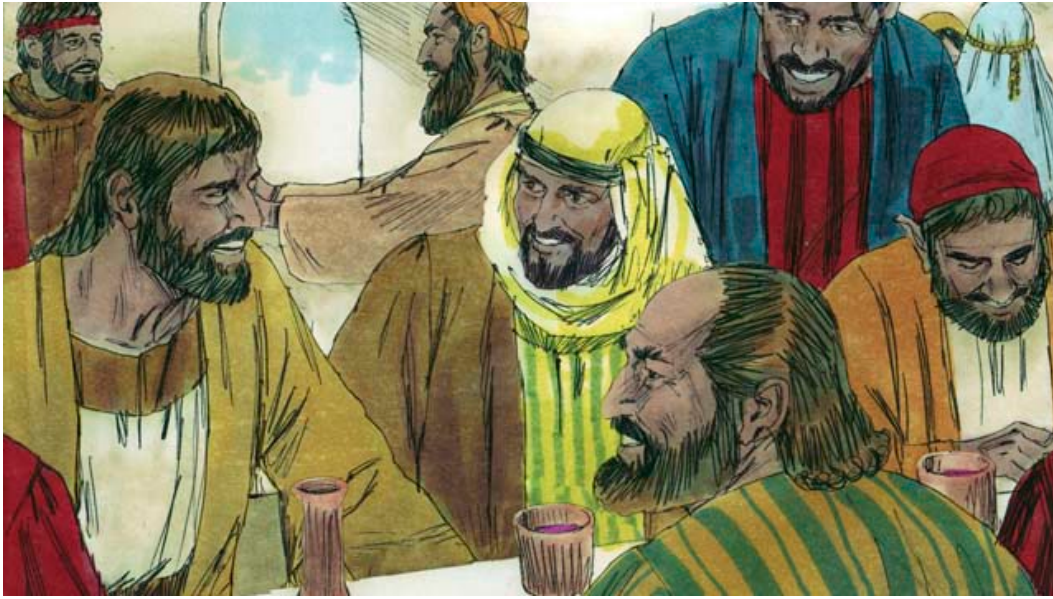


Peter answered them, "All of you need God to forgive your sins. So repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ. Then God will also give you the Holy Spirit as a gift."

43-12



About 3,000 people believed what Peter said and became disciples of Jesus. They were baptized and became part of the church in Jerusalem.



The believers continually listened as the apostles taught them. They often met together and ate together, and they often prayed with each other. They praised God together and shared everything they had with each other. Everyone in the city thought well of them. Every day, more people became believers.

A Bible story from: Acts 1:12-14; 2

Community Study: One Community—Allowing Our Unity to Be a Witness to the World

Key Idea: celebrating the unity of Christian community

Key Passage: John 17:20-26

Main Session: OBS 43 (The Church Begins)

Recite the Core Belief Verse (3-5 minutes)

The verse below summarizes the teaching of the current passage. Read the verse out loud as a community. Read it again several times as a group until the whole community can recite it from memory.

19 So then, now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. Instead you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. 20 You have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself was the cornerstone. Ephesians 2:19-20

OR

8 Finally, all of you, be likeminded, compassionate, loving as brothers, tenderhearted, and humble. 1 Peter 3:8

Think about Unity and Disunity (5-10 minutes)

Think about a time when you saw a group of people unified. Think of a time when you experienced a group of people divided. Describe these experiences.

When I saw a group of people unified together, it looked like this...

When I experienced a group of people divided, it looked like this...

Read the Passage (3-5 minutes)

Jesus prayed that the church would function in unity as one community of faith. The unity of the church is one of its greatest testimonies to the wider world. Read the passage below to learn about what God teaches about the unity of believers.

20 I pray not only for these, but also for those who will believe in me through their word 21 so that they will all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world will believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you gave me, I have given to them, so that they will be one, just as we are one: 23 I in them, and you in me—that they may be brought to complete unity, so that the world will know that you sent me, and that you have loved them just as you loved me. 24 Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you gave me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 Righteous Father, the world did not know you, but I know you; and these know that you sent me. 26 I made your name known to them, and I will make it known so that the love with which you have loved me will be in them, and I will be in them. John 17:20-26

Discuss the Passage (10-15 minutes)

Working together as Christians can be difficult. It is important to remember the importance of functioning as a unified community of faith. As a community, use the following questions to discuss the teaching of the biblical passage.

1. What does Jesus pray for believers in this passage?
2. What does it mean for believers to be unified? What does it look like for believers to function as one?
3. What are the challenges that make it hard for believers to function as one? What kinds of things cause division in a community?
4. How can the unity of your community/team be a witness to the world?

Witness God's Character (5 minutes)

Jesus says that the unity of the church represents the unity of God the Father and God the Son. After exploring this passage, talk about what characteristics of God your community can witness as you are unified.

If we are a unified community, we can bear witness/represent these characteristics of God...

Pray to God (5 minutes)

Pray that God would help your community be unified and one with each other. Use John 17:20-26 as a guide for your prayer. Encourage different members of your community to pray parts of Jesus' prayer out loud.

Sing a Song (3-5 minutes)

Choose a song that expresses the unity of God's people. Sing this song together as a community.

Movement 1: Understand the Story

Read each question aloud. Give the group time to answer before sharing the answer.

Observation Questions

43-01

What did the disciples do after Jesus returned to heaven?

After Jesus returned to heaven, the disciples stayed in Jerusalem as Jesus commanded them.

What were the disciples doing while they waited in Jerusalem?

They constantly gathered together to pray.

43-02

When did the Jews celebrate Pentecost?

They celebrated Pentecost every year, 50 days after the Passover.

Why was Pentecost a special day of celebration?

Pentecost was a time when the Jews celebrated the wheat harvest.

Who came to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost?

Jews from all over the world traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost together.

When time Pentecost occur this particular year?

This particular year, the time for Pentecost came one week after Jesus had returned to heaven.

43-03

What happened to the believers during the Pentecost after Jesus rose from the dead?

There was a sound like a strong wind, and something like flames of fire appeared over their heads. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages.

Did the believers know these languages?

No. The believers did not know these languages, but the Holy Spirit enabled them to speak the languages.

43-04

Who gathered to observe the believers speaking in other languages?

The people in Jerusalem gathered in a crowd to see what was happening.

What were the believers saying?

The believers were speaking/proclaiming great things God had done.

Why were the people in the crowd astonished?

The people in the crowd were from many different countries, but they each heard the Jewish disciples (who spoke Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek) speaking in their native language.

43-05

What did some of the people think was the reason the disciples were talking this way?

They thought the disciples were drunk.

How did Peter respond to the accusation that they were drunk?

Peter instructed the people to listen to him. He told them they were not drunk and explained that the prophet Joel predicted this would happen.

What did Peter say was causing them to speak these languages?

Peter said God would pour out his Spirit in the last days.

43-06

What did Peter say about how Jesus showed people who he really was?

Peter proclaimed that Jesus did miracles/wonders by God's power to show who he was.

How would people know that Jesus did such miracles?

Peter said that people witnessed Jesus do these miracles.

Who did Peter say was responsible for crucifying Jesus?

He said the people in the crowd crucified Jesus.

43-07

What happened to Jesus?

Peter explained that Jesus died, and God raised him to life again.

Who affirmed Jesus' resurrection from the dead?

Peter explained that the prophet predicted that the Messiah would rise again to life and the disciples were witnesses of Jesus' resurrection when he appeared to them many times.

43-08

What happened to Jesus after he rose again from the dead?

God honored Jesus by having him sit at his right hand.

Who did Jesus send to his disciples?

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to his followers just as he promised he would do.

What caused the disciples to be able to speak in other languages?

The Holy Spirit caused them to be able to speak in other languages.

43-09

Who did Peter say crucified Jesus?

Peter said the people crucified Jesus.

What were the two things that Peter said God caused Jesus to become?

He became Lord and Messiah.

43-10

How did the people respond to Peter's message?

They were deeply moved and asked, "Brothers, what should we do?"

43-11

What did Peter tell the people to do?

He told them they needed God to forgive their sins, so they should repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

What did Peter say they would receive if they did this?

Peter said God would give them the Holy Spirit if they repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus.

43-12

How many people believed and were baptized that day?

About 3,000 people believed.

What community did these people form after they were baptized?

These believers became part of the church.

43-13

What did the disciples spend their time doing?

The disciples continually listened to the teaching of the apostles, spent time together, ate together, prayed with each other, praised God together, and shared everything.

What did the people in the city think of the Christians?

The people who lived in the city thought well of the Christians.

How often did new believers come to faith in Christ?

Every day, more people became believers.

Movement 2: Theological Questions

Answer the following theology questions as a community. Discuss what truths this story teaches.

1. Who is the Holy Spirit, and what important role does he have in God's work? What does the story of Pentecost teach us about the person and work of the Holy Spirit?
2. What is the core content of the gospel message? How does Peter's speech provide a summary of the gospel message?
3. What is the appropriate response to the gospel message? How do people become believers/disciples? What does this story teach us about how people became followers of Jesus and joined the church?

4. What does it mean to be the church? How does this story give a picture of what it means for believers to be a part of a faith community?

Movement 3: Live It Out

Personal Implications & Applications From The Story

Guide the group to discuss practical obedience from this story and name concrete next steps.

1. How has the Holy Spirit give you power to be a witness for Jesus?
2. How has your understanding and belief in the gospel grown deeper as a result of this story?
3. In what ways has Jesus taken away your guilt as a sinner?
4. Think about this week. Where does "The Church Begins" challenge you to obey God in a practical way?
5. How does this key idea shape one decision you need to make right now: The story of the beginning of the church teaches us that the Holy Spirit empowers Jesus' followers to preach the gospel and forms Jesus' followers into the community of believers called the church.

Movement 4: Retell the Story

Invite the group to retell the story several times until they can tell it clearly and faithfully.

1. Can someone retell "The Church Begins" from beginning to end in their own words?
2. Retell this story again, but focus on what God did at each key moment.
3. Retell the story in three parts: beginning, middle, and ending. What changed in each part?
4. If you were teaching this story to your family tonight, how would you tell it simply and clearly?

Church Ministry

Reflect on how this story can edify and mature the Christian community. Design a way to minister this story to your church community.

Ministry Preparation: Take time to consider how you could minister this story to others. Record some ministry ideas below.

Ministry Implementation: Minister this story to a group of believers as you had planned. Use the information in this study to help develop a teaching/lesson or lead a discussion of this story with other believers. Record your ministry plan below.

Ministry Reflection: Think about what you learned from ministering this story to other believers. Reflect on your experience below.

Movement 5: Share It

Help each person plan how they will share this story with others before the next gathering.

1. Who is one specific person you will share "The Church Begins" with this week?
2. When and where will you share this story with them?
3. What is the one main truth from this story you want them to remember?

Report-back next meeting: Who did you share with, and what happened?

Mission Engagement

Consider how you will witness this story to unbelievers. Design a way to share this story and engage them in what it teaches about Christianity and the gospel.

Witness Preparation: Take time to consider how you will witness this narrative to unbelievers. Record some ideas below.

Witness Implementation: Share this story with an unbeliever. Use the information in this study to help develop a teaching/lesson or lead a discussion of this story. Record your ministry plan below.

Witness Reflection: Think about what you learned from ministering this story to unbelievers. Reflect on your experience below.