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Jerusalem

This ancient city, overflowing with Biblical history, saw Jesus' death and resurrection as well as the birth of the New Testament church.

PART 8 — LOOKING OVER JERUSALEM, THE CITY OF DAVID

NEW DAWN



ANCHOR TEXT: As you start this lesson, read Acts 2:1-41 for context.

JERUSALEM

As Jesus prepared to lay down His life, He brought His disciples down to **Jerusalem** one last time. The city swelled with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims for Passover, still a week away, and word began to spread that the famed Rabbi was in the village of **Bethany**, just two miles east of the capital (John 12:1). Expectations were rising. At last, it was time for Christ to make His grand entrance.

Zechariah 9:9 foretold that the Messiah would come to Jerusalem on a donkey, the mount of a victorious king. Ezekiel 43:1-3 also predicted the Messiah would come through Jerusalem's East Gate and enter the temple. Jesus fulfilled both prophecies as He arrived from the **Mount of Olives** (Matthew 21:1). Thousands gathered to welcome Him, laying down palm leaves as symbols of submission and crying out for salvation—"Hosanna to the Son of David" (21:8-9)!

The time was now, they thought. The King had come to claim His throne.



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Mount of Olives

Outside Jerusalem's East Gate, across the Kidron Valley, Jewish tombs cover the western half of the Mount of Olives to mark the location of the Messiah's promised arrival.



Center of the World

Now drawing travelers from all over the earth, the busy streets of modern Jerusalem offer a glimpse of the crowds that gathered annually for Passover in Christ's day.

As soon as Jesus entered the temple to teach, however, the people began to realize that He wasn't the kind of king they were hoping for. After generations of oppression, the Hebrews expected the Messiah to be a military overlord who would defeat the Roman occupation of Israel and set their nation free. But that wasn't the Kingdom Jesus was bringing. As He would declare that week to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

Later, as Christ and His 12 disciples shared the Passover meal, He showed them what His Kingdom would look like: Jesus stooped down as a servant to wash their feet (John 13:5). Then He instituted the Kingdom meal: bread to remember His body that was soon to be broken for them, wine to remember His blood that would pour out to purchase their redemption (Matthew 26:27-29).

Tension was rising. The disciples realized the cross was coming. But who would betray Jesus, and how would it all happen?

After the meal, they traveled outside the city's east wall, past the temple and across the Kidron Valley into the **Garden of Gethsemane**. As they made the night journey, Christ reassured His disciples. "I will ask the Father," Jesus said, "and he will give you another advocate to help you" (John 14:16). *Another* Advocate. The Greek word here, *allos*, means "another of the same kind." Because they had come to know Jesus intimately, they would recognize this coming Helper who would counsel and encourage them.

Jesus went even a step further, saying, "...it is for your good that I am going away.

Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you" (John 16:7). Imagine the disciples' faces as they heard these words. *Better?* They had spent the last three years walking with Jesus, following after Jesus, and hearing Jesus' teaching! What could He possibly mean that it would be better to have this Counselor with them while Christ was away?

The disciples would not find answers to their questions that night. While the rest of the city slept, Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane and rushed off to face six different trials under cover of darkness (Matthew 26:57). In those days, it was illegal for the Sanhedrin, the high court of the temple leaders, to carry out criminal trials through the night. But Jesus' enemies weren't after justice, they wanted His blood. His teaching and His Kingdom were a threat to their way of life. Early in the morning, a paid-off mob demanded that Pilate sentence Jesus to be crucified (John 19:6).

HIS TEACHING AND HIS KINGDOM WERE A THREAT TO THEIR WAY OF LIFE.

The people of Jerusalem awoke to find the Messiah, the Man they had just welcomed into the city, carrying His cross outside the gates to His execution (John 19:16). On the hill called **Golgotha** in Hebrew and **Calvary** in Latin, Jesus was crucified and died (Mark 15:22). For three days, His disciples sat in silence, wondering what had just happened.

"PEACE BE WITH YOU! AS THE
FATHER HAS SENT ME, I AM
SENDING YOU."

JOHN 20:21





Southern Steps

These stairs are the likely location where the New Testament church was born, as God poured out His Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

When it seemed like all was lost, hope dawned. On the third day, Jesus stepped out of His own grave alive (John 20:14-16). His work was finished: death was defeated, sin utterly atoned for; the veil in the temple separating sinners from the presence of God was finally torn in two (Matthew 27:51).

Over the next 40 days, the risen Jesus visited His followers all across Israel—in Jerusalem (John 20:19), on the road to **Emmaus** in the western hill country (Luke 24:15), and all the way north to **Galilee** (Matthew 28:16).

On one of those occasions, Christ told His 11 disciples to remain in Jerusalem and “wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:4-5). This was the Advocate Christ had been talking about on the night of His arrest: “But 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” (1:8). With this promise and global commission, Jesus ascended into Heaven over the Mount of Olives (1:9).

And so, the disciples waited. When the Feast of Weeks came—called *Pentecost* in Greek because it takes place 50 days after Passover—Jerusalem was again bustling with Jewish pilgrims from all over the Roman world. On that day, designated as a time to thank God for His gifts (Exodus 34:22), God sent down the gift of His Spirit, just as Christ had promised. All of the disciples “were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4).

The Hebrew pilgrims were amazed at this public display of God's power. People from throughout the Empire—places like modern-day **Italy, Greece, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt**, and more—all heard these fishermen from Galilee speaking the truth of God in their own language (Acts 2:5-11). Seizing this opportunity, Simon Peter stepped forward on the southern steps outside the temple and proclaimed the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ (2:14).

The Spirit moved in the hearts of Peter's hearers. That day, 3,000 people received Christ as their Lord and Savior (Acts 2:41). The disciples baptized them in the *mikvehs* beside the southern steps, pools of water that Jews typically used to wash themselves before entering the temple.

The gift they had been waiting for had finally arrived. The Holy Spirit was living and working within them—the church was born! It was the dawn of a new era in God's redeeming plan.

THE GIFT THEY HAD BEEN

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FINALLY ARRIVED.

By the power of the Spirit, this new community of believers grew and multiplied: "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). In the next two years, followers of Jesus filled Jerusalem (5:28). Within 20 years, Scripture records Christians spreading the good news of Jesus around the Roman Empire, raising up a new generation of disciples (8:5; 11:19; 13:1).

The 3,000 baptized on Pentecost were turning the world upside down, all by the power of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the book of Acts alone, the Holy Spirit is referenced more than 50 times in intimate and personal terms. We see Him leading, prompting, opening doors, and removing veils (Acts 13:2; 16:6; 20:28). He is the Helper Jesus promised, working in the hearts of believers with the same power that brought Christ back from the dead (Romans 8:11).

The gift that Jesus promised is still at work today. Followers of Christ have the Holy Spirit as our Helper, our Advocate, and our best Friend. When we open our Bibles, we read His Word, hear His voice, and discover His calling. He is alive within us, fueling us, guiding us, and doing the impossible through us. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people in our neighborhoods and around the world—all so that everyone may know the freedom and new life that Jesus brings.

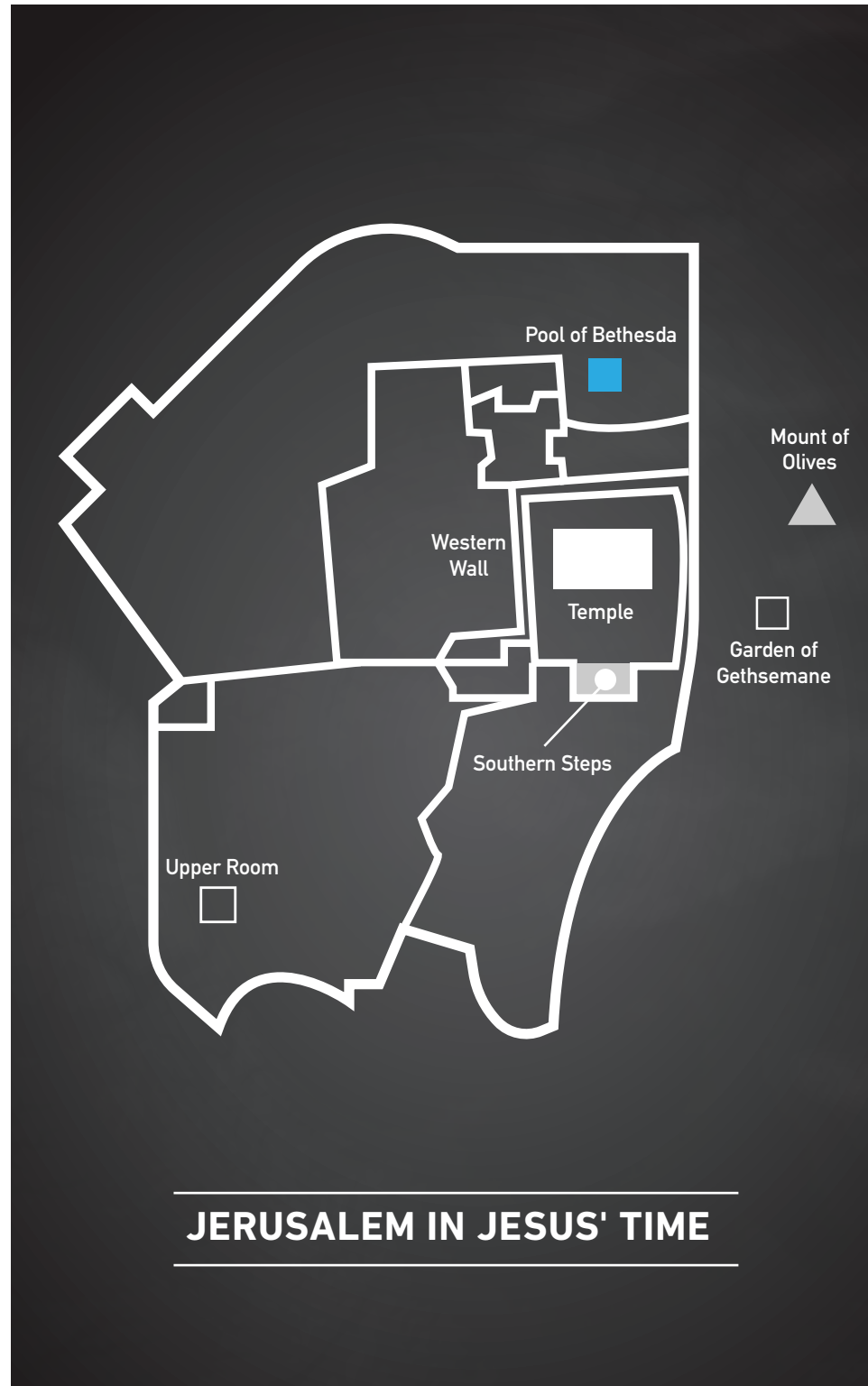
Christ has granted us a promise and He has given us a calling. When we walk in the Holy Spirit's power and submit to His leading, we experience a new dawn in our lives, advancing the Kingdom of God in the world and making the name of Jesus known to all.



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JERUSALEM IN JESUS' TIME

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- ¹ John 14:15-31 describes the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Truth—as an Advocate, a Comforter, and a Helper. How would you describe the Holy Spirit?
- ² If the Holy Spirit is to you what Jesus was to the Disciples, what should your relationship with the Holy Spirit look like? In what ways is it better to have the Holy Spirit within us than it is to have Jesus Himself in the room with us?
- ³ How did Jesus' life demonstrate complete dependence on the Holy Spirit? How was the church changed when the Holy Spirit came?
- ⁴ Jesus told the disciples that they would “receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8). What would it look like for you to walk in this same power?
- ⁵ How can you be more aware of what the Holy Spirit is doing in your life? What dream do you have that seems impossible and could only be accomplished if the Holy Spirit showed up?

🕒 EXTRA INFO

For all of its amazing history, Jerusalem does not meet the criteria that usually make for a great city. Built in the hills of Judah on the edge of the wilderness, with little natural access to water or major trade routes, God selected this city in order to put the power of His Holy Spirit on full display. It's here that King David established a capital for Old Testament Israel, where Solomon built the temple of the Lord, and where Jesus died and rose again. Jerusalem was the perfect birthplace for the New Testament church, as thousands of people came to the city from all over the Mediterranean in order to celebrate Pentecost. After their conversion to Christ, these new disciples took the Gospel throughout the Roman world.

The Book of Acts records the dawn of the New Testament church, and the Holy Spirit is the central character in this book. About 75% of the book's references to the Holy Spirit depict Him empowering people to speak. The Book of Acts makes clear that the Spirit's highest priority is to use us as His mouthpieces to share the good news that Jesus is the Messiah and Savior of the world, sent by the Father to grant new life and forgiveness to everyone who turns to Christ in faith.

At the dawn of the New Testament church in AD 33, there were about 3,000 Christians in the world. By about AD 100, that number multiplied to 8,000 Christians all over the Roman Empire. In AD 300, this number exploded to 6-7 million Christians on earth! By this time, about 10% of the Roman Empire had turned to Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Not only did these early centuries of church history experience astonishing advancement of the Gospel, but Christians also faced great persecution. By AD 325, at least 2 million Christians had been martyred for their faith. Early Christian leader Tertullian wrote in AD 197, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” He recognized that it was often when persecution struck Jesus' followers most fiercely that the Holy Spirit caused the Gospel to bear its greatest fruit. Today, more Christians are persecuted and killed for their faith than ever before in world history. Nevertheless, the Kingdom of God continues to advance around the globe as the Gospel is proclaimed to thousands of people groups who have never heard it before.