

UNIT

# 1

# The Rise of the Church

& the Fall of Rome



Pentecost

# Bible History to Read and Talk About

## Ascension of Jesus: Acts 1:1–11

- Why did Jesus want his disciples to stay in Jerusalem for a time? Do you think Peter and the other disciples needed to receive God's power in their lives? Why or why not?
- Where did Jesus tell his disciples that they would go to be witnesses? Was it far from their homes? Why do you think Jesus would want his friends to go to faraway places? Would it be hard to do that? Why or why not?
- Do you think the disciples were sad or unhappy or scared when Jesus went to heaven? Why or why not? What did the two men in white clothes say to the disciples when Jesus went up into heaven? Why would it be helpful to the disciples to have Jesus's promise that He was coming back? How is it helpful to us today to have this same promise?

## Day of Pentecost: Acts 2:1–41

- What happened on the day of Pentecost? Do you think the people in the upper room were surprised? Astonished? Scared? Happy? Excited?
- There had been Jews from all over the world in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Name the countries the people were from. What did they say and do when the Holy Spirit came to Jesus's disciples? Do you think they were surprised? Astonished? Scared? Happy? Excited?
- What did Peter do when some people said

that the disciples were drunk? Do you think Peter was acting differently than he had when Jesus was taken to be crucified? Why or why not? If your answer is "Yes," what made the difference? What was the result of Peter's preaching?

## Conversion of Saul: Acts 8:1–4, 9:1–22

What did Saul do to people who believed in Jesus? Do you think Saul was a scary man to the followers of Jesus? Why or why not?

What happened to Saul when he was going to Damascus? Why was it hard for Ananias to go see Paul? What would you have done if you had been in Ananias' shoes?

After Saul's conversion, what were some of the things he did? What response did he receive from the Jews? From the Hellenists (Greeks)? Where did the believers send him? What was the result? How did that help solve the problems the Christians were having?

Saul, whose name was changed by God to Paul, went on to become a messenger of God's good news to the world beyond Israel. His many missionary journeys took him from the Middle East, throughout the Mediterranean, and all the way to Europe. Just as Jesus had told his disciples, they became witnesses of Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and they even began going unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Read more about it in the Book of Acts!

## Fascinating Folks & Exciting Events

### **Nero and the Burning of Rome (AD 64)**

Roman emperors were very powerful people. Because the army, who had the force to accomplish imperial commands, was totally loyal to the Emperor, there was no one who could stop a bad emperor from doing evil and horrible things. One of the worst was the Emperor Nero. He was so afraid that someone in his family would try to take over and become emperor in his place that he even killed his step-brother and his mother! Then he began to kill anyone who angered him.

Everyone in Rome feared and distrusted Emperor Nero—with good reason! When a devastating fire broke out in Rome, Nero decided to rebuild the city. However, his greatest efforts were in building himself a huge and magnificent new palace. People whispered among themselves that Nero had set the fire on purpose so he could watch it burn and then claim the land for himself. When he heard that the people were against him, he said he was innocent and would never do that. He said it was the Christians who started the fire! He used this story as an excuse to kill many Christian believers, including Peter and Paul. Eventually, the people of Rome had had enough of Nero, and he ended up being killed by a servant.

### **Constantine's Conversion (AD 312)**

At this point in history, two incredible events occurred in the Roman Empire. The first was when a young man with a small army convinced an emperor with a large army to fight a battle outside of the protection of the walls of Rome - and he WON! The young man was Constantine, and his winning the battle of Milvian Bridge was considered almost a miracle by the people of Rome. The second incredible event was when Constantine announced to the Empire that Christians were no longer to be persecuted, and

that, in fact, he himself was a Christian! This had a dramatic effect upon the Christian Church. Because the Emperor himself proclaimed Christianity to be good, a huge number of people joined the Church—probably to gain favor with the Emperor rather than because of a true conversion experience. This meant that, though the persecution of Christians was a thing of the past, now the Church was being filled up with people who were bringing their pagan beliefs with them.

### **Athanasius and the Council of Nicea (AD 325)**

With Christianity now the favored religion in the Empire, many strange ideas about Jesus came forth from various teachers. One man, Arius, was especially good at teaching these strange ideas since he could write catchy songs to help people learn the new beliefs. Arius taught that Jesus was not really God but more like a superhero created by God. Many people supported this Arian doctrine because it was similar to the idea of the Greek gods and goddesses, which were more familiar to them.

However, one leader in the Church fought like a lion to stop the spread of this new idea. His name was Athanasius. He believed what the Scriptures taught: that Jesus was fully God, of the same substance as God, that Jesus was with God from the beginning, and was not a part of the created world. When Emperor Constantine called together the leaders of the Church at the Council of Nicea to end the arguing about Arius's teaching, Athanasius forcefully presented this true perspective from Scripture. The people at the council were convinced that his position was the correct one, and they decided that Arius's teachings were heresy (false). You can read what the Council of Nicea decided was true Christian belief by reading the Nicene Creed. It can be found in hymnals, or ask your pastor.

## Word Search

Using the words from your vocabulary list at the bottom of the page, search for words in the puzzle. The words are diagonal, vertical, and horizontal. Have fun!

W A E D I U W B S A C O N S A T I E P  
 B L X R A M A N T I O C H E R I M B A  
 I M N C A T N C R D C U E G I O S T U  
 D C A R O M E S L K H R L D F B N A L  
 J O T P Y N A M N A E X R E M N E G F  
 A S C H A S S F O T R M M O G F S A W  
 L N H P U G L T U D M Y C M A I G C A  
 E G U H C S Y C A R I A H H T P O K L  
 X I R I H A E H J N T I I A U P L N E  
 A S T P J S H U S A T H T N D R Y E X  
 N A Y T R E W I C I H I K T Y R C R K  
 D C L E E P A L P S U P N T M A I H A  
 R K P M S O M I W P S Q R E E C R A M  
 I C P O L Y C A R P O A O T L Y P D N  
 A T R I E A N P Y O M R M R O O T R R  
 K E O H G K P T G E V T N A T L E A I  
 N Q P G W Y C O N V E R T H P P L I A

Alexandria  
 convert  
 ichthus  
 persecute

Antioch  
 Hadrian  
 legion  
 Polycarp

catacombs  
 hermit  
 martyr  
 Ptolemy

Church  
 Hippo  
 Nero  
 Rome

Constantine  
 hymn  
 Paul  
 sack

# Hands-On History Fun

## Create-A-Craft:

### Catacomb Art on the Sidewalk

Early in the history of the Church, the Christians in Rome often met for services in the catacombs, which are underground burial sites. Some of the Christians were wonderful artists who painted pictures about events from the Bible on the walls of the catacombs. Why not share with your family and neighbors about Bible events by doing "catacomb style" sidewalk art?

**You will need: Large, colored chalk; ½ cup sugar; 1½ cups water; sidewalk or butcher paper**

Combine the sugar and water, stir to mix. Soak the chalk in the sugar solution for 3–4 minutes. Then, draw pictures from the Bible, such as Noah's Ark, creation of the sun and moon, the cross of Jesus, the empty tomb, etc. Soak your chalk again when it dries out.

## Fun Foods to Fix:

### Painted "Fish" Toast

Try your hand at making an ICTHUS, the Christian symbol of a fish that the early Christians used to identify one another. (In Greek, it is spelled "ΙΧΘΥΣ.") Though they would make their drawing in the sand, you can make it on toast—and then eat it!

**You will need: ½ cup milk, divided into 2 containers; green food coloring; blue food coloring; new paint brush or clean pastry**

**brush; 1 slice of bread per person; butter and sugar for spreading on toast**

Place several drops of food coloring into the milk (one container of milk per color). Using either a new paint brush or clean pastry brush, paint a fish on the bread. Toast the bread and observe your fish symbol. Would your Christian friend recognize it? Lightly spread with butter and sugar if you wish. Remember, this is "ichthus," not icky!



# Your Own Masterpiece

Draw a picture depicting a story from the book of Acts.

# Creative Fun with History!

## Going Goofy Game:

### Gospel Explosion

This game is to demonstrate that safe Roman roads and the common Greek language allowed the Gospel to explode throughout the world in the first few centuries after Jesus's ascension.

Six or more players needed (if you have fewer than six people, "Roman Road" and "Greek Language" may be played by the same person):

**"Christian," who proclaims in a loud voice, "I have Good News!"**

**"Roman Road," who frequently proclaims, "Safe roads,"**

**"Greek Language," who frequently proclaims, "Get it?"**

**"Jew" (may be played by more than one player)**

**"Samaritan" (may be played by more than one player)**

**"Far-Away-Foreigner" (may be played by more than one player)**

In a large area, preferably outside, set up a course of orbits around a center point. Mark the center point using a brightly colored cloth, or paper plate, etc., and call that place "Jerusalem." In a similar way, mark another spot ten or more feet away to indicate the first orbit—call it "Judea"—and a third spot ten or more feet away to show the second orbit, "Samaria." Finally, mark a spot ten feet beyond that for the outside orbit and call it "The Uttermost Parts." The children will be running around these orbits similar to the orbits of planets. If they have a hard time visualizing their course, place more markers

around each orbit for them to follow.

Gather the players into a tight circle at Jerusalem. Have the smallest player be "Christian," the largest players be "Roman Road" and "Greek Language." Have everyone count together out loud, "One, Two, Three, GO!"

At this point, the player (players) called "Jew" starts running around outside of the group in a circuit that follows your first orbit, in Judea. As soon as all "Jews" are out and have run a complete circuit, the player (players) called "Samaritan" needs to run out to the second orbit and run in a circle around the center at that marker (similar to the orbits of the planets).

As soon as all "Samaritans" make a complete circuit, the player (players) called "Far-Away-Foreigner" needs to run to the outside marked spot and run a circuit around the "uttermost parts." Or, all the players could leave Jerusalem at once!

"Roman Road" and "Greek Language" carry "Christian" (or if this is too difficult, they may take "Christian" by the hand), run out as a unit around the orbits, all proclaiming loudly, and tag the other players as they run around their orbits. They need to first tag all players representing "Jew," next "Samaritan," then "Far-Away-Foreigner."

When one is tagged, he must freeze and say three times in a loud voice, "I have received the Good News!" After this, the tagged one joins with "Christian's" group and helps to tag the remaining players.