

## COMMENTARY

### ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

#### Acts 6

vs. 1-7

As the Church grew, problems began to arise because of the size. The Grecian Jews (Jews born and raised outside of Palestine, spoke Greek and had adopted Greek customs and culture) felt like their widows were being neglected compared to the widows of the native Hebrews of Palestine (born and raised in Palestine, spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, resisted the Greek language and culture and considered themselves superior to the "Grecian" Jews). The apostles gathered the church together and re-iterated the importance that the apostles continue to spread the message of Jesus Christ. The solution, they had determined, would be to appoint 7 good Christian men who would handle the ministry to the widows.

The church selected 7 men of their choosing. These men were then prayed for by the apostles who laid their hands on them (symbol of being set apart for service and enabled these men to perform miracles-- Stephen and Philip are both shown later to have been given this ability). These men are referred to as "deacons" (means: to serve).

The Church continued to grow, reaching even some of the religious leaders who had resisted it.

vs. 8-15

Stephen, one of the 7 deacons, performed miracles as God worked through him. Some Jews began to resist and argue with Stephen, but they could not compare to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit which spoke through Stephen. Finally, they decided to have some men accuse Stephen of blasphemy against Moses and God. This caused a great disturbance and Stephen was arrested.

Before the Sanhedrin, false witnesses were brought to falsely testify against Stephen. The charges were: 1. Speaks against the Law and the Temple, 2. Says that Jesus will destroy the Temple and change the laws of Moses.

Stephen is described as having the appearance of an angel, during this time.

#### Acts 7

vs. 1-53

When asked of the accuracy of the charges, Stephen began his defense.

He started by showing how Abraham (see Chart 2 for more information) was given promises by God and had to separate himself from the ungodly.

He speaks of how Joseph, who loved God, was mistreated by his own brothers and sent to another land, where God provided for him. Joseph ended up being the source of "salvation" for his brothers when the famine struck and they moved to Egypt where Joseph now lived.

Israel was then oppressed by the Egyptians and God raised up Moses. Moses, at 40 years of age, had to flee from Egypt after trying to help his people (who then turned on him). God then called Moses from being a shepherd (Moses was now 80 years old) to lead the people who had rejected him. Even though he led them out of Egypt, Israel still resisted his leadership and turned away from God.

Years passed from Israel's taking of the land until they built a temple for their God.

Stephen now compares the present religious leaders with all of their ancestors who had resisted God's chosen men and had even resisted God. He accuses them of having put God's anointed one (Jesus) to death!

vs. 54-60

At these last accusations the religious leaders became furious. Stephen looked to Heaven and saw the Glory of God with Jesus beside Him. He told the leaders this and they ran at him screaming. They then took Stephen outside of the city of Jerusalem and stoned him. Saul watched over the cloaks of those stoning.

Stephen prayed, while being stoned, that God would forgive his slayers and that He would accept Stephen's spirit. Following this, he died.

## ACTS 8

vs. 1- 4

From the day of Stephen's death, a great persecution broke out against the Church, with a man named Saul leading the way. The Christians scattered across the known world taking the message of Jesus with them.

vs. 5- 8

Philip, the deacon (not the apostle, for the apostles stayed in Jerusalem) went up (down-- being in reference to altitude; up-- in reference to going North) to Samaria and taught of Jesus, there. God worked miracles through Philip (healing and casting out demons) and the people then were convinced that his message was from God.

vs. 9-25

Simon, who used the power of Satan to deceive the people, had quite a following in Samaria up to this time. After seeing and hearing Philip, Simon became a follower of Christ.

During this time, Peter and John were sent up to Samaria to help with the work there. The apostles laid hands on the believers and the gift of miracles came upon the believers there, as evidence of God's approval of them into Christ's Church (the Samaritans were considered half-breeds by the Jews and this was to show them that they were now equal in God's sight).

Simon offered to buy the ability to "lay hands" on someone and empower them. He was rebuked by Peter for his worldly thoughts and told to repent. Simon asked for Peter to pray for him, that he would be forgiven. Peter and John then returned to Jerusalem, after having preached the message of Christ in many Samaritan villages.

vs. 26-40

Philip was then instructed by an angel to head out from Samaria to a road that ran between Jerusalem and Gaza. On the road he met an official of the country of Ethiopia (in charge of the treasury). The Holy Spirit instructed Philip to go up to the chariot and there he found that the official was reading from the prophet Isaiah (Is. 53:7,8). Philip explained how Jesus was the fulfillment of that prophecy and how eternal life was available through Christ.

As they traveled they came to a body of water and the official asked Philip if he could be baptized. Philip and the believing official entered the water and the man was immersed. Philip was immediately taken by the Lord to Azotus and he continued his preaching, while the official returned to Ethiopia rejoicing.

## STUDY GUIDE

### ACTS 6

1. What happened when the number of disciples multiplied?
2. What was done about the problem?
3. Who were chosen to serve?
4. How is the growth of the church described?
5. What did Stephen do?
6. Why couldn't men argue against Stephen?
7. What conspiracy was designed?
8. How was Stephen's appearance described as he stood before the Sanhedrin?

### BONUS

1. The seven men chosen to serve became deacons. What does this passage tell us about the deacons responsibilities?
2. What were the responsibilities of the twelve apostles?
3. What result was seen because of these two groups serving faithfully and what does it suggest for us today?

## STUDY GUIDE

### ACTS 7

1. In Stephen's defense, whom did he mention that the leaders respected? (see whole chapter)
2. What did God command and promise Abraham in Mesopotamia?
3. Did Abraham live to see that day?
4. Who were mean to Joseph?
5. When did the Hebrews begin to increase?
6. Where did Moses grow up?
7. What happened when Moses went to see his people after 40 years?
8. What was Moses' prophecy?
9. How did Israel turn away from God, in the days of Moses?
10. Who does Stephen liken the fathers to and why?
11. What individual is mentioned as being at the stoning?
12. What plea did Stephen make at his stoning which was similar to Jesus' on the cross? (see also Luke 23:34)

### BONUS:

1. Outline Stephen's defense.
2. Give examples of how Stephen listed the righteous and how the wicked opposed them.

## STUDY GUIDE

### ACTS 8

1. Who was giving approval to Stephen's death? the nations? (vs. 2)
2. Who was scattered and why?
3. Who began to destroy the church?
4. Why did the crowds in Samaria listen to Philip?
5. Why had the people given their attention to Simon?
6. How did the people respond to Philip's preaching?
7. Who prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit?
8. What did Simon attempt to buy and what was the response?
9. Who did Philip meet on the desert road?
10. With what passage did Philip begin to teach the man?
11. Summarize the Eunuch's baptism.

### BONUS:

1. Explain how God used persecution to help the church grow.
2. What are possible reasons the Jerusalem church would have sent Peter and John to Samaria?
3. Explain the prophecy of Isaiah and go from there to tell the good news of Jesus.