

Small Group Week 4

Context: We are in the first 1/3 of the book of Acts (chapters 1-7) that takes place in Jerusalem.

- Acts 1 - Jesus ascends into heaven, and his followers wait in Jerusalem
- Acts 2 – Jesus’ followers receive the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost
- Acts 2-4 - Peter preaches two sermons and at least 5,000 decide to put their trust in Jesus Christ and are baptized.
- Acts 3-4 - Peter and John miraculously encounter a lame man, who receives healing from the Lord, and they are put in jail because the Jesus’ movement is a threat to the corrupt Jewish leaders who are trying to keep their positions of power.
- Acts 4 - Persecution begins at this point and it only prompts Jesus followers to ask for more boldness from the Lord as they seek to spread the good news of Jesus to the masses.
- Acts 5 – Ananias & Sapphira become a threat to the beautiful fellowship and mutual love of the young church. The Apostles are very busy healing the sick and the early church is growing, while the religious leaders of Jerusalem persecute the followers of Jesus. This only makes early Christians more emboldened to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Choosing of the Seven

Acts 6:1-15 (NIV)

¹ In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

³ Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them

⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Stephen Seized

⁸ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen,

¹⁰ but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized

Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.

¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.

¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin

Acts 7:1-60 (NIV)

¹ Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"

² To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran.

³ 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

⁴ "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.

⁵ He gave him no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child.

⁶ God spoke to him in this way: 'Your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.

⁷ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.'

⁸ Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

⁹ "Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him

¹⁰ and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt; so he made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

¹¹ "Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our fathers could not find food.

¹² When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers on their first visit.

¹³ On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family.

¹⁴ After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all.

¹⁵ Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died.

¹⁶ Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

¹⁷ "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt greatly increased.

¹⁸ Then another king, who knew nothing about Joseph, became ruler of Egypt.

¹⁹ He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our forefathers by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

²⁰ "At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house.

²¹ When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own

son.

22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

23 "When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites.

24 He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian.

25 Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.

26 The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?'

27 "But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, 'Who made you ruler and judge over us?'

28 Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'

29 When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

30 "After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai.

31 When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to look more closely, he heard the Lord's voice:

32 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

33 "Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals; the place where you are standing is holy ground.'

34 I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

35 "This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

36 He led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the desert.

37 "This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.'

38 He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.

39 "But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.

40 They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt--we don't know what has happened to him!'

41 That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made.

42 But God turned away and gave them over to the worship of the heavenly bodies. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets: "'Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?'

43 You have lifted up the shrine of Molech and the star of your god Rephan, the idols you made to worship. Therefore I will send you into exile' beyond Babylon.

44 "Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.

45 Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the

time of David,

⁴⁶ who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.

⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

⁴⁸ "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says:

⁴⁹ "'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? ⁵⁰ Has not my hand made all these things?'

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

⁵² Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him--

⁵³ you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

The Stoning of Stephen

⁵⁴ When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.

⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,

⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Questions:

1. In Acts chapter 6, we read seven new leaders who are commissioned to help to serve the widows and take pressure off of the Apostles. What areas in life do you lead others?

2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV)

² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

2. As you lead others, is there someone you are learning from and following at the same time? If so, who are some key leaders in your life, and how do they influence you?
3. Have you ever experienced being persecuted for your faith? If so, how did you handle it?
4. Has anyone misrepresented you by saying things that weren't true? How did you find courage when others were misquoting you, lying about you and making you look bad?
5. How do you find the strength to bless those who curse you?