

>>>>>> Acts - Lesson 12 <<<<<<<

- 1) Last time, we finished with Peter and the rest of the apostles before the Sanhedrin after being arrested (gently) in the Temple Courts.
- 2) They had been asked a series of questions by the Chief Priest and then replied...

Acts 5:29–33 (NIV)

- 3) So, with that, moving on to a little sanity from an unexpected source...

Acts 5:34–39 (NIV)

- 1) Likely Gamaliel had to settle everyone down first before he could reason with them.
- 2) This is the same Gamaliel who was Paul’s teacher.
- 3) Though, as a Pharisee there were many differences between Gamaliel and the Sadducees, he is still a very unlikely ally of the apostles.
 - a) In truth, he was probably not, he was only attempting to apply some logic to this chaotic situation.
 - b) I am sure, he did not agree with the apostle’s message.
- 4) His idea was really straightforward – since their leader was gone (just like Theudas and the Judas he mentions) they could expect this “preaching” to end shortly.

What do you think Gamaliel is missing? What is the big difference in the followings Judas and Theudas and the followers of the Way at this point?

Number of followers:

Theudas – 400

Judas – no number given. The Scripture simply says “all who followed him were dispersed” (guess - under a thousand)

- 5) We have no way of knowing if Gamaliel knew the number (probably not) but, at this point the number of Christians was over 5000!
- 6) They were also beginning to return to their home countries and spread the message even further.
- 7) Gamaliel’s logical scenario does appear to have had the desired effect.
 - a) Things seem to settle down and the talk of killing them goes away.
 - b) Vs 40 begins by saying: ⁴⁰ His speech persuaded them.
 - c) They must have had at least a small, tiny bit, of an inkling that Gamaliel could be right.

What part of Gamaliel’s argument do you think persuaded them?

If from God they would be unable to stop them? Or

Fear of standing against God Or

That it might just “go away”?

- d) After all, they knew that Jesus’ life witnessed to the fact that He was of God.
 - i) Though they might try to deny it, somewhere inside themselves, they had to acquiesce to that truth.
- 8) Regardless, as we continue, we see, they could not just follow Gamaliel’s final words and let them go – they had to do something.

Acts 5:40b–42 (NIV)

- 1) I am sure that in this situation as in most, there were those members of the Sanhedrin that still wanted to kill them all. (Likely some of the Sadducees in particular)
- 2) The next best thing in the way of a compromise was to flog them and release them.
- 3) I’m sure they had a slim hope that their command not to speak anymore in the name of Jesus” would work or that Gamaliel was right and this would come to nothing.
- 4) WRONG in either case!!!.
- 5) The Romans had at least two types of whips for flogging.
 - a) The more serious of the two had a handle with leather straps attached to it.
 - b) Knots were tied into the straps with bone or sharp metal bits tied onto them.
 - c) This was the device used prior to crucifixion
 - d) The second type was basically the same but without the bone or metal fragments.
 - e) This was the type used on those about to be crucified – it hastened their deaths.
 - f) This is the kind of punishment Jesus anticipated when he spoke to the disciples about their final trip to Jerusalem, and it is what he received prior to his crucifixion (Matt 20:19; 27:26; Mark 10:34; 15:15; John 19:1).
- 6) Most likely, the Jewish instrument for flogging was like the second one.
 - a) It would cause lots of pain but would not kill the victim.
- 7) As we proceed thru our study, Paul will be flogged numerous times and, in all likelihood, with the second type of whip.
- 8) Getting back to this incident, the disciples after being flogged, left the Sanhedrin “rejoicing” having suffered dishonor or embarrassment for the name of Jesus!
- 9) Knowing these guys were in tremendous pain – yet, they were able to rejoice and we can assume share that rejoicing with all their brothers and sisters.
- 10) Verse 42 says a lot with a very few words:
⁴²Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.
 - a) What we see here is *first*, they did not obey the command or the Sanhedrin. AND, they did it right where they were doing it when this last incident started – in the temple courts.
 - i) Obeying the angel and God rather than the Sanhedrin.

- b) **Second**, they were also teaching in houses.
 - i) Likely, these were gatherings where folks would come to hear what one of the apostles had to say concerning Jesus and the Way.

Questions or Comments?

- 11) Looking at Acts timelines, there could be as much as two years between the floggings and what we are about to read next – the choosing of the first 7 deacons.
- 12) Regardless of the amount of time, the problem was one of growth – we know that the Church had grown to over 5000 by this time.
- 13) One would assume that over this period of time, their numbers in Jerusalem were growing at a tremendous rate.
- 14) One might also assume that many of the original believers had returned to their home towns throughout Judea and the rest of the world and were continuing to spread the Gospel there.
- 15) Basically, things were beginning to settle down some.

Acts 6:1–7 (NIV)

- 1) We need to look, at least briefly, at the potential underlying cause of this problem. It is actually two-fold.
 - a) **First**, as with any group that is growing and which consists of individuals from many and varied backgrounds, there will be differences regardless of the hearts involved.
 - i) Especially hearts that are as young in the faith as these were.
 - ii) We have the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews.
 - (1) Hellenistic Jews were mainly those who were NOT living in Jerusalem.
 - (a) They actually came from the diaspora – those who for one reason or another had left the homeland and settled throughout the Roman Empire then, returned.
 - (b) They likely spoke Aramaic and Hebrew and were likely fluent in Greek as well.
 - (2) The Hebraic Jews on the other hand were native Israelites living in the homeland and not part of the diaspora.
 - (a) They probably spoke some Greek but were not as fluent as the Hellenistic Jews.
 - (b) They also spoke Aramaic and Hebrew.
 - (3) Obviously, some if not a lot of cultural differences here.
 - iii) The **Second** part of the problem was a little more subtle.
 - (1) Normally, the families would care for the needs of their widowed relatives.
 - (2) However, we need to remember that in many cases, those normal family ties may have been cut when the widow would be come a member of the Way.

- (3) The same thing is still happening in many parts of the world today. If you become a Christian, you become dead to the rest of your family.
- iv) On the good side of this was that the new family of believers had to take on the responsibilities of the missing family.
- 2) This problem was probably NOT a true matter of neglect.
- 3) It was also likely not the whole group against the whole group – it was more specifically those who were responsible for the distribution of the food and the widows that were being overlooked.
- 4) My guess would be that it was simply a matter of logistics – not having enough people to do the necessary tasks to assure that all the widows were taken care of.
 - a) This would be especially true if the disciples were the only ones involved at this point.
- 5) We need a solution!
 - a) Apostles, hit the road and deliver food to these widow ladies.
 - i) As stated – Not a real good idea.
 - ii) Why – because, as with most of us, we have ministries that we are chosen for
 - (1) God has given us talents (or whatever other terminology we might use) for these ministries.
 - iii) If we are suddenly forced (due to expediency or any other factor) to abandon or not give our whole effort to that ministry, that ministry will suffer.
 - iv) Before we ever embark on such a change, much prayer and consideration must be given
 - (1) We can never assume that any given path is what God wants without prayer and consideration.
 - (2) Not every open door has been opened by God!
 - (3) In this case, I am sure the prayer and consideration did take place.
 - (4) The obvious thing that would suffer without a solution would be the daily teaching of the Gospel and healing of the sick etc. which was being done by the apostles.
- 6) The solution here was of course, to appoint deacons (7) to handle the task that was not being handled.
 - a) Now, as to whether they were the “boots on the ground” folks actually taking the food to the widows or they could have been the organizers – getting others involved to actually do the distribution – is not clear.
 - b) My guess would be perhaps a little of both – we really do not know how many widows were involved in this distribution.
 - c) Either way, it appears to be the solution that was needed.

- 7) Of the seven, Luke makes a special note regarding Stephen – “man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit”.
- 8) As we will see in a moment, just how true that is.
- 9) Before we get to that, we need to be sure we note the results of this decision clearly. In vs. 7, Luke states:

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.
- 10) Due to the apostles preaching and more than normal prayer, we see a significant result:
 - a) Word is spread – I would observe that this was likely not only the apostles but men like Stephen as well.
 - b) Both of those items I think could be expected given the situation – however, the final note here is the a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.
 - c) I think we need to recall, there is always an undercurrent in the Sanhedrin, and among the leaders in general that have doubts about what they were attempting to do.
 - d) There were those who as, Gamliel pointed out, would really like not to be found fighting against God if the Way was of God.
 - e) Obviously, as time has passed, many of those who did perhaps feel that way decided that it was time to stop fighting them and join them – so, they did.

Questions / Comments?

Acts 6:8–10 (NIV)

- 1) As we begin this reading, we can see where and why Luke made the comment he did about Stephen.
- 2) There are some extraordinary characteristics given here regarding Stephen that we really need to look at.
 - a) Full of God’s grace and power.
 - i) The assumption here is that he was extraordinary in his speaking and talking about the salvation offered through the Lord.
 - ii) I think we must assume that he was what we might call “a cut above” the average disciple.
 - b) Performed great wonders and signs among the people.
 - i) One would assume this meant healings and possibly other miraculous signs – perhaps not unlike the apostles.
 - c) Very much Greek speaking – dispute with:

- i) Jews of Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia all of whom would be Greek speakers as well.
 - ii) Collectively, this was probably a group of Jewish slaves and children of Jewish slaves who had been freed by Rome.
 - iii) They had formed their own synagogue in Jerusalem.
- 3) Now, as to the argument – we are not told any details regarding what it was about.
- a) We do know that it stemmed from the opposition these men had to Stephen’s message.
 - b) Likely, it was concerning the teachings of Jesus, and Jesus himself as the Son of God and Messiah.
- 4) We also do not know exactly where and why these arguments started.
- a) A possibility would be that Stephen was attempting to teach (not unlike the apostles) in this synagogue of the Freedmen
- 5) The major point is that Stephen basically out gunned them – they and their arguments were no match for his wisdom and the Holy Spirit supplied by God – so...