

A SURVEY OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

5. THEY CEASED NOT TO TEACH AND PREACH JESUS CHRIST.

Acts 5:42

Adult Sunday School
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Chapter four of the Book of Acts ends with a familiar formula that is found in two places. “Verses 32 – 37 contain another summary of the character of the early Christian fellowship similar to that in 2:42-47. One of the outstanding characteristics of this spirit which filled the church was unity, a sense of oneness that manifested itself in the sharing of material resources.” (Wycliffe p. 1132) Both of these passages seem to form divisions to certain periods of growth in the church. The passage in chapter two concludes the very birth of the church. Chapter four concludes the first persecution of the church by the Jews.

As we begin a survey of chapters 5 through 7 we realize that the church is entering a different phase of its development. In these chapters there are five events that mark the continued growth of the people of the church.

1. The cleansing of the church of Ananias and Sapphira.
2. The power of God on the Apostles

3. The pronouncement of the church “ought to obey God rather than man” (Vs. 5:29b)
4. The Apostles responsibility to the Word and “*seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom*” (Vs. 6:3) are chosen
5. The death of the first martyr, Stephen.

I. THE CLEANSING OF THE CHURCH (5::1-11)

The membership of any church is not made up of perfect people but sinners that are saved by the grace of God. Salvation takes place instantly but Christian growth is a lifelong process. In the early church there were wonderful examples of great faith and kindness. Chapter four ends with just such an example. *“Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.”* (vs. 36-37) His act of generosity was observed by a couple who through envy and greed sinned greatly. Ananias, with Sapphira sold a piece of property and gave part of the proceeds to the church. However, they kept part of the price but told everyone proudly that they were giving it all. They lied to the Holy Ghost and He took their lives. God was cleansing His church. *“And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”* (vs. 1)

II. THE CHURCH IS USED OF GOD TO TOUCH LIVES.

(5:12 – 16)

After the cleansing of the church, there is mentioned in verses 12 and following a great growth of the numbers of the people. The Apostles were used of God to do many great miracles. As a result, many people were drawn to them from the city as well as from towns around Jerusalem. As a result, *“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.”* (vs. 14)

III. THE CHURCH KNOWS RENEWED PERSECUTION

(17- 42)

Another result of the miracles of chapter 5 was the renewed attention from the leadership in the Temple. They saw the people going to this new faith and began to be insecure to the point that they punished the leaders of the church. The Apostles were put in prison and then beaten. The Temple leadership accused them of disobeying the instructions of the Temple and blaming them for the death of Jesus. (cp. 4:13 – 17) The reaction of the Apostles was to say that they would obey God rather than man. They were witnesses of the death and resurrection of Jesus and would continue to preach in His name. The Leaders were very angry and looked for ways that they could be legally put to death. Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, reasoned that there had been others in the past who had claimed to be followers of a Messiah and that

they had come to nothing. If these men were not of God, they too, would die away. If they were of God then the leadership of the Temple would be guilty of fighting against God. *“And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. (Vs. 40-42)*

IV. THE CHURCH GROWS AND GAINS ORGANIZATION (6:1-7)

As the church grew in number, problems of organization began to appear. One of the functions of the church was to care for those who were poor. The Apostles were trying to make sure that food was distributed among those in need as well as attend the study of the Word and teaching the people. With this number of people, it soon became too much for them. It was decided that certain men should be appointed to oversee the distribution of food and care for the poor. These were later called the first deacons. These were men of Great faith and accomplishment. The names are mentioned in chapter 6 verse 7. As a result of this action, *“the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem*

greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” (vs. 7)

V. THE CHURCHES FIRST MARTYR ((6:8 - 7:60)

One of the deacons was a man named Stephen. He was a man *“a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost”* (vs. 5) One day when he was teaching in the synagogue, there arose a dispute with several of the leaders. Stephen reasoned with them and when they could not refute him, they became very angry. Stephen preaches a wonderful sermon that outlines the history of the Jewish people to show how God brought the Messiah to the world. His conclusion to the message was a stinging indictment of these people. *“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? (7:51-52)* Upon hearing his words the crowd began to stone Stephen. As he died, he prayed that God would not hold his murder to their charge. Chapter 7 begins the persecution of the church that would result in the church being spread around the world. In verse 58 a name is mentioned that would soon be synonymous with prison and death for the believers. Saul was consenting to the death of Stephen and would soon be chief among those who would seek to destroy the church.

Ideas to consider:

1) Can you give examples of how church members are not perfect but forgiven? Can you give examples of Church members who have good character?

2) God did many miracles in the early church. Why is He not doing this today?

3) Can you give instances today of where we should obey God rather than man?

4) What kind of man does the Bible teach should serve as a deacon?

Notes:
