

Acts of the Apostles
Luke, the beloved physician
Discussion Session 2
Chapters 6-10
Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible (pgs.)

Outline:

- I. Home missions (Acts 1-12)
The witness to the Jews in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.
Outstanding leader—Peter.
Important city—Jerusalem.
- II. Foreign missions (acts 13-28)
The witness to the Gentiles, to the “uttermost *parts!*”
Outstanding leader—Paul.
Important cities—Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome.

Things to do:

1. Read all of the Book of Acts.
2. Answer the questions and fill out the outline. Use your own words. Do not quote unless the questions asks for that.
3. Be able to locate on the map, the places mentioned in Acts 1-12.
4. Draw Paul’s first and second journeys on the map, and Paul’s third and fourth on the maps provided.
5. Memorize Acts 1:8, 4:12, 16:31 (Optional)
6. Make a report on the life of at least one great missionary.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, how privileged I am to have the book of Acts which not only identifies many good practices to follow, but also many pitfalls to avoid. I pray that I may be prepared in season and out of season, make time to pray in accordance with Your will, and be careful to study the Word of God, so that I may mature in the faith and grow in the grace which You provide. But I also pray that I would be obedient to Your Word, listen to Your instruction, and obey Your commands, so that I may work the works of God and that You may be glorified in my life. This I ask in Jesus' name, AMEN.

Discussion Questions

Home Missions- ACTS 1-12

ACTS 6

1. How many men did the brethren choose to take over the church business of serving tables, looking after the widows, etc.?
_____ Seven _____
2. What were the twelve apostles to do? (6:2,4) _____ Gather, and said to choose seven among them who were filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and they were to give their attention to the prayer and the ministry of the word. _____
3. How is Stephen, one of these deacons, described? (6:8, 10) _____ A man full of God's grace and power, he performed great wonders and signs among the people. _____
4. all manner of false witnesses spoke against him? (6:15) _____ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. _____

ACTS 7

1. After reviewing Israel's history before the council what strong accusation did Stephen make? (7:51-52) _____ He said "you stiff necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors; always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestor did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him"—you have received the law that as given through angels but you have not obeyed it. _____
2. When Stephen looked up into heaven what did he say he saw? _____ He saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. _____
3. On casting him out of the city how did they kill Stephen? _____ They stoned him _____
4. At whose feet were the witnesses' clothes laid? _____ At the Feet of Saul _____
5. What was Stephen's last prayer? _____ He cried out "Lord do not hold this against them." (A connection to Jesus' prayer in Luke "Father Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.") _____

6. Who else had prayed such a forgiving prayer? (Luke 23:24) _____ Jesus on the Cross _____
7. The name Stephen means “crown.” Why would he receive a crown in glory? (Rev. 2:10) _____ “Do not be afraid from what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.” _____
Regardless of our suffering, we will still receive the same crown of our victor, if we remain faithful. .

ACTS 8

1. What was the result of the persecution in Jerusalem? (8:1-4)
_____ The great persecution broke out against the church, everyone except the apostles scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried and mourned the death of Stephen. _____
2. What deacon preached in Samaria?
_____ Philip _____
3. Who in Samaria was rebuked by Philip for offering to buy the power of the Holy Ghost/Spirit? _____ Simon paid to receive the Holy Spirit__ (Acts 8:18-19) _____
4. Whom did Philip see in a chariot near Gaza? _____ The Ethiopian Enoch _____
5. Of whom did the verse speak which the Ethiopian read in Isaiah 53:7-8? (8:30-35) _____ Jesus _____
6. After the Ethiopian had been baptized what happened to Philip? (8:39-40)
_____ The Spirit of the Lord took Philip away. Philip appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. _____

ACTS 9 (1887-1899)

1. Why was Saul going to Damascus? _____ he went to the synagogue and asked for letters saying that he if he crossed any of those who were preaching the good news or “the way” he could arrest them as prisoners of Jerusalem. _____
2. What did he see near Damascus? _____ ”A light from heaven flashed all around him, he hear a voice saying “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute

- me?” This voice was the presence of Jesus, and he was to get up and go into the city and await further instructions. _____
3. What did Saul say when he realized his mistake in persecuting the Christians? (9:6) _____ “He asked who are you, Lord?” _____
 4. How long was Saul blind? _____ He was blind for three days _____
 5. What believer in Damascus visiting Saul, caused him to receive his sight and baptized him? _____ Ananias _____
 6. After Saul was converted, how did the Jews in Damascus treat him? (9:20-25) _____ They were astonished with his turn around, and baffled by his teaching, proving that Jesus is the true Messiah. _____
 7. Who in Jerusalem welcomed Saul into the fellowship of the believers there? _____ Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul was on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. _____
 8. When the Grecians were about to slay Saul where did the brethren send him? _____ The took him to Caesarea, and sent him to Tarsus. _____ (This was Saul’s own birthplace.)
 9. What miracle did Peter perform at Lydda? _____ He raised a dead woman named Tabitha. He told her to get up and he took her hand and helped her to her feet. _____
 10. What were some of the Dorcas’s good works? (9:36, 39) _____ She was doing well and helped the poor, made Peter’s clothes. _____
 11. Why did Peter go from Lydda to Joppa? _____ In Lydda he went to see and heal a man named Aeneas who was paralyzed and be ridden. After that he traveled to a city called Joppa where he met Tabitha later called Dorcas, who died and he raised from the dead. _____
 12. Later with who did Peter stay at Joppa? (9:43) _____ He stayed with a tanner called Simon. A Tanner is someone who dealt with carcasses and strong odors, they were normally outside the walls of the city. _____

ACTS 10

1. Describe Cornelius. _____ Cornelius was a centurion in the Italian Regiment. He was devout and God fearing, gave generously to the poor, and prayer regularly. A truly devout Christian _____

2. Where did Cornelius live? _____ **Cornelius lived in Caesarea** _____
3. What did Peter see in his vision on the house top of Joppa? _____ **He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice called to Peter "Get up, kill and eat.** _____
4. What did God tell Peter about unclean animals? (10:15) _____ **Do not make anything unpure that God has made clean.** _____
5. Also, what people did the Jews consider unclean? (10:28) _____ **Eating with Gentiles.** _____
6. What Gentile in Caesarea did Peter now willingly visit? _____ **Cornelius** _____
7. After Peter preached Christ to the household of Cornelius what amazing thing happened? (10:44, 46) _____ **The Holy Spirit came on all who heard his message, and they spoke in tongues and praised God.** _____
8. Did Peter expect God to do this for the Gentiles? (10:45) _____ **No because they were not considered to be God's own people, but we now understand that God's own people is everyone on earth regardless of race, color, sexual orientation, background, ethnicity, etc.** _____

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your people, Israel, through whom the Messiah was born, and thank You that there is no partiality with God and that all sinners may be saved by grace through faith in Christ. Thank You for my own salvation, and I pray that as we wait for the any day return of our Lord Jesus Christ in the clouds, that many more Jews and Gentiles, men and women, bond and free, old and young, from every race and nation, may come to faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:" (Acts 10:34)

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“And 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.” (Acts 6:7)

Chapter 6:1-7

Choice of Seven

The appointment of the first laymen in the early church, the deacons, was the result of a problem that arose in connection with the ministry of love the apostles had taken upon themselves. We can distinguish the hand of the enemy again in a situation, which was initially meant for good, but which turned sour because of the flaws of human nature. Satan worked upon the capacity for racism and jealousy among the saints.

It is not certain who the “Grecian Jews” were. Some commentators believe that they were visitors. It seems doubtful, however, that those people would be merely visitors who had remained after coming to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. The fact that the problem revolves around widows would make us think that these were people who had taken up residence in Jerusalem or in the country. They may have been Jews who were born outside the country of Israel and who had migrated back to the land of their fathers. Growing up abroad, they spoke Greek and were consequently looked down upon by those who were born in Israel and only spoke Aramaic. Another possibility is that these were actually gentiles who had converted.

The twelve must have delegated the distribution of food and money to others, who had shown partiality to their own race and people. The suggestion that the apostles would take it upon themselves to oversee this ministry would only be to right the wrong. But even that would be too much of a task in a church which numbered several thousand members. The apostles understood their primary task to be “prayer and the ministry of the Word.”

The qualifications for those who were to give themselves to the mundane task of distribution was that they be “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.” The apostles correctly understood the matter not to be merely a question of fair distribution but that it was a spiritual problem.

Incidentally, this matter proves that communism in its pure form cannot exist as long as there are human beings who have a capacity for jealousy and egoism. The controversy is not capitalism versus communism but “the flesh” against “the Holy Spirit.” In a perfect world, capitalism would probably not be able to flourish. The very fact that some people sold their property and divided their excess money was obviously the fruit of the Holy Spirit, although God did not make it into a law.

The apostles never considered the option to cancel the distribution of food and money. They only wanted this ministry of love to be better organized. The election of the deacons also proves that they were in favor of some form of democracy. The communism of the early church was not like communism, as we know it now; there was no dictatorship involved.

We do not know how the election took place, but we are given seven names, among which Stephen, Philip, and Nicolas beg our special attention. The main reason why Luke included this incident in his narrative may well be to introduce Stephen and Philip to us. Stephen would become the first martyr of the church, whose death would ignite the great persecution, and Philip became the bridge of the Gospel to Samaria. Nicolas is called “a convert to Judaism.” This probably made him the only non-Jew in the group. His place of origin, Antioch, may have made him instrumental in the founding of the first church among the gentiles, although this is not specifically mentioned. As we progress in our study, it becomes clearer how well laid is Luke’s plan of narrative in the Book of Acts.

The fact that Stephen is mentioned separately and that he is described as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” seems to indicate that he served as the chairman of the committee. The “faith” mentioned, probably, relates to the gift of healing. He was probably a Hellenistic Jew, which would make him immanently suited for the ministry for which he was chosen. Greek would then have been his native tongue, although he may have spoken Hebrew also.

An immediate result of the reorganization of the church, if we may call it that, was a great increase in the number of adherents. Luke says: “the word of God spread.” He does not mention if that was due to the fact that the apostles could now devote themselves exclusively to preaching; we rather get the impression that Stephen, the layman, was a key figure in this tremendous revival. One of the greatest miracles mentioned is the conversion of a large number of priests.

As we have seen, the majority of priests, if not all, belonged to the party of the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection. Their conversion meant a complete turnabout.

Chapter 6:6-8:3

Occasion of the dispersion; Ministry and Martyrdom of Stephen

It was probably Stephen's ministry, and probably the conversion of the large group of priests that caused opposition against the preaching of the Gospel. This opposition came those who were not natives of Jerusalem. It was difficult for them to understand the condition of the place at that time, but Jews kept coming and going, living abroad, and returning to the temple to take part in celebrations and feasts. The foreigners had their own synagogues and places of worship.

It is mentioned that Jerusalem housed about 480,000 synagogues at the time.

Luke mentions and singles out one group, a group called "the Libertines." But there is a large difference of opinion of this actual word, it is possible that we can narrow it down to three.

1. The word is Latin, and means properly "Freedman," and a man who had been slave and was set at liberty. Many have supposed that these persons were manumitted slaves of Roman origin, but who had come proselyted to the Jewish religion, and who had a synagogue in Jerusalem. It is said that 4000 Jewish Proselytes of Romans slaves made free and were sent at away at one time.
2. These person were Jews by birth, and had been taken captive by the Romans, and then set at liberty, and called "freedman" or "liberties." There were many Jews of this description so there can be no doubt. Pompey the Great, sent large numbers of Jews to Rome. These Jews were set in liberty at Rome and assigned beyond the Tiber for their residence.
3. They took their name from a place which they occupied. This opinion is more probable than from than the others because those named here are named from the countries that they occupied.

Those who live outside a country generally demonstrate greater patriotic fervor than the natives of the country do. Those who took it upon themselves to argue

with Stephen may have had greater fanatical in their desire to maintain the rituals and customs of Judaism than the Jews who lived in the shadow of the temple.

Any suggestion that the temple and the whole complex of ceremonies that were carried out in that building might be a mere image of another dangerous and offensive. That such was the core of Stephen's preaching obvious from his defense as Luke records it in the next chapter. However, in every argument they had with Stephen they were checkmated; an experience that was deflating of a person's ego.

Stephen was unable to convince them that they were wrong, condemning themselves as being in error, they resorted to bribing to take him to court on false charges. Only a few were persuaded by the money to lie. The law stated that at least two witnesses were required for a conviction. We read: "One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."¹⁸⁶ It is also quite likely that Stephen had made statements similar to the ones of which he was being accused. It would be sufficient to misquote him or to quote him out of context in order to make his case look bad enough for a conviction. What Stephen had actually preached is very clear from his defense, which Luke recorded in the next chapter.

Many of the priest who converted were probably not members of the Sanhedrin. If they were this would be difficult to explain.

The Scene is set with Stephen standing before the Sanhedrin with them looking at him intently, and they saw that his face look like the face of an angel. (6:15)

It is suggested that Luke may have borrowed this expression which was most uncommon among Jewish writers. There is a phenomenon that Luke describes is that of the divine appearance of divine glory on the face of Moses after he came down from the mountain where God had spoken. We read: "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony of his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him." The man accused of blaspheming Moses stood before them with the glory of Moses.

It is not meant that there is anything miraculous in the case of Stephen, but its language that denotes calmness, dignity, and confidence in God, all of which were so marked on his countenance that it impressed them with clear proofs of innocence and piety. In some people who may be facing death, that a heavenly place may be or can be seen on their face. This peace is often the greatest peace condemnation to those who observe it. It was probably a sense of guilt that made the Sanhedrin so angry that they killed Stephen on the spot.

We read in Acts 7:1-53, which is more than likely a condensed version, but still quite detailed. Scholars regard the content of this passage as out of place. The pendulum swings from one side to the other.

How was Luke able to reproduce the text of Stephen's address in such detail? We do not have any indication whether the trial was public. Some suggest that maybe Paul was present.

A superficial glance at Stephen's representation of Abraham's call might lead to the thought that he was incorrect in stating that God called him when he was still in Ur. The Genesis account gives the impression that the call came while Abraham was in Haran. Stephen's version was evidently widely accepted by the rabbis of his time. We conclude from this that, when God called Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his father's household, his father, Terah, took the initiative and made the whole family migrate from Ur to Haran, but not to the land which God had promised to Abraham alone. We read: "Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there."¹⁸⁸ It wasn't until "the old man died" (interpret the expression in the way the apostle Paul uses it) that Abraham was free to follow God's call.

There is an insinuation in Stephen's approach that, when God calls man and reveals himself to him, man will always try to obstruct or slow down the realization of that revelation. It wasn't until death of him who wanted to keep the initiative, instead of following the divine leading, that Abraham entered the Promise Land. In beginning with Abraham's call. Stephen established the fact that the resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to their illustrious ancestor.

Stephen gives many suggestions and addresses many ideals, these may not be very obvious to us, but they were definitely understood by members of the court. He quickly reviews the history of salvation, then establishes the fact that the right of circumcision was an outward seal of the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. Paul probably heard this statement and the seed of his later teaching about the place and meaning of circumcision may have been planted in the his heart at this time. The controversy of circumcision, of course had not yet come up, since there had not yet been converts to Christianity among the Pagans.

In his brief account, Stephen peeled off the layers of gloss that tradition had put upon it. In a closer look at their “glorious history” brought up an interesting fact about the long line of rebellion and how it was marked with sin. The origin of this was traced all the way back to the brothers betrayal of Joseph when they sold him to some passing Ishmaelites as a slave, and considered even murdering him.

The Moses came upon the scene and felt a burden to deliver his own people from slavery; they rejected him. This incident of Moses’ intervention in a fight between two Israelite men, after having killed an Egyptian himself, as an indication of his prematurely running ahead of God’s plan with His people. Stephen used this story as an illustration of how Moses, who was in Stephen’s time considered to be the greatest character in Scriptures, was initially rejected by his own people. He predicted the Messiah, which was the point that Stephen was trying to make.

Stephen took more time with the recounting and calling of Moses than any other part of his review. It is possible that that Moses at that time called that God, appeared to a human being in glory and revealed His true identity YHWH, or YAHWEH. Stephen calls the voice that called Moses “an angel.” Where as Exodus calls it “an angel of the LORD.”

One accusation against Stephen was that he spoke against the law. When Moses received the Law on the summit, the people were making their Golden Calf.

One of the most powerful moments in Stephen’s address is when he quotes the Prophet Amos. There is no record that the people of Israel worshipped Idols during their desert journey. Moses does hint at it however, in his farewell

speech. *Also, we note that it is mentioned in the Ten Commandments.* The intent, however, was not to blame the Israelites of Idolatry, but to make mention that their hearts belong to Moloch, but they sacrificed to YHWH. This made it easy for Stephen to make connections and conclusions to prove that leaders proved to be zealous for Moses and the temple, but their hearts did not belong to God.

Stephen did not mention the fact that that tabernacle was constructed in the desert and had been neglected for centuries until the coming of David. He mentioned that the temple was built by Solomon and was an extension of the tabernacle which had been the vehicle of God's revelation in the desert.

The sin of the Pharisees and doctors of the law in Jesus' time was due to how they shifted the focal point of somethings. Jesus had lambasted the leaders of the people by calling them blind. "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, if anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the Temple, he is bound by oath." "You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the Temple that makes the gold sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and everything on it. And he who swears by the Temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it." They worshipped the temple instead of God.

Stephen alluded to King Solomon's words in his inaugural prayer: "But will God really dwell on earth? The heaven's even the highest heavens, cannot contain you. How must less this temple I have built?" He followed this statement with Isaiah's word's: "The LORD says: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? He has not hand made all these things, and os they came into being? declares the LORD.'" This is in a most powerful way, saying that the temple with all its ceremonies and rituals is an empty hull if God is not in it. The members of the Sanhedrin had excluded God from His temple and from their own lives. *Which truly is an extremely important part of human life.* they diverted the worship of God from the person of the Almighty, to a building made by man.

Stephen's defense then is turned into an accusation, thus putting the court on trial. He did this by using Scripture as the sole source of the law. This also served as a warning for the Israelites about possible captivity. God had said: "I sent them into the land ot their enemies—they their uncircumcised hearts are

humbled, and they pay for their sin... These sayings were borrowed from Deuteronomy where we hear Moses say “Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.”

The essence of worship never consists in the facility where it takes place, but in the person who is being worshipped. Jesus mentions this several times, said simply to a Samaritan woman: “A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain or in Jerusalem... Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth.

In chapter 7 verse 52, Stephen asks the question: “Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecuted? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One.”

It may prove to be true that some prophets escaped the wrath of the nation, but the history of Israel can be summed up with the declaration that the people were generally persecuted. Those who spoke in the name of God were the persecuted. Just as Stephen did, Jesus also mentioned this in His sermons. We see allusions to this in pieces in Matthew and other places in the Gospels. In the Sermon on the Mount we read the Beatitude: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”²⁰⁰ His most condemning and compassionate words are found in His accusatory address to the Pharisees in Matthew’s Gospel: “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”²⁰¹ Jesus suggested that the Israelites were the

descendants of Cain rather than of Abraham. Jesus singled out the prophet Zechariah who had been assassinated by order of King Joash.²⁰² The tradition says that Isaiah, who more than anyone else, foretold the coming of the Messiah was sawn in two by order of King Manasseh.

Stephen continues with words from the apostle John, from his first Epistle. His messages even reach back to the fight of Cain and Abel. One thing that was lacking in the courtroom that day was love. Sanhedrin did not show any love or compassion towards Stephen. The way that the persecuted Stephen that day was ruled by the presence of power, and darkness.

Stephen's parting thought is an accusation that they prided themselves of keeping the law to the minutest detail, but they actually broke their law. Jesus referred to this when he said to the same people: "You give a tenth of your spices. Dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law-justice mercy and faithfulness. These more important matters were defined as the two Great Commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and to Love your neighbor as yourself. They never had love for God nor love for their neighbor otherwise they wouldn't be persecuting people for crimes such as these.

Stephen tells them as he ends his sermon that "You have received the law that was put into effect through angels." This has puzzled many for sometime. This accusation outraged the masses. The members of the Sanhedrin, however, did not consider the possibility of throwing away the "worser part of it." These individuals changed from a group of leaders into a raging mob. No sentence was pronounced, and the waiting period between the execution and the sentence was dispensed.

We see an allusion of both heaven and hell at the same time in verse 54-56, which gives us a rare vision. Hell burst open in reaction of the members of the Sanhedrin and heaven open before Stephen's eyes. The dear servant of God saw Jesus rise from His throne and stand up and welcome and embrace him. It appears that several of God's saints are allowed such a vision at the point of death. Death is the ugliest and fiercest foe we face in this life. God hates it more than we do, but Stephen's vision at the moment of his home going is meant to provide us with comfort. God wants us to look forward to the Second Coming. Until then we may comfort ourselves with Stephen's words.

Stephen's last concern is for his murderers. His last prayer was "Lord, do not hold this sin against them," asking God not to enter this murder as evidence against them on the Day of Judgement. This is a direct quote from Jesus' final prayer on the cross "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." This yet again demonstrates God's love for sinners. This is the first instance in Scripture in which a prayer is directed to Jesus.

The Gospel in Samaria 8:4-25

Luke tells us that Stephen's death triggered a great persecution for the church in Jerusalem, one so severe that more of the believers fled the city. However, it seems that Saul was one of the instigators of the Satanic fury. He converted, but yet was still haunted by this previous period of his life. This is evident in his testimony in Acts: "And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him." He also references the epistles: "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." Goes even further to say that "Even though I was once a blasphemer, persecutor, and violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief."

When the people fled, they scattered throughout all a Judea and Samaria and beyond. It is not for certain if everyone except the apostles left, or whether after some time if those who fled returned. However, their lives were more endanger than anyone else. The decision to remain may have been due to the conviction that God wanted them to stay, regardless of the consequences. They possibly also felt that they were under divine persecution. He had said to them: "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles," and: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."²¹⁴

This persecution achieved the exact opposite of its intended goal. The blood of the first Martyr Stephen became the seed of the Church.

Chapter 8:4-40

Philip spread the gospel during a time of oppression. Forced to flee from Jerusalem to Samaria, he preached the gospel there and performed miraculous signs (v4-8). The gospel had now been offered to and accepted by the Samaritans. When Peter and John prayed for them, these Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit (cf Acts 2), confirming that they had been accepted by the Lord into the church.

Luke records the incident of Simon the sorcerer's attempt to purchase the ability to impart the Holy Spirit (8:18-24) to drive the point home: the work of God *cannot* be purchased with money. One whose heart is set on gaining wealth from ministry can have no share in it (v 21). Though Peter's words are a stern warning to the readers of this book, his call for repentance and forgiveness is also meant as a source of great comfort (v. 22-23).

The gospel now spread to Ethiopia (v. 26-40). Just as the angel of the Lord had led Israel through the desert (Ex. 23:20), so here Philip was led in "The desert road—that goes down.... To Gaza" (Acts 8:26) to tell the story about Jesus to an Ethiopian eunuch.

SUMMARIES

Chapter 6

The Choosing of the Seven, Stephen Seized

Background: Exodus 20

A dispute between the Grecian and Christian Jews in Jerusalem cases them to choose seven deacons to take care of the widows of the Church. One of the deacons, Stephen, becomes an enemy of the Jewish leaders because of his bold preaching.

Chapter 7

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin, The Stoning of Stephen

Stephen stands trial for his Christian witness. Before the high priest, he delivers a sermon condemning the rulers of Israel and proclaiming Christ's resurrection. As a result, the people stone Stephen at the feet of Saul.

Chapter 8

The Church Persecuted and Scattered, Philip in Samaria, Simon the Sorcerer, Philip and the Ethiopian

The message of Jesus Christ Spreads beyond Judea into Samaria. Philip encounters a magician named Simon who claims to follow Christ and is baptized. When Peter and John come to Samaria, however, Peter confronts Simon from trying to buy the Holy Spirit. Afterward, Philip baptizes an Ethiopian eunuch who he meets reading the Isaiah Scroll.

Tonight we lift up Deborah, Lily, Shawna, Martha's Grandson Rudy, Patrick, Alexis, all those who are affected by the war, those who are struggling with addiction, the homeless, and all veterans.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your people, Israel, through whom the Messiah was born, and thank You that there is no partiality with God and that all sinners may be saved by grace through faith in Christ. Thank You for my own salvation, and I pray that as we wait for the any day return of our Lord Jesus Christ in the clouds, that many more Jews and Gentiles, men and women, bond and free, old and young, from every race and nation, may come to faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons:” (Acts 10:34)