

# Monday - Week Thirty-three

## Acts Six: The seven deacons

**Summary:** The early church experienced growing pains and responded by calling seven men to help distribute food to widows.

### Background and Comments

- Some of the Jews who opposed Stephen were from Cilicia. Since Cilicia was the birthplace of Paul it is entirely possible that Paul was one of the people trying to argue against Stephen.
- Stephen's opponents couldn't stand up to Stephen's wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. We can imagine Stephen standing up to this group of Jews who wanted to discredit him and his Lord; the Spirit equipped him to proclaim God's Word forcibly.
- Stephen's face shown like an angel's! All of this should have shown these Jews that Stephen's cause was just. Unbelievers can be quite stubborn though.

### Lessons for Today

- In verse four the disciples said that they needed to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word (preaching and teaching). This is a job description for your pastor. This point has been made many times in the devotion guide but it's worth making again: your pastor must concentrate his efforts on prayer and proclamation of the Word (whether that is in the pulpit, the classroom or in the home). Have you and your church made every effort to take other jobs away from him? Once a year the church council needs to review what your pastor is spending time on. The whole congregation will benefit from this disciplined approach.
- The apostles didn't try to take on added responsibilities they couldn't handle. The lesson for us is obvious. God has not called any of us to do it all. God has things for every Christian to do!
- The Jews couldn't match Stephen's wisdom so they brought false witnesses against him. People still slander Christians today. Have you ever been slandered because of your faith?

**Read:** Psalm 140; 1 John 3

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, give my pastor Stephen's wisdom, courage and dedication. Help him to faithfully study the Word of God and to bring the concerns of our church to You in prayer. In Jesus' name; Amen.

## Tuesday - Week Thirty-three

### Acts Seven: Stephen's Speech

**Summary:** Stephen defended himself by recounting Israel's history and then reminding them that they had killed the Son of God.

#### Background and Comments

- Stephen's speech was a recounting of God's grace to the Israelites. He was showing these Jews that he was not blaspheming God at all; he was talking about God's love.
- Stephen made the point that God does not live in houses (temples) made by men because he had been accused of speaking against the temple. Stephen was pointed them beyond the temple and all its sacrifices to the ultimate Sacrifice, Jesus.
- The first verse of chapter eight tells us that Paul (Saul) was there giving his approval to Stephen's stoning. In 7:58 we read that everyone laid their cloaks at Paul's feet. There are some scholars that argue that crowds laid their clothes at the feet of the lead prosecutor. Was Paul Stephen's main accuser? We don't know for sure - but the possibility exists.

#### Lessons for Today

- The main theme of Stephen's final sermon was that the Jews were just like their fathers when they rejected God. Israel had a long history of rebellion; they had now rebelled against Jesus, God's Son. Stephen's courage amazes us. He spoke the truth even though his very life was at risk. What risks do you face as you live your Christian life?
- When God allowed Stephen to look into heaven he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Usually we read of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. Perhaps Jesus was standing because He was preparing to welcome another saint into heaven. Jesus cares for you as much as He cared for Stephen. Jesus is intimately interested in your life right now.
- Stephen prayed that God would not hold this sin against these people. Imagine the impact that prayer had on everyone there ... especially on St. Paul. God answered Stephen's prayer; He forgave their sins.

**Read:** Psalm 141; 1 John 4.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, sometimes You put me in a position that I might suffer for my faith. Forgive me for the times I have failed You. Give me courage when I am in that position again. Amen.

# Wednesday - Week Thirty-three

## Catechism Review

Read Questions 272-274.

1. Baptism gives us the greatest gifts we will ever receive: the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil and eternal salvation. Take some time to analyze how all three of these blessings are connected. Write down your thoughts.

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2. Explain: the devil hates to see little babies baptized.

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3. Would you agree or disagree: baptism saves you.

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4. Would you agree or disagree: everyone who is baptized will be saved. Explain.

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5. Some churches place the baptismal font in a prominent place in their church so that people are constantly reminded of their baptism. How could you remind yourself of your baptism more often than you do?

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**Read:** Psalm 142; 1 John 5.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for all the blessings that You give me in baptism. Help me to remind other members of my congregation of these same blessings they have. In Jesus' name I pray; Amen.

# Thursday - Week Thirty-three

## Acts Eight: the Church Struggles and Grows

**Summary:** The devil attacked the Church with renewed fury through Paul. The devil must have been happy about this new young tool in his army.

### Background and Comments

- Verse three says that Paul began to destroy the church. The Greek word translated “destroy” means to be ravaged by a wild animal. Paul’s single minded purpose was to destroy the church. He used the incredible gifts (and Paul was a very gifted person!) God had given to him in exactly the opposite way God had intended. The same thing still happens today.
- Philip encountered Simon the sorcerer and converted him. This man who had been a force for evil now became a Christian. As we see from later developments Simon still struggled with the sin of pride and greed. The Bible never tells us what happened to Simon after Peter’s rebuke.
- The Ethiopian needed help understanding the Bible. Each one of us can use this kind of help sometimes. Where should we get that help? First of all we can pray about it. Second we can continue to read the Bible; the Bible is its own interpreter. Third we ask our pastor for help. There are many good commentaries written (our Synod’s “People’s Bible” series is very good).

### Lessons for Today

- The devil persecuted the church and caused it to scatter. In his haste to destroy the church the devil actually helped to make it grow! Wherever Christians went they shared the life-changing news with other people. God is powerful and wise enough to use even the most evil plans of the devil.
- God certainly guided Philip and the Ethiopian. The Ethiopian just happened to be reading a passage about Jesus from Isaiah when Philip was near his chariot. God often puts us into “perfect position” to witness to others. We need to remain alert so that we can see these opportunities. Pray that God would give you many chances to share your faith.
- The Ethiopian went away rejoicing because he had heard about Jesus? Do you “go away rejoicing” too?

**Read:** Psalm 143; 2 John.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving me Your Word. As I read and meditate on the Bible please give me understanding so that I can then share it with others. I pray in the name of Jesus; Amen.

## Friday - Week Thirty-three

### John - Lesson Four: Jesus first disciples (1:35-51)

1. At the time of Jesus there were many rabbis. Young men gathered around these famous teachers to learn as much as they could. The brightest students went on to become rabbis. How were Jesus' disciples similar to these students? How were they much different?
2. Luther says that Jesus called "poor fishermen, good, simple, uncouth bumpkins". Why do you think Jesus chose the type of people He did to be His apostles?
3. Andrew doesn't get as much attention in the Bible as his brother. (We can see that from verse 40) Andrew seems to have been a down to earth, steady and humble disciple. It was Andrew who found the boy with the food for the feeding of the 5,000. Andrew led a group of Greeks to Jesus in John 12:20-22. Why is it often harder to be an Andrew than a Peter?
4. Nathaniel is not mentioned often in the Bible. Jesus tells us that he had integrity. Why is that valuable for a disciple of Jesus?
5. When did Nathaniel get to see "greater things?"

What great things have you seen?

**Read:** Psalm 144; 3 John.

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, Philip and Andrew didn't do anything spectacular - they simply invited people to come and hear Jesus. Let me also invite people to come and hear Jesus in the Word of God. In Jesus' name; Amen.