

Jesus Builds – the book of Acts

Lesson Nine | Acts 5:17-6:7

Background

The book of Acts was written by the physician, Luke, as a continuation of his Gospel. Jesus said he would build his church and Acts is the earliest history we have about that. It begins with the Ascension on Mount Olivet and then tracks the development of the early church with a particular focus on Peter in the early chapters and Paul in the later chapters, taking us to the early AD 60s.

Context

Peter and John were instructed to stop preaching Jesus (4:18) but they refused (4:19-22). After the events of Acts 5:1-11 when Ananias and Sapphira were struck down for lying to the Holy Spirit about the price of the property they sold, the apostles continued preaching Jesus and God validated their message with signs and miracles. (5:12-16) This stirs up the Jewish leadership again and lands the apostles in jail.

Bible Study Tip

A great study tool to own is a Bible Dictionary. This is an encyclopedia of many of the names and terms we find in our Bibles.

Intensifying Opposition to Christianity

1. As in 3:1-4:5, the preaching of the apostles accompanied by signs and miracles again leads to their arrest and being brought before the Jewish Sanhedrin in 5:17-42. But the opposition is intensifying as now the Sanhedrin is thinking about imposing the death penalty. (5:33)
2. The opposition we see here will culminate in the martyrdom of Stephen, which in turn will lead to the dispersion of Christians from Jerusalem into other areas.
3. **Jealousy:** The Sadducees are “jealous” (5:17) because of the success of the Christian message so they have the apostles jailed.
4. **Jailbreak:** Luke spends little time with the miraculous jailbreak (5:19-20) because the climax is the subsequent Sanhedrin meeting and the speech of Gamaliel, a leading Rabbi.
5. **Another trial:** After the jailbreak the apostles are once again brought before the Sanhedrin and interrogated. (5:26-32) NOTE there is no mention of the embarrassing jailbreak.
6. **Gamaliel:** Because the apostles are intent on continuing to preach Jesus the Sanhedrin wants to execute them (5:33), but Gamaliel changes their mind.
 - Gamaliel I was grandson of the famous Rabbi Hillel and had significant influence from about AD 25-50
 - He held the title of Nasi (or president) of the Sanhedrin
 - The Jewish *Mishna* states: “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died.”
 - Gamaliel’s best known pupil was the apostle Paul (Acts 22:3)
7. Gamaliel advises that the Sanhedrin leave the Christian movement alone because if God is not in it, it will fizzle out like other well known movements.
8. As the church grows, there is a dispute about whether Greek-speaking and native Hebraic Jewish widows are being treated equally in the daily distribution of food. (6:1)
9. The “Twelve” elect exception men (6:3) to take on the task of providing for the widow.
10. **Deacon Prototypes:** While not called “deacons” they are at least deacon prototypes under the authority of the apostles.
11. Note that Stephen is listed first. He will be the first martyr.