

20-21 Bible Study #7

10/27/20

Current Bible Study

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Review of Last Week

- We began with a look back at Peter's message to the men and women from around the Roman Empire attending the Feast of Pentecost concerning the Good News of the early Church
- 3000 were baptized into the community in one day (offset those lost at Sinai)
- They were told to devote themselves to the teaching of the Apostles, fellowship, prayer and the breaking of the bread
- Peter and John entered the temple and healed the man lame from birth
- Then we saw Peter's message to the Jews in the temple concerning the healing of the man who was lame from birth by the name of Jesus, a man they killed whom God raised from the dead
- This message aroused the interest and condemnation of the Sadducees who had them arrested and thrown into jail (remember they did not believe in life after death)
- This event led to the addition of 5000 to the church

Review of Last Week (Cont)

- The next day they were called before the Sanhedrin where they again defended themselves by accusing the leadership of killing Jesus whom God raised from the dead
- After a warning from the Sanhedrin, Peter and John refused to stop preaching and in fact continued to preach the message of the risen Jesus (from God)
- They returned to the community rejoicing and praising God
- We then were told about the decision to live in communion by pooling all resources (may have been tied to predicted destruction of Jerusalem)
- We also learned that frequent Eucharistic celebrations were part of the early church

Acts 5

Acts 5

- **Acts 5:1-11** *“But a man named Ananias with his wife Sapphira sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back some of the proceeds, and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles’ feet...And great fear came upon the whole church, and upon all who heard of these things”*
 - The economic situation facing the early church in Jerusalem was dire
 - Through the “gift of tongues” they were converging a large number of people very quickly
 - This required that the members sell everything they had as quickly as possible in order to provide for all the additional members
 - They also were waiting for the command to leave Jerusalem in a hurry

Acts 5 (Cont)

- In this case, *Ananias* and his wife, who were members of the community, pretended to sell everything for the good of the community, but retained a portion for themselves
- They, in fact, lied to the community and to the Holy Spirit
- This led to their demise for lying to the Holy Spirit
- Paul will remind us of the dire nature of the situation as he collected funds for the Jerusalem church from the churches he established throughout the Roman Empire

Acts 5 (Cont)

- **Acts 5:12-16** *“Now many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon’s Portico...and they were all healed”*
 - As more and more joined the church, some even carried their sick into the streets hoping that if Peter passed by at least his shadow might fall upon and heal them
 - Father pointed out that this formed the basis for our understanding of the power of relics
 - The belief was, that if one touches something (a garment, a piece of skin or bone) from a holy person, you were touching God
 - We can see this in the Old Testament when a man was raised from the dead after his body touched the corpse of *Elisha (2nd Kings 13:20-21)*
 - We also saw people being cured by touching Jesus’ garments and later those who touched Paul were healed
 - Unfortunately, some non-Catholics see this practice as idolatry, even though they must admit that it was Biblical

Acts 5 (Cont)

- **Acts 5:17-26** *“But the high priest rose and all were with him, that is, the party of the Sadducees, and filled with jealousy they arrested the apostles and put them in the common prison...afraid of being stoned by the people”*
 - This objection was coming from the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection or even that it was possible that a man could be raised from the dead
 - It would appear that the Pharisees, who had been causing most of the problems against the apostles, were silent at this point
 - Father suggested that this might have been happening because the Pharisees were converting to the New Way in droves
 - Thus, Peter and John would eventually have to stand before the Sanhedrin

Acts 5 (Cont)

- **Acts 5:27-32** *“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council....And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him”*
 - Once again, Peter keeps on blaming them for the death of Jesus
 - He tells them that he must obey God rather than men
 - Father said that Peter was not very ecumenical!
 - But, he was preaching the truth
 - He gave them another jab when he accused them of “hanging Jesus on a tree” which was considered a curse in Deuteronomy
 - This was a very bad accusation because as he said, “God raised Jesus from the dead”

Acts 5 (Cont)

- **Acts 5:33-42** *“When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them...They did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”*
 - There are several references in the New Testament to the great rabbi Gamaliel
 - As a respected teacher, they obeyed him when he asked that Peter and John be put outside the chamber so he could speak to the Sanhedrin privately
 - He pointed out that men had appeared from time to time in the past and acquired a significant following

Acts 5 (Cont)

- But, each time after the leader died, the group folded up and disappeared
- He suggested that if Jesus was not from God this would most likely happen
- But, if he was from God they would find themselves opposing God!
- Father suggested that *Gamaliel* considered that these events concerning Jesus might be true because he (Gamaliel) was a Pharisee who believed in the resurrection from the dead
- There is an early Church tradition that *Gamaliel*, along with his family, were converted and baptized by Peter and Paul

Acts 6

Acts 6 (Cont)

- **Acts 6:1-6** *“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews... and laid hands upon them”*
 - Peter provided a detailed explanation of who the *Hellenist* and *Hebrew* were at this point in the early church
 - First, at this point in time, everyone who entered the early church was a Jew
 - At that time, there were two distinct groups of Jews who practiced the Law:
 - The ethnic Jews living in Israel who spoke Aramaic (the majority) – the Hebrews
 - Those who converted to Judaism as proselytes, and ethnic Jews living in the diaspora who spoke Greek (a minority) – the Hellenists
 - The first group looked upon the second group as second-class citizens
 - Both groups practiced circumcision and Kosher
 - Members from both groups were entering into the New Way of Judaism along with the same set of prejudices (at this point Gentiles had not started joining the church)

Acts 6 (Cont)

- Here, in **Acts 6**, we see the Aramaic speaking ethnic Jews are being called the *Hebrews*
- The Greek speaking ethnic Jews and proselytes were called the *Hellenists*
- The same ration continued in the early church as seen among the Jews
- What was going in the church was that the *Hebrew* converts were not providing equal care to the widows of the *Hellenists'* converts as they were to their own
- The *Hellenists* complained about this injustice to the Apostles and sought redress of the matter
- The solution was to select 7 *Hellenist* men (Greek speaking) to serve as helpers (Deacons) to the Apostles to help in this matter
- You can see from the names of the seven that they were Greek speakers

Acts 6 (Cont)

- **Acts 6:7** *“And the word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith”*
 - Father speculated that “priest” in this passage might have been a member of:
 - The Levitical priesthood among the Sadducees who were converting from the temple to the new way
 - The Essene community in Jerusalem, as all Essenes were considered to be priests
 - The *Essene* quarter of first century Jerusalem eventually became the Christian quarter as the *Essenes* simply seemed to drop out of history

Acts 6 (Cont)

- **Acts 6:8-12** *“And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people...and they brought him before the council”*
 - Again, we can see some of the divisions within the city as *Stephen* disputed in the synagogues of the Greek speakers
 - Father reminded us that there were a variety of Jewish synagogues within *Jerusalem* at that time (for it was there that the people read and discussed the scriptures)
 - The scriptures were either presented in Greek (from the Septuagint) or in Aramaic
 - The minority of the Jewish synagogues in *Jerusalem* read the scriptures in Greek
 - Thus, when Stephen presented his argument, it was in Greek

Acts 6 (Cont)

- **Acts 6:13-15** *“and set up false witnesses who said, This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law...all who sat in council saw that his face was like the face of an angel”*
 - The holy place was the temple
 - There were people who could be hired as professional false witnesses to bring accusations against someone
 - Father indicated that most likely Stephen said some of things
 - The same tactic was used against Peter and Jesus
 - The truth was that the temple was going to be destroyed in 40 years and the customs of Moses would be changed, but the people did not know that
 - This was all about the new covenant instituted by Jesus which was totally different from the old covenant (**Jeremiah 31:31**)