

Acts of the Apostles

Week 7: Acts 5:17-6:7

The Apostles Arrest and Miraculous Escape (5:17-26)

“Go...and tell the people all about this new life.”

- The success of the apostles' ministry (5:12-16) provoked a jealous response from the High Priest and his associates who had the apostles thrown in jail (v 17-18).
- In the night, an angel of the Lord set them free and then sent them right back to the temple to continue preaching “about this new life” (NIV) / “the whole message of this Life” (NASB) (v 20).
- A bit of comedy then ensued when the Sanhedrin met to try the apostles but couldn't find them (v 21-24).
- Eventually, someone discovered that they were back in the temple courts teaching the people, the very thing the High Priest didn't want them doing (v 25).
- Once more, the captain of the temple guard went and retrieved the apostles – this time peacefully because he realized that the people were on the apostles' side (v 26).

The Accusation and Peter's Response (5:27-32)

“We must obey God rather than human beings!”

- The trial opened with the high priest reminding the apostles of the prohibition against preaching about Jesus (vv 27-28; see also 4:18)
 - o The apostles violated that prohibition by filling Jerusalem with the teaching.
 - o They also were accusing the leadership of murdering “this man” implying that they deserved divine retribution.
- Peter (and the other apostles) restated their previous position (see 4:19).
 - o They must obey God rather than human beings (v 29).
 - o The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after they crucified him (v 30).
 - Peter's point is simple and direct, the leaders stand in opposition to the very God they claim to serve.
 - They cannot avoid the guilt of his death by blaming it on the Romans.
 - o God exalted Jesus to his right hand as “Prince and Savior” for the purpose of bringing Israel to repentance (v 31).
 - The language recalls the messianic Psalms (Psalm 110:1) and echoes descriptions of Moses.
 - Jesus is the Messiah who makes it possible for people's sins to be forgiven if they repent and turn to God.
 - This offer is even available to the leaders of Israel if they repent and turn to God in Christ.

- The apostles were witnesses of these things along with the Holy Spirit (v 32). The leaders of the Temple should be able to see God's hand at work in the apostles' lives if they were not so hardhearted.

Gamaliel's Advice and the Apostles' Release (5:33-42)

"If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men."

- The leaders responded to Peter's call to repentance with anger and want to put all the apostles to death (v 33).
- A Pharisee named Gamaliel intervened.
 - The Pharisees, though opponents of Jesus in the gospels, show up more favorably in Acts. This may be in part because unlike the Sadducees, they believed in both angels and the eventual resurrection of the faithful.
 - They would be more open to the idea that God was doing something new.
- Gamaliel suggested a more moderate approach to the apostles.
 - Messianic wannabes come and go, he noted, but they all eventually die away (vv 35-37)
 - Leave them alone and the movement will likely fade away on its own (v 38).
 - If it is from God, you couldn't stop it anyway and you don't want to end up being opposed to God (v 39).
- The Sanhedrin decided to follow this more moderate approach which still included floggings and threats and did nothing to keep the apostles from continuing to preach the gospel (vv 40-42).
- The apostles considered persecution a reason for rejoicing since they were "counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (v 41).

The First Deacons (6:1-7)

- The growth of the church created some administrative issues when some of the Hellenistic Jews complained that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (v 1).
 - These widows would not have had the same built in social networks since they had spent most of their lives outside of Israel proper.
 - It's clear that the early church took seriously the call to care for widows.
- They appointed seven deacons to take over the task of caring for widows (vv 2-6).
 - This was an important job, and the men are to be "full of the Spirit and wisdom" (v 4).
 - Their names indicate that these men were all Hellenistic Jews.
 - The laying on of hands probably wasn't a formal ordination in the way we think of today, but a blessing and commissioning for the task at hand.
- The word of God continued to spread, and the church continued to grow (v 7).
 - This is the first time in Acts that the believers are called disciples.
 - The priests who joined the church were likely poor priests like Zechariah (see Luke 1:5-23) and not those of the wealthy aristocracy that opposed the church.

Sources

Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

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