



Acts Study Week 3

Opening scripture verse: Acts 6:6 2. & Opening prayer

- Welcome
- Announcements

Introduction to the study

“Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life” (11:18). Equipping Leaders for Mission - The Book of Acts chapter 6 opens with a growing church that is experiencing some growing pains along ethnic lines. The Hellenists (Jewish Christians from the diaspora whose native language and dominant culture are Greek) complained that the Hebrew leaders (local Jewish Christians whose native language is Aramaic / Hebrew) were neglecting the needs of the whole community. This crisis results in the twelve apostles calling upon the Greek speaking community to choose leaders to meet the needs of the growing church.

The community selects seven leaders (notice all seven have Greek names 6:5), whom the apostles commission for ministry by prayer and the laying on of hands (6:6). These seven deacons (meaning servants) are called to serve the community, while the apostles will focus on prayer and preaching (6:4).

Stephen is one of the seven deacons called and commissioned to serve the community, but in Acts chapter 6, he witnesses by speaking in a local synagogue. Stephen is arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, where he gives a long speech reciting select portions of Israel's history. He ends his discourse by accusing the Jewish religious leaders of killing the prophets, resisting the Holy Spirit, and betraying and murdering Jesus. The religious leaders are enraged by Stephen's accusations. He is executed and becomes the first Christian martyr. It is at Stephen's death, that we meet Saul, who approves of Stephen's execution (8:1a). The death of Stephen ushers in a period of persecution against the church in Jerusalem, forcing many followers of Jesus to scatter into Judea and Samaria, recalling Jesus' commission of 1:8b.

After the death of Stephen, the spread of the Gospel is both geographic and ethnic. Philip witnesses to both the Samaritans (8:4-13) and to an Ethiopian official (8:26-40). Peter witnesses to the Samaritans (8:14-25), to those living on the coastal plain of Judea (9:32-42), and to a Gentile Roman soldier named Cornelius (10:1-11:18). When Peter reports back to Jerusalem, the leaders of the church praise God,

Equipping Leaders for Mission

As the Jesus movement spreads into Samaria, Judea, and beyond, the church in Antioch becomes an outpost for the Gentile mission (11:19-30). It is in Antioch where the disciples are first called Christians (11:26c). The disciples are joyfully fulfilling the commission of Jesus (1:8b), but all is not well. The Prophet Agabus predicts the coming of a severe famine (11:28), the Apostle James is executed, and Peter is arrested and imprisoned (12:1-5). Though Peter escapes from prison, he is forced to flee to Caesarea (12:6-19). And lest we forget about Saul, who was present at Stephen's death and led the persecution of the church (8:1-3). We will learn more about Saul in an upcoming.

Opening Reflection Questions

1.. Think about a great leader you know or have known, and then respond to the following questions: Are leaders born or framed? Is leadership a gift that is bestowed? Or is leadership a skill that may be learned?

2.. "... and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians" (11.26). When people ask about your "faith designation", how do you respond? Do you respond, "I'm Lutheran" or "I'm Catholic" or "I'm Baptist"? What if you simply chose to respond, "I'm a Christian" or "I'm a disciple of Jesus"? What's the difference? Do you prefer one way of responding over the other? Why?

Study and Conversation A. Read Acts 6:1-7

1. What problem does this passage present for the newly formed church?

2. What is the solution that the twelve apostles offer? Why didn't they volunteer to be the solution? (6:2-4)

Equipping Leaders for Mission

1.. Can you think of current examples where communities are divided along ethnic lines? What do you consider some of the problems to be? Brainstorm with your study group two or three solutions to the problems you just considered.

2. How did the twelve apostles show good leadership in this passage?

3. What happens in an organization or community of faith when leaders fail to lead? Can you share an example when you or an organization you know experienced a "leadership failure"?

4. What might we learn from the early church leaders about resolving conflicts and differences?

3. The church is always in need of gifted and skilled spiritual leaders. Can you think of someone that you know who might make a good pastor? If yes, brainstorm with your study group about how you might encourage that person(s) to consider serving as a leader in the church.

Read Acts 11:19-30. After Cornelius (a Gentile, Roman soldier) and his household receive the Holy Spirit and are baptized (10:44-48), Peter returns to Jerusalem to provide a report to the leaders of the church. The leaders are delighted to learn that God is doing a new thing by including Gentiles in the Jesus movement (11:18b). As the church grows beyond its geographic and ethnic borders, the city of Antioch (in the Roman province of Syria) begins to play a greater role in God's mission to reach "the ends of the earth".

Closing Question:

What is your one take away from today's study?

With whom might you share this take away this week?

Equipping each other for mission

1. What are a few key events that occurred in the city of Antioch during this time? (11:20-21)

(11:22)

(11:25-26)

2. How do you think today's meaning of the term "Christian" differs from what the folks in Antioch meant by the term "Christian"?

Homework

- Read the Book of Acts chapter 9 and 13-15
- Work through Study #4

Closing Prayer:

O God, give us grace to set a good example to all among whom we live, to be just and true in all our dealings, to be strict and conscientious in the discharge of every duty; pure and temperate in all enjoyment, gracious and generous and courteous toward all; so that the mind of Jesus Christ may be formed in us and all may know that we are his disciples; in whose name we pray. Amen.