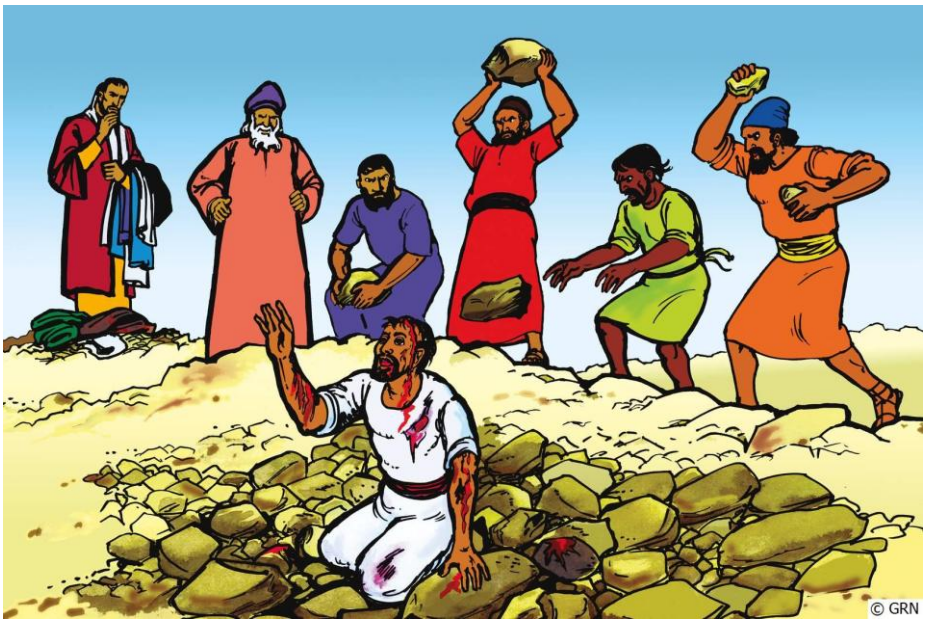
The Early Church of Jesus Christ

A Bible teaching commentary on the Acts of the Apostles in easy-to-read English

Written by Fred Morris



The apostle Stephen stoned to death watched by Saul

Acts Unit 3 of 12

Chapters 5:1-7:60

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ACTS CHAPTER 5.

God punishes Sin.

Sin separates us from God. He sent Jesus to die for sinners so that we can be saved by God through the punishment Jesus received in our place. When we repent and receive a new life we should leave our old lives and bad habits behind us.

A married couple who had joined the believers sold some land. They took some of the money to Peter. They told him it was all the money they got for their land, but it was only part of the money. They lied. This is called 'deception' and it is a sin. Peter did not say that keeping some of the money was wrong, but telling a lie about it was wrong. They could do what

Peter and the woman who lied about her money

they wished with the money, but they could not lie to God (5:4).

Peter said, "Satan ... made you lie to the Holy Spirit ... You have lied to God" (5:3 to 4). When Peter said this, the man fell dead at his feet.

Three hours later his wife came in and told the same lie. "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?" Peter asked her. She, too, fell down dead (5:9 to 10).

'The whole church ... were filled with fear' (5:11). We all deserve punishment when we sin against the Spirit of God. He wants us to repent (1 Peter 3:10 to 12).

God sends his Angel to set the Apostles free.

Every day more and more people believed in the Lord Jesus. The believers met together in the Temple courtyards on the east side of the Temple in Jerusalem (5:12). Many people came from far and near to hear their teaching and to see miracles of healing by the apostles in the name of Jesus. This made some of the Jewish leaders very angry and jealous, so they put the apostles in prison (5:18).

During the night, God sent an angel to them. He opened the doors of the jail and brought them out (5:19). The angel told them, "Go! Stand in the Temple courts and tell the people all about this new life" (5:20). They obeyed and went to the Temple courtyards early the next day to teach the people.

The Good News of Jesus gives new life to us all: we have all done wrong; we are all sinners (1 John 1:10; Romans 3:23). When people hear the message of God, and faith grows in

their hearts, they confess their sins and turn back to God. They believe the Good News and God forgives them by His grace and mercy (Romans 10:10; Ephesians 2:8-9). They are 'born again'. They become 'a new creation' (2 Corinthians 5:17). A new person! We are forgiven when we repent because of the sacrifice of Jesus. He took the punishment for sin and died in our place.

That same morning the Jewish leaders met together in the courtyards. They sent officers to bring their prisoners from the jail, but they came back to say, "We found the prison locked ... The guards were standing at the doors. But when we opened the doors, we did not find anyone inside" (5:22 to 23). The apostles were found outside, preaching in the name of Jesus.

The apostles spoke boldly to the Jewish court. They had a very strong faith in Jesus (5:29). They understood very clearly the truth about Jesus and about God's plan for Jews and other nations (5:30 to 32).

The Jewish leaders wanted to kill the apostles (5:33). But one of the chief leaders said, "Men of Israel. Think carefully about what you plan to do with these men... Let me give you some advice. Leave these men alone! Let them go! If these plans and actions are only human, they will fail. But if their plans come from God, you will not be able to stop these men. You will only find yourselves fighting against God" (5:34 to 39). These are wise words!

The court ordered the apostles to be whipped. Then they ordered them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus (5:40). They let the apostles go free, but they continued to teach.

They were full of joy. 'Day after day, they kept teaching in the temple courts and from house to house. They never stopped telling the Good News that Jesus is the Christ' (5:41 to 42).

In many countries of the world, the Christian church has grown during times of persecution. Today many Christian believers are in prison. Many are tortured because of their faith. Some die and their spirits go to Heaven. Many survive and God brings revival with miracles of healing and deliverance and other signs and wonders.

ACTS CHAPTER 6.

Preparing the Church to grow.

More and more Jews were joining the Christian church in Jerusalem (6:1). Soon they needed more people to help share food for the poor and the widows. This needed to be shared fairly to avoid complaints. They needed extra helpers and teachers to enable the church to keep growing.

The apostles asked the believers to choose seven men. Notice how they chose them:

- They understood that this work of serving others was important.
- They called a church meeting.
- They chose the men to do this work so that the apostles could be free to teach (6:2).
- They chose men who were wise and full of the Holy Spirit (6:3).
- The apostles laid their hands on the seven men they chose and prayed with them and for them (6:6).

The result of choosing church helpers who were filled by the Holy Spirit was:

- Everyone was pleased (6:5).
- God's message, the Good News of Jesus, continued to spread (6:7).
- The numbers of believers in Jerusalem continued to grow (6:7) and included many of the Temple priests.
- One of the chosen workers performed miracles among the people (6:8).

The Work and Witness of Stephen.

God uses ordinary people to do wonderful things. When we preach the Good News, through the Holy Spirit, God calls and saves sinners. He delivers them from the grip of sins that hold them fast. God does 'signs and wonders', and He does them through anyone He chooses. He uses anyone He wants to use (Hebrews 2:4).

Stephen was an ordinary man, but 'full of faith and the Holy Spirit' (6:5,8). He helped to share out the money so that poor people could buy food. God also used him to do miracles. Everywhere Stephen went he told people about Jesus and His power to save them from their sins. Some Jewish leaders believed and began to follow the teachings of Jesus (6:7).

Some of the Temple leaders opposed Stephen (6:9). Stephen's talk made them angry, but they could not deny his wisdom or the Spirit of God who spoke through him (6:10). So they went out and paid some men to tell lies about Stephen in court (6:11,13). Satan often uses lies to attack the truth from God.

'We have heard him speak words against God's Law and this Temple', they said. Stephen was speaking *for* God, but they said he was speaking *against* God. 'Blasphemy' means saying evil things about God (6:11).

So the crowds and the Jewish leaders were angry with Stephen (6:12). Stephen remained calm: 'his face was like the face of an angel' (6:15).

ACTS CHAPTER 7.

Stephen speaks to the Jewish Leaders.

The High Priest ruled over the Court of the Jews. He asked Stephen, "Are these things true?" (7:1) Stephen answered him this way. He spoke about the history of the Jews; how God made promises to Abraham and Moses. He said that God gave laws to help the nation of Israel to know Him and to live to please Him. Stephen said that the Jews did not listen to the Spirit of God. When God sent prophets they killed them (7:51 to 52). They did not obey God's Law, but worshipped idols, and they sacrificed their children and worshipped the stars in the sky. Because of this, God let the Jews go as slaves to a foreign land (7:43).

Stephen reminded the Jewish leaders what God had done:

- It was God who called Abraham to live in the land where the Jews were now living (7:2 to 4).
- It was God who promised Abraham that his family would live in the land (7:5).
- God also told him that for 400 years his family would live in a foreign land (Egypt) and would be slaves, but afterwards would come back to this land (7:6 to 7).

- It was God who saved baby Moses so that many years later he would lead the family of Jacob (Israel) to the Promised Land 7:17 to 22).
- God waited patiently for many years to call Moses after he ran away to another land (7:23 to 34).
- It was God who spoke to Moses at the burning bush. God used Moses to lead the Jews back to the Promised Land (7:30 to35).
- It was God who told Moses about the Prophet who would come (the Messiah) (7:37).

Stephen told them that their ancestors did not obey God (7:51) and did not listen to Moses or the prophets of God from long ago (7:52).

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