

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
NOTES AND QUESTION FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY

PART SEVEN - CHAPTERS 6 AND 7

We need to know the Devil's schemes.(II Cor.2:11) The book of Acts is a good place to find out because his schemes have not changed. He still uses plan A - stick to good works and keep quiet about Christ crucified and risen,(chap.4) - and it usually succeeds. For those who keep talking he produces plan B - say the right words, but you do not have to mean or do them,(chap.5) - and all too often we believe him. If we insist on meaning what we say about Jesus, plan C is the answer - get us looking at each other and complaining.(chap.6) It does not matter whether the issue is real or imaginary. Grumbling divides equally effectively either way. It is usually possible to persuade people to grumble on racial or social lines because our prejudices are never far beneath the surface.(6:1)

Division in a fellowship keeps leaders preoccupied with refereeing conflicts and so they become too busy to pray, (listen to God) and minister, (pass on what they learn from Him.)(6:2,4)

The answer was for the whole group to get back on their knees, listening to what God was saying, not just about the issues over which they grumbled, but the grumbling itself. When our hearts are right with Him and therefore each other, He can show us practical ways of dealing with administrative problems.

When we choose people for tasks in the church we look first at their skills and qualifications. When God does the choosing He looks first at the heart. If, like Stephen and the others, we are full of faith,(6:5) we will be full of the Spirit and so of wisdom. We will have a good reputation with other Christians because His life in us will show.(6:3) Consequently we will be full of grace, God's 'givingness', and full of power, God's ability.(6:8) Even if the opposition are as smart as Saul of Tarsus, Christ through us will answer those who oppose the truth in a way that is irresistible.(6:9,10) Tarsus was a city of Cilicia and therefore the Synagogue of the Freedmen is likely to have been where he attended.

The church appointed Stephen to divide the food up fairly. God had bigger things in mind for him later.(6:8) Do not let your title or office in the church limit how God would use you.

Every few chapters Luke gives a summary of what has been achieved in the section before. Chapter 6:7 is the first of these. The word was spreading and the church was growing.

Because Stephen's opponents could not answer the logic and truth of what he said, they could only resort to a smear campaign against him,(6:11-14) just as they had against his Lord.(Matt.26:59-61) We should not be surprised when we are slandered. He was. Powerful though his words were, there was an even more compelling answer to their charges against Stephen. Jesus Christ shone through his life.(6:15)

Chapter 7 is Stephen's answer to those charges. As you read it keep his audience in mind. It fitted their background and needs superbly.

7:1-7 Q.1 For the Jews their spiritual heritage began with Abraham. What had God promised Abraham?(Gen.12:1,7; 13:15; 15:13,18; 17:8) What warning had he given him about future problems? How would God deal with those problems? What did all this have to do with being Christians?

7:8-14 Q.2 Jacob's 12 sons were revered as being the fathers of the 12 tribes. How had their treatment of their brother Joseph been comparable to the Council's treatment of Jesus? How did God turn Joseph's situation to good for the sake of the Israelites? (Gen.37,39,41,42,45,46) How did God work beyond the cross for the benefit of the Jews?

7:15-22 Q.3 Just as Joseph had been the saviour of his generation so 400 years later there was another saviour. How would the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt have been similar to the Jews' situation in Stephen's day?(Exod.1) How was the early life of Moses comparable to the life of Jesus?(Exod.2)

7:23-37 Q.4 How was Moses received at first by his people? How was Jesus received by His people?(Lk.4:28,29; Jn.1:11) What message was God giving us when He sent Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days? How was the work of Moses similar to the work of Jesus?

7:38-43 Q.5 Again in the wilderness, the Israelites rejected Moses' leadership.(Exod.32) What did they replace it with? How had the same thing happened in Stephen's time? What was the new golden calf? How do we do the same?

7:44,45 Q.6 What are the similarities between Joshua and Jesus? Both names mean 'the Lord saves'. What did the Israelites in Joshua's time have to keep central in their lives to know victory?(Josh.1:1-9) What does that mean in our lives?

7:46-50 Q.7 David is very frequently in the New Testament compared to Jesus. Solomon began well but later missed the point of God's purpose. (I Kgs.3:3-9) How can the two of them be compared with Jesus and the Jewish Council? How do we make the same mistake as Solomon? Where does God want to live today?

7:51-53 Q.8 Why did these three verses get Stephen killed? Would it not have been wiser for him to have stopped at verse 50?

7:54-56 Q.9 What is the secret of facing hatred and violence as a Christian?

7:57-60 Q.10 What similarities are there between the death of Stephen and the death of Jesus?(Lk.23:34,46) What effect did this occasion have on Saul? Was Stephen's death worthwhile?