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## The Acts of the Apostles

### Chapter 6



#### Review of Chapter 5

- While Barnabas and others generously purposed and gave back to God to help build up the Church, Ananias and Sapphira, his wife, devised to deceive God and the Church by secreting some of the funds from the sale of some of their land while at the same time reporting that they were, likewise, laying ALL the proceeds at the Apostles' feet.
- The sin here is two-fold: sacrilege against the Holy Spirit by stealing from that which they had already given God and then lying to God and to the Apostles (the Church).
- Ananias is struck dead immediately after being confronted.
- Sapphira is given an opportunity to tell the truth. Instead, she continues the lie and she too falls dead.
- So that such poison of heart would not be a temptation for others to emulate without consequence, an example is made of them. As a result, we read that "great fear came upon all the Church and upon all who heard these things." (v. 11)

"But perhaps some one will say that he dealt very harshly with her. What do you mean? What harshness? If for gathering sticks a man is to be stoned, much rather ought he for sacrilege" (St. John Chrysostom, Homily XII on Acts 4:36,37)

- Immediately following this encounter, we read that "many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord..." (v. 12).
- God's grace and healing are even communicated through the physical creation (light and shadow), revealing the limitlessness of God's divine power. This also explains why the Church from the beginning has also used water and oil as the means of communicating God's power to heal.
- The Apostles are arrested anew, forbidden from preaching the Gospel, and thrown in prison. God sends His angel to release them and they depart immediately for the Temple to begin preaching again.
- The Apostles' boldness in continuing to preach the Gospel, despite threats from the authorities, reminds us that should a government forbid us from going to church, preaching the Gospel, or sharing our faith, we must obey God first, as St. Peter says, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (v. 29).
- The Pharisee Gamaliel (vv. 35-39) wisely warns his fellow Jewish leaders against further persecution of the Apostles, reminding them of others who came before them falsely proclaiming themselves to be the Messiah (Theudas and Judas of Galilee), warning them, "if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it."
- After beating the Apostles, they release them and the Apostles go right back to the Temple, teaching and preaching the truth of God that Jesus is the Messiah, the God-Man.

#### Chapter 6

Q: Why would the number of disciples (here: 'followers of Christ') present new challenges for the Church to respond to? What is the problem here that needs to be addressed? Why?

n.b. v. 1, "Hebrews" here means Jews who spoke Aramaic. "Hellenists" means Greek-speaking Jews from the diaspora. The "daily distribution" here refers to alms for the widows, who are commanded by God to be cared for by the Church (e.g. James 1:27).

Q: What is the authority that Christ God has established in His Church in terms of to address such needs as they arise, i.e, what do we see here and in Acts 1 (the choosing of Judas' replacement)?

Q: How are the new deacons "appointed" (v. 3)?

n.b. the word, "to serve" (v. 2) is in the Greek, "διακονεῖν."

Q: Why would orderliness and ordaining "laying on of hands" be important for the new diaconal ministry to succeed and fulfill its purpose in the life of the Church?

n.b. v. 7, "priests" is not here presbyteroi (Gk: πρεσβυτέροις, NT priests, as in Acts 15:22), but ιερέων, i.e., Jewish priests who had become followers of Christ and had been baptized but not necessarily ordained as priests (presbyters) of the Church.

Q: How does the ministry of the deacons differ from the ministry of the bishops and priests?

Q: Why would the actions of the Apostles here result in the increase in believers as we read in v. 7?

Q: How can it be said that the New Testament Orthodox Church is not a democracy but a hierarchy?

"And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' <sup>26</sup> But not so *among* you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves." (Lk. 22:25-26)

Q: What are the characteristics of St. Stephen, the Protodeacon (vv. 5, 8, 10, 15)?

"See how even among the seven one was preeminent, and won the first prize. For though the ordination was common to him and them, yet he drew upon himself greater grace. And observe how he wrought no (signs and wonders) before this time, but only when he became publicly known; to show that grace alone is not sufficient, but there must be ordination also..." (St. John Chrysostom, Homily XV on Acts 6:8)

Q: What are the charges that the false witnesses charge St. Stephen with? What is true and what is false in their claims?

n.b. Christ was also charged with blasphemy at His trial, as we read in Matt. 26:61, "This *fellow* said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.' "

Q: When Jesus Christ says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will rise it up" (Jn. 2,19), what is He referring to?

Q: In what way does Christ indeed "change the customs which Moses delivered to us" (v. 14)?

