

STUDIES IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
Crisis and Victory in the Early Church

I. 1:1 - 6:7 THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY

Key verses: 4:19, 20; 5:3, 4, 29, 38, 39.

Summary: 6:7

II. 6:8 - 9:31 THE CRISIS OF PERSECUTION

Key verses: 7:51, 52; 8:1, 2, 15, 16.

Summary: 9:31

III. 9:32 - 12:24 THE CRISIS OF PREJUDICE

Key verses: 10:14, 15, 27, 28, 34, 35, 44; 11:3, 19.

Summary: 12:24

IV. 12:25 - 16:5 THE CRISIS OF DOCTRINE

Key verses: 13:46; 15:1, 5, 10, 19.

Summary: 16:5

V. 16:6 - 19:20 THE CRISIS OF SPIRITISM

Key verses: 16:16; 17:16; 19:11-13, 18, 19.

Summary: 19:20

VI. 19:21-28:31 THE CRISIS OF ACCUSATION AND DEFENSE

Key verses: 19:33; 22:1, 30; 23:29; 24:2, 8, 10, 19; 25:8, 16; 26:2, 7, 19-23;
28:19

Summary: 28:30, 31

THE INTRODUCTION:

It is important to note in Luke 1: 1-4 and Acts 1: 1-5 the author's concern for order and certainty in his writings about Jesus and the apostles. It reflects God's concern for order and for the truth. May the Lord help us to live orderly lives and true.

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I. 1: 1-6: 7 THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY

Who were those people who caused so much commotion in Jerusalem? They openly preached Jesus as the Messiah. The apostles were devoted to prayer and worship (2:42; 3: 1); (2: 44-45; 4: 32-37); and many believed his message (2:41, 47; 4: 4; 5:14).

But the Jewish leaders, particularly the chief priests and Sadducees, opposed to ill treat them and imprison them! Why? Because the apostles believed and preached:

- That the Jews had killed the Messiah (5:28, 30).
- By the authority of Jesus' name, not the high priest (4:12, 18).
- The bodily resurrection of Jesus (4:12; 23: 8).
- The reality of the Holy Spirit (5:32).
- The reality of angels (5:19).
- Without possessing official credentials (4: 5-7).

Who were they? Four possibilities:

- ¿A New religion?
- ¿A Reformation of Judaism?
- ¿A New sect of Judaism?
- ¿People of God? (Romans 9: 8)

What they said and did indicate that it was the fourth possibility: the people of God.

- "We must obey God rather than men" (4:19, 20; 5:29).
- "God raised Jesus from death (5:30).
- "You did not lie to men but to God" (5: 3, 4).
- "... But if it be of God, you can not destroy ..." (5:39).

The evidence that they were the people of God was so strong that many of the priests obeyed the faith (6: 7).

6: 7 The Victory

- The Word of God grew
- The Number of the disciples multiplied greatly
- Many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

II. 6: 8 - 9:31 THE CRISIS OF PERSECUTION

Who were the persecuted? In the first portion of the book (1: 1-6: 7) we find persecution, but prisons and beatings were limited to the apostles. Now a great persecution arose against the whole church in Jerusalem (1: 8).

What happened?

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--Steven was stoned (7: 57-60). In his sermon before the Sanhedrin he stressed the persecution perpetrated by them and their ancestors against the prophets of God from Joseph, Moses and all the prophets until even the Messiah (7: 9, 35, 39, 51, 52).

--This sparked a great persecution against the church (8: 1). Everyone except the apostles were scattered.

--Saul wrecked havoc on the church, dragging men and women and committed them to prison.

--Saul undertook a trip to Damascus to persecute the Christians there (9: 1, 2).

--After Saul's conversion and his first sermons, Jews conspired to kill Saul (9:23, 29).

What were the blessings and victories of those days of great persecution?

--The disciples were scattered and went everywhere preaching the good news.

--Phillip preached in Samaria and later to the Ethiopian eunuch, and in cities from Ashdod to Caesarea (8: 5, 27, 40).

--Saul, the main persecutor becomes (9: 3-5), Saul had an encounter with the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus while persecuting believers. The Lord said to Saul that he was persecuting the Lord himself.

--Saul was to be used by the Lord as one of His chosen instruments. In his ministry for the Lord Saul was to suffer persecution (9:15, 16).

--Saul began to preach Christ (9: 20-22, 29).

9:31 The Victory

Then the church:

--had peace

--was built-up

--walked in the fear of the Lord

--grew

--and was strengthened by the consolation of the Holy Spirit.

PERSECUTIONS

1. The Muslim - Lull
2. The Communist - Wurmbrand
3. Counter-reformation - in Spain
4. Amin in Uganda

III. 9:32 to 12:24 THE CRISIS OF PREJUDICE

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A problem of prejudice arose in the early church. What were those prejudices? And against whom? The Jewish believers showed partiality for the Jews and prejudice against the Gentiles. As a matter of habit they did and fulfilled many things that pleased them as Jews. Herod imprisoned Peter because it pleased the Jews.

Here are three cases of prejudice

1. Peter found it difficult to enter the house of Cornelius to preach the gospel. (10:28) but God made him change his mind Pedro by the following:

- The vision of the sheet of animals (10:11, 28).
- The reputation of Cornelius (10:22).
- The provision for Cornelius to hear the word (10:33, 34).
- The falling upon Cornelius and his household of the Holy Spirit (10:44 - 47).

2. The party of the circumcision in Jerusalem criticized Peter for having visited Cornelius (11: 2, 3). But they were silent and glorified God after hearing what happened to Peter (11:18).

3. The great persecution scattered disciples as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, and they spoke the word to none but only to the Jews (11:19). Some men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached the gospel to the Greeks and many believed in Antioch (11: 20-22). The believers in Antioch become a blessing for their material donations to the church in Jerusalem (11: 27-30).

Prejudice has a “brother” named pride. It is noteworthy the contrast between the increasing humility of Peter and the growing pride of Herod:

1. Peter rejected the worship Cornelius offered Peter (10:25, 26).
2. The people praised Herod as a god and he accepted the adulation of the people (12: 21-23).

12:24 The Victory

The Word of the Lord

- grew
- multiplied

PREJUDICE

- Existed for several reasons.
- Prejudice created barriers against the spread of the gospel.
- Examples of prejudice:

1. In the USA - Between some European-Americans and some African-Americans.
2. In the Middle East - between some nominal Christians and some Muslims.

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3. In western countries - between some nationals and some immigrants.
- 4 In Bangladesh - between some converts from Hinduism and from Islam.
5. Among some rich and poor, and some educated and uneducated.
6. In Spain - between some in different regions, and between some Roma and non-Roma.

IV. 12:25 - 16: 5 THE DOCTRINAL CRISIS

What was the doctrinal perversion that appeared in the early church? Some people wanted the Gentiles who had become Christians to become Jews first through circumcision and keeping the law, before they could be Christians. Here's the sequence:

GENTILE - JEWISH - CHRISTIAN

That doctrine was the result of prejudices of the party of the circumcision already discussed in 9:32 to 12:24.

During his missionary journeys some Jews rejected Paul and his preaching. He said he would turn to the Gentiles because the Jews rejected the word of God and did not believe themselves worthy of eternal life. The Gentiles were glad when they heard the preaching of the gospel and many believed (13: 46-48; 14:21, 22).

In verses 15: 1, 2, 5 we see that those of the party of the Pharisees taught this.

The Lord led them to meet in council in Jerusalem and took care of that strange and twisted teaching through:

--Peter told the leaders gathered how God had used him to preach to the Gentiles (15: 7-11) first.

--Paul and Barnabas testified to how God had used them to carry the gospel to many Gentiles (15:12).

--James gave a discourse in which he quoted the prophets saying they agreed with the extension of the gospel to the Gentiles (15: 13-18).

--Paul, Barnabas, Judas and Silas were sent back to Antioch with instructions and later these decisions agreed to by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem were carried by Paul and Silas to Syria and Cilicia (15:22, 23, 30, 41; 16: 4). These ordinances showed their sensitivity to Jewish communities.

16: 5 The Victory

1. The churches were consolidated in the faith.
2. And they increased in number every day.

DOCTRINE

1. In Bangladesh some Christians want Muslims to become like Hindus before becoming Christians because they were saved out of a Hindu background!

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2. Hindus must become English before becoming Christians? They do not!
3. Africans must become Americans before becoming Christians? They do not!

V. 16: 6 - 19:20 THE CRISIS OF SPIRITISM

What was the problem that arose in an increasing manner with the advance of the gospel in Europe and westward? Spiritism was manifested in divination, in idolatry, in exorcism, and magic. Which spirit do we accept and which do we reject?

1. Paul and his companions were led by the Holy Spirit (16: 6-10).
2. Paul cast the spirit of divination out of the slave girl (16: 16-18).
3. Paul finds Athens full of idols (17:16; I Corinthians 10:19, 20). (Of note is the difference between an altar and an idol.)
4. Some disciples in Ephesus receive the Holy Spirit (19: 6).
5. God gave Paul authority over unclean spirits and people burned their books of magic (19: 11-20).

19:20 The Victory

1. The word of God grew
2. And prevailed mightily

The story of Tommy Titcombe

VI. 19: 21-28: 31 THE CRISIS OF ACCUSATION AND DEFENSE

What were the accusations the Jews made against Paul and his ministry? (19:26, 27)
Were they right? What was Paul's reaction?
Why did he appeal to Cesar?
Did he accuse his nation of anything?

20: 13-37 Paul gave a "defense" before the elders.

28: 17-20 Paul had on several occasions appeared before tribunals and governors (chapters 24-26). They tried to kill him. He had to suffer greatly at the hands of the Jews, and even to be shipwrecked as he recalled in Acts 27. He knew it was for "... the hope of Israel ..." 28:20.

ALLEGATIONS

We will be accused of blasphemy to God (19:37) and desecrate the temple (21:28) and teaching against the Jewish race, law and its temple.

28:30, 31 The Victory

Paul preached freely and without obstacle.