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BIBLE STUDY

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**“GROWING PAINS”**

**Acts 6:1-15**

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***Acts 6:1 "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration."***

“In those days” refers to the previous chapter where the early church experienced the divine judgement of Ananias and Sapphira. Signs and wonders wrought by the Apostles. Imprisonment and persecution of the Apostles and exponential growth of the kingdom. These factors all contributed to the disciples increasing in number. A kingdom disciple is a believer in Christ who takes part in the spiritual developmental process of progressively learning to live all of life in submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ. The goal of the church is not merely for people to become Christians, but for them to develop into fully committed disciples. Personally, my pastoral goal is progressive. It is to spiritually lead people to Jesus Christ and MEMBERSHIP in His family, while developing them to Christ-like MATURITY, intentionally equipping them for their MINISTRY in the church, and MISSION in the world, in order to MAGNIFY God’s name. As long as the church was small and they each were greatly needed, they were all pulling in one direction. They were working for a common cause. Now that the number has gotten so large and diverse, there is murmuring. The kingdom growth agenda is unity not uniformity. Some of the Greeks think the Hebrew widows are being cared for better than the Greeks. The Hellenistic Jews (those ﻿who spoke Greek) and the Hebraic Jews (those who spoke Aramaic) began to argue, the former complaining that their widows were being overlooked in charitable distributions. While they were racially the same, they were culturally different. The early church was very concerned about the needs of widows. Many times, widows lived in the church and prayed for the church.

***1 Timothy 5:9-11***

***9 Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man.***

***10 Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.***

***11 But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry;***

***James 1:27 “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”***

***Acts 6:2 "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples [unto them], and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables."***

This clash of cultures and accusations of unfair treatment led the Twelve to gather the disciples to address the concerns. These twelve disciples who seemed to be the leaders of all the rest are explaining that they should not be encumbered by trying to see to the needs of all of these widows. Their primary responsibilities were preaching the word of God and prayer. The man of God ministering has enough to do staying in the Word of God and bringing spiritual guidance to the people. Someone else should see to the operational responsibilities of the church. If they have to stop and see to the physical needs of the people, they will not be able to properly care for their spiritual needs.

***Acts 6:3 "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."***

The apostles had the community of believers choose seven men of ﻿good reputation to deal with the issue. Seven means spiritually complete. We see that these seven were to be men who were very close to God. They must be honest and of good report. Many interpreters understand this passage to describe the selection of the first deacons, who would serve the physical needs of God’s people, while the apostles (and, eventually, the elders/overseers) addressed the spiritual needs.

***Acts 6:4 "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."***

The twelve apostles were not to be bothered with anything, except the spiritual needs of the people. Perhaps, that is one of the problems in churches today. Too many pastors look at the ministry as a secular business. To do kingdom work properly and put “humpty dumpty” back together again, we must ask the king. The church should not burden the pastor with all of these administration duties. It takes too much of their time away from prayer and study of the Word. The are many different calling and giftings in the body, and everyone should operate in their calling.

***1 Corinthians 12:28-31***

***28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.***

***29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?***

***30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?***

***31 But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.***

***1 Corinthians 13:13 “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.”***

***Acts 6:5 "And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:"***

The whole company of disciples agreed with this proposal. They chose seven spiritual men, all of whom had Greek names. That’s an important point because they wanted men who ﻿could relate to the Hellenistic Jews so that they could address their specific needs and concerns. Of these seven, Stephen was the most known to us. These men were above reproach. They were men of high character. These men would be fair in all their dealings. Proselyte means a newcomer. In Hebrew, it meant stranger. Philip and Stephen are really the only two out of the list that the Bible tells us anything else about. These are like many deeply sincere people in the church today who really work in the background and do not feel the need to be recognized by others.

***Acts 6:6 "Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid [their] hands on them."***

***Acts 6:7 "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."***

The apostles laid their hands on them and prayed for them, commissioning them for their work. This is a spiritual ceremony to anoint these men to the job they are to do. They were installed formerly when the apostles laid hands on them. We see, here, that, these apostles having their priorities straight caused the Word of God to increase greatly. Then the word of God spread, and the disciples grew in number. A legitimate need was not ignored but addressed with spiritual and natural wisdom and God blessed their faithfulness. A church is only as powerful as the prayers that go up for it, and the people who are obedient to those prayers. These apostles spent much time in prayer and their ministry was powerful because of it. Disciples, here, is the same as followers of Christ. This strong message of God's Word even convinced many of the priests and they believed, also.

***Acts 6:8 "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people."***

One of these men, Stephen, receives high praise from Luke. He was “full of faith and the Holy Spirit”, full of grace and power, and was ﻿performing great wonders and signs among the people. That’s quite a resume. Clearly, then, Stephen was no spiritual slouch. Notice, that Stephen was full of faith and power. This is saying that the power of the Holy Spirit was so great in Stephen, that the great wonders and miracles were a by-product of the power of God in him.

***Acts 6:9 "Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called [the synagogue] of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen."***

It seems that there was a large number of synagogues at this time. These different nationalities of people had their own synagogue, and that is why there are so many different names. These Libertines were Jews from Rome. The Cyrenians were from North Africa. Alexandrians were Jewish people from Alexandria and were very large in number. Then there were, also, some from Asia. Whether they did not hear, or whether they did not receive what they heard, is not explained. They just came against Stephen.

***Acts 6:10 "And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake."***

His (Stephen's) message was with power of the Holy Spirit. Stephen's message was so powerful that they could not overcome it. When opposition arose from various unbelieving Jews, they were no match for his wisdom or for the Spirit who empowered his speaking.

***Acts 6:11 "Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and [against] God."***

***Acts 6:12 "And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon [him], and caught him, and brought [him] to the council,"***

***Acts 6:13 "And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:"***

“Suborn” means to throw in stealthily or introduce by collusion. They really had not heard Stephen blaspheme Moses or God but said that to get Stephen in trouble. Since they couldn’t best Stephen in legitimate argument, they sought to destroy him by deception. They persuaded some men to lie about him, claiming that he had spoken blasphemous words against Moses and God. They really had lied about Stephen. Their accusations were untrue. However, they were enough to get the Sanhedrin to take notice. He gave no resistance, so they caught Stephen and brought him before the religious rulers. When Stephen was taken before the Jewish leaders, more false witnesses alleged that he was preaching against the temple and the law, and that he was claiming Jesus was going to destroy the temple and change their customs. They considered Stephen a threat to Judaism. This is much like the accusers of Jesus. They have no reason to accuse Stephen of anything. The whole accusation was a lie.

***Acts 6:14 "For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us."***

***Acts 6:15 "And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."***

The Jewish leaders hated Stephen and lied about him. But when they looked at him, his face was like the face of an angel. The man ﻿whom they wanted to kill had the appearance of one who had been in the holy presence of God. The law of Moses was the basis of worship in the temple and the synagogues. They, themselves, had twisted the law until it was hardly recognizable. They had taken Stephen's message and twisted it into something ugly, instead of the beautiful message of promise that it was. One of the laws of Moses said not to be a false witness. They really were not concerned with Moses' law. They were just jealous. As they all looked at Stephen, they saw an inward light that made his face as the face of an angel. This should have told them who he was, but they ignored this. This light within him was the presence of the risen Christ.

**QUESTIONS**

1. When the number of disciples increased, what problem arose?
2. Who was the murmuring about?
3. Who did the twelve apostles call to discuss the problem with?
4. How many men were chosen to take care of these needs?
5. What attributes did they have to have?
6. What two things did these 12 give themselves to continually?
7. What was Stephen full of?
8. What is a Hellenist?
9. What does proselyte mean?
10. When they set these seven before the apostles, what did the apostles do?
11. In verse 7, we learn that a great many of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ were obedient to the faith.
12. A church is only as powerful as what?
13. Disciples in verse 7 meant whom?
14. Stephen full of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, did great wonders.
15. What did they do with Stephen?
16. They were not able to resist what about Stephen?
17. What does suborn mean?
18. What did they say Stephen said about Moses?
19. Who did they stir up with these accusations?
20. What did the false witnesses say?
21. What lie did they tell in verse 14?
22. All that sat in the council saw Stephen's face as what?