

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

Third Quarter 2018: *The Book of Acts*

Lesson 4 The First Church Leaders

Read for this week's study

Acts 6; Acts 7:48; Hebrews 5:11–14; Micah 6:1–16; Acts 7; Acts 8:4–25.

Memory Text

“The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7, NRSV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Appointment of the Seven
- III. Stephen's Ministry
- IV. Before the Sanhedrin
- V. Jesus in the Heavenly Court
- VI. The Spread of the Gospel
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “The Jews from the Greco-Roman world who were now living in Jerusalem having spent most of their lives in a Greco-Roman environment and having lived in close contact with Gentiles, would naturally be more willing to understand the inclusive character of the Christian faith. In fact, it was many Hellenistic believers that God used to fulfill the command of bearing witness to the entire world.” (Sabbath afternoon) How does your cultural experience influence how God can use you [as a leader]?
2. What is the significance of the appointment of the seven (Acts 6)? What consequences for today's leadership can be drawn from this story?
3. Stephen's ministry ignited strong opposition (Acts 7). What can we learn from that, and why has this not changed throughout the centuries? If it is true that most people seem to process religious things emotionally rather than rationally, (or is it other things as well, not just religious issues?) why do you think this happens? And if it is true, how effective can rational arguments be in dealing with those issues?

4. “When asked to explain his actions, Stephen made no effort to refute the charges nor to defend his faith. Instead, he raised his voice in the same way the ancient prophets did when they brought God’s *rîb* [=covenant lawsuit] against Israel.” (Tuesday’s lesson). What is the significance of the fact that Stephen decided to tell a story? The way he told it made his response incredibly meaningful.
5. What is the importance of the spread of the gospel among the Samaritans? Why does Luke include the eunuch story (Acts 8)?
6. Ron Heifitz, a Harvard educator, is best known as a “guru” on the subject of leadership. In his book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* he writes about the distinctions between what he calls “technical challenges” and “adaptive challenges.”
7. Technical problems, he says, are problems where you already know what the solution will be. You already have the necessary know-how. You just need to apply it. Technical challenges just require implementation. There is something that is already known and it requires little significant modification of behavior (“technical”).
8. But adaptive problems are in a whole different category. When you face an adaptive challenge, standard operating procedure is not going to get you where you need to go. You’ll need to run new experiments and make new discoveries. Adaptive challenges require not just implementation, but transformation. You are going to have to change something which is largely unknown and this will require problem-solving, discovery by doing, and along the way a lot of shifts in behavior (“adaptive”).
9. Who is rocking the boat? Stephen, Peter, John or Philip? Who is the central character at work in all these stories? It’s God. God is the one who’s rattling everybody’s cages. God is the one who is bringing change to his people.
10. Change is God’s appointed tool for moving His children forward. Therefore, to reject change can easily mean to fight God and to be an architect of decay. The cemetery is the only place where there is no change... Fighting change can easily end up as fighting God. Change is God’s appointed tool for bringing the story towards completion.
11. What can we do to be on God’s side today, not only as individuals, but also as a community of believers?

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

With reference to the Holy Spirit, did you notice Stephen’s magnificent speech?

He was a deacon, and that’s most significant. But he couldn’t have made that speech if he hadn’t read his Bible through, rather carefully, book by book, I think. Because what a summary he gave! And as he came near his climax at the end, in chapter seven, his audience realized

where he was going, and Stephen sensed their growing opposition. Knowing he had but a few moments left, he brought his speech to a climax, as you recall. Look at 51; 7:51. In the light of all this history, he says:

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears [how did he know about circumcision supposing to be the heart and the ears? That's as old as the Old Testament, isn't it? Jesus emphasized it, but it's in the Old Testament]. You always resist the Holy Spirit [in the Old Testament they resisted the Holy Spirit. That is, as your fathers resisted the Holy Spirit, so do you]. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered. You who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it. Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him.

But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed [you notice, when you're full of the Holy Spirit, you speak the truth, and you speak it with focus, and you speak it with power. And Stephen was doing it, and you remember he was a deacon. Don't underestimate the deacons. Deacons should do more preaching, it would appear.] Gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.

What didn't they like about what he'd said? It was so true. And by the way, he was only quoting the prophets. You remember all those prophets who talked about the stubborn resistance of the people. He wasn't making up anything new. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *The Picture of God in all 66 – Acts*, recorded April, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/59MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/60MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

In the book of Acts, the turning point seems to be primarily a sermon preached by a deacon; which is a point not to be overlooked. Who says deacons can't preach? Here's one of the best sermons in the whole Bible, and preached by a deacon, on a very important occasion. Best we should begin the story in Acts 6:8 and read through here, because this is apparently what it took to change a very devout legalist into a very devout man of faith, and maybe it would help us understand what's involved in this, and maybe how we should approach others. I looked through different versions in which to read this story that will include Stephen's magnificent presentation. I like the *New English*, but there were a few spots where the idiom was quite British. So I've wound up with the *Good News Bible*, in American idiom; the American Bible Society. Let me read this to you. Can you imagine the scene? The whole Sanhedrin listening to

this, and Paul listening to this? And after he heard it, he never was the same. He wasn't ready to give in yet, but his conscience bothered him after this. And that's how Jesus could say, "You're having trouble with your conscience, Paul." {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio presentation, Galatians, #2, recorded February, 1978, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link:*

<http://pkp.cc/2MMGALATIANS66>

When disunity came into Judaism and Christians began, Paul went out to restore unity in Judaism. And how did he do it, in Acts 26? He arrested these Christians. He punished them. He put them in prison, and he consented to their death. When Stephen said words before the Sanhedrin that seemed to be a threat to unity, how did those Sabbath-keeping saints seek to keep unity? They stoned him to death. They saw nothing wrong with that use of force. It was to them justice.

In the name of God, Paul went out to keep unity in the church. That's been very popular through the years. Hundreds of thousands have been tortured to death at the stake to keep unity in the Christian church. Has it worked? You cannot force trust and love. It just can't be done. It's the very antithesis of freedom. And Jesus cleared that all up, and the angels realized that that's the truth. And that's the greatest protection against hostility and disunity and apostasy and defection in the hereafter. There is not one streak of arbitrariness in our God. He is not exacting, vengeful, and severe. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Ephesians & Colossians, recorded May, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/67MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/68MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

But, you see, so often we are trying to settle people on all the other matters. If you settle people on the Sabbath, the sanctuary, the state of the dead, tithe, and health, without settling them on the truth about God they might keep the Sabbath as Jesus' enemies did. They might pay tithe as his enemies did. They might read the Bible as his enemies did. In this campaign to win a million Adventists, we could, forbid the thought, develop a million enemies who faithfully keep the Sabbath, practice health reform, pay tithe, and read their Bibles. Now that is a horrible thought. But if we are not clear on the picture of God we might do well not to be in such a hurry. Have you read Ellen White's comment? "The Lord is not now working to bring many into the truth, because there are so many unconverted in the church."

And here we are trying to win people and the Holy Spirit isn't! We almost need to get a message from him, "Now's the time to go." I'm not saying it hasn't come, but it would seem to defeat the purpose of God if he were to empower us to go out and misrepresent him. He won't

do it. But as soon as we are settled into the truth, so the Holy Spirit could give us power of influence and persuasion to tell the truth about God it would make sense for him to do so.

I do not believe the latter rain or the Holy Spirit will fall until God's people are really settled into the truth. The same Spirit that will settle them into the truth will then give them persuasiveness and influence to spread this everlasting good news about God to the whole world and then the end will come. Which raises the question, "What is Christ waiting for now?"

It's nothing artificial. He is waiting for a group to be like Job, and to be able to pass through the time of trouble. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Revelation, recorded August, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/79MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/80MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

In the end all theology goes back to the picture of God. And the good news is that he is like this, and that he is not like that. And that's why I believe our whole mission as a church is to picture God as he really is. But if we just go and say he is like this, this and this, without evidence, why would anybody believe us? We have to go with the evidence which is in the sixty-six. Do you remember the man who was reading in the chariot and he couldn't understand Isaiah? We have to be like Philip who got in with him and explained. We need to be able to help people understand this. And I think one of the most helpful things is to help people keep reading on and not getting bogged down in details. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Revelation, recorded August, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

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In his letter to the believers in Ephesus, Paul explains Christ's purpose in establishing his church:

He appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ [a symbol for the Christian church]. And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful men, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent. Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head (Ephesians 4:11–15, GNT).

There is no closer unity than this oneness that is inherent in our faith. Growing up together in love and admiration for the same Christ and the same God, we are bound together by the very truth that sets us free! God's true church is made up of individuals who in the highest sense of freedom choose to band together for mutual encouragement and for greater efficiency in spreading the gospel to all the world.

God still waits for his children to grow up like this. He needs better spokesmen than Jonah proved to be. Reluctant teachers of the truth, moved only by fear or obligation, are themselves a sad denial of the content of the Good News. God waits for loyal people who are proud of the Good News, who "look eagerly for the coming of the Day of God and work to hasten it on" (2 Peter 3:12, neb). {Maxwell, Graham. *Can God Be Trusted?*, 142-143. Redlands, California: Pine Knoll Publications, 2002}

<http://speakingwellofgod.org/written-materials/can-god-be-trusted-chapters/chapter-13>

Further Study with Ellen White

There is another spiritual lesson in this miracle of the stilling of the tempest. Every man's experience testifies to the truth of the words of Scripture, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. . . . There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Isaiah 57:20, 21. Sin has destroyed our peace. While self is unsubdued, we can find no rest. The masterful passions of the heart no human power can control. We are as helpless here as were the disciples to quiet the raging storm. But He who spoke peace to the billows of Galilee has spoken the word of peace for every soul. However fierce the tempest, those who turn to Jesus with the cry, "Lord, save us," will find deliverance. His grace, that reconciles the soul to God, quiets the strife of human passion, and in His love the heart is at rest. "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven." Psalm 107:29, 30. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever." Romans 5:1; Isaiah 32:17. {DA 336.4}

There will be peace, constant peace, flowing into the soul, for the rest is found in perfect submission to Jesus Christ. Obedience to God's will finds the rest. The disciple that treads in the meek and lowly steps of the Redeemer finds rest which the world cannot give, and the world cannot take away. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." Isaiah 26:3. {OHC 98.5}

Lowliness and meekness of mind, which ever characterized the life of the divine Son of God, possessed by His true followers, bring contentment, peace, and happiness, that elevate them above the slavery of artificial life. {OHC 98.6}

There is no other ground of peace than this. The grace of Christ received into the heart, subdues enmity; it allays strife and fills the soul with love. He who is at peace with God and his fellow men cannot be made miserable. Envy will not be in his heart; evil surmisings will find no room there; hatred cannot exist. The heart that is in harmony with God is a partaker of the peace of heaven and will diffuse its blessed influence on all around. The spirit of peace will rest like dew upon hearts weary and troubled with worldly strife. {MB 27.3}

And “blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9). The spirit of peace is evidence of their connection with heaven. The sweet savor of Christ surrounds them. The fragrance of the life, the loveliness of the character, reveal to the world the fact that they are children of God. Men take knowledge of them that they have been with Jesus. {HP 35.5}

The gospel invitation is not to be narrowed down and presented only to a select few, who, we suppose, will do us honor if they accept it. The message is to be given to all. When God blesses His children, it is not alone for their own sake, but for the world’s sake. As He bestows His gifts on us, it is that we may multiply them by imparting. {MH 102.1}

The Samaritan woman who talked with Jesus at Jacob’s well had no sooner found the Saviour than she brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples. The disciples saw nothing in Samaria to indicate that it was an encouraging field. Their thoughts were fixed upon a great work to be done in the future. They did not see that right around them was a harvest to be gathered. But through the woman whom they despised a whole cityful were brought to hear Jesus. She carried the light at once to her countrymen. {MH 102.2}

This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ. Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. No sooner does he come to know the Saviour than he desires to make others acquainted with Him. The saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life. In doing this work a greater blessing is received than if we work merely to benefit ourselves. It is in working to spread the good news of salvation that we are brought near to the Saviour. {MH 102.3}

The truth will have the same molding influence upon hearts whatever the nationalities. Every human heart that accepts the truth will bow to the majesty of its sway, and when Christ is abiding in the heart by faith they will be of one mind, for Christ is not divided. They will be strong in His strength, happy and united in His peace. The truth is the same in its subduing power upon all hearts. It will refine and ennoble the heart of the receiver. {OHC 171.5}

Though He was a Jew, Christ mingled with the Samaritans, setting at naught the Pharisaic customs of His nation. In face of their prejudices, He accepted the hospitality of this despised people. He slept under their roofs, ate with them at their tables, partaking of the food prepared and served by their hands—and taught in their streets, and treated them with the utmost kindness and courtesy. {3SM 238.2}

Jesus sat as an honored guest at the table of the publicans, by His sympathy and social kindness showing that He recognized the dignity of humanity; and men longed to become worthy of His confidence. Upon their thirsty souls His words fell with blessed, life-giving power. New impulses were awakened, and the possibility of a new life opened to these outcasts of society. {3SM 238.3}

Christ recognized no distinction of nationality or rank or creed. The scribes and Pharisees desired to make a local and a national benefit of all the gifts of heaven and to exclude the rest of God's family in the world. But Christ came to break down every wall of partition. He came to show that His gift of mercy and love is as unconfined as the air, the light, or the showers of rain that refresh the earth. {9T 190.4}

But not to any class is Christ's love restricted. He identifies Himself with every child of humanity. That we might become members of the heavenly family, He became a member of the earthly family. He is the Son of man, and thus a brother to every son and daughter of Adam. His followers are not to feel themselves detached from the perishing world around them. They are a part of the great web of humanity; and Heaven looks upon them as brothers to sinners as well as to saints. The fallen, the erring, and the sinful, Christ's love embraces; and every deed of kindness done to uplift a fallen soul, every act of mercy, is accepted as done to Him. {DA 638.4}

The angels of heaven are sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. We know not now who they are; it is not yet made manifest who shall overcome, and share the inheritance of the saints in light; but angels of heaven are passing throughout the length and breadth of the earth, seeking to comfort the sorrowing, to protect the imperiled, to win the hearts of men to Christ. Not one is neglected or passed by. God is no respecter of persons, and He has an equal care for all the souls He has created. {DA 639.1}

Through the gospel, souls that are degraded and enslaved by Satan are to be redeemed to share the glorious liberty of the sons of God. God's purpose is not merely to deliver from the suffering that is the inevitable result of sin, but to save from sin itself. The soul, corrupted and deformed, is to be purified, transformed, that it may be clothed in "the beauty of the Lord our God," "conformed to the image of His Son." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Psalm 90:17; Romans 8:29; 1 Corinthians 2:9. Eternity alone can reveal the glorious destiny to which man, restored to God's image, may attain. {MB 60.3}

Through the plan of salvation a larger purpose is to be wrought out even than the salvation of man and the redemption of the earth. Through the revelation of the character of God in Christ, the beneficence of the divine government would be manifested before the universe, the charge of Satan refuted, the nature and results of sin made plain, and the perpetuity of the law fully demonstrated. Satan had declared that the law of God was faulty, and that the good of the universe demanded a change in its requirement. In attacking the law, he thought to overthrow the authority of its Author, and gain for himself the supreme allegiance. But through the plan of salvation the precepts of the law were to be proved perfect and immutable, that at last one glory and love might rise to God throughout the universe, ascribing glory and honor and praise to him that sitteth upon the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever. {ST, February 13, 1893 par. 12}

The purpose and plan of grace existed from all eternity. Before the foundation of the world it was according to the determinate counsel of God that man should be created and endowed with power to do the divine will. The fall of man, with all its consequences, was not hidden from the Omnipotent. Redemption was not an after thought, a plan formulated after the fall of Adam, but an eternal purpose, suffered to be wrought out for the blessing, not only of this atom of a world, but for the good of all the worlds that God had created. {ST, February 13, 1893 par. 3}

Through creation and redemption, through nature and through Christ, the glories of the divine character are revealed. By the marvelous display of his love in giving “his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” the character of God is revealed to the intelligences of the universe. Through Christ our Heavenly Father is made known as the God of love. {ST, February 13, 1893 par. 5}

God takes men as they are, with the human elements in their character, and trains them for His service, if they will be disciplined and learn of Him. They are not chosen because they are perfect, but notwithstanding their imperfections, that through the knowledge and practice of the truth, through the grace of Christ, they may become transformed into His image. {DA 294.4}

No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple courts, that every soul may have free access to God. His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere. It lifts out of Satan’s influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions, and places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. {PK 369.3}

As His representatives among men, Christ does not choose angels who have never fallen, but human beings, men of like passions with those they seek to save. Christ took upon Himself humanity, that He might reach humanity. Divinity needed humanity; for it required both the divine and the human to bring salvation to the world. Divinity needed humanity, that humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man. So with the servants and messengers of Christ. Man needs a power outside of and beyond himself, to restore him to the likeness of God, and enable him to do the work of God; but this does not make the human agency unessential. Humanity lays hold upon divine power, Christ dwells in the heart by faith; and through co-operation with the divine, the power of man becomes efficient for good.

{DA 296.4}

He who called the fisherman of Galilee is still calling men to His service. And He is just as willing to manifest His power through us as through the first disciples. However imperfect and sinful we may be, the Lord holds out to us the offer of partnership with Himself, of apprenticeship to Christ. He invites us to come under the divine instruction, that, uniting with Christ, we may work the works of God. {DA 297.1}

All heaven is interested in the work going on in this world, which is to prepare men and women for the future, immortal life. It is God's plan that human agencies shall have the high honor of acting as co-workers with Jesus Christ in the salvation of souls. {5T 573.3}

God might have committed the message of the gospel, and all the work of loving ministry, to the heavenly angels. He might have employed other means for accomplishing His purpose. But in His infinite love He chose to make us co-workers with Himself, with Christ and the angels, that we might share the blessing, the joy, the spiritual uplifting, which results from this unselfish ministry. {SC 79.2}

Angelic agencies, though invisible, are cooperating with visible human agencies, forming a relief association with men. Is there not something stimulating and inspiring in this thought that the human agent stands as the visible instrument to confer the blessings of angelic agencies? As we are thus laborers together with God, the work bears the inscription of the divine. With what joy and delight all heaven looks upon these blended influences, influences which are acknowledged in the heavenly courts! Human agencies are the hands of heavenly instrumentalities, for heavenly angels employ human hands in practical ministry. Their acts of unselfish ministry make them partakers in the success which is a result of the relief offered. This is Heaven's way of administering saving power. The knowledge and actions of the heavenly order of workers, united with the knowledge and power which are imparted to human agencies, relieve the oppressed and distressed. {ML 305.2}

Through the ministration of angels, God sends light to His people, and through His people the light is to be given to the world. {ML 304.6}

It is a wonderful thought that human beings can speak the word of God, in simple words of comfort and encouragement. The humblest instruments will be used of God to sow the seeds of truth, which may spring up and bear fruit, because the one in whose heart they were sown needed help—a kind thought, a kind word, made effective by the One who has said, “Lo, I am with you alway.” {HP 188.4}

To us also the promise of Christ’s abiding presence is given. The lapse of time has wrought no change in His parting promise. He is with us today as truly as He was with the disciples, and He will be with us “even unto the end.” . . . {HP 188.5}

He finds His faithful ones, and holds communion with them, encouraging and strengthening them. And angels of God, that excel in strength, are sent forth by God to minister to His human workers who are speaking the truth to those who know it not. {HP 188.6}