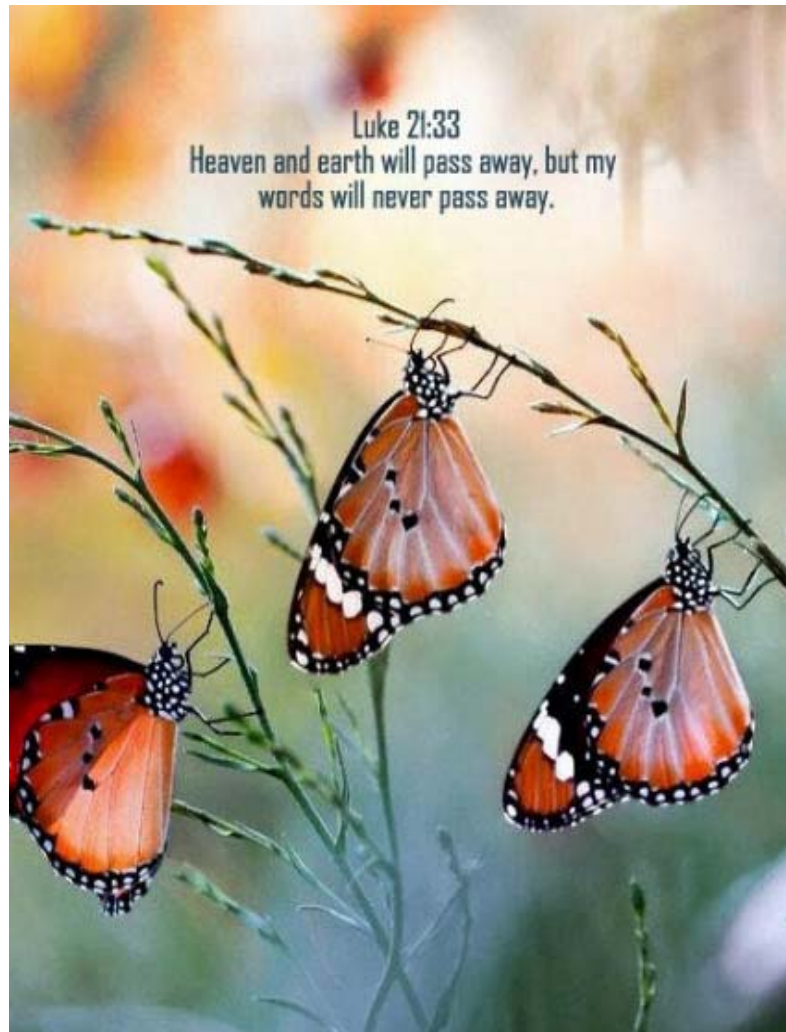


Daily Devotional

September 2018



Foreword

Have you ever thought about the blessing of being able to interact with things that will last for all eternity? There are two that we are blessed to interact with on a daily basis—the Word of God and people. I trust this devotional will stimulate your time in God’s eternal Word, which in turn will prepare you to interact with the people God brings and has brought into your life.



We give thanks to the Lord for those saved individuals with whom we are going to spend eternity, and we hope He will use us to reach the lost that they too may have the eternal life that is available through Jesus Christ our Lord!

This month our study in the Word will alternate between Acts and our study of the feasts in Leviticus.

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Redig". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Return to Acts

Monday September 3: Read Hebrews 4

Everyone wants to know if Ananias and Sapphira, from Acts Chapter 5, were believers. There are many who will say, "True believers would never sin this way" or "God would not have struck down His children in this way." To begin with, always be suspicious when someone puts the word *true* or *real* in front of the word *believer* or *Christian*. When they do, they typically add some unbiblical criteria to what it means to be a child of God. In this case, they are using the presence or absence of sin in the life.

A person is a saved child of God dependent upon one thing and one thing only: Have they placed their faith in the person and work of Christ for their salvation? (John 3:36) Although the text never addresses this subject directly, let me give you five reasons why I think there is ample reason to believe that Ananias and Sapphira were believers. In fact, the narrative loses its impact if they are not believers!

1. One possible reason their belief is not addressed in the text is that it never crossed Luke's mind that it would be an issue. He has been writing nonstop about the early church since the end of Chapter 2. In context, those who were added to the Church were believers!
2. The decision of Ananias and Sapphira to sell the land is in keeping with something a believer would do and not an unbeliever. Remember, no one was under any compulsion to sell personal property. Furthermore, the subtlety of their sin is also more in line with the sin of a believer, rather than an unbeliever.

Continued on the next page.

Return to Acts

Monday September 3: Read Hebrews 4 (Continued)

3. Ananias and Sapphira were put to death for a combination of deceit, hypocrisy, and lying, which are certainly sins. But, if they are unbelievers, then they are already objects of God's wrath, so why would these sins prompt additional judgment? On the other hand, if they were believers, these are exactly the kinds of sins that would prompt discipline from a holy God. (Hebrews 12:5)
4. The life of an unbeliever is by definition a lie against the Spirit—for the unbeliever resists and suppresses His ministry of conviction. Any additional lies would simply be words or actions consistent with what he or she already is. Only a believer could be called to account for doing something he or she shouldn't be doing, that is lying to the Holy Spirit! For only a believer stands as a new creature in Christ.
5. This narrative is preserved in the Word of God to caution believers, not unbelievers. If this describes unbelievers, much of the take-home message in terms of application is lost. Unbelievers don't need to stop lying to the Holy Spirit in order to get saved, they need to trust in Christ. Believers on the other hand should most definitely tread lightly with respect to the life they live before the scrutiny of a Holy God!

*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight.
Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes
of Him to whom we must give account.*

Hebrews 4:13

Return to Acts

Tuesday September 4: Read I Samuel 16

I am sure you would agree that the Ananias and Sapphira narrative is a piece of high drama in the life of the early church. Although most are familiar with the story, rarely do we pause to consider the principles that God is trying to teach us as the result of His swift action, or why the incident is included in the pages of Scripture. So for the next two days, let's see what kind of application we might make. By the way, if Ananias and Sapphira were unbelievers, there really is no application for the believing church and that would squander what God intends for us to consider. So ponder the following:

- Our lives as Christians are ultimately lived before God, not before men!

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. . . And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:17, 23-24

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Return to Acts

Tuesday September 4: Read I Samuel 16 (Continued)

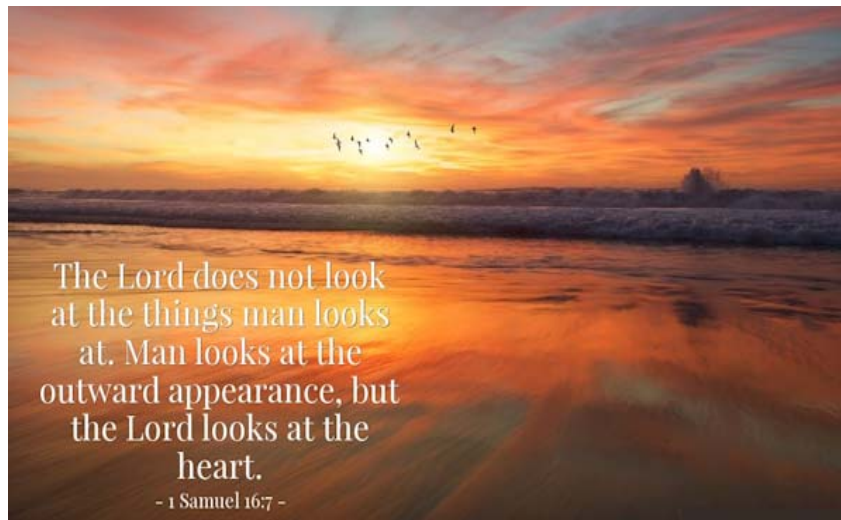
This exact point stands out clearly in the narrative when Ananias and Sapphira are charged with *lying to the Spirit*. Didn't they actually lie to Peter? We need to learn that all of our actions on the horizontal, toward one another, are ultimately lived in the vertical!

- God measures the thoughts and intents of the heart, and is not taken in by outward appearances!

*For the Lord does not see as man sees;
for man looks at the outward appearance,
but the Lord looks at the heart.* 1 Samuel 16:7

Ananias and Sapphira had a small view of God. For they apparently gave no thought to the basic truth that He would see right through their deception before Peter and the others. We make a huge mistake ourselves when we forget we are dealing with a sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient God!

More tomorrow.



Return to Acts

Wednesday September 5: Read Titus 2

Taking up where we left off yesterday, these are additional lessons we can learn from the narrative of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:

- Somewhere in the recent past, Ananias and Sapphira responded to a message that proclaimed:

*Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this:
God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified,
both Lord and Christ. Acts 2:36*

In this famous sermon, Peter is calling the people of Jerusalem to faith in who Jesus is—Lord—and what He has done—Christ! He is both Divine and the Savior of the world. Although Ananias and Sapphira had responded in faith and were believers, their actions were those of individuals who thought God wouldn't know, couldn't act, and wasn't holy. **GOD SIMPLY SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT!** We really need to learn this lesson! It will save us a lot of wear and tear in the Christian life when we do.

- As one last point, consider Titus 2:11-14:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say, "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions. . . to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good.

This is a powerful statement of the pattern for those who turn to the Lord—deny self, live godly lives, while expectantly waiting for Christ's certain return—a pattern that Ananias and Sapphira compromised. I suggest we respond to this lesson, preserved through the centuries, by avoiding ever doing any such thing!

And all God's people say, "Amen!"

Lessons from Leviticus

Thursday September 6: Read Leviticus 23

Some weeks ago, we read the opening chapters of Leviticus and were introduced to the major sacrifices instituted by God for His chosen people, the Israelites. Although this sacrificial system does not apply to us as Church-age Christians, this Old Testament book is still for us, specifically in the way that every Old Testament sacrifice, in one or more ways, points to Christ. In this way, the Jewish people were prepared daily for the coming of the Messiah.

Today we begin looking at a second portion of Leviticus, which consists of just Chapter 23, although it will take some time to unravel even a portion of what is there. For in Leviticus 23, we have the seven feasts that were prescribed by God for His people. Let me list them for you: The *Passover*, the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, the *Feast of Firstfruits*, *Pentecost*, the *Feast of Trumpets*, the *Day of Atonement*, and the *Feast of Tabernacles*. The first four all happen in the spring—in fact, the first three all happen in the month of Nisan which falls sometime during March or April. It is important to note that Nisan is the beginning of the Jewish religious calendar. In other words the first month of the year, religiously speaking, corresponds to the Passover and falls in March or April. (Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after *Firstfruits*, which puts it roughly at the beginning of summer.)

The other three feasts occur in the fall. More important, than dividing them by the time of year, is to understand that the first four feasts have been fulfilled as the result of the First Coming of Christ. On the other hand, the remaining three feasts speak prophetically, at least in part, of events yet to come. Since the first four have been sovereignly fulfilled, we can have confidence the remaining three will be as well. And so we begin!

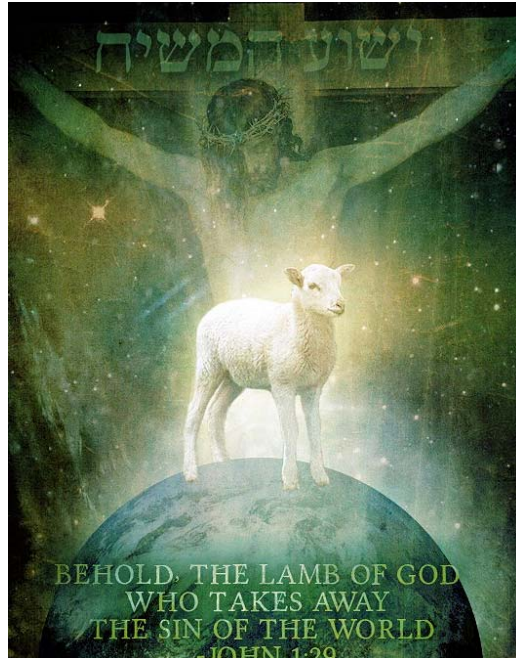
Lessons from Leviticus

Friday September 7: Read Exodus 12 (Leviticus 23:4-5)

On the 14th day of the first month (Nisan), the Jewish people were to celebrate the *Passover*. The Jewish calendar is based on the moon, ours the sun, so there is no exact correlation. That's the reason that Nisan falls sometime in the March-April timeframe. Furthermore, it was designated by God as the first month of the year in terms of their relationship with Him. In other words, all future generations are to mark the time beginning with God's delivery of the Jewish people from their bondage in Egypt.

Consider now what God was teaching His people through this first feast of the year:

- The chosen lamb was to be without blemish or defect (Exodus 12:5), as Christ was without sin.
- The lamb was to be roasted over the fire. There is much historical evidence to indicate that the lamb was roasted upright on a pomegranate pole with a crossbar through its shoulders. If so, the sacrifice was even then pointing ahead to the cross.



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Lessons from Leviticus

Friday September 7: Read Exodus 12 (Leviticus 23:4-5) (Continued)

- The lamb's blood was to be painted on the sides and tops of the door-frames of all Jewish homes because:

"The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt." Exodus 12:13

The blood kept the destroying angel from executing the judgment of God upon the first-born in that house.



So consider what it means when the scriptures say in I Corinthians 5:7:

For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed.

Could it be that His blood, a reference to all that He accomplished on the cross, is what preserves from the judgment of God all those who have trusted in Him? If so, then the Jews had an annual sacrifice to prepare them for the coming of the eternal Lamb of God Who would take away the sins of the world! (John 1:29)

Lessons from Leviticus

Monday September 10: Read I Corinthians 5 (Leviticus 23:6-8)

The second of the seven major feasts immediately follows the first:

"On the 15th day of that month the Lord's Feast of unleavened Bread begins; for seven days. . ."

Leviticus 23:6

The *Passover* was a one-day feast held on the 14th of Nisan and then was immediately followed by the seven-day *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. Both feasts are connected to the same historical event—the exodus of God's people from Egypt.



Leaven speaks of sin, and thus God is calling His people to fellowship with Himself by the removal of sin from the life. Once again, we see this beautifully connected to the idea of *Passover* in a New Testament passage:

Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I Corinthians 5:7-8

Continued on the next page.

Lessons from Leviticus

Monday September 10: Read I Corinthians 5 (Leviticus 23:6-8) (Continued)

Now how does the Lord address this call to remove the leaven of sin from our lives?

*But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another, and the blood
of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.
If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves,
and the truth is not in us. 1 John 1:7-8*

There is no fooling ourselves. We do sin and it needs to be addressed. Furthermore, it is not something we can address ourselves. Rather it is the precious blood of Christ that cleanses us from sin.

Do you see it? Every year the Jews were reminded of the need to remove sin from their lives that they might have fellowship with God. In reality, this is beyond us, but God has provided the means—the finished work of His Son on the cross whereby:

*...one sacrifice He made perfect forever,
those who are being made holy. Hebrews 10:14*



Lessons from Leviticus

Tuesday September 11: Read Luke 24 (Leviticus 23:9-14)

The *Feast of Firstfruits* is the third of the spring feasts. During the early spring, the Jews were to take the first of their crops to ripen—this would have been barley—gather it into a sheaf and bring it to the priest who waved it before the Lord on behalf of the person who brought it. The barley harvest, as well as each of the grains to follow, had three components:

- Firstfruits, that which ripened first
- General harvest, the bulk of the harvest
- Gleanings, a final portion that had been overlooked.

So when the first crop of each year (barley) was marked out, no grain of the portion that ripened first was to be eaten until the Firstfruits offering was made. At the start of each year's harvest, the Lord was given the glory due His name—first! Of course, this was fitting and appropriate, but there is much more included in the timing of this feast. It actually occurred during the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* and was the day after the Sabbath that occurred at the start of the feast. This means that the first three feasts all occur during the same eight-day period.

Even more astounding is that Christ was crucified and died on the day of the *Passover*, and then was resurrected on the day corresponding to the celebration of *Firstfruits*:

He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. Leviticus 23:11

For the Jews, the day after the Sabbath is the first day of the week—Sunday for us. I trust the truth of Christ, the Firstfruits of the resurrection, has taken on new meaning! (I Corinthians 15:23) We'll connect one more feast tomorrow.

Lessons from Leviticus

Wednesday September 12: Read Acts 2 (Leviticus 23:15-22)

The final spring feast is called the *Feast of Weeks*, which occurs in early summer. Here are a few of the details from the Jewish perspective:

- It is celebrated 50 days after *Feast of the Firstfruits*, which dealt with the first of the barley harvest. This feast corresponded to the harvest of the wheat crop.
- It is again a time of giving thanks for God's bounty.
- It is also a remembrance of God giving the Law through Moses at Mt. Sinai following the Exodus. So it is a feast intimately related to God's guidance of His people.

Have you caught the connection to the fulfillment of this feast in the New Testament? The Greek word for 50 is *Pentecost*. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was 50 days following the *Feast of Firstfruits*, which we have already seen corresponded to the resurrection of Christ. Once again, God has determined to guide His people. This time it is His Church and He guides them by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Praise God for His Spirit whom He has poured out on all who believe. (I Corinthians 6:19)

What a difference between the law and the Spirit! In Exodus 32:28, 3000 died on the day the Law was given. In Acts 2:41, 3000 were saved. That is because:

...the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
II Corinthians 3:6

After some lessons from Acts, we'll return to the three fall feasts in a few days—feasts which speak prophetically of things yet to come.

Return to Acts

Thursday September 13: Read Acts 6:1-6

You are probably aware that today's text is typically used as the Scriptural origin for deacons. If we look more closely at this passage, we will find more than expected. For starters, consider this: The church is facing a potential disaster in these first six verses! Why would I say such a thing? Consider the context of the past few chapters.

In Chapter 2, 3000 new believers were added to the Church at one time. In Acts 2:47, we learn that more are being added daily. At this point, this unfolding mystery of the Church had Satan's full attention and was firmly in his crosshairs! Who do you think was behind the jealousy of the Pharisees in Acts Chapter 4 that led to the arrest and threatening of church leadership? Who do you think was behind the lying spirit within the church in Acts 5—for he is the *father of lies*? And now what do we find in Chapter 6? Once again, there is sin within the church!

Let's be quick to admit that injustice in the distribution of food to the widows was sin. But let's be equally quick to recognize that a complaining spirit within the church, if not yet sin, could quickly turn into the sin of division. And behind it all would be Satan, for he loves to find the tiniest of cracks and begin to drive the *wedge of division and dissension*! Why would he do such a thing? Because the church's reputation was good and they enjoyed:

...*favor with the people.* Acts 2:47

Satan wants to damage the witness and check the work of the church in facilitating the transfer of lost people out of his dominion and into the kingdom of God. We'll see how the Apostles addressed the problem, but for now consider the importance of the reputation of the church. Just how many have been turned off by a bad church witness and ultimately who is behind the mess when it occurs?

Return to Acts

Friday September 14: Read Ephesians 4

The Apostles act decisively to address a potential problem in the church before it gains momentum. Satan uses any kind of problem to cause division, which in turn can lead to a loss of witness and distract from our mission to reach the lost and disciple the saved.

Perhaps you think this overstates the case. Consider, to this day, when people want to attack the Church, what example do they use to prove their point that the Christianity is *no better* (different) than any other religion? (Moslems in particular will point to this example.) The answer I am looking for is the *Crusades*. In fact, if you give it some thought you will realize there are many other historical departures by the church—and behind each is Satan as a liar, manipulator, and distracter. When he has his way, we end up with an outcome like France under Cardinal Richelieu, England under Henry VIII, Russia under Rasputin, and the Spanish Inquisition. In fact, history is littered with examples of things bearing an association by name to Christianity while having absolutely no connection to it.

In the language of Ephesians 4, they have lost their connection to the head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, and have ceased to grow up in Him. (Ephesians 4:15-16) Perhaps you are thinking, "It is a long way from favoritism in the distribution of bread to the Crusades!" True enough. But the sin nature of man coupled with the efforts of Satan to frustrate God's purposes for the Church are a terrible combination. So it is my desire to constantly remind you of our need to be on the alert for potential division in the church that we might not give the evil one even the slightest of crevices in which he can begin to drive the wedge of dissension and sow false doctrine.

Return to Acts

Monday September 17: Read I Timothy 3

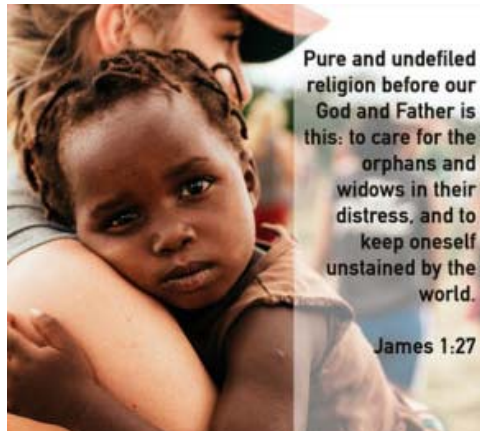
Now let's focus on the details of deacon ministry. As we have seen, Acts 6 provides broad guidelines for deacon service. Here are a few of the particulars:

- Injustice matters within the fellowship. Injustice regarding the distribution of food is what drew the apostles attention, and they jumped on it. It matters in our fellowship as well, for the principle stands:

*But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!*
Amos 5:24

- God's ways include sensitivity to the needs of the most vulnerable.

*Religion that God our
Father accepts as pure
and faultless is this:
to look after orphans
and widows in their
distress and to keep
oneself from being
polluted by the world.*
James 1:27



Pure and undefiled
religion before our
God and Father is
this: to care for the
orphans and
widows in their
distress, and to
keep oneself
unstained by the
world.
James 1:27

While the world has a habit of exploiting the weak, Christianity has historically built hospitals and orphanages and attempted to provide medical care as part of evangelism efforts.

- There is a division of labor within the body.

*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.
There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.*
I Corinthians 12:4-5

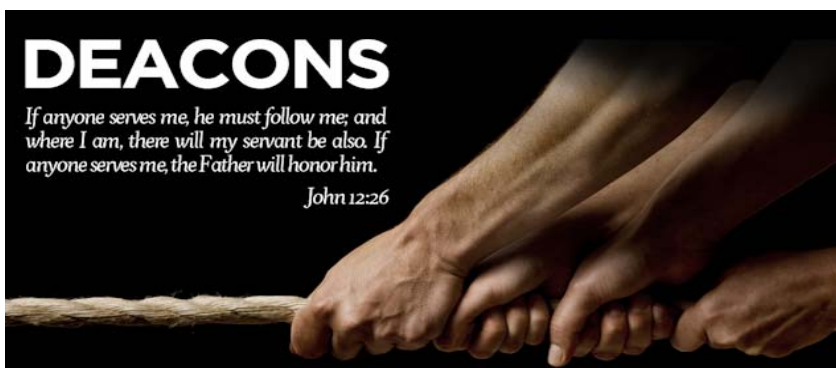
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Return to Acts

Monday September 17: Read I Timothy 3 (Continued)

Deacons have a particular kind of service within the fellowship. Perhaps you are thinking that none of the above passages even mention deacons. That is because we need to think about the role of deacons a little bit differently. Today's reading describes the character threshold for deacon service: Things like being men worthy of respect, sincere, self-controlled, holding to the truths of the faith, and being good managers within their own homes. Now take the above passages and this list of character qualifications and tell me if this is your general experience with deacon ministry?

I trust it is in our fellowship, but over the years your experience might be quite different. Often deacons hold power within the church or take on a narrowly-defined set of responsibilities. But notice there weren't any specific responsibilities listed in I Timothy 3. I would suggest what God intends is a group of men who can spot injustice of any kind and eliminate it, who have a heart for the vulnerable, who have a proven track record within their own families, and who see their calling as one of *hands-on* service within a body of believers. When they function like this, deacons are a wonderful group to have around.



Return to Acts

Tuesday September 18: Read John 13

Now let's return our focus to the few verses we have read in Acts 6 regarding the establishment of deacon ministry. First, it appears that deacons are primarily problem solvers, they are doers, and they meet needs. When Peter says, choose those who can be appointed over *this business*, he is looking for those who can address a need.

Notice the job description of those who are selected is to *serve tables*. The word serve is the verb form of the word from which we get the word deacon. Deacons don't have a call to specific duties, they have a call to serve within the fellowship. In this case, it is to deal with a very practical issue, that of food distribution, so that those who are called to spiritually lead can be about their calling to study and pray. Next notice the criteria for selection and how well it matches the character criteria we saw yesterday in I Timothy 3. Choose those:

*...who are known to be full of the Spirit
and wisdom. Acts 6:3*

Of course, in a general sense, all of us are called to service within the body of Christ:

*...whosoever will be great among you,
let him be your servant. Mark 10:43*

But deacons are capable trouble-shooters who lead the way! They address a variety of practical problems and meet a range of needs within a local fellowship. In doing so, they pave the way for others to put their own gifts into play in order to serve the fellowship and reach the lost. And don't forget, deacons may be gifted in other areas as well. Philip was an evangelist and the longest message in the Bible was given by a deacon, Stephen, in Acts 6-7. Truly, functional deacons are a blessing to any fellowship. And all God's people say, "Amen!"

Return to Acts

Wednesday September 19: Read Acts 6

Today we begin to unfold Stephen's great message before the Sanhedrin and his resultant martyrdom. Here is the first principle we can extract:

Bold proclamation of the Gospel is going to draw persecution—count on it!

Stephen has done *great wonders and signs among the people*, and spoken divine wisdom in the power of the Spirit. (Verses 8, 10) You would expect the people to embrace God's work among them. Some do, but right along with a positive response we read that *opposition arose*. (Verse 9) Our study has already revealed to us that people are being added to the church daily as the result of placing their faith in the person and work of Christ. Whenever that is the case, persecution is right around the corner! Stephen points out one reason in the next chapter:

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers; You always resist the Holy Spirit. Acts 7:51

Note that the resistance is not coming from blatantly sinful pagans, but from highly religious people. So now we have learned two things:

- Gospel proclamation is going to draw persecution.
- Don't be surprised if it comes from the religious crowd!

What should we do when we come up against such persecution? Should we clam up and hunker down to avoid any further conflict? Or, should we continue to contend for the truth? Notice I said *contend for the faith* as in Jude 1:3, and not become contentious for the faith! There is a fine line that Christians sometimes cross when they become obnoxious for the faith which rarely impacts the lost. As you can see, we have much more to discuss.

Return to Acts

Thursday September 20: Read Acts 7

Stephen's message in Acts 6 and 7 is fascinating in its own right. Notice, as is the case with many deacons, he was gifted in more than just one area. Rather than focus upon the details of his message, I want to ask and try to answer this question: "Why is such a lengthy message about the history of Israel in a New Testament book describing the early growth of the Church?" After all, space is at a premium in the Bible. Why did God decide to include this as part of His Word? We'll look at the first of three reasons today.



In broad terms, mankind's view of God can be summarized by two competing schools of thought. There are those who claim that God, if He exists at all, is an impotent spectator. We see this attitude expressed by those who scoff at the idea of a Second Coming of Christ:

...knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is this promise of His coming? . . ."

II Peter 3:3-4

Continued on the next page.

Return to Acts

Thursday September 20: Read Acts 7 (Continued)

In our day we have those, like avowed atheist Sinclair Lewis, who scoff. During a public debate on whether God exists, he declared, "If there is a God, let Him strike me dead now!" Then he walked off the stage in dramatic fashion. Of course, we know that no action was required on God's part. For, although Sinclair Lewis was biologically alive, he was already dead, spiritually speaking, and ignorant of his true condition.

Then, in contrast to this first position, there is the understanding that God is always at work.

*He makes known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times what is still to come.
His purposes will stand! Isaiah 46:10*

In this view, God is both the prime-mover behind human history and sovereign over it. Have you figured out what Stephen is doing? He is telling us in no uncertain terms which view of God is correct. The hand of God has been involved in every aspect of Israel's history from Abraham to the Exodus, and then to the establishment of the nation of Israel. In fact, you can see that God is equally involved throughout church history. There are no unforeseen factors on God's side of things. This age will continue until the precise time the trumpet blows, the dead rise, and the next step in God's timetable is underway.

We (the church) are God's masterpiece, caught up in the grandest of all dramas, with a clear call as to our mission and purpose! Stephen's great sermon should prompt this kind of reflection. Please don't lose sight of that in the details!

Return to Acts

Friday September 21: Read Romans 1

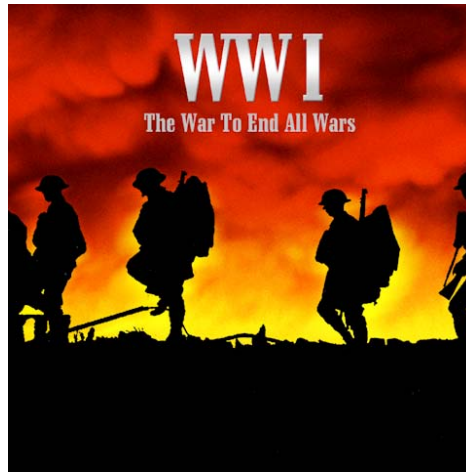
Here is a second reason I believe Stephen's lengthy, and very Jewish message, is contained in a book dealing with the growth of the Church. The history of the Jews shows the lostness of the Jews.

. . .our fathers refused to obey . . . Acts 7:39

You stiff-necked people. . .with uncircumcised hearts. . .

Acts 7:51-54

This, in turn, mirrors the lostness of mankind. In other words, we should see ourselves in the narrative. Consider just our recent history. World War I was acclaimed to be the *war to end all wars*. Yet, before we knew it, WWII claimed the lives of millions including seven million Jews in what has become known as the Holocaust.



Surely that should have shocked mankind into its need of a Savior! Hardly! Fifteen million killed in Russia as Stalin takes power and 50 million in China under Mao. Since then we have seen many more skirmishes and atrocities around the world, countless efforts at genocide, while the *civilized world* promotes abortion on demand and pursues helter-skelter every moral deviancy imaginable.

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Return to Acts

Friday September 21: Read Romans 1 (Continued)

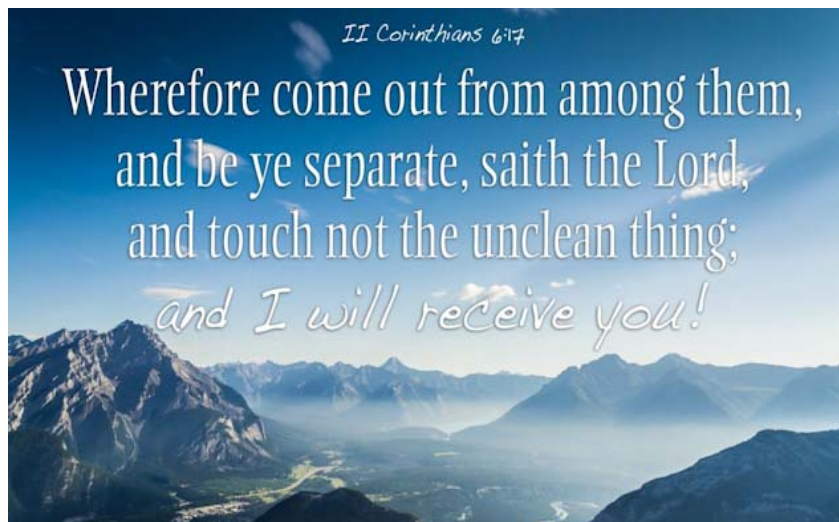
And, how has the church managed to navigate all of this? I would suggest the church in America is in desperate need of revival! Does not our nation seem to be characterized by today's reading:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Romans 1:21

The lost of our nation need to turn to Christ in faith, and the saved need to repent of their worldliness:

. . . come out and be separate. . . II Corinthians 6:17

Instead, I fear our nation is on the verge of gnashing its teeth and turning its back on the one thing that can save and redeem—the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ! And so, Stephen's great sermon is to remind us of mankind's common need throughout history—the desperate need of a Savior!



Return to Acts

Monday September 24: Read Matthew 25

One final reason for including the details of Stephen's message and martyrdom is to address the issue of legacy. For what we have in Acts 5-7 is two men with the same outcome, but vastly different legacies. I am speaking of Ananias from Acts 5 and Stephen from Acts 7. I say they had the *same outcome* because both died:

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died.

*. . . Then the young men came forward,
wrapped up his body, and carried him out
and buried him. Acts 5:5-6*

When he (Stephen) had said this, he fell asleep. . .

*Godly men buried Stephen and
mourned deeply for him. Acts 7:60, 8:20*

The amazing contrast between these two isn't one of long life—both died young. Nor, is it one of material prosperity or ministry success. It is one of spiritual legacy. One died the *sin unto death*, the other caused the Lord to stand!

*But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up
to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing
at the right hand of God. Acts 7:55*

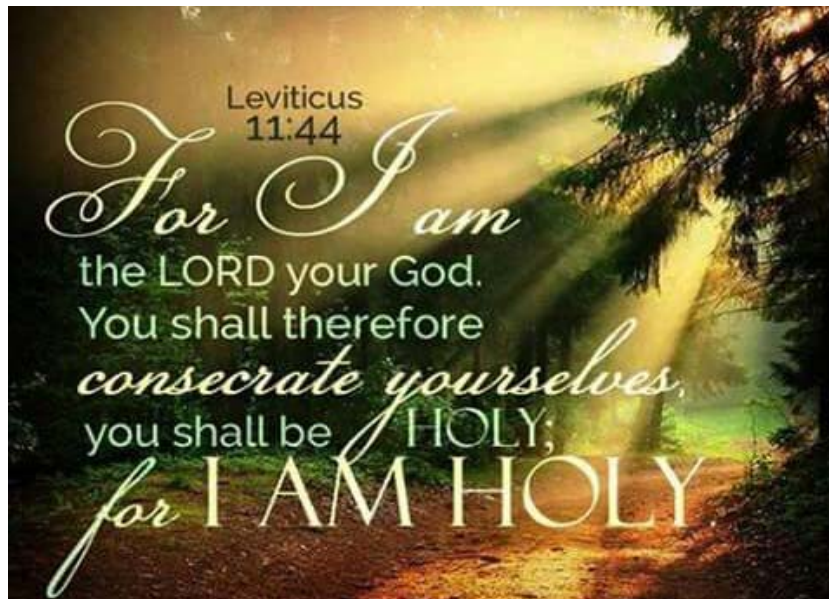
Why was Jesus standing? Ephesians 1:20 makes it clear He was raised and seated in the heavenlies! I think it quite likely that He was standing to honor or recognize Stephen. Perhaps you are thinking, what did he do to elicit such a response from our Lord? As we have learned, Stephen bore witness to God being at work, the needy condition of man, and God's provision of a Savior—Jesus Christ. We can do what Stephen did! We can bear witness in the same way! Stephen caused the Lord to stand, and no doubt say soon after: *"Well done my good and faithful servant!"* Pray that our spiritual legacy would prompt the same affirmation from our Lord.

Return to Acts

Tuesday September 25: Read I Corinthians 5

Before we move on, there is one last point we can glean from the narrative in Acts 5 involving Ananias and Sapphira and the stoning of Stephen in Acts 6-7. Have you given any thought to God's differing responses?

In Acts 5 we have a subtle sin of the heart, and God puts the sinners to death. In Acts 6-7 we have conspiracy, open deceit, and eventually murder, and there seems to be no response from God at all. Can you explain this? Let me give you a principle that we should understand, one which is clearly laid out in today's reading. God is much more likely to reach in and discipline His church (and His children) than He is going to reach in and judge lost mankind. For we are to *come out* of the world and be separate, while the principal need for lost mankind is to come to faith in Christ! Stated another way, the call on the saved is to *be holy as I am holy*. (I Peter 1:16)



Return to Acts

Tuesday September 25: Read I Corinthians 5 (Continued)

But God's call to the lost is to:

*Come! Whoever is thirsty let him come. . .
take the free gift of the water of life.*
Revelation 22:17

We can note this distinction very clearly in today's reading. On the one hand, Paul tells the church in Corinth:

*Shouldn't you rather have been filled
with grief and have put out of your fellowship
the man who did this? . . . Get rid of the
old yeast that you may be a new batch
without yeast—as you really are.*
I Corinthians 5:2,6

In short, he told them to exclude a man involved in overt sin from the fellowship. Contrast that with:

*I have written you in my letter not to associate
with sexually immoral people—not at all
meaning the people of this world. . .*
I Corinthians 5:9

Of course lost people are immoral, greedy, worldly—or sometimes moral! Regardless of their behavior, their first need is to be new creatures in Christ, not to clean up their lives. So, we are to concentrate on giving them the Gospel message.

However, once they are part of the church, God has a totally different threshold for discipline—as Ananias and Sapphira found out. Don't make yourself eligible to be on the receiving end of God's discipline. Also, don't tolerate actions within the fellowship to which you belong that merit God's discipline!

Lessons from Leviticus

Wednesday September 26: Read Joel 2

Returning to our study of Leviticus, we have arrived at the first of the fall feasts, and the fifth overall.

The Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the Lord by fire." Leviticus 23:23-25

This is the extent of the relatively short guidance on what is called the *Feast of Trumpets*. Consider the following:

- Whereas the spring feasts have already been fulfilled in Christ, the three fall feasts all speak, at least in part, of some prophetic event yet to be fulfilled.
- The *Feast of Trumpets* speaks of the yet future repentance and re-gathering of the Jewish people just prior to the Second Coming of Christ.
- The lengthy gap between the last of the spring feasts (*Feast of Weeks*) and the *Feast of Trumpets*, which occurs sometime in September or October, corresponds to insertion of the church between Jewish rejection of Christ at His First Advent and their turning to Him at His Second Advent. For God has promised that Israel yet has a glorious future.
- But, it is going to take some very dark times first before Israel, in repentance, turns to the Lord. That's the point of our reading in Joel.

Blow the trumpet in Zion. . .let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. Joel 2:1

Lessons from Leviticus

Wednesday September 26: Read Joel 2
(Continued)

Verse 13 makes so clear God's desire for His people:

*"So, rend your heart and not your garments.
Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious
and compassionate. . ."*

Now, like much prophecy, there has already been a partial fulfillment of this prophecy regarding Israel's suffering at the hand of the Assyrians. But the pouring out of the Spirit of God in Joel 2:28, the deliverance of Joel 2:32, and the judgment of the nations in Joel 3:1-2 has not yet happened. In fact, that's the point of the *Feast of Trumpets*—to look ahead to God's future deliverance for a repentant people!



Lessons from Leviticus

Thursday September 27: Read Leviticus 6

On the tenth day of the same month of the *Feast of Trumpets* is the most solemn of all the feasts, the *Day of Atonement*. The phrase Yom Kippur is a transliteration of the Hebrew referring to this day. It literally means Day of Cleansing or Day of Covering. In traditional Judaism, the *Feast of Trumpets* and Yom Kippur are connected by ten days of reflection and repentance called The Days of Awe. The *Day of Atonement* is described in Leviticus 23:26-32 and then in much greater detail in today's reading.

Two prominent activities by the priests are portrayed in today's reading. First, the bull is sacrificed for the sins of the priest and his family, and then the sacrifice of the goat for the sins of the people. In each case, the blood is taken into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled upon the *mercy seat* or *atonement cover*. Inside the ark were a number of things that spoke of the sin of the people, which in turn were covered by the *Mercy Seat*. Here above the *Mercy Seat* and between the cherubim dwelt the presence of God with His people. So on the *Day of Atonement*, the High Priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices upon the *Mercy Seat*. Symbolically, God looked down and the sins of the people were covered by the blood of the sacrifices—and so His righteousness and justice were satisfied. Now, in addition to this, the priest took a second goat, placed his hands upon it, and confessed the sins of the people. This goat was then taken far out into the desert and released. Symbolically, this represented the taking away of the sins of the people.

...as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Psalm 103:12

Are you getting a sense of the tremendous way in which these sacrifices pointed ahead to Christ?

Lessons from Leviticus

Friday September 28: Read Hebrews 9

Chapter 9 of the book of Hebrews is packed. You can learn much about the arrangement of the tabernacle (temple) and the ministry of the High Priest in the first seven verses. Now as we have come to learn, the feasts prescribed for Israel all point to the work of Christ, and the connection is clearly made in this chapter. Christ is the ultimate High Priest, acting on behalf of the people. He did not enter the earthly Holy of Holies:

For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Hebrews 9:24

Furthermore, he did not enter:

. . .heaven to offer Himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Hebrews 9:29

This is a direct reference to the *Day of Atonement*, but there are differences. Christ enters heaven—not year after year—but just once. And here is the reason:

But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Hebrews 9:26

So year after year, the sins of the people were covered by the sacrifices offered at the *Day of Atonement*, but God's justice was not yet satisfied until Christ fulfilled the feast. For by one sacrifice He has done away with sin and the justice of God has been satisfied.

Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people. . . Hebrews 9:28

When He said "*It is finished*" (John 19:30), He meant it! The demands of God's justice had been *paid in full!*

VISTOSO

Community Church

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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