

DIVINE MATHEMATICS

The book of Acts teaches us some divine mathematics... You probably didn't even know there was such a thing - *but God knows His math*. Remember, there's even a book of the Bible called "*Numbers*." God adds, subtracts, and multiplies.

In Acts 2:47 we're told, "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." When any church is a healthy church God *adds* to that church.

In Acts 5 the Lord subtracted two hypocritical members from the church - Ananias

and Sapphira. Sometimes God makes necessary subtractions.

And in chapter 6:7, we read, "the Word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem..." At times, God brings about explosive growth. He multiplies the number of disciples.

God adds. God subtracts. God multiplies. These are all functions of divine mathematics. But notice, God never divides. Man causes division - not God.

THE PRIORITY OF A PASTOR

Acts 6 illustrates the value of good leadership. A division is averted, and the ministry's expansion continues because of some wise and quick-thinking apostles.

Accusations of prejudice and inequities were swirling, but the real problem is identified in verse 1, "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying..."

The church had experienced such explosive growth, its leaders and resources were unable to keep up. The church's infrastructure was being stretched too thin.

To this point, the ministry of the church revolved around the apostles. Twelve men were being asked to "*do it all*" for a church of 5000 members. The problem was not the *presence of favoritism*, but the *absence of delegation*. It was impossible for 12 men to oversee every ministry of the church without neglecting the most vital ministries - the study of God's Word and prayer.

In verse 2 the apostles make a decision that saves the church from schism and solidifies its growth. They recognize their priorities, and give ministry to others. The

apostles say in verse 2, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." This is the decision all pastors need to make.

We reach a point when we have to recognize our priorities, and involve others in the work. When famous preacher Alexander Maclaren was interviewed for a pastorate he asked the elders, "Will you want my feet or my head? I cannot give you both."

Church members can be unrealistic. They want powerful sermons on Sundays - but they want the pastor on the run, visiting everybody and his cousin during the week. If you want to be taught God's Word - your pastor needs time in his study!

Don't misunderstand, the apostles would've been happy to wait on tables, or clean toilets, or move chairs. They weren't "*too good*" to tackle these tasks. They just knew if the church was going to grow, and if they were going to last, they would need to stick to their priorities, and delegate ministry to others.

Devotion Box - Be Faithful In The Little Things

Stephen, the first name to appear in the list of deacons, is a good example to all of us. Be faithful in the menial tasks - and God might broaden your ministry and use you in mightier ways. According to verse 8, Stephen went from *table waiter* to *miracle worker* - it was quite a promotion. Hey, because Stephen was faithful in the so-called *little things*, God blessed him with more influential opportunities.

Philip was also a deacon in the church of Jerusalem, but in 8:5 he heads to Samaria to preach Jesus, and a great revival results. The message is received and miracles take place - demons are cast out, people are healed. Great joy comes to Samaria. Philip the deacon becomes Philip the evangelist. Both Stephen and Philip teach us to be faithful in the mundane, and God may use you to do mighty works.

DESIGNATED DOERS

The solution to the church squabble in Acts 6 was the appointment of deacons - *designated doers* - to administrate the daily, physical duties of the church.

The apostles tell the church in 6:3, to choose seven men, "of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom."

The church chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. All seven men had Greek names which meant the apostles graciously allowed the Hellenists to choose men from among their own ranks - men they could trust.

Remember too, these men were chosen to wait on tables and distribute meals - yet high qualifications were established for what we might consider routine tasks. Any act of service done in Jesus' name should be considered a big deal.

OUT OF THE NEST

Understand what's happened by the end of Acts 7. Tens of thousands of believers are worshipping together in Jerusalem. The fellowship is warm and giving - the power of the Spirit is evident - miracles are occurring - the church is exploding - there's high energy and great harmony. The church in Jerusalem is the place to be.

There's only one problem - Jesus said, "Go into all the world." What about Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth? These new believers need a little nudge out of the nest. And that's what God provides them in chapter 8... The outbreak of persecution forces them away from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and eventually to all the world.

THE STORY OF STEPHEN

At the end of chapter 6 Stephen is persecuted. He's accused of blasphemy against the temple and the Law of Moses - and he's hauled into court.

Acts 6 closes in verse 15 with an interesting comment, "And all who sat in the council (*...the Jewish Sanhedrin*), looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel." Like Moses, Stephen radiated the glory of God. But unlike Moses, Stephen taught a better way to God... through faith in Jesus Christ.

God is not confined to the temple, nor limited by the Law. *God is doing a new work on the earth...* that's the theme of the defense Stephen musters in Acts 7.

The Jews remind me of the burglars in Fort Lauderdale who broke into a house and stole a box of white powder. They thought it was cocaine, but it was the cremated remains of Aunt Gertrude. Imagine, those burglars sitting around trying to get high on the ashes of ol' Gerti. This was the problem with the Jews.

Jesus made the Law and temple rituals obsolete. Judaism was a dead religion. Stephen on the other hand was high on a real relationship with God. The Law and temple were no longer needed. All they needed now was Jesus Christ.

Stephen's sermon is a masterpiece. He retraces Jewish history demonstrating how God was always up to something new - yet each new initiative was met with resistance. Call his sermon *a panoramic view of a people's stubbornness*.

God picked out a man among a pagan people, and promised Abraham a son and descendants. Those descendants went to Egypt to escape the famine, and became slaves to the Egyptians - until God raised up a deliverer named Moses.

DL Moody once said, "Moses spent 40 years in Pharaoh's court thinking he was a somebody; 40 years in the desert learning he was a nobody; and 40 years as Israel's leader showing what God can do with a somebody who knows he's a nobody." The story is recounted in 7:23 of how Moses tried to deliver the people through his own efforts. It was a tragic mistake. Moses had to flee to the desert.

It wasn't until he was 80 years old that God appeared to him in the burning bush. Verse 30 tells us, "And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai."

Notice Stephen says "an Angel of the Lord" appeared in the bush, but in verse 32 the Angel calls Himself, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob..." What's up with this...?, an angel who claims to be God Himself.

The word translated "*angel*" means "*messenger*." I believe the messenger who appeared to Moses was none other than the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus. It was Jesus who spoke to Moses, and was responsible for the Hebrews' deliverance.

You'd think the Israelis would be thankful for all God had done - but verses 39-50 describe their worship of idols. For the next 900 years they were lured away again and again by false gods. They were finally imprisoned in Babylon.

Stephen sums up his Hebrew history lesson in verse 51, "You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers..." He was speaking of Jesus.

Verse 54, "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth." They looked like pit bulls in clerical robes.

It was at that moment, Stephen saw a vision. The heavens opened and Jesus was standing at the right hand of God. Elsewhere in the New Testament we're told Jesus is always seated at the right hand of God, yet apparently Stephen's faith and courage caused Jesus to rise to His feet to greet His servant to glory.

The Jews pick up rocks to stone Stephen, and in a bath of blood he asks God to forgive his executioners. He then turns his spirit over to the One who saved it.

It's been said, "The blood of the martyrs becomes the seeds of the church." It's true. As we'll see, Stephen's death causes many to receive the life of Christ.

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PHILIP IN SAMARIA

When the church in Jerusalem heard about the revival in Samaria they sent two of the apostles, Peter and John, to check it out and provide their blessing. Remember, in Matthew 16:19, Jesus told Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." And every time the Gospel breaks a cultural barrier, Peter is there to open the door - here with the Samaritans and, in Acts 10, with the Gentiles.

Understand too, Philip was a deacon turned evangelist - he preached to see people saved. But there is more to the Christian life than salvation. Salvation is the tip of the iceberg. The Spirit not only lives in us, but He comes upon us with power.

It's like sitting in one of those dunk'n booths. Your feet are wet - the Holy Spirit dwells in you - but God hits the lever and you're suddenly immersed in the Spirit. Like the old hymn, "mercy drops 'round us are falling, but the showers we plead."

The Samaritans had the Holy Spirit within them - they'd believed on Jesus. But according to verse 16, "as yet (the Holy Spirit) had fallen upon none of them." Peter and John came to Samaria to lay hands on the believers and impart this power.

ON THE ROAD WITH PHILIP

In 8:26, Philip obeys an impractical command. He leaves this great revival in Samaria, and travels down a lonely wilderness road that leads to nowhere. It's not until Philip arrives that God's purpose becomes clear. And isn't that the case with most of God's commands?

You don't always see what He intends until you take the step of faith He requires - then God's purpose becomes clear.

Philip sees an Ethiopian dignitary sitting in his chariot. When Philip approaches the Ethiopian he's reading Isaiah 53 - where Isaiah predicts the sacrifice of Jesus. Philip climbs into the chariot and according to verse 35, "and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him."

As they travel down the road, apparently they pass a pond. That's when the Ethiopian asks Philip, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" And I love Philip's response, "I believe with all your heart, you may." Philip doesn't try to *water down* the qualifications of baptism. Salvation, and thus baptism, require more than intellectual assent. It's a heart issue. You've got to believe with *your heart* - your will and desires - not just mind and mouth. "And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'"

Note verse 38, "both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him." If Philip sprinkled the man why did they go down into the water? We believe the early church practiced full-immersion baptisms. They dunked them.

Devotion Box - From Persecutor To Preacher

All that Saul had done had been in the name of God - but on the road to Damascus he meets God - and discovers that God is on the other team. A blinding light opens Saul's eyes. He gets knocked off his high horse - in more ways than one - and hears a voice in Acts 9:4, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Saul said, "Who are You, Lord?" What a shocker it must've been, when he heard the Lord say, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting..." Understand Jesus takes persecution personally. Whenever the church is mistreated, it's as if you've mistreated Jesus. We are His body on earth.

In verse 5 the Lord says to Saul, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" - which was the equivalent of a cattle prod. Saul's rage was evidently a reaction to the Holy Spirit's conviction. He had seen the peace and joy in Stephen's face. He was haunted by Stephen. He'd wake up at night in a cold sweat. The Holy Spirit wouldn't let him forget Stephen's testimony. All Saul could do was fight harder.

We think of Christianity's most vocal and antagonistic critics as the unreachables, but it may be just the opposite. If they weren't under the Holy Spirit's conviction they would be ambivalent or apathetic. They're kicking against the goads be-

cause God keeps pressing the point. Saul surrenders to Jesus in verse 6. He asks, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Jesus tells him to enter Damascus and wait for further instructions.

Imagine, being Ananias - you're a simple disciple in Damascus. One day God speaks to you in a vision to go to a house on the street called Straight, and there you'll find Rabbi Saul. Pray for him that he might receive his sight. This is like God telling you to journey to a secluded hide-away, where you'll find Osama Bin Ladin. You're to pray for him that God will open his eyes.

In verse 13, Ananias voices his reservations. God says, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My Name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel." And I love how Ananias addresses Saul when he enters the house. Verse 17, "Brother Saul." What an affirmation of God's grace! "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Verse 18, "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized." The Church's most antagonistic persecutor will soon become its most aggressive preacher. Never underestimate the life-changing power of the Gospel.

Devotion Box - Cutting Zs Not Asking Whys

Understand Peter's situation in Acts 12 - he's handcuffed to two soldiers. He's on the verge of execution - yet he's sound asleep - out like a log - when the angel appears. No restless nights for Peter. His life is in the hands of God. I love Peter's faith. Peter is *cutting z's* rather than *asking whys!* In fact, verse 7 tells us, Peter snoozed so soundly the angel had to slap him to wake him up.

His chains fall off - gates swing open - before Peter knows it, he's outside the jail. We're told in verse 11, it's only after he's outside that Peter realizes he was actually freed. At first he wasn't sure if it was a dream or a real experience. It reminds me of the guy who confessed, "I dreamed I was eating a plate of spaghetti, and when I woke up, my pajama string was gone!"

Bible Scan - Acts 6-12

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org
For back issues of Bible Scan study guides: www.calvarychapelstonemountain.com/biblescan.htm

Calvary Chapel Announcements:

Baby Dedication, March 10th

Men's Raft Trip, Sunday, May 19th—Monday, May 20th

Middle School Retreat, Monday, June 17th—Friday June 21st

Kid's Camp, 1st-2nd Grade, July 16th-18th, 3rd-5th Grade, July 18th-21st

- Next Bible Scan - March 10, 2002 - Acts 13-19

"But the Word of God grew and multiplied." - Acts 12:24

Bible Scan Memory Verse

PETER'S WRESTLING MATCH

It was noon and time for lunch, but Peter didn't like what God placed on the menu. God gave Peter a vision - a giant picnic blanket descending from the sky.

It was full of *incredible edibles*... but not for a pious Jew. This was not a kosher picnic. Everything on the menu was off-limits to Peter's culture and religion and upbringing - yet God commands him in verse 13, to "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."

Peter's response is the ultimate contradiction, "Not so, Lord!" The word "*Lord*" means boss. How can He be Lord when you refuse to do what He requires?

Understand, this is no small matter for Peter. Diet was big deal to a Jew. He'd been trained and conditioned from childhood to consider certain foods clean and others unclean. To change would force him to ditch long held beliefs - throw tra-

dition to the wind - uproot conviction. He would have to violate his conscience. This would be like God asking your very traditional grandparents to wear shorts to church - or commanding a diehard vegan to pig out on a chili-cheese burger.

Hey, Peter is in a rooftop wrestling match with his conscience.

Understand our conscience is an interesting organ. It can be trained by either truth or tradition. The conscience can fight against the Spirit, or be His ally. In this case, Peter's conscience supported a prejudice that needed to be pinned. God is teaching Peter that He was doing a new work. What once was called unclean would now be okay - and that not only included pork chops, but Gentiles.

A NEW DAY A NEW WAY

Peter begins his sermon in Acts 10:34, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality..." Ol' *prejudiced Pete* has come a long way in a short time. He preaches the Gospel and we're told in verse 44, "While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word."

Before he finished his sermon, faith was born in the heart of the Gentiles. The Spirit was poured out upon them. Verse 46 points out the Gentiles also spoke in tongues just as the Jews had done at Pentecost. It was a final confirmation that salvation had come to the Gentiles, just as it had the Jews.

Without being circumcised - having never offered a sacrifice - or celebrated a Passover - God blesses the Gentiles for no other reason than their faith in Jesus. A new day dawned. Guys, in a real sense you and I owe our inclusion into God's kingdom to what happened that day at Cornelius' house.

Devotion Box - The Disciples Were First Called Christians In Antioch

A side-note appears at the end of Acts 11:26, "And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch." The suffix "*-i-a-n*" meant "*the party of*" - the word "*Christian*" meant "*the party of Christ*." This was how the Romans referred to their slaves. Claudius' slaves were called "*Claudians*." The Romans meant the name Christian as a derogatory term - but the Christians took as an honor!

Devotion Box - The Power Of A Praying Church

In Acts 12:5 the church orchestrates a jailbreak. We're told, "Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church." Puritan preacher Thomas Watson wrote of this passage, "The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer that fetched the angel." The church's plan was prayer! Guys, nothing is more powerful than a praying church.

It's funny, the church called an all night prayer meeting to intercede for Peter - but when the answer to their prayer knocks on the door, they don't believe it's him. Don't attribute Peter's release to the church's formidable faith. They prayed a prayer they didn't expect to be answered - but... at least they prayed. *The only prayer God can't answer is the prayer that never gets prayed.*