

## Reading Schedule for April 9 -15, 2018

There will be evidence of Spirit-led boldness in the disciples as we read chapters 4 through 7 this week. There will be many reasons why they should back off like arrest, imprisonment, growing opposition and even death. Our first martyr is identified as Stephen in chapter 7. These words are quite challenging and apply to us even today. Subtle but certain opposition to the message of Christ is mounting in our culture. Let the disciples be your example and may they inspire a similar boldness in us.

**April 9 - Acts 4:1-22:** "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." (v.13) I almost included verse 12 with verse 13 because both of these are impressive to me. Peter and John were fishermen. They would not be thought of as public speakers that displayed so much confidence. It was surprising to the religious leaders in Jerusalem. Their identification with Jesus is noteworthy as the religious court made reference to this fact. The Holy Spirit is bringing to mind that which they learned from Jesus. Jesus told them that they could trust in the Holy Spirit's help as they are delivered up before man (Matthew 10:19). He would give them the words to say. This is demonstrated by Peter in these verses. The truth found in verse 12 is not popular in our day either. Peter says that salvation is found in no other name. In other words, Jesus is the only way to heaven. You will be called bigoted, close-minded and intolerant by others when you say Jesus is the only way. Are you willing to stand up for Christ and his authority? How does the boldness of the disciples challenge you?

**April 10 - Acts 4:23-37:** "After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." (v.31) There is a statement that is repeated several times in Acts - "filled with the Holy Spirit." I think Peter is filled four different times, with each time being connected to the challenge of proclaiming the Gospel. The Bible teaches that we need to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) for effective ministry and the power to witness (Acts 1:8). There is also a connection to prayer and being filled. They waited in Jerusalem, praying for the coming of the Spirit. His filling on Pentecost launched the church. Have you been filled with the Spirit? If you are a believer you have the Spirit in you (John 14:16-18). But how much does the Spirit have you? The key to being filled is to surrender. John the Baptist said "I must decrease so he can increase." That is the idea. The early church believers prayed with surrendered hearts for more of Christ's influence. You can too. What does it mean to you to be filled with the Spirit?

**April 11 - Acts 5:1-11:** "Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God." (v. 4) This story bothers us and it bothered the early church believers as well. But we are ignorant of how much was at stake. Everything was moving forward in unity and power. Human deception and blatant sin could mar the tender beginning days of the Lord birthing His Church. This couple did not have to give anything but pretended to give all. It says that Satan was behind this deception, of course. The Lord took Ananias and Sapphira to heaven to save the church and to save them from greater harm. It may be hard to see this as gracious but that is because we are so connected to our human existence and so tied to this life. How do you respond to this sobering event?

**April 12 - Acts 5:12-42:** "Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing." (v.36) This is such an interesting event as God protects the Apostles. God uses Gamaliel to free the disciples. He is telling the truth, which is fairly

surprising. In so many words, he is saying, "If we are opposing God nothing can stop them." They will be killed by others who hate them and it will come to nothing, as with Theudas, or it will continue and there's nothing we can do to stop it. These words affirm God's blessing over his message of salvation through his Son. In verse 41, after being flogged, the disciples rejoiced in the privilege of suffering for Jesus which meant they actually suffered with him. After I experience a setback, I will often withdraw. But not the disciples, they continued to proclaim the message publicly and from house to house. In my introduction I mentioned the theme of BOLDNESS. That is the word to contemplate. You are not able to muscle out boldness but when the Spirit moves in you and through you, you will have power. These men demonstrated what the influence of the Spirit looks like. How do you respond to their example of boldness?

**April 13 - Acts 6:1-7:** "Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them." (v.3) The Gospel ministry is a shared endeavor. 1 Corinthians 12 highlights how the Body of Christ functions best. It is when everyone is doing their part. But the best things happen when people are surrendered to the Holy Spirit, just like these seven leaders were in the early church. The Apostles were getting weighed down by the needs in the church so more people had to step up and serve others along with the Apostles. This is still true today. Romans 12:6-8 highlights spiritual gifts that strengthen the church. Exodus 18 tells us about Moses and how he had to do everything. But this was actually his lack of insight. His Father-in-law gave him advice to share the load. The Holy Spirit equips each believer so we can share the load together. What part are you to play in the Body? How are you gifted?

**April 14 - Acts 6:8-15:** "Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people." (v.8) Stephen is one of the seven leaders chosen to serve the church by helping the widows. This verse describes him in such a positive way. But this did not mean everyone liked him. There were some who opposed him out of jealousy. He would outwit them by speaking the truth empowered by the Spirit. We think this means people will like us. But Stephen is an example of doing the right thing and saying the right thing, but being backed in a corner as they seize him. This short reading reminds us that the Kingdom of God pushes with force and there will be resistance oftentimes. The message of these chapters tells us about the battle we face as we shine light in a dark world. How do you respond to this paragraph?

**April 15 - Acts 7:1-34:** "To this he replied: 'Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran.'" (v.2) This is the first half of the longest speech in the Book of Acts. I chose for us to read the first half of his message. It reminds me of Psalm 78 as Stephen gives an historical account. How God has worked in the past gives us insight into what he might be up to in the present. He begins with Abraham, then on to Joseph with recognition of Moses also. Why might he pick these leaders? Is there any indication in his speech? Why do you think he uses history? I will give you a hint about tomorrow's reading with the idea that the Jews of Stephen's day were repeating the errors of yesterday. However, there are good examples of faith in the past as well. Let us learn from the good and poor examples from the past. What stood out to you in these first few verses?

**PRAYER: We have several community groups that meet in homes; please pray for their leaders, their growth and their love one to another.**