

Throughout the book of Acts, the author Luke inserts several “summary” statements such as:

- *Acts 2:41* Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.
- *Acts 4:4* Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.
- *Acts 16:5* And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

One of these statements, given in Acts 6:7 between the appointment of deacons and the martyrdom of Stephen, sums up the ministry in Jerusalem before the gospel spreads. **It contains a curious phrase.**

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

Strangely enough, the strongest opposition to Jesus’ ministry came from the Chief Priests in Jerusalem. They were supposed to be God’s representatives to minister to the Jews, but they were fighting His Son! Why? They had the most to lose if the masses obeyed His teaching and replaced religion with reality!

- *Mark 11:18*¹⁸ And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine.
- *John 12:10*¹⁰ But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death;
- *John 18:3*³ Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.
- *Matthew 26:59*⁵⁹ Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death;
- *Matthew 27:20*²⁰ But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.
- *John 19:6*⁶ When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.
- *Mark 15:31*³¹ Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save.
- *John 19:21*²¹ Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews.
- *Matthew 27:62-64*⁶² Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, ⁶³ Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. ⁶⁴ Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.

It was the Chief Priests who fought hardest against the Apostolic Church, trying to stamp it out. But even as they fought it, they could not stem the tide of conversions within their own ranks!

In general, the priesthood had grown very corrupt by the time of Jesus; it was just a religious form! As early as the time of Jeremiah, some priests had acted also as priests of Baal. (Jeremiah 2:8) In the time of Ezekiel, they ministered before these idols in the Temple itself (Ezekiel 44:12) and allowed the heathen to join them in their sacrifices! (Ezekiel 44:7) Isaiah prophesied against a priesthood that had become sensual, covetous, drunkards, tyrannical, and adulterous. (Isaiah 28:7-8, 56:10-12) Although they were somewhat chastened by the captivity, the root evils soon reappeared. Malachi, in the last word we have on the subject in the Old Testament, says that the priests performed their services for money (1:10), corrupted the covenant and caused people to stumble (2:8), were despised by the people (2:9), and forgot entirely that they were supposed to be messengers of the Lord! (2:7) Many of the most righteous among the priests were of the “lower orders” and even of the Levites.

- *2 Chronicles 29:34*³⁴ But the priests were too few, so that they could not flay all the burnt offerings: wherefore their brethren the Levites did help them, till the work was ended, and until the other priests had sanctified themselves: for the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests.

History says there were approximately 8000 “ordinary” priests who served at the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. A much smaller number served in “official” priesthood positions: The High Priest, the Sagan (second priest), 2 Katholikin (chief treasurers), 7 Ammarcalin (in charge of gates) & 3 Gizbarim (undertreasurers). These 14 officers formed the “council of the Temple.” Also, there were heads of certain divisions, heads of families under these, overseers of guards, etc. **But while their hierarchy fought the church, “a great company of the (ordinary) priests were obedient to the faith”!**

When did reality replace religion in the lives of the priests? When did divinity overtake duty? Could it have been an encounter with someone touched by the Nazarene that turned the tide? Consider the following:

1. IT WAS THE PRIESTS’ DUTY TO INSTRUCT THE PEOPLE IN THE LAW.

- *Mark 1:22²² And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.*
- *John 7:45-46⁴⁵ Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? ⁴⁶ The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.*
- **Could it be that some of the priests who were devoted to the Law were convicted when they heard it explained with authority by the One who had written it?**

2. IT WAS THE PRIESTS’ DUTY TO APPRAISE THINGS DEDICATED TO THE SANCTUARY.

- *Leviticus 27:12¹² And the priest shall value it, whether it be good or bad: as thou valuest it, who art the priest, so shall it be.*
- The custom of donation to the Temple had been abused over the years, with some reserving gifts (“Corban”) for the Temple just so they would not have to support their aged parents with the money!
- *Mark 7:10-13¹⁰ For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: ¹¹ But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. ¹² And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; ¹³ Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.*
- **Could it be that some of the priests who had gone along with erroneous traditions were set free when they heard from Jesus that there had to be more to worship than corrupt religion?**

3. IT WAS THE PRIESTS’ DUTY TO ACT AS THE COURT OF APPEAL IN ANY DIFFICULT CASE.

- *Deuteronomy 21:5⁵ And the priests the sons of Levi shall come near; for them the LORD thy God hath chosen to minister unto him, and to bless in the name of the LORD; and by their word shall every controversy and every stroke be tried:*
- *Matthew 22:17-22¹⁷ Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? ¹⁸ But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? ¹⁹ Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. ²⁰ And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? ²¹ They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. ²² When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.*
- *Matthew 22:28-33²⁸ Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. ²⁹ Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. ³¹ But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, ³² I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. ³³ And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.*
- **Could it be that some of the priests who had wrestled with weighty questions of the people were converted when they heard of the Wisdom of the Ages being shared with the masses?**

4. IT WAS THE PRIESTS' DUTY TO ADMINISTER THE OATH OF PURGATION TO ANY WOMAN ACCUSED OF ADULTERY, AND TO RENDER THE VERDICT IF STONING WAS WARRANTED.

- *Numbers 5:21-22*²¹ Then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing, and the priest shall say unto the woman, The LORD make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when the LORD doth make thy thigh to rot, and thy belly to swell; ²² And this water that causeth the curse shall go into thy bowels, to make thy belly to swell, and thy thigh to rot: And the woman shall say, Amen, amen.
- *Deuteronomy 22:22*²² If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.
- *John 8:10-11*¹⁰ When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? ¹¹ She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.
- **Could it be that some of the priests who had wrestled in vain with secret sins of their own all the while they judged others found hope in the mercy and forgiveness of the Nazarene?**

5. IT WAS THE PRIESTS' DUTY TO INSPECT LEPERS AND DECLARE THEM CLEAN.

- *Leviticus 14:2*² This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the priest:
- It seems the Law of Moses regarding the cleansing of leprous individuals in Leviticus 13-14 had never been used in Jewish history to cleanse anyone who had been put out of the camp.
- Naaman was healed of leprosy in the Old Testament (2 Kings 5), but he was not Jewish!
- But suddenly, lepers begin to come to the priests asking for cleansing - they have been healed!
- *Matthew 8:4*⁴ And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.
- *Luke 17:14*¹⁴ And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.
- **Could it be that some of the priests who had to dust off the scrolls to relearn a ceremony they thought would never be fulfilled caught the revelation of the Messiah Jesus Christ?**

6. IT WAS THE PRIESTS' DUTY TO ADDRESS THE TROOPS BEFORE THEY WENT OUT.

- *Deuteronomy 20:2*² And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle, that the priest shall approach and speak unto the people,
- *John 18:3*³ Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.
- The soldiers who arrested Jesus were Temple Guards, who had probably been addressed by some of the priests prior to heading for the Garden of Gethsemane that night.
- *John 18:6*⁶ As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.
- **Could it be that some of the priests who heard reports of this powerful man who freely used the unutterable name of God decided to find out more about the name of Jesus?**

7. IT WAS THE PRIESTS' DUTY TO OFFER THE MORNING AND EVENING SACRIFICES ON THE ALTAR, TO TRIM THE LAMPS AND LIGHT THEM EVERY EVENING, AND TO OFFER INCENSE BEFORE THE VEIL EVERY MORNING AND EVENING.

- *Exodus 29:39*³⁹ The one lamb thou shalt offer in the morning; and the other lamb thou shalt offer at even:
- *Exodus 27:20-21*²⁰ And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always. ²¹ In the tabernacle of the congregation without the veil, which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before the LORD: it shall be a statute for ever unto their generations on the behalf of the children of Israel.
- *Exodus 30:7-8*⁷ And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. ⁸ And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.
- The ordinary priests had never viewed the magnificent Ark of the Covenant behind the veil in the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter there, on the Great Day of Atonement.

- Luke 23:44-45 ⁴⁴ And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. ⁴⁵ And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.
- Josephus says the evening sacrifice was at the ninth hour, exactly when the veil was rent! The priests had heard of the magnificent Shekinah, but what did they see that day? Nothing! The glory of the Lord had departed from the Temple before the captivity as seen in Ezekiel's vision (10-11).
- Ezekiel 10:18 ¹⁸ Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims.
- Ezekiel 11:23 ²³ And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city.
- **Could it be that some of the priests who finally discovered that there was no reality behind their religion turned to the reality of the One who embodied the Spirit of God?**

IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THESE EVENTS HAD AN EFFECT ON AT LEAST SOME OF THE PRIESTS! BUT IT WAS EVEN MORE POWERFUL WHEN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS WAS MULTIPLIED!

- John 14:12 ¹² Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.
- Acts 4:33 ³³ And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all

You can be set free from dead religion, and then you can help someone else find freedom!