

Acts Chapter 6

Overview: Acts chapters 6 & 7 describe the ministry and martyrdom of Stephen, a spirit filled believer.

- There are two words for “crown”, one is “diadema” which means “a royal crown”, the other is “stephanos” which means “victor’s crown”. You can inherit a “diadema”, but the only way to get a “stephanos” is to earn it.

Revelation 2:10 “... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown (stephanos) of life.”

- Stephen was faithful both in life, and in death, he is a good example.
- The church had been birthed at Pentecost, they had been tested, added to, then multiplied. They had been culled or subtracted from (Ananias & Sapphira), then added to some more, tested some more, and persecuted.
- The disciples walked away from the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. Now they’re back to being multiplied, and the church is just beginning to experience some growing pains.

V: 1 Healthy, well fed sheep re-produce! But there are always going to be challenges, and at times issues with the sheep. When you get people involved things get messy.

- **Murmuring / complaint** (NKJV) (G1112) goggusmos, gong-goos-mos'; a grumbling:--grudging, murmuring.
- An accusation of discrimination. Grecians / Hellenists vs: Hebrews.

Explanation:

- The conquest and reign of Alexander the Great greatly influenced world. The Grecian culture, style of dress, philosophy of life, and language permeated every culture including the Jews.

Map / Pictures - Zappori: Birthplace of Mary - Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi first codified the Mishna (Oral laws written down). Mosaics of Greek god Dionysus.



- The Jews who had adopted the Grecian ways were known as Hellenists. Those Jews who maintained their traditional Jewish culture, remaining true to the old ways and traditions were referred to as the “Hebrews”.
- The Greek translation of the OT known as the Septuagint was a concession to that Grecian culture within Judaism, which in some ways is not unlike the newer Bible translations are today. (Being written in Alexandria)
- The “Hebrews” looked down upon the “Hellenists” as being compromised, 2nd class Jews.
- They didn’t realize that they had all become Christians even though they weren’t called that yet.

Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

- This later carried over to the believing Hebrews & Hellenists as a potential point of division between the supposedly “more spiritual” versus the “less spiritual”. Old prejudices that needed to be dealt with. (That’s how we grow, and learn to deal with stuff Biblically)
- Even though the early church was not perfect in their operation or distribution towards those in need, it is interesting that they were seeking to minister to the needs of those in need right at the beginning.

Galatians 6:10 “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

- People have at times sought to define the church as a social or welfare institution thinking that we need to meet all the practical needs of society. The government has certainly been defined this way and because of it we can see the shape that our government is in. The government was never intended to fill that function that way either.
- The Levitical system set in place a way for the truly poor, and for those able to work to glean in the fields and provide for themselves and their families. The older generations were to be taken care of by the younger generations - that is part of what honoring your father and mother is all about.
- People have often said that until you meet their practical needs you can never meet their spiritual needs - and many churches because of that have become social needs oriented churches, where Jesus, the Gospel, and salvation become secondary issues even though they would never admit to that.
- Testimony: Bay St. Louis / Kitchen & Dinner tent - means to an end.

There is a balance to be struck:

James 1:27 “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

- The Bible goes on to define what real widows are, or who the really needy are - the Bible also says that if you don't work you don't eat.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 “... this we command you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.”

- That is part of where the balance comes in.
- Even in the garden of Eden before the fall there weren't any freebies, we were made and created to work.

Genesis 2:15 “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it / tend it / to work it and to keep it.”

- When we're born again, we are again called to good works:

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

- *So the church is growing and thriving, but this issue has come up relative to the distribution to the widows in need between these two groups within the church family. Part of that process of becoming one family...*

V: 2 The 12 exercise their authority as “Apostles” and call or summon the “multitude” of disciples.

- 3,000 + 5,000 + multitudes = multitudes more.
- What does that look like for a church gathering where they are? No sound system or modern ministry helps / power-point, not even written Bibles.

All the Apostle said pretty much the same thing:

1 John 1:3 “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Paul said the same thing:

1 Corinthians 15:3 “³For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; ⁴And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

What is our role, how do we do it? The same way.

2 Corinthians 3:3 “For as much as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”

V: 2b “... It is not reason / desirable / right that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.”

- Apparently the Apostles were involved in the practical ministry of helping out but it had grown to the point of distracting the Apostles away from what they really should be doing - studying God’s Word, teaching God’s Word, and spending time with the Lord in prayer.
- There are practical needs to address, somebody needs to do it. (The Pastor can’t do it all.)

Priorities.

Matthew 6:33 “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

- When we keep our priorities straight and do what God wants us to do in His church, He will raise up the help if that is what is needed. When God guides, he provides - in every way.

V: 3 With such a great number, why only 7? Could have been 70 or 700?

- Significance of the number “7”.
- It means they are going to work hard!

- Qualifications to serve, representing the church and Jesus.
 1. From “among you” - part of the church.
 2. Honest report, meaning a good reputation.
 3. Full of the Holy Spirit.
 4. Wisdom, demonstrated.

- Need to be filled with the Holy Spirit even to wait on tables properly.

Zechariah 4:6 “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.”

John 15:5 “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.”

- Paul would later expound on the qualifications of a “Deacon” - “Minister” - servant in his letters to Timothy and Titus.

V: 4 Leaders within the church need to be given to prayer and the study of God's Word, the ministry of God's Word.

“Continually” (G4342) proskartereo; to be constantly diligent, steadfast.

Prayer: Spending time with God, in communion with Him, talking to Him, and listening to Him.

Psalm 34:15 “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry.”

James 5: 13-16 ¹³Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. ¹⁴Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: ¹⁵And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. ¹⁶Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

Psalm 119:18 “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy Law.”

Bible Study: “ministry of the Word.” “Diakonia” - like a waiter at a table. Serving it up.

- You can't give what you don't have... Once you receive it you can give it to others.

Psalm 1:1-3 ¹Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. ²But his delight is in the law of the Lord: and in His law doeth he meditate day and night. ³And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

Psalm 119:165 “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”

2 Timothy 2:15 “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.”

- Each of these components is important in a healthy ministry, and in a healthy Christian walk.

- And just as there are different parts of the body, and of the body of Christ, there are different parts of ministry, there are needed divisions of responsibility – no one man can do it all.

Romans 12 & 1 Corinthians 12:4-22 Diversities of gifts & differing parts of the body.

V: 5 Everyone agreed, thought it was good. (Word of wisdom)

James 3:17 “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

- Stephen is distinguished as being full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and the others are added in, knowing that they also meet the requirements set forth in verse 3.
 1. **Stephan**: personal name meaning “crown” (Stephanos). (1st martyr, powerful orator.)
 2. **Philip**: personal name meaning “Lover of horses” or “Warrior”.
 - Became evangelist, had 4 daughters who became prophetesses. Acts Ch. 8
 3. **Prochorus**: personal name meaning “leader of singers.” (Judah / Praise)
 - (Later became assistant to Apostle John, later martyred.)
 4. **Nicanor**: “Conqueror”
 5. **Timon**: personal name meaning “honorable.”
 6. **Parnenas**: personal name meaning “faithful” or “constant.”
 7. **Nicolas**: personal name meaning “conqueror of people.”
 - These are all Greek names reflect a Hellenistic culture as opposed to Hebrew, possibly an attempt to circumvent or refute any future charges of bias.
 - Being filled with the Spirit, Godly men – the distribution would be fair to all.
 - No “hoarding” of power here, they seem to be empowering these Hellenists to do what is needed. Not being control freaks or micro managers.

Romans 12:10 “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.”

Philippians 2:1-4 “¹If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, ²fulfill ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. ³Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each

esteem other better than themselves. ⁴Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

- Notice in our passage that the church, the believers are more unified at the end of this “trial” than at the beginning. The church doing what the church is supposed to do.
- There is an issue in the church, it’s dealt with in a Biblical way, the Spirit moves, and God is glorified.

V: 6 While they are not to move too quickly, they did confer upon them responsibility publicly by laying hands upon them.

- Note the order: they “prayed” (1st), then they laid hands on them (2nd).
- Often times we seem to lay hands on men and pray in that order.
- Much like ordination this was in agreement with what was already taking place through the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

1 Timothy 5:22 “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure.”

2 Timothy 1:6 “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.”

- We see all through the NT, including many times in the book of Acts, the disciples laying hands on people for the purpose of imparting healing, or the gifts of the Spirit. This really is just following the example that Jesus has given us.

V: 7 Cause & effect: The need became evident, the Spirit gave wisdom and power - this is the cause.

- Men filled with the Holy Spirit; serving the Lord along side the Apostles.
- The Apostles freed up to spend more time in prayer and teaching God’s Word.

John 6:63 “It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”

Result / effect: Then the Word of God spread, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly.

- The first challenges to the church were external; the Sanhedrin and the religious establishment attacking, trying to hinder the church. God gave them strength and wisdom, courage in dealing with these things.
- The next two challenges were internal, first Ananias and Sapphira and their hypocrisy, their duplicity which was dealt with forcefully by the Holy Spirit through Peter.
- The second internal challenge was that of the murmuring or back biting which was also dealt with quickly and in a biblical manner.
- Obviously the Apostles prayed and God gave them the solution which when implemented immediately bore good fruit, and dealt with the issue.

James 3:17 “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

- The secret to church growth and ministry expansion is simply to feed the flock. Healthy sheep reproduce.

V: 7b “... *and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*”

- It is estimated that there were around 8,000 priests serving in the Temple, and now many of them were won over to obedience in the faith.

John 12:42 “Nevertheless even among the rulers also many believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.”

Jeremiah 29:13 “And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart.”

- Any of the priests entering the Temple would have seen what had happened.
- Current events regarding Jesus lining up with Messianic prophecy. (Jesus dying on cross just as a shophar sounded and the veil was torn, the words of John the Baptist – “Lamb of God”.)
- **Seeing the veil being torn in two from top to bottom.**
- Knowing that it was 60 feet wide, 30 feet high, and 10 inches thick, being torn from the top. It took over 100 priests just to hang it. Impossible for any man to tear it.

- Knowing that anyone entering the Holy of Holies unworthily would die, but now the way was open because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.

Jesus' words ringing true in their hearts:

John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

- Knowing that only the Son of God, God Himself could do that, open the way.
- Only the Son of God could give access to the Holy of Holies through His sacrifice on the cross.
- Too much evidence to ignore for a rational person seeking to truly know God.

V: 8 Now specifically now describing Stephen, one of the seven that were just ordained within the group. He will be the main character of the rest of this chapter and chapter 7.

"...*full of faith and power*..." – There is a definite connection between the two.

Jesus said:

Matthew 17:20 "... if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

Matthew 19:26 "... but with God all things are possible."

Hebrews 11:6 "But without faith it is impossible to please Him..."

Zechariah 4:6 "... not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."

"*Wonders and miracles*" or "*wonders & signs*" ^{NKJV} – all pointing towards Jesus!

Zechariah 4:10 "For who hath despised the day of small things?..."

- Faithfulness in the days of small things, Stephen started off waiting on tables.

Matthew 25:21 & 23 "His lord said to him, well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

- These men didn't start out looking for positions of greatness or authority, they simply sought to serve in the small things, and God took them from there.
- Pastors / janitors / servants... hanging sheet rock / pushing a broom.

Luke 16:10-11 “¹⁰He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. ¹¹If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?”

V: 9 “Libertines” / “Freedmen” (NKJV) Previously displaced Jews, slaves who had gained their freedom from Rome, wherever they had been. Upon returning to Jerusalem formed their own ethnic synagogues.

- It is estimated that there were over 400 synagogues in Jerusalem at this time.
- **Libertine:** ¹ a person, especially a man, who behaves without moral principles or a sense of responsibility, characterized by a disregard of morality, especially in sexual matters:

² a person who rejects accepted opinions in matters of religion; a freethinker.

V: 10 Unable to resist or adequately oppose the wisdom of God, nor the power of the Holy Spirit.

- **Resist:** (G436) anthistemi, anth-is'-tay-mee; to stand against, i.e. oppose:--resist, withstand.

Romans 8:31 “What then shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Matthew 10:19-20 “¹⁹But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. ²⁰For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.”

- On the other end; it doesn't matter how smart you are or what degrees you have if you aren't born again then it's all for nought.

1 Corinthians 2:14 “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

V: 11 These “Libertines” “suborned” men to claim that Stephen had spoken blasphemous words “against Moses and God”, it seems that they have somewhat equalized the two – which is in itself blasphemous.

- **Suborned:** (G5260) *hupobállō*; To introduce underhandedly, to make a secret agreement, to suborn, put forward by collusion. To suborn in the legal sense is to induce a person to make a false oath, i.e., to commit perjury.

- They saw they were losing the debate so they turned it into a personal attack.
- There are only two responses to sin:
 1. Repentance.
 2. Rationalization.
- Here we see the extreme form of the latter.
- Another way to put it is that there are only two ways to cover sin:
 1. Cover it with blood, the blood of Christ.
 2. Cover it with more sin, or in this case the blood of man.

V: 12-14 Brought before the “council”, which was the Sanhedrin.

- The culmination of intrigues, inducements, false witness, stirring up the people.

Proverbs 6:16-19 “¹⁶These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto Him: ¹⁷A proud look ⁽¹⁾, a lying tongue ⁽²⁾, and hands that shed innocent blood ⁽³⁾, ¹⁸An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations ⁽⁴⁾, feet that be swift in running to mischief ⁽⁵⁾, ¹⁹a false witness that speaketh lies ⁽⁶⁾, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” Six out of seven!

- If you are going to come against the truth, the only way to do that is with a lie!
- Blasphemous words against “this Holy place and the Law” - I think there’s a law about that...
- Their faith depends in large part upon the temple, the structure itself – which can and will be destroyed – like an idol.
- If our faith is dependent upon a man – who can be lead astray, then our faith is shakable, movable – not grounded.

Psalms 115:3-8 “³But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased. ⁴Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. ⁵They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: ⁶They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: ⁷They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. ⁸They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.”

- Our faith is truly based upon the Rock, upon His Word, upon Jesus Christ himself and His completed work on the cross. **Romans 10:17**

Romans 10:17 “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

V: 15 Cool, calm, and collected – in the midst of a storm.

- A true Christian witness!
- Presents a contrast:

2 Corinthians 6:14 “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness / lawlessness? And what communion hath light with darkness?”

- Here we see the stark contrast of the dark back drop of lies and deceit - against the light of the Word, the Light of the world, as He shines in Stephen’s face, and it is stunning just as a diamond against black velvet.
- Addressing his students concerning ministry, C. H. Spurgeon said, “Men, when you teach on heaven, let there always be a glow on your face, a gleam in your eye, and a smile on your lips. When you teach on hell, your normal face will do fine.”

Isaiah 40:11 “He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”

- Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He gathers His sheep, He doesn’t scatter them.
- He feeds them / us Truth, not lies. He wants them / us to prosper and grow, in His grace.
- Stephen is being accused of blasphemy against Moses and God. It is interesting to note that by the grace of God, Stephen wasn’t contradicting Moses, he was fulfilling and even imitating Moses – which is why God made Stephen’s face to shine like Moses’ face when he came down from Mount Sinai. Sort of a validation from God. (Ex. 34:29-30)