

The Book of Acts  
Chapter 6

*Acts 6:7-8*

*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.*

*8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*

I. Review of Chapter 5

1. In chapter 5 we saw the rise of the first documented church trouble in the new church.
2. What had begun as a spontaneous outpouring of love and generosity, became a hypocritical expression of pride and lies and ended in the death of a husband and wife, Ananias and Sapphira, who had lied to the Holy Ghost.
3. But rather than destroying the church, it strengthen their faith and commitment to truth, and the church saw many miracles, signs and wonders demonstrated by the apostles as they ministered in the streets.
4. But the popularity of the apostles also led to their arrest and imprisonment. But in the night, the angel of the Lord released them from jail and commanded them to go to the temple and preach Jesus.
5. They were rearrested and brought before the High Priest and full council and called to answer for preaching Jesus when they had forbidden them from doing so.
6. The apostles answered that they had to obey God rather than men and then preached Jesus death and resurrection to the people who had killed Jesus and tried to spread fake news to cover up the resurrection.
7. Intending to kill them, the wise councilman, Gamaliel, advised them, if this preaching was of man, it would fade away. But if it was God, they could not stop it, and they had better not fight against God.
8. This time they had the apostles beaten and threatened them again to stop preaching Jesus, and then set them free. They went on their way rejoicing and kept preaching Jesus.
9. It is like they lived in a different reality than the priests and council. They said, "this is the way it is!" Yet the church said, "No, this is the way it is."

II. Chapter 6

III. The Need for Church Organization

A. Real people stories in the Bible

1. **[1] What situation arose which required the appointment of deacons?**
2. Luke, the author the Book of Acts, detailed explosive growth in the early chapters, from 120 to 3000 additional believers in chapter 2. Chapter 4 shows an additional 5000 believers are added. Acts chapter 5 said multitudes of believers were added. And again in chapter 6 we will see an increase, but this time believers were not added, but multiplied.
3. But along with blessings, the Bible does not hide the thorny issues that arise in the human interactions recorded on its pages. And there are a lot of them.
4. Scripture reveals the troubles in human character right alongside the stories where some of these same human characters yielded to God to obediently do some great acts of kingdom ministry, even miraculous ministry.
5. So remember that when you read the Bible and come across some thorny issue, the Bible deals with the reality of doing the kingdom work in a fallen human world.

- B. Division arises in the church
1. Acts chapter 6 starts with that very mix of human and divine.  
*Acts 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.*
  2. The first problem had been the instance of hypocrisy by Ananias and Sapphira, and God had disposed of that problem by sending instantaneous judgment on the guilty couple.
  3. This second problem was of a different nature and had to be solved in an altogether different way.
  4. We read of the practice of believers selling their possessions, sharing their wealth, and having all things in common, which possibly included some living quarters, but certainly included shared meals.
  5. This had worked very well in the early days as it grew out of a spontaneous outbreak of love expressed through the Holy Ghost working in their midst.  
*Rom 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*
  6. But as the number of disciples increased so rapidly, not just adding believers to the church, multiplying the number of believers, it soon put a tremendous burden on the Apostles to minister to the needs of so many.
  7. It was inevitable that some should be missed in the daily ministration. And when the Grecians complained against the Hebrews that their widows were being neglected, the Apostles decided it was time to properly organize this business.  
*Acts 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.*
  8. The “daily ministration” refers to the daily distribution of food that the apostles were overseeing.
- C. Define the parties
1. **[2] Who were the Grecians referred to in verse 1?**
  2. Definition: **The Grecians**
    - a. The Grecians referred to here were Jews of the dispersion who had been born and raised away from the land of Judah/Israel in foreign countries where Greek language and Greek culture were prominent.
    - b. They had come to Jerusalem, perhaps for the Feast of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, and for reasons not described in the passage, they stayed in Jerusalem and lived in this common, shared, communal setting.
  3. **[3] Who were the Hebrews against whom the Grecians made a complaint?**
  4. Definition: **The Hebrews**
    - a. The Hebrews were the Jews who were natives of Judah/Israel and spoke the native Hebrew or Aramaic language. The disciples of Jesus would have been in this second group.
  5. It is important to note that in a region like Palestine, it was not uncommon for folks to be bi-lingual, or even tri-lingual. The Romans who ruled the land would have spoken Latin, the natives of Judah would have spoken Hebrew/Aramaic, but the common language of the Roman Empire was Greek.
  6. It had only been about 60 years since the Romans had gained this territory when they conquered the Greeks.

- D. The problem—neglect caused by lack of a plan
1. The conflict appears to have arisen out of a perceived national origin bias.  
*Acts 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.*
  2. Some of the Grecian Jews, who were all widows, even though they were part of the fellowship of this booming Spirit-filled church, felt that they were being left out from some of the privileges of the native, Hebrew saints, who were also widows.
  3. And it is entirely possible that some of the Hebrews may have seen the Grecians as “foreign invaders” who were taking their jobs and benefits.
  4. But it is also entirely possible that the conflict had arisen simply because of the language barrier that contributed to this feeling of exclusion.
  5. In any event, when some of their widows missed in the daily distribution of food and other necessities, it caused them to feel as though they were being discriminated against.
  6. And while their claim of missing out on the food distribution was real, it is most likely that that neglect was not intentional on the part of the Apostles, but simply a need to better organize.
- E. The Twelve confront the problem
1. **[4] Why was more organization needed in the early church at this time?**
  2. As soon as this problem was brought to the apostles’ attention, they realized it was time to better organization and delegate this matter to others so they could focus on the spiritual ministry Jesus had called them to.  
*Acts 6:2, 4*  
*2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.*  
*4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*
  3. They knew they were ordained of God to focus on preaching the gospel message of salvation to the people.
  4. Neglecting that important work to focus on food distribution was not what Jesus had called them to do but was a task that could be delegated.
  5. As the number of disciples increased, the need for more organization in the early church increased. More workers were needed to minister to both the spiritual and physical needs of the people.
- F. The solution--organization
1. **[5] How did the Apostles provide for this need?**
  2. To effectually accomplish this, it was necessary to organize and delegate the work.  
*Acts 6:3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*
  3. Jesus had organized the effort of feeding of the thousands on the two occasions when He multiplied the bread and fish.
  4. He instructed the people to be seated on the ground in groups of fifty and one hundred. Then, as the twelve disciples passed out the bread and fish, they were able to serve every individual in each group.
  5. They could not possibly have served all the people without missing some if they had continued to wander around as a crowd.
  6. The miraculous power of God was essential to supply the food, yet the organization of the people and the workers were essential for the proper distribution of the food.

7. God must supply the spiritual food but the teamwork of an organized church is necessary to distribute it.

#### IV. Qualifications for Deacons

##### 1. **[6] What was required of those who should be elected to the office of deacon?**

2. The author of the book we are using in this study, Jet Witherspoon, used the word “deacon” to describe the people chosen to organize the distribution of food, although that word was not used in Acts.

3. There that word used to describe church helpers, and in our setting, it is equivalent to a Department Director.

4. When Paul wrote to the church or churches in Philippi, he addressed saints, bishops, and deacons:

*Phil 1:1 Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:*

##### 5. **The bishops were the pastors of the churches, deacons were appointed church helpers, and the saints were the church members.**

6. In the passage in Acts 6, we read this list of qualifications (others are found in 1 Tim 3):  
*Acts 6:3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.*

7. The Apostles emphasized that the men chosen to serve as deacons must be of honest report (having a good reputation) and be filled with the Holy Ghost and with wisdom.

8. And it was absolutely essential for them to be filled with the Holy Ghost and wisdom, for they could not properly minister to the needs of the people without the love and the wisdom of God.

9. While it is certainly possible for a person without these high qualifications to be a table server, it is obvious that putting someone in charge with oversight over an area of church ministry, did require that qualification.

10. But handling food alone was not all that was expected of these seven helpers.

11. They were not living by bread alone, but as we will see in this chapter and in chapters 8 and 21, that at least two of the seven ended up handling the Word of God skillfully themselves.

#### V. The First Seven Deacons

##### A. Seven appointed to work

1. So here is the list:

*Acts 6:5-6*

*5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:*

*6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.*

2. A careful reading of this list will reveal that, with the exception of Stephen, these are all Greek names.

3. In other words, the ones who said, “something should be done,” got appointed to the task of doing something.

4. I’ve said it before, **before you say to the pastor**, “Our church should...,” be one who understood why “we **should**” can become “we **could**.” **Be a willing problem solver, not merely a complainer.**

5. Bread alone cannot give one satisfaction in life. The qualification of being full of the Holy Ghost, provided the anointing to serve everyone equally with love.
  6. Having wisdom is needed when working with people who feel slighted, for having faith and divine wisdom helps build bridges.
  7. The seven men were selected by the congregation, perhaps by vote or nomination. After they were selected, the Apostles laid their hand on them and, by prayer, officially appointed them to this ministry.
- B. Blessings followed on the church
1. **[7] How did God put His blessing on this move of the church?**
  2. God put His blessing on this decision to organize the church, and also blessed the men who were chosen.  
*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.*
  3. The Word of God increased since the Apostles now gave all their time to prayer and the preaching of the Word. As the result, disciples were greatly multiplied, including a great company of the priests from the temple.
  4. If you ever read passages in the gospels or Acts where private conversations of the priests were revealed, we know that Joseph of Arimathea was a follower of Jesus, as well as a great company of priests.
  5. They would have heard the eyewitness report of the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb of Jesus and guarding the prison cell of the apostles, and were able to report the testimony of the eyewitnesses to the writers of scripture.
- C. The waiter becomes a minister
1. **[8] To what greater ministry was deacon Stephen led by the Spirit of God?**
  2. *Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*
  3. First notice how Stephen was full of faith. If you will remember, when we did our study on the **levels of faith**, we noted that Stephen was one of a few individuals, including Barnabas, who had this highest level of faith.
  4. The Word of God was further increased by the ministry of Stephen who, along with his work as a deacon, began to teach and preach the gospel and minister to others.
  5. Stephen's ministering to the saints in that service of waiting tables, brought him into closer contact with the people, and, thereby, seems to have stimulated his zeal for the gospel of Jesus Christ.
  6. Being full of faith and the Holy Ghost moves a person to have compassion on people. So in conversations with needy people, their spiritual needs will come up.
  7. So when there is a need and full faith, there will be wonders and miracles.
- D. Persecution follows blessing
1. But something you probably have noticed in Luke's reporting in Acts, is how consistently that a great move of God among the multitudes is often followed by some form of persecution.
  2. Stephen had preached the gospel to the multitude of unbelievers, including some Jews from the Grecian cultures who disputed with Stephen.
  3. Remember, he was appointed to this position because of complaints by some of the Grecian widows in the church, and now others of that background did not like how this table waiter was preaching so boldly:

*Acts 6:9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.*

4. His faith led Stephen to minister and preach, and his wisdom gave him an advantage in disputes:

*Acts 6:10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.*

5. **[9] What persecution resulted from Stephen's zealous ministry?**

6. They had been educated in their local synagogue schools thought they were pretty thrifty with the Law of Moses. But they were not able to resist or withstand the wisdom and power with which Stephen spoke.

7. When they discovered they could not defeat him by argument, they determined to silence him by other means.

8. Verses 11-14 detail how these argumentative folks, hired and bribed unprincipled men to give false testimony against him, and stirred up the members of the Sanhedrin, who arrested him and brought him before their council for trial.

9. **[10] What false accusations were made against him?**

10. *Acts 6:12-14*

*12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,*

*13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:*

*14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.*

11. Stephen, in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, had doubtless told them that salvation was not in observance of the ceremonial law and the Temple services, but through faith in Jesus Christ.
12. And the accusation that Jesus was going to destroy the temple may have been based on Jesus' own words that this temple would be torn down and raised in three days. The elders of the temple didn't realize Jesus was speaking of His body.
13. And in Jesus' trial, false witnesses had brought up that same accusation.
14. Or maybe Stephen had told them that Jesus had said the Temple was going to be destroyed (Matt 24:1-2).

## VI. Conclusion

### **[11] How did the Lord witness for him?**

1. *Acts 6:15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*
2. These men twisted Stephen's words, and brought false accusations against him, but God witnessed for him by making his face shine like an angel before his accusers.
3. Chapter 7 continues with Stephen's testimony before the council.
4. In three chapters, 4, 5, and 6, there were three arrests and hearings before this same Sanhedrin court.
5. They got out with no pain in chapter 4, only a threat.
6. They got out with a beating and a threat in chapter 5.
7. And chapter 6 is paired with chapter 7, so we will see how there was even a different outcome with this appearance before the council.