

Acts 6:1-7—September 1, 2020

Acts 6:1-4

1. Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, a complaint arose from the Hellenists against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily service. 2. The twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not appropriate for us to forsake the word of God and serve tables. 3. Therefore select from among you, brothers, seven men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. 4. But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word.” (WEB)

1a. “Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying”

“In those days” refers to what we discussed in chapter five.

A long, long time ago, you and I studied Acts 1:8. Here it is again to remind you:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth”.

That process is well underway by the time of our study in Chapter 6.

1b. “a complaint arose from the Hellenists against the Hebrews”

Hellene means Greek. Scholars tend to agree that these *Hellenists* were Greek-speaking Jews who had adopted elements of the Greek culture. In this instance, these *Hellenists* were also Christians—although the word Christian won’t appear until Acts 11:26...

The Hebrews would have been Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians who would not have been assimilated into the Greek culture.

1c. “because their widows were neglected in the daily service”

Widows and orphans were vulnerable financially
most widows inherited no property
no way to earn money
there were many widows,

Torah law included provisions to provide for the needs of widows and other poor people.
Here is some OT scripture to help put you to sleep. But first, you can see what the widows faced:
Leviticus 19:9-10 and 25:25 and 25:35
Isaiah 1:17, 23; 10:1
Jeremiah 5:28; 7:6; 22:3
Malachi 3:5

2. “The twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not appropriate for us to forsake the word of God and serve tables”

- The twelve thought it would be inappropriate to forsake the word of God through Jesus, their Rabbi.

- Jesus had commissioned them to proclamation/preaching. (Matthew 28:19-20)
- The idea of administering the distribution of food and other necessities to Jerusalem widows was not their calling.

There is no indication here that the apostles felt that the administration of the daily distribution was unworthy of their concern, but they had been called to a different form of service.

They had to be careful. The administration of the daily distribution crowd out their primary calling—preaching.

Paul uses the metaphor of the parts of the human body to emphasize the validity of the gifts and callings of individual believers (1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. God has set some in the assembly: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracle workers, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, and various kinds of languages. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all miracle workers? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with various languages? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. Moreover, I show a most excellent way to you.

(1 Corinthians 12:27-31 WEB). RAISE YOUR HAND IF YOU FALL INTO AT LEAST ONE OF THE CATEGORIES MENTIONED HERE. WANNA SHARE?

3. “Therefore select from among you, brothers, seven men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business”

The apostles stated three criteria to be used in selecting the seven men:

- First, they were to be “men of good report.”
- Second, they were to be “full of the Holy Spirit.”
- Third, they must be “full...of wisdom.”

LET'S TALK ABOUT WISDOM

4. “But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word”

The priority for the twelve was prayer and the ministry of the word—which is proclamation of the Gospel. That was in keeping with the commission that Jesus had given them (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8).

Acts 6:5-7

5. These words pleased the whole multitude. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch; 6. whom they set before the apostles. When they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. 7. The word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly. A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. (WEB)

5a. “These words pleased the whole multitude”

All the believers were pleased—not just the Hellenists, who had felt neglected, but the Hebrews as well. They weren't committed to winning an argument or defending their actions. They genuinely wanted to do the right thing.

Christians today need to take note of that. Do you agree? If so, how can we make it happen?

5b. “They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch”

These are all Greek names. It is a mark of the good spirit of the Hebrew believers that they demanded no representation on this committee.

- Luke singles out Stephen for special mention. He is “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.”
- The Philip mentioned here is not Philip the apostle, who was mentioned frequently elsewhere (Matthew 10:2-4; John 1:43-46; etc.).

Allow me to add some information here about the Philip you just met, perhaps for the first time. When there are multiple characters with the same name, it is confusing. Normally, I wouldn't add stories like this to the passages we are studying, but this Philip is mentioned twice at significant events in the Christian development...so here ya' go.

- On the first occasion, Philip proclaims the Messiah in the city of Samaria, exorcizes unclean spirits, and heals many people. He then explains the writings of the prophet Isaiah and proclaims Christ to an Ethiopian eunuch, leading to the eunuch's baptism. ANYBODY KNOW THE QUESTION THE EUNUCH ASKED PHILIP. A LITTLE GOOGLE SEARCH MIGH HELP.
- On the second occasion, Paul visits Philip's home in Caesarea. On that occasion, he is identified as “Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven” (Acts 21:8 WEB).

As noted above, except for Stephen and Philip, we know nothing further of these seven men.

6a. “whom they set before the apostles”

It was the multitude who chose these seven men and recommended them to the apostles.

6b. “When they had prayed, they laid their hands on them”

- In the Old Testament, Moses laid hands on Joshua to commission him (Numbers 27:18-23).
- In the New Testament, apostles laid hands on people to heal them (Matthew 9:18; Acts 28:8), to impart the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17; 19:6), and to ordain them for a particular work (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 2 Timothy 1:6).
- In this instance, the laying on of hands indicates both approval and empowerment for the task that the seven have been chosen to do.

7a. “The word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly”

The book of Acts has reported several instances of church growth, so this report is in keeping with those.

- The number of disciples has been growing in Jerusalem is significant.
- The Jerusalem church is the leading church, and it will keep that role a long time.

When I say the Jerusalem church, what is your thought on the expansion of the church from this story to Constantine in the fourth century? OKAY TO DO SOME RESEARCH IN ADVANCE TO TALK ABOUT THIS QUESTION.

7b. “A great company of the priests were obedient to the faith”

Priests were among Jesus’ most pig-headed (I couldn’t think of a better word) opponents. However, those opponents were priests from the higher reaches of the priestly hierarchy including the chief priests. Most likely, the priests who were becoming believers were from the rank and file of the priesthood. The disciples have been preaching in the temple, so these priests could have been convinced by listening to that preaching.

EXTRA STUFF JUST FOR FUN...

We talked about Philip in this lesson. One of the seven is a man named Stephen. This same Stephen became the first Christian Martyr so here is some detail on him:

Stephen was arrested on trumped up charges (6:11). When brought before the council (the same on Peter and John faced), Stephen preached a lengthy and powerful sermon (7:2-53). They (the council) threw him out of the city, and stoned him” (7:58 WEB), and he died.

Saul, later to become the apostle Paul, observed the stoning, and “was consenting to (Stephen’s) death. A great persecution arose against the church which was in Jerusalem in that day” (8:1 WEB).