

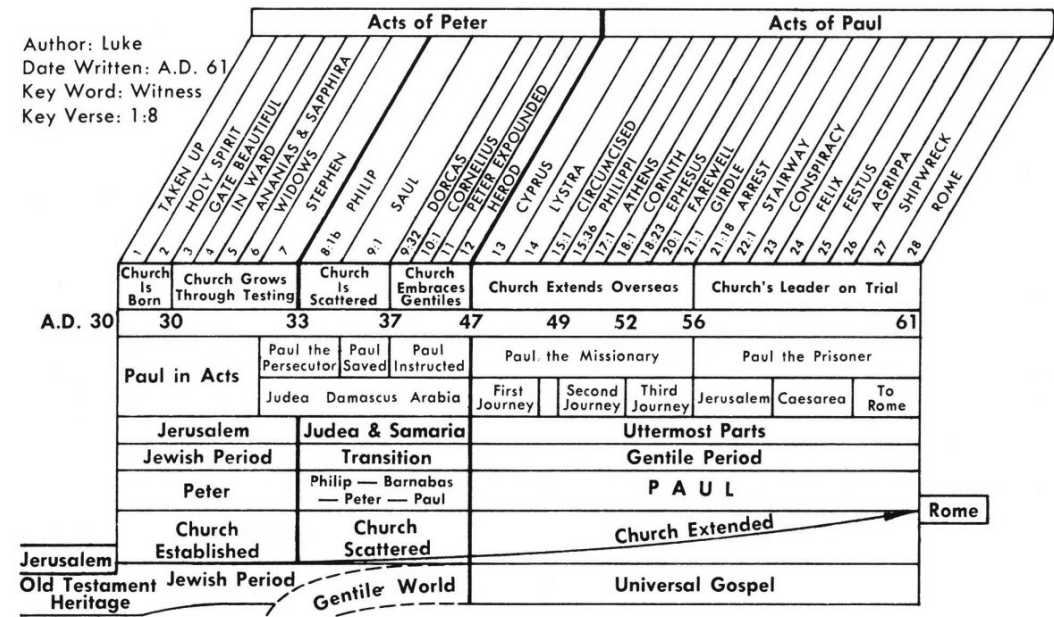
# Acts 6 Commentary

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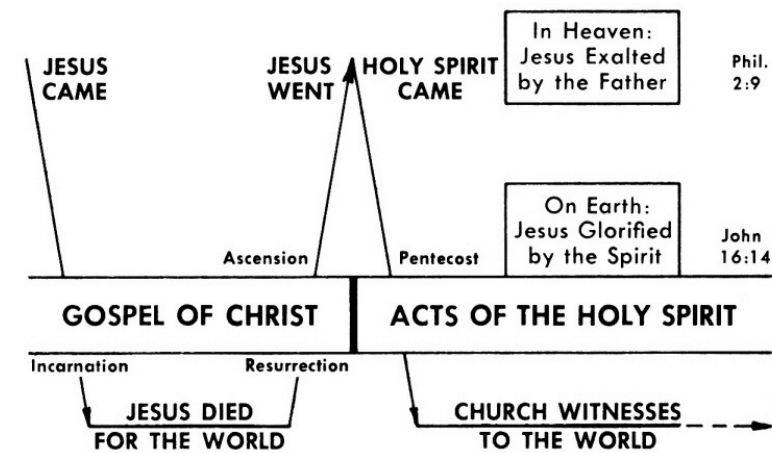
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Chart from [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission

## THE EXPANDING WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT-EMPOWERED CHURCH



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Acts 6:1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing [*in number*], a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the [*native*] Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving [*of food*]. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

KJV Acts 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Heb, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministraton.

- **Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number** Acts 6:7; 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14,28; Ps 72:16; 110:3; Isa 27:6; Jer 30:19
- **a complaint arose** 1 Cor 10:10; Heb 13:1; James 4:5; 5:9
- **on the part of the Hellenistic Jews** Acts 9:29; 11:20
- **against the native Hebrews** 2 Cor 11:22; Php 3:5
- **because their widows were being overlooked** Acts 9:39,41; Dt 24:19-21; 26:12; Job 29:13; 31:16; Isa 1:17; Ezek 22:7; Mal 3:5; Mt 23:14; 1 Ti 5:4,5,9; Jas 1:27
- **in the daily serving of food** Acts 2:45; 4:35
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE FIRST CHURCH CONTROVERSY: CHURCH GROWTH, GROWING PAINS

Let's review - Jesus had instructed the disciples to be His witnesses beginning in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8+) and we see four major divisions...

- The witness at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47)
- The witness by Peter and John (Acts 3:1-4:31)
- The witness of the Apostles (Acts 4:32-5:42)
- The witness of Stephen (Acts 6:1-8:3)

The devil has tried to destroy the infant church by persecution from without, then by deception within and now seeks to sow seeds of dissension within.

**Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number** - Where there is life there is growth! Most translations add "number" (not in Greek text). Luke does not say for sure but this statement presumably reflects the "time" just described when the apostles were preaching and teaching in the Temple and from house to house (Acts 5:42). The prioritization of proclamation of His Word would certainly account for the number of **disciples increasing**.

Notice that this is the first use of the term **disciple** in the book of Acts. Even more important note that in context Luke uses **mathetes** to refer to believers, followers of Christ. In fact the most common name given to the followers of Christ in the book of Acts is **disciples**. Some say that since disciple is not used after Acts, it is not an appropriate name for believers in general and some even say that it is reserved for believers who are more committed and attain a higher level of maturity. Luke refers to ALL the believers as disciples, and does not single out a special group. And by the way, what is the "Great Commission?" Our Lord clearly commanded us to "Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations...." (Mt 28:19+). It is not an accident that the only verb in the

Greek that is a command (aorist imperative) is **make disciples**. Believers are disciples according to Jesus!

**Disciples** (3101)(**mathetes** from **manthano** = to learn) describes one who learns from another by instruction, and includes the idea of one who intentionally learns by inquiry and observation (cf **inductive Bible study**). The point of calling the believers disciples is to emphasize that becoming a Christian is not just a *momentary* decision for Christ (which sadly for men is just that - momentary - a profession but not a possession of Christ within), but is a *lifelong* pursuit of Christ-likeness, learning to live like Jesus lived! So although the word disciples is not used after Acts, clearly this term is still an accurate description of all true believers, those who are genuine followers of Christ.

**Luke's** uses of **mathetes** in Acts - 30x in 28v -

Acts 6:1; Acts 6:2; Acts 6:7; Acts 9:1; Acts 9:10; Acts 9:19; Acts 9:25; Acts 9:26; Acts 9:38; Acts 11:26; Acts 11:29; Acts 13:52; Acts 14:20; Acts 14:22; Acts 14:28; Acts 15:10; Acts 16:1; Acts 18:23; Acts 18:27; Acts 19:1; Acts 19:9; Acts 19:30; Acts 20:1; Acts 20:30; Acts 21:4; Acts 21:16

Notice that in this passage Luke changes his "**Biblical mathematics**" from **addition** (Acts 2:41, Acts 2:47, Acts 5:14) to **multiplication** (so to speak)! Since Luke gives no specific number here, we only know that the Church is growing by **quantum leaps**. A growing church will experience growing pains, or perhaps better referred to in this context as "growing growls (murmurings)." This passage thus gives us an **axiom** principle, growth always causes tension. And the devil knows "**mathematics**" so that when God sets out to **multiply**, the devil steps to **divide**! Sometimes he uses doctrinal differences. In the present case the problem was not *doctrinal* but *functional*! We need to be sure we are not ignorant of the devil's schemes. And remember that sometimes what seem to be the smallest differences can grow into the largest problems (see **illustration** below).

Perhaps your church is not a big church like Jerusalem but that is not what is important. Pastor **Adrian Rogers** says "Now, there's nothing wrong with a small church, and there's nothing so necessarily great about a big church. Bellevue Church is a big church, but we don't always go around talking about the size of our church. Nobody wants to come to something just because it's big. I don't think that Bellevue Church is a great church because it's big, I think it may be a big church because it's great, but not vice versa. Some of the greatest churches on this earth are small churches. But, I'll tell you something: there's something wrong with a church, big or small, that's not growing if it's surrounded by lost people. Because, dear friend, our mandate—our mission—is to reach souls for the Lord Jesus Christ. If we're not reaching them, then we're not doing what we're told to do. I heard of an artist who was commissioned to paint a portrait, or paint a picture, of a dead church. They thought that he would show a church with the roof sagging and with weeds in the yard. They thought he would show a church with the upholstery tattered and the carpet raveled, but he didn't. He showed a gorgeous building—fresh paint, sparkling windows, wonderful carpet, elegant-looking, moderate-size crowd. They looked so well fed, so well healed, and everything was just right. And the person said, "Why, that doesn't look like a dead church to me." He said, "Look closer at the picture." And, he looked more closely, and he could see cobwebs in the baptistery. That, my friend, is the portrait of a dead church—a church that is not multiplying. Listen, a church will glow and grow or it will dry and die. It will evangelize or it will fossilize, but it will not stand still. Now growth is not easy; growth is not automatic. Growth—you have to plan for it; you have to pray for it; you have to work for it; and you have to cultivate and water something if you want it to grow. But still, God must give the increase. Spiritual growth is the product of spiritual life, and numerical growth is the product of spiritual growth. And so, I believe that God's plan for this church—for any church—is to be fruitful and multiply. In these days, you know, there are people who are so spiritual, and they say, "I just don't believe in numbers." Well, God is interested in numbers. Verse 1: "And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied..." Some people just use little phrases like that to excuse their lack of spirituality or their laziness. Dear friend, where there is healthy life there's growth." (How to Turn Your Problems into Possibilities)

A T Robertson observes "The new freedom from the intercession of Gamaliel was bearing rich fruit." I would add, probably not the effect he would have hoped for as an orthodox Jew!

**Increasing** (rapidly multiplied - NLT)(present tense)(4129)(**plethuno** from **plethos** = fullness from **pletho** = to fill) means to be made full, grow, increase or be multiplied. In the active sense it means to cause to increase, to cause to become greater in number, to multiply (increase in number especially greatly).

**W A Criswell** makes an excellent point that "This incident was not primarily a case of the early church solving its social problems, for it solved the problem with dispatch. The episode points to the primacy of the ministry of "the word of God" (Acts 6:2), which always kept the death and resurrection of Christ in the foreground: the scarlet thread through Scripture, or the suffering of Christ for sins and victory over death, which came immediately in its wake. (Believers Study Bible)

## **WHERE THERE IS GROWTH THERE ARE PROBLEMS**

**A complaint arose** - It was like a distant rumble. A low, muffled noise came from the Hellenistic Jews. It is like the sound one hears

from a large crowd before a service or play begins. It is not "a loud outspoken dissatisfaction, but that undertone murmuring which one sometimes hears in the lobbies of our present day churches where certain cliques are "having it out," so to speak, among themselves."

Paul used this word (**goggusmos**) commanding the members of the church at Philippi to **Do** (present imperative) all things without grumbling or disputing" (Php 2:14+), which suggests there were differences of opinion among the Philippians but they had not yet risen to the point of loud, overt **dissension** which is a precursor of **division**. Murmuring needs to be cut off at the head! Of course the only way to obey Paul's command to "do all things without grumbling...." is to continually rely on the Spirit (cf these seven are to be "full of the Spirit" - Acts 6:3) rather than our "default mode," the flesh! Only the Spirit can continually give us the (divine) **desire** and (supernatural) **power** to not grumble or complain (see Php 2:13NLT+). Have you grumbled, murmured or complained this past week? About your church? About your spouse, etc? If so, confess, repent and be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18+) so that you can walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16+) and not fulfill the desire of the flesh (which is to grumble). Paul gives another solution for not murmuring - "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Th 5:18+, cf continual praise Heb 13:15+) Beloved, we cannot murmur and give thanks or praise to God at the same time! And as discussed below, remember that when you murmur, you are murmuring against God!

Did you know that the Bible ranks murmuring in the same category as idolatry, fornication and tempting God? Read Paul's words in 1 Cor 10:7-10. Note what God did to murmurers in the Old Testament!

In the present context it appears the Hellenistic Jews had a legitimate complaint, but Luke's use of goggusmos indicates that they voiced their legitimate complaint in an "illegitimate" way -- murmuring!

**Complaint** (1112)(**goggusmos** from **goggúzo** = to say anything in a low tone) is an **onomatopoetic** word (words that "sound" out their meaning) which means to speak privately in a low tone, usually expressing dissatisfaction or discontent. Grumbling, murmuring, complaining. Robertson says this describes "secret grumbings that buzz away till they are heard." **Fruchtenbaum** says goggusmos "means "whispering" and emphasizes a smoldering discontent, which, if it was not handled, can very easily flame up and produce a split in a Church. What was happening in this infant church was an undercurrent of constant, secret whispering that finally grew loud enough for the apostles to become aware of the problem and nip it in the bud!

Goggusmos has its most concentrated use the LXX in the passages in Exodus and Numbers that record the sad episodes of Israel's **grumbling** (Ex 16:7, 8, 9, 12; Nu 17:5, 10). Notice that when we grumble, we are in essence grumbling against the Lord! Woe!

Moses said, "This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumbings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumbings are not against us but against the LORD."

In the papyri it occurs in a letter from a doctor to his mother in which he says he has not been able to send his brother to her because he could not leave the patients, "lest there be some murmuring against us. "

**Adrian Rogers** says that "Murmuring is a half-uttered, half-concealed complaint—not that a person comes out and says to the right person, at the right time, in the right spirit, for the right reason, that something needs to be done. Well, that's always acceptable, and that's always good—when a person comes in the right spirit, at the right time, to the right person, and for the right motive. But murmuring... you know what murmuring is? Now, the Bible says: "Do all things without murmurings..." When you murmur—listen—you're really murmuring against God." (How to Turn Your Problems into Possibilities)

**On the part of the Hellenistic Jews** - As discussed below this probably refers to the Greek speaking Jews in the church.

**Hellenistic Jews** - You will encounter considerable variation in the commentaries on the identification of this group, but suffice it to say there is not much factual information available. Most commentaries differentiate between these two groups on linguistic and geographic grounds. These are Greek-speaking Jewish believers from Jewish settlements outside Israel (from the Dispersion, the **Diaspora**). Robertson suggests "These Hellenists had points of contact with the Gentile world without having gone over to the habits of the Gentiles."

**Hellenistic** (1675)(**Hellenistes** from **hellenizo** = to hellenize) refers to a Jew by birth or religion who can speak Greek only and not a Semitic language, either Hebrew or Aramaic. **Hellenistes** used chiefly of foreign Jews and proselytes whether converted to Christianity or not (2x - Acts 6:1; 9:29; one additional use in Textus Receptus - Acts 11:20; no uses in the Septuagint).

**Gilbrant** gives a lengthy discussion of **Hellenistes** -

With the conquests of Alexander the Great in the Fourth Century B.C. and the subsequent rise of the Roman Empire, the Mediterranean world had become relatively unified through easier travel, common language, and shared elements of culture. For purposes of commerce many Jews migrated to commercial centers all around

the Mediterranean Sea. As a result differences developed between them and Palestinian Jews. Even though they generally held onto their religious heritage, Jews of the Dispersion adopted the language and—in varying degrees—the customs of Graeco-Roman culture; they became “Hellenized.” This background sets the context for the meaning of *Hellēnistēs*. The traditional view has been that Jew versus Greek, or Gentile, distinguished racial and religious matters; but Hebrew versus “Hellenist” distinguished languages and customs between Jews at home and abroad (cf. Lightfoot, *Philippians*, pp.146-148). Hebrews spoke Hebrew (Aramaic) as their mother tongue while “Hellenists” used Greek and/or some other language to which they “were born” (Acts 2:6,8,11).

The Hebrew-Hellenist distinction also tended to correlate with Palestinian Jew and Dispersion Jew. That correlation was not absolute, of course, since in Jerusalem itself there was one synagogue (some think five) apparently for Hellenists (Acts 6:8-15; cf. 6:1-5), the one from which Stephen—and perhaps Saul and Barnabas—originated (Acts 6:36,37; 7:58-81; 11:20,22; 15:36-41). Jews raised outside Palestine might return to their ancestral land, and Jews raised in Palestine might emigrate elsewhere but diligently observe the law of Moses, the traditions of the elders, and Jewish social customs. Paul’s family could be an example since he called himself a “Hebrew of Hebrews” (Philippians 3:5) despite being born in Tarsus of Cilicia. *Hellēnistēs* would typically refer to a Jew outside of Palestine, though the word itself stressed which language he spoke.

**Hellēnistēs** evidently does not appear anywhere earlier than Acts of the Apostles, and there it occurs for certain in only two places. Acts 6:1 records a difficulty in the Jerusalem church because the “Hebrews” had been overlooking widows among the “Hellenists” when dispensing support. The second passage is Acts 9:29 where Paul, having returned to Jerusalem after his conversion, was disputing with the “Hellenists,” probably many of the same group whose synagogue earlier was instrumental in getting Stephen executed with Paul’s approval.

According to most editions of the Greek text, a third usage appears in Acts 11:20. Describing the persecution of Judaeans Christians, Luke says that in general these believers preached the gospel wherever they fled but only to Jews (Acts 11:19; cf. Acts 8:4). In Antioch, however, some Cyprians and Cyrenians “began to speak also to the Hellenists” (UBS 3rd; Wescott-Hort; Majority Text; Textus Receptus). When news of this reached Jerusalem, the church sent Barnabas to Antioch, and he in turn traveled on to Tarsus and brought Paul to this new work (Acts 11:22-25).

A rather well-attested alternate reading puts “Greeks” (*Hellēnas* Nestle-Aland 25th) in place of “Hellenists” (*Hellēnistas*), which makes proper sense under the traditional meaning of the latter term. There would have been nothing unusual about preaching to Greek-speaking Jews. That had already been done in Jerusalem long before (Acts 6:1ff), since it was being done elsewhere in this same scattering (Acts 11:19). Also, Samaritans had been evangelized without objections (Acts 8:4-25), although they were farther removed from mainstream Judaism than Greek-speaking Jews in Antioch would have been. Yet preaching to these people in Antioch must have been unusual because the term “Hellenists” in Acts 11:20 clearly contrasts with the word “Jews” in 11:19, and because soon afterward Judaizers tried to get them to be circumcised (Acts 15:1-35; cf. Galatians 2:11ff.). It is possible, then, that those actually evangelized in Antioch were in fact Gentiles (possibly “God-fearers,” or *sebomenoi*, Gentiles who attended synagogue but were not circumcised so as to be included among proselytes: Luke 7:2-5; Acts 10:2; 13:48-50; 16:14; 17:4,17; 18:7).

The question that remains is how to define **Hellēnistēs** in light of this fact. Various suggestions have been made: (1) that **Hellēnistēs** means “proselyte” since Nicolas, one of the seven, was a proselyte (Acts 6:5); (2) that **Hellēnistēs** and *Hellēn* are synonyms meaning “Gentile” in all three references. If so, one wonders why there were not (recorded) conflicts over their conversion as was the case later in Antioch, why Peter and other Jewish Christians were so skeptical about evangelizing Cornelius’ household (Acts 10:1 to 11:18), why the main body of fleeing Christians preached only to Jews, or why the conference on circumcision even occurred. God’s granting Gentiles repentance unto life was a new thought as late as Acts 11:18 (cf. 8:14-16; 22:22-24). Furthermore, early Gentile conversions do not fit with the natural expansion of Christianity to increasingly distant groups—Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles (cf. Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16, etc.). Another view is as follows: (3) that **Hellēnistēs** means simply “Greek-speaking” with no implication about race or religion. If this is so, one wonders what contrast would have been communicated between Acts 11:19 and 11:20. Both groups would have been Greek-speaking. To use in the same sentence a term for Antioch Gentiles that could as well be used for Jews with whom they are deliberately contrasted would surely be unclear. On the whole, the easiest proposal seems to be (4) that the principles of textual criticism by themselves are simply inadequate in Acts 11:20. **Hellēnistēs** means “Hellenized Jew,” but it is not the right word here even as *Hellēn* is not the right word in Acts 9:29 despite its presence in one major manuscript. The reader needs to interpret the text in light

of context and let **Hellenistēs** have its traditional meaning: Greek-speaking Jew. ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Against** - pros - generally means towards but in this context (hostile) means against. **Pros** is used this way in Eph 6:12 "out struggle is not **against** (pros) flesh and blood." In Col 3:13 "whoever has a complaint **against** (pros) anyone" -- These two groups in Acts 6:1 should have been "bearing with one another." (Col 3:13).

**The native Hebrews** - This group appears to be Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians who are native to Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.

**Because their widows were being overlooked** - NLT paraphrases it as "their widows were being discriminated against." The point is that unless the church took care of them, they would not be taken care of. Note that that the murmuring arose not from *among* the widows, but from others because of their needs. Were they intentionally **overlooked** because they were Hellenistic **widows**? The text does not say, but the fact that the growth was so rapid supports the premise that they "slipped between the cracks" because the church was growing so rapidly. They had a real problem but they initially sought to handle it in the wrong way - complain, murmur. It is like a leaking faucet for if it goes on long enough you can end up with a big bill (so to speak)! Murmuring in any church needs to be quickly addressed by the spiritual leaders. Is there any leaven of murmuring in your church?

Recall that "under the Law of Moses, widows were under special protection (Deut. 14:29; 24:19; 26:12). Under Pharisaic rule, widows were often ignored (Mk. 12:38–40). Widows became a special concern of the Jerusalem Church, as we know from the pastor of that church, who wrote James 1:27." (Fruchtenbaum)

**Polhill** note on widows - "[Diaspora](#) Jews (AS PRESUMABLY THE HELLENISTIC WIDOWS WOULD BE) often moved to Jerusalem in their twilight years to die in the holy city. When the men died, their widows were left far from their former home and family to care for them and were thus particularly in need of charity. Many of them may have been attracted to the Christian community precisely because of its concern for the material needs of its members....The Jews had a weekly dole for resident needy, called the quppah. It was given out every Friday and consisted of enough money for fourteen meals. There was also a daily distribution, known as the tamhuy. It was for nonresidents and transients and consisted of food and drink, which were delivered from house to house where known needy were dwelling. The Christian practice seems to have embraced elements of both Jewish systems. Like the tamhuy it was daily, and like the quppah it was for the resident membership." (NAC - Acts)

**Overlooked** (1865) ([paratheoreo](#) from [pará](#) = aside or beyond + [theoréo](#) = to behold, contemplate) means to look at a thing by the side of another, to compare, to examine things placed beside. In classic Greek [paratheoreo](#) means "to examine or compare" as well as "take slight notice of, overlook," depending on the context. This is the only use in the NT and means to look beyond, to look past something and so to overlook, neglect, slight. Not found in the Lxx.

**In the daily serving of food** - As the number of the believers grew, this would be an overwhelming task for the apostles.

**Utley** suggests what several commentaries also express - "The early church followed the patterns of the Synagogue. Every week funds (i.e. alms) were collected to feed the poor. This money was used to buy food, which was given out weekly by the Synagogue and daily by the early church. See Special Topic: [Almsgiving](#). It seems from history that many Jewish families who lived and worked in other countries returned to Palestine in the father's later years so that he could be buried in the Promised Land. Therefore, there were many widows in Palestine, especially the Jerusalem area. Judaism had an institutional (i.e. Mosaic Covenant) concern for the poor, alien, and widows (cf. Exod. 22:21–24; Deut. 10:18; 24:17). Luke's writings show that Jesus, too, cared for widows (cf. Luke 7:11–15; 18:7–8; 21:1–4). It is, then, natural that the early church, patterning itself on both the Synagogue social services and the teachings of Jesus, would have an overt concern for church widows."

**Serving** (1248) ([diakonia](#) is probably derived from [dioko](#) = to pursue, "to be a follower of a person, to attach one's self to him:" - note on origin is from Vincent.) means the rendering or assistance or help by performing certain duties, often of a humble or menial nature serve, including such mundane activities as waiting on tables or caring for household needs—activities without apparent dignity. [Diakonia](#) is related to [diakonos](#), a servant, not in his relation (like [doulos](#)) but more in regard to his activity. The term covers both slaves and hired servants.

**MacArthur** "The basic idea in both words always had to do with humble, submissive, personal service, not simply with an office or a particular function."

I love Luke's play on the word [diakonia](#) which he uses in Acts 6:1 to describe "serving food" and in Acts 6:4 to describe "serving" the word of God! Literal bread is necessary for physical life and spiritual bread is necessary for spiritual life. Jesus brought this out in His rebuttal to the devil declaring "MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD." (Mt 4:4, cf Lk 4:4+). How is your diet? It is well-balanced by intake of physical and spiritual bread? Remember that Peter made it clearly that the way to go in respect to salvation (i.e., to be progressively sanctified, made more

Christ-like by the Spirit) is to be "like newborn babies, (longing) for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." (1 Peter 2:2) If your spiritual growth has become "stunted" it is likely that you are not taking in the pure milk of God's Word. You may be listening to great Christian songs, reading wonderful daily devotionals written by godly men and women, reading stimulating Christian novels, etc. But if you are neglecting the intake of the **pure** (undiluted) Word of God, you are making a mistake. As an aside, be careful of falling into the trap of some read through the Bible in a year programs, which assign such lengthy readings that you are forced to rush through in order to make sure you do not get behind schedule. You are under grace, not law and one verse chewed over and over in the morning is far more valuable than one chapter which goes in one ear and other the other (cf James 1:22+). It is not how many times you go through the Bible, but how many times the Bible goes through you. Read the Bible in a way that it "reads" you. As Gipsy Smith told of a man who said he had received no inspiration from the Bible although he had "gone through it several times." "Let it go through you once," replied Smith, "then you will tell a different story!" Woodrow Wilson said "Give the Bible to the people, unadulterated, pure, unaltered, unexplained, uncheapered, and then see it work through the whole nature."

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**Illustration** - When a certain Dallas church decided to split, each faction filed a lawsuit to claim the church property. A judge finally referred the matter to the higher authorities in the particular denomination. A church court assembled to hear both sides of the case and awarded the church property to one of the two factions. The losers withdrew and formed another church in the area. During the hearing, the church courts learned that the conflict had all begun at a church dinner when a certain elder received a smaller slice of ham than a child seated next to him. Sadly, this was reported in the newspapers for everyone to read. Just imagine how the people of Dallas laughed about that situation! This brought great discredit not only to the church but to Jesus Christ! The tiniest events sometimes cause great problems. Again and again a church has ward off a frontal attack only to be subverted from within. - Kent Hughes

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As **Adrian Rogers** says "the devil can get us divided, sometimes, more over incidentals than fundamental(s)...Where there's growth there are problems. Now, that's all right, brother. I'll tell you what, I'd rather be a part of a growing church with problems than a dead church that has none. I mean their great big problem is that they are just simply dead. Sometimes, people don't understand that a church doesn't have any real difficulties because it's d-e-a-d, dead."

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**Ray Pritchard** - "Anyone can be great because anyone can serve." Those are the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They remind us of the words of Jesus who declared that he did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). On the night before he was crucified, when the weight of the world was on his shoulders, he took a towel and basin and washed the dirty feet of his disciples. By that one simple gesture he showed forever what sort of man he was and what sort of people we should be. He came to serve, and in his bloody death on the cross he served all humanity. Was Jesus great? The question hardly needs answering. He was great because he was God's servant. Dr. King is right. Greatness is open to all because anyone can be a servant. We generally don't realize this until a crisis comes. Most of the time we rock along contentedly, knowing that someone else will do the serving. That's why we elect presidents and prime ministers, why we call pastors and hire department heads. Serving is fine with us as long as someone else does most of the work. Then a crisis comes and we begin to see things differently. I am told that the Chinese word for "crisis" is made up of two word-symbols – one meaning "danger" and the other "opportunity." That's what a crisis is: a danger and an opportunity rolled up together.

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## **Acts 6 Enemy Tactics**

We are not ignorant of [Satan's] devices. --2 Corinthians 2:11

Satan uses many methods to hinder the work of the Lord. Chapters 6 through 8 of Acts contain three illustrations of how he does his evil work through people and circumstances.

1. Satan creates dissension within the church. "In those days ... there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists" (Acts 6:1). When a church becomes known for its bickering and backbiting, its witness in the community will be damaged.
2. The enemy tries to divert ministers and teachers from their main purpose of preaching the gospel. The apostles were feeling pressured to "leave the Word of God and serve tables" (6:2). Satan employs a similar tactic today by getting a pastor so involved in church programs that he has little time for prayer and the study of the Word.
3. In every age Satan seeks to destroy God's people. In Acts 7 and 8 we read that Stephen was martyred, and that Saul "made havoc of the church" (8:3).

We need to be aware of Satan's tactics and be on guard against his attacks. We don't want to be a cause of dissension and diversion in the church. Instead, let's prayerfully focus on Christ's purpose for our lives. --R W De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

I want to live above the world,  
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;  
For faith has caught the joyful sound,  
The song of saints on higher ground.  
--Oatman

Know Satan's strategy to avoid sin's tragedy

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## Acts 6 - DISSENSION—DIVERSION—DESTRUCTION

For we wrestle ... against spiritual wickedness in high places. Ephesians 6:12

While I was enjoying a visit with Mr. H. Hildebrand, of the Briercrest Bible Institute, Caronport, Saskatchewan, he pointed out to me that the book of Acts, chapters 6, 7, and 8, suggests three ways by which the devil tries to hinder the work of the Lord. These three avenues of attack are: (1) dissension, (2) diversion, and (3) destruction.

Satan attempts to frustrate our efforts for the Lord by causing dissension and strife within the church. In verse 1 of Acts 6 we read: "And in those days ... there arose a murmuring." How often we have seen strong testimonies completely silenced because of dissension, murmuring, complaining, bickering, and backbiting on the part of some within the church. In addition to dissension, however, the evil one will also resort to diversion, sidetracking us from our main purpose. How he would like to have seen the twelve apostles in Acts 6 "leave the word of God and serve tables." The devil is busy at work using this very same tactic today. It is easy in our busy church programs to become side-tracked, diverted, and engaged in everything else but the ministry of the Word. In addition to dissension and diversion, the devil uses destruction. In chapter 7 we see Stephen martyred, and in chapter 8 we are told that Saul "made havoc of the church." But, even as the Psalmist declared: "The wrath of man shall praise thee," so Satan's destructive attack is taken by God Him-self and used for the accomplishing of His own program. As a result of the devil's persecution the believers "that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."

Conscious of these three possible areas of attack, let us be on guard and prepared for the onslaughts of the adversary that the "work of the ministry" be not hindered. Let us put on "the whole armour of God" that we "may be able to withstand in the evil day" (Eph. 6:13). And through it all remember, "the battle is not yours, but God's," and He it is who "goeth before you."

Exercise your graces, or Satan will exercise your corruptions! ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**Acts 6:2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.**

KJV Acts 6:2 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.

- **So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples** Acts 21:22
- **It is not desirable** Acts 4:19; 25:27
- **for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.** Ex 18:17-26; Nu 11:11-13; Dt 1:9-14; Neh 6:3; 2 Ti 2:4
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PRIORITIZATION OF PREACHING THE WORD

**So** - This functions like a term of conclusion in this context. There were problems, **SO** there must be a solution. The leaders did not throw up their hands in frustration, but sought a practical but spiritual solution.

**The twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said** - This is the only place the apostles are called "**the twelve**" and here clearly signifies the fact that they are Spirit filled and thus of one mind and one heart regarding how to avert a potential disaster in the infant church.



**Utley** - This is the first example of what came to be called congregational polity (cf. Acts 6:3, 5; 15:22). This is one of three biblical ways the modern church organizes itself: (1) episcopal (i.e. one top leader); (2) presbyterian (i.e. a group of leaders); and (3) congregational (i.e. the whole body of believers). All are present in Acts 15.

**Summoned** (4341)(**proskaleo** from **pros** = to + **kaleo** = to call) is used only in the middle voice and means call to oneself. (1) literally; (a) call to oneself, summon (Mt 10.1); (b) to call in an official or legal (it was a legal technical term like our "**summons**") (Acts 5:40, Mt 18:32). **Proskaleo** is used of a divine call, as God's call to faith and salvation (Acts 2.39) or a call to a special task as God's call in entrusting men with the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 13:2; 16:10).

**Gilbrant** - The essential meaning in classical Greek is "summon, invite." Actively one can "invite" or "summon" someone to something (e.g., to court, to a banquet; *Liddell-Scott*). The translators of the Septuagint used *proskaleomai* to translate three Hebrew words, although one, *qārâ'*, most often stands behind it. The term describes "summoning" someone (Genesis 28:1; 1 Samuel 26:14 [LXX 1 Kings 26:14]; Esther 4:5). God's summoning the Hebrew people is a distinct indication of His relationship with them (Exodus 3:18; 5:3; cf. Psalm 50:4 [LXX 49:4]; Wisdom of Solomon 18:8). In contrast, the ungodly summon death by their evil deeds (Wisdom of Solomon 1:16; cf. Proverbs 9:14f.). To "call on" God is tantamount to putting faith in Him (Joel 2:32). ([Complete Biblical Library Greek-English Dictionary](#))

**Proskaleo** - 29x in 29v - call(2), called(13), calling(3), summoned(8), summoning(3).

Matt. 10:1; Matt. 15:10; Matt. 15:32; Matt. 18:2; Matt. 18:32; Matt. 20:25; Mk. 3:13; Mk. 3:23; Mk. 6:7; Mk. 7:14; Mk. 8:1; Mk. 8:34; Mk. 10:42; Mk. 12:43; Mk. 15:44; Lk. 7:19; Lk. 15:26; Lk. 16:5; Lk. 18:16; Acts 2:39; Acts 5:40; Acts 6:2; Acts 13:2; Acts 13:7; Acts 16:10; Acts 23:17; Acts 23:18; Acts 23:23; Jas. 5:14

**Proskaleo** - 12x in the Septuagint - Ge 28:1; Ex 3:18; Ex 5:3; 1 Sa 26:14; Est. 4:5; Est. 8:1; Job 19:17; Ps 50:4; Pr 9:15; Joel 2:32; Amos 5:8; Amos 9:6;

**Congregation** (4128)(**plethos**) denotes a great number and in this context is a technical term for the whole body of believers, the fellowship, the community, the congregation, the church (cf Acts 6:5, 15:30). Luke does not state that every member was present and considering the size of the church at this time, that would have been difficult.

**It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables** - Prior to this time the twelve apostles had apparently been ministering to widows, waiting on tables, distributing food and funds. Earlier the angel who released the twelve had ordered them (Acts 5:20+) "**Go**, stand and **speak** to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life." And in Acts 5:42+ we see they immediately obeyed and that "every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." But now because of the massive growth, the apostles were becoming negligent in their sermon preparation, so to speak. They were getting behind in their commission to be Jesus' witness and to win souls to Him. The apostles had not made a choice between good and bad, for it was not bad to minister to widows, but they had made a choice between the good and the best, especially given their specific commission.

So if your gift is serving tables, then serve tables filled with and enabled by God's Spirit, serving as unto the Lord Jesus Christ and do not be discouraged by the thought that your work is less valuable than the work of those who are preaching or teaching the Word of God. Here is the principle you must lay hold of -- God does not assess the different parts of the Body of Christ the way men do. What He is interested in is that we are faithful in using the gifting His Spirit has given each of us, for "A spiritual gift is given to **EACH** of us so we can help each other" (1 Cor 12:7NLT), for the "Spirit works all these things, distributing to **EACH ONE** individually just as He wills." Thus **EVERY** believer has at least one spiritual gift and to fail to use it for the benefit of the Body of Christ and the glory of Christ is to be reckoned by God in the future as a poor steward!

**THOUGHT** - So what's the **upshot**? First, if you are a genuine believer realize you have a spiritual gift from the Spirit of God. Then, know your gift! Finally, use your gift empowered by the very same Spirit Who gave you the gift! Beloved, do not be deceived by the secularism and relativism of our culture which is not just post-Christian, but is now in the phase of "neo-barbarianism" (a phrase used by R C Sproul). You will be judged accordingly. We all need to pray for the attitude of Paul who said "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." Then Paul explained why he was so passionate to be pleasing to the Father declaring "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that **EACH ONE** may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (NOT SINS BUT SIMPLY DEEDS DONE IN OUR OWN STRENGTH, NOT GOD'S AND NOT FOR HIS GLORY)." (2 Cor 5:9, 10+). If you need motivation to live your life in the light of eternity and not the "now" or the "present," then take a few minutes and read R C Sproul's essay from the 1977 issue of *Tabletalk*, entitled "**Right Now Counts Forever**." Just the title should stir your emotions to seek to live with a Spirit enabled passion and power to please the Pater (Father)! Let me quote from R C Sproul's follow-up 30 years after he

first penned "Right Now Counts Forever"..

It has been thirty years since I penned my initial essay under the byline **Right Now Counts Forever.** It was in the decade of the '70s, at a time when our culture was still reeling from the deleterious effects of the war in Vietnam, and even more significantly from the radical moral revolution that marked the decade of the 1960s. History has shown that that moral revolution of the '60s has introduced far more change into life in the United States than the political revolution of the 1770s. Our culture was described in the '70s as one that was strongly influenced by secularism. **The principal motif of secularism is that life is cut off from eternity.** (ED: READ THAT AGAIN) All life must be lived in the here and the now, in this saeculum, for there is no eternal dimension. On the heels of secularism came the philosophy of relativism. Though relativism was embraced on many sides in the 1970s, it has since become so firmly entrenched in our culture that the estimated number of Americans embracing some form of philosophical or moral relativism reaches over 95 percent. In this regard, our culture has moved from what was then called neo-paganism to a culture now of neo-barbarianism. Though Roe v. Wade was already in place when I penned my first essay, the proliferation of abortion on demand, which reaches a million and a half a year, has so marked our culture as a culture of death that all vestigial remnants of our civilized culture die with the death of every unborn baby. Our nation is a nation at war with itself, where values, family, and morality so split asunder families and counties, states, and the nation, that the unified basis of our former civilization has been shattered. One thing, however, has not changed in the past thirty years, and that is the fact that because God reigns, everything that happens today has consequences that last well into eternity. It is as true today as it was the first time I picked up the pen for my byline, that what happens right now counts forever. Let the culture be paganized, let the culture be barbarian, but let the church be the church and never negotiate the eternal dimension of life. (from "[Right Now Counts Forever](#)")

#### Related Resources:

- [Spiritual Gifts](#)
- [Spiritual Gifts Chart](#)
- Redeem the Time

**Desirable** (pleasing) (701)([arestos](#) from [aresko](#)) is an adjective which describes that which is acceptable, pleasing, satisfying, agreeable, that which elicits an agreeable response, gratifying. The first use in the Septuagint is Ge 3:6 where Eve says the tree was good for food and that it was a **delight** (Hebrew = taavah from avah - to incline or desire = a desire; Lxx = arestos) to the eyes." So here in Acts 6:2 the idea of "**not desirable**" is that it would not be pleasing in God's eyes. Arestos is used in Acts 12:3 "When he (Herod) saw that it **pleased** the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also."

**John Stott** - The devil's next attack was the cleverest of the three. Having failed to overcome the church by either persecution or corruption, he now tried distraction. If he could preoccupy the apostles with social administration, which though essential was not their calling, they would neglect their God-given responsibilities to pray and to preach, and so leave the church without any defence against false doctrine. (The Message of Acts)

**Neglect** (forsake)(2641)([kataleipo](#) from [kata](#) = intensifies or strengthens the meaning of + [leipo](#) = leave behind, forsake) literally means to leave behind or leave remaining (of a person or place - Mt 4:13, 16:4, 21:17, He 11:27). Figuratively as in this passage in Acts 6:2 [kataleipo](#) was used to mean "**neglect**".

Luke's uses of [kataleipo](#) in Acts - Acts 6:2; Acts 18:19; Acts 21:3; Acts 24:27; Acts 25:14

**Word** (3056)([logos](#)) is a general term for speaking but always includes with rational content. In this context the Word of God would include the "whole message of this Life," (Acts 5:20+) but especially the good news "of the Gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24+).

**Serve** (wait on) (1247)([diakoneo](#) - derivation uncertain - cp [diakonias](#) = in the dust laboring or running through the dust or possibly [diako](#) = to run on errands; see also [diakonia](#)) means to minister by way of rendering service in any form or to take care of by rendering humble service.

**Tables** (5132)([trapeza](#) from [tetra](#) = four + [peza](#) = foot) means a table, as that on which one sets food (Mt 15:27 Mk 7:28 Lu 16:21 22:21, 30) or from which one distributes money. It is interesting that the **table** in Acts 6:2 was to help people (widows) whereas the **table of the money changers** was to [bilk](#) the people, including poor widows. (Mt 21:12 Mk 1:15 Jn 2:15).

In Acts 6:2 [trapeza](#) is used to depict serving the widows and it could be a meal or it could be money (or both).

**Marshall** points out that "It is not necessarily suggested that serving tables is on a lower level than prayer and teaching; the point is rather that the task to which the Twelve had been specifically called was one of witness and evangelism." (TNTC-Acts)

**Alistair Begg** says this verse teaches not that waiting on tables is bad, for it is absolutely indispensable, but that "waiting on tables cannot take the place of the ministry of the Word of God. That is why soup kitchens cannot take the place of the ministry of the Word of God. That is why social action cannot take the place of the proclamation of God's Truth. That is why singing cannot take the place of the proclamation of God's Word...It is God's Word which is light and reality and food for the soldier and the map for the traveler." ([From his introduction to 1 John](#))

For a balanced understanding of this topic the reader is referred to **John Piper's** excellent discussion on the integral relationship between "[Serving Widows, Preaching the Word, and Winning Priests](#)"

One is reminded of one of Paul's last commands (knowing his death was imminent) to Timothy

**Preach** (aorist imperative - It is urgent! Do not delay!) the word; **be ready** (aorist imperative) in season and out of season (WHETHER CONVENIENT OR NOT!); **reprove** (aorist imperative), **rebuke** (aorist imperative), **exhort** (aorist imperative), with great patience and instruction. (2 Ti 4:2+ Paul explains why in 2 Ti 4:3-4+).

**Acts 6:3** "Therefore, brethren, **select** from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

KJV 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.

- **Therefore, brethren** Acts 9:30; 15:23; Mt 23:8; 1 John 3:14-16
- **select from among you seven** Acts 1:21; Nu 11:16; Dt 1:13; 1 Cor 16:3; 2 Cor 8:19-21
- **men of good reputation** Acts 10:22; 16:2; 22:12; 1 Ti 3:7,8,10; 5:10; 3 John 1:12
- **full of the Spirit and of wisdom** Acts 2:4; Ge 41:38,39; Nu 11:17-25; 27:18,19; Job 32:7,8; Isa 11:2-5; Isa 28:6,26; 1 Cor 12:8; Eph 5:18; James 1:17; 3:17,18
- **whom we may put in charge of this task** Acts 6:6; 13:2,3; 1 Ti 3:8-15
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SEVEN SPIRITUAL MEN FOR SERVICE TO WIDOWS

**Life Application Bible** - Finding qualified people who can and will help share the load of work is a mark of a healthy congregation.

**Therefore** - Term of conclusion. It is interesting that no apostle is singled out as making this statement. Perhaps they spread out through the large number of believers to make sure all heard their conclusion.

Notice that the apostles propose a plan so that the church would be better organized. Some people do not believe the church should be organized. They quote statements like "The church is an organism, not an organization." While that is true, it is also true that for an "organism" to function properly, it must have proper organization! Paul wrote to the church at Corinth "But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner." (1 Cor 14:40). And ultimately it is the Holy Spirit Who brings order, exactly what He did in Genesis 1, moving over the face of the deep bring order out of disorder, turning chaos into cosmos. And He is still the One Who turns church chaos into harmony.

**Brethren** (80)([adelphos](#) from **a** = denotes unity + **delphus** = a womb) means literally from the same womb and literally a brother, but is used figuratively here to describe spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ (cf Ro 8:29+), all born of one Spirit (Jn 3:3-8, 1 Cor 12:13)!

**Select** (aorist imperative) (1980)([episkeptomai](#)) means to make a careful inspection, to examine, and here to look with interest and insight at the candidates before making selections. Presumably the entire body of believers offered names to the apostles.

**From among you seven men** - By saying **from among you** the apostles are saying the church did not need outside applicants (First Qualification), consultants or services but that this was to be an "inside job." They also said the positions should be filled by **men** (Second Qualification), for the Greek word here specifically refers to male gender. Clearly, they are not saying women are either inferior or of no use to the Body life, but that this particular position calls for **men**. Why seven? Commentaries vary from seven is the number of fullness, to the known fact that seven was usually the "number of men used to handle public business in a Jewish

town, the official council." (LAC) **Stanley Toussaint** suggests "Selecting seven men may go back to the tradition in Jewish communities where seven respected men managed the public business in an official council." (BKC) (cf [Josephus Antiquities 4.214](#)).

The **seven** to help the **twelve** is like the **seventy** to help the **one** (Moses) in the Old Testament as described in Ex 18:17-22 (no number given here but later seventy elders described - Ex 24:1). Notice like the 7 in Acts 6 there were 3 criteria for choosing the men who would assist Moses...

Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. 18 "You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. 19 "Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, 20 then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. 21 "Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able (1) **men who fear God**, (2) **men of truth**, (3) **those who hate dishonest gain** (or "those who hate bribes") and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. 22 "Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.

**NET Note** on the qualifications - Able men describes these men as respected, influential, powerful people, those looked up to by the community as leaders, and those who will have the needs of the community in mind. **God-fearing** describes them as devout, worshipful, obedient servants of God. **Men of truth** indicates that these men must be seekers of truth, who know that the task of a judge is to give true judgment (U. Cassuto, Exodus, 220). The word "truth" includes the ideas of faithfulness or reliability, as well as factuality itself. It could be understood to mean "truthful men," men whose word is reliable and true. **Those who hate bribes** is another objective genitive, one that refers to unjust gain. To hate unjust gain is to reject and refuse it. Their decisions will not be swayed by greed. It is not clear how this structure would work in a judicial setting. The language of "captains of thousands," etc., is used more for military ranks. There must have been more detailed instruction involved here, for each Israelite would have come under four leaders with this arrangement, and perhaps difficult cases would be sent to the next level. But since the task of these men would also involve instruction and guidance, the breakdown would be very useful.

Dt 1:13 describes Moses addressing the congregation - "Choose wise and discerning and experienced men from your tribes, and I (Moses) will appoint them as your heads. suggest that the choice of these people was not simply Moses' alone." So like the 12 apostles, Moses gave the congregation a role in the selection process.

Now we get to the three additional qualifications they required in the men who would "wait on tables" for Jesus. As mentioned elsewhere many consider these seven men to be the first deacons, but this is not necessarily the case because they are never specifically called deacons in this section. Paul mentions the specific word deacon in Php 1:1 and the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3 and there clearly is overlap with some of the qualifications mentioned in Acts 6.

**Diacons** likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, 9 but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as **deacons** if they are beyond reproach. 11 Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12 **Deacons** must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. 13 For those who have served well as **deacons** obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Ti 3:8-13)

**Bob Utley** comments - The word "serve" is the common Greek term for service, diakonia. Unfortunately many modern commentators, looking for guidelines for the later office of deacon (cf. Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8-10, 12-13) have used this text to help define that ministry task. However, these are not "deacons"; they are lay ministers/preachers. Only [eisegesis](#) can find deacons in Acts 6.

**Good reputation** (:well-attested" NET) ([3140](#))([martureo](#)) means to bear witness and it is as if their life gives testimony or witness to who they really are. Martureo is in the passive voice in this verse and means to be well spoken of, to be approved and thus to have a good reputation. Ultimately reputation is what others think is true about us, while character is what God knows to be true about us! **Martureo** is used in Heb 11:2 to describe those who have "gained approval" on the basis of their faith, thus they were faithful men.

These men had to be of impeccable character and integrity because they would likely be entrusted with not only food but money (offerings that had been laid at the apostles' feet.)

**Full (pleres) of the Spirit** - That is they are **controlled** by the Spirit of Jesus, because they have surrendered themselves to Him, willingly submitting to His Lordship, His will and His way in their life. Ponder this a moment -- what are they being selected to do? In essence to minister to widows (or "to wait tables"), which we might be inclined to think is of as a lesser "ministry." But these criteria clearly indicate God's high standard for what He considers to be a high position. As Paul taught us "the body (of Christ) is not one member but many" and "God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired." (1 Cor 12:14, 18) adding that "In fact, some of the parts that seem weakest and least important are really the most necessary." (1 Cor 12:22NLT). James adds that "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." (James 1:27+) The conclusion is that these members need the same divine power Source to "serve bread" as the apostles need to "serve Living Bread!"

Filling with the Spirit is an absolute necessity for effective ministry for God. Filling with the Spirit denotes and delivers supernatural power for ministry. And remember that every believer is a minister for Jesus in one way or another. Everything we do, every day, is in some way ministry. So back to the filling. The question is in whose power are you ministering throughout the week, yours or His? Only the latter will bear eternal, spiritual fruit! We are all filled each day, but the question is are we filled with Self or are we filled with the Spirit? As someone has said "In every believer the Holy Spirit is resident, but what He wants to be is President!"

These men were to be Spirit filled men. Why would this be so important? Because ministry for Jesus needs His power and the provision of His power is by His Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. And since every saint has the Spirit of Christ (Ro 8:9), every saint can potentially be Spirit filled. To do God's Word we need God's power. Jesus made this patently clear when He declared that "apart from Me you can do absolutely nothing." (Jn 15:5).

#### **Related Resource:**

- [Spirit-Filled Believers Are Like Artesian Wells](#)
- [The Holy Spirit-Walking Like Jesus Walked!](#)
- [1 John 4:4 Commentary](#)
- [A Spirit Filled Church](#)
- [Acts 1:8 Commentary](#)
- [Ephesians 5:18 Commentary](#)
- [Galatians 5:16 Commentary](#)
- [Our Anointing - The Holy Spirit](#)
- [Praying in the Spirit](#)
- [The Holy Spirit-2](#)

(Full of) **Wisdom** (4678)(**sophia**) means men who are controlled by the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding. While sophia is practical, it also emphasizes understanding of ultimate things—such as life and death, God and man, righteousness and sin, heaven and hell, eternity and time. **Sophia** is mental excellence in its highest and fullest sense (Vincent). **Sophia** is used frequently in the New Testament to describe the ability to discern and conform to God's will, certainly a good trait for these seven men to possess! And as Charles Simeon reminds us "True wisdom is the gift of God." As James says "the **wisdom** from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy." ( James 3:17)

In this context **wisdom** would doubtless include having a practical knowledge of how to manage charitable funds. And remember wisdom is not knowledge. You can have a lot of knowledge about Jesus and doctrinal matters but be virtually devoid of godly wisdom. Here is the crucial difference -- wisdom is the supernaturally enabled ability to use knowledge from God's point of view. Knowledge can puff you up because you know so much, but wisdom makes you humble that you know no more. And remember that godly wisdom is something we can pray for as James says "if any of you lacks **wisdom**, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5+) Have you asked Him for wisdom in the dilemma you are currently experiencing? But be sure to ask in faith (James 1:6-8).

So Luke gives us an excellent "checklist" for those who are to fill positions of service in the Body - they should be (1) from the body = believers, (2) men, (3) reputable, (4) spiritual and (5) practical. There is no lowering of the standard because they do not have one of the more "showy" positions in the Body! We tend to forget this when we select folks for position of service and we default to other criteria that are not necessarily Biblical. And we reap what we sow! While the text does not say, it would seem reasonable that women who are appointed to leadership roles in a church should meet the 4 criteria unrelated to gender.

These men remind me of one of my favorite Old Testament descriptions in 1 Chr 12:32

Of the sons of Issachar, **men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do**, their

chiefs were two hundred; and all their kinsmen were at their command.

**Whom we may put in charge of this task** - The apostles are in charge and are the final arbiters of who should be in charge of the widow ministry.

**May put in charge** (2525) (**kathistemi** from **katá** = down + **hístēmi** = to set or stand) means literally "to stand or set down". It is used figuratively here to refer to "setting someone down in office" or appointing or assigning the seven to a position of authority. To put in charge or to appoint one to administer an office. To set in an elevated position. Westcott says that it is "the ordinary word for authoritative appointment to an office." Knowling adds that **kathistemi** "implies at all events an exercise of authority."

**Task** (5532) (**chreia** from **chraomai** = to use, make use of or **chreos** = a debt) means a necessity, what is needed or the occasion of need. In this passage **chreia** refers to an activity that is needed, their duty of feeding the widows.

**Utey** adds that "This passage cannot be used to assert that deacons handle the business matters (KJV, "this business") of the church! The word "task" (**chraomai**) means "need," not "office."

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### Acts 6:1-10 Life-Giving Rain By David C. McCasland

They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. —Acts 6:10

During the August heat of 1891, R. G. Dyrenforth arrived in Midland, Texas, determined to blast rain from the sky. Known as a "concussionist," he and his team launched and detonated huge balloons filled with explosive gases, fired cannons, and exploded piles of dynamite on the ground—shaking both earth and sky. Some believed he made it rain a little, but most said all he caused was noise. The explosive power was impressive but ineffective.

When the early church needed overseers, they sought people with a different kind of power. They chose "seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3) to manage the daily distribution of food. One of those was Stephen, a man "full of faith and power, [who] did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). When disputes arose, those who argued with Stephen "were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke" (Acts 6:10).

The Bible makes it clear that Stephen's spiritual effectiveness came from being filled with the Holy Spirit, who gave him the right balance of faith, wisdom, and power.

God's Spirit in our lives today replaces the loud noise of self-interest with His gentle, life-giving rain. Holy Spirit, I want my life to be marked by Your power. May my words and actions give life-giving rain to encourage others to know You and trust You. In our life for Christ we accomplish nothing without the power of the Spirit. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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### Acts 6:1-7 Good Listeners By David C. Egner

Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak. —James 1:19

In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love for God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brothers is learning to listen to them. It is [because of] God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear."

Listening was a key element in solving a problem between two ethnic groups in the infant church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7). One group felt that their widows were being discriminated against in the distribution of food. So the apostles wisely listened to their complaint, worked out an acceptable solution, and settled the dispute.

Listening to others is also important today because our churches are becoming increasingly diverse. We come from broad ethnic and racial backgrounds and are at different levels of maturity. But if we show our love by listening, our common faith in Christ can bind us together.

Are we so driven to express our views or vent our feelings that we don't really hear what others have to say?

Lord, teach us how to love. Make us good listeners to others, as You are to us. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**Be this our common enterprise:**

**That truth be preached and prayer arise,**

That each may seek the other's good,

And live and love as Jesus would.

—Brewster

Listening may be the most important thing you do today.

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### **Acts 6:1-7**

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer understood the GERMAN importance of listening to one another. He wrote,

"The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love for God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brothers is learning to listen to them. It is [because of] God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear." (Life Together)

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Listening to others is important today because churches are becoming increasingly diverse. We come from broad ethnic and racial backgrounds and are at different levels of maturity. But if we show our love by listening, our common faith in Christ can bind us together.

When we are driven to express our views or vent our feelings, we fail to hear what others are trying to say. If, on the other hand, we follow Paul's admonition and esteem others better than our-selves (Philippians 2:3), we will improve our listening skills and reach a much higher level of love for one another.—D C Egnor

Lord, when I am more interested in being heard than in hearing, I am in danger of causing division and strife in Your family and in mine. May I learn to hear what others are feeling as well as what they are saying. And may I respond in love to their true need not just their spoken one. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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### **Men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. Acts 6.3**

These were the qualifications for those who were to be set apart to serve tables, to look after the financial and business affairs of the Church. Note carefully the three things deemed essential for such service. First, they were to be "of good report"—that is, quite literally, "of good witness." They must be witnesses who had proved themselves as such, men in and through whom Christ had been made known. Second, it is said they were to be "full of the Spirit." That adds emphasis to the first requirement, for it is only men "full of the spirit" who are "of good witness." It also shows that the same witness to Christ must be borne in the work to which they were appointed. Finally, they were to be "of wisdom." That is the recognition of the necessity for natural ability for business affairs; and, in its relation to the fulness of the Spirit, shows how the natural ability must be under His control. What a condemnation all this is of the way in which the Church has too often appointed men to manage her business affairs! No man should be allowed to share in such work who is not himself a witness by the Spirit. It is equally true that no witness should be appointed to this work if he lack wisdom, for that is essential to all true serving of tables. (G Campbell Morgan - Lif Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible)

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### **The Boat**

Read: Acts 6:1-7

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. —1 Peter 4:10

A group of teenagers on a ministry trip in Jamaica were enjoying some downtime with a game of Ultimate Frisbee. But when someone noticed that a boat had overturned off a nearby beach, the game ended and the teens eagerly rushed to the water to help.

There they found a small group of professional boat operators struggling with their craft—trying to turn it upright. That's where the teens could help. They waded in, put their young strength to work, and together they were able to right the boat.

What happened that day in the Caribbean Sea reminds me of what can happen in the church. The "professionals," the pastor and others who are trained to lead the church, face a task they can't do alone. It's often a struggle to get the work of the church done until laypeople join in and work alongside the leadership.

This was the situation in Acts 6. Some people in the church were being neglected, and the "professionals," the apostles who were leading the church, realized they couldn't do everything by themselves. Only when seven laypeople pitched in to help the leaders could the church proceed.

How can you come alongside your pastor and other leaders to help keep your church moving ahead? [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

O Lord, help me in every way  
To have a faithful heart;  
Teach me to love and serve Your church,  
And always do my part.  
—Fitzhugh

Teamwork divides the effort and multiplies the effect.

## Acts 6:4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

KJV Acts 6:4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

- **But we will devote ourselves** Acts 2:42; 20:19-31; Ro 12:6-8; 1 Cor 9:16; Col 4:17; 1 Ti 4:13-16; 2 Ti 4:2
- **to prayer and to the ministry of the word** Acts 1:14; 13:2,3; Ro 1:9; Eph 1:15-17; 3:14-21; Php 1:4,9-11; Col 1:9-13; Col 2:1; 4:12
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### THE APOSTOLIC PRIORITIES: PRAYER AND PREACHING

**But** - Term of contrast. In contrast to serving tables for widows, they will focus on serving the Word to the disciples!

**We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word**- Note that these activities are done with a sense of devotion, not a sense of [drudgery](#) or a legalistic duty. This begs a question (of all saints) - Is prayer to the Throne of God for me (you) a daily delight or a "daily grind?"

**Will devote** (4342) ([proskartereo](#) from **prós** = implies motion toward + **karteréo** = steadfast, endure, hold out) means to be earnest towards, to persevere. Here it describes the apostles' steadfast single-minded fidelity to praying and preaching the Word. A great pattern for everyone called to be a pastor-teacher. Also a good pattern for every disciple to emulate. They persisted obstinately with devotion and effort, attending assiduously to prayer and serving the Word. As an aside, while they clearly made the volitional choice (active voice) to pursue this course of action, such an action is not one's natural desire (even apostles), so implicit is that they devoted themselves cognizant of their continual dependence on the Spirit for His supernatural enablement. Since prayer precedes preaching in this passage, that suggests that one of their prayers was something like this "Lord, give us a hunger and thirst for righteousness and enable us by Thy Spirit to preach with power as good workmen who will need not be ashamed for we accurately handle the Word of truth." (cf 2 Ti 2:15+) The apostle Paul declared "my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the **Spirit** and of **power**." (1 Cor 2:4, cf 2 Cor 6:7, 1 Th 1:5+) Beloved, that is the genre of preaching that will shake the pews, convict hearts and bring down the revival fires of God upon slumbering saints! Yes Lord, do it now! " My soul cleaves to the dust; **revive** me according to Thy Word." (Ps 119:25) Amen.

Luke has already used [proskartereo](#) 3 times to describe the prayer and fellowship in the early church...

Acts 1:14+ These all with one mind **were continually devoting** themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Acts 2:42+ They **were continually devoting** themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 2:46+ Day by day **continuing** with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,

The related noun ([proskarteresis](#)) is used in one NT passage that gives us a great parallel to Acts 6:4...

With **all** prayer and petition pray ([proseuchomai](#)) at **all** times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with **all perseverance** ([proskarteresis](#)) and petition for **all** the saints. (Eph 6:18+, cf Col 4:2+ which uses [proskartereo](#))

**Comment:** See discussion of what it means to [Pray in the Spirit](#). Note repetition of "**all**" in this passage!



Christian, seek not yet repose,  
Cast thy dreams of ease away;  
Thou art in the midst of foes;  
Watch and pray.

Principalities and power,  
Mustering their unseen array,  
Wait for thy unguarded hours;  
Watch and pray.

Watch as if on that alone  
Hung the issue of the day,  
Pray that help may be sent down;  
Watch and pray  
--Charlotte Elliot

Did we **in our own strength** confide, our striving would be losing;  
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;  
[Lord Sabaoth](#), His Name, from age to age the same,  
And He must win the battle  
[A Mighty Fortress Is Our God](#)

**D Edmond Hiebert** comments on the importance of prayer to secure God's Hand to work in our human efforts - Prayer is the most powerful and effective means of service in the Kingdom of God . . . It is the most dynamic work which God has entrusted to His saints, but it is also the most neglected ministry open to the believer. The Bible clearly reveals that believing prayer is essential for the advancement of the cause of Christ. It is the essential element for Christian victory...We may marvel at the spiritual power and glorious victories of the early apostolic church, but we often forget that its constant prayer life was the secret of its strength...If the church today would regain the spiritual power of the early church it must recover the truth and practice of prayer as a vital working force."

How many churches have a weekly prayer meeting? **Spurgeon** once said "Oh! yes, (the prayer meeting) is the place to meet with the Holy Ghost, and this is the way to get His mighty power. If we would have Him, we must meet in greater numbers; we must pray with greater fervency, we must watch with greater earnestness, and believe with firmer steadfastness. The prayer meeting...is the appointed place for the reception of power."

**Kent Hughes** notes that "today's average pastor according to a Christianity Today survey, spends only **three minutes a day** in prayer."

**H. A. Ironside** was asked if he could do his life's ministry over again would he do anything differently. He answered, "I would pray more."

**Prayer** (4335) ([proseuche](#) from **pros** = toward or immediately before + **euchomai** = to pray or vow) is the general word for prayer used only of prayer to God. The prefix preposition **pros** conveys the sense of being immediately before God and hence congers up pictures of holy reverence, adoration, devotion, and worship. The basic idea of **proseuche** is to bring something, and in prayer this pertains to bringing up prayer requests. In early Greek culture an offering was brought with a prayer so that it be accepted. With the final sacrificial offering having been made by our Lord Jesus Christ, Great High Priest (Jn 19:30+), now believers can "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need." (Heb 4:16+).

It is worth noting that **proseuche** is used 37 times in the NT with 9 uses describing the early church! What has happened to us as a church in America? Might this relate to how infrequently we see the power of the Lord at work in our midst? (A rhetorical question)!

All uses of **proseuche** in the NT -

Mt. 17:21, 21:13, 21:22; Mk. 9:29, 11:17; Lk. 6:12, 19:46, 22:45; Acts 1:14; Acts 2:42; Acts 3:1; Acts 6:4; Acts 10:4; Acts 10:31; Acts 12:5; Acts 16:13; Acts 16:16; Ro. 1:10; Ro. 12:12; Ro. 15:30; 1 Co. 7:5; Eph. 1:16; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; Col. 4:12; 1 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 2:1; 1 Tim. 5:5; Phlm. 1:4; Phlm. 1:22; Jas. 5:17; 1 Pet. 3:7; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 5:8; Rev. 8:3; Rev. 8:4

**The ministry of the Word** - They were diligently persevering in serving (see [diakonia](#) above) **the Word** of Life (Php 2:16+), which alone gives supernatural spiritual life. Jesus said "It is the **Spirit** who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the **words that I have spoken** to you are spirit and are life." (Jn 6:63) Paul also links the work of the **Spirit** and the work of **the Word** writing that "we all,

with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord (IN HIS WORD cf James 1:23-25+), are being transformed ([metamorphoo](#) present tense, divine passive = by the Spirit = [progressive sanctification](#)) into the same image (Christ-likeness, cf Ro 8:29+) from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the **Spirit**." (2 Cor 3:18+)

Dear pastor, the apostles set the template - priority to prayer and the Word. Does this describe your ministry? Or have you become busy as a "jack of all trades," stealing time from your primary call to pray and preach the Word?

The late pastor **Jack Arnold** notes that "From beginning to end, it should take a pastor **fifteen to twenty hours** to prepare one sermon. Yet, the average pastor spends two to four hours for sermon preparation....It is sad but true that most ministers have very little time for **prayer** and the Bible because their members keep them so occupied with secondary things - matters that could be taken care of by ruling elders, deacons, staff and lay members of the church." ([Sermon](#)) How long do you spend each week to prepare your message on Sunday? Do you put it off until Saturday to prepare? Here is a summary of sermon prep time for some well-known pastors - John MacArthur – 32 hours John Piper – All day Friday, half day Saturday. Mark Dever – 30 to 35 hours Matt Chandler – All day Tuesday, all day Thursday. Kent Hughes – 20 hours. Tim Keller (big Manhattan church) – 14-16 hours. ([Ref](#))

**Oliver B. Greene** says, "A minister who preaches as many as three sermons a week needs at least forty-eight to sixty hours of that week to be used in preparation for his sermons, and many of those hours should be spent in prayer, seeking not only God's will for the message, but also the enlightening interpretation of the Holy Spirit on the text God would have him use. Any message delivered without preceding prayer and study will not accomplish that which the Word of God is given to accomplish."

**C H Spurgeon** once said that "If we are weak in communion with God we are weak everywhere."

**J Vernon McGee** writes "The apostles felt that they should not give up the study of **the Word** of God. They felt it was important for them to continue with that. If they gave up the study of **the Word** of God and served tables, that would be the undoing of them. They should spend their time in **prayer** and in the study of **the Word** of God. It is important for every church to recognize that the minister should have time to study the Word of God and should have time for prayer. (**Ed**: And I would add it is important for every minister to acknowledge their desperate need for devotion to prayer and the Word!) Unfortunately, the average church today is looking for a pastor who is an organizer and a promoter, a sort of vice-president to run the church, a manager of some sort. That is unfortunate. As a result the church is suffering today. When I was a pastor in downtown Los Angeles, I had to move my study to my home. I built a special room over the garage for my study. I found out that all I had in the church was an office, not a study. They didn't intend for me to study there. They didn't want me to study there." (Thru the Bible)

**John MacArthur** - The apostles'pledge to devote themselves to their ministry set the pattern for all to follow. The ministry demands total commitment, everything a man has to give. There is no substitute for hard work and discipline. A young man once said to the gifted expository preacher of God's Word Donald Grey Barnhouse, "I'd give the world to be able to teach the Bible like you." Looking him straight in the eye Dr. Barnhouse replied, "Good, because that's exactly what it will cost you." (NT Commentary - Acts)

I recall some 20 years ago when I went to my pastor and told him I would be willing to rent a place (even a place on the lake) for him to go away each week and be alone with God in prayer and His Word. Would you like to know his answer? "I'm too busy to get away!" Well, a few years later he got ensnared by immorality and the replacement pastor was also too busy to spend time with God in prayer and the Word. Would you like to know the result of his neglecting to preach and teach the pure milk of the Word? The church soon had a very painful split and he ended up leaving the original church, taking away more than half of the members. And then in his new church, he ended up being asked by the elders to leave! While there may have been "extenuating" circumstances (as they say), I have not one iota of doubt that these tragic debacles were related to a paucity in preaching the pure Word. Dear pastor, if you are not focused on the prayer and the Word, I plead with you for the sake of the glory of God and the Body of Christ, to rearrange your priorities. I am reminded of the church at Ephesus who even had Paul as a teacher for two years, but within a generation heard the following words of warning, including three "staccato-like" commands, from the Lord of the Church

But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore **remember** (present imperative) from where you have fallen, and **repent** (aorist imperative) and **do** (aorist imperative) the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. (Rev 2:4-5+)

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**Ray Pritchard** - More than once John Emmans, who served as pastor here at Calvary from 1952-1958, has told me this story. When he first came to this church (back then it was called Madison Street Bible Church) as a young man, the elders (led by the revered R. E. Nicholas), gave him a sign to put on his door which read, "**Do not disturb. In study and in prayer.**" They told him to focus on spiritual ministry, and they would watch after the needs of the congregation. I think that's right in the spirit of Acts 6.

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**Adrian Rogers** - I've learned, a long time ago, that the very best thing I could do for my people...is be prepared to preach. And if I'm not that, there's not a lot of other things that ultimately matter. Some wise man said that a preacher who's always available isn't worth

much when he is available. I agree with that—that a man has to be alone with God in the Word of God, studying and pouring out his heart to God in prayer for his people, and getting a word from God for his people. I know that there are ministers, who have all kinds of programs, and their people are doing all of these things, but they're not being free. I heard a silly story about a man who went into a pet store and bought a parakeet. They had two parakeets. The man said, "I've got one for a hundred dollars and one for twenty-five dollars." He said, "They look alike to me. What's the difference?" He said, "Well, the hundred-dollar parakeet can sing and talk real well. The twenty-five dollar parakeet doesn't sing that much, but he'll talk a little." The man said, "I'll take the twenty-five dollar parakeet. I want to save some money." After a week, he went back to the pet store and said, "He hasn't said a word." The man said, "Well, did he peck for the little bell?" He said, "Well, you didn't say anything about a little bell." "Oh," he says, "he has to peck a little bell before he talks." He said, "Well, do you have any?" He said, "I've got one for five dollars, so he bought a little bell and put it in there." A week later, he came back, and he said, "He still hasn't said a word." "Oh," he said, "well, did he run up and down the little ladder?" He said, "Well, you didn't say anything about a little ladder!" "Oh," he said, "he's gotta have a little ladder." And he said, "Well how much is the little ladder?" He said, "I've got one for ten dollars." So, he bought a little ladder. Then, he came back the third week, and he said, "Hey, that bird still hasn't said a word." "Ah," he said, "did he look in the little mirror?" The man said, "What little mirror?" He said, "You've got to have a little mirror; I've got one here for fifteen dollars." He sold him a little mirror. He came back the next week, and he said, "Listen, that bird has not uttered a peep!" "Oh," he said, "did he swing on the little swing?" He said, "How much is the swing?" He said, "I've got a swing for you for thirty dollars." And, he bought the little swing. Then, he came back the last week and said, "Let me tell you about that bird." He said, "That bird pecked the bell, then he ran up and down the ladder, then that little bird looked in the mirror, then he got in the swing and went back and forth, and then he shuddered, shivered, fell over backward, stuck his little feet in the air, and looked over at me and said, "Don't they sell any birdseed in that store that you go to?" I heard that, and I thought about so many churches. The pastor has the people pecking bells, running up and down ladders, and swinging on swings. I want to tell you something, friend: activity is no substitute for the Word of God, amen? I mean, you have to feed people. Now, there were people over here, talking about physical food and the widows being neglected, but the apostles said, "We're going to give ourselves continually to the ministry of the Word of God. We're going to be serving square meals from the pulpit. We're going to be preaching the Word of God, for the Bible says: 'desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.'" **And, I'll tell you that this church, or any church, will be strong to the degree that it maximizes and emphasizes the ministry of the Word of God—not only from the pulpit, but in our classrooms and in our homes.** We need to do that.

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A minister observing a poor man by the roadside breaking stones with a hammer, and kneeling to get at his work the better, said to him, "Ah, John, I wish I could break the stony hearts of my hearers as easily as you are breaking these stones!" The man replied, "Perhaps, master, you don't work on your knees?"

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**Prayer and Power** - A friend who knew Mr. Spurgeon many years ago, and who heard him preach on many occasions, says that he once heard him preach in one of our large towns in the afternoon and evening on a certain day; and that at the close of the afternoon service Mr. Spurgeon spoke of the consciousness that the service had not been what it should have been. His friend (then a student) admitted that he thought the preacher had not been himself in the preaching. Mr. Spurgeon, with a remark to the effect that it would never do to repeat the failure in the evening, went out into the woods to pray. Indeed, he spent the whole interval between the afternoon and evening services in prayer. The latter meeting was one of great power, and different in all respects from that of the afternoon. Many preachers of to-day might imitate Mr. Spurgeon's example with great advantage to themselves and their congregations.

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**Prayer and Preaching** alternate or simultaneous, are the right and left side of a living ministry. The preaching work may be laboriously and conscientiously performed without comfort or success if the other side be from any cause paralysed. I watched once the operations of a brick-maker in a field of clay. There was great agility in his movements. He wrought by piece, and the more he turned out the higher was his pay. His body moved like a machine. His task for a time was simply to raise a quantity of clay from a lower to a higher level by means of a spade, lie threw up one spadeful, and then he dipped his tool in a pail of water that stood by. After every spadeful of clay there was a dip in the water. The operation of dipping occupied as much time as raising. My first thought was, if he should dispense with these apparently useless baptisms, he might perform almost double the amount of work. My second thought was wiser: on reflection, I saw that if he should continue to work without these alternate washings, the clay would have stuck to the spade, and progress would have been altogether arrested. I said to myself, Go thou and do likewise. Prayer is the baptism which makes progress quick. (W. Arnot, D. D.)

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#### **F B Meyer - Acts 6:4 We will give ourselves continually to prayer.**

If ever there was a sacred work, it was that of caring for these poor widows; and yet the apostles felt that even such duties might interfere with the continual ministry of intercession. No doubt they always lived in the atmosphere and spirit of prayer, but they rightly felt that this was not enough either for them or their work. So they sought a division of labor, that while some specially served tables

and ministered the alms of the church, others might be set free for steadfast continuance in prayer. This would keep the communication with the King on the throne clear and fresh, would draw down the power and blessing of the heavenly world, and be the means of procuring wisdom and strength for their great responsibilities.

There are many courses of usefulness open to each of us in this world, and we must choose the one, not only most suited to our idiosyncrasies, but in which we can best serve our day and generation. It may be that in our incessant activities we are neglecting the one method by which we may contribute most largely to the coming of our Father's kingdom. Notice that word give. It is as though the Spirit of prayer were seeking natures so pure, so devoted, that without hindrance He might form Himself into them. Give yourself to Him for this!

"In that day," said our Lord, speaking of the Day of Pentecost, "ye shall ask in my name." It is only when we are full of the Holy Spirit that we can experience the true power to plead with God, and use the name of Christ so effectively as to receive the richest blessings for ourselves and others. Much prayer, much blessing; little prayer, little blessing; no prayer, no blessing. "The Word of God increased." (Our Daily Homily)

"I was lately in company of one of our older ministers," said a young minister the other day; "one who has laboured long and with much success in some of the most difficult fields of the Church. The object of my interview was to learn from him the secret of success with which it had pleased God to crown his ministry in positions and places where others had failed. Instead, however, of directly giving me the information I desired, he told me with great sorrow the reason why he had accomplished so little, and said with unaffected sadness, 'My young friend, the mistake of my life has been that I have not prayed more. I fell into the error of most ministers — I studied and preached. I worked and worried too much, and I prayed too little. Could I live my life over again, I would be more with God and less with men. I see it all now — what wasted years of unrest I have passed, how much of my life was my own doing, and how little of God has been in my active ministry! I can now, in the evening of my days, only ask God to forgive my shortcomings, and to aid me in spending my few remaining years differently from the imperfect way in which I have served my Master."

**Acts 6:5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.**

KJV Acts 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:

- **The statement found approval with the whole congregation** Acts 15:22; Ge 41:37; Pr 15:1,23; 25:11,12
- **Stephen** Acts 6:3,8,10; 7:1-60; 8:1,2; 11:24; Micah 3:8
- **Philip** Acts 8:5-13,26-40; 21:8
- **Nicolas** Revelation 2:6,15
- **proselyte from Antioch** Acts 13:1
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

These seven remind me of an American western entitled "[The Magnificent Seven](#)."

**The statement** ([logos](#)) **found approval with the whole congregation** - **Found approval** is the Greek verb [aresko](#) which means to be pleasing and is first in the Greek for emphasis. The apostles were not dictators but leaders here they led by presentation of the plan to the entire congregation. We do not know if they had a voice vote or ballots, but regardless of the method, the results were unanimous (**whole congregation**).

**And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**- The order of the seven is significant because the first 2 men played significant roles in the spread of the Gospel in Acts 7 (Stephen) and Acts 8 (Philip). It is notable that Stephen is characterized as **a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**, because one of the criteria of all seven men was that they be **full of the Spirit** (Acts 6:3). Paul Apple writes "Sadly, too many of us are full of ourselves." (Wish he hadn't said that! I have a big mirror in my bathroom!)

**And Philip** ("lover of horses") - See description of his ministry in Acts 8:5-40+. Two missionary journeys are recorded in Acts 8:5-13 and Acts 8:26-40. **Philip** is the only man specifically called an **evangelist** in Acts - "**Philip the evangelist**" (Acts 21:8). **Philip** was instrumental in taking the Gospel to **Samaria** ("you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and **Samaria**" - Acts

1:8+) (See [map of expansion](#) of the early church)

Notice how God used these two table waiters -**Stephen** was the first **martyr** for the faith and **Philip** was the first **missionary** for the faith! None of us know what God might do with us when we are obedient to do exactly what He has set before us at a given time. To avoid doing what He obviously leads us to do could mean (and probably will mean) we will miss out on the privilege of doing some other work for Him. If God is calling to wait on tables, then dear Spirit filled believer, wait on tables! These two men remind me of God's words in Jeremiah 45:5 "*seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not.*" Jesus said "*he who is least among you, this is the one who is great.*" (Lk 9:48).

**Chose** (1586) (**eklego** from **ek** = out, out of, out from + **légo** = select, choose) (see also [eklektos](#)) means literally to select out, single out or choose out of. The idea in **eklego** speaks of the sizable number from which the selection is made. It implies the taking of a smaller number out of a larger. For example, in secular use, Virgil's *Eclogues* (from eklego) are short, selected excerpts taken from a more larger collection of poems. Why is this criterion so important? Who are you more likely to know intimately -- a man with whom you have lived life or a man coming in to interview for a position?

**Stephen, a man full ... of the Holy Ghost**- Can I see the dew of heaven as it falls on a summer evening? I cannot. It comes down softly and gently, noiselessly and imperceptibly. But when I go forth in the morning after a cloudless night, and see every leaf sparkling with moisture, and feel every blade of grass damp and wet, I say at once, "There has been a dew." Just so it is with the presence of the Spirit in the soul. (J C Ryle)

**Stephen** (4736) (**stephanos** from **stepho** = to encircle, twine or wreath) means crown. It was "the victor's crown," a symbol of triumph in the Grecian athletic games. How fitting that it is the name of this godly saint who paid the highest price when he was stoned for speaking the truth of the Gospel! The related word is [stephanos](#) (4735) was a wreath made of foliage or designed to resemble foliage and worn by one of high status or held in high regard. The **stephanos** was literally an adornment worn around the head as a crown of victory in the Greek athletic games, this reward being given to the runner who crossed the goal first, to the disc thrower with the longest toss, etc. Apart from recognition of athletes and winners of various kinds of competitions, in the Greco-Roman world, the awarding of a crown or wreath signified appreciation for exceptional contributions to the state or groups within it. The recipients were usually public officials or civic-minded persons serving at their own expense.

Here is a summary of crowns for believers, all described by the same Greek word **stephanos**.

CROWN	VERSE	DESCRIPTION
Stephanos	1 Cor 9:25+	Incorruptible Crown
Stephanos	2 Ti 4:8+	Crown of Righteousness
Stephanos	1 Th 2:19+	Crown of Rejoicing
Stephanos	James 1:12+, Rev 2:10+	Crown of life
Stephanos	1 Peter 5:4+	Crown of glory

**Stephanos** - 7x in 7v - Acts 6:5; Acts 6:8; Acts 6:9; Acts 7:59; Acts 8:2; Acts 11:19; Acts 22:20

#### Related Resources:

- [What is the verse about casting our crowns before the feet of Jesus?](#)
- [What are the five heavenly crowns that believers can receive in Heaven?](#)

**Full** (abounding) (4134) (**pleres** from **pleos** = full, **pletho** = to fill) means filled up as opposed to empty (as of a hollow vessel - Mt 14:20, 15:37, Mk 6:43). Of a surface, covering every part (leprosy in Lk 5:12). Figuratively, of one full of, filled with, abounding in, thoroughly endowed with (Lk 4:1 full of the Holy Spirit, Acts 9:36 abounding in deeds, Stephen full of grace and power Acts 6:8) **Pleres** is repeatedly associated with **the Holy Spirit** - Lk 4:1, Acts 6:3, 5, 7:55, 11:24. Clearly the state of being filled with the Spirit was of great import in the life of Jesus and the lives of the disciples in the Book of Acts. When **pleres** is used in this figurative sense, it conveys something more than simply "filling up to the brim" so to speak. It also conveys the truth that what fills a person, controls the person. For example, notice what filled Elymas the magician (Acts 13:8) in Acts 13:10 - **all deceit and fraud**. And what was the "effect?" He made "**crooked the straight ways of the Lord.**" (Acts 13:10). As an aside notice how Paul was "enabled" to confront this man who seems in essence to be enabled or to be even demonically controlled and empowered ("**you son of the devil**" Acts 13:10)? "**Paul, filled with** (controlled by, enabled by) **the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze upon him.**" (Acts 13:9). The upshot is that to be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by the Spirit and thus supernaturally empowered or enabled to accomplish what cannot be accomplished naturally (by relying on my human "power"). This is why Eph 5:18+ is so critical to the Christian life, for there is simply no other way to live this "Christ life," this supernatural life, then the same way Jesus as a Man lived it--**filled with**

**the Holy Spirit!** (Luke 4:1, 14+).

**Prochorus** ("before the dance"), **Nicanor** ("conqueror"), **Timon** ("honoring"), **Parmenas** ("steadfast") and **Nicolas** ("victor over the people"), a **proselyte from Antioch** - Most commentators feel that all seven names are Greek, and thus are Hellenistic Jews chosen to solve the problem the Hellenistic members had raised (Acts 6:1). However, this is not absolute as some Hebraic Jews did have Greek names. Other than the meaning of their names (see parentheses above) we know nothing of these 5 men because they are not mentioned again in the NT. What we do know about these seven men is that all met the high qualifications in Acts 6:3 which in itself is quite a testimony.

**Antioch** (literally "an Antiochian" an inhabitant of Antioch) - [Wikipedia](#). See [map of Antioch](#) as the launching site for Paul's first missionary journey.

**Antioch** - 19x in 18v in the NT

Acts 6:5; Acts 11:19; Acts 11:20; Acts 11:22; Acts 11:26; Acts 11:27; Acts 13:1; Acts 13:14; Acts 14:19; Acts 14:21; Acts 14:26; Acts 15:22; Acts 15:23; Acts 15:30; Acts 15:35; Acts 18:22; Gal. 2:11; 2 Tim. 3:11

**Nicolas** was obviously a Gentile who converted from paganism to Judaism and then became a believer in Jesus. Some (e.g., Early Church Fathers) associate **Nicolas** with the Nicolaitans mentioned in Revelation 2:6, 15+ but this is by no means definitive as there is absolutely no evidence to link this godly man Nicolas with this ungodly heretical group!

**Nicolaitanism** (see also [Wikipedia](#)) probably represents a movement present in the churches at Ephesus and at Pergamos to subject the people of God to one or more powerful leaders. The term is derived from **nikao** (Gk.), "to conquer," and **laos** (Gk.), "people," hence, "people conquerors." Very plausibly, the Nicolaitan movement marks the beginning of a form of priesthood in the church. On the other hand, this group has also been viewed as representing those who have compromised with the world through the practices of immorality and idolatry. Though some tradition has identified them as followers of the Nicolas of Acts 6:5, one of the first seven deacons (ED: NOTE THEY ARE ACTUALLY NEVER CALLED DEACONS IN ACTS 6) in the early church at Jerusalem, evidence for this identification is not extensive. (Believers Study Bible)

**Proselyte** (4339) (**proselutos** from **proserchomai** to come near to join) describes a stranger, foreigner, one who comes from his own people to another. In the NT **proselutos** is a technical term for a Gentile who has come over to Judaism usually won over from paganism through Jewish missionary efforts and then by submitting to circumcision (males), self-baptism before witnesses (The Talmud adds that Gentile conversion must be supervised by three Jews - *The Talmud of Babylonia*) and offering of a sacrifice. Related terms are **those reverencing God** (Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7) or **those fearing God** (Acts 10:2; 13:16, 26). **Robertson** adds that "Many remained uncircumcised and were called **proselytes of the gate**." ([Word Pictures in the New Testament - Acts](#)) The first use of **proselutos** is by Jesus describing Jewish "missionaries" who traveled far "to make one **proselyte** and when he becomes one, (he is made) twice as much a son of hell as" the Jewish missionary. (Mt 23:15). In their zeal to make converts one of the places the Jewish missionaries had visited was Rome. **Zodhiates** says that "such zeal being so remarkable at that time that it became proverbial among the Romans."

How exciting that Nicolas a Gentile is not a disciple of Christ. He was a "preview of coming attractions" as God's Spirit opened the gate to Gentiles to enter into salvation without having to go through Judaism.

**Acts 6:6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.**

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

- **after praying, they laid their hands on them** Acts 1:24; 8:17; 9:17; 13:3; 1 Ti 4:14; 5:22; 2 Ti 1:6
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### "INSTALLATION SERVICE"

**And these they brought before the apostles** - More literally "they were caused to stand." Presumably the congregations selected the seven although exactly how they did this is not described.

**And after praying** - What did they pray? Luke does not say. Surely in their prayer they would acknowledge God's provision in choosing these seven men. (cf Acts 1:24+) **NET Note** adds that "The prayer indicates their acceptance and commissioning for ministry (cf. Dt 34:9)."

**Praying** (4336) (**proseuchomai** from **pros** = toward, facing [emphasizing the direct approach of the one who prays in seeking God's face] + **euchomai** = speak out, express a wish, pray) in the NT is always used of prayer addressed to God (to Him as the object of faith and the One who will answer one's prayer) and means to speak consciously (with or without vocalization) to Him, with a definite aim (See study of noun **proseuche**).

**They laid their hands on them** - This practice does not speak of nor warrant interpretation as a description of so called "apostolic succession." (See [Is apostolic succession biblical?](#)) **Larkin** has some interesting thought on **laid their hands on them** - "**The laying on of hands**" is used in Old Testament passages with the "choice of supplementary leadership" form. Hebrew *samak*, used in Numbers 27:18, means "to lean the hand on, exercise some force at the base of the hand at the joint" and has the significance of to "pour your personality--or a quality of yours relevant at this moment--into him" (Daube 1976:162; compare Nu 27:20). What the apostles pass on to the Seven through the laying on of hands is not the Spirit, for the Seven already have the Spirit (Acts 6:3). Rather, they receive authority to work as the apostles' representatives in a specific task (Parratt 1969:213). (IVP NT Commentary - Acts)

**Constable** adds that "**Laying hands** on someone symbolized the bestowal of a blessing (Ge 48:13; et al.). It also represented identification with the person (Lev. 1:4; 3:2; et al.), commissioning as a kind of successor (Nu 27:22,23), and granting authority (Acts 8:17-19; 9:17; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Ti 4:14; 5:22; Heb. 6:2).

**Fruchtenbaum** - Members of the Sanhedrin were appointed to their office by the laying on of hands. (Ibid)

While Acts 6 is regarded by many as teaching about the office of deacon, it is notable that the actual Greek word for **deacon** (**diakonos**) is not used here nor elsewhere in the book of Acts. The cognate words **diakonia** in Acts 6:1 ("serving") and Acts 6:4 ("ministry") and **diakoneo** ("serve") occurs in Acts 6:2.

#### Related Resources:

- [Laying on of Hands - Bob Utley](#)
- [Laying on of hands - what does the Bible say?](#)
- [What are the qualifications of elders and deacons?](#)
- [What are the responsibilities of deacons in the church?](#)

**Acts 6:7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.**

KJV 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.

- **The word of God kept on spreading** Acts 12:24; 19:20; Col 1:6; 2 Ti 2:9
- **the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem** Acts 21:20; \*Gr:
- **the priests** 2 Chronicles 29:34; 30:24; Ps 132:9,16; Mt 19:30; Luke 2:34; John 12:42
- **obedient** Ro 1:5; 16:26; 2 Th 1:8; Heb 5:9; 11:8
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE DYNAMIC GOSPEL YIELDS DIVINE MULTIPLICATION

**The Word of God...spreading** explains why the number of disciples continued to increase.

**THOUGHT** - There is a principle - No Word. No Growth! This begs the question to all preachers -- Are you preaching the Word ever ready in season and out of season, reproofing, rebuking, exhorting, with great patience and instruction (2 Ti 4:2+) or are you using the Word of God to launch into your "favorite topics" or discussions? God only promises that the Word from His mouth (i.e., "the pure milk of the Word" - 1 Pe 2:2+) will not return void (cf Isa 55:11)! He does not promise that *pious platitudes* will not return void and in fact more often than not they do return void (cf the warning inherent in Proverbs 29:18+ where practically speaking "no vision" equates with no divine revelation/exhortation/exposition from His Word - i.e., shepherds failing to preach the Word of God). Jesus was clear that sheep need to be fed (Jn 21:15-17+) and the only "food" for sheep is the Word of God (cf Mt 4:4+, Lk 4:4+). God's blessing is upon those shepherds who feed the **Word of God** to His sheep, and here in Acts 6:7 we see that blessing was accompanied by increasing

numbers of sheep! Luke has several similar "summaries" that describe the spread of the Gospel and increase in His sheep - Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 9:31; 12:24; 13:49; 16:5; 19:20. In summary, the order is important, first speak the Word of God and then the sheep of God will grow (either numerically and/or qualitatively - being increasing edified and growth in greater degrees of Christ-likeness - cf Eph 4:11-14+, 2 Cor 3:18+).

**Adrian Rogers** sums up this first section noting that "Where there is healthy life there is growth. Where there is healthy growth there are problems. Where there are problems, there are God-given solutions. Where there is a God-given solution there is even greater growth....Do you know why this early church bounded and grew as it did? Because, every time the devil attacked, they went to God and God counter-attacked. And, their problems became a springboard for greater growth. Listen, friend, all Hell can't stop a church that'll keep its eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank God for a growing church. "

**Ray Pritchard** - Instead of derailing the church, this crisis propelled it to even faster growth. Surely this is a mark of God's hand of blessing. Even the bad things work out for good. (A Place to Serve)

Acts 6:1 begins this section with "**the disciples were increasing.**" And now only a few verses later Luke records that number of **disciples** are increasing **greatly**. Why would he repeat this description of "church growth" so soon? What had transpired in the interim? The devil had attempted to disrupt and divide the church but his efforts had been frustrated by the godly leadership, including the provision of godly, Spirit filled men to care for the Hellenistic widows. Their **just treatment** of these otherwise helpless and hopeless Hellenistic widows would have been like "living oracles" testifying loud and clear of the pervasive power of the Gospel to be good news for ALL people, reminding us that those who are often easily forgotten by men, are not forgotten by God!

Thus the progress of the spread of the Gospel continued unabated with even greater numbers of converts. I agree with **Dr Criswell's** analysis that "After this event (SELECTION OF SEVEN SPIRIT FILLED SAINTS WHICH ABORTED A SCHISM) the church experienced its greatest revival since Pentecost."

**THOUGHT** - There is a lesson here for all churches -- Internal splits and bickering will sap the saints of their desire and power to spread the Gospel. In order to quickly "fix fences" and resolve rifts, churches must have godly praying men, who are of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and filled with wisdom. How sad when a church's leaders are chosen based on their charisma, contributions, corporate success, etc. Spiritual criteria should **always** trump secular, humanistic criteria in selection of church leaders. I have repeatedly seen churches place successful businessmen (often retired) who were wealthy and/or influential into leadership positions and the results have been a leadership team of potentially "high capability" but generally "low spirituality!" And too often those same churches have reaped the rotten fruit sown by more secular based selections!

**The word of God** - In this context, this phrase is a synonym for the Gospel. In Acts 13:26 it is called '**the Word of this salvation.**' In Acts 14:3 and Acts 20:32 it is called "**the Word of His grace.**" In Acts 15:7 it is called '**the Word of the Gospel.**' The phrase the **Word of God** appears 11x in Acts - Acts 4:31; Acts 6:2; Acts 6:7; Acts 8:14; Acts 11:1; Acts 13:5; Acts 13:7; Acts 13:46; Acts 17:13; Acts 18:11.

**Robertson on spreading...increasing** both in the imperfect tense - The two imperfects kept pace with each other.

**How did the Word of God keep on spreading?** Clearly **the Word** had to be spoken (cf Ro 10:14+). But once spoken, the Gospel has the intrinsic power to penetrate and transform a heart, for the Gospel is "the **power [dunamis]** of God for salvation to everyone who believes." (Ro 1:16+). The word **dunamis** describes inherent power to accomplish supernaturally what cannot be accomplished naturally. The Gospel alone has the power to circumcise a hard heart! The apostles' privilege (and ours) is simply to speak the Gospel and it will keep on spreading supernaturally. Those that are born again will want to tell others about their new life in Christ.

**Kept on spreading (837) (auxano)** means to cause to grow or cause to become greater in extent, size, state, or quality. Three times in Acts, Luke gives us similar descriptions of the Word using the verb **auxano**, all three uses in the imperfect tense signifying this growth was occurring over and over (again and again).

But the **word of the Lord** continued to **grow (auxano)** and to be **multiplied**. (Acts 12:24+)

So the **word of the Lord** was **growing (auxano)** mightily and prevailing. (Acts 19:20+)

Although the verb is not **auxano**, Luke gives a similar of the power of the Gospel in Acts 13:49+

"And the **word of the Lord** was **being spread (diaphero** in imperfect tense) through the whole region."

**From these observations on the Word of God (the Lord), what is the message to every pastor of every church in the world?** Preach the Word in season and out if you want to see your congregation grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and



Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pe 3:18). **There are no shortcuts or substitutes!** And you can only preach the Word by setting aside time to study and prayerfully prepare your messages. Preaching that has a paucity of the Word is guaranteed to produce spiritually anemic believers. I can remember going to one pastor and strongly encouraging him to take the sheep deeper into the Word of God. Would you like to know his answer? "They would not be able to handle it!" Woe! He preached sermonettes and what he got was "Christianettes" so to speak. Several years later that church split into two churches!

How important for pulpits everywhere to ensure and facilitate conditions which maximize the "growth" of the Word of the Lord in the "garden" of the local body of Christ, "in Whom the whole building, being fitted together is (continually) **growing** (*auxano*) into a holy temple in the Lord." (Ep 2:21-[note](#))

In his description of one of the most foundational truths in the New Testament regarding spiritual growth of disciples, Peter says that after "putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure (unadulterated, no additives, no artificial substitutes) milk of the Word, that (purpose clause) by it you **may grow** (*auxano*) in respect to salvation ([progressive sanctification](#) into conformity with the image of Christ - Ro 8:29+). (1 Pe 2:1+, 1 Pe 2:2+)

**Ray Pritchard** observes that "In the beginning the widows are going hungry and their friends are upset. Anger threatens the unity of the body. By the end the anger is gone and the widows are fed because the seven men are now serving the Lord and are recognized by the whole congregation. This is precisely how the body of Christ is supposed to function." (A Place to Serve)

**And the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem**- **ESV** says "the disciples multiplied greatly." "**Increase greatly**" would suggest that there were so many new disciples being added to the church that it was difficult to keep track of the exact number. And so Luke's last specific count was in Acts 4:4+ writing that "the number of the men came to be about five thousand." So we don't know how many believers were in Jerusalem at this time, although estimates of the size of the church are as high as 25,000. While it is very difficult to determine the population of Jerusalem at this time (circa 33 AD), the Roman historian Tacitus estimated the population of Jerusalem at the time of the Jewish wars (AD 66-73) to be about 600,000. So while this is only a guess, membership in the "first apostolic church of Jerusalem" would have been about 5% of the population.

**Disciples** ([3101](#)) See previous discussion on [mathetes](#). As **Horton** says the word **disciples** means "**learners**, so-called because they were all believers desiring to learn more about Jesus and the Gospel (Acts 2:42+)." (Acts: A Logion Press Commentary) How wonderful to have a church full of men and women "**learners**" continually longing for the pure milk of the Word that by it they might grow in respect to their salvation! (1 Pe 2:2+) This is the kind of church that can turn the world upside down!

**Continued to increase** (imperfect tense)([4129](#))([plethuno](#) from **plethos** = fullness from **pletho** = to fill) means they were being multiplied (divine passive) by the intrinsic [power](#) of the Gospel and the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.

**And a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith** - Luke is not referring to the chief priests or the members of the Sanhedrin, but to the "rank and file" priests who did the daily work in the Temple. Some estimate that the number of priests in Jerusalem at this time was in the range of 2000, but I have read some reputable sources that place the number as high as 18,000. That seems a bit high to me, but the point Luke makes is that the Gospel is making significant inroads into the Jewish priesthood. Their eyes were being opened by the Gospel and the Spirit (cf Acts 26:18+) to see that the sacrifices they were carrying out pointed to the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29+, cf Col 2:16, 17+). Perhaps with their knowledge of the Old Testament they began to see the many Messianic passages pointed to the Messiah Christ Jesus. Heaven will be fascinating as we can ask the priests what led them to see that Jesus was their personal Redeemer!

One other thought on the response of the priests to the Gospel - One of the signs that the Messiah had come was healing of lepers (cf Lk 7:22+). When a leper was healed, he had to be examined by the Temple priests. While Luke does not specify what signs and wonders Stephen was performing, if any of them were healing of lepers, supposedly they would still have to be "cleared" by the priests (Mt 8:2-3, 4). So imagine these priests witnessing these "walking Messianic markers" that were like giant flashing signs pointing to the fact that the Messiah had come and died for them! See more on this below.

**What factors may have contributed to this influx of orthodox Jewish priests into Christianity?** First, think about what a priest would normally do at the Temple -- perform sacrifices! And yet we know that Jesus "offered one sacrifice for sins for all time," (Heb 10:12+, cf Jn 19:30+) so that there was no longer the need to perform animal sacrifices. It would seem that for a priest to accept the Gospel, in doing so, they would essentially lose their job! Talk about count the cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus! (cf Mk 8:34-36+). Also recall what happened on the day Jesus died on the Cross -- Matthew records that "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom," (Mt 27:51, Mk 15:38+, Lk 23:45+, cf Heb 10:19-23+) exposing the Holy of holies to the priest's sight, whereas for centuries this veil had hidden the Holy of holies from view except on the Day of Atonement and then only by one priest for one day! It was as if the torn veil provided the priests with a continual reminder that the Old Covenant had been abolished by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God (Heb 8:13+). Did the torn veil contribute to the fact that **many of the priests** were receiving the Gospel? I think so, but we will have to wait until we can discuss it with them in Heaven.

**F F Bruce on the priests** (as compared to the religious leaders of the Sanhedrin) - The ordinary priests were socially and in other ways far removed from the wealthy chief-priestly families from which the main opposition to the Gospel came. Many of the ordinary priests were no doubt men holy and humble of heart, like Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, men who would be readily convinced of the truth of the Gospel."

**Priests** (2409) (**hierous** from **hieros** = holy, consecrated to God) is a consecrated person who serves deity. **Priests** in the NT refer primarily to the ceremonial officials of Jesus' day who offered Temple sacrifices, etc. **Hierous** describes the specific position and not necessarily a priest's character (e.g., see Lk 10:31 where a priest was a "bad Samaritan" so to speak). Most of the priests had "religion" without relationship with the Great High Priest, Christ Jesus. And so the first use of hierous in Acts 4:1+ describes "the **priests** and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to" Peter and John who were speaking to the people. Acts 4:3 tells us these priests (et al) "laid hands on (Peter and John) and put them in jail!" But now in Acts 6 we see a dramatic change in the attitude of many of the priests. While we do not know how much time passed between Acts 4:1 and Acts 6:7, it is clear that many of them were shifting from "religion" to "relationship" with Christ by grace through faith.

**Were becoming obedient to the faith** - This could be paraphrased "they were believing the Gospel."

**C H Spurgeon on obedient to the faith** - The priests were obedient to the faith; why not you? They believed in Christ, saw the fold, entered in, and were saved; why should not you be like them? Did you notice how it is described? They were "**obedient to the faith.**" Then it seems that the Gospel is all summed up in that word **'faith.'** To be obedient to the faith; to believe that Jesus is the Son of God; to trust Him because He has suffered in your stead; to believe that the divine justice is satisfied with the death of Christ, and to rely upon that satisfaction which Christ has rendered; that is to be saved, to be obedient to the faith. ([Good Earnests of Great Success](#) or [here](#))

**John Butler on obedient to the faith** - Being obedient to the faith is another way of saying a person has gotten saved, has obeyed the call of God to turn to Jesus Christ. The purpose of the Gospel, which these verses have been speaking about, was to save souls ("obedience of faith"). (Analytical Bible Expositor - Romans)

**Arnold Fruchtenbaum** notes that **becoming obedient** is "Imperfect active, which emphasizes repetition: one after the other, priests were coming to the faith. Because these were priests, it means that most of these, if not all, were **Sadducees.**" (If so, that is fascinating as they were the ones who did not believe in the resurrection. And if so, one can imagine the anger this generated with the high priest who was a Sadducee as were many of the Sanhedrin.)

**A T Robertson** agrees that "The priests were usually **Sadducees**, who had been so active in arresting the apostles. It is a fine outcome and doubtless embittered the Sadducees all the more." (Studies in the New Testament)

**David Thompson** - Many priests were beginning to realize we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and not by works or keeping the O.T. Law. This was causing a real problem with the religious world. ([Sermon](#))

**Becoming obedient** (imperfect tense again and again, one after another)(5219) (**hupakouo** from **hupó** = under + **akoúo** = hearing) literally means to hear under and then to listen with attentiveness with the implication that there is a positive response to what is heard. The sense is that one understands and responds accordingly -- the priests understood the Word of God proclaimed by the apostles and repented and believed in that Word. The picture of **hupakouo** is that of placing oneself under what has been heard and therefore submitting to and obeying what is heard, in this context the spoken Word of the Gospel.

Paul uses this same verb **hupakouo** in the context of describing the Lord's return and His "dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who **do not obey** (hupakouo) **the Gospel** of our Lord Jesus." (2 Th 1:8) In contrast to the ready reception **by many of the priests**, the individuals Paul describes openly rejected the Gospel, and steadfastly refused to believe it.

In Romans 10:16+ **hupakouo** is used again in the context of salvation, Paul writing "However, **they did not all heed** (hupakouo - "not all have obeyed") the good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?"

John uses a different verb which expresses the same thought as hupakoo here in Acts 6:7

"He who **believes** in the Son has eternal life; but **he who does not obey** the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (Jn 3:36+)

**The Faith** (**pistis**) is a specific phrase (definite article "the" plus "faith") found some 38x in the NASB. Approximately **one-half** of the 38 occurrences of the phrase **the faith** refer not to the **ACT** of believing (SUBJECTIVE) but rather to **WHAT** is believed (OBJECTIVE) as in the presence of the priests who believed the (objective) doctrine Gospel as in Gal 1:23+ "He who once persecuted us is now preaching **the faith** which he once tried to destroy." Jude writes "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for **the faith** which was once for all handed down to the saints." (Jude 1:3+)

**Fruchtenbaum** - **The faith** is the system of the faith in the gospel or the body of apostolic doctrine. (Messianic Bible Study Collection)

**Spurgeon** - it seems that the gospel is all summed up in that word **"faith."**

**Charles Swindoll** sums up some principles for **growing** in Acts 6:1-7 - **Rapid growth doesn't excuse unmet needs.** Now, that's a lesson for today's leadership to remember. These men in leadership listened to a legitimate complaint and then did something about it. They didn't defend themselves against the accusation of favoritism. They didn't ignore the problem as something beneath their level of concern. They didn't dismiss or minimize the need, and they certainly didn't discredit the people complaining. **They listened to the criticism and then saw it as an opportunity to address an unmet need.... Concerned involvement doesn't require losing priorities. The apostles found a way to meet the congregation's needs and solve the problem without sacrificing their top priorities. That's a tough balance to maintain!** It takes creative thinking, willingness to flex, courage to delegate, and the wisdom to risk failure. Welcome to Leadership 101. (Acts-Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary)

**John Piper's** summary of his sermon entitled [Serving Widows, Preaching the Word, and Winning Priests..](#)

The way Luke celebrates the triumph of the church over this threat is by showing its effect in Acts 6:7: "And the word of God [that had not been forsaken or diminished] increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." **What Luke is celebrating is that the triumph over this in-house problem resulted in a new breakthrough in evangelistic power.** Now, even priests, who had been so hostile (Acts 4:1), are responding to the Word of God and obeying the faith. **The church had been tested. She had passed the test by caring for the widows and guarding the Word.** And God honored this triumph with new power and fruitfulness. The Word of God, Luke says, grew like a living thing—because the Word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). It's the power of God unto salvation. We have a great message. There are places in the world where it is growing with tremendous power. I mentioned Cuba. Similar stories could be told today about the USSR and China and Indonesia and parts of Latin America.

**Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.**

KJV Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

- **And Stephen, full of grace and power**, Acts 6:3,5,10,15; 7:55; Eph 4:11; 1 Ti 3:13
- **was performing great wonders and signs among the people** Acts 2:17,18; 4:29,30; 8:6
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **A TABLE WAITER PERFORMING SIGNS AND WONDERS**

**And Stephen, full of grace and power** (KJV has "full of faith and power") - Stephen is repeatedly described as a "filled" man -**full of the Spirit** in Acts 6:3 and **full of faith and of the Holy Spirit** in Acts 6:5. Stephen's "supernatural" manifestations would have been especially irritating to the anti-supernatural Sadducees!

**Horton on grace and power** observes that Stephen was "both the recipient and the channel of God's unmerited favor." (Ibid)

**S Lewis Johnson** calls Stephen "**The Paul before Paul**" (I suppose he means not only in time, but literally before him when he was stoned!). The comparison recalls to mind Paul's words on successful ministry

But by the **grace** of God I am what I am, and His **grace** toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the **grace** of God with me. (1 Cor 15:10+)

**David Thompson** has a slightly different emphasis on **Stephen** being **full of grace** - He was at a very unusual filled level in his grasp of grace. He completely embraced the Grace of God as opposed to works and law, which will become evident in his message (Acts 7). This is ultimately the reason Satan wants Stephen stopped. He had a grasp of grace in a religious world of works. When a man is full of the Spirit, full of wisdom, and full of faith, he will grasp grace and communicate the grace message....He came to understand the value of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He saw the difference between law and grace. He saw the difference between worship in the Temple and worship in the church. He was a tremendous Grace Age Bible scholar and he will be killed because of it...WHEN YOU ARE A FAITHFUL AND POWERFUL PERSON OF GOD WHO ACCURATELY COMMUNICATES GOD'S TRUTH CONCERNING GOD'S GRACE, SOME RELIGIOUS PEOPLE WILL BE JEALOUS OF YOU AND HATE YOU AND

MAY SEEK TO DESTROY YOU. Now Satan of course is in this attack. He wants to stop the communication of the Grace of God. He thinks if he can silence Stephen, he can cause others to shy away from proclaiming the same doctrine. But his plan will not work. The Grace Age is moving forward in full force and it is about to reach out to the entire world. ([Sermon](#))

**Full** (abounding) ([4134](#)) see discussion above on [pleres](#)

**Horton on full of grace** - The phrase "**full of grace**" is found in only one other passage in the New Testament (John 1:14+), and there it describes Jesus. The Holy Spirit could use Stephen because he reflected the character of Jesus. (Acts: A Logion Press Commentary)

**Grace** (favor) ([5485](#))([charis](#) from from [chairo](#) = to rejoice) is a word which defies a simple definition but at its core conveys the sense of favor while the specific nuances of **charis** depend on the [context](#) in which it is used. Someone has written that the word **grace** is probably the greatest word in the Scriptures, even greater even than "love," because **grace** is love in action, and therefore includes it. Stephen was a man who manifested "love in action!"

**Paul Apple** - Grace - a special manifestation of the divine presence, activity, power, glory, and favor of God

It is hardly too much to say that God has in no word uttered Himself and all that was in His heart more distinctly than in this word grace (charis)!

**Longenecker** on **grace** - It could indicate God's favor to Stephen, or the spiritual charm or winsomeness of Stephen; that is, the power which flows from God.

**Adrian Rogers** says the best definition of **grace** that he has ever heard is that God's grace is "both the **desire** and the **ability** to do the will of God."

It is striking that almost the same words occur in Php 2:13NLT-note "**For** ([term of explanation](#) - explains how it is possible to Work out our salvation - Php 2:12-note) God is working in you, giving you the **DESIRE** and the **POWER** to do what pleases Him." When you have a godly desire, that desire is from God, because no good thing can come out of our old vile heart! And only God the Spirit in us can give the supernatural power necessary to accomplish that godly desire! So we could paraphrase Php 2:13, in simple words, by saying that God's Spirit is continually giving us the grace (desire and power) to do what pleases Him! This practical definition of grace ought to free many of us who are "trying to clean ourselves up!" It can't be done! We need His grace to give us the desire to "clean up" and the power to "clean up!" Are you resisting His grace? You can either receive it or resist it! The first way leaves us filled, while the second way leaves us empty, dry, and spiritually barren. O beloved, tell God you desperately need and want Him to pour out His grace on the situation you find yourself entwined.

**Power** (Miracles) ([1411](#))([dunamis](#) from [dunamai](#) = to be able, to have power) power especially achieving power. It refers to intrinsic power or inherent ability, the power or ability to carry out some function, the potential for functioning in some way (power, might, strength, ability, capability), the power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature. Dunamis is translated "**miracles**" 17x (out of 116x) in the NASB.

Stephen reminds us of the courageous Old Testament prophets like Micah who declared

On the other hand **I am filled with power— With the Spirit of the LORD—** And with justice and courage To make known to Jacob his rebellious act, Even to Israel his sin. (Micah 3:8+).

**Was performing** (imperfect tense - one after another) **great wonders and signs among the people** - While many consider Acts 6 to be a description of "deacons," it is clear that Stephen was performing works considerably different than what one would expect to see with a deacon. And the same could be said of Phillip for he is an evangelist in Acts 8. Stephen is the first non-apostle described as doing miraculous works.

**Wonders** would arouse close observation and **signs** would point to the supernatural.

**Wonders** ([5059](#))([teras](#)) are similar to signs but appeals more to the senses, being recognized as a phenomenon that needs to be explained. Something strange, exceptional, causing the beholder to marvel. **Teras** refers to "something strange", a phenomena which compels one's attention and causes one to "look again" or causes the beholder to marvel. **Teras** is always in the plural and always translated "**wonders**."

**Signs** ([4592](#))([semeion](#) from [sema](#) = sign) are those things that serve as a pointer to aid perception or insight. In the NT **asign** speaks of a token which has behind it a particular message to be conveyed. Semeion describes a miracle whose purpose in this context is to authenticate the claims of Stephen performing the miracle.

**Brian Bell** - STEPHEN! went "from serving tables to doing miracles. In the parable of Talents, in Mt.25:21, Jesus said, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" Being faithful in the little things, in the small things, the Lord honors! D.L.Moody, "There are many of us that are willing to do great things for the Lord; but few of us are willing to do little things." (ARE YOU BEING FAITHFUL TO WHAT YOU KNOW BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT JESUS HAS CALLED YOU TO DO FOR HIM, FOR HIS GLORY?)

**David Thompson** agrees writing 'There is a very important principle to glean here and that is if you are faithful in little ministries, God will entrust you with larger ministries. If you will be faithful in small things, God will use you for big things.' ([Sermon](#))

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## Acts 6:8, Acts 7:54-60 The Courage Of Conviction

By Haddon W. Robinson

Acts 7:54-60

Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. —Acts 6:8

Shortly before the American Civil War, a young lawyer from Vermont settled in Adams County, Pennsylvania. There he witnessed fugitive slaves escaping from bondage, so he devoted himself with all his powers to free those who were in slavery.

When the war broke out, Thaddeus Stephens was a powerful influence in the US government. But at his death years later, he was virtually alone. Written on his tombstone in an obscure cemetery are these words: "Finding that other cemeteries were restricted as to race by charter rights, I have chosen to lie in this humble spot, in order that I may testify, even in my death, to those principles which I have advocated through a long life."

In Acts 6 and 7, we read about a man of God named Stephen. He was full of faith, power, and conviction. He was brought before the Jewish ruling council on trumped-up charges and allowed to make a statement. It turned into a powerful indictment of the religious leaders. They despised him and his message, so they dragged him out of Jerusalem and stoned him. Stephen fell to his knees and prayed for his killers. The way he died spoke as eloquently as his sermon.

As followers of Christ, we must be people of conviction. How far are we willing to go for what we believe? [Our Daily Bread](#). [Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

Convictions forged in pain and loss  
Provide the strength that's needed  
For those sold out to serving Christ,  
Those who His call have heeded.  
—Sper

It is better by far to die for something than to live for nothing.

**Acts 6:9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.**

KJV 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.

- **But some men** Acts 13:45; 17:17,18
- **the Synagogue of the Freedmen** Acts 22:19; 26:11; Mt 10:17; 23:34; Mark 13:9; Luke 21:12
- **Cyrenians** Acts 2:10; 11:20; 13:1; Mt 27:32
- **Alexandrians** Acts 18:24; 27:6
- **Cilicia** Acts 15:23,41; 21:39; 22:3; 23:34; 27:5; Gal 1:21
- **Asia** Acts 2:9; 16:6; 19:10,26; 21:27
- **Rose up and argued with Stephen** 1 Cor 1:20
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**OPPOSITION TO  
STEPHEN ARISES**

**But** - This is a strategic **term of contrast**. This term often marks a "change of direction," which is certainly the case in this context. In fact this change of direction marks the beginning of the end for Stephen who is martyred in Acts 7. But as subsequent chapters demonstrate it marks the beginning on the explosion of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Tertullian said "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," but beginning in this passage we see that the blood of Stephen was the seed sparking the spread of the Gospel.

**Some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia** - **Some men** are identified as Hellenistic Jews, but we do not know how many ganged up on Stephen. An interesting thought is that Saul (later Paul) who was from Cilicia may have debated unsuccessfully (unable to cope - Acts 6:10) against Stephen (we'll find out in Heaven)! Luke does not say, but there is no reason to suggest these Hellenistic Jews were disciples of Jesus Christ. They are more examples of dark emissaries of the evil one sent on a seek and destroy mission against God's messenger of Gospel light. Beloved, if you are preaching or teaching the Word in the power of the Spirit and fortified by prayer to the Father, you can be sure "forces from the dark side" will sent to attack Christ's ministry through you! That is why in some of Paul's last orders to Timothy he issued four "staccato-like" commands...

But you, **be sober** ("be self-controlled" NET)([nepho](#) in present imperative = continually - only possible by being continually filled the Spirit!) in all things, **endure hardship** (kakopatheo in aorist imperative = Just Do It! It is urgent!), **do** ([poieo](#) in aorist imperative) the work of an evangelist, **fulfill** ([plerophoreo](#) in aorist imperative) your ministry ([diakonia](#)). (2 Ti 4:5+).

The word **synagogue** is singular so some commentators think this phrase refers to only one synagogue while others think it describes several distinct synagogues. There could have been more than one because one rabbinic tradition states that there were up to 480 synagogues in Jerusalem. That number seems to be very high, but does at least suggest there were multiple synagogues scattered throughout Jerusalem. In any event, it looks like this attach is "by committee" of Hellenized Jews from a number of Roman provinces.

**Synagogue** ([4864](#))([sunagoge](#) from [sunágo](#) = lead together, assemble or bring together) refers to a group of people "going with one another" ([sunago](#)) literally describes a bringing together or congregating in one place. Eventually, **sunagoge** came to mean the place where they congregated together. The word was used to designate the buildings other than the central Jewish temple where the Jews congregated for worship. Historically, the Synagogues originated in the Babylonian captivity after the 586 BC destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar and served as places of worship and instruction.

**NET Note** on **synagogue** - A synagogue was a place for Jewish prayer and worship, with recognized leadership (cf. Luke 8:41). Though the origin of the synagogue is not entirely clear, it seems to have arisen in the postexilic community during the intertestamental period. A town could establish a synagogue if there were at least ten men. In normative Judaism of the NT period, the OT scripture was read and discussed in the synagogue by the men who were present (see the Mishnah, m. Megillah 3–4; m. Berakhot 2).

**Robertson** on **Synagogue of the Freedmen** - The Libertines (Latin libertinus, a freedman or the son of a freedman) were Jews, once slaves of Rome (perhaps descendants of the Jews taken to Rome as captives by Pompey), now set free and settled in Jerusalem and numerous enough to have a synagogue of their own.

**Freedmen** ([3032](#))([libertinos](#)) only here in NT and describes Jews who had been taken prisoner by Pompey (circa 63 BC), were carried to Rome and made slaves but afterward freed and like many Jews in the diaspora they returned to Jerusalem where they established a synagogue. In Jerusalem,

**Cyrenians** - Jews from Cyrene ([ISBE](#)) ([Map](#)) (NT - Mt 27:32, Mk 15:21, Lk 23:26, Acts 2:10, 11:20, 13:1).

**Alexandrians** - Jews from [Alexandria](#) ([ISBE](#)) ([Map](#) - see bottom of map)([Roman Amphitheater](#))

**Cilicia** - Jews from [Cilicia](#) ([ISBE](#)) ([Map](#)) This location is intriguing as it was the birthplace of Saul of Tarsus as we learn in his testimony before a rabid Jewish mob...

"I am a Jew, **born in Tarsus of Cilicia**, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. 4 "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished. (Acts 22:3-5)

Some have speculated that Saul knew Stephen from this synagogue but that cannot be substantiated. Of course we do know Saul (later name Paul) was watching as Stephen was being stoned and thus presumably heard his Spirit filled sermon (the longest

recorded in Acts) in Acts 7 (Acts 7:58, 8:1)

**Asia** - Jews from Asia ([Holman Bible Dictionary](#), [ISBE](#)) ([Map](#))

**NET Note on Asia** - "**Asia**"; in the NT this always refers to the Roman province of Asia, made up of about one-third of the west and southwest end of modern Asia Minor. Asia lay to the west of the region of Phrygia and Galatia. The words "the province of" are supplied (in NET Translation) to indicate to the modern reader that this does not refer to the continent of Asia.

**Chuck Swindoll** said, "Dynamic people rarely evoke neutral responses. They are either loved or hated" (Acts, Vol. 1, p. 58).

**Rose up and argued with Stephen** - The picture of **rose up and argued** is they "stood up" which congers up the scene of a debate, presumably in the setting of the synagogue. While Luke gives us enough information that we can identify these [antagonists](#) as Hellenistic Jews (all cities mentioned are where Jews had been dispersed), the question arises were they also believers? And given the context they were almost certainly not believers in Jesus. So Satan could not divide the church with murmuring so he stirs up some of his emissaries to carry out an assassination! Little did he know that the subsequent persecution that ensued would fan the flames of the Gospel throughout the entire Roman Empire!

**Argued**(4802)([suzeteeo](#) from **sun** = together + **zeteo** = to seek, inquire) means to carry on a discussion, to inquire together and evolved to a negative meaning - to dispute, debate or argue (Mk 1:27, etc). Of **Pharisees** arguing with Jesus (Mk 8:11), of **Scribes** arguing with Jesus' disciples (Mk 9:14), of **Jews** arguing with Stephen (Acts 6:9), of **Paul** (Saul at the time) arguing with the Hellenistic Jews (Acts 9:29).

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### **Stephen the First Martyr J. R. Miller, 1909**

Acts 6:1-8, 7:54 to 8:2

Stephen is one of the most interesting characters in the New Testament. His story is short--but intense. His work belongs to a few days, and he makes but one speech--but his influence belongs to all after time! He was the first deacon and the first Christian martyr.

Stephen's fiery eloquence touched many hearts--but it also aroused the members of the Jewish synagogues, who set themselves against him. We must not be surprised if our efforts to do good, awaken opposition. The more we try to honor Christ and build up His kingdom, the more opposition we shall encounter. So long as we keep quiet about people's sins and connive at their wrongdoings, they may not seriously oppose us. But when we assault the evil we see in them and openly condemn it--we shall certainly stir up enmity and antagonism and bring upon ourselves opposition and possibly persecution.

Stephen's opponents were no match for him in argument. "They were unable to stand up against the wisdom and the Spirit by whom he spoke." It was not Stephen with whom they had to contend; there was an unseen One beside him all the while who helped him. The Spirit in Stephen whom his proponents could not resist--was the Holy Spirit. Stephen was an inspired man when he stood before his opponents and declared to them the words of God. He was filled with God, as were the apostles on the day of Pentecost. If we go out in Christ's name to speak for Him, there will always be One with us whom no man can withstand. If only we remembered this, it would make us brave, resistless, in speaking the truth.

False witnesses were brought to testify against Stephen, to try to convict him, as the rulers had tried to convict Jesus. False witnesses are continually testifying against Christianity, in the effort to prove that it is not a divine religion. The world is full of books which seek to cast doubts upon divine revelation. In all life, too, there is a disposition to bear false witness. Reputations are made and unmade, in certain drawing rooms.

In the council before which Stephen was standing, there was intense bitterness. The faces of the men grew dark with rage, as they looked upon him and heard his words, which they could not answer. They were little like honorable judges sitting in a court of justice. Their hearts were full of rage and fury. In contrast with all this, Stephen himself was calm quiet. The peace of God was in his heart. He was sustained and strengthened by the trust, which nothing could disturb.

The record says, "All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel." What is the face of an angel like? We cannot tell--but we know that those who live in God's presence, in the light of God's love, must have shining faces. No doubt Stephen's face shone. The secret of the shining was in his heart. The peace of God was there, and even amid the excitements about him, with enraged enemies glowering upon him, he had no fear--but was kept in perfect quiet. An angel's face must be gentle and loving, for angels never know the feeling of anger or bitterness of hate--and we know that Stephen's heart was full of love. There was no unforgiveness in Stephen--he had learned from his Master the lesson of patience under injustice or wrong--to make dark lines upon his countenance. An angel's face must have marks of strength in it. Stephen was strong. Even with all the people against him, he had no fear. He was strong in God.

The contrast between the members of the Sanhedrin and Stephen is most striking. His quietness and sweetness enraged them the more. "When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him." They became like infuriated wild beasts as they listened to Stephen's words. But while the rulers were so furious, Stephen was calm and full of peace. He had found refuge from the strife of tongues in the presence of God. The secret is given in the words, "full of the Holy Spirit." When God is in a man, filling him--there is no room in him for fear or anger, or for any earthly passion.

Stephen "looked up steadfastly into heaven." That was well. If he had not looked up--he would not have seen the vision of glory, which he now beheld. If he had looked down, he would have seen danger and would have been afraid. He looked up and saw not the human rage and fury--but the sweet peace of heaven above him. Like Moses, "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible." We should train our eyes to look up-ward, heaven-ward, God-ward--for there are our blessings, our goal, our home, God Himself, and all fair and beautiful things.

The members of the Sanhedrin lost all self-control, all dignity, and in their rage became an ungoverned mob. They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and, rushing upon Stephen, dragged him out of the courtroom, through the gate, out of the city, and stoned him! Thus the eloquent voice was hushed, so that no more could it be heard on the earth. His life, cut off so suddenly, so violently, when only beginning its usefulness, seems a failure. But it was not a failure. Someone says that Stephen's mission in this world was to deliver only one speech of half an hour. But if his words had reached or impressed no other life, they fell upon the ears of Saul, the persecutor, and he never forgot them. Stephen died, and Saul was converted. Stephen's preaching was stopped--but Saul was called to take up his unfinished work. We owe Paul to Stephen's martyrdom.

Stephen's dying prayers were like his Master's. He prayed first, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." To Stephen, dying was only breathing out his soul into the hands of Jesus Christ! He knew it was not death--but life, that was before him. His body was being mangled and broken--but his spirit, his real self, could not be harmed. Beyond the strange mystery of death--Jesus waits to receive the departing spirit. Death is only a gateway through which the soul passes, and then life and glory burst upon the vision of the emancipated spirit.

Stephen's other prayer was also like his Master's. Jesus prayed for His murderers, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do." Stephen, with the same spirit of forgiveness, pleaded for his murderers, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." It is the old lesson of love for enemies taught over again.

Very beautiful is the picture of death which is given here: "He fell asleep." Sleep is death's new, sweet name! What a picture of peace the word suggests, right here in the heart and fury of the mob! In the midst of all the wild scene--Stephen fell asleep!

We think of a tired child creeping into the mother's bosom and falling asleep. Sleep is not a terrible experience; it is nothing to be dreaded. We sleep when we are weary--and we awake refreshed. Sleep is not the cessation of life. We expect to awake, after we have slept. As we part for the night, we do not say, "Farewell," but "Goodnight," for we expect to meet again in the morning.

This beautiful Scriptural designation of death tells us, therefore, of life beyond, of resurrection, of immortality. We shall awake from this sleep of death--and our life shall go on again. We shall awake refreshed, lying down weary--and rising strong; lying down sick, or old, or deformed, or worn-out--and rising well, young and radiant in heavenly beauty!

The last scene in our passage shows us the burial of Stephen. It was quiet--but impressive. He was greatly beloved, and the sorrow over his death was sincere. His body was laid away in the grave--but they could not bury his influence. Martyrdom did not destroy his life. No doubt he did more by dying than he could have done if he had lived on for years, preaching Christ.

**Acts 6:10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.**

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

- **But they were unable to cope** Acts 5:39; 7:51; Exodus 4:12; Isa 54:17; Jer 1:18,19; 15:20; Ezek 3:27; Mt 10:19,20; Luke 12:11,12; 21:15; John 7:46
- **with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking** Job 32:8,18; Micah 3:8; Luke 1:17; 1 Cor 2:4
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **CONNIVERS CAN'T COPE WITH OTHER WORLDLY WISDOM**

**But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking** - They did not have the



(intellectual) strength to stand against Stephen! These natural men could not stand against a supernaturally empowered man (then or now!) **Cope** means they could not contend against or deal successfully with Stephen's wisdom from on high! Men filled with self were no match for a man filled with the Spirit!

Jesus had prophetically promised His disciples

"When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."(Luke 12:11-12+)

"So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. (Luke 21:14, 15+)

**Unable** (**ou** = absolute negation + **ischuo** - to be strong enough to accomplish something) - Literally they did not have the power or resources to overpower Stephen's wisdom. The verb **ischuo** is in the imperfect tense which pictures the adversaries coming with arguments again and again, but each time Stephen being able to counter and repulse their attack, for Stephen was strong in the Lord and the strength of His might (**ischus**) (Eph 6:10+) and had "put on the full armor of God, so that (he was) able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil (Eph 6:11+). Yes, Stephen's **antagonists** were flesh and blood, but ultimately he was in a struggle (hand to hand combat so to speak) "against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.(Eph 6:12+)

As **Horton** says "Stephen was not depending on his own wisdom but on the anointing and gifts of the Holy Spirit. No wonder all their arguments fell flat!" (Ibid)

**Cope with** (436)(**anthistemi** from **anti** = against + **histemi** = to cause to stand) is literally to stand or set against. The picture of **anthistemi** is to arrange in battle against and opponent thus pictures a **face to face** confrontation. Here we see the dark forces of Satan in the form of these Hellenistic Jews are face to face with Stephen and are unable to stand their ground because of the fact that he is filled with the Holy Spirit and with divine wisdom. Luke uses this same word to describe "Elymas the magician (for thus his name is translated) was **opposing** (antihistemi) them (Barnabas and Saul before his name change), seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith." (Acts 13:8) So immediately on their first missionary journey Satan opposes their Gospel witness, just as he does to Stephen here in Acts 6.

**Wisdom** (4678) see **sophia** - Note that there are only 4 uses of **sophia** in Acts and all are associated with Stephen - Acts 6:3; Acts 6:10; Acts 7:10; Acts 7:22.

**The Spirit with which he was speaking** - What Spirit? Some think his own spirit (small s), but I prefer to the Holy Spirit. And why mention Him again as Stephen has repeatedly been described as empowered by the Spirit. He needed the boldness that the Spirit enabled. We have repeatedly seen that filling with the Spirit enables bold speech (Acts 4:31+, cf Acts 4:8). **Speaking** is imperfect tense picturing the Hellenist opponents again and again trying to pierce Stephen's spiritual armor, but again and again Stephen would deftly deflect their thrusts.

**ILLUSTRATION** - D. L. Moody was to have an evangelistic campaign in England. An elderly pastor protested, "Why do we need this 'Mr. Moody'? He's uneducated, inexperienced, etc. Who does he think he is anyway? Does he think he has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit?" A younger, wiser pastor rose and responded, "No, but the Holy Spirit has a **monopoly** on Mr. Moody." Stephen was also a man on whom the Holy Ghost had a monopoly.

**Acts 6:11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."**

KJV Acts 6:11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

- **Then they secretly induced men to say** Acts 23:12-15; 24:1-13; 25:3,7; 1 Ki 21:10,13; Mt 26:59,60; 28:12-15; John 16:3; Ro 3:8
- **We have heard him speak blasphemous words** Acts 6:13; 18:6; 26:11; Lev 24:16; 1 Ki 21:10-13; John 10:33-36; 1 Ti 1:13
- **against Moses and against God** Acts 7:37-39; 15:21; 21:20-22,28; John 1:17; 5:45-47; 9:29; Heb 3:2-5
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## DEFEATED ADVERSARIES BRIBE FALSE WITNESSES

**Then (tote)** - This conjunction marks succession instead of what should have been a retreat by the antagonist so that they might mull over what Stephen said and even come to faith. But they were intractable, stiff-necked and determined to stop Stephen. In this context, since these Hellenistic Jews could not **cope** with a Spirit filled Hellenistic Jew, they choose to **cheat**, by **coercing** men to **calumniate** against Stephen.

If you can't beat 'em then lie! The unbelievers treated Stephen the way the Sanhedrin treated Jesus. They arrested him on trumped-up charges & hired false witnesses. (Brian Bell)

Inciting false witness was a tactic the devious Jews tried with Jesus

Now the chief priests and the whole Council **kept trying to obtain false testimony** against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. They did not find any, even though **many false witnesses came forward**. But later on two came forward, and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" (Matt. 26:59-61)

**They secretly induced men to say** - "Secretly instigated." (NET) "Persuaded" (NLT) "Procured" (NJB), "Bribed" (GWN) They put lying words into the mouths of these mealy mouthed scum!

**Secretly induced** (5260)(**hupoballo** from **hupo** = under + **ballo** = throw) means to throw under and "to put under like a carpet, to bring men under one's control by suggestion or by money. One recalls the plight of Caiaphas in the trial of Jesus when he sought false witnesses." (Robertson) The idea is to introduce underhandedly. It is used only here and means pictures the opponents making a secret agreement, to suborn. **Louw-Nida** says "to hire a person to act in a particular way, often involving dishonest activities—to hire, to bribe, to induce."

To **suborn** means to incite to commit a crime or an evil deed, to procure (false testimony or perjury), or to induce to commit perjury or give false testimony, taking a false oath and committing **perjury**. Are we surprised? Satan is the father of lies! (Jn 8:44).

**Vincent on hupoballo** - The verb originally means to *put under*, as carpets under one's feet; hence, to *put one person in place of another*; to *substitute*, as another's child for one's own; to *employ a secret agent in one's place*, and to *instigate or secretly instruct* him.

**Cleon Rogers on hupoballo** - It applies to the secret instigation of persons supplied w. suggestions of what they are to say, much as in the modern frame-up

**We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God** - Notice that the deluded Jews placed the accusation regarding Moses before that regarding God! They did not realize that the Law had been nailed to the Cross as Paul wrote - "having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." (Col 2:14+) "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." (Ro 10:4+)

As Jesus said

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. (Mt 5:17)

**Comment** - They accused Jesus (and by association Stephen) of the following "He came to destroy the Law and the Prophets." On the contrary, Jesus' coming signaled the Law's fulfillment not its abolishment or annulment. They had neither eyes to see this nor ears to hear it.

As **Bob Utley** observes "These Jews put God after Moses! Their very sentence structure reveals the perception problem. Moses' Law had become ultimate."

Regarding against God would recall Moses' words

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. (Ex 20:7)

Leviticus 24:16 decrees

'Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.

Recall the threatening words from the Jews to Jesus

The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God." (John 10:33)

So if the antagonists were successful in their accusations, they could "legally" call for stoning of Stephen which is the conclusion the Sanhedrin arrived at in Mk 14:64

"You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.

**Blasphemous** (989) (**blasphemos** from **bláx** = sluggish, slow, stupid + **phémē** = rumor, fame; see **blasphemeo**) is an adjective which describes speech that is slanderous, defaming, demeaning. It means to show contempt or disrespect for something, in this case **Moses** and **God**.

**Words against Moses** - Literally words *toward* Moses in context in a hostile sense, implying Stephen had spoken words opposing Moses. Can you see the irony once again? Stephen had a "shining face" just like Moses ([see below](#))! There was no *opposition*. There was *agreement*! Stephen preached grace, and grace in our hearts enables us to obey the Law. These unbelieving Jews were so fixated on works as the the road to righteousness that the mention of righteousness received by grace through faith was antithetical to their who system of belief and way of life and they were angry enough to kill Stephen in hopes that it would put an end to this new idea (not really new because it was always in the OT - cf Ge 15:6+) of grace based righteousness on the basis of belief in Christ's finished, substitutionary, fully atoning work on the old rugged Cross!

**Acts 6:12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council.**

KJV Acts 6:12 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,

- **they stirred** Acts 13:50; 14:2; 17:5,13; 21:27; Pr 15:18
- **dragged him away** Acts 4:1-3; 5:18,27; 16:19-21; 17:5,6; 18:12; Mt 26:57
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## ANOTHER KANGAROO COURT

**Kangaroo Court** - A kangaroo court is a court that ignores recognized standards of law or justice, and often carries little or no official standing in the territory within which it resides. The term may also apply to a court held by a legitimate judicial authority who intentionally disregards the court's legal or ethical obligations. The defendants in such courts are often denied access to legal representation and in some cases, proper defense. Prejudicial bias of the decision-maker or from political decree are among the most publicized causes of kangaroo courts.[citation needed] Such proceedings are often held to give the appearance of a fair and just trial, even though the verdict has in reality already been decided before the trial has begun.

**And they** - The false witnesses in Acts 6:11. They were on a mission to destroy Stephen so they stirred up the people in a mob like mentality which included **elders and scribes** to give it a semblance of legitimacy.

**Stirred up** (4787) (**sugkineo** from **sun** = with, serves to intensify meaning of + **kineo** = stir up, move, used in Acts 24:5, 21:30) to incite, arouse, put into a commotion (BDAG adds "in reference to many changes taking place"), to inflame the feelings or passions with another or others. Used only here in NT. BDAG has one secular use in the sentence "**moved** by the utterances of disaster victims." **Stir up** means to try to stir up public opinion, to agitate, foment, instigate, provoke, arouse or excite feelings and passions.

**Robertson** on the picture produced by **sugkineo** - They shook the people together like an earthquake

## HOW TO RUFFLE A RABBLE

A **mob** is defined as a disorderly crowd of people, especially one that is intent on causing trouble or violence. What a shift from a people who esteemed the apostles to a people who wanted to destroy a disciple! They surrounded Stephen in an angry and excited

way. Stephen does not realize it, but unbeknownst to him, this is the last day of his life and also unbeknownst to him is the fact that the spilling of this godly man's blood will mark a major turning point, a defining moment, a crucial crossroads in the life of the Church.

**The people, the elders (presbuteros) and the scribes (grammateus)** - No mention of Sadducees yet. Let's see the response of the group referred to as **the people** in the first 6 chapters - In Acts 4 Peter and John "were speaking to **the people**, the **priests** and the **captain** of the temple guard and the **Sadducees** came up to them...and laid hands on (**epiballo**) them and put them in jail." (Acts 4:1, 3) In Acts 4:21 the **people** "were all glorifying God for what had happened (healing of lame man)." In Acts 5:12 "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the **people**." In Acts 5:13 "**the people** held them in high esteem." In Acts 5:26 the captain and officers "were afraid of **the people** lest they be stoned." Stephen "was performing great wonders and signs among **the people**." (Acts 6:8) But then we come to Acts 6:12 and something changes with the group known as "the people." The false witness stirred up the people, so that now they take action against one of the disciples, Stephen. The involvement of **the laity** in persecution for the first time suggests that the resistance to the church and the Gospel messages is beginning to increase.

**Guzik** comments on **the people** - The opponents of Stephen could do nothing against the followers of Jesus until they got popular opinion on their side. Previously, persecution against the apostles had been limited because popular opinion was with them (Acts 2:47, 5:26). Popular opinion can be easily shaped. The same crowds that **praised Jesus** (Luke 19:35-40) soon **called for His crucifixion** (Luke 23:18-23). The crowds that loved the apostles (Acts 2:47, 5:26) cry out against Stephen. This is why we should never let popular opinion shape the vision or focus of the church, but let it rest on God's eternal Word.

**Jesus** had predicted this would occur

"But before all these things, they will lay their hands on (**epiballo**) you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. (Lk 21:12)

Why mention the **scribes**? These are the recognized "experts" in the Law of Moses, the very thing they accused Stephen of "tampering with!" (Acts 6:11). **Wikipedia** has this note on **scribes** - "As early as the 11th century BCE, scribes in Ancient Israel, were distinguished professionals who would exercise functions which today could be associated with lawyers...." **Zodhiates** adds a scribe was "one skilled in the Mosaic Law (Ezra 7:6, 11, 12, 21; Jer. 36:26) and commonly used in the same sense in the NT (Matt. 13:52; 23:34; 1 Cor. 1:20); especially for those who sat in Moses' seat, explaining the law in the schools and synagogues."

**MacArthur** notes that "Not all **Pharisees** were **scribes**, but the **scribes** were primarily **Pharisees**, who were interpreters and teachers of the law of Moses and the traditional rabbinic writings."

**Robertson** adds that "It is the **Pharisees** who are conducting this attack on Stephen while the Sadducees had led them against Peter and John. The position of Stephen is critical in the extreme for the Sadducees will not help him as Gamaliel did the apostles."

**And they came up to him** - They "Rushed at him." (Robertson) Imagine the reaction you would have if an angry rabble were rushing toward you! But Stephen stands stable and sturdy because he is full of the Spirit. It is good to be full of the Spirit **BEFORE** that angry crowd or individual gets in your face!

**And dragged him away and brought him before the Council** - The verb used here for taking Stephen into custody to appear before the "Supreme Court" of the Jews (the Sanhedrin) is different from that used when "they laid hands on the apostles and put them in a public jail." (Acts 5:18+). The verb there is **epiballo** which is used of waves crashing against a ship. The verb **harpazo** was used of a wolf suddenly snatching a lamb from a flock, which gives us a interesting picture of what this group did to Stephen. One does not get the picture of them gently leading him away.

**Dragged** (seized) (4884) (**sunarpazo** from **sun** = with ~ intensifies meaning + **harpazo** = to seize, rapture) means to seize suddenly and violently, to grasp with great violence. Stronger than **harpazo** by itself! Of a mob seizing Stephen to drag him away (Acts 6.12); of demon activity seize (Lk 8.29); passive, of a ship in a storm and forced off course by the wind and swept on (Acts 27.15).

**Before the Council** - this phrase occurs only in Acts where it is found 3x - Acts 5:27; Acts 6:12; Acts 24:20 (Also in Acts 4:5-7). So this is the third time the Council sits in judgment on the disciples, first Peter and John, then all twelve and now Stephen by himself. Each time the intensity of their "persecution" increased, going from warnings, to flogging and finally stoning. The "golden era" of the new Church in Jerusalem was about to end, but this persecution would lead to spread of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

**Council** (supreme court) (Picture of the Sanhedrin) (4892) (**sunedrion** from **sun/syn** = together + **hedra** = a seat or **hedraios** = sedentary, as one seated in a chair) means ones seated together. This noun generally describes an assembly or council. In classical Greek **sunhedrion** initially referred to the place of meeting; and later described the assembly itself or the "council." In secular language **sunedrion** was used of a variety of official groups and councils including legislative bodies. In the intertestamental period prior to the birth of Christ **sunedrion** became a technical term for the "supreme court" or "high court" of the Jews who adopted the Greek into their own language (Hebrew/ Aramaic), calling the council the Sanhedrin. In the NT

uses the **council** or **Sanhedrin** consisted of 71 members (70 members plus the highest official, the high priest) from the chief priests, former high priests, and the chief priests or heads of the twenty-four courses or divisions, elders, and scribes or lawyers. Apparently the council itself determined who could belong. There were also local councils throughout the [Jewish Diaspora](#) with 23 members, which were also called sunedion.

#### Related Resource:

- [Bob Utley's topic The Sanhedrin](#)

**NET Note** - "the Sanhedrin" (the highest legal, legislative, and judicial body among the Jews). Stephen suffers just as Peter and John did.

#### Acts 6:13 They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law;

KJV Acts 6:13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

- **They put forward false witnesses** Acts 6:11; Ps 27:12; 35:11; 56:5
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### FALSIFYING THE FACTS TRUMPED UP CHARGES

**They put forward false witnesses** - More literally "they set up false witnesses." (ESV) Or as we see in modern court room settings where the witness takes his stand to give the testimony. The took the stand, opened their mouth and out flew lies against Stephen.

**False** ([5571](#))(**pseudes**) means deliberately deceptive, those who utter falsehoods and lies (like their father - Jn 8:44!)

As **Jack Arnold** said "These false witnesses gave half-truths, for a bald-faced lie would never have been accepted by the common people. Someone has said "A half of the truth is a whole lie."

**Witnesses** ([3144](#))(**martus/martys**) describes one who testifies in legal matters.

**Who said this man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law** - "**This man**" is their way of expressing their extreme contempt of Stephen. The are elaborating on the charge in Acts 6:11. Notice that **So against the holy place and the Law** is synonymous with against the Temple and against the Law of Moses. Remember that the first church was almost all Jewish and they were still co-mingling in the Temple precincts, but resistance in now beginning to rise against those Jews who no longer believed works saved a man but only by grace through faith in Christ alone.

To speak against **the Law**, God's law in Torah was to blaspheme God.

**John Stott** explains "this was an extremely serious double accusation. For nothing was more sacred to the Jews, and nothing more precious, than their temple and their law. The temple was the 'holy place', the sanctuary of God's presence, and the law was 'holy scripture', the revelation of God's mind and will. Therefore, since the temple was God's house and the law was God's word, to speak against either was to speak against God or, in other words, to blaspheme."

Similar charges were apparently leveled against Paul in Acts 25:7,8.

After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove, while Paul said in his own defense, "I have committed no offense either **against the Law** of the Jews or **against the temple** or against Caesar."

**Ceased** ([3973](#)) (**pauo**) here is modified by "not" (ou = absolute negation). They are falsely accusing Stephen of absolutely not ceasing to speak against the holy temple and the holy law.

Acts 6:14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us."

KJV Acts 6:14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

- **we have** Acts 25:8
- **that this Nazarene, Jesus** Isa 66:1-6; Jer 7:4-14; 26:6-9,12,18; Da 9:26; Mic 3:12; Zech 11:1; 14:2; Mt 24:1,2; Mk 14:58; Lk 13:34,35; 21:6,24; Jn 4:21
- **alter the customs which Moses handed down to us** Isa 65:15; 66:19-21; Hosea 3:4; Gal 3:19,23; 4:3-5; Heb 7:11-19; 8:6-13; Heb 9:9-11; 10:1-18; 12:26-28
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## STEPHEN'S "BLASPHEMOUS WORDS"

**For** - Term of explanation. In what sense did he speak against the Temple and the Law? What blasphemous words did Stephen speak? They explain their false charges in Acts 6:13. One lie usually begets another.

**We have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus will destroy this place**- What place? They are meeting before the Council in the [Hall of Hewn Stone](#) was within the Temple precincts, so **this place** would be a reference to the Temple complex.

**This** is used in a contemptuous sense here just as it had been in Acts 5:28.

What are they accusing Stephen of in this statement? Think about what they say Stephen says. Apparently Stephen had quoted Jesus. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones says "**In other words, Stephen was charged, finally, with being a Christian, with being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ and all that was involved and implied in that.**" (Authentic Christianity). Have you ever been "charged" of being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ?

This false accusation apparently alludes to Jesus' words spoken almost 3 years before His crucifixion

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. (Jn 2:19-21)

**Piper:** What Jesus meant when he said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up," was that he himself was taking the place of the temple—by dying for sin once for all, and by rising from the dead to reign as the everlasting priest and Lord of glory. When I die, the temple system dies. And when I rise, I am the temple. I am the sacrifice for sins. I am the priest and go-between with God. I am the presence and radiance of his glory. The temple is finished.

**Mark** records how the false witnesses misrepresented Jesus' words in John 2, presumably exactly what was happening to Stephen...

"We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'" 59Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent. (Mk 14:58-59)

**Bob Utley** - Jesus saw Himself as the "new Temple," the new center of worship, the new meeting place of God and humanity (cf. Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34). Stephen's preaching about a full and free forgiveness in Jesus was probably the source of "speaks against the Law." The gospel message reduces "the Mosaic Covenant" to a historical witness instead of a means of salvation. In a sense their charges were true! These two charges were designed to stir up the Sadducees (i.e. "destroy this place") and the Pharisees (i.e. "alter the customs which Moses handed down").

**F F Bruce** on **will destroy this place** (the Temple) - Whatever form of words Stephen used which gave rise to the charge that he said Jesus the Nazarene would destroy the Temple (Mt 26:61), it seems plain that he had not only repeated the words which Jesus Himself had spoken, but also grasped and expounded their inner meaning. The apostles and many of the rank and file of the Jerusalem church might continue to attend the Temple services and be looked upon as devout and observant Jews; Stephen saw that the work of Christ logically involved the [abrogation](#) of the whole Temple order and its [supersession](#) by a new edifice not made with hands, and yet within the main stream of OT revelation (ED: cf Heb 8:13). Jesus Himself had said, "one greater than the temple is here" (Mt. 12:6); these and other sayings of His about the Temple were apparently preserved by the early church in Jerusalem, but it was Stephen who appreciated their full force. The Gospel meant the end of the sacrificial cultus and all the ceremonial law. These were the outward and visible signs of Jewish [particularism](#), and could not be reconciled with the universal scope of the Christian message of salvation accomplished (ED: cf Jn 19:30, Heb 10:12). This was the argument, pressed by Stephen in synagogue debate, which formed the real basis of the case for the prosecution. (NICNT-Acts)

**Nazarene** (3480)(**Nazoraiois** from **Nazara** = **Nazareth**) describes an inhabitant of **Nazareth** and here describes Jesus. In the plural **nazoraiois** is used once to describe Christians (in a derogatory sense) (Acts 2:45+) This was in the inscription on the Cross (Jn 19:19).

**Nazoraiois** - 13x in 13v - Nazarene(9), Nazarenes(1), Nazareth(3).

Matt. 2:23; Matt. 26:71; Lk. 18:37; Jn. 18:5; Jn. 18:7; Jn. 19:19; Acts 2:22; Acts 3:6; Acts 4:10; Acts 6:14; Acts 22:8; Acts 24:5; Acts 26:9

**Related Resource:**

- [Bob Utley's Topic Jesus the Nazarene](#)

**Jesus** (2424)(**lesous**) - It is interesting that they use His Name here, because the chief priests had **assiduously** avoided pronouncing His Name.

**Destroy** (abolish, tear down)(2647)(**kataluo** from **kata** = down, prefix intensifying verb **luo** = loosen, dissolve, demolish, untie, undo) means literally to loosen down (unloose) and then to utterly destroy or to overthrow completely. Gamaliel used this verb to justify letting the apostles go free (Acts 5:38, 39). **Kataluo** is used literally of destroying, demolishing or dismantling an edifice (even brick by brick). In the Olivet Discourse Jesus had predicted the future destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem

And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? (POINTING TO THE TEMPLE COMPLEX) Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." (Mt 24:2, cf Mk 13:2) which is what they accused Stephen of saying about the Temple (Acts 6:14)

**And alter the customs which Moses handed down to us** - **NET Note** says "Stephen appears to view the temple as a less central place in light of Christ's work, an important challenge to Jewish religion, since it was at this time a temple-centered state and religion. Unlike Acts 3–4, the issue here is more than Jesus and his resurrection. Now the impact of his resurrection and the temple's centrality has also become an issue. The "falseness" of the charge may not be that the witnesses were lying, but that they falsely read the truth of Stephen's remarks."

**Alter** (change) (236)(**allasso** from **állos** = other, another) has the literally meaning of to make otherwise. The basic sense is "to make other than it is." It means to to change, to cause one thing to cease and another to take its place, to exchange one thing for another. To make something different. To alter.

**Guzik** - Why would they make such accusations? Because Stephen was clearly teaching that Jesus was greater than Moses; that Jesus was God; that Jesus was greater than the temple; that Jesus was the fulfillment of the law; and that Jesus was greater than their religious customs and traditions.

**Custom** (habit)(1485) **ethos** from **etho** = to be used, to be accustomed) refers to a usual or customary manner of behavior, habit, pattern of behavior which is more or less fixed by tradition or the usual practice. It may be established by law or otherwise generally sanctioned by the society. **Gilbrant** on the uses of **ethos** - **Ethos** carries two basic meanings: (1) an informal sense of "custom," i.e., "habit"; and (2) a formal "custom" or "law." For example, Jesus' "habit" (ethos) was to go to the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39; cf. NIV "as usual")

**Luke's** uses of **ethos** in Acts - Acts 6:14; Acts 15:1; Acts 16:21; Acts 21:21; Acts 25:16; Acts 26:3; Acts 28:17

**Handed down** (3860)(**paradidomi** from **para** = alongside, beside, to the side of, over to + **didomi** = to give) conveys the basic meaning of to give over from one's hand to someone or something, especially to give over to the power of another. The basic meaning give over from one's hand to someone. In this context it means to pass on, transmit, relate or teach oral or written tradition (Mk 7:13; Lk 1:2; Ac 6:14; 16:4; 2 Pet 2:21; Jude 1:3).

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**ILLUSTRATION** - In 1903, someone noticed a Russian sentry standing guard at a post with no apparent reason for his being there. When asked why he was standing guard there, he answered, "I'm just following orders." The question was asked of the captain of the guard, but he didn't know why that sentry was posted there. The inquiry eventually went up the chain of command to the czar, but he didn't know either! He asked that someone track down the answer. Finally, it was discovered that in 1776, Catherine the Great had planted a rose bush there, and posted a sentry to guard it. The bush had been dead for over 80 years, but the sentry was still standing guard! Traditions are hard to change!

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**Guzik** summarizes the accusations - These were the accusations against Stephen. Significantly, many of the same false

accusations were leveled against Jesus (Matthew 26:59–61). It is a good thing to be accused of the same things Jesus was accused of. They accused him of these things because Stephen clearly taught that:

- Jesus was greater than Moses (blasphemous words against Moses)
- Jesus was God (blasphemous words against ... God)
- Jesus was greater than the temple (blasphemous words against this holy place)
- Jesus was the fulfillment of the law (blasphemous words against ... the law)
- Jesus was greater than their religious customs and traditions (Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change customs)

Of course, Stephen never taught against Moses and God, but his glorification of Jesus was twisted. Stephen never spoke blasphemous words against this holy place (the temple), but he would not make it an idol as many Jewish people in that day did. Stephen had his words twisted, and false accusations were brought against him.

**Acts 6:15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.**

KJV 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.

- **saw his face like the face of an angel.** Exodus 34:29-35; Eccl 8:1; Mt 13:43; 17:2; 2 Cor 3:7,8,18
- Acts 6 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### STEPHEN'S SERAPHIC SEMBLANCE

I love what **H A Ironside** said about this passage - I wish I could have a photograph or picture of Stephen standing before the council, listening to all those false accusations, and noticing the expressions of rage, ridicule, and indignation on the faces of his accusers. Yet he stood there, looking at them with a radiant countenance, full of love, trust, peace, and confidence, undisturbed by all the bitter things that were being said. His heart was not filled with malice because of their hatred toward him, but joy in the realization that he was there as Christ's faithful servant. ([Commentary](#))

Beloved, a Stephen-like radiant, shining countenance should be the goal of all of us for Paul wrote

so that (see Php 2:14+) you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom **you appear as lights in the world**, (Php 2:15+).

And Jesus even commands us to...

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Mt 5:16+).

Comment - Stephen obeyed and Saul saw it and surrendered to the Savior! Let it shine dear follower of Christ.

**And fixing their gaze on him** - They looked at Stephen with fixed eyes. Can you just imagine the hatred that filled their eyes! But Stephen is a Spirit filled man (filled with courage and boldness) who fears God and not men!

**Fixing their gaze** (816)(**atenizo** from from **atenes** = strained, intent which in turn is from **a** = intensifies + **teino** = to stretch, to extend or to strain all of which help to paint a picture of the meaning of **atenizo**) means to look intently, to fix one's gaze on something, to stare at something, to gaze earnestly, to look straight at something, to fasten one's eyes upon. 2 Cor. 3:13 speaks of God's people being denied the opportunity to "see" the fading glory on the face of Moses after his descent from Sinai.

**Atenizo** is a favorite verb for Luke with only 2 other uses by Paul - Lk. 4:20; Lk. 22:56; Acts 1:10; Acts 3:4; Acts 3:12; Acts 6:15; Acts 7:55; Acts 10:4; Acts 11:6; Acts 13:9; Acts 14:9; Acts 23:1; 2 Co. 3:7; 2 Co. 3:13.

**Utley** - "**fixing their gaze on him**" This is a literary device often used by Luke. It denotes uninterrupted attention (cf. Luke 4:20; 22:56; Acts 1:10; 3:4, 12; 6:15; 7:55; 10:4; 11:6; 13:9; 14:9; 23:1).

**All who were sitting in the Council** (the Supreme Court) - Every eye was riveted on Stephen. The **Council** (See preceding note on [sunedron](#)) sat in a **semi-circle** on elevated seats so they could look down on the accused in the center. Talk about



intimidating! Stephen however is full of the Spirit and therefore full of (controlled by) boldness, enabled to stand strong. Can't you see him making eye contact from one side of the group to another, not afraid to engage their gaze! As is frequently the case, it was not truly Stephen who was on trial, but the hearts of the members of the Sanhedrin. And Stephen's eyes were filled with grace, not anger or animosity. This would be enough to rattle any and all of the members of the Sanhedrin.

**Ellicott** - Like the [Areopagus](#) at Athens, it took cognizance—as in the case of our Lord (Mt 26:65) and Stephen (Acts 6:13)—of blasphemy and other like offences, and its peculiar prerogative was that it could order **death by stoning**. ([Ellicott](#))

**Horton** writes that the comparison of Stephen's face to an angel may be an allusion to the face "of Jesus when He was transfigured and the inner glory showed through (Luke 9:29+ = "the appearance of His face became different"). "So full of the Spirit, so full of wisdom, faith, grace, and power is Stephen that the glory of God shines from his face." (Quoting Larkin) (Acts: A Logion Press Commentary)

**Utley on face like the face of an angel** - This may have been similar to (1) Moses' face glowing after visiting with YHWH (cf. Exod. 34:29–35, 2 Cor. 3:7); (2) Jesus' face and body glowing during His transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17:2; Luke 9:29+); or (3) the messenger angel of Daniel 10:5–6+. This was a way of metaphorically denoting one who had been in the presence of God.

**Saw his face like the face of an angel** - Is this not a touch of divine irony? Think about this for a moment -- before whom is Stephen being arraigned? The Sanhedrin. And who composes a majority of the Sanhedrin? The Sadducees who do not believe in angels! Does not our great God have a sense of humor!

**NET Note** says "This narrative description of Stephen's face adds to the mood of the passage. He had the appearance of a supernatural, heavenly messenger."

**Marshall** writes that Stephen's face was ""The description is of a person who is close to God and reflects some of His glory as a result of being in His presence (Ex 34:29ff)." (TNTC-Acts)

**Guzik** on Stephen's face like an angel - Stephen was at perfect peace. His face was not filled with fear or terror, because he knew his life was in God's hands and that Jesus never forsakes His people.

**Brian Bell** - In a commencement address at Harvard University, Alexander Solzhenitsyn tried to summarize the root problem facing Capitalism & Marxism. He said that the trouble w/both systems is that men have forgotten God. One system does it by its materialistic philosophy; the other system by its materialist economy. But "the sin of forgetting God" is not just the sin of economics & governments. It can be the sin of religion as well! Religious people forget God by setting up a religious system in His place!!! 1.3.1.2. Stephen was up against such a system! ([Sermon](#))

**Face** ([4383](#))([prosopon](#) from **pros** = towards + **ops** = eye, the part around the eye and so the face) means literally toward the eye or face.

All of Luke's use of **prosopon** in Acts - Acts 2:28; Acts 3:13; Acts 3:19; Acts 5:41; Acts 6:15; Acts 7:45; Acts 13:24; Acts 17:26; Acts 20:25; Acts 20:38; Acts 25:16

**Henry Varley** said, "The world has yet to see what God can do with & for & through & in a man, who is fully & wholly consecrated to Him."

Stephen comes about as close as anyone in Scripture for he was: full of faith (6:5); full of Grace (6:8); full of Power (6:8); full of Light (6:15); full of Scripture (ch.7); full of Wisdom (6:3,10); full of courage (7:51-56); full of Love (7:60)

**Angel** ([32](#))([aggelos/angelos](#)) literally means a messenger (one who bears a message - Lk 1:11, 2:9, etc or does an errand). Most of the NT uses refer to heavenly angels (messengers) who are supernatural, transcendent beings with power to carry out various tasks. In this context **Stephen** is compared to an **angel** in appearance, but he will soon carry out the function of an **aggelos** literally delivering a message in the form of a sermon that will take into the presence of literal angels in Heaven!

**Constable** adds that "Stephen proceeded to function as an **angel** (a messenger from God), as well as looking like one, by bringing new revelation to his hearers, as Moses had. The Old Covenant had come through angelic mediation at Mt. Sinai (Heb. 2:2). Now revelation about the New Covenant was coming through one who acted like and even looked like an angel."

Stephen's face shone with the glory of God and as Larkin says "To a greater or lesser extent, that's the way it is with all those who are full of the Spirit of God

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image **from glory to glory**, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18+).

This description of Stephen's face recalls the appearance of Moses to the congregation when he came down Mt Sinai with the Law..

It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. 30So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. 31Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. 32Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. 33When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. 34But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, 35the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with Him. (Exodus 34:29-35)

See [Moses and Stephen: the Old Testament and the New](#)

**John Stott** asks "Was it not God's deliberate purpose to give the same radiant face to Stephen when he was accused of opposing the law as he had given to Moses when he received the law? In this way God was showing that both Moses' ministry of the law and Stephen's interpretation of it had his approval."

**A T Robertson** - Where were Peter and John at this crisis? Apparently Stephen stands alone before the Sanhedrin as Jesus did. But he was not alone for he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). There was little that Peter and John could have done if they had been present. Gamaliel did not interpose this time for the Pharisees were behind the charges against Stephen, false though they were as Gamaliel could have found out.

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**A Face Shining for the Lord** - I cannot tell you the privilege it is to go forth as Christ's messenger. I have lately returned from a visit to China, and it has been, not an occasional thing, but quite the usual thing, to find the missionaries full of blessing and boiling over. One who reached China about a year ago was not there very long before the natives gave him a name — "**Mr. Glory-face**" — because his face was always shining for the Lord. He left a large business in which over two thousand hands were employed. He left a very precious work for God, in which he had been happy and much blessed. But what was his testimony? "The Lord promised me," he said, "a hundredfold more than all I left for Him. He has given me a very large hundredfold. It has been the best investment I have ever made." (T. Hudson Taylor.)

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**Joseph Parker** - The face is made every day by its morning prayer, and by its morning look out of windows which open upon Heaven.

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[Character Seen in the Face](#) - Phillips Brooks

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It was once said of a Christian man that "His face was a thanksgiving for past mercies and a love-letter to all mankind."

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A little boy going home one day, exulting in the fact that he had met Mr. Pennefather, was asked by his mother, "What did he say to you?" "He said nothing," was the child's reply, "but he beamed upon me." His singularly attractive power, however, was not confined to children. An importunate beggar, who was one day telling his tale of want to a party of travellers, suddenly caught sight of Mr. Pennefather, and prefaced his appeal with the exclamation, "You, sir, with heaven in your face !"

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It is said that Raphael, the great master of the beautiful, in sketching any figure or group of figures, gave his first attention to the drawing and modelling of the limbs, adding the draperies only after he had satisfied himself as to these. By this method he succeeded in imparting to them an air of inimitable ease and truthfulness. In like manner, grace, the character-creating principle, begins from within, gradually but surely harmonising the outward man with the laws of the new nature, and so producing that "beauty of holiness" which is so indescribable yet so familiar to us all. (A. F. Muir, M. A.) See also [Man or Angel](#)

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An American minister quaintly said, "Many Christians are like chestnuts: very pleasant nuts, but enclosed in very prickly burs, which require various dealings of nature and her grip of frost before the kernel is disclosed." This reminds me of an incident in my experience. Some years ago, when walking with a dear friend in the West-end of London, we happened to meet a lady truly eminent for her good works, but, alas I possessing a stern, sombre expression of countenance. I remarked to my friend, "That lady is a very

earnest Christian." She replied, "I would not like to make her acquaintance, judging from her face." Here was one of Christ's servants repelling instead of attracting to Himself. Truly it has been said, "Gloominess, irritability, discontent, and touchiness are four things more catching than cholera."

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**ILLUSTRATION OF ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE IMPACT OF A "ANGELIC" LIFE FACE - Judson's Life: An Aroma of Christ** was "The sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him (Jesus) in every place." (2 Cor 2:14) Many years ago when the great missionary Adoniram Judson was home on furlough, he passed through the city of Stonington, Connecticut. A young boy playing about the wharves at the time of Judson's arrival was **struck by the man's appearance. Never before had he seen such a light on any human face.** He ran up the street to a minister to ask if he knew who the stranger was. The minister hurried back with him, but became so absorbed in conversation with Judson that he forgot all about the impatient youngster standing near him. Many years afterward that boy—who could never get away from the influence of **that wonderful face**—became the famous preacher **Henry Clay Trumbull** (Read [The life story of Henry Clay Trumbull, missionary, army chaplain, editor, author - 1905](#)) (See also his fascinating book [The Blood Covenant](#)). In a book of memoirs he penned a chapter entitled: **What a Boy Saw in the Face of Adoniram Judson.** **That lighted countenance had changed his life. Even as flowers thrive when they bend to the light, so shining, radiant faces come to those who constantly turn toward Christ!** ([Read the original story in context of H C Trumbull's life story](#))

### LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE DEAR DISCIPLE OF CHRIST!

**Adoniram Judson** once wrote "**A life once spent is irrevocable. It will remain to be contemplated through eternity..** If it has been a useless life, it can never be improved. Such will stand forever and ever. The same may be said of each day. When it is once past, it is gone forever. All the marks which we put upon it, it will exhibit forever... Each day will not only be a witness of our conduct, but will affect our everlasting destiny (**Note:** Not in loss of salvation but of rewards - cp 1Co 3:11, 12, 13, 14, 15, Jn 15:5, 2Co 5:10-[note](#), cp 1Ti 4:7, 8-[note](#)). No day will lose its share of influence in determining where shall be our seat in heaven. How shall we then wish to see each day marked with usefulness! It will then be too late to mend its appearance. It is too late to mend the days that are past. The future is in our power. Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone, indelibly marked. (See page 33-34 of [A memoir of the life and labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson](#))

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#### Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60 Standing Ovation

By Jennifer Benson Schuldt

Look! I see ... the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God! —Acts 7:56

Susan Boyle spent most of her adult life living with her cat Pebbles, caring for her aging mother, and singing in church. She certainly didn't look like a musical superstar. That's probably why the audience laughed at this unassuming middle-aged woman before she performed in a talent show. Undeterred, Susan faced the unfriendly crowd, sang beautifully, and went on to receive a standing ovation.

Stephen was confronted by a hostile crowd in the days of the early church (Acts 6–7). A panel of religious authorities listened to lying witnesses accuse him of blasphemy (Acts 6:13). Stephen responded by speaking the truth of God's Word, which reinforced his faith in Christ. At the end of his speech, he said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (7:56). Then the crowd stoned him (v.58). Jesus, who was watching from heaven, welcomed Stephen home.

Most Christians aren't confronted with this much hostility. Yet we all need to "stand fast in the Lord" when the pressure is on (Phil. 4:1). We can't let others silence our voice for Christ. Speaking up for Jesus does not always win the crowd's favor here on earth, but it does ensure His approval in heaven, where it matters the most. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the strife will not be long;  
This day the noise of battle—the next the victor's song.  
To him that overcometh a crown of life shall be:  
He with the King of glory shall reign eternally.  
—Duffield

If you meet opposition, maybe it shows that you are doing something that counts.

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## Acts 6:8-15

when Moses came down from Mount Sinai .. the skin of his face shone Exodus 34:29

The late G. Campbell Morgan once told of a factory girl who, after she was saved, simply radiated Christian joy. One day while waiting for a train at York station she slowly walked up and down the platform to pass the time. A highly cultured lady, sitting nearby, observed her closely. Finally, impressed by her sweet face, she called to her, "Excuse me, Miss, but what makes you so happy?" The girl replied, "Was I looking happy? I didn't know it showed, but I certainly am. I'll be glad to tell you why!" She then witnessed to the woman concerning the wonders of salvation and the joy it brings to the heart, and eventually led her to a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ.

This girl wasn't trying to look happy. Her face just naturally reflected the joy of her soul. Moses also did not know his skin was shining with a celestial glow when he came down from the Mount. It glistened because he had been in close touch with God. The same was true of Stephen the day he laid down his life to become the first martyr of the Christian church (Acts 6:15). His face lit up with angelic glory because of his close relationship to Jesus Christ.

I am not much impressed when I see someone deliberately turn on a "Pepsodent smile" and assume a "happy" attitude in a Christian meeting. Unsaved people in the entertainment world have the ability "to put on a happy face," even when their hearts are full of pain and sorrow. What we need is such a glorious consciousness of the indwelling presence of the Lord that we will glow with spiritual health like Moses who "wist not that the skin of his face shone." This will give us a song in the darkest night, and joy in the midst of life's deepest trials. It will make us living demonstrations of the transforming power of the Savior. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

You don't have to tell how you live each day,  
You don't have to say if you work or pray,  
A tried, true barometer serves in its place;  
**However you live, it will show in your face!**  
—Anon.

The light of God's Son in your heart will put His sunshine on your face! —Bosch

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## Acts 6:9-15 A Daily Beauty

By Vernon C. Grounds

All who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. —Acts 6:15

When you look in a mirror, what do you see? Do you see a lovely reflection? A handsome face? Or do you see a plain or unattractive countenance?

We want to give those who behold us what my friend called an aesthetic blessing. But what about the beauty of holiness? Are others blessed by the beauty that flows through us from Christ?

A distinguished Bible scholar of the 19th century, J. B. Lightfoot, was described by one of his devoted students as "startlingly ugly: a stout little man with a grotesque figure and a squint." But that same student also said that Lightfoot was "the best man I have ever encountered, and I say this deliberately after the experience of many years. In a day or two ... his face appeared the most beautiful and lovable thing imaginable."

When Stephen was brought before the Jewish council for interrogation, "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke" (Acts 6:10). As he was being accused, they "saw his face as the face of an angel" (v.15).

By God's transforming grace, we too can have a daily beauty in our lives. As we walk prayerfully in the Spirit, our faces increasingly reflect the beauty of Jesus. ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,  
All His wonderful passion and purity;  
O Thou Spirit divine, all my nature refine  
Till the beauty of Jesus is seen in me.  
—Orsborn

Nothing can dim the beauty that shines from within.

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## Acts 6:15 UNDENIABLE EVIDENCE

And all that sat in the council ... saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Someone gave me a card the other day with this question printed on it, **"If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"** As I thought of this I couldn't help wondering how many enemies of the Gospel would testify that I was guilty of witnessing to them concerning my Savior? How many wicked people would say that my godly conduct and Christlike spirit put them to shame? Would unsaved individuals charge that the influence of my life constitutes a menace to their cause?

Our suggested Scripture reading (Acts 6) presents Stephen on trial because of his devotion to Jesus Christ, and the evidence was indisputable. In fact, the reason for his arrest was that his adversaries had become infuriated when "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke." They had been silenced by his arguments and confounded by the Christlike attitude he evidenced. They hated him so much they resorted to bribery and perjury to destroy him. However, as they looked upon him, their faces angry and their eyes flashing, they saw Stephen's countenance glowing as if reflecting the very presence of God. This radiance was too much for his antagonists, and they soon hustled him out to the stoning ground. One of their number, Saul of Tarsus, however, never forgot that scene. The remembrance of it burned in his soul until he accepted Jesus as his Master and, like Stephen, became a Spirit-filled Christian witness.

Ask yourself the solemn question, "If I were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me? [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.](#))

Has someone seen Christ in you today?  
Christian, look to your heart, I pray.  
The world, with a criticizing view,  
Has watched, but did it see Jesus in you?  
—Hopkins