

November 30, 2022  
Acts 6

### ADMINISTRATION (6:1–7)

6:1. **The Grecian Jews** could not speak Aramaic, the native tongue of Jews living in Israel. They probably were reared outside the land and were bilingual, speaking both Greek and their native tongues (cf. 2:5–11). Probably Gentile proselytes to Judaism who later became Christians were also in this group. The native Jews were also bilingual in that they spoke Aramaic and Greek (cf. 21:40). In the Jewish world tensions existed between the Grecian Jews and **the Aramaic-speaking** Jews; tragically these strains were brought into the church.

6:2. The **tables** (*trapezais*) may refer to tables used for serving food or money tables, that is, banks. Probably it was used here to refer to the place where funds and supplies were administered for the widows.

**The Twelve** recognized their proper priorities in **the ministry of the Word of God** and prayer (cf. v. 4).

6:3–4. The apostles mentioned three qualifications for those who would be enlisted to serve: they must (a) **be full of the Spirit** and (b) be full of **wisdom** (cf. v. 10). In addition they were to (c) be **known** for these things, that is, the previous two qualifications were to be their reputations. All three were necessary for the handling of finances. (Faith, v. 5, is not another qualification, for belief is simply the means of being filled with the Holy Spirit.)

Selecting **seven men** may go back to the tradition in Jewish communities where seven respected men managed the public business in an official council.

By choosing these seven, the Twelve could **give** their **attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word** (cf. v. 2).

6:5. The suggestion of the Twelve **pleased the whole group** of the disciples. Significantly all seven men had Greek names, implying they were Hellenists. **Nicolas**, the last one named, was not even a Jew but was **a convert to Judaism** and then to Christianity. The early church evidently felt the problem of the unintentional neglect of Grecian Jewish widows would be best solved by the Hellenistic Jews; certainly they would not neglect the Aramaic-speaking widows.

The introduction of these seven (cf. 21:8) prepares readers for the ministries of **Stephen** and **Philip**, the first two men listed. Furthermore, the reference to Grecian Jews looks ahead to the wider spread of the gospel outside the circle of Jerusalem and Judea. (Nothing else is known about the other four: **Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas.**)

6:6. Though the Christian community selected the Seven, they were commissioned by **the apostles**. This was done by prayer and the laying on of **hands**. The practice of laying hands on others was a gesture signifying commissioning and granting of authority (cf. 8:17–19; 13:3; 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; Heb. 6:2).

Were these the first deacons? Which church office is in view here? Three answers are given to these questions.

(1) Some say these were the first deacons. Several factors are used to support this viewpoint. First, the office of deacon is assumed in Paul's letters (cf. Phil. 1:1). If Acts 6:1–6 is not an account of their beginning, it is argued, when and where did deacons originate? Second, several words related to deacon (*diakonos*) are found here: "distribution" (lit., "service") in verse 1 is *diakonia*, and "to wait" in verse 2 is *diakonein*. However, these men were never called "deacons" (*diakonoi*) as such. Much later they were called "the Seven" (21:8). Furthermore, the words "distribution" and "wait" do not seem to have a technical sense here. These words in the Greek New Testament are commonly used in a nonspecialized sense.

(2) Others hold that these were precursors to the office of elder. This is not a common interpretation, but it gains its support from 11:30, which refers to relief money being given to the

elders. If deacons handled these funds earlier (chap. 6), it is argued, they must have later become the elders (chap. 11). However, the office of elder has its origin in the Jewish synagogue.

(3) A third view is that these seven men held a temporary position for the purpose of meeting a specific need. This seems to be the best approach for a couple of reasons. First, these men were chosen for a particular task, not an overall one. Second, they were in a temporary responsibility because of the communal nature of the church at Jerusalem. Even so, these men do illustrate the role and function of the office of deacons.

6:7. This verse contains another of Luke's progress reports. The church was rapidly growing in numbers (cf. 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1; 9:31), with even many Jewish **priests** becoming believers (**obedient to the faith**; cf. Rom. 1:5). With the appointment of these men, readers are prepared for the work of Stephen and Philip and the proclamation of the gospel outside Jerusalem.

## II. The Witness in All Judea and Samaria (6:8–9:31).

### A. *The martyrdom of Stephen (6:8–8:1a).*

#### 1. THE ARREST OF STEPHEN (6:8–7:1). STEPHEN'S MINISTRY, ARREST, AND TRIAL ARE STRIKINGLY SIMILAR TO THE LORD'S.

6:8. Like Christ and the apostles, **Stephen was full of God's grace and power** (cf. 4:33; Luke 2:40, 52). Interestingly Stephen was "full of" or controlled by five factors: the Spirit, wisdom, faith, grace, power (Acts 6:3, 5, 8). What an outstanding leader! Furthermore, he **did great wonders and miraculous signs** (cf. 2:22; Luke 24:19; also cf. Acts 2:43). These evidences of God's grace were in addition to his responsibilities in the daily ministrations to the widows.

6:9–11. **The Synagogue of the Freedmen** was perhaps comprised of those who themselves or whose forebears had been set free from being prisoners of war or from slavery. Precisely who they were is not known for sure.

The members of this synagogue were from three divergent areas—North Africa (**Cyrene and Alexandria** were two of its leading cities), **Asia** (the western portion of modern-day Turkey), and **Cilicia**. Possibly this was the assembly Paul attended because Tarsus was located in the province of Cilicia.

Besides being one of the Seven and a wonder-worker, Stephen was also a skilled debater. His opponents **could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke** (cf. "full of the Spirit and wisdom" in v. 3 and "full of ... the Holy Spirit" in v. 5 and 7:55).

To remove Stephen, the men of the synagogue covertly induced men to make an accusation against him. Like those who complained against the Lord Jesus, they charged **Stephen** with **blasphemy** (cf. Matt. 26:65).

6:12–14. These words were sufficient to arouse the laity and leaders to apprehend **Stephen** and accuse **him before the Sanhedrin**. This is the third of four times in Acts when the Lord's followers stood before this Jewish court; the others were Peter and John (4:15), Peter and the apostles (5:27), and Paul (22:30).

The **false witnesses** were not necessarily outright liars. Stephen had probably said the things they accused him of; however, they misrepresented the intentions and imports of his statements (cf. Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58; John 2:19). The Lord Himself predicted the destruction of the temple (Matt. 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6), though He never said *He* would do it. The other half of the allegation against Stephen involved the temporary nature of the Mosaic system. Undoubtedly he saw the theological implications of justification by faith and the fulfillment of the Law in Christ. Furthermore, if the gospel was for the whole world (Acts 1:8), the Law had to be a temporary arrangement.

6:15. **All ... the Sanhedrin**—all 71 of them—**looked intently at Stephen** to see his response. **They saw that his face was like that of an angel**. Evidently his face glowed with glory (cf. Moses' face, Ex. 34:29, 35).

7:1. **The high priest** mentioned here possibly is Caiaphas, the same one who presided over the trials of the Lord (Matt. 26:57; Mark 14:54; Luke 22:53; John 18:13, 24; cf. comments on Acts 4:5–6).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 367–369.