



## Focus Points...*For Acts 6*

### Stop And Consider...

- \* The extent and demands of the remarkably growing influence of the early church; and
- \* The attention the Twelve gave to selecting leaders in the church.

### Look...

- \* At the qualifications of the Seven, who were anything but “warm body” volunteers; and
- \* At the insatiable, unquenchable lust for the blood of Christians.

### Listen...

- \* To Stephen’s detractors and their accusations; and
- \* To Luke’s commendation for the Seven, including Stephen.

### Prayer:

Holy Spirit, You call many people to serve in the Kingdom. As You provided passionate men of faith and wisdom to the early church, work within me that I may respond and fulfill Your calling to me to share in the joy of sharing Jesus Christ. Amen.

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### Commentary:

The apostles’ response “in those days” of Acts 6:1ff . provides some valuable insight on the development of the early apostolic church.



*The first insight* is that the early Christian community consisted of both Hebraic Jews (i.e. Hebrew speaking) and Grecian Jews (i.e. those who spoke Greek, not Hebrew) (Acts 6:1).

*The second insight* is that the proceeds of the common apostolic treasury was used to fund, among other things, daily food distribution (6:2).

*The third, and most significant insight* for the future welfare of the church, was the administration of the distribution program by individuals other than the Twelve. This ministry had become so successful that the Twelve could no longer “wait on tables” and preach the Word, too (6:2).



By delegating the non-preaching tasks to others, the Twelve began an important precedent regarding the preaching office. Preachers would do the preaching; many other ministry tasks would be delegated to others so that they could expand the ministries' effectiveness in Jerusalem and beyond.

Chosen for their remarkable faith, seven men were selected and consecrated by the laying on of hands for this awesome task. The result, Luke noted, was a continued rapid increase in the numbers of believers (6:7).

The selection of the seven is, in some ways, a preface to Luke's real focus: the apprehension and execution of one of these exemplar chosen seven, Stephen. Though not an apostle, Stephen was "full of God's grace and power" (6:8). Like the apostles, Stephen performed "great wonders and miraculous signs" (6:8). He was also known for his intellectual prowess, surmounting those who contended against him (6:10).

*A fourth insight* is that as the Christian church expanded in Jerusalem, the threat of persecution elevated significantly. By focusing on Stephen's arrest and trial for the balance of chapter 6 and all of chapter 7, Luke detailed the severity of persecution in Jerusalem.

As Luke, in 6:11ff., described Stephen's circumstances, one cannot help but notice the parallel to what happened to Peter and John. Especially noteworthy is how Stephen's experience parallels Jesus' Sanhedrin trial.

- \* As Jesus was set up and accused of blasphemy, Stephen's detractors also stirred up hostile opposition against him.
- \* Like Jesus, Stephen was seized and brought before the Sanhedrin.
- \* Like Jesus, Stephen was accused of conspiring to destroy the Temple.
- \* Like Jesus, Stephen was accused of perverting and undermining Moses' Law.

Might Luke be dropping some hints of *Déjà vu* at Stephen's trial? Definitely!

As the charges were leveled against him, Stephen, like Jesus, sat silently. Innocent, Luke's report exposed the Sanhedrin's shameful admission of Stephen's innocence.

"All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel." (6:15)



Chapter six ends with one of the most abrupt chapter endings in the Book of Acts. The narrative, which had gained momentum, stopped cold at the chapter division, leaving plenty of unanswered questions.

- \* What would happen to Stephen, one of the select Seven?
- \* What would be the outcome of his trial?
- \* Would Stephen demonstrate the same kind of boldness as Peter and John when they stood before the high priests?
- \* Would others be saved as a result of Stephen's confession?
- \* What would happen to the church if they lost this most prominent spokesman?

The cliff-hanger continues in Acts 7:1ff.

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, what a remarkable ministry you have given to Your Church. Bless those whose ministry is proclaiming Your Word of grace. Bless also those whose ministry provides for the needs of the church and surrounding communities. Give all our leaders passion. Impart to them a firm conviction that their witness might be heard by believers and unbelievers alike, to the glory of Your name. Amen.

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