

ACTS CHAPTER SIX

This chapter records events that happened about five years after Pentecost. The church is still meeting in the temple and in homes. There will be no church building for another 200-300 years.

Read Acts 1:1-8

1. *In your own words, briefly describe the problem that was developing in the young church.*

Note that there are two types of Jewish believers in the church at this time....those from Palestine who spoke Aramaic and those from outside who spoke Greek. The problem in part stems from the church's plan to "have everything in common." It was the daily distribution of food that started the problem.

2. *From vs. 2-6, how were the first deacons elected and what was to be their first responsibility in the church?*

The apostles agreed that there was a problem and proposed a solution. They didn't want to neglect their jobs of ministering the word. They needed help. Every pastor feels the need to surround himself with good men that can help carry the load. No matter what size church he is shepherding, the pastor struggles to find enough time to study the word and to feed the sheep. The tyranny of the urgent often prevails over his schedule. Having other godly people who can help with the administrative duties of the church gives the pastor freedom to devote his time to the preparation of the word. The apostles left a good example for us in this chapter.

3. *How many men were chosen and what were their qualifications?*

The apostles wanted men with spiritual maturity to handle even this task of food distribution. Their names are Greek which signifies that they were chosen from the group that was complaining. Giving people responsibility in a particular area often will demonstrate that they are respected and trusted. In this situation it seems to have solved the problem and restored harmony.

4. *The deacons were to relieve the apostles of some responsibility so they could spend more time doing what?*

How does this compare to the role of deacons in your church today? Eph. 4:11-13 tells us that God gives people different gifts, but always for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. When a pastor surrounds himself with godly men who can use their gifts to serve in the church, the pastor has freedom to spend his time in the Word. Consider I Cor. 14:33. Our God is a God of order. He has clearly defined the qualifications of

elder/deacons/overseers in I Tim 3 and Titus 1:5-9. God is not pleased with a church that has no sense of orderliness. Any structure functions best when there is a clear chain of command and when people are faithful to do the job they have been given. God gives us these guidelines to help His work advance. It is always a blessing to see people working in the area that they have been gifted to serve in. They feel fulfilled, the needs are met, and they do the job with dedication and excellence.

5. *From vs. 7, what seems to have resulted from the new plan?*

The church was on target. The gospel was being preached and people were being saved.

6. *Who is introduced in verse 8 and how is he described?*

The book of Acts is beginning to take a turn. Peter has been the primary personality up to this point. Soon Paul will be in the spotlight, but in between these two apostles, we see Stephen. He was chosen by the church to help with the food distribution, but he was a man with many gifts. He is described as being full of grace and power and doing great wonders and miraculous signs. His grace and power attracted attention and opposition, however.

There were many synagogues in Jerusalem. We could think of them as neighborhood churches. If there were ten Jewish men in an area, it was considered worthy of a synagogue. This synagogue had been formed originally from men who had been freed from captivity in Rome. That's why they called themselves the Synagogue of the Freedmen. They despised Stephen and his message in the same way that Jesus was despised. They charged him with blasphemy, but we'll see in the next chapter that Stephen had great respect for Moses and God.

Notice how they refer to the Lord as "this Jesus of Nazareth". It was a derogatory way of referring to Jesus, since they thought that nothing good could come from Nazareth. (Compare John 1:46). They produced false witnesses, just as they had with Jesus. Apparently Stephen had been teaching that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament law and that believers now had freedom to live by the direction of the indwelling Spirit. Later on Paul would take up this message and would also be persecuted because of it.

Read vs. 9-15

7. *Why did people have a difficult time when they tried to argue with Stephen?*

Consider Colossians 2:6-8. How is it possible to discern between godly wisdom & worldly wisdom? Consider 2 Tim. 3:16 & 17 in your answer. How could this verse be implemented in churches today or is it?

8. *Compare Acts 6:11-14 with Matt. 26:59-66 and Luke 23:1 & 2. What do the two trials have in common?*

9. *The council saw Stephen's face become like the face of an angel. When you read this verse, what image comes to mind? Consider Ex. 34:29-35 and II Cor. 3:18.*

Moses is the only other man whose face radiated the glory of God. God was giving this sign of His approval of Stephen and his message. His accusers should have seen that as a warning that they were in the wrong, but even this supernatural manifestation didn't penetrate their hard hearts.

10. *Read Matt. 5:10-12, Luke 6:22 & 23 and John 15:18-21. Summarize what Jesus taught concerning persecution.*

Note: In Matt. 5:11 & 12 it describes the persecution as people saying all kinds of false and evil things against you. In Luke 6:22, the word "exclude" could also be translated "ostracize" or separate from your company. Have you had instances of this in your family? In your workplace? In your neighborhood? Rejoice! God is remembering that and you will have great reward from Him.