

Acts 6**Lesson 6
Seven Appointed and Stephen Arrested****Outline****I. Appointment of Seven Men to Care for Widows (vv. 1-7)**

- A. *The Hellenist widows were neglected (v. 1)*
- B. *Apostles told the brethren to choose seven men to care for the widows (vv. 2-4)*
 - 1. So the apostles would not have to leave their work in the word to serve tables (vv. 2, 4)
 - 2. Qualifications (v. 3)
 - a. Good report
 - b. Full of the Holy Spirit
 - c. Full of wisdom
- C. *Seven men were chosen and appointed (vv. 5-6)*
- D. *Many obeyed the gospel (v. 7)*

II. Stephen Opposed and Arrested (vv. 8-15)

- A. *Stephen worked miracles (v. 8)*
- B. *Stephen was opposed (vv. 9-11)*
 - 1. Disputed with him (v. 9)
 - 2. Couldn't resist his wisdom (v. 10)
 - 3. Charged him with blaspheming Moses and God (v. 11)
- C. *Stephen arrested and brought before the council (vv. 12-15)*
 - 1. False witnesses testified that he spoke against the holy place and the law (vv. 13-14)
 - 2. When the council looked on him they saw his face as the face of an angel (v. 15)

Key Verses That Summarize the Chapter**Acts 6:3, 11**

3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;
11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."

“As the church grew it began to encounter all the problems of an organization and an institution.”¹ Indeed the church was facing growing pains. They already had dealt with problems from outside the church with the Sanhedrin council (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42) and problems from the inside with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

In this chapter the church faces complaints from within (vv. 1-7), and false reports from without (vv. 8-15).

Appointment of Seven Men to Care for Widows (vv. 1-7)

The Hellenist widows were neglected (v. 1). The fact that the church was rapidly growing (v. 1)² explained part of the difficulty in caring for those in need. The larger numbers meant it was more likely for someone to be overlooked. The Hellenists³ complained against the Hebrews⁴ because their widows had been neglected in the “daily serving of food” (NASV). Perhaps the social and cultural differences between these groups helped drive the problem.

There is no evidence that this neglect was intentional. If it were intentional, it would seem that a rebuke would be in order. If it were intentional, why didn’t those responsible defend it? There was no rebuke to those who complained or to the rest of the disciples. “In the very nature of such distributions, it was inevitable that some should receive less, others more, and that almost any person desiring to find fault could easily have ‘discovered’ some basis for alleging it.”⁵

The apostles told the brethren to choose seven men to care for the widows (vv. 2-4). So that the apostles would not have to neglect their work in the gospel, they instructed the brethren to select seven men to see to this (vv. 2, 4). These men were to be of good reputation (honorable men of character), full of the Holy Spirit (following the instructions of the Spirit), and full of wisdom (v.3).

Seven men were chosen and appointed (vv. 5-6). The church did what the apostles said and selected seven men and presented them to the apostles. We know very little or nothing about most of these men. Stephen is seen in the last section of this chapter and the next. Philip is mentioned in Acts 8:5-40 and 21:8. Nicolas was a proselyte⁶ from Antioch. All of the seven have Greek names, suggesting that they too are Hellenist. The apostles laid their hands on the seven (v. 6).⁷

1 William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 50.

2 Previous progress reports are found in Acts 4:4 and 5:14.

3 Hellenist (or Grecians, KJV) were Greek speaking Jews born and reared outside of Palestine.

4 Hebrews were Jews born and reared in Palestine and spoke the Hebrew language.

5 James Burton Coffman, *Acts*, 122.

6 A Gentile who had converted to Judaism.

7 There are two views concerning the laying on of hands in this verse: One view says the apostles laid hands upon them to impart spiritual gifts (cf. Acts 8:14-19). Evidence for this view is that Stephen worked miracles (v. 8). The other view says that this was a means of approving, endorsing and appointing them to their work (cf. Acts 13:3). Either is possible. This writer leans toward the latter view.

Many obeyed the gospel (v. 7). Here we have another progress report. The number was multiplied greatly. The fact that many priests were obedient tells us how effective the gospel was.

It is important that we have a good understanding of this section of Scripture because of the things we learn from it and because of how it is abused.

1. **Were these men deacons?** Many refer to the seven as deacons according to 1 Timothy 3. The word “serve” (v. 2) is the word *diakoneo* which is the same word used in 1 Timothy 3:10, 13. The word simply means a minister or servant and does not always suggest the office of a deacon. There is no evidence that the church had elders or deacons at this point. However, the principle of how deacons work under the oversight of the leadership (elders or in this case apostles) is seen in this passage.
2. **How men are appointed.** This is the only passage that tells us how to appoint men to serve. The leadership (apostles) asked the congregation to select the men based upon the qualifications given. The congregation put forth the men they selected, and the leadership appointed them to serve.
3. **The church did its own work.** This was a case of a local church taking care of its own needy. No organization was formed to do the work. Institutionalism teaches that the church can’t care for its own without an organization between the church and the work being done. Here the church arranged, oversaw and provided for the needy widows. They didn’t set up a widows home (a separate organization between the church and the work being done) and donate to it that it might arrange, oversee and provide for the needy widows.
4. **Is this a case of women in business meetings?** Some argue from this text that women can (and should) be involved in decision making business meetings. The women took no leading role. The apostles (all men) led in the matter (v. 2). The congregation was asked to select seven men (v. 3). The apostles would then appoint them (v. 3). This is no different than when elders ask the congregation to suggest names of men to serve as elders and deacons. The elders are in the lead making decisions, the men and women merely suggest those who might be appointed.⁸

Stephen Opposed and Arrested (vv. 8-15)

Stephen worked miracles (v. 8). This is the first record of one other than an apostle working miracles.⁹ The miracles caught the attention of some opposing Jews. This begins the record of the first martyr (cf. Acts 7).

⁸ See Tom M. Roberts, “Does Acts 6 Authorize Women in Business Meetings?” Guardian of Truth Magazine, XXXIX: 3 p. 16-17, February 2, 1995.

⁹ The apostles could lay hands on one and give them the power to work miracles (Acts 8:14-17). There is no evidence that that power could be transferred.

Stephen was opposed (vv. 9-11). Those of the Synagogue of the Freedmen¹⁰ (from four different places) began disputing with Stephen (v. 9). However, they could not refute what he said (v. 10). They charged him with speaking against Moses and God (v. 11). Stephen answers that charge in chapter 7.

Stephen arrested and brought before the council (vv. 12-15). Stephen stood before the same council that Peter and John faced (Acts 4-5). False witnesses were arranged to testify that he spoke against this holy place and the law (vv. 13-14).¹¹ They misapplied what he had said (v. 14). As the council members looked at Stephen they saw his face “as it had been the face of an angel” (v. 15, ASV).¹² How it was like the face of an angel we are not told.

Questions

1. Who were the Hellenist (or Grecians)? _____

2. What progress reports are given in this chapter? _____

3. What qualifications were given for selecting these seven men? _____

4. What do we know about who these seven men were? _____

10 “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” (A. T. Robertson, *Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft & Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament. Copyright (c) 1985 by Broadman Press).

11 It may be that Stephen had discussed the destruction of Jerusalem (and temple) and even quoted the Lord on the matter (Matt. 24:1-2). That could be the basis for saying that Stephen was against this holy place (v. 13).

12 “Saul of Tarsus was in that council, and it is a most reasonable conjecture that he reported this phenomenon to Luke” (James Burton Coffman, *Acts*, 131).

5. How does this passage show the concept of Institutionalism to be wrong? _____

6. What can we learn from Acts 6:1-7 about how deacons work in relationship to the leadership? _____

7. What *first things* are seen in the case with Stephen? _____

8. Who opposed Stephen? _____

9. What charges were made about the teaching of Stephen? _____

10. What was the basis of the charge that he spoke against the holy place? _____

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