

LESSON SEVEN

(6:1-12)

On Solomon's Porch, 6:1-6

6 *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them.*

V. 1 - Whether intentional or otherwise, racial problems begin to appear among the disciples. Probably those widows who were Christian were excluded from the temple support (if such there was) and had only the help of their Christian friends. Perhaps the Grecian widows were more needy than the others, or lived in a hard-to-reach spot, etc. The text doesn't say that the widows murmured, only that some were murmuring about the neglect of them.

(daily) distribution - Translates the Greek term regularly used for ministry deaconship, or service. The church had concern for those in need, and was attempting to alleviate the problems as best they could; but humans, few or many, may lack wisdom and planning sufficient for the needs of all.

V. 2 - **It is not right** - The 12 saw their specific task as being too demanding to permit this work/service (same Greek word as mentioned above in v. 1 and in v. 3, *ministry* of the word). They did not object to serving/ministering, per se. The service was worthy, and needed, but others who were not charged with the tasks of the apostleship could serve in said areas as well as they.

V. 3 - **pick out** - the verb means to select, or be concerned with, look after, an active participation, etc. It is the same root as is transliterated "Episcopal" and/or translated as in 20:28 (guardian) or I Tim. 3:1 (bishop). The disciples were to do the selecting, not the apostles.

good repute - From a word which means of a good witness. Certainly the task was important, the men above reproach were needed. We would do well to learn from this!

we may appoint - The apostles laid down the qualifications for these men, and then were to set to work the men chosen. The Greek term is seen in Matt. 24:45, 47; Luke 12:14; Acts 7:10, 27; 17:15; Titus 1:5; Hebrews 5:1; James 4:4; and carries the idea of put in a place of service. (Paul gave Titus the charge to appoint elders in Crete, not to select them but to assign them to work.) There is no reason to suppose the men could only do the task for which they were chosen, or that they necessarily served beyond the duration of the existing need.

V. 4 - The apostles proposed that they would continue steadfastly and specifically in prayer and ministering of the word. For those interested, the Greek term is used in this verse to refer to the Gospel message, etc., and in verse 5 in reference to what the apostles instructed the people to do. The Greek term had a wide usage. Note now v. 7.

V. 5 - It may be of interest that all seven names are non-Jewish, whether the men were so or not. We hear of Philip, Acts 8 and 21. Certainly, if Stephen and Philip are any examples, the seven

later did more than minister at the work for which they were specifically chosen.

V. 6 - The laying on of hands was a common practice in the early Church (Acts 8:17; 13:3; 19:6; I Tim. 4:14; 5:22; II Tim. 1:6; Hebrews 6:2) as well as Jewish life, Leviticus 3:2; 16:21; Numbers 27:18; Deut. 34:9. It evidently was a meaningful custom to them, and signified assignment of responsibility or imparting of power.

QUESTIONS

61. The Hellenists were Jews whose language was Greek; probably so because of their parentage (many Jews were in other lands than Palestine). Would this be a reason for the neglect (i.e., inability to communicate)?

62. Had the apostles been given a specific place to fill (i.e., a deaconship of their own) for God?

63. The apostles, directed of God (we assume) laid down the rules for the occasion, while the congregation, using these guidelines, did the actual selection. Is this a good example for church policy today?

64. Could men today be chosen as “deacons” for a specific task, and when the task was completed, cease being “deacons”?

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

V. 7 - The Word of God increased - The Greek text indicates continually. The same idea is emphasized about the priests; there were continual conversions. Many Jews were doubtless like Simeon and Joseph of Arimathea, Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-40 with dispositions to believe the compelling evidences.

were obedient - Greek word imperfect tense: kept becoming obedient. **the faith** - as used in Acts 14:22; Galatians 1:23; Jude v. 3. An objective system to be accepted as true and reliable.

V. 8 - In the midst of all the apostles and the work they were doing, Stephen is magnified. We actually know more of his work, and that of Philip, than of almost all the apostles. He kept doing the miraculous things, evidently while doing the specific tasks for which he had been chosen and appointed.

At the Synagogue of the Freedmen, 6:9-12

9 Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. 10 But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly instigated men, who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council.

V. 9 - Libertines/Freedmen - Former Jewish slaves of Rome, or (apparently) descendants of such; now free men. Saul of Tarsus may well

The Increase of the Word of God, 6:7,8

have had his first direct confrontation with a Christian in this exchange with Stephen.

The Greek word translated “disputed” means to question or to exchange questions, sometimes with rancor or evil intent in the questioning. See Mark 1:27; 8:11; 9:14, 16; 12:28; Luke 22:23.

V. 10 - God, we believe, enabled Stephen to answer effectively all their questions, so that they were never able to have any advantage over him. Paul later was like this in Acts 17. Naturally, having lost face in public, the Jews, rather than admit defeat, stooped to worldly ways.

V. 11 - Because truth was too evident in Stephen’s answers, the men resorted (as did the Jewish leaders with Jesus) to underhanded tactics. (A good lesson for us: face the truth squarely, and if proved wrong, accept it and repent. It is also pertinent that we not be like those Jewish men: equate our understanding of God’s Word as being equal to it; thus holding that any disagreement with us is tantamount to disagreement with God. It might not be so! We, as Christians, should be willing to accept truth wherever we find it, knowing that God’s truth is not undermined by any other truth. Of course, the charge of blasphemy, if true, was serious. The truth was, however, they were the ones who were blaspheming Moses and God. Ref. 3:22.

QUESTIONS

65. Stephen was said to be “full of grace.” What did that expression mean?

66. From what sections of the world did (some of) the Libertines come?

67. Why would they “secretly” conspire against Stephen? Would this indicate good motives?

68. Was Stephen actually preaching about the destruction of the temple, or was the temple’s demise to be one of the effects of Christianity?

LESSON EIGHT

(6:13 - 7:60)

Stephen Before the Sanhedrin, 6:13-7:57

13 And set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” 15 And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

7 And the high priest said, “Is this so?” 2 And Stephen said: “Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, 3 and said to him, ‘Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you.’ 4 Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living; 5 yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his posterity after him, though he had no child. 6 And God spoke to this effect, that his posterity would be aliens in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and ill-treat them four hundred years. 7 ‘But I will judge the nation which they serve,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and worship me in this place.’ 8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac