

Notes on Acts 6-7

Acts 6:1-7 – The Seven are chosen (Stephen introduced)

Complaint by the Greek-Jews (meaning language, culture?) against the Hebrews (natives of Palestine or those devoted to distinctly Jewish culture?) during daily distribution to widows (foreshadowing??)

Distracted devotion?

- Choose 7 men full of the Spirit and wisdom to serve at the tables, so we can be devoted to prayer and the ministry of the Word
- ministry of service (diakonia) and Ministry (diakonia) of the Word?
- “deacons” but not “Deacons”

Acts 6:6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

Acts 6:7 ¶ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and **a great many of the priests** became obedient to the faith.

*** An important detail!!

The strategies of Satan: persecution, subversion, distraction – Have they worked??

Acts 6:8-15 – Stephen brought before the Sanhedrin (Council)

What do we know about Stephen? Good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom (6:4), chosen to wait on tables, full of faith (6:5), full of grace and power, doing great wonders and signs (6:8; cf (2:2, 43; 5:12))

Synagogue of the Freedmen, Cyrenians, Alexandrians, Cilicians and Asians – a synagogue is a more private gathering of at least 10 Jewish men – the Talmud claims there were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem before A.D. 70 [cf. Luke 8:41; 13:10ff]

- Freedmen – former slaves (Jews, now having come to Jerusalem)
- Cyrene – chief city of modern-day Libya
- Cilicia – SE Asia Minor (Turkey), home of Tarsus

They could not withstand the wisdom and Spirit with which Stephen spoke (6:10)

False charges of Blasphemy:

- Stephen speaks against Moses and God;
- against the holy place (the Temple) (cf. Luke 21:5-6, 20-24) and the Law (cf. Luke 20:27-38)
- The Temple was especially important to the Sadducees while the Law (and traditions associated with it) were especially meaningful to the Pharisees – the case here is more complex and dangerous than the case against Peter and John in Acts 4:2 and 5:28
- “Jesus will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us” (6:14)

Like the face of an angel (cf. Moses (!) Exo. 34:29ff.)

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Acts 7:1-53 – Stephen's Defense

Abraham (2-8), Joseph (9-16), Moses (17-43), David and Solomon (44-50): God does not dwell in a house made by human hands. God is not restricted to one place, but rather He has pledged Himself by covenant to a people and He is with them wherever they go. The whole narrative is all about God's gracious initiative in the lives of His people.

The Punch-Line (51-53): Just as Joseph's brothers rejected him and the Israelites rejected the Law given to Moses, you have resisted the Holy Spirit. You are not part of God's covenant community (uncircumcised hearts and ears)! You betrayed and murdered the Righteous One. You have received the Law and did not keep it!

The irony: Stephen's teaching in the Temple were a call to repentance because He pointed to Jesus as the source of their salvation, but rather than repenting, his opponents multiplied their sin.

The shadow vs. the reality (cf. Col 2:17, Heb. 8:4; 10:1). By fulfilling the roles of the Temple and the Law, Jesus did not reject them (Matt. 5:17, John 2:16-21), He validated them.

Acts 7:54-60 – The Stoning of Stephen

Saw the glory of God and Jesus (cf. Saul's conversion, Acts 9)

Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God [cf. Luke 22:69, Acts 2:33]

A young man named Saul... (7:58, 8:1)

Stephen as Jesus [cf. Luke 21:12]

- Teaching in the Synagogue/Temple: Luke 21:37 | | Acts 6:9-10
- False witnesses/charges brought against: Luke 23:2 | | Acts 6:11, 13
- Brought before the Jewish Council: Luke 22:66 | | Acts 6:12
- Accused of blasphemy: Luke 22:70-71 | | Acts 6:11, 13
- Unlawfully/innocently killed: Luke 23:13-16, 41 | | Acts 7:58
- Calls on God/Jesus to receive his spirit: Luke 23:34 | | Acts 7:59
- Cries out for forgiveness to perpetrators: Luke 23:46 | | Acts 7:60

Acts 8:1-4 – The Aftermath of Stephen's Death

- Persecution: A great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 7:52)
- Dispersion: They were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (except the apostles!) (Acts 1:8)
- Proclamation: Those who scattered went about preaching the word!

Genesis 50:20 "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

Acts 2:23-24 "This Jesus... you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it."