

# “The Choosing Of The Seven”

## Acts 6:1-15

Message by Michael J. Barnard

February 26, 2023

**Teaching Aim:** To explore the major move made by the early church to meet the needs of the Hellenist (or Greek) widows who were being neglected. To recognize the need for church leadership to make necessary changes as the church grew larger so that nobody would fall through the cracks. To realize the “*servant nature*” of the office of deacon and to understand why this office is so important to the health of the local church body today.

### **DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (*BIBLE STUDY*)**

#### **Part I: A crisis in the early church as the Greek widows were being neglected (Acts 6:1-5)**

1. As we come to **chapter 6**, the early church had the kind of problem every church would like to have, they were growing very quickly. Some estimate that the church in Jerusalem had grown to 20,000 members by this point; in that sense it had become a megachurch. The twelve apostles were doing the best they could, but people were now falling through the cracks. Which group of Christians began to complain that their widows were being neglected (**vs. 1**)? What were the widows not getting their share of? (See **James 1:27**)
  
2. Who were “*the Hellenists*” and what made them different from the Hebrew Jews? (See Commentaries) How could this crisis have divided the early church? Why do you think there are so many church splits today? How did the twelve respond to the accusations? Why is it important for church leadership to rapidly address problems before they spread?
  
3. The apostles realized they were unable to meet all the needs (**vs. 2**). Their dilemma was that the Greek widows needed help, they wanted to help, but they just didn’t have the time. The accusations were true. What was the primary responsibility of the apostles? What is the primary responsibility of elders and pastors today?
  
4. What Greek word is translated “*serve*” in **verse 2**? (See Commentaries) What English word does it sound like? D.L. Moody said, “*It is better to put ten men to work than to try to do the work of ten men.*” How do we see this principle at work in **verse 3**?

5. It is estimated that every year in the United States, 17,000 pastor walk away from the ministry. Many are overwhelmed and beaten down. Why do you think being a church leader is so difficult? What kind of expectation do you have of your pastor?
  
6. The apostles wisely decided they couldn't do it all. What plan did they come up with? What three qualifications did the apostles place on the seven men who were selected to help them? According to **verse 3**, who selected these men?
  
7. In light of **verse 4**, why did the apostles add this new office to the church? Why is it important for every pastor and elder to be able to focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word? What will happen if pastors and elders are trying to take care of everything else in the church? What can we learn about the apostles from their response?
  
8. How did the congregation respond to the apostle's decision (**vs. 5**)? What seven men were chosen "to serve" in this new office? What can we learn about each man from their names? (See Commentaries) Who were the most famous members of "the seven?" (See **Acts 6:8-7:60; 8:5-40; 21:8-9**) Who was Nicolas and what heretical group do some scholars speculate he formed? (See **Rev. 2:6-7; 2:12-17**) Do we know this to be true for sure?

**Part II: The choosing of "the seven" by the church body and apostles was a brilliant solution to a difficult crisis (Acts 6:6-7)**

1. Once "the seven" had been chosen, they were brought before the apostles to be affirmed and then ordained. What did the apostles do to the men after they prayed for them (**vs. 6**)? What is the significance of laying hands on an individual? (See Commentaries.)
  
2. As mentioned earlier, "the seven" were the prototype of what we call deacons today (**vs. 6**). The English word "deacon" comes from the Greek "diakonos" which means "to serve." What is the difference between the office of elder and deacon? What qualifications do we find for deacons and their wives in **1 Timothy 3:8-13**? Why do you think the deacons' wives are given qualifications as well?

3. Alexander Strauch writes on page 156 of his book *“Minister of Mercy – The New Testament Deacon”*: *“Through the deacons, the local church’s charitable activities are effectively organized and centralized. The deacons are collectors of funds, distributors of relief, and agents of mercy. They help the poor, the jobless, the sick, the widowed, the elderly, the homeless, the shut-ins, the refugees, and the disabled. They counsel and guide people. They visit people in their homes. They relieve suffering. They comfort, protect, and encourage people, and help to meet their needs. In contemporary language, they are the congregation’s social workers.”* Given Alexander Strauch’s explanation, how does the role of the deacon fit into the local church today? Why is this office so important to the health of any church?
  
4. What happened to the early church as a result of the apostles and deacons sharing the leadership responsibilities (**vs. 7**)? It is believed that approximately 8,000 priests were serving in Jerusalem at the time of this writing. The Levitical priests administered the distribution of charity from the tithes in ancient Israel to the people in need. Why do you think so many priests were converted to Christianity at this time? Is it possible some of them were drawn to Christianity by what they saw in the ministry of *“the seven?”*

### **Part III: The faithfulness and giftedness of Stephen brought opposition (Acts 6:8-15)**

1. Which member of *“the seven”* became the major focus in **verses 8-15**? Note: Stephen’s name means, *“crown, or jewel;”* he would live up to his name. What can we learn about Stephen from **verse 8**? Up until this point, who are the only other people alive who had done great signs and wonders among the people? What can we learn about the spiritual state of Stephen from the description Luke gives him?
  
2. Anytime somebody sticks their head above the crowd, someone will take a shot at it. Who tried to take Stephen down in **verse 9**? What is a synagogue? (See Dictionary) Who were the individuals who comprised the *“Synagogue of the Freedmen?”* Why do you think they were going after Stephen? What do you think would have happened if Stephen had given in and compromised? Are you ever tempted to compromise your faith?
  
3. Apparently, members of *“the Synagogue of the Freedmen”* had gotten into a debate with Stephen. What can we learn about Stephen’s oratory skills from **verse 10**? Who helped him? What did the leaders of the Synagogue of the Freedmen do as a result of losing the debate (**vs. 11**)? Who else was lied against in a similar way? (See **Matt. 26:59-61**) The *“so-called”* spiritual leaders twisted the words of Stephen to make it sound like he said something he didn’t. (See **Matt. 26:63-67**) Note: Stephen would soon have to face the same evil council that Jesus had faced and was convicted by.

4. How far did the leaders of the Synagogue of the Freedmen go in attacking Stephen (**vs. 12**)? Note: this is the third of four times in the Book of Acts that believers were brought before the Sanhedrin or the Jewish ruling council. (See **Acts 4:15; 5:27; 6:12; 22:30**) Who were the other individuals who had to appear before the Sanhedrin?
  
5. What false charges were made against Stephen (**vs. 13**)? What is the meaning of the word, "*blasphemy*?" (See Dictionary) Did Stephen commit blasphemy? Is it possible Stephen simply referred to the words of Jesus in **Mark 14:57-59** & **John 2:18-22 (vs. 14)**?
  
6. What second charge was made against Stephen in **verse 14b**? Would the importance of the Jewish temple and the law be changed forever by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ? If so, how? (See **Col. 2:16-17**) What can we learn about the spiritual state of human beings from **Rom. 3:10-18**? Is anyone able to be saved by following the Old Testament law? What can we learn about the purpose of the law from **Gal. 3:24**?
  
7. As the 71 members of the Sanhedrin intently stared at Stephen, what did they notice? Who should this have reminded them of? (See **Exod. 33:20-23**) What was the cause of Moses' face glowing? Is it possible Stephen was in the presence of the Lord at this time? If so, how?
  
8. Have you ever seen a fellow Christian's face glowing as they shared Christ with others? What was it that caught your attention? Sadly, the beautiful glow on Stephen's face would not deter the corrupt religious leaders from their desire to kill him. Do you think Stephen realized that his life was on the line as he testified? How was Stephen so courageous in the face of this challenge?

### **MINER'S CORNER ~ Manna to live by!**

- As our churches grow larger, church leaders need to adapt to the growing needs.
- It is important that no members of the church fall through the cracks, especially the widows and orphans.
- Sometimes the best people to minister to a specific group are those from that group.
- *"The seven"* were the prototype of the office of deacon today.
- The elders are the spiritual leaders of the church; the deacons assist the elders in leadership as ministers of mercy through the administration of charitable gifts and by helping those in need.
- In the context, it appears *"the seven"* may have played a part in leading many priests to Christ.
- Stephen and Philip stood out among *"the seven"* and have a special place in the Bible.
- Stephen would be persecuted to the death for his faith and love for Jesus Christ.