

Lesson 4

IV. SELECTION OF THE SEVEN AND STEPHEN'S BOLD DEFENSE

(Acts 6 - 7)

A. Appointment of the Seven (6:1 - 8)

Many times when we see problems in the church we want to think we are the only ones with problems. We forget that churches have always had problems. The church at Jerusalem was no exception. The first recorded problem we find facing the church at Jerusalem had racial overtones. Many churches have faced these types of problems with various solutions. The inspired writer Luke gives God's solution for such problems. The problem: The Grecians, Hellenists as called in the NKJV, widows they felt were being neglected in the daily distribution. The apostles summon the disciples telling them "*It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.*" The solution was to have the Grecians look out among them and seek seven men. Whether these men were deacons or not is not known, but these men had qualifications to meet. They couldn't just load the jury on this one. These men had to be men first of all with a good reputation. That might let a lot of men off today. Some don't consider their reputation, how important their name is, to be kept it pure. Proverbs 22:1; Ecclesiastes. 7:1 . Secondly these men had to be filled with the Holy Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit was going to be their guide in the decisions they would make. Then they had to be full of wisdom. Wisdom is important in making decisions Proverbs 4:5 7 .

Seven men were chosen: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. Of these men only two are even heard of throughout the rest of the New Testament. Philip the great Evangelist who would first preach the Gospel to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-25). He would also lead the Ethiopian Eunuch to Christ (Acts 8:26-40).

The inspired writer mentions Stephen separately since the remainder of the chapter is devoted to him. The narrative says that "*Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people*" Acts 6:8. Many if not most of these early Gospel preachers had the power of God that enabled them to perform miracles, since the church did not have the completed New Testament. They need God's power to confirm the word being preached twas from God (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3-4). Since the revelation of God is now complete we no longer need the Gospel confirmed by miraculous gifts (2 Peter 1:3; 1 Corinthians 13:8-10; James 1:25; Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

B. Accusations Made Against Stephen (6:9 - 11)

Some of the Jews felt threatened by the growth the church was experiencing. "*Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia , disputing with Stephen.*" (Acts 6:9) The Scriptures do not reveal exactly what he preached that got under their skin, we do know he was preaching Christ, showing the difference between the Gospel and every false way. When ever the Gospel is preached fully, it will stir opposition from "the enemies of the cross of Christ." (Philippians 3:18). Notice other places that the preaching of the Gospel created an uproar: Corinth (Acts 18:12-17); Ephesus (Acts 19:23) and about every other city mentioned in the book of Acts.

The Jews the Bible says, disputed with Stephen. The word disputed comes from the Greek word *sunzeteo* sun with zeteo to seek literally meaning is to seek with, to examine or question. The same word is used in Luke 24:15

They could not stand up and resist the wisdom by which Stephen spoke, so they like others resorted to the one of the oldest tricks known to man. Find men to make false witness against him, have them

say they heard him blaspheme God. This would once and for all get rid of Stephen, and they thought their troubles. Blaspheme under the law of Moses was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16).

C. The Arrest of Stephen (6:12 - 15)

These Jews, like many others who have followed, used the old adage that *“If you cannot answer a man’s arguments, attack the man.”* Turn it into a personality contest! In order to convict him they did exactly what was done by Ahab in the Old Testament to Naboth. In order to get his vineyard, which he had refused to sell. Ahab brought false witnesses against him (1 Kings 21:1-19). When the Jews hearing Stephen succeeded in creating the right atmosphere they ceased listening to Stephen and had him arrested. The charges brought against Stephen were similar to what had been brought against Jesus (Mark 14:56-64). Later accusations were made against Paul (Acts 21:28). The Jewish council should have investigated further but they too were interested in seeing Stephen silenced! An interesting statement is made in verse 15 *“And all who sat in council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.”* Perhaps this image would haunt them for the rest of their lives for the heinous deed they had perpetrated against Stephen.

D. The Defense by Stephen (7:1 - 53)

In this chapter Stephen begins to make a defense. Of course, no defense is good when you are up against false witnesses. Some have called Stephen’s defense an apology. Not an apology in the sense we use it today saying *“I am sorry,”* quite the contrary. The noun form of the word apology appears in the Bible eight times the word *apologia* simply translated - Defense (Acts 22:1), Answer (Acts 25:16) and Clearing (2 Corinthians 7:11). The verb form *apologeomai* is used 10 times and is translated *“Shall answer”* (Luke 12:11), *Have made his defense* (Acts 19:33) and *Excusing* (Romans 2:15). Paul informed the Philippians in Philippians 1:17 he was *“set for the defense of the Gospel.”*

Stephen was then asked by the High Priest were these things true. He begins his defense by recalling Jewish history beginning with the Call of Abraham to the reign of Solomon. Because false witnesses sprinkle some truth with error he could not simply reply with a yes or no answer. One of the witnesses to these events was a young man who we will get very acquainted with later, Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:1). Saul will later use historical events to get his lessons across to his hearers (Acts 13; 1 Corinthians 10).

Stephen’s purpose for his defense was two fold to show that the accusations against him were false and to point them to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the events recorded in the Old Testament.

After Stephen spent time rehearsing their history to them he pulled the rug right out from under them by calling them *“stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!”* He says they have always resisted the Holy Spirit. He told them that their fathers had persecuted the prophets and killed any who foretold the coming of the Just one. He said they had not kept the law. The Jews began gnashing at the teeth. Stephen then gazed into heaven and told them what he saw when he said *“Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God!”* They would hear no more from him. They then cast him out of the city and stoned him. One thing that probably was remembered by them all was the way Stephen died. As they were stoning him Stephen called on God and said similar to what Jesus had said at his death *“Lord Jesus receive my spirit.”* Then he said *“Lord do not charge them with this sin.”* Then he died.

Selection of the Seven and Stephen's Bold Defense
Lesson 4

I. ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS GIVING SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

1. What was the nationality of the widows being neglected? _____

2. How many men were selected to "serve tables?" _____
3. Why didn't the apostles want to see to the needs of the neglected widows? _____

4. What is the meaning of the word deacon? _____

5. What charges were made against Stephen? _____

6. How long were the descendents of Abraham treated badly? _____
7. What did Stephen accuse these people of? _____

8. Why did Stephen say the Israelites were carried away beyond Babylon? _____

9. Where and what was the purpose of the burning bush? _____

10. What did Stephen ask the Lord to receive? _____

II. TRUE OR FALSE

- _____1. Acts 6:1 indicates that Gentiles had already been saved.
- _____2. A deacon's children must be members of the church.

_____3. Stephen spoke with wisdom.

_____4. Peter referred to Abraham in Acts 7:2.

_____5. Moses knew that he was to deliver his people when he slew the Egyptian.

III. RESEARCH

I. Give the details for building the tabernacle? _____

IV. THOUGHT QUESTION

I. Is there any difference in the phrases, “seek out from among you” and “whom we may appoint?” explain your answer _____

