

## Support for Hellenistic Jews; Martyrdom of Stephen

### Acts 6 & 7

#### Outline

- 6:1-6 | Seven men chosen to manage food distribution
- 6:7 | Summary of growth of the church
- 6:8-15 | Stephen performs miracles and refutes arguments; accused of blasphemy
- 7:1 | The high priest asks for explanation of Stephen
- 7:2-53 | Stephen's Sermon
  - v2-8, Abraham's faith
  - v9-16, Joseph and patriarchs in Egypt
  - v17-29, Moses' first 40 years in Egypt
  - v30-34, God's appears to Moses after 40 years
  - v35-43, Rebellion against Moses in wilderness
  - v44-50, Tabernacle and Temple
  - v51-53, Murder of the Righteous One
- 7:54-60 | Stephen has a vision of heaven and is stoned to death

#### Reflections

Conflicts among God's people have unfortunately resulted in judgments being made as to whether or not some who have adopted parts of the culture around them should be granted the same privileges as those who have remained faithful to traditional views. In Acts 6, we find an example of and the response of church leadership to one such conflict and are introduced to one of the group of men selected to deal with the situation, Stephen, who becomes the first martyr of the Christian church.

The setting for the activities in Acts 6 is still in Jerusalem. In particular, the focus is on a growing concern among Hellenistic Jews of some being neglected in the distribution of food for the widows. These were Jews who used Greek as their primary language and used the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint<sup>1</sup>, in their synagogues as opposed to those who kept the Hebrew language and scriptures.

This adoption of the Greek language and parts of Greek culture was frowned upon by more traditional Hebrew speaking Jews and also resulted, as in this case, in some widows who were without means of support being neglected from the daily distribution of food from the temple. This became an issue in the Christian community and the apostles determined that a group of faithful men were chosen to take over the management of this portion of food distribution among these Hellenistic widows.

The qualifications for those to be chosen were simple in some regards: of good reputation and full of the Spirit and wisdom. They were also to be chosen from among the Hellenistic Jews. The men chosen were Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

These men were not deacons but were selected for a specific task but also had ministries that went

---

1 Parts of the Septuagint are believed to have been translated as early as the 3rd Century BC and the whole of the Old Testament completed by the 2nd Century BC. This text came into wide use among the Jews of the Diaspora and even by some in Palestine.

Orr, James, ed. "Septuagint." *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939.

Siegfried, Carl, and Richard Gottheil. "HELLENISM." *Jewish Encyclopedia* - [jewishencyclopedia.com](http://jewishencyclopedia.com). 1906. Web. 25 Oct. 2015.

Smith, William. "Septuagint, The." *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Public Domain. 1884.

## Support for Hellenistic Jews; Martyrdom of Stephen

beyond the task for which they were selected. In particular, we learn that Stephen performed signs and wonders among the people and also boldly defended the faith when challenged by some from the Synagogue of Freedmen. Finally, being unable to stand against his strong testimony, they decided to present false witnesses against him which resulted in his being brought before the Council to answer the charges.

Acts 7 is Stephen's response. If there was ever a chapter in the New Testament that every Jewish person should read, this would be one of them. He lays out in a beautiful way the history of God dealing with His people and their refusal to respond. He even accuses those present of being stiff-necked just like their forefathers who refused to listen and also persecuted the very prophets sent to call them back to God. Eventually, they drive him out of the city and stone him to death.

One last character is introduced to us who will monopolize the majority of the book from this point forward, Saul of Tarsus. In Acts 8:1, we find that "Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death." This is not the last we will see of him in the book.

The final take away from these chapters is this: we might be selected for a task in the church but that doesn't mean that we are limited to only that task by God. While we might have the responsibility of managing a project or cleaning the church, but that doesn't mean that we are to neglect the gifts that God gives us — in Stephen's case, performing signs and wonders and effectively giving a defense of Jesus as the Messiah. Do the tasks assigned to you but also use the gifts that God has given you to the fullest, so that God will be glorified in all that You do.

Lord God, the One who calls His people to various tasks in the Kingdom and gives gifts necessary for furthering the Kingdom to Your glory. Help us to recognize what our gifts are and to use them effectively to the glory of Your name. Thank You for the examples of these Hellenistic Jews who accepted the call to manage a need in Your church but, in particular, for Stephen who showed us what can be accomplished for Your Kingdom when we truly live by the two greatest commandments, Love God and Love others as much as we love ourselves. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, in Jesus' name. Amen.

---

*Key Words:* New Testament, Gospels, Acts, Hellenists, Stephen, Martyrdom, Gifts, Laying on of Hands, Prayer

---

---

*Note:* This was originally published by me on [studythebook.org](http://studythebook.org) on October 25, 2015.

---