

**Bible Study Series: The Book of Acts
"Signs of a Healthy Church"**



Sacred Selections - Acts 6:1-7

Topics:

- Reflection Questions
- Important Emphasis
- Outline
- Key Terms
- Introduction
- Exploring the Text
- Understanding the Text
- Life Application

Reflection Questions

- A. What benefits and challenges arise from having different kinds of people in the church assembly where you worship?

- B. When working as part of a team, do you prefer to "do the work" or to lead and coordinate others?

Important Emphasis

Sacred Defined

The word *sacred* is an adjective used to describe a person or thing worthy of worship or declared holy. It usually appears in a religious context, but an object or place set

aside for a particular purpose can also be *sacred*. Sacred spaces and items are intended to be treated with care and respect. Jerusalem is a *sacred* place for many religions. In the secular, Fenway Park is considered a *sacred* place for Red Sox fans.

The selection, appointment, and training of church leaders are *sacred* activities.

- S** Spirit-led, Sanctified, and Set Apart
- A** Anointed and Aligned with the Word of God
- C** Christ-centered, Consecrated, and Committed,
- R** Righteous, Regenerated, Redeemed
- E** Enduring, Ethical, Exemplary
- D** Devoted, Discerning, and Disciplined

Outline

Sacred Selections (Acts 6:1-7)

- I. **The complaint to the church leaders (6:1)**
- II. **The conference of the church leaders (6:2–4)**
 - A. *Their dilemma (6:2)*
 - B. *Their decision (6:3)*
 - C. *Their duties (6:4)*
- III. **The choice by the church leaders (6:5–7)**
 - A. *The individuals (6:5)*
 - B. *The installation (6:6)*
 - C. *The increase (6:7)*

Key Terms

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Alms | <input type="checkbox"/> Greek-Speaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Persecution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bible | <input type="checkbox"/> Hebrew-Speaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Prayer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church | <input type="checkbox"/> Hellenists | <input type="checkbox"/> Preaching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complaining | <input type="checkbox"/> Holy Spirit | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consecrated | <input type="checkbox"/> Jerusalem | <input type="checkbox"/> Servant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Corruption | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Serve |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deacons | <input type="checkbox"/> Martyr | <input type="checkbox"/> Service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Devote, Devoted | <input type="checkbox"/> Ministry | <input type="checkbox"/> Set Apart |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diaconate | <input type="checkbox"/> Neglect | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discrimination | <input type="checkbox"/> Obedient | <input type="checkbox"/> Temporal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distraction | <input type="checkbox"/> Palestine | <input type="checkbox"/> Widows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Growth | | |

Introduction

In Acts chapters 1-5, Luke records key events in the development of the Christian church. From arrests at the hands of the Jews [Jewish leaders], to the attempted deception within the congregation [a corrupt husband and wife]; the early days of the church experienced some difficulties. Yet the growth was phenomenal! Chapter 6 returns to an internal problem—some apparent discrepancies in the distribution of goods to certain of the needy widows in the congregation. The result: complaints from those who thought they were being _____ against and a rising tide of anger. It was a potential disaster. It was a _____. But the Spirit-filled [and Spirit-led] apostles wisely solved the young church's problem.

At this point in Luke's gospel, we see the new faith movement begin to spread beyond Jerusalem in fulfillment of Jesus' commission—"...*Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world*" (**Acts 1:8**). The key figures in this widening mission were the _____ non-Palestinian Jewish Christians who had settled in Jerusalem and whose language, and ways were Greek.

The _____ Jews, who were in a majority in the Church of Jerusalem, were inclined to despise and neglect the minority who spoke Greek. In particular, the _____ widows received less food than their Hebrew-speaking sisters. This led to complaints, and the impartiality of the Apostles was called into question.

The Apostles, finding the distribution of charity too great a burden for them, summoned a meeting of the Church, and called upon the brethren to elect seven men to undertake this business [food distribution and serving]. The office to which they were appointed was in later times called the _____ or the office of _____ (**Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8, 12**); but the name had not yet come into use, and St. Luke consequently did not use it.

The events recorded in Acts 6:1-7, serve as a bridge between 1:1–5:42 and 6:8–8:40. It wraps up Luke's snapshots of life in the Jerusalem church with an example of internal problem solving, a practical working out of fellowship. At the same time, it introduces us to a group within the church that will be pivotal in 6:8–8:40—the Hellenists. In 6:1–7, we see those Hellenists emerge who will take the next step on the road to fulfilling the commission recorded by Luke in Acts 1:8.

The devil's next attack was the cleverest of the three imposed upon the 1st Century church. Having failed to overcome the church by either _____ or _____, he now tried _____. If he could preoccupy the apostles with social administration, which though essential was not their calling, they would neglect

their God-given responsibilities--to pray and to preach-- and so leave the church without any defense against *false doctrine*.

Q - As you study and reflect on this passage (Acts 6:1-7) concerning the Sacred Selection of church leaders, ask yourself this question, “Do leaders in my church reflect the biblical characteristics required for healthy church leadership?”

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE [NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (NASB 1995)]:

6 ¹Now at this time, as the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint developed on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. ² So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. ³ Instead, brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” ⁵ The announcement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ And they brought these men before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. ⁷ The word of God kept spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Sacred Selections

Acts 6:1-7

I. The complaint to the church leaders (6:1)

¹Now at this time, as the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint developed on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

The Greek-speaking Christians complained that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. There were more widows than usual since many of them who came from other Greek-speaking countries had returned to Jerusalem to live out their years and be buried with their ancestors. Their money may have run out, and they needed help. Widows in general needed help since property was passed on from father to son, and the son was responsible to care for the mother. She typically had no wealth of her

own. This disturbing situation caused quite a dilemma for the Apostles and became a hindrance to their efforts to create and maintain a healthy church.

II. The conference of the church leaders (6:2-4)

² So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

³ Instead, brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

A. **The dilemma (6:2)** -- So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

As a result of this dilemma [problem], the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers to discuss the need to prioritize preaching and teaching over administering a food program for the Twelve. They recognized the physical and time limitations that made it impossible for them to do both effectively.

B. **The decision (6:3)** – Instead, brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

The apostles established specific requirements for the candidates to be selected to fill these new "administrative" positions in the church:

The apostles requested that seven assistants be appointed to make sure that everyone received what they needed. The first qualification for these assistants was that they be *known*, that is, that they have a _____ . Those holding such a sensitive position would need to be trusted. Many church leaders have failed the test of being above reproach when given the opportunity to manage church resources, especially money. Churches should consider this principle when electing people to their boards.

The second qualification was being _____. Even an administrative task was a spiritual one, and the filling of the Holy Spirit was as much needed for the distribution of food as it was for the preaching of the word. The unity of the community, which these men had to maintain, was as much a witness to the Lord as was the teaching in the name of Jesus.

Finally, to be effective in their task, they needed _____ to distinguish genuine need from wants and demonstrating their ability to apply God's truth to real-life situations. The principle of distribution had been that no one lacked anything, but this also meant that no one received more than others. The assistants had to be able to judge the exact amount each person needed.

The number seven, which was commonly used for handling public business in Jewish towns, was chosen as the ideal size for this council. However, there is no indication that seven is established as a fixed number for what later would be known as the *diaconate* or office of deacon.

C. The Duties (6:4) -- .⁴ *But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*"

But we will devote ourselves to... The original expression used here [devote] means *intense* and _____ [determined, unrelenting, tenacious] application to a thing, or unwearied effort in it. (**Acts 1:14**). It means that the apostles meant to make this their constant and main object, _____ by the cares of life, and even by attention to the _____ wants and needs of the church.

To prayer. The passage suggests that the apostles would dedicate themselves to their duties, including public prayer and preaching. Although it is not explicitly stated, it is believed that the apostles also recognized the importance of private or secret prayer in preparing themselves for their public preaching.

And to the ministry of the word. To preaching the gospel; or communicating the message of eternal life to the world. The word ***ministry*** properly denotes [means, implies, alludes to] the employment of a _____, and is given to the preachers of the gospel because they are employed in this _____ as the servants of God, and of the church.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. What complaint did the Grecian Jews make? (6:1)

2. What did the apostles—the Twelve—do in response to criticism? (6:2-4)

3. Why did the Twelve choose prayer and teaching over caring for the poor? (6:2-4)
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4. What did the Twelve tell the other believers to do? (6:3)
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EXPLORING THE TEXT

III. The choice by the church leaders (6:5-7)

⁵ The announcement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ And they brought these men before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. ⁷ The word of God kept spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

A. The individuals (6:5) -- *The announcement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.*

It is evidence of the unity of the community that everyone approved of the course of action directed by the Apostles and was involved in appointing these leaders. There were no factions.

And they chose Stephen, etc. A man who soon showed that he was every way qualified for his office and fitted to also defend the cause of the Lord Jesus. This man had the distinguished honor of being the first Christian _____ .
(Acts 7)

And Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. A proselyte is one who is converted from one religion to another. (Matthew 23:15) The word does not mean here that he was a convert to Christianity--which was true--but that he had been converted at Antioch from paganism to the Jewish religion. As this is the only proselyte mentioned among the seven deacons, it is evident that the others were

native-born Jews, though a part of them might have been born out of Palestine, and have been of the denomination of *Grecians*, or *Hellenists*.

In Antioch, the disciples of Christ were first called Christians according to **Acts 11:26**.

B. The installation (6:6) -- *And they brought these men before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.*

And after praying. Praying invoked the blessing of God to attend to them in the discharge of the duties of their office.

They laid their hands on them. The act of laying hands on someone in Jewish tradition was not meant to transfer power or abilities, but rather to signify that the person received their authority or commission from those who laid hands on them—to be _____. It was a symbolic gesture, similar to how Jesus laid hands on the sick to indicate that the healing power came from Him. The laying on of hands itself did not possess any inherent healing power but served as a visible representation that the power originated from the Lord Jesus. This practice of laying hands has been consistently followed in ordination ceremonies. In the specific context mentioned, although the individuals were chosen by the church, they obtained their immediate commission and authority from the apostles. (**1 Timothy 5:22**)

Though the new office-bearers are not called *deacons* here, it is universally admitted that this was the first institution of that order in the Church; the qualifications for "the office of a Deacon" are laid down later in one of Paul's Epistles (**1 Timothy 3:8-13**).

C. The increase (6:7) -- *The word of God kept spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.*

And the word of God kept spreading. That is, the gospel was more and more successful, or became more mighty and extensive in its influence.

And the number of disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem.

The presence of highly inspired preachers and administrators, such as the apostles and the seven chosen individuals responsible for practical matters in the new church, led to the rapid spread and extensive understanding of the doctrine of God. As a result, the number of disciples experienced significant growth. This

expansion can be attributed to God's continuous blessings upon His own word, especially when proclaimed by individuals specifically equipped for this purpose.

And a great many of the priests. The conversion of a group of priests in Jerusalem is a remarkable instance of the power of the gospel. The exact size of the group is not mentioned, but it is noted that the number of priests in Jerusalem was significant. Their conversion is seen as a powerful demonstration of the truth of the gospel, considering that priests were likely among the most hostile towards it. This event is highlighted and recorded as evidence that the gospel was able to humble even the proud, haughty, selfish, and envious priests, leading them to embrace the message of the cross.

Were obedient to the faith. One design of the gospel is to demonstrate and reveal the power of truth in subduing all classes of men [and women]; therefore, in the New Testament we have the record of its having actually subdued every class to the _____ of faith.

The word "faith" in this context refers to the Christian religion. It is used as a representation of the gospel itself, highlighting the importance of faith as a requirement in the Christian belief system. To become obedient to the faith means to follow the requirements of the gospel, particularly the requirement to believe. **(Romans 10:16)** The involvement or agreement of the priests would have helped address criticism directed at the gospel, which claimed that it primarily attracted followers from lower socioeconomic classes. **(John 7:48)**

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

5. How did the group respond to the apostles' proposal? (6:5)

6. Who was selected to serve the widows? (6:5)

7. Who chose the seven candidates? (6:5)

8. How were the men given authority to do their task? (6:6)

9. What was the effect of the appointment of certain people to serve the widows? (6:7)

10. How did the church fare after the apostles delegated the serving of food to others? (6:7)

Life Application

- How can you help free your church leaders to focus on their mission of prayer, evangelism, and teaching?

- What could you do this week to help resolve a conflict between believers?

References:

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Jamieson-Faust-Brown Commentary
Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary
Navigators Life Change Series – The Book of Acts