

LESSON 6

SELECTION OF THE FIRST “DEACONS”; THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH THREATENED; SEVEN SERVANTS SELECTED (6:1–7)

Satan had first tried to stop the progress of the church from without—by having Peter and John arrested. Then he had tried to destroy the church from within—using Ananias and Sapphira. Next he had tried again from without—as all the apostles were arrested. Now he was trying again to disrupt the church from within.

1. What strengths of the Jerusalem congregation did Satan attempt to attack in these verses?
2. Who were Hellenistic Jews, and who were native Hebrews?
3. Why did the apostles specify that the church choose seven men to serve at tables?
4. What were the qualifications for the seven men to be chosen?
5. What does the background of laying-on-of-hands in Bible times tell us about its function in this induction?
6. Why is it remarkable that many priests were being converted?

ONE OF THE SEVEN (STEPHEN) ARRESTED (6:8–15)

The name of Stephen will forever be enshrined in our hearts as the first of thousands who have died for Jesus. His name is synonymous with “the first Christian martyr.” Stephen is like a meteor that flashes across the sky and then is gone. We are introduced to him in chapter 6 as one of those chosen to serve tables. By the end of chapter 7, he is dead. In a brief period, he was used mightily by God to accomplish His purposes.

7. How was Stephen’s name prophetic of his life and death?

8. What was the Synagogue of the Freedmen (6:9)?
9. Based on the accusations made against Stephen, what can we guess he was preaching?
10. What does the statement that Stephen's face was "like the face of an angel" (6:15) mean?

**STEPHEN'S DEFENSE:
A REVIEW OF JEWISH HISTORY (7:1-53)**

Stephen's defense is a sermon with unique qualities. It is one of the few in the Book of Acts spoken by someone other than an apostle, and it is the longest sermon in the book. Perhaps it is long because it is the climax of God's efforts to reach His chosen people. Some have dismissed Stephen's sermon as "little more than a dull review of Jewish history with a few insults at the end." Every indication, however, is that it was spoken by inspiration—and that every sentence in the lesson was for a purpose.

11. What were the three basic thrusts of Stephen's defense?
12. What theme did Stephen introduce with his reference to the patriarchs in 7:9?
13. Why was it significant that the heart of Stephen's sermon was the story of Moses?
14. What details did Stephen give of Moses' upbringing that are not part of the Exodus account?
15. How do the stories of Joseph and Moses, as recounted by Stephen, parallel the Jews' rejection of Christ?
16. How did Stephen approach the charge of speaking against the temple differently than he had the other charges?
17. In what ways did Stephen say his accusers were guilty of the very accusations they had brought against him?

STEPHEN'S DEATH (7:54–60)

This time no Gamaliel spoke up to cool the flames of hatred. Was Gamaliel not present on this occasion, or did he simply choose not to oppose the Council a second time? It would be hard to believe that Gamaliel approved of the action taken on this infamous day.

18. Why might it be significant that Stephen saw Jesus *standing* at the right hand of God?
19. In what ways did the stoning of Stephen break Roman and Jewish laws?
20. Why might the witnesses to this execution have entrusted their garments to Saul?