

# THE FIRST DEACONS

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Summer 2021, Acts 6:1-7

August 1, 2021

*So the word of God spread.  
The number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly,  
and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.  
Acts 6:7*

## Catching our breath

<sup>1</sup> *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing . . . .*  
Acts 6:1

- 1) Growth does not guarantee \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Luke has given the believers a new name: \_\_\_\_\_ (“believers” in Acts 2:44)

## Growing pains

<sup>1</sup> *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food . . . .*  
Acts 6:1

- 1) The church has always faced multi-culturalism: cultures clash but the gospel unites
- 2) Complaining is \_\_\_\_\_ (Philippians 2:14; 1 Peter 4:9; Exodus 16; Isaiah 58:7-12)
- 3) Growth led to an administrative \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Making sure needs are met (see 2 Thess. 3:12; Titus 2:14; ) is an important role for the disciples

## **The apostles' solution**

*<sup>2</sup> So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup> Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them <sup>4</sup> and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

Acts 6

- 1) The apostles recognized the need to share leadership (see Exodus 18)
- 2) "Wait on tables" is NOT a put down (see Romans 16:1; 1 Timothy 3; Philippians 1:1)
- 3) Overseers (elders) and deacons have different but essential ministries in the church

Key question: how do today's VDM share the apostles' "prayer and word" ministry?

## **Learning from the disciples' decision**

*<sup>5</sup> This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. <sup>6</sup> They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*

*<sup>7</sup> So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*

Acts 6

- 1) The decision was made corporately and by consensus  
Key question: how much of this process is prescriptive?
- 2) The decision honored the input of the Hellenistic members of the community
- 3) The decision reflects what the Holy Spirit thinks is most important of our leaders

## Even more Pentecost lessons for the church today

- 1) Watch (and organize) for God's surprises!

*<sup>7</sup> So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*

Acts 6

If we want to see the Word of God increase, multitudes added to the disciples, and a great company of those who are least likely to be saved brought in, there must be an adequate instrumentality. Nothing can avail without *the operation of the Holy Spirit and the smile from heaven.* from Spurgeon's "Great Success" sermon (attached below)

- 2) Rule #5 (paraphrased): Don't waste grace and power

*<sup>8</sup> Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people . . . .*

Acts 6 (go back to Acts 4:32-35 for the importance of grace and power)

- 3) It's OK to know the opposition

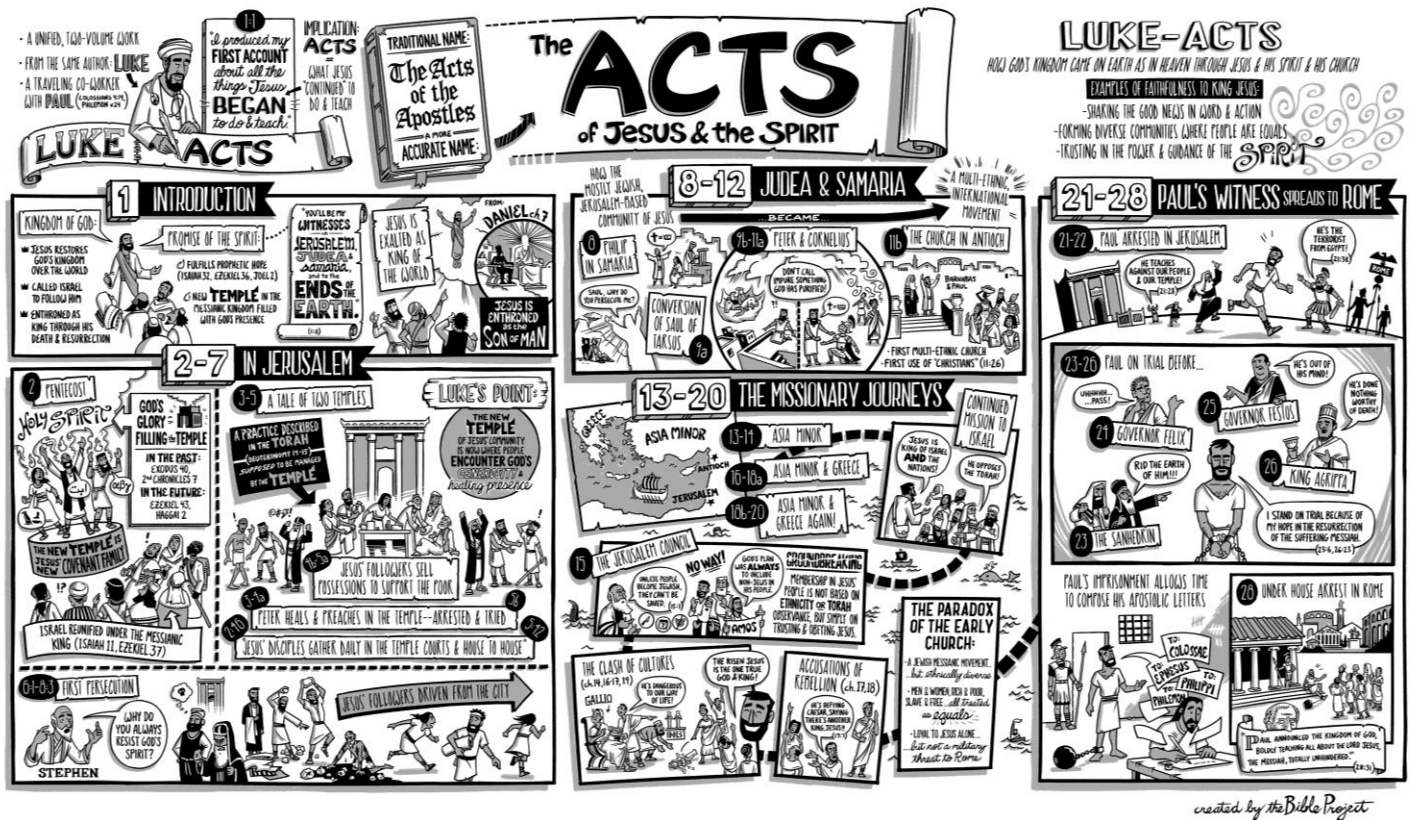
*<sup>8</sup> Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. <sup>9</sup> Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, <sup>10</sup> but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.*

Acts 6

- 4) Diaconal work must remain a priority for the church (for our members and community)

May we not take a lesson from that, that God's great influences, when they come into a man, do not concern themselves only with great intellectual problems and the like, but that they will operate to make him more fit to do the most secular and the most trivial things that can be put into his hand to do? The Holy Ghost had to fill Stephen before he could hand out loaves and money to the widows in Jerusalem.

Maclaren's work on Acts 6 (read all of Section III for the importance of the Holy Spirit)



## Resources for further studies in Acts

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at <https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg>

Spurgeon has a wonderful sermon (especially the conclusion to the unconverted) on this text at <http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/sermons/0802.htm>

I really appreciate J.C. Ryle's essay on conversion in Acts: <https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle> <https://www.onergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle>

Alexander Maclaren has an especially helpful commentary on Acts available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html>

Deffinbaugh has a helpful introduction at <https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts> His Acts series is at <https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts> His sermon on this text is at <https://bible.org/seriespage/11-growth-pains-acts-61-15>

Tim Keller has a wonderful sermon at <https://www.monergism.com/signs-king-%E2%80%93-acts-237-47> and his important ["Hope for the City"](#) sermon on Acts 8 begins with the Stephen story.

John Piper has an interesting take on this passage at <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/be-like-barnabas-not-like-ananias>

I have really appreciated John Stott's *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce's work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984).

Carl Trueman's conclusion in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020) influenced my thinking on the church. His third point, the importance of proper natural law thinking, is reflected in Kevin DeYoung's blog at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/>