

**Commentary on Acts, Chapters 6 and chapter 7 verses 1-16
by Chuck Smith 2.12.23**

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February memory verse Luke 24:45 (NKJV)

And **He** opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the **Scriptures**.

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CHAPTER 6

Now in those days, when the number of disciples was multiplied ([Act 6:1](#)),

We found the Lord adding to the church and now He's multiplying. I love the Lord's mathematics.

there arose a murmuring ([Act 6:1](#))

Now another problem with this community living that was practiced by the early church sharing everything. Another problem arises here in chapter 6.

there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations ([Act 6:1](#)).

Daily the people would come to receive their dole from the church. They had everything in common, so they had a commissary. And each day they would give out according to the needs of the people. Give them their food and all. The Grecians do not imply that they were Greeks. But they were Jews who had followed the Hellenist's culture. Many of the Jews had taken Greek names. And had become totally acculturated to the Grecian culture which was spread throughout the world by Alexander the Great. Greece brought culture to the ancient world. And even after Rome conquered over Greece, these pockets of Grecian culture remained and were strong in the ancient world. There were those who had adapted the Greek culture. There were those who were still living by a strict Hebrew culture. So when it speaks of the Grecians and the Hebrews, they were, all of them, Jews. But there were those who were of the Greek culture, the Hellenistic culture, those of the Hebrew culture.

Now those who had adopted the Hellenistic culture felt that there was favoritism when they were doling out the supplies and all. That there was favoritism being shown towards those who were of the Hebrew culture. The little old women who would come up in their Hebrew garb would get an extra dole. Where these ladies who would come in

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their Grecian fashions would get less. And they'd say, "Hey, wait a minute. This isn't right that these widows who are of the Hebrew culture are getting more than those of the Grecian culture." So they came to the disciples with this problem.

So the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them [they had a big gathering of the people], and they said, It is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God, and serve at these tables ([Act 6:2](#)).

In other words, "We have more important things to do than to stand at the tables and to dole out the church's welfare. It isn't right. It isn't reasonable that we should have to take the responsibility of doling out the church's goods."

Wherefore, brethren, look out from among yourself seven men ([Act 6:3](#))

And these are the traits and the characteristics they're to possess. One: they are to be, men of honest report, [Two:] full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business ([Act 6:3](#)).

So it isn't right that we should leave the ministry that God has given unto us to take care of the tables, so let's appoint seven men, good reputations, filled with the Holy Spirit, having wisdom, and let them take charge over the church's commissary and,

We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word ([Act 6:4](#)).

Now you remember when we were talking last Sunday about the men that God uses? They are men of prayer, and they are men of the Word. They're men who put this as the top priority in their lives. They do not allow other things to interfere with their prayer or with their study of the Word. They are men of the Word and men of prayer. And so here, this pressure to take an active role, to settle this dispute, they backed away from it. They said, "Let's just pick out seven men to do this in order that we might be able to give ourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the Word."

And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and so they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch ([Act 6:5](#));

An interesting thing appears here, and that is when they chose these seven men, look at their names: Nicolas, Parmenas, Nicanor--these are Greek names. So those of the Grecian culture felt that their women were getting a lesser dole, and so in wisdom, they chose men who obviously had come from a Grecian culture themselves to take charge of overseeing the church's welfare. It was a wise way to solve a difficult problem.

When we were growing up, I had two brothers. And my mom was a outstanding pie baker, among other things, and there was always that problem of the last piece of pie.

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And so often my brother and I would be vying for that last piece of pie. And that's a polite way of saying fighting. I've fought over more than one piece of pie. And it was an advantage of being the older brother, too. But when we would bring our dispute to my mom and we would both be claiming that piece of pie or desiring our portion of that piece of pie, she would always let one of us cut it in half and the other one got the first choice. Boy, I mean we got out the micrometers. It was just a good solution to a difficult problem. And so it is interesting to me that in picking these men, they picked men with Greek names. Indicating that they probably had themselves a Hellenist cultural background.

It would be easy for anyone with any kind of ambition to be going up the ladder in the church to say, "Hey, wait a minute. Why do you want me to wait on tables? I want to preach the Gospel." The qualifications by which they chose these men, they would've all been qualified ministers of the Gospel for sure. Yet, these are the men who were chosen. But to me it is interesting that as we move on in the book of Acts, the activities of the next person that we get to are none other than Stephen who was one of those chosen who was spoken of as a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. We will see Stephen being used by God in things other than waiting on tables. But that's where he went to begin his ministry.

There are a lot of people who feel called to the ministry. When they attend Calvary Chapel and they see the marvelous work that God is doing here, it has a way of inspiring men to go into the ministry. It is interesting that during the first twenty years or so of my life, when we were scraping the bottom all of the time to get enough money to buy food and the necessities, and pastoring little churches, fifty, sixty, seventy people, at that time I seemed not to inspire anybody to go into the ministry. But the interesting thing about those today who are being inspired towards the ministry is that they want to begin with a full time pastorate of a church of five hundred or so. A church that is able to provide them with a nice parsonage and an adequate salary. And they seem to forget that the first twenty years of my ministry I worked in secular jobs to keep the family in food and clothes and shoes. "Oh, but I feel that God is calling me to the full time ministry." Romaine has a good way of dealing with these people. He gives them a mop and says, "Alright, you want to start your full time ministry? The men's room is back there. You might as well learn what the ministry is all about."

But, it is important that we start somewhere. But rarely does a person start at the top. God usually brings us through the ranks. Stephen started on waiting tables, and I'm certain that he was faithful in that area and then God moved him up. So many times people come up and say, "I feel called to the ministry". And I say, "Do you teach a Sunday school class?" "No." I say, "Well, that's where you start. Go over and volunteer to teach a Sunday school class. Are you on the prayer watch?" "No." "Then volunteer to take a prayer time." That's where you really start in the ministry. You start in those more insignificant places. When you are faithful in the little things, the Lord will then raise you up and give you bigger things. It is interesting to me that the next two people that we come across in the record are not apostles but are two of these men who were chosen

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to wait tables, Stephen and Phillip. And we see the marvelous work that God raises them to having begun waiting tables. It isn't long before God takes them from there. So they chose these seven men.

Who they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them ([Act 6:6](#)).

We have, it seems, developed a custom of laying hands on people and then praying. But from the book of Acts, it would seem that their pattern was praying and then laying their hands on people. We find this in a couple of places where they pray and then laid hands on them. I think we find that pattern also in about the thirteenth chapter when Paul and Barnabus were sent forth in their ministry. Verse three of chapter 13, "And when they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away." So the pattern was to pray and then lay hands on them. I don't know that there is anything to that, but it's just interesting to me that we have that other tendency of just laying hands on people then praying, where they did it the other way around.

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly ([Act 6:7](#));

Again, we see the work of God adding to the church. A powerful community.

and a great company even of the priests were obedient to the faith ([Act 6:7](#)).

Now one of these seven men,

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue on the Libertines, and the Cyrenians, and the Alexandrians, and those of Cilicia and Asia, and they were disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist [or to counteract] the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake ([Act 6:8-10](#)).

Here they got into these arguments, but Stephen was just walking all over them. He spoke with such wisdom and such a Spirit that he was just putting them down.

So they suborned men [or paid off men], which said, We've heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, came upon him, and they caught him, and brought him to the council, and they set up the false witnesses, which said, This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel ([Act 6:11-15](#)).

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Beautiful, isn't it? And so, because they could not overcome his argument, the wisdom, the Spirit by which he spoke, they went to devious methods to stop his witness, hiring these men to make these false accusations against him, accusing him of blasphemy. Accusing him of speaking against the temple and against the law of God.

Now, there probably was a certain element of truth, for it is quite possible that Stephen did tell them that this temple is going to be destroyed. Because Jesus had told the disciples that "not one stone was going to be left standing upon another" of that temple when they asked Him of the signs of His coming and the end of the age. They were there in the temple and they were looking at these huge stones, and Jesus said, "Not one stone is going to be left standing on another." So Stephen could have been telling them that, "Hey, this temple is going to be destroyed." And also he could have been telling them, "That having the law of Moses is not enough for salvation. You must believe in Jesus Christ to be saved. That salvation cannot come by the law of Moses, but salvation comes through a living faith in Jesus Christ." And it could very possibly be that Stephen was saying these things, and they just twisted them slightly or reported only half of what he said.

In the early church when a dispute arose among the Grecians--that is, those Jews of the Grecian culture. They were actually Jews, but they had followed the Grecian culture, which was a universal culture as the result of Alexander the Great's conquest of the world. He left little pockets of Greek culture in the major areas and in Jerusalem. There were many who were no longer kosher. No longer following the Hebrew culture. But had adopted the Grecian culture, though they were still Jews. They felt that their widows were being slighted when the church was doling out its welfare program. And so they complained to the apostles, who said, "Let us appoint seven men that are of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, to take care of this ministry of administering the church's welfare, in order that we might give ourselves continually to fasting and prayer." And so Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, was chosen as one of the seven, as also was Philip. Now these men were chosen for the task of waiting tables. However, the Holy Spirit had other plans for them. But, I do believe that their faithfulness in those little things is what qualified them for the greater ministry that God had.

We really don't start at the top in our ministry for the Lord. You have to start off with the little things. You have to start off with a plain, simple task. And as Jesus said, "Thou hast been faithful in a few things, now I will make you ruler of many." And I think that this is the process that the Lord does follow. Our faithfulness in the little things. So often a person comes and says, "I want to get into the ministry". And I say, "Go to the Sunday school department and volunteer, that's the best place to start in the ministry." If you can learn to relate God's truth to children then you can relate it to anybody. It's important that we get started in the Sunday school or some other small task in order that we might develop our own abilities as well as test to see if this is what God has actually called us to.

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So many times when people say, "I want to go into the ministry," they expect me to dismiss Romaine and put them in his place on the staff. And there have been those that have requested that we do that. But I'm convinced that every church needs a Romaine.

So Stephen was one of those that was chosen, full of wisdom, full of the Holy Spirit, and of a good report. But Stephen soon got into trouble. Not with the church, but because the Lord was working mightily through his life with great wonders--that is, the works of God that would cause people to wonder at them and miracles that he was doing. And so there were those of the synagogue of the Libertines who called him and challenged him. And they were not able to really deal with the Spirit of wisdom by which he spoke. So they hired some men to bear false witness against Stephen. And as Stephen was standing there in the counsel to face these charges, they all saw his face as though it was the face of an angel, that shining beautiful glow of the Spirit upon Stephen.

And so that brings us to chapter 7. As we noted, chapter 7 is really just a continuation of chapter 6, and you can't really start straight off in seven, you've got to have the background from six to understand the beginning.

CHAPTER 7:1-16

Then said the high priest, Are these things so? ([Act 7:1](#))

You see, you've got to have chapter 6 where they accuse Stephen of blaspheming God, of saying that the temple was going to be destroyed, and of blaspheming Moses. Speaking against Moses and the temple. These were the false charges that were made--partially true. And, of course, a partial lie is probably one of the hardest things to fight. Partial truth, partial lie is extremely difficult to combat. An outright lie is no problem. But partial truth, partial lie is difficult to combat, and this is what he was facing. He, no doubt, had declared that Jesus was going to establish a new order. And that God was not met just in the temple, but God is now dealing with men everywhere in their hearts and lives. So the priest said, "Are these things so?"

And he said, Men, and brethren, and fathers, hearken ([Act 7:2](#));

So now begins Stephens' defense before the counsel, which is going to lead to his death. He is going to so anger them that they are going to pick up stones and gnash their teeth against him and stone him. It is interesting that in his defense he is, first of all, the accused. They have made these accusations against him, but before he is finished with his defense, he becomes the accuser and he accuses them. And his accusations of them was something that they couldn't handle, and they took up stones and killed him. So he starts his defense in recounting their history. And as he recounts their history, going back to their father Abraham, whom they all acknowledged as the father of their nation, how that God had called him out of the land of his fathers to come to a land that God would ultimately give unto him and unto his seed for a possession. How that he journeyed to Haran until his father died, and then came on to the land that

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God had given to him. However, though God had promised him the entire land, he did not personally gain any inheritance in the land. Except that when his wife died, he bought a cave to bury her in, and that was the only part of the land that Abraham ever possessed--the burial cave that he had purchased from the people of the land. But then God had told Abraham that his seed was to go into a strange land where they would dwell for four hundred years. At which time God would deliver them from that land, and at that time He would give to them the land that He had promised unto them. And, that God would then judge the nation that had made them serve in such terrible bondage.

So he gave to Abraham the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him ([Act 7:8-9](#)),

The Jews not only lived in the present, they also lived in the past. Their history is extremely important to them. They have great reverence for the dead. And there is a feeling among the Jews that if you want to be near to God then you should be near the body of His saints. So they have a common practice of going to the graves of the patriarchs to pray. So at the cave of Mek Pela there in Hebron, you'll find the Jews coming there by the hundreds to pray there at the burial cave where Abraham and Jacob were buried. You'll find in Jerusalem on Mount Zion there is a place called the "Tomb of David". And anytime of the day, you can go in there and find the older men, as a rule, praying there by the tomb of David. The same is true of the tomb of Rachel near Bethlehem. And they go to the graves of righteous people to pray because they have a feeling that the Spirit of God still remains around the graves of righteous people, and that's a good place to get close to God. They prided themselves in their fathers and they were always talking about "our fathers" and always with great pride.

Stephen, in his address, is going to be showing them where the history of their fathers isn't as illustrious and glorious as they would like to believe. Their fathers for envy sold Joseph into Egypt. They rejected Joseph. Sold him as a slave to Egypt, but God was with him. And He delivered him out of all of his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh the king of Egypt, who made him the governor over Egypt and all of his house.

Now there came a dearth over the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance ([Act 7:11](#)).

You notice "our fathers", but Joseph has been cast out by them.

But our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first ([Act 7:11-12](#)).

He's really building the case on "our fathers". He's showing them that Judah and Levi and all these rotten brothers are actually their fathers.

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And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers; and Joseph's family was made known to Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and his family, seventy-five all together. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died there, and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Emmor, the father of Sychem. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, till another king arose, which knew not Joseph ([Act 7:13-18](#)).