

Murmuring and Persecution(Acts 6)

Introduction/Review

To get a better understanding of the opening words of Chapter Six, we need to remember what had just occurred. The events surrounding Ananias and Sapphira had created a fear and awe among all those living in Jerusalem. After their death's for dishonesty and lying, the church continued to grow. The people viewed them with respect and esteem, but no one wanted any type of casual relationship with them. Luke is clear, they were either a disciple or they did not join with them.

So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things. 12 And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. 13 Yet none of the rest dared join them, but the people esteemed them highly. 14 And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, Acts 5:11-15

The chapter closed with a description of the continuing work of the apostles.

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5:42

Problems with The Daily Distribution(6:1-6)

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Acts 6:1

It is in the midst of "those days," when the apostles were "teaching every day," "believers were the more added," and "the number of disciples was multiplying," a problem arose within the church. Luke sums it up with the terms "there arose a murmuring." Unhappiness among the Hellenists broke out in a "grumbling, complaining and muttering against." During the daily distribution, some of the widows who were from among the Israelites who lived out among the Greeks (Hellenist or Grecian Jews), were not properly being cared for. These would be the people described in the second chapter as "from every nation under heaven," and later described as being "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11). These people were sojourners who had come to Jerusalem for the Pentecost and remained as members of the church. These would be widows who had come along with the men and would have no family among those who lived there. This is the third time this event has been described by Luke so it is important for us to see the others.

Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. Acts 2:44-45

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. Acts 4:32-35

He is very specific in the first account that it was from among "all who believed" that they "had all things common," and that it was these believers who "sold their possessions and goods" and in the midst of these same believers where "they divided them among all." Again in the second account, it was the "multitude of them who believed" who "had all things common," and in the midst of these believers "nor was there anyone among them who lacked." Again, it is the disciples "who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds," and it is the disciples who "distributed to each as anyone had need." All of this occurred within the church among the disciples of Jesus.

Now with the numbers growing and multiplying a point has been reached where there is too much to do and not enough time and people to do them and some of the widows were not getting what they needed. Instead of solving the problem they compound it by grumbling. Instead of dealing with this privately, the twelve call the entire congregation together.

There are only two solutions. Either the apostles take more time to do this thus leaving less time for preaching, or they find others who are qualified to do this task. The Spirit inspires them to do the latter. Remember the apostles were highly qualified men who could do something no one else could do.

Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." Acts 1:21-24

Few others among these disciples could “become a witness of His resurrection as the apostles” were doing. So it was not desirable that these highly qualified men should set aside this important task that only they could do to “serve tables.” Yet this too was an important task. They would be over the money that was being given by the disciples. They would have to take that money and distribute it to those who had need with both wisdom and compassion. But it is obvious that though godly men would be needed there were many more men who could be honest and wise than there were men who had been with Jesus from the time of baptism of John until His ascension.

There are three qualifications. First, each of these seven men must have a good reputation for honesty, integrity and fairness. The word simply means “being witnessed,” but in the context of the murmuring and the task at hand it would mean that there was no one among those present who would testify that such men were not worthy. The others have to do with their spiritual characteristics. It is obvious that the wisdom they are to be full of is determined by their own effort and toil, but the Holy Spirit could either be the miraculous measure they received from the laying on of the apostles hands, or the fruits of the Spirit described by Paul in Galatians. The disciples put forward the seven men and after praying, the apostles immediately appointed them to the office by laying hands upon them.

After this event, things continued to progress and a great company of the priests began to obey the gospel, giving greater and greater credibility and honor to the message.

Stephen: The Flashpoint that Scattered the church. (6:8-15; 7:1-60)

The winds of change began soon after the seven were appointed. Although Luke will not explain in detail until Chapter Eight, miraculous abilities were transferred from the apostles to other Christians through the laying on of the apostles hands (Acts 8:14-20). The seven all had hands laid upon them and soon after this, Stephen began to perform miracles. This was the first time anyone but the apostles is described by Luke as doing miracles.

We know nothing else about Stephen except his name is a Hellenistic name and likely means he was a Jew from another part of the world. Not only did Stephen do the work he was appointed to do, but he also continued his efforts to influence others to serve Jesus, with new abilities he began to do great wonders among the people in Jerusalem. began to do The Holy Spirit gave Stephen the ability to perform miracles (*wonders and signs*) and he was able to do great good. Here are the only things we know about him:

Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, 6:5

Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 6:8

they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. 6:10

being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing 7:55

And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 7:59

He cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." 7:60

We know nothing else about him except what is revealed above. We know from his name that he was probably a Hellenist, and while working he came across a group of men from the Synagogue of the Freedmen who decided to debate him and seek to destroy his doctrine and influence. But since Stephen is speaking by inspiration they were unable to do so.

But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; 20 for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Mt 10:19-20

But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Mark 13:11

Since they were arguing with the Holy Spirit they could not possibly out think or out reason the discussion. Their integrity and honor are non-existent. They follow the example of Jezebel.

She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; 10 and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die. I King 21:9-10

The False Charges:

*We have heard him speak blasphemous words against **Moses** and **God**." 6:11*

*This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this **holy place** and **the law**; 6:13*

*Heard him say: Jesus of Nazareth will destroy **this place** and change the **customs which Moses delivered** to us." 6:14*

The court is the same one Jesus faced, Peter and John faced and all the twelve had just faced.