

Acts 6

Stephen and the Sanhedrin

<p>God</p> <p>Jesus Christ</p> <p>Holy Spirit</p> <p>Apostles</p> <p>Church</p> <p>Grecian Jews</p> <p>Hebrew Jews</p> <p>Seven men</p> <p>Full of Spirit</p> <p>Stephen,</p> <p>The martyr</p> <p>High Priest</p> <p>Sanhedrin,</p> <p>Teachers</p> <p>of law,</p> <p>A young</p> <p>man named</p> <p>Saul,</p> <p>Synagogue of</p> <p>Freedmen</p>	<p>Acts 6:7. “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.” With this statement, Luke closes out the Jerusalem evangelism. Jesus’ next move was in the other regions of Israel and this will be our next lesson. The encounter of Stephen with the Jewish leaders serves as a connecting link in Luke’s narrative.</p> <p>NOTE: Luke used the foregoing statement and other similar summary statements to indicate a change in the direction of God’s evangelism program in this document entitled Acts, or “The Acts of The Apostles.” In this case the evangelism program was carried from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. See Acts 8:1. The territory changed, and to some degree, the culture of the people. This will happen along the guidelines of Jesus’ commission (1:8). For other similar summary statements see 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:10, 20; 28:30, 31.</p> <p>Scene # 1. 6:1-7: The numerical growth of the church was increasing and so was the need for the daily distribution of food for those who could not support themselves, namely, the widows. Note the response to the preaching: 3,000, 2:41; 5,000, 4:4; Men and women added, 5:14. The number was increasing, 6:1. A large number of priests became obedient to the faith, 6:7.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The disciples could be divided into two groups according to their heritage. They were Jews but some were identified as Grecian Jews. They spoke the common Greek language of the Roman Empire in Asia. Those who lived in the Jerusalem area would be known as Hebraic Jews. They would have spoken the Hebrew or more likely the Aramaic language. 6:1. The sharing of food and other domestic needs started when the first three thousand were added to the saved (2:44, 47). Many of these people had come to Jerusalem from foreign nations (2:5-11). They wanted to stay on to learn more about Jesus Christ and to share in the fellowship of evangelism (2:42; 4:31). The “all things common” program was supported, in part, by contributors like Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus (Barnabas), and people like Ananias and Sapphira (4:36; 5:1, 2). The twelve apostles were the overseers of the church in the beginning. Elders would be appointed later (11:30). They were all instructed by Jesus, the king, via the Holy Spirit. See John 14:26; 15:26, 27; 16:12-15. The Twelve’s main concern was prayer (keeping in step with the Lord’s wishes) and the “ministry of the word” to both the saved and the “corrupt generation” of Jews (2:40-42). The Twelve laid their hands on seven men who were full of the Spirit and wisdom. They took the responsibility for this communal living program of the church. They would all be scattered shortly; therefore, the communal living aspect would cease. 8:1. Of course, in times of severe famine believers would show the sincerity of their love by practicing the “you eat, I eat” communal principle. See Acts 11:28-30; II Cor. 8:14. The fact that most of these seven men had Greek names may suggest they were Grecian Jews. One, Nicolas, a proselyte, had been converted from paganism to the Jewish faith. <p>Scene # 2. 6:8-7:60. Jews from out of town, the Synagogue of the Freedmen, moved the Sanhedrin court with their lies to kill Stephen.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Stephen was one of a new group of preachers who had the power of the Holy Spirit (10). The Sanhedrin listened to Stephen’s summary of Jewish history until he charged them with “always resisting the Holy Spirit.” He also charged them with betraying and murdering the Righteous One. “When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.” 7:54. However, what moved them to stone Stephen to death was when he proclaimed; “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” 7:56. Jesus is standing there yet as the church’s Prince and Savior. 5:31. “Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” 7:58. <p>Stephen’s last prayer was for the Jews. A lesson on forgiveness for believers: “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” 7:59.</p>
--	--

Questions for Discussion

A. **Summary statements.** Please read these scriptures: Acts 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30, 31.

1. What is similar about the content in these scriptures?
2. What does each scripture suggest had happened before this summary statement?
3. How would you categorize the message about what happened?
 - a. Negative.
 - b. Positive.
4. Which of the following best relates to what caused the foregoing to take place?
 - a. The churches dedication to regular worship services to God.
 - b. The quality of the Bible classes for the members of the churches.
 - c. The evangelism programs our king was directing from heaven with the help of the Holy Spirit in cooperation with the apostles and the church members.
5. How did the geography change after each summary statement?
6. Where did the evangelism program start and in which direction did it appear to be going?

B. **Scene # 1. Numerical growth tribulations.**

1. Although Jesus' evangelism had been for the Jews, two groups of people were identified by Luke. Please name them.
2. Name a Christian who became an example of sharing his possessions. What did he do?
3. How did the responsibility of the leadership shift from one group to another in the early years of the existence of the church?
4. Why did the twelve apostles want to delegate authority to other Spirit filled people in regard to the need for the physical care of certain church members?
5. Does Jesus command His church to practice communal living today?

C. **Scene #2. Stephen and the Sanhedrin court.**

1. How is this encounter a pivotal point in Jesus' evangelism?
2. Identify the people who started this encounter. What were their charges?
3. What may have caused the members of the Sanhedrin court to view Stephen's face as an angel?
4. How far back into history did Stephen start his discourse?
5. How did Stephen try to help his audience understand how the charges against him were about what His promises to Abraham were all about? See Acts 7:37, 49, 50.
6. As any good speaker would do, Stephen brought his sermon to a fitting close. How did he close his lesson?
7. Although his closing remarks infuriated the Jewish leaders, what caused them to kill him?
8. Who was the significant person watching and applauding Stephen's death?
9. How did Stephen follow the example of Jesus in his response to their evil deed?