

## Acts 6 (NIV)

### *The Choosing of the Seven*

*6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 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. 3 Brothers and sisters, 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 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word 'apostle' as "one of an authoritative New Testament group sent out to preach the gospel and made up especially of Christ's 12 original disciples and Paul." The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word 'disciple' as "one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another" In the Book of Acts, Dr. Luke uses the word apostle as someone that was taught by Jesus and a disciple believed in Jesus. Based on these definitions as believers we are also disciples of Jesus.

In these verses, we are told about two different kinds of Jews, Hellenistic and Hebraic. There are more than one kind of Jew because Israel and Judah were conquered and scattered. The Northern tribes of Israel were conquered by the Assyrians and scattered and then Judah was captured and taken to Babylon. Daniel 2:36-40 tells us about the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar. When Daniel interpreted the dream with God's help we find out that each section of statues body was a different country that would lord over Israel. These included the Babylonians (the golden head), Medes and Persians (the breast of silver), the Greeks (the brass thighs), the Romans (the iron legs) and the divided world (the feet of iron and clay). Jesus was symbolized by the destroying rock. At this point in time, Israel was under Roman rule. The Hellenistic Jews had ended up in Greece during the rule of Alexander the Great. The Hellenistic Jews spoke Greek and the Hebraic Jews spoke Aramaic from Assyrian and Persian control.

"Satan loves to use an unintentional wrong to begin a conflict. The Hebrews were right in their hearts, and the Hellenists were right in their facts. These were perfect conditions for a church-splitting conflict." Guzik

The disagreement was about the care of widows was interfering with sharing the Gospel. Those that were preaching did not have time to spend taking care of widows.

*6:5 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. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 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.*

The problem was solved by delegating the care of the widows to other men. They chose seven men who were of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. (NASB) Paul puts a title to these men in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8 and that title is 'deacon'. 1 Timothy 3:8 says "In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain." These verses tell us that the deacons were ordained because they were chosen and then prayed over.

The important point about creating these positions was that spreading the Gospel was NOT more important than caring for the widows. One name stands out in the list above the rest and that is Stephen. Luke called him out specifically as being *a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*. Does this mean that the other men were not full of faith and of the Holy Spirit? No, Luke was most likely drawing attention to Stephen because of what happens later to Stephen. The result of solving this potentially divisive issue was that *“the word of God kept on spreading; the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”*

### ***Stephen Seized***

*6:8 Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. 9 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—who began to argue with Stephen. 10 But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.*

*11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”*

In verse 3, the deacons are described as full of the spirit and of wisdom. In verse 5, Stephen is described as a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Here in verse 8, Stephen is described as “a man full of God’s grace and power, they performed great wonders and signs among the people. It looks as though Stephen is growing beyond caring for the widows. Throughout the Gospels and Acts, we have seen that these characteristics in Jesus and the apostles. They have caused Jewish leaders to become jealous.

*6:12 So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. 13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. 14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.”*

*15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*

These Jewish leaders began to argue with Stephen.

Those from Cilicia: “The mention of Cilicia suggests this may have been Paul’s synagogue before he was converted. He came from Tarsus in Cilicia.” (Lovett)

They weren’t successful because Stephen was speaking with wisdom and the Spirit. The Jewish leaders tried to overcome their inability to win their arguments with Stephen by creating false gossip or rumors or lies against Stephen. We have heard these same techniques used by the Jewish leaders during Jesus’ trial before the Sanhedrin. Matthew 26:59-61 says *“The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally, two came forward and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’”*

Popular opinion changed easily at that time. One minute they were for Stephen and against him the next. We saw the same thing happen to Jesus. Consider how they felt about Jesus in Luke 19:35-40

(Triumphal entry) and then in Luke 23:18-23. (Crucifixion) We are again facing the mob mentality. When they looked at Stephen they saw the face of an angel.

“The face of an angel also means that Stephen was at perfect peace. His face was not filled with fear or terror, because he knew his life was in God’s hands and that Jesus never forsakes His people.”  
Guzik