

Acts Revisited

Chapter 6

Seven Men Chosen to Serve Tables (1-7)

- Church growth statement – while the disciples were increasing (1)
- A complaint (1)
- Hellenistic Jew
 - Born of a Jew, but usually outside of Palestine; spoke the Greek language; used the Septuagint in their synagogues; Greek in culture.
- Native Hebrews
 - Those born in Palestine and who spoke the Hebrew language.
- Widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food (1)
- The Twelve (Apostles) called a congregational meeting of the complainers (2)
- The Apostles should not be serving tables and then neglect the Word of God (2)
- Verse two shows the primary function of leadership in the church!
- In order to serve (word for deacon in the verb form) tables
- Select among the complainers (3)
- Seven men
 - Good reputation – men of integrity
 - Full of the Spirit – full of the fruit of the spiritual life – Galatians 5:22-23
 - Full of Wisdom – to be prudent and skillful in distributing funds or food
- They will be in charge of this task – delegation of duties (3)
- We, Apostles, will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (4)
- The congregation liked the idea and chose seven Hellenistic Jewish men (from the group within the church where the complaint came from)
- All had Greek names (5)
 - Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch
 - Nicolas possibly had followers who went astray in Revelation 2:6-7
- After the selection by the congregation, they were brought before the Apostles for ordination or appointment (6)
- The Apostles prayed (6)
- The Apostles laid their hands on them (6)
- First mention of this in the NT

- Used in OT for bestowing a blessing
- Setting apart a sacrificial animal
- Commissioning a successor
- Apostles' laying on of hands passed on miraculous power
- Because the Apostles handled the situation properly and swiftly, growth takes place (7)
- Great number of priests
- Being obedient to the faith – faith ALWAYS included obedience

Stephen is arrested (8-15)

- The death of Stephen, the first recorded Christian martyr, connects Saul (Apostle Paul) with the early days of the church.
- Stephen found favor in the eyes of God – Grace (8)
- Stephen was full of “power” – working miracles (8)
- Up to this point no one performed miracles except the Apostles
- Stephen, and the other men, had the laying on of the Apostles' hands
- Was performing shows continuous action (8)
- The “Freedmen” rose up against Stephen (9)
 - Including those from Cyrenians – chief city in North Africa
 - Also including Alexandrians – Major city in Egypt
 - And also from Cilicia and Asia – modern day Turkey
- They had no strength to withstand (10)
 - The wisdom – wisdom as in his knowledge of the Old Testament?
 - The spirit of Stephen (or Holy Spirit)? Capital S or Lower case s?
 - KJV is lower case
 - NASB, ASV, NIV are all upper case
- These Freedmen bribe men to say that they heard Stephen speak blasphemous against Moses and God (11).
- The Freedmen stirred up the people – similar tactics that were used to put Jesus to death (12).
- Stephen is brought before the Council and tried (12)
- The Freedmen put forth these bribed men as witnesses against Stephen (13)
- They accuse him of speaking against the holy place (temple) and the Law (13)
- These false witnesses take Stephen's words out of context (14)
- Jesus warned that the temple would be destroyed (14) – Matthew 24:1-2
- These false witnesses said that Stephen was teaching that Jesus would replace the customs of Moses with something else (14)
- The entire Council looked intently at Stephen (15)
- Stephen's face looked like that of an angel? (15)

Doctrines from Chapter 6

- No favoritism should be shown in the church – Hellenistic verses native Jewish
- Meeting the congregation's needs – widows in the DAILY serving of food
- Each function in the church is important – serving tables or teaching the Word
- The primary function of the leadership is the ministry of the Word
- Delegation is biblical
- Selection and ordination as taught here in Acts 6
- Laying on of the Apostles' hands passing on miraculous power
- Faith has ALWAYS included obedience!

Gareth Reese on Ordination - New Testament History – Acts, College Press, 1976, page 268.

It is not enough that they be elected by the suffrages of the people. The common-sense of mankind requires that all candidates for important offices, whether civil or ecclesiastical, shall be installed with some solemn and impressive ceremonies. And hence the apostles said to the disciples at Jerusalem, "You choose . . . We will appoint (ordain)." This is all that is meant in the Scriptures by ordination. It is simply a solemn setting apart of such persons to their respective offices as have been previously elected by the suffrages of the congregation, according to the standard of qualifications laid down by the Holy Spirit.

That this was always done by the imposition of hands, with prayer and fasting, seems clear from the following Scripture: (1) Acts 6:5, 6: "And the saying pleased the whole congregation. And they chose Stephen . . . , Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed they laid their hands on them." (2) Acts 13:1-3: "Now there were in the church which was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers . . . Barnabas and Saul . . . And when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." (3) Acts 14:23: "And when they ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they had believed." "Neither ecclesiastical nor extraordinary powers are imparted by ordination. There can be no 'direct succession' by the laying on of hands. The claims of religious groups to pass on powers has made possible tyranny in the name of piety," wrote L. Edsil Dale.⁸ And this conclusion is right. Ordination is the ceremony that inducts the elected person into the office. But no ecclesiastical rights or privileges are imparted by ordination. It is true that when the apostles laid on hands, they often passed on special powers (spiritual gifts), but there are no apostles in the flesh today, it must be remembered, to pass on such powers. It shall be shown in chapter 8 that the passing on of special powers did not go beyond the apostles. So, while it is true that the laying on of an apostle's hands often imparted special powers, it is also true that the laying on of hands in the Bible was often only symbolic.