



Servants of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:1-7)

Notes: Week Thirteen

Acts 6:1-7 (NIV)

The Choosing of the Seven

6 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews^[a] 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.”

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.

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 6:1](#) That is, Jews who had adopted the Greek language and culture

Acts 6:1-7 (HCSB)

Seven Chosen to Serve

6 In those days, as the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews^[a] against the Hebraic Jews^[b] that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. ² Then the Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, “It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to handle financial matters.^[c] ³ Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry.” ⁵ The proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.^[d]

⁷ So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 6:1](#) Jews of Gk language and culture
b. [Acts 6:1](#) Jews of Aram or Hb language and culture
c. [Acts 6:2](#) Or *to serve tables*
d. [Acts 6:6](#) The laying on of hands signified the prayer of blessing for the beginning of a new ministry.

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible¹

Acts 6:1-7

6:1 The distinction between **Hellenistic** and **Hebraic Jews** probably refers to their respective languages. Many Jews whose primary language was Greek were converted to Christianity (e.g., Paul; [Ac 9](#); see note at [22:3](#)). Needy Hellenistic believers felt they had been neglected in the early church's charity **distribution**. This imbalance may have arisen due simply to the logistical challenge caused by the rapid addition of Hellenistic Jewish Christians. The existing church structure proved unable to meet the growing demands. It was time for change.

6:2-4 The distinction between those responsible for **preaching** and those responsible for distribution of food marks the beginning of functional distinction of roles and responsibilities in the early church. The apostles (**the Twelve**) believed **prayer** and preaching were their primary duties. It is not that other roles were unimportant. In fact, the high requirements (**good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom**) that had to be met by the **seven men** who would take over the **duty** of food distribution signals the importance of all roles in Christian service. Each of the "seven men" filled a position that later came to be reserved for deacons. Informally, therefore, these men were the first Christian deacons. They were responsible for the practical needs of the congregation.

6:5-6 **Stephen** and six others (their Greek names probably identify them as Hellenistic believers) were selected as the first deacons. They were set apart for service by prayer and the laying on of **hands** by the apostles. The laying on of hands occurs in several contexts in Acts ([8:17](#); [13:3](#); [19:6](#)). Here, as in [13:3](#), it indicated the church's recognition that God had called these people to a particular ministry.

6:7 Bold **preaching about God** drove growth in the **number of the disciples** in the early church. Even **a large group of priests** became followers of Christ. Luke did not specify who the priests were, but they were probably those who performed duties in connection with worship at the temple. This put them in a good position to hear the apostles preach on a regular basis.

English Standard Version - Study Bible²

Acts 6:1-7

6:1-12:25 *The Witness beyond Jerusalem.* Beginning with Greek-speaking Jewish Christians in Jerusalem ([6:1-7](#)), the Christian gospel was proclaimed to an ever-widening circle—to Samaria ([8:4-25](#)), to an Ethiopian ([8:26-40](#)), to a Gentile God-fearer ([10:1-48](#)), and to the Gentiles of Antioch ([11:19-30](#)). Key figures in the outreach were the Hellenists Stephen and Philip, the apostle Peter, and eventually Paul and Barnabas. The stage was then set for Paul's ministry that would go to the "end of the earth" ([1:8](#)).

6:1-7 *Seven Chosen to Serve the Hellenist Widows.* The growth of the church created problems when a number of Hellenistic (i.e., Greek-speaking) Jews responded to the gospel. The resulting language barrier led to the neglect of some needy widows, and the apostles called upon the Greek-speaking community to choose leaders to meet the need.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 6".

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Acts 6".

The Progress of God's Word in Acts

6:7	And the word of God continued to increase.
12:24	But the word of God increased and multiplied.
13:49	And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.
19:20	So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

6:1 The **Hellenists** were Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora (“dispersed” Jews living outside Palestine). Their primary language was Greek. The **Hebrews** were native Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic as their primary language and had attended the Hebrew-speaking synagogues. Not as fluent in Greek, they seem to have overlooked the Hellenist widows unintentionally. Some scholars claim this verse is just the “tip of the iceberg” indicating serious theological frictions between these two groups in the Jerusalem church, and that they had major differences over observance of the OT law and the proper role of the Jerusalem temple. But the text itself indicates just the opposite, for several places show essential unity in doctrinal understanding among the apostles and those who followed them (see [15:1-35](#); [Gal. 1:18-19](#); [2:1-10](#)). Any differences in emphasis were not major, but it does appear the Hellenists were less drawn to the temple, as Stephen’s speech in [Acts 7](#) suggests. **the daily distribution.** That is, of provisions for the needy.

6:4 Essential to the work of the apostles was their devotion **to prayer and to the ministry of the word**. The burgeoning ministry of charity was distracting them from this calling. The Greek-speaking Hellenists from whom the seven were selected were better equipped to serve and communicate with the widows.

6:5 **Stephen** and **Philip** will become prominent in the Acts narrative; the NT makes no further mention of the other five.

6:6 The apostles confirmed the congregational election when **they prayed and laid their hands on them**. Laying on of hands is done in connection with several things in Acts: healing ([9:17](#)), the gift of the Spirit ([8:18](#); [9:17](#); [19:6](#)), and commissioning to a ministry (both here and at [13:3](#)). Interpreters differ over whether these seven men should be considered the first “deacons” in the church. On the one hand, the noun “deacon” (Gk. *diakonos*) does not occur here. On the other hand, the corresponding verb (Gk. *diakoneō*, “to serve, help, render assistance”) is used in [6:2](#), and this same verb is used of those who serve as deacons in [1 Tim. 3:10](#), [13](#). However, this is a common verb for “service.” It could well be these men were called to deal with this issue and any like it.

6:7 **the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.** In spite of suffering and persecution ([5:41](#)), in spite of sin in the church ([5:1-11](#)), and in spite of conflict ([6:1](#)), the church continued to grow. It grew in the context of remarkable love among the Christians in Jerusalem ([4:32](#), [35](#)), frequent miracles ([5:12](#)), and the courageous proclamation of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit ([5:29-32](#)). **The word of God continued to increase** in spite of widespread opposition. **A great many of the priests** became Christians. The lower ranks of the priesthood numbered in the thousands, of whom many were poor and may have first been attracted to Christians by their charity, under the guidance of the newly appointed deacons ([6:1-6](#)).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Acts 6:1-7

6:1 When we read the descriptions of the early church—the miracles, the sharing and generosity, the fellowship—we may wish we could have been a part of this "perfect" church. In reality, the early church had problems just as we do today. No church has ever been or will ever be perfect until Christ and his followers are united at his second coming. All churches have problems. If your church's shortcomings distress you, ask yourself: Would a perfect church allow me to be a member? Then do what you can to make your church better. A church does not have to be perfect to advance the cause of Christ.

6:1ff Another internal problem developed in the early church between the Hebrew-speaking Christians (probably local Jews who had been converted) and the Greek-speaking Christians (probably Jews from other lands who had been converted at Pentecost). The Greek-speaking Christians complained that their widows were being unfairly treated. This favoritism was probably not intentional but was more likely caused by the language barrier. To correct the situation, the apostles put seven respected Greek-speaking men in charge of the food distribution program. This solved the problem and allowed the apostles to keep their focus on teaching and preaching the Good News about Jesus.

6:2 "The Twelve" are the 11 original disciples plus Matthias, who had been chosen to replace Judas Iscariot ([1:26](#)).

6:2-4 As the early church increased in size, so did its needs. One great need was to organize the distribution of food to the poor. The apostles needed to focus on preaching, so they chose others to administer the food program. Each person has a vital part to play in the life of the church (see [1 Corinthians 12](#)). If you are in a position of leadership and find yourself overwhelmed by responsibilities, determine *your* God-given abilities and priorities and then find others to help. If you are not in leadership, you have gifts that can be used by God in various areas of the church's ministry. Offer these gifts in service to him.

6:3 This administrative task was not taken lightly. Notice the requirements for the men who were to handle the food program: They were to be well respected and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. People who carry heavy responsibilities and work closely with others should have these qualities. We must look for spiritually mature and wise men and women to lead our churches.

6:4 The apostles' priorities were correct. The ministry of the Word should never be neglected because of administrative burdens. Pastors should not try, or be expected to try, to do everything. Instead, the work of the church should be spread out among its members.

6:6 Spiritual leadership is serious business and must not be taken lightly by the church or its leaders. In the early church, the chosen men were commissioned (by prayer and laying on of hands) by the apostles. Laying hands on someone, an ancient Jewish practice, was a way to set a person apart for special service (see [Numbers 27:23](#); [Deuteronomy 34:9](#)).

6:7 Jesus had told the apostles that they were to witness first in Jerusalem ([1:8](#)). In a short time, their message had infiltrated the entire city and all levels of society. Even some Jewish priests were being converted, an obvious violation of the wishes of the high council that would endanger their position.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1826-1827.

[6:7](#) The word of God spread like ripples on a pond where, from a single center, each wave touches the next, spreading wider and farther. The Good News still spreads this way today. You don't have to change the world single-handedly; it is enough just to be part of the wave, touching those around you, who in turn will touch others until all have felt the movement. Don't ever feel that your part is insignificant or unimportant.

Life Essentials Study Bible⁴

A Principle to Live By Acts #12: Leadership Priorities

from Acts 6:1-7

Spiritual shepherds in the church are to maintain biblical priorities.

In spite of persecution, the church in Jerusalem continued to grow. However, the apostles faced another challenge. Since so many believers initially stayed on in Jerusalem rather than returning to their homes in various parts of the Roman Empire, their resources were stretched to the limit, and the Grecian widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food.

To understand this special need, we must remember that when Jews put their faith in Christ as the Messiah, they were cut off from the welfare system in Israel. In Jerusalem, there was money in the temple coffers to care for the needy, but believing widows no longer had access to this benevolence fund. Furthermore, it was the Grecian widows—who had come from other parts of the Roman Empire—who were neglected. They were probably the first to deplete their financial resources, whereas the believing Hebrew widows who lived in Jerusalem and Judea were cared for by their families.

The apostles made it clear that they could not allow this problem to deter them from carrying out their God-given priorities: prayer and preaching ([v. 4](#)). Consequently, they wisely delegated the responsibility to care for these widows to a group of spiritually mature men. Since they were Grecian Jews, as we can infer from their names, they would certainly be motivated to care for these needy women who were also Grecian.

The apostles followed the same basic approach that was outlined for Moses in caring for the various needs of the people when they were camped at Mount Sinai.

Reflection and Response

In what specific ways can spiritual leaders apply this principle in the church today?

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1490.