

The Book of Acts; Lesson #4— The First Church Leaders

Get Scriptures to read. Acts 2:42- Acts 5

Memory Verse

Acts 6:7 (NKJV) *Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

The Appointment of the Seven

Acts 6:1 (NKJV) *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.*

“The cause of complaint was an alleged neglect of the Greek widows in the daily distribution of assistance. Any inequality would have been contrary to the spirit of the gospel, yet Satan had succeeded in arousing suspicion. Prompt measures now must be taken to remove all occasion for dissatisfaction, lest the enemy triumph in his effort to bring about a division among the believers.”— The Acts of the Apostles, p. 88.

Acts 6:3–4 (NKJV) *Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”*

Opening for a Supreme Court Judge

Exodus 18:13–23 (NKJV) *And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening. ¹⁴ So when Moses’ father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, “What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?” ... Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you. Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. ²⁰ And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. ²¹ Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. ²² And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you.”*

Qualifications for a Deacon

1 Timothy 3:8–13 (NKJV) *Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ¹⁰ But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.*

¹¹ *Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

1 Kings 7:7 (NKJV) *Then he made a hall for the throne, the Hall of Judgment, where he might judge;*

1 Kings 3:16 (NKJV) *Now two women who were harlots came to the king, and stood before him.*

2 Chronicles 1:2 (NKJV) *And Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds, to the judges,...*

2 Kings 15:5 (NKJV) *And Jotham the king’s son was over the royal house, judging the people of the land.*

***2 Chronicles 19:5–6 (NKJV)** *Then he set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, ⁶ and said to the judges, “Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment.*

1 Corinthians 6:1–6 (NKJV) *Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?*

² *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?*

³ *Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? ⁴ If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? ⁶ But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!*

Stephen’s Ministry

Acts 6:5 *And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit,*

Acts 6:8–9 (NKJV) *And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.*

False Witnesses

Acts 6:11–13 (NKJV) *Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.”¹² And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council.¹³ They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law;*

1 Kings 21:9–10 (NKJV) *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.*

Mark 14:55–59 (NKJV) *Now the chief priests and all the council sought testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none.⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree. Then some rose up and bore false witness against Him, saying,⁵⁸ “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.’ ”⁵⁹ But not even then did their testimony agree.*

Exodus 20:16 (NKJV) *“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

***Matthew 5:11** (NKJV) *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*

1 Peter 4:14 (NKJV) *If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.*

Before the Sanhedrin

Stephen’s response is the lengthiest speech/sermon in Acts, which by itself is an indication of its significance.

Acts 7:9 (NKJV) *“And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him*

Acts 7:35 (NKJV) *“This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush.*

When asked to explain his actions, he made no effort to refute the charges nor to defend his faith. Instead, he raised his voice in the same way the ancient prophets did. Indeed, by Acts 7:51–53 Stephen is no longer the defendant but God’s prophetic attorney presenting God’s covenant lawsuit against these leaders.

Acts 7:51–53 (NKJV) *“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.*

⁵² *Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,⁵³ who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”*

When was the last time you needed courage to take a firm and uncompromising stand for Jesus? Did you, or did you waffle instead? If the latter, what needs to change?

Jesus in the Heavenly Court

“When Stephen reached this point, there was a tumult among the people. When he connected Christ with the prophecies and spoke as he did of the temple, the priest, pretending to be horror-stricken, rent his robe. To Stephen this act was a signal that his voice would soon be silenced forever. He saw the resistance that met his words and knew that he was giving his last testimony. Although in the midst of his sermon, he abruptly concluded it.”—Ellen G. White, AA p. 100.

The judgment on earth was but an expression of the real judgment that would take place in heaven. God would judge the false teachers and leaders in Israel.

The end of the 3-½, 490 years.

Accused of blasphemy,

False witnesses high priest tares his clothes.

Taken out of the city,

Pray for the forgiveness of his executioners. Saul hears this.

Jesus looks up to the Father and Stephen looks up to Jesus.

Acts 8:2 Loyal friends bury Jesus and Stephen.

The Spread of the Gospel

Acts 8:1 (NKJV) *At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

***Acts 1:8** (NKJV) *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*

Colossians 1:23 (NKJV) *if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.*