



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

Acts 6:1-8 English Standard Version August 6, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, August 6, 2017**, is from **Acts 6:1-8**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Acts 6:1) Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

The Church continued to grow after the Day of Pentecost. Hebraic Jews read and spoke Hebrew and used the Hebrew Scriptures. Hellenistic Jews read and spoke Greek and used the Greek Scriptures (the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Old Testament). Many Hellenistic Jews would have been visiting Jerusalem and converted to Christianity on the Day of Pentecost and afterward, and though many of them would have returned to their homes, others would have stayed in Jerusalem and become a part of the Church there. Some Hellenistic Jews and their descendants could have returned from the Diaspora to Jerusalem many years before, some could have heard Jesus teach, have been one of His followers, and have received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Some Jews in Jerusalem could have adopted the Greek culture, language, and philosophies first brought to Jerusalem by and after Alexander the Great. It is possible that some Hebraic Jews felt religiously and spiritually superior to Hellenistic Jews, and these feelings of superiority were carried over into the Church. In any event, the Church had grown so large that deacons needed to be appointed to administer works of charity, especially to the widows in the Church. The Bible teaches, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27). Years later, in 1 Timothy 5, Paul described how widows in the Church should be treated.

(Acts 6:2) And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

The Lord Jesus Christ had commanded the twelve disciples to preach the Gospel, the ministry of the word of God. If they added to that task all the administrative duties of the growing Church, they would not have been able to fulfill the Lord’s command to them. The twelve disciples agreed on a solution, which involved the selection and appointment of the first deacons in the Church.

(Acts 6:3) Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

The Apostles turned to those who were members of the Church, which would have included Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews, and asked them to look among themselves and choose seven men to be deacons. The number seven was considered a perfect number, and it would have made certain that when making decisions there could never be a tie vote. There is no indication that any vote had to be unanimous, because that would have enabled one person to block a majority decision. However, unanimous decisions would have been more likely because each of the seven was to be known by members of the church as “full of the Spirit and wisdom.” These deacons would not have been new converts, because it would have taken some time for them to be known by the members of the Church as men full of the Spirit and wisdom. Being full of the Spirit, they would be open to the Lord’s leading and better able to communicate to all in the Church the Spirit of Jesus Christ and His wisdom in their decisions and ministries. Wisdom would enable them to make good decisions that would be beneficial and fair to all concerned. Before being selected as deacons, they needed to demonstrate these qualities and be trusted by the Church members as faithful and responsible people.

(Acts 6:4) But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

The disciples all agreed on the reason deacons should be appointed as an office in the Church. The disciples followed the example and teaching of Jesus Christ, because Jesus prayed in the evening and early in the morning before He began His ministry of the word each day. The Church continued to grow and prosper in the ways of the Lord Jesus because the disciples were faithful to do all that Jesus commanded them. Furthermore, the Lord Jesus showed them what to do so they could continue to obey Him and meet the needs of everyone in the Church through faithful leaders. Moses learned the same lesson when he was leading the Jews in the wilderness (see Exodus 18).

(Acts 6:5) And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

The proposal pleased the whole group, perhaps because the twelve disciples trusted the Church members to choose their own leaders to solve their administrative problems. Among these seven, only Stephen and Philip are mentioned again in the New Testament. Looking ahead, Stephen is described as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit;” therefore, we know his murder was not due to lack of faith or lack of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, through Stephen’s persecution and death the gospel began to spread to Samaria and many other places as Church members were scattered; and through Philip’s ministry the gospel is spread to many places too. The efforts of evil men would not stop spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. In addition, the service of these seven deacons was not to be limited to administrative tasks, but to serve as a foundation for even greater responsibilities; and all members of the church, especially when scattered, preached the gospel of Jesus.

(Acts 6:6) These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

The Church chose the seven deacons and the apostles appointed them to serve as deacons. The apostles prayed and received approval and direction from the Lord Jesus on how to proceed; therefore, they laid their hands on these seven signifying their approval and appointment according to the will of the Lord Jesus. The laying on of hands often demonstrated setting someone apart for consecrated service to God.

(Acts 6:7) And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

By solving this administrative problem the right way and by meeting the real needs of all concerned, the word of God spread. The Church continued to grow in Jerusalem, and the gospel would spread far beyond Jerusalem when persecution of the Church began. Many priests resided in and traveled to and from Jerusalem. These priests would hear the gospel and the controversies regarding the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. Many would remember Jesus and His miracles and teaching. Many of these priests would also see the signs, wonders, and miracles that accompanied the preaching of the gospel by the Apostles, who preached the same message of Jesus. By the grace of God, a large number of priests became obedient to the faith; which means they believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and became obedient to His commands and

teachings. These priests would then return to their homes throughout Judea and spread the gospel in some of their synagogues. Saul, later Paul, would search some of these synagogues for Christians to persecute. Nothing would stop the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the spread of the gospel would occur in many unusual ways, another sign of God's grace.

(Acts 6:8) And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

Stephen was one of the first seven deacons in the New Testament church. The Apostles established their qualifications for selection as “men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3). Luke says Stephen was “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). The Bible commends Stephen in everything; he was “full of grace and power” (Acts 6:8). He did “great wonders and signs” that endorsed his teaching. He did more than what was first required of him as a deacon; which was to serve tables to meet the needs of Greek and Hebrew widows. Through Stephen, the Church began to see the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me” (Matthew 5:11). “Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also” (John 15:20). “But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name” (Luke 21:12).

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Who in the Church were complaining and why? What do you know about these groups?
2. What did the twelve apostles say were their primary responsibilities? Why do you think they said this?
3. How were the first deacons chosen and what were the requirements set by the apostles for their qualification?
4. How many deacons were chosen? Why do you think they chose this number?
5. What happened after the apostles prayed and laid their hands on these deacons?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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