



Men's Bible Fellowship

ONE MAN. ONE MISSION. NO ONE LEFT BEHIND.

Colton, CA

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# ACTS

## “ATTACKS FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT”

### LESSON 6

My dad was one of fourteen children and would attend family reunions every summer. I was spared the annual pilgrimage to the East Coast, where the majority of relatives lived, due to school, athletic, or work commitments. Part of the routine was my debriefing by my parents upon their return to Southern California. They would pull out a picture of an assembled hoard and dutifully name and give a short biography on my aunts, uncles, first and second cousins, most of whom I had never met. Unfortunately, the legacy of this experience is a tendency to gloss over lists of names when I read them in Scripture. But we are told in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” On closer analysis, this seemingly obscure passage serves as a model for structure and how to create harmony within the church body.

A little background will help illustrate how big this problem could have become without the action taken by Spirit-led leaders. The Hellenists were Jews not native to Jerusalem or Judea. They were influenced by Greek culture and may not have spoken Aramaic or Hebrew but Greek. The special animosity towards this group resulted from a program of Hellenization, instilling Greek culture into the locals, started by Antiochus Epiphanes (successor to Alexander the Greek) in 166 BC in Judea. This ruler converted the temple into a shrine for Greek gods. An idol for Zeus was placed on the altar and pigs (unclean animals) were offered in sacrifice. It was only through a Jewish revolt led by the Maccabees that the temple was restored (the restoration is the basis for the celebration of Hanukah).

The problem of discrimination was not ignored but addressed by delegating the solution to seven leaders, notably all of them bearing Greek names. Paul will later write in Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The role of the apostles or elders as proclaimers of the gospel and an auxiliary or support group of deacons would later serve as a model for the early church. The solution allowed the apostles to “keep the main thing the main thing”; that is, the preaching of the Word. The number of disciples was increasing; some scholars believe the church may have grown to over 25,000 members by this time.

When strife from within failed to derail the advance of the church, opposition once again arose from the outside. We will look in far greater detail at the trial and eventual martyrdom of Stephen in our next study. It is interesting to note how the charges against Stephen were markedly similar to those brought against Jesus (see Matthew 26:61). It is assuring to note that the wisdom provided to Stephen by the Spirit is promised to us as well when we are under

assault for the gospel. Luke 12:11–12 says, “Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say”. The countenance of Stephen before his accusers was the very essence of “grace under fire.” As I watched recent interviews of Mariam Ibrahim (under death penalty for Christian beliefs in Sudan) and Kent Brantly (missionary doctor and Ebola survivor), I was awestruck at the serene tranquility that permeated their very beings as they described their experiences while laying their lives on the line for the advancement of the gospel. This is evidence that the Holy Spirit is just as active today as He was in the life of Stephen two thousand years ago.

## Prayer

Start by praying over the passage and asking the Holy Spirit to give you fresh insights and wisdom in understanding it. Then read through the entire passage two or three times.

## Memory Verse

“Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say”. Luke 12:11–12 NKJV

## Day 1 – Seven Chosen to Serve – Acts 6:1–7

(Part 1)

When overt attacks by the Sanhedrin failed to slow the spread of the gospel, the opposition shifted to a division within the Christian body based on ethnic prejudice. The ultra- conservative Jews felt that Gentiles were merely fuel for the fires of hell and that Jews influenced by secular Greek culture weren’t much better. Based upon historical events they felt justified in their elitist attitudes.

1. What was the condition of the church prior to the dispute?

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2. What two groups are involved in the dispute and summarize the complaint lodged against the church.

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3. The apostles would later be replaced by elders also called overseers (*presbuteros and episkopos*) in the local early church—a role analogous to pastors or ministers in our present

church. What should be the primary job description of those in this position?

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4. As the church grew rapidly out of necessity, various ministries appeared within the early church. It seemed inevitable that a hierarchy of service seemed destined to relegate some to second-class servants (“I preach the Word but you just wait on tables”). How did Paul refute this line of thought in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31?

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## **Day 2 – Seven Chosen – Acts 6:1–7**

(Part 2)

As we look at the qualifications required for the first deacons (*diakonos*) we see these men were so much more than just waiters. Stephen delivers a message that touched the heart of Saul of Tarsus, destined to become Paul before becoming the first martyr of the church. Philip was the first to take the gospel outside of Judea, becoming a missionary to Samaria. They were commissioned by the laying on of hands.

1. What can we learn from the names listed for the seven servants?

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2. Why is the inclusion of Nicolas of particular significance (he was a first)?

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3. What do you feel was the significance or purpose in the apostles laying hands on the seven chosen for service?

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4. The church seemed to have grown too quickly to keep count of all the new members. We have not been given a number since Acts 4:4. What significant detail emerges about the new converts in verse 7? How could this group’s willingness to obey the faith come as a surprise?

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**Day 3 – Stephen Accused of Blasphemy – Acts 6:8–15**

(Part 1)

Until now only the apostles had worked miracles but now Stephen and later Philip would work signs and wonders. The groups opposing Stephen were all from areas under Greek influence. The Freedmen were former slaves from Libya. The Alexandrians were from the capital of Egypt and second largest city in the Roman Empire. The other areas were in modern-day Syria.

1. Stephen was able to perform wonders and signs. Why do you feel this was significant (see John 4:48)?

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2. The poor Hellenists didn't have a chance against Stephen. Why? (See Luke 12:11–12 and 21:15.)

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3. The opposition was playing around with Stephen. According to Leviticus 24:10–16, what was the penalty for blasphemy?

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4. How do the charges against Stephen parallel those made against Jesus (Matthew 26:59– 61)? How does this compare to what Jesus actually said (John 2:19–21)?

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5. You may recall from the Old Testament that Moses radiated after receiving the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 34:29). Stephen's face is literally glowing before his opponents.

What can we learn from Paul’s comparison of the glory of the Old and New Covenants in 2 Corinthians 3:7–18?

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#### **Day 4 – Qualifications for Overseers and Deacons – 1 Timothy 3:1–13**

While the seven chosen for service in Acts 6 seem to be a solution for a temporary problem in the church body, they seem to be prototypes for the office of deacon that emerged in the early church. Likewise the apostles were replaced by the position of overseer and elder (two terms used largely synonymously). These are the only two positions mentioned in the New Testament. The position of overseer/elder is analogous to our pastor/minister while the deacons of the first century are called elders in some churches and deacons in others.

1. What are some of the qualifications for becoming an overseer in the church? How do they set the bar high for anyone seeking to be an overseer? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What dangers are there in promoting a person to a position of overseer if they have not attained spiritual maturity? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What are the qualifications for deacons? What blessings are promised to those serving as deacons? \_\_\_\_\_

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#### **Day 5 – Take Away / Summary**

If one of your friends at work or a neighbor were to ask you what you did on Tuesday, you would tell them you went to a Bible study. The next question would likely be, “What did you learn?” We often summarize an entire athletic contest or a movie in a few brief sentences and easily convey the essence of the event. Now apply these same skills to give a summary of the passage in a sentence or two. Then, in an additional sentence or two, describe what impact this passage will have on how you live.

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### Memory Verse

“Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say”. Luke 12:11–12 NKJV

### Key Words/Phrases

Write out the definition of these key words. You can use a regular dictionary or go to one of the Greek sources listed in the Tool Box at the end of the study. You may also use a concordance to see where else and how the word is used in the Bible. *How would these phrases instruct or encourage us today?*

Full of the Spirit and Wisdom (Acts 6:3 also in Acts 6:10)

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Laid Hands on Them (Acts 6:6)

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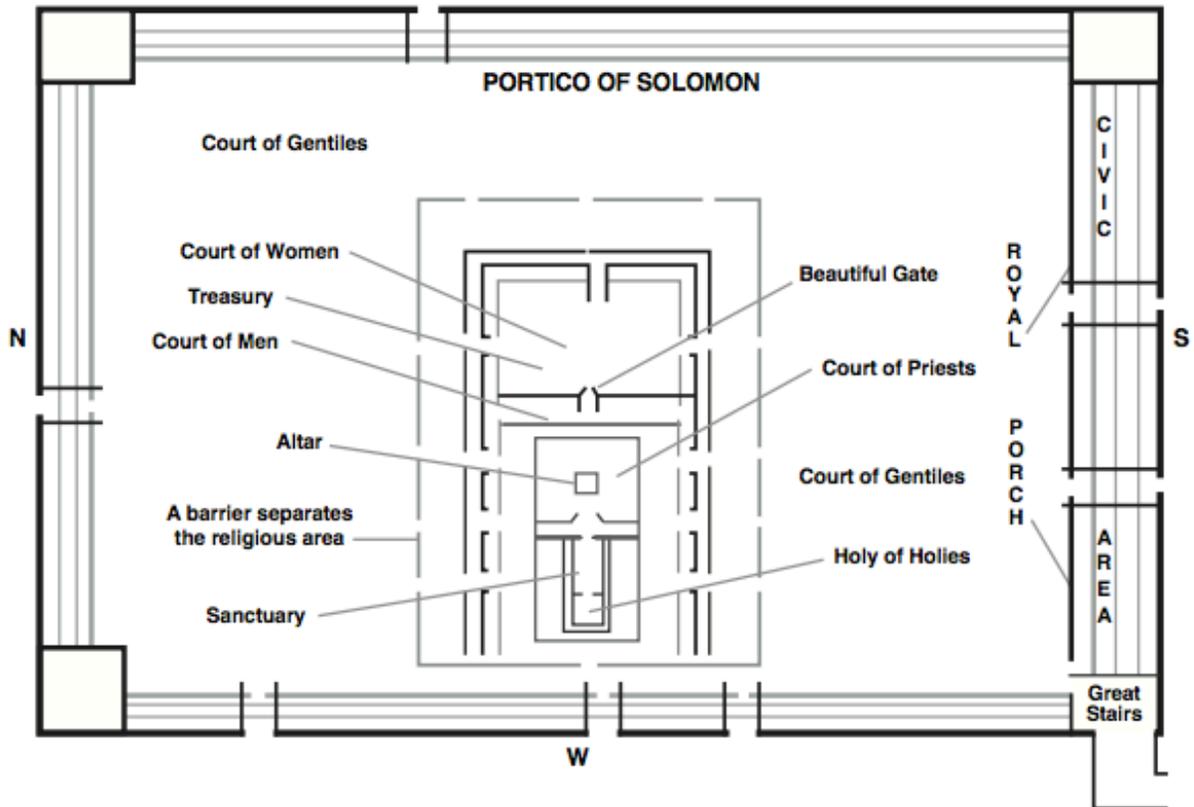
### Tool Box

**Step 1: The Bible.** Read the passage in a couple of different versions. If you are having trouble understanding a passage, choose a more dynamic version such as *New Living Translation* or *The Message*). To focus in on the exact meaning of a verse, choose a more literal translation such as *New American Standard Bible* or *New King James Version*.

**Step 2: Study Tools.** Use these to help you dig deeper. Background Information: 1) Unger’s Bible Dictionary 2) Bible Dictionaries online at biblestudytools.com and blueletterbible.com. Word Studies: 1) Zodhiates’ *The Complete Word Study New Testament* 2) Vine’s *Complete Expository Dictionary* 3) Strong’s *Dictionary of Bible Words* 4) The two websites listed above

## Herod's Temple During the Early Church

The crippled beggar mentioned in Acts 3 was sitting at the Beautiful Gate. The Apostles taught in the Portico of Solomon or in the Court of the Gentiles. The Sanhedrin met within a chamber in the Sanctuary of the temple itself.



## OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

