

### Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

#### Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now. Click on any Bible verse to read it or use your own Bible.

#### Further Study: with your small group or on your own

Complete with your small group if you are in one; or complete on your own, spending time with God.

Song for the week: Praise the Lord - Micah Tyler

Song links: <https://youtu.be/7DXGozXsllg?si=ZXev94qzD4dVhWJO>

### **Read Acts 6 - 7**

#### **Personal reflection:**

Instead of reading, some prefer to listen to the Bible. Take about 10 minutes to click on and [listen to Acts 6-7](#) or [listen to Acts 6-7 dramatized](#). If you have time, consider listening to it both ways. (Remember, throughout the study, you can click on any verse mentioned to read it.)

Did you enjoy listening to the passage? What, if anything, did you notice differently when you listened? Consider including the practice of listening to the Bible into your quiet time.

There is an unknown space of time between Acts 5 and Acts 6 - 7. In Acts 4:32, the believers were “of one heart and of one soul (or mind),” a Hebrew form of expression for complete accord (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges). Time has passed and there was discord between the Hebrews and the Grecians. They were no longer of complete accord.

Often when we are in a smaller group, it is easier to think the same way. As groups grow, additional ideas, feelings, agendas and the like come up. Is there a time you can remember and relate to this? How did the group navigate differences successfully? How can you be truthful and kind / loving when expressing your thoughts?

The Hebrews were Jewish people who lived in Judea, spoke Aramaic or Hebrew and read the Tanakh (see below). “Aramaic was used by the common people, while Hebrew remained the language of religion and government and of the upper class (Britannica).”

The Grecians (Hellenists) were Jewish people who were born outside of Judea and lived in Gentile countries, who spoke Greek and read the Septuagint (see below). They were steadfast in their worship of the true God, not mixing with the cultures around them. Not growing up in Judea, they were not as familiar with the holy places and had more zeal for the sanctity of them. (paraphrased: Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers). *Optional, read these verses: John 7:35, James 1:1, 1 Peter 1:1*

The Tanakh contained 3 parts: Torah / Law, Nev'im / Prophets and the Ketuvim / Writings

The Septuagint contained 4 parts: Law, History, Poetry and Prophets along with writings called the Apocrypha (used by Grecians and early Christians, still used today by Eastern Orthodoxy)

There were two groups of Jews who had become disciples, believers in Jesus - the Hebrews and the Grecians. The first read the Tanakh and the second read the Septuagint.

On the day of Pentecost, the Grecians had come to Jerusalem to participate in the festival. It was on that day that the Holy Spirit came upon the 120 believers who began speaking in the languages of those listening (Grecians) and about 3,000 people believed in Jesus as their Messiah that day. *Optional, read these verses: Acts 1:12-15, Acts 2:1-12, Acts 2:41*

The Hebrews and Grecians had the most important thing in common - belief in Jesus. Yet they felt conflict over important issues, such as how the widows were not being equally cared for. Today in the Church, we should still have the most common thing in common - belief in Jesus - but may also have conflict over important issues. How can you actively engage with those you are not in agreement with to communicate your thoughts and not cause discord nor have your agenda be one to convince the other side?

There is a difference between the disciples who became apostles (sent by Jesus) and the disciples who were growing in number. The word "disciples" was the common name for believers before they were called Christians in Antioch. *Optional, read these verses: Acts 6:1, Acts 11:26*

Within the disciples, widows and their children "were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food." Later as the Church grew, Paul would write to Timothy about how to care for the widows and orphans, but the Church was still young and in need of direction. Church growth meant delegating and setting up policies.

With the Church's consent, seven were chosen so that the apostles could continue to focus on what Jesus had called them to do - preach and teach. As the seven all had Greek names; it is probable that they were all Grecians "from the aggrieved party (Life with God Bible)." *Optional, read these verses: Acts 6:2, 1 Timothy 5:13-16*

What reasons can you think of for why the "aggrieved party" would have been tasked with solving these issues of disagreement?

For the first time in the New Testament the act of laying hands on people and praying for them is mentioned. But it was not new to the Jewish people. Joseph blessed his grandchildren while laying his hands on their heads. Moses laid hands on Joshua when he was commissioned. With Joshua, he was then filled with the spirit of wisdom. Eventually laying hands on people and praying became the custom in the Church. *Optional, read these verses: Genesis 48:10-20, Numbers 27:22-23, Deuteronomy 34:9, Acts 6:6, Acts 13:3*

It was also the first time in the New Testament Church that duties were assigned yet it was something that the Jewish people would have been accustomed to already. "Moses delegated some of his administrative duties to others who were God-fearing and trustworthy so he could devote himself to prayer for the people and teaching God's message (Cultural Background Study Bible)." *Optional, read this verses: Exodus 18:13-23*

Moses' father-in-law had urged Moses to make this decision. He said, "If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied." In what ways was that also true for the apostles and the early Church?

As opposition increased against Steven, they argued with him. Like Joshua, Steven was given wisdom from the Holy Spirit. Later Paul writes of also receiving wisdom from the Holy Spirit. *Optional, read these verses: Acts 6:9-10, 1 Corinthians 2:6-8*

The wisdom given helped the men bring glory to God. Have you ever asked the Holy Spirit for wisdom when you were telling someone about God? Did you sense the knowing of things you might not have known or been able to explain until God helped you? If so, record some of them.

The people lied and said that they heard Stephen “speak evil things against Moses and God (Acts 6:11).” In those times, defendants were given the opportunity to reply to the accusations made against them. “Stephen calmly replied to their accusations with a riveting account of God’s presence and guidance throughout the history from Abraham to present day (Life with God Bible).”

Stephen was a Grecian. Why do you think he spent so much time telling them about Jewish history and their deliverers like Joseph and Moses?

How was Steven’s message similar to Peter’s first recorded messages?

“The most rousing part of a speech was often the conclusion; in a deliberative speech, such as this one, the conclusion was meant to stir the hearts to change the action. Returning charges against accusers was common. Charging one’s judges, by contrast, might provoke one’s own martyrdom. Calling his accusers stiff necked evokes various critiques of Israel, but especially Deuteronomy 10:16 (The Cultural Background Study Bible).”

Jesus ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father. Yet Stephen sees Jesus standing. “He has stood to receive Stephen’s testimony and to be his advocate. Jesus is rising from his throne to come to Stephen’s defense and to judge his persecutors (The Gospel Coalition).” *Optional, read these verses: Matthew 26:64, Acts 7:56*

How might Stephen’s conclusion and his having seen Jesus standing further angered those condemning him? How might seeing Stephen’s faith have been bolstered by seeing Jesus standing?

The Greek word for witness is “martyrs.” It is someone who is persecuted or killed for refusing to renounce their belief. It cost Stephen his life to tell of Jesus, making him the first Christian martyr. “Steven’s death became his final act of service, moving believers to new areas to spread the gospel (Life of God Bible).”

“Jewish custom insisted that the person being executed confess his sins; instead, Steven confessed theirs (Cultural study Bible).”

How did Steven’s prayer while he was being stoned mirror Jesus’s prayers? (See Luke 23:34 and Luke 23:46)

**Putting it into practice:** Read Deuteronomy 10:16 . There is simplicity in the verse. Does it stir anything in you that you want to talk with God about or change?

Spend time with God this week asking Him who He might want you to serve and who He might be asking you to witness to. What might you tell people about God and how He is real based on who you know Him to be?

## **Further Study - with your small group or on your own**

In Acts 6, the first discord is noted in the Church. As One Hope grows, it would be normal for us to have disagreements. However, disagreements do not need to lead to discord.

How can the skills of listening, asking questions and reflecting help you understand people who think differently than you?

Getting food to the widows and orphans, “remained a simple work of love and compassion offered to meet real needs (Life with God Bible).”

What simple work can you do within the Church that meets real needs? Is there a way you can do this as a small group?

Read Acts 2:3.

What were the two qualities that those making decisions for the Church had to have?

Why are these qualities important for people who are serving others? What could happen if these qualities are ignored?

“The apostles understood that the Spirit of God needed to be just as present in the unseen works of compassion as in public ministry of preaching and evangelism. Steven and his team, in their wisdom, understood that their work was essential within the scope of all of the church and that they were called to be an extension of Jesus' love to the world (Life with God Bible).”

When have you felt God calling you to serve in an unseen way? If you obeyed Him, what did you learn?

As One Hope continues to grow, how can you support our leaders so that they can also be able to “stand the strain”?

When Stephen was stoned, according to the law, “one of the witnesses was to smite him with a stone upon the breast, so as to throw him down. If he were not killed, the second witness was to throw another stone at him. Then, if he were yet alive, all the people were to stone him until he was dead (Vincent's Word Studies).”

Stephen was stoned while Paul (still named Saul) was present. Paul gave his approval and guarded the clothes of those stoning Stephen. *Optional, read these verses: Deuteronomy 17:7, Acts 22:20*

Have you ever thought someone would never accept the gospel, never trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior? If so, how does knowing the great change that happened in Paul encourage you to continue praying and witnessing for that person?

Is there anything from this week's personal reflection time which you would like to discuss more with your small group?