

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

Lesson 6c: Acts 6-7 – The First Deacons and the First Martyr

Introduction

The rapid growth of the early church created issues that needed to be addressed. We see the office of deacon being formed within Chapter 6. We also see the rise of Stephen as an early church leader and the level of persecution against the church raised as Stephen is martyred.

Acts 6:1-7 – The First Deacons

What was the issue that created the need for deacons and what does this teach us about when deacons should be ordained?

There was a problem between the Jews from Israel and those from the diaspora (Jews from other parts of the world). The Grecian widows were being neglected. Deacons were ordained when there was a NEED for them to be ordained.

Why couldn't the apostles handle this problem themselves? What does this teach us about the duty of ministers?

The apostles, like all ministers, needed to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer. If at all possible, ministers should focus on the spiritual aspects of the church.

Define the following words:

Deacon – an attendant, servant, minister to another

Tables (end of vs. 2) – money counter or a table on which food is served

What were the qualifications for a deacon? (See also 1 Timothy 3:8-13)

Here in Acts 6, they were supposed to be honest, spirit-filled (allowing the Spirit to direct their lives), and wise. In 1 Timothy, we see the qualifications expanded to grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of earthly gain, inner purity, spiritually mature and proven, blameless, one-woman men, good managers of their household. Their wives must also be grave, not slanderers, sober, and faithful.

On a big picture level, what is the purpose of the deacons?

Deacons are supposed to take a load off of the ministers in the church and help to maintain harmony in the body.

How did the early church conduct its business and how can we apply this today?

The apostles (spiritual leaders) proposed a solution to a spiritual problem and the group reached a consensus and acted on it. We can still do this today.

Acts 6:8-15 – Stephen's Ministry

What was Stephen doing? Does it appear that he was a preacher?

Stephen was performing miracles and disputing with people in the synagogues. It does appear that Stephen was a preacher.

Who was Stephen ministering to and what does this show us about the spread of the gospel?

It appears that he was ministering to Grecian Jews living in Jerusalem. We see the focus moving away from national Jews to all Jews.

What was it about Stephen that made his speaking so effective? (See also Luke 21:15)

His wisdom and his attitude were of God and were being powerfully accompanied by the Spirit to affect the hearts of the hearers.

When the Grecian Jews couldn't overcome Stephen's message, what did they do?

They slandered him by making up lies and twisting the things that he said.

Why did Stephen's face shine as angel? (See also 2 Corinthians 3:7-11)

It was a divine affirmation. It was clear that God approved of what Stephen said.

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

Lesson 6c: Acts 6-7 – The First Deacons and the First Martyr

Acts 7:1-53 – Stephen's message to Sanhedrin council

What does Stephen point out about the Israelite's response to the giving of the law (vss 38-41)
While being next to Sinai with God's presence manifested, they worshipped an idol.

After being punished because of their idolatry, did the Israelites learn their lesson? (vss 42-43)
No, their future generations continued to seek after idols and gave their hearts to sin. God responded by making them captives in Babylon and even on this day, they were under Roman rule.

What is the point of Stephen's message to the Jews? (vss 51-52)
Stephen demonstrated that the Jews had always rebelled against God, killed His prophets / messengers, and had even killed the Son of God Himself.

Why do you suppose he went through such a long narrative to build up to this point? (vss 1-37)
Stephen was probably pointing out that at every step of the way, God made it clear that He was working around them and for them. He gave them plenty of signs, yet they persisted in rejecting Him.

Acts 7:54-60 – The Murder of Stephen

How did Stephen's message affect the Jews and what was their response? Does this still happen today?

They were convicted by the message and responded by lashing out against Stephen to stop his voice and kill him. Yes, this still happens today. Many times the people who are most outraged against Christians and do all within their power to silence them are the ones who are most under conviction by the message of the gospel.

What was the last straw for the Jews?
Stephen told them that he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand.

What does Stephen's statement about Christ mean? (See further Matt 26:62-65, Heb 1:3, 12:2)
Christ being on the right hand of God signifies His place of glory, honor, and power. It affirms His deity because Scriptures teach that God shares His glory with no one.

What difference do you notice about Christ's position between Acts and the passages in Matthew and Hebrews?
The passage in Acts mentions Him standing. This may be due to His praise of Stephen's willingness to suffer martyrdom for Him.

What do Stephen and Saul have in common?
Both were Grecian Jews. Stephen may have been the first gospel preacher that Saul heard as a young man.

Assignment:

Read Acts 8:1 – 9:31 in preparation for the next lesson