

Sermon Title: Infant Church Takes First Steps (Part 1)
Scripture Text: Acts 6:1-2 (Acts #13)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-30-23

Let's come back to the Book of Acts, where we have gotten a good start. We are now this morning arriving at Acts Chapter 6, and we're just going to take a look at the beginning of this chapter today.

But I want to take you back to something we saw when we began our study of the Book of Act, when we were introducing it: that this book records the historical unfolding of crucial transitions; it records a period of transition, about 30 years long—a little bit more than that, maybe. And these transitions are *very* important in the development of the redemptive program of God.

First is the transition from the Gospels to the Epistles. There is a reason why the Book of Acts sits between the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament. The Church was predicted by Jesus in Matthew Chapter 16. In Acts, it is beginning to be unfolded, but it is *fully* established in the Epistles; we have the beginning of it here. We saw the first use of the word "church" in Acts Chapter 3, so we know the church is now a thing; but the full doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ (Col. 1:24), comprised of Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-16;3:6), and there being this plan then for Israel and all the promises God is going to fulfill to them—like we are reading in Romans 9, 10, and 11—that is primarily explained in the letters of Paul. Our passage today shows a small step in that process of that transition.

There is also the "big one"—the transition from Judaism to Christianity. To use the terminology of Colossians Chapter 2 and of Hebrews 8, 9, and 10—the "shadow" gives way to the reality (Col. 2:17).

There is also the transition from the Mosaic Law, being that which governs worship, to the Church Age as a whole. The purpose of the Law of Moses was to lead people to faith in Christ. Galatians 3:24—"the Law" is a "tutor to lead us to" the Savior. The Law actually *separated* Jews from Gentiles, culturally; and so it required time and teaching and effort and patience to bring Jews and Gentiles together in "one body," the Church (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13; Eph. 4:4; Col. 3:15). Now of course, the foundation of that is being transformed by Christ (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. 1 Cor. 1:30).

Then there is the transition from the ministry of Christ to the ministry of His agents. The New Testament opens with the Gospels; the central character, of course, is Jesus Christ. *He Himself* ministers and teaches in the Gospels. The Book of Acts records the transition from His own ministry to the ministry of the Apostles and those who followed the Apostles. And remember how Jesus, a couple of times, sent the twelve out in teams of two, and then He sent seventy out in teams of two; He was laying the groundwork for this transition from Him to His agents. And again, Acts is the bridge.

Then there's the transition from Israel, as the center of the activity of God, to the entire world (cf. Is. 49:6). And today, we are going to begin to major on part of that transition from Judaism to Christianity, and from Israel to the Church.

Jesus announced the beginning of the New Covenant when He instituted the Lord's Supper celebration to replace the Passover celebration. Remember that night before He went to

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the cross, and He changed the ritual, and He said, "This cup is the new covenant in *My blood*" (1 Cor. 11:25; cf. Lk. 22:20). The very next day on the cross, as He died giving His blood—"My blood" is a metonym for giving His life (cf. Col. 1:20, 22)—as He gave His life, then He cried out from the cross, "It is finished!" (Jn. 19:30); and at that point, the sacrifice was complete: He had borne the "sins" (1 Pet. 2:24), He had incurred "the wrath of God" (Rom. 5:9; cf. Is. 53:5); and remember, at that moment God dramatically ripped "the veil...in two from top to bottom" (Matt. 27:51)—[the veil] that prevented anyone from accessing "the Holy of Holies" (Heb. 9:3; cf. Ex. 26:33)—to symbolize that now, anyone could come into the presence of God (Heb. 10:19-20; cf. Eph. 2:18; 3:12).

So, the New Covenant was begun; and from that day on, all that went on in the Temple was like—and I thought of a metaphor this week; I'm going to invent this term: The Temple, from the time of the death and resurrection of Christ until its destruction, was one giant "spiritual lame duck session" (cf. Heb. 8:13).

But see, the New Covenant has arrived! The Savior has come! The Gospel, by the time we get to Acts 6, is *rampaging* through Jerusalem! But the unique idea of the Church is *just beginning to take shape*. So we are going to see the infant Church take its first steps.

Marsha and I had a *perfect* living illustration a few weeks ago: We got to meet our first granddaughter. She is the cutest baby that has been born—at *least* in this millennium! She is absolutely adorable; we want to go back and see her, again and again. But you know what? She's not good for much: She doesn't do chores, she won't wash dishes, her math is abominable, her pronunciation is non-existent.

Well, *you don't expect* an infant to be mature, right? Well, we are talking about the infant Church here; and we are going to see, if you will, a couple of baby steps—maybe one significant baby step. And this passage is *full of many* applications to us; so I'm going to take my time, go slowly, get started, make a case for something ancillary to this today, and then we will wrap it up next time we come back to this chapter. So before we dive into the specifics of the chapter, I would like you to take a step back with me, and view a "big picture" of the *very early* development of the Church.

Before spiritual construction on the Church began, Jesus had to "die" (1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Rom. 5:6), "rise again" (Mk. 8:31), and "ascend" to the "Father" (Jn. 20:17). Then He had to fulfill His promise to send the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:7; Acts 1:4), which is recorded in Acts Chapter 2. And He said, When that happens—oh, you are going to "receive power" and you are going to be "My witnesses," starting "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea"—which we are seeing now—and then to "Samaria"—coming soon in a chapter near you in the Book of Acts—and then "to the remotest part of the earth"—to the Gentiles (Acts 1:8).

So, some miracles accompanied the arrival of the Holy Spirit, when He came in Chapter 2. And then there was that sermon by Peter that led to the repentance and the baptism of three thousand people: Acts Chapter 2, Verse 41—"So then...that day there were added about three thousand souls." Just six verses later, in 2:47, we are told: "The Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

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A little interlude of some persecution of Peter and John in Chapter 3; then in Chapter 4, Verse 4—"The number of the men came to be about five thousand." And in *that* comment, the word "men" isn't the word for "people," it's the word for "males"; so that does not include women and children. This thing is getting big! And then Chapter 5, Verse 14—"And all the more believers in the Lord, *multitudes* of men *and* women, were constantly added to their number."

Now, sneak preview: In the passage that we are coming to today, you're going to see *two more* statements like that. Verse 1 of Chapter 6—"Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food." We'll get to that last part in a minute, but [the Church] is still multiplying.

Chapter 6, Verse 7—"The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples *continued* to increase *greatly* in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." Now, *that's* pretty cool; we'll talk about that, too.

Now, I cite all that to begin to build a case to address a modern idea that needs to be refuted. It's an idea that is not healthy for local churches. And I have friends in the ministry whoa actually believe this, but it's not good. It's the belief that the idea of "church membership" is unbiblical; and it is therefore not right to ask people to become designated—recognized as members of a local church.

Now, okay, I will grant: There is no verse that says you must go through a process to become a member of your local church—sign on the dotted line, or whatever it might be. But you know, there is also no verse that says to brush your teeth, or to change the oil in your car, or to register for the draft, or that you need a driver's license. The lack of a specific verse is a *terribly* weak argument against church membership.

You see, if you belong to Jesus Christ, you *are* a member of your Church. The Greek word that is translated "member" describes a part of the body. We think of "dismembership"—which I highly recommend against—it means losing a piece of your body, right? So we are as connected spiritually with one another in Christ as the parts of your body are connected to the whole; and we need to act in conjunction with, and in harmony with, one another, just like your body has to work together—or it's crippled or sick or hampered from functioning as it should (cf. Eph. 4:15-16).

There is not *one* part of your physical body that functions better on its own! I will strengthen that: There is to one part of your body that *can* function on its own! It's a whole (cf. 1 Cor. 12:15-21).

There are statements like this: Romans Chapter 12, Verse 5—"so we, who are many"—so there are many individuals in this, just like there are many parts of your physical body—we "*are* one body in Christ, *and* individually members one of another." There is a collective there, and there is an individual there: We *collectively* are the "body"; we are "individually" connected to one another.

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There's also Ephesians 4:25—"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are *members* of one another." We *belong* to "one another"; we are spiritually connected.

It says it twice in First Corinthians 12: Verse 20 and Verse 27—"But now there are many members, but one body...Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it."

Now, I cited all those passages about the numerical growth of the Church to help you observe that from the beginning, the Apostles—the Christians in general—kept track of numbers of people. They were so closely involved with one another that they knew when there were needs, what the needs were, and they responded individually and collectively and sacrificially to meet those needs. That required record-keeping, in addition to involvement.

We know in Chapter 2, where we heard that they knew all the distinct languages which were spoken by the people who had come from elsewhere to Jerusalem for Pentecost. *That* required some record-keeping as well.

They knew about one another in great detail. We are going to see in Chapter 6 when priests repented—they were the ones that were persecuting them in Chapter 5; and when they came to faith, they knew that. They knew, and they kept track of which ones of them were Greek-speakers and which ones of them were Aramaic-speakers.

Oh, and they knew the marital status of people. They knew which ones were widows, and they took care of them *daily*. There was *a lot of caring*, and *a lot of record-keeping* required in order to do that (cf. Acts 20:28).

I won't take you there right now, but you can see later in other New Testament books that when believers moved or travelled from one location to another, they were recommended by name and by letters sent between churches; and that thing that is mentioned just a few times in the New Testament took root—that practice became well-documented in the years following the close of the New Testament.

So when somebody says, "Why would you want to have 'church membership'? That's not in the Bible," I would prefer to ask a different question. I would prefer to ask: "Why would *anyone* who has been transformed by Jesus Christ *not* want to be *as committed as possible* to His work and the building of His Church?"

Why would *any* Christian want to *avoid* being named among the ones who belong to Jesus? If you are in Christ, *that is the most important thing about you!* Wouldn't you want it to be shown and stated *as commonly as possible*, to be part of your testimony?

Now in the Bible, as soon as a person was publicly identified with Jesus Christ—primarily by baptism, which followed repentance and conversion (e.g., Acts 16:33-34)—that person was immediately *known* to the other Christians, was *counted* in the numbers, and was *expected* to be visibly identified with the local church.

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Now, it was kind of easy in the first chapters of Acts, because the churches you had a choice of were: Jerusalem, or—you were not a Christian. There was only one. Life was easier to manage, in that way.

But the way members of the local church get identified *does* vary in different cultures, and I'll grant that. The most basic system—probably practiced by the most believers in the world—is the system that I have come to be familiar with through our partnership with our Russian friends: A person hears the Gospel. That person repents and declares his or her faith in Christ; they say, "I trust Christ." At the next opportunity, they are brought to church; they are brought up *in front* of the church, where they are named, welcomed, and prayed for; and then they are taken under the wings of the church leadership, and they do some instruction in the basics of sound doctrine. Most people there are coming out of the cult of Russian Orthodoxy, and so there is quite a bit to make sure that they *understand* what the words actually mean. And when the elders sign off on their preparation, *then* they are baptized—and that's a *big day*! That's a *big celebration*! And once the people are baptized, *then* they are considered members of the church, *and* they are allowed to partake in the Communion service; they do not allow it until the end of that process (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27-29). Now, that's a different cultural thing, different than the way we do it; but Baptism Day is also always Communion Day—you go to wherever the baptism is, and you come to the church and you have a service, and you come around the Lord's Table (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16, NKJV).

And I would say this: Often, not only in Russia but in many places in the world—that process comes at the cost of being ostracized from your family (cf. Matt. 10:34-37; 19:29). But in their world, there is generally a maximum of...well, one church in any town or village—one Gospel-preaching church. So there is no place to *hide* if you are committed to Jesus Christ.

One of the times that I was over there and got to be around for a baptism service, I heard, "We're all excited—they' ae going to baptize eight people tomorrow, and we are really excited about this!" And then I came to the service—and, you know, all my fingers are intact; I can count to eight and beyond—and there were only seven who were baptized. And I said, "Oh, no! Did somebody drop out? Is somebody sick?" And they said, "Well, no. We baptized Sergei way early this morning at a different location because of the threats on the lives of the people who would baptize him"—*from his family*! We have it *pretty easy*, folks!

Now, there are some denominations that have very precisely-described procedures for becoming a member of their local congregations, different ways of handling the children of believers; there are processes in some places for transferring from one place to another, for ordination involving different churches. A lot of those things get detailed, and that's okay—that's fine. But the idea that you can belong to Jesus Christ and *not* be visibly, overtly, regularly, conspicuously committed to a local church—that idea is *foreign* to Church History! Only in very *recent* history—and primarily in the United States, where we value our individuality and our individual freedoms and our personal rights—only in these very latter days have people even *tried* to separate salvation from being identified with the church (cf. Pr. 18:1). The two go hand in hand!

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Now, let's be clear; do not fall off the *other* side of this horse, now that I have you on: You cannot *be saved* by joining a church, any more than you can become an Audi by sleeping in your garage overnight! That's not how it works! You must "hear" the Gospel (Rom. 10:14), understand "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4); then, convicted of your sins (Lk. 18:13), you "turn away" from your sin (Ezek. 18:30; 1 Pet. 3:11) and you "turn to" Christ (2 Cor. 3:16; cf. Acts 20:21; 26:20), and you put your "faith" in Him, and Him alone, for salvation (Acts 26:18; Gal. 2:16)—then you are "born again" (Jn. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23); and when you are "born again," you are *supernaturally* "made alive" in "Christ" (Eph. 2:5) and "placed" into "the body" of Christ (1 Cor. 12:18), which is "the church" (Col. 1:18, 24), where we are all "members of one another" (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25). *Then* it becomes your responsibility and your privilege and your humble duty to do everything you can to live out your involvement with other Christians in the local church (Heb. 10:24-25; cf. Rom. 12:10; 14:19; 1 Cor. 12:25; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 5:19, 21; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 4:9; 5:11; Jas. 5:16; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8-10).

Now, it sounds like I'm going to argue against everything I just said: We are an *independent* Bible Church. Well, that means we don't have a denominational formula, a denominational affiliation. The way I like to describe it: When you are independent, you can make your friends wherever you want to, and you are not *hindered* by any of those barriers as well.

And we *do* cooperate with *lots and lots* of people in *lots and lots* of ministries. But we do the membership thing *solely* on the basis, not of a prescription from headquarters, but we do it on the testimony of personal faith and understanding of the Gospel. Since we *don't* have a denominational affiliation, we spell that out in our by-laws. Insert commercial for the next go-around of the "HBC Distinctives" class; it just finished last month, but it will be along in another few months, and you might want to come and check that out.

Now, that idea of belonging to a local church, and being publicly identified as such, *began* in the Book of Acts. That's my point. You don't have a verse that says: "Sign the membership application." But the *concept* is all over the place: keep track of people, care for people, administrate, supervise, organize, plan, make things work.

And what we have before us in Acts 6 is one of the first visible steps in the development of what we call "Ecclesiology"—there's your 25-cent word for the day. "Ecclesiology" is the word for the Doctrine of the Church. The fullness of that doctrine was revealed over the span of time, from the Book of Acts through the close of the New Testament. The *bulk* of Ecclesiology was given through the Apostle Paul because *he* was the Apostle *specially called* to take the Gospel to the Jews *and* the Gentiles (Acts 26:17; Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:7)—and so it makes a lot of sense that God revealed through him this *phenomenal* new entity called the Church.

So let's look at this infant church take first steps; and theologically-speaking: "Ecclesiology" is born. But you don't have a full-blown Ecclesiology in Acts 6—or 7 or 8 or 28; it takes the rest of the New Testament.

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Now, here's an outline for all of Chapter 6. I'm only going to get to the first two and a half points this morning, but here is what we are going to see:

A Need Arises (vs. 1)
Leaders Prioritize (vs. 2)
Leaders Propose A Plan (vss. 3-4)
People Are Put Forth (vs. 5)
Leaders Pray And Confirm (vs. 6)
God Keeps Moving (vs. 7)
and Stephen Rises Up (vss. 8-15)

This is *ongoing* in the history of the Early Church; but first: A Need Arises.

As is *generally* the case in life, it was something of a crisis that provoked some creative thinking that led to something good. If you'd like a secular proverb version of this: "Necessity is the mother of invention." You *need* something, so you invent something to fix it.

A need surfaced in the form of a complaint—it was a legitimate complaint—and Spirit-led people responded in a godly way. Chapter 6, Verse 1—"Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food."

A couple of things to pick out of there, innocent-looking little phrases:

What is translated "at this time" is literally "in these days"; this isn't a record of a time in history, it's the regular passing of days—this was the ongoing, day-by-day lives of the Christians in Jerusalem.

They had a problem, a *growing* problem. The word translated "increasing"—as in "increasing in number"—that could literally be translated "multiplying." Following those numerical references that we have seen, the numbers could well have been 15,000 to 20,000! That's *a lot* of people to keep track of!

What is translated "Hellenistic Jews" is simply literally "Hellenists." They were the ones from outside Palestine—Jerusalem and Judea, the region "Palestine"; the area, if you will. Jews were scattered *all over* the Roman Empire; that's called the *diaspora*—that's the Greek word for "the Dispersion" (Jn. 7:35). And those that did not live near the mother ship—near the Temple in Jerusalem—they were daily immersed in a quite a bit different culture. Thanks to the spread of the Greek culture and Alexander the Great, a lot of them had a lot of Greek influence with them. God used Alexander the Great to spread the Greek culture and the Greek language, to have the New Testament written in a language very, very precise, and that could be spread worldwide very quickly. God was sovereign in all of that (Ps. 103:19; Prov. 20:24; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11). But there were these people who were more influenced by the Greek culture; most of them had, as their *first* language, Koine Greek—the language of the New Testament.

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Now also, most of these people did not have just one language—they may have dealt in Greek, in Latin, the Jews in Aramaic; there were many others, and you can see all those languages that are mentioned in Acts Chapter 2.

What is translated "native Hebrews" is literally just "the Hebrews." They were the ones who *did* live in and around Jerusalem and Judea. Their daily language was probably Aramaic, the current dialect of Hebrew. And to them, the Hellenists were *maybe* a little suspect because of the cultural shades of differences. You know how it works: When you meet someone who doesn't speak your language as fluently as you do, you can tell just from hearing them—they're not as smart as you are! Isn't that how you think? And so you talk to them more slowly and louder—and it doesn't help a bit! There are things like that which are the natural human reactions.

Well, the Hellenists who were there observed that "their widows"—the widows that were part of their families—were not receiving an adequate or equal or appropriate share of the food that was provided for the care of the most needy among the first Christians.

Now, as I said: This incident is *one of many* baby steps in the development of the functioning of the church as the Body of Christ.

Now, it is quite interesting to me—I just observed this; *this week* it only dawned on me: In the next to last letter from the Apostle Paul—the one who gave us the most information about Ecclesiology—in the next to last chapter of the next to last book of his, he gives detailed instructions about what qualifies people for material and financial support from the church; and he primarily deals with widows, as far as those who are needy. So the *first* step of the church functioning is actually finished being codified in the *last* step of the Doctrine of Ecclesiology.

And would you notice also that this was going on in "the daily serving of food." That shows that this was part of ongoing ministry; this was not a one-off situation of crisis. This was not a complaint that, "Well, last week at the potluck, some people got seconds before others got their first serving, and somebody got left out!" By the way, that is a 21-century-old problem. Bring more food.

The point is: A Need Arose. That is what led to the invention of a new idea, and it was a very good idea. The next part is: The Leaders Prioritize.

We have seen in Acts Chapter 2—and then again in Chapter 4, and again in Chapter 5—people were bringing their contributions, mainly in response to need, and some just in pure worship. They always "laid" them "at the feet" of "the Apostles" (4:37; 5:2). Well, that makes sense: It was clearly the Apostles whom God had set up as the leaders of this new thing (1 Cor. 12:28). But that *original* group of a hundred and twenty has grown more than a *hundredfold*! So just imagine: Heritage Bible Church is here today. We *already* need two services. Imagine if, instead of the three hundred people we were, imagine if we were, this fall, *thirty thousand*! That's the magnitude of the management problem that needed to be dealt with.

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It's like the difference between you operating your own home; you have your own family; you know where the kids' bedrooms are; you try to put the same number of kids to bed each night; you keep track of them; you feed them; you pay the bills—you do all of that. Well, imagine that in just a matter of weeks or months, suddenly your home has to take care of *several hundred* people. That's the magnitude!

A *huge part* of the testimony of the Early Church was how rigorously, relentlessly, daily, they cared for one another. Jesus said, before He went to the Cross: They "will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:35). That was happening!

Remember this statement from immediately after the salvation of those first "three thousand souls": Acts 2:42—"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." Now, there were only twelve Apostles, until Paul was brought in. They were given revelation from God (Matt. 10:40)—their teaching was crucial (Jn. 16:13); it was foundational. Ephesians 2:20 says the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." They diligently taught the ever-growing numbers of people in the Temple; and it says they went "from house to house" as well (Acts 2:46; 5:42)—it wasn't all public proclamation; there was a lot of personal interaction. And so, they needed to prioritize, according to their abilities and their calling.

Now, it's a *very good thing* to feed hungry people. Galatians 6:9 says, "Do not grow weary" in caring for each other, and "doing good" deeds for each other. It is a *very good thing* for believers to share meals together. It is a *very good thing* to pay special attention to the needs of widows and orphans as a subcategory. But it is not possible to teach full time, be devoted daily to prayers, and to reason with people about the Gospel day in and day out, *and* also to handle the hard work of distributing and serving food.

So, Chapter 6, Verse 2—"So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God...' " (cf. 1 Tim. 4:6, 13, 15-16; Titus 1:5, 9) This is the Apostles—the leaders—prioritizing. Those are the right priorities for the Apostles. Again, as we see the fullest expression of life in the church fleshed out in the writings of the Apostle Paul, he relates the very *same* priorities for the men who followed the Apostles and became the elders of the local churches. Again in that same chapter, in First Timothy 5:17 he says: "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching."

Do you see the transition that we mentioned there, from Jesus to His agents: Jesus sent out the twelve, two-by-two; then He sent out seventy, two by two. He was talking about the spreading and the multiplying of the oversight of the ministry. But "especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" are "to be considered worthy of double honor"—which is financial support (1 Cor. 9:14).

So, as the various parts of *your body* serve different functions, each one has to do the thing that it is designed to do. The same is true for the church; and the Apostles set the pattern of prioritizing that is to be followed in every congregation.

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Now, I said we are going to go two and a half points; I'll nibble at the next one. A Need Arises, and The Leaders Prioritize. Thirdly: The Leaders Propose A Plan.

What we are about to see is a New Testament application of the principle that was taught to Moses by his father-in-law Jethro; it's recorded in Exodus 18. The idea is that the weight of responsibility of leading and judging wisely will *crush* any one person, and it was crushing Moses. His father-in-law counseled Moses to build a team to do triage on the things that were coming to him, and to teach the team to handle the routine things so that only the most crucial matters could come to him.

That is exactly what the twelve Apostles did. When it came to the excellent ministry to windows, the excellent ministry of prayer, the excellent ministry of teaching and preaching the Word of God, the plan proposed by the Twelve did not minimize *any* of those things. They did not blow off the complaint, they handled it. And it also kept their priorities in place.

So, Verses 3 and 4—these were the Apostles speaking: "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

I realize fully that we have recently been devouring much longer sections in Acts. I want *full credit* for having dealt with 32 verses last week! And one time, I did *a whole chapter* in Acts! But I don't want to hurry through this passage, because there are going to be *so many things* here that will connect *so directly* to us. On our next visit to Acts, we are going to see who to apply these priorities and the same principles that the Apostles applied, and we will explore how to best make them work in the ongoing life of Heritage Bible Church, where "we are members of one another."

But I want you to see where this is headed, so I'm going to give you a preview of the rest of this chapter. We are going to see the standard set for determining *who* should be entrusted with any kind of oversight of serving in the church, and then we will see how it played out. I think the formula is: Membership plus Leadership plus Fellowship plus Integrity with the Right Priorities equals Powerful Collective Testimony. So, Verses 5 and 6—"The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them."

We are going to see who God continued to multiply the number of Christians. We will take a different look at these extra-special conversions of some priests, and how one of the new leaders blossomed spectacularly. Look at Verses 7 and 8—"The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith"—*one chapter* after they were trying to kill the Apostles! "And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people." Now, he's not even an Apostle, and yet God allowed him to do some of the "signs of" an "apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12).

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Scripture Text: Acts 6:1-2 (Acts #13)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 4-30-23

Well, no surprise: When that happened, the enemy of Christ formulated a new attack on this group: Verses 9 through 15—"But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.' And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council." Oh, don't they *love* doing that! "They put forward false witnesses who said, 'This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.' And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel."

Ooh, and Chapter 7 is *awesome!* But we are not done with Chapter 6.

Let's pray:

Our Father, thank You for this new life we have in Christ. We were "dead in our trespasses and sins," but You "made us alive in Christ"—that is all for Your glory! We thank You not only for our new life, we thank You for one another. We thank You for faithful leaders who, through the centuries, have made sure that this glorious message of the Gospel was passed down to us. We pray that You will continue to multiply the number of disciples, even around here, as we see in the Book of Acts. Father, we pray that You will keep raising up leaders "of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom." I pray that You will place in every one of us the desire for greater service and greater ways to minister to one another, and to see Your Church built up for Your glory, in Jesus' name. Amen.