
Book of Acts – Course A

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If you have not already done so, save this lesson to your computer using the "save" feature of your browser or PDF reader. Then print out the lesson (or at least open it in your browser or PDF reader **offline** – not on the Internet). Read the lesson and **study in your Bible the passages indicated >>> Scripture <<<**. Following each passage, study each question that has a number enclosed in asterisks (*1*, *2*, etc.), and **write down your answers on paper**. Some questions include more than one number because they have more than one blank to fill in. ("Think" questions should be carefully considered for your own benefit, but your answers will not be submitted to us.) Please take your time, study each passage carefully, answer the questions honestly, and consider the applications to your own life (John 12:48; 2 Tim. 2:15).

When you have studied the whole lesson and written down answers to all the indicated questions, return to the menu for this course on our web site at www.BibleStudyLessons.com and click on the link for the **answer quiz** for this lesson (or simply click on the link at the end of this lesson). Follow the directions to submit your answers and receive your grade. You will then be given an opportunity to see the correct answers to the questions. Please save this lesson and the correct answers for future reference.

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Thank you for your interest, and God bless your study of His word.

Problems Inside & Outside the Church – Acts 6&7

Lesson 5

Introduction:

All local churches face problems. The first congregation was no exception, but they realized problems do not just go away by themselves. They must be confronted.

The church's first internal problem had been about collecting funds (the case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5). We will see that the second internal problem concerned distribution of funds. Money has often been a center of conflict, whether in the early church or today's church.

I. Men Appointed to Care for Widows – Acts 6:1–7

>>> Please read Acts 6:1–7. <<<

1 What problem did the church face? Answer: Some Grecian _____ were neglected in the daily distribution.

2 What solution did the apostles reveal to solve the problem? Answer: They said to appoint (give a number) _____ men to watch over the matter.

3 What work did the apostles themselves continue to emphasize? (a) making new laws, (b) prayer and the word, (c) recreation and sports. Answer: _____.

Comments: A problem arose when certain Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) in the church claimed that their widows were not being cared for as well as other widows. To solve the problem, the apostles said that men should be especially appointed to see that the distribution was handled fairly and properly.

The men chosen had to be wise and spiritually minded, having a reputation for righteousness. Not just any men may be appointed leaders among God's people. 1 Timothy 3:1–13 and Titus 1:5–9 list qualifications men must have to serve as elders or deacons in local churches. As in Acts 6, when God has spelled out the qualifications, the local church is expected to determine which men meet those qualifications.

The issue here concerned what needy people should be cared for by church funds. This "business" was accomplished under the guidance of men within the framework of the local church. This is the first of many passages that emphasize local church independence (cf. 1 Peter 5:1–3; Acts 14:23; 20:28). Specifically, each local church should decide for itself what needy members it will care for.

Instead of this, modern churches often form boards, societies, and institutions to centralize and supervise the work on behalf of many local churches. Such was never done in the New Testament, neither in evangelism nor in benevolence. Each local church was completely capable and responsible to make decisions about its own local work without supervision or guidance from any central earthly organization.

Finally, note that the church did care for the physical needs of its own destitute widows. But the highest officers, the apostles, did not consider such work to be their primary focus. Physical concerns were delegated to others, while the highest leaders concentrated on spiritual concerns: worship and teaching God's word. This harmonizes with other passages showing that the emphasis of local churches should be on spiritual matters. The church exists to help people be saved, grow in their relationship with God, and receive eternal life. See 1 Peter 2:5; John 18:36; Acts 20:28–30; John 3:3,5; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 4:11–16.

Think: Even the authorized work of caring for destitute members should not be allowed to hinder the spiritual emphasis of the church. Should the church then allow itself to become involved in Social Gospel practices which appeal to people's physical, material interests but are not even authorized activities for local churches to engage in?

In order to prosper in God's work, a local church must deal with its internal problems (cf. v7).

II. Stephen's Preaching and Arrest – Acts 6:8–15

>>> Please read Acts 6:8–15. <<<

4 What work did Stephen do? (a) started a monastery, (b) blessed the holy water, (c) did miracles and disputed with false teachers. Answer: _____.

5 How effective was his teaching? Answer: People could not resist the _____ of his speech.

6 How did his opponents deal with Stephen (v13)? Answer: They had _____ testify against him.

Comments: For several chapters now the record of Acts will follow the work of two of the seven men appointed in Acts 6.

Stephen was the first man after Pentecost who was said to do miracles but not an apostle. Interestingly, verse 6 said the apostles had laid hands on these men. Acts 8:14–22 will show that people, who were not apostles, could receive miraculous power by having apostles lay hands on them; but only apostles could so impart these powers.

Think: Many people today say we should "tolerate" all other views and should not say other religious people are wrong. But Stephen boldly disputed with men in error, just as the apostles and other faithful preachers did throughout Acts. Should we should imitate their example? See also Rev. 3:19; Gal. 6:1,2; Eph. 5:11; 2 Tim. 4:2–4.

As with the apostles in Acts 4,5, Stephen's effective preaching of truth led to opposition. People could not disprove his teaching, but they still refused to accept it. Instead, they resorted to lies and persecution. This is just what Jesus predicted (Matt. 5:10–12).

Note that John 2:19–22 clearly says that Jesus' statement about destroying the temple and raising it up referred to his body, not to a place of worship.

III. Stephen's Defense – Acts 7:1–53

When the high priest allowed him to speak, Stephen presented one of the best overviews of Old Testament history to be found anywhere.

The Promises to Abraham

>>> Please read Acts 7:1–8. <<<

7 What Old Testament character did Stephen begin describing? (a) Moses, (b) David, (c) Eve, (d) Abraham, (e) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

8 What command did God give him (v3)? Answer: He was to leave his country and go to a land that God would _____ him.

9 What promise did God make to him (vv4,5)? Answer: He promised to give the land of Canaan to his _____.

10 What covenant did God make with him (v8)? (a) circumcision, (b) the 10 Commands, (c) the sabbath day, (d) the rainbow. Answer: _____.

Comments: Stephen may appear to be ignoring the charges against him. However, he had already proved the Jews could not answer his evidence (6:10ff). By summarizing Jewish history, he began with a subject the Jews knew and loved, then he used it to show that they had rejected God's word like their ancestors had repeatedly done.

God had commanded Abraham to leave his homeland not even knowing where he was going (Gen. 12:1). Because of Abraham's obedient faith (Heb. 11:8–10), God gave him three great promises. Abraham's descendants would become a great nation, would inherit Canaan, and through them

would come a blessing on all nations. These blessings were to come on Abraham's descendants, yet at the time he was childless! In Acts 3:25,26, Peter had explained that the promise of the blessing on all nations referred to salvation through Jesus' death.

Circumcision of male children was the sign of this covenant (Gen. 17:9–14). The promises were repeated to Abraham's heirs: Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons. Before these promises would be fulfilled, however, Israel must undergo slavery. See Gen. 12:2,3,7; 22:17,18; 26:3,4.

Joseph's Role in the History of the Nation

>>> Please read Acts 7:9–16. <<<

11&12 What did Joseph's brothers do to him, and what did God do? Answer: His brothers sold him into _____, but God made him _____ of the land.

13 What caused Joseph's brothers to go to Egypt? (a) they were lost, (b) a famine, (c) they went to fight a war, (d) a religious pilgrimage. Answer: _____.

14 Whom did Joseph then bring to live in Egypt with him? Answer: He brought his father (named) _____ and his relatives went to Egypt.

Comments: In fulfillment of God's prediction, Abraham's descendants became slaves in Egypt. This began because, of Jacob's twelve sons, the favorite was Joseph. In envy, his brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt (Gen. 37). Yet God blessed Joseph by a series of fascinating providential acts, so that he became governor of the land (Gen. 39–41). When famine came, Joseph had prepared the Egyptians. But Joseph's brothers were unprepared, so they went to Egypt to buy food.

There Joseph recognized his brothers and, unknown to them, tested their repentance. Finally, he revealed himself to them and forgave them (Gen. 42–45). He then brought Jacob and the whole family to Egypt, so he could provide for them. So the Israelites escaped the famine, but other trials awaited them.

Slavery and the Birth of Moses

>>> Please read Acts 7:17–22. <<<

15 How did a later Egyptian king treat the Israelites? (a) he mistreated (dealt treacherously with) them, (b) he made slaves of them, (c) he caused the death of their babies, (d) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

16 Who was eventually born? (a) Jesus, (b) Peter, (c) Moses. Answer: _____.

17 Who brought him up as though he were her own son? Answer: Moses was brought up by _____.

Comment: Years later an Egyptian king or Pharaoh came to power who did not know Joseph. He enslaved the Israelites and caused the death of their sons, because he feared their growing numbers. God heard the prayers of His oppressed people and sent a deliverer named Moses. By God's providence, Moses escaped death as a baby by actually being raised as the son of Pharaoh's own daughter!

Moses' Flight from Egypt

>>> Please read Acts 7:23–29. <<<

18 What attempts did Moses make to help the Israelites? Answer: He killed an _____ and tried to reconcile two Israelites.

19 Where did he go when he realized his deed was known? (a) Midian (Madian), (b) Jerusalem, (c) Rome, (d) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

Comment: When Moses grew up, he realized he was really an Israelite, so he decided to try to help the Israelites. First, he killed an Egyptian who was mistreating an Israelite. Then he tried to make peace between two Israelites. One of them rejected him saying, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us?" When he realized that people knew he had killed the Egyptian, he fled to the land of Midian.

The Call of Moses at the Burning Bush

>>> Please read Acts 7:30–37. <<<

20 How did God appear to Moses? (a) as a woman, (b) in a cloud, (c) in a dream, (d) in a bush that burned but was not consumed. Answer: _____.

21 What did God instruct Moses to do for the Israelites? Answer: God wanted Moses to deliver Israel from _____.

22 Whom did Moses predict that God would later raise up? Answer: Moses predicted God would send a _____ like Moses.

Comments: Later God appeared in a burning bush and called Moses to go to Egypt to free the Israelites. He empowered Moses to do great miracles, including the Ten Plagues on the Egyptians, the crossing of the Red Sea, and providing for Israel in the wilderness. By the time Israel left Egypt, the first of God's promises to Abraham had been fulfilled: they had become a great nation.

Moses also predicted the coming of a later prophet like himself. This prophet was Jesus (see on Acts 3:22,23). Note the similarities:

Similarities between Moses and Jesus

*Both were lawgivers and judges (vv35,38).
Both delivered people from bondage (v35).
Both were prophets and mediators (vv37; cf. Gal. 3:19).
Both did great signs and wonders (v36).
Both were rejected by the people (vv35,39–41,52).*

The Israelites' Idolatry

>>> Please read Acts 7:38–46. <<<

23 Where did God speak to Moses (v38)? Answer: God spoke to Moses at Mt. _____.

24 What did Israel worship (vv39–43)? (a) a calf, (b) images, (c) the host of heaven, (d) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

25 God instructed Moses to make the tabernacle in what way? Answer: He made the tabernacle according to the _____ God had showed him.

Comments: Stephen here approaches the main point of his defense. God gave laws to Israel through Moses and led them into the promised land of Canaan. But the people worshiped idols repeatedly throughout their history. God kept His promises, but the people disobeyed Him and did not keep their part of the covenant.

Note that the second promise to Abraham had now been fulfilled: his descendants had received the land of Canaan. Some people, even today, claim that Israel never really received the land, so Jesus will give it to them when He returns. But the Bible clearly says they did receive all that God had promised (Josh. 23:14; 21:43–45).

Stephen's Rebuke of the Jews

>>> Please read Acts 7:47–53. <<<

26 What did Solomon build? (a) an idol, (b) a temple to God, (c) the city of Rome, (d) all the preceding. Answer: _____.

27 How did Israel treat the prophets that God sent them? Answer: The Jews had _____ the prophets.

28 What application did Stephen make to the Jews of his day? Answer: The Jews disobeyed the law and murdered the _____.

Comments: In Canaan, Israel was led by judges then later by kings, including David and Solomon. Solomon built the temple. Stephen quotes Scripture showing that, though God approved of the temple, no building could ever contain God. This showed that the Jews misunderstood the significance of God's gifts to them.

God had given the Israelites great promises through Abraham, deliverance and the law through Moses, and the temple through Solomon. They seemed to think these things assured them of God's favor. Stephen showed that they were mistaken. They still had to obey God. But despite God's goodness, the people became more disobedient. God sent prophets to teach the people and call them to repentance. Yet Stephen asked which of those prophets the people had failed to persecute or kill.

This brought Stephen to his climax. The prophets had foretold of the coming Messiah. The Jews knew their ancestors had mistreated the prophets and disobeyed the law. Yet they themselves also had disobeyed the law and had even killed the Messiah that the prophets predicted!

Once again the defendant became the accuser! The Jews had put Stephen on trial, claiming he disrespected the law and the temple. He proved they were really the ones who disrespected the law.

IV. The First Christian Martyr – Acts 7:54–60

>>> Please read Acts 7:54–60. <<<

29 What did the Jews do to Stephen for his message (v58)? Answer: They cast him out of the city and _____ him.

30 What did he see in heaven? Answer: He saw Jesus standing (where?) at the _____ of God.

31 What plea did he make on behalf of his murderers? Answer: He asked the Lord to not charge them with this _____.

Comments: Stephen had just accused the Jews of being like their ancestors, who persecuted and killed the prophets. They proceeded to prove he was correct by doing the very same thing to him!

Note again the contrast to the Jews on Pentecost in Acts 2. When they had been accused of having killed Jesus, they repented and were baptized. But when Stephen made the same accusation against these Jews, they killed him! The effect of the gospel depends on the hearts of the hearers.

Before dying, Stephen was allowed to see Jesus at God's right hand. This further confirms that Jesus now reigns as King (see on Acts 2:33).

And note once again the importance of bold proclamation of truth. Many today want the gospel message to be watered down and compromised with "a positive message." The gospel does contain positive truth, but people will not appreciate it till they first see their own error and their need for repentance. Faithful preachers did not fail to tell people their errors. Stephen was willing to die rather than compromise.

The "first Christian martyr" died calling on Jesus to receive his spirit and to not charge this sin against the murderers. He died as his Master had died. Among the murderers was a young Jew named Saul. He never forgot Stephen's death (see Acts 22:20). In Saul's case, Stephen's prayer was fulfilled, not immediately, but later when Saul repented and was converted (see Acts 9).

Personal application questions:

32 Should church supervision be local or centralized? _____

33 How common is disobedience among God's people? _____

34 Should Christians show other people their errors, even in religion? _____

When you have carefully studied this lesson and written down answers to all the questions, [click on this link to submit your answers.](#)

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