

## Bibles???

### The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Let's pray...

[Act 6:1-15 NKJV] 1 Now in those days, when [the number of] the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

Now, in order to understand the reason for the division within the church, we must first understand who were the two groups that were at odds with each other.

The Hebrews and the Hellenists

Both groups are Jews –

Remember, the early church was made up of Jews – it's not until we get later on in the book of Acts that we see the gospel introduced to the Gentiles.

So the Hebrews and the Hellenists were two groups of Jews.

The Hebrews were the more traditional ones – they continued to speak in Aramaic and followed closely the culture of that was passed down through the years – they tended to be the Jews that were born and raised in Israel.

The Hellenists however, were the Jews – who for the most part, were foreigners.

They tended to have Greek names instead of Hebrew names,

Greek was their first language and they submerged themselves into the Greek culture.

The Hebrew Jews were considered old fashioned by the Hellenist Jews while the Hellenist Jews were considered to be compromisers by the Hebrew Jews.

So, this division, so obvious among the Jews at large, it began to manifest itself in the church.

Remember, earlier we saw the mighty work of the Holy Spirit within the church when the church was in one accord.

But now there is division.

What was the division about?

The Hellenist Jews began to notice that the poor in their group (primarily the widows), were not getting their fair share of the daily distribution of food and goods.

Keep in mind that a woman during this time – when her husband passed away, if she didn't have any children, she had no livelihood – she was dependent upon the charity of others.

So the Hellenist Jews saw the preferential treatment that was going on and they brought their complaint to the Apostles.

The Greek word that is used here for distribution – is the word, diakonia – which means service.

This is where we get the word for “deacon” – which simply means “servant” –

And many times we get caught up with titles at church – but in reality, the deacons of the church are those who serve the church as servants in any capacity.

**2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of [good] reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."**

So the apostles, they see that there is a problem within the early church –

But because the church was growing in numbers – we saw that in verse 1 - the responsibility of distributing food by the apostles had begun to cut into their prayer and study time.

Turn with me to the book of Exodus 18 – because we find a very similar example in the Old Testament.

Now, as Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness – there were problems / divisions that occurred between the people – just like we find in the early church.

So we are told in the book of Exodus that the people would bring their problems before Moses and let him judge.

The problem was that there were so many problems occurring, people would stand in line all day so Moses can judge on their case.

That is where Jethro, Moses' father-in-law steps in and gives him some advice.

**[Exo 18:17-23 NKJV] 17 So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do [is] not good. 18 "Both you and these people who [are] with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing [is] too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. 19 "Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. 20 "And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. 21 "Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place [such] over them [to be] rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 22 "And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be [that] every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear [the burden] with you. 23 "If you do this thing, and God [so] commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace."**

Jethro's advice is for Moses to seek God and be His spokesmen to the people and for him to pick out God fearing men to hear the cases that the people were bringing – the big cases, they can still come to you – but the little ones, let them do it.

And that is what we have here in the book of Acts –

They were going to select seven men

The qualifications of these seven men

- Men of good reputation: a person in ministry doesn't have to be perfect, but they do need to have a reputation for goodness.

Others must see that their life is aimed at doing that which pleases God. Sure they may stumble and fall along the way but do they get back up, admit their failure and keep moving forward. No one is perfect – the process of our Christian growth doesn't happen overnight.

- They must be filled with the Holy Spirit: There must be evidence in these men's lives that the Spirit is working in them. And the main way of knowing if a person is filled with the Holy Spirit is to look at the fruit of their life.

Paul tells us in Galatians 5, **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.**

- Wisdom: There is a big difference between wisdom and knowledge.

Knowledgeable men are not always wise men.

There are lots of people who know lots of stuff, but they don't know what to do with their knowledge.

Solomon – the wisest man gives us a few qualities of a wise man in the Proverbs.

Proverbs 9:10 tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom – a wise man is aware of his relationship to God – someone who doesn't have humility before God is not wise.

Proverbs 17:28 tells us that a wise man is one who is slow and careful about what he says -

Proverbs 9:9 tells us that a wise man is one who is teachable and willing to learn. They understand that they don't know it all and they want to continue to keep growing and learning.

Now – keep in mind that these are the qualities they were looking for those that were going to serve in the church cafeteria.

And as these seven waited on tables – the apostles will then serve in the teaching ministry.

This doesn't mean that the apostles are now "above" the lowly food ministry. It just means that they're going to focus on what should be their main responsibility.

Prayer and studying the Word of God.

Church, it doesn't matter how many times one has read the bible, we will never come to a point where we can say, "I know all there is to know in God's Word" That is the enemy speaking.

We must take care to read His Word daily.

Will we understand everything we read? Of course not.

Will we get a profound truth every day? Maybe not

Will we grow? Yes

**5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.**

I had you make a note of three of the servants that were selected

Stephen – we will see in the next few verse and in chapter seven, after giving a tremendous message to the Sanhedrin, he will be arrested and he will be put to death as the first martyr.

Phillip, we will see in a few weeks in chapter 8

And the last one I had you make a note of is Nicolas – a proselyte, meaning that he wasn't even born a Jew. He converted to Judaism.

I want you to notice that all seven of the men chosen – had Greek names, meaning they were most likely Hellenists.

It was the Hellenists that had complained – and the apostles appoint Hellenists to oversee the food distribution – no longer would they feel cheated of the food distribution because Hellenists were the ones that were serving tables.

**7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.**

The word of God spread – meaning the word of God was growing.

Not just in the sense that it was spreading – but also in the sense that it was making an impact in the lives of the believers.

And a big reason was that the apostles were now more focused on their ministry of the Word.

At the end of verse seven – we are told that a great many of the priests became converts – these were those that worked in the temple.

These were some of the individuals who had been in opposition to the early church – they are now joining the church.



**8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.**

I want you to keep in mind that Stephen was one of the guys selected to serve in the cafeteria of the church.

And what did Stephen do – he served faithfully.

And now God has raised him up to greater areas of ministry, one where the Holy Spirit is empowering him to do great wonders and signs among the people.

Church, sometimes we can get our eyes on wanting to do the "big things" for God. But I think that God is often looking for those who will be faithful in the small things before giving them the big things.

Turn your bibles to Luke 16

We are going to look at a portion of the parable of the unjust steward –

I am going to read from the NLT

**[Luk 16:10-12 NLT] 10 "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. 11 And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth,**

**who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? 12 And if you are not faithful with other people's things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?**

Here is the thing church - God rewards faithfulness

So we shouldn't despise the days of small things.

We should be faithful to what God has for us today. Even if it involves serving tables like Stephen.

Even though we have seen the apostles empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform miracles in the previous chapters, here we see Stephen empowered.

**9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.**

A little history lesson – the word synagogue is never found in the Old Testament.

When the Jews were in exile in Babylon – some 500 years prior to this, the Jews would meet in small groups to read and study the Books of Moses (the first five books of the bible)

These meetings were called synagogues – that is what synagogue means “meetings or assembly”

When the Jews returned to Jerusalem, even though the temple was rebuilt – they continued to meet in synagogues – and the reason was that they realized it had been a neglect of God’s Word that had resulted in their being judged & removed from the land. So they determined to never let that happen again by devoting themselves as students of the Scriptures.

The synagogue was the center of study during this time – and there were several in Jerusalem during this time.

The Jews in this particular synagogue, they take it upon themselves to try to take down Stephen in a doctrinal debate.

But it was no contest; Stephen, with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, embarrassed them with his simple and powerful proofs that Jesus was the Christ.

I had you make a note of Cilicia –

Cilicia was a Roman Province –

And we find in Acts 21,22,23 that Paul mentions that he was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia.

So it could very well be that one of those that came to argue against Stephen was Saul – and they will meet again at the end of the next chapter.

**11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."**

Once these men realized that they couldn't handle the logic, the wisdom and the anointing of which Stephen was speaking, they turned to false witnesses to try to destroy him.

Remember, the crime of blasphemy was punishable by death.

That was the charge that the religious rulers brought up against Jesus.

Here is a question, if they secretly induced men to do this – how did Luke find out???

Again, it is most likely that Paul told him later on of what went on behind closed doors.

**12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon [him], seized him, and brought [him] to the council. 13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 "for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."**

Witnesses came in under oath & gave knowingly false testimony about what they heard Stephen say.

Perhaps Stephen has repeated some of the things that Jesus said regarding the temple.

**[Mat 24:2 NKJV] 2 And Jesus said to them, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not [one] stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”**

However, Jesus never said that He would destroy the temple, He said that the temple was going to be destroyed – and it was by the Romans later on.

They accused him of these things because Stephen clearly taught that:

- Jesus was greater than Moses (blasphemous words against Moses).
- Jesus was God (blasphemous words against... God).
- Jesus was greater than the temple (blasphemous words against this holy place).
- Jesus was the fulfillment of the law (blasphemous words against ...the law).
- Jesus was greater than their religious customs and traditions (Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change customs).

**15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.**

As Stephen is falsely accused in front of the Sanhedrin, those who sat in the council were expecting him to break down and ask for mercy.

But instead – they described his face as the face of an angel (again, Paul must have told Luke this later on during their trips together)

This doesn't mean he was cute or something, like when you hear someone say that someone's child has "the face of an angel".

No, this means that Stephen was fully at peace during the entire ordeal.

He was filled God's Spirit on the inside, he had the beautiful glow of God's Spirit on the outside – just like when Moses came down the mountain after spending time with God.

And watching all of this – was a young man by the name of Saul.

Keep in mind that months before Stephen stood in front of the council – Jesus stood in the same spot.

Here Stephen is calling them to repentance.

They'd rejected the Son of God, but it was not too late.

If they reject the Spirit of God, it would be. (Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is the only unpardonable sin)

And it was their condemnation of Stephen that resulted in their judgment at the hand of the Romans.

And we will see that take place next week – Lord willing.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 'May the LORD bless you and protect you. 25 May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. 26 May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'

