

Acts of the Apostles



Chapter 6



INTRODUCTION 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17
18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28

The Need for Assistants.

- 1 * At that time, as the number of disciples continued to grow, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.^a
- 2 * So the Twelve called together the community of the disciples and said, “It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to serve at table.*
- 3 Brothers, select from among you seven reputable men, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, whom we shall appoint to this task,
- 4 whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”
- 5 The proposal was acceptable to the whole community, so they chose Stephen, a man filled with faith and the holy Spirit, also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism.
- 6 ^b They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them.*

- 7 The word of God continued to spread, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly; even a large group of priests were becoming obedient to the faith.^c

Accusation against Stephen.

- 8 * Now Stephen, filled with grace and power, was working great wonders and signs among the people.
- 9 Certain members of the so-called Synagogue of Freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and people from Cilicia and Asia, came forward and debated with Stephen,
- 10 but they could not withstand the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke.^d
- 11 Then they instigated some men to say, “We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.”^e
- 12 They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, accosted him, seized him, and brought him before the Sanhedrin.
- 13 They presented false witnesses* who testified, “This man never stops saying things against [this] holy place and the law.
- 14 For we have heard him claim that this Jesus the Nazorean will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.”^f
- 15 All those who sat in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.
-

* [6:1–7] The Hellenists...the Hebrews: the Hellenists were not necessarily Jews from the diaspora, but were more probably Palestinian Jews who spoke only Greek. The Hebrews were Palestinian Jews who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic and who may also have spoken Greek. Both groups belong to the Jerusalem Jewish Christian community. The conflict between them leads to a restructuring of the community that will better serve the community's needs. The real purpose of the whole episode, however, is to introduce Stephen as a prominent figure in the community whose long speech and martyrdom will be recounted in [Acts 7](#).

* [6:2–4] The essential function of the Twelve is the “service of the word,” including development of the kerygma by formulation of the teachings of Jesus.

* [6:2] To serve at table: some commentators think that it is not the serving of food that is described here but rather the keeping of the accounts that recorded the distribution of food to the needy members of the community. In any case, after Stephen and the others are chosen, they are never presented carrying out the task for which they were appointed ([Acts 6:2–3](#)). Rather, two of their number, Stephen and Philip, are presented as preachers of the Christian message. They, the Hellenist counterpart of the Twelve, are active in the ministry of the word.

* [6:6] They...laid hands on them: the customary Jewish way of designating persons for a task and invoking upon them the divine blessing and power to perform it.

* [6:8–8:1] The summary ([Acts 6:7](#)) on the progress of the Jerusalem community, illustrated by the conversion of the priests, is followed by a lengthy narrative regarding Stephen. Stephen's defense is not a response to the charges made against him but takes the form of a discourse that reviews the fortunes of God's word to Israel and leads to a prophetic declaration: a plea for the hearing of that word as announced by Christ and now possessed by the Christian community. The charges that Stephen depreciated the importance of the temple and the Mosaic law and elevated Jesus to a stature

above Moses ([Acts 6:13–14](#)) were in fact true. Before the Sanhedrin, no defense against them was possible. With Stephen, who thus perceived the fuller implications of the teachings of Jesus, the differences between Judaism and Christianity began to appear. Luke’s account of Stephen’s martyrdom and its aftermath shows how the major impetus behind the Christian movement passed from Jerusalem, where the temple and law prevailed, to Antioch in Syria, where these influences were less pressing.

* [\[6:13\]](#) False witnesses: here, and in his account of Stephen’s execution ([Acts 7:54–60](#)), Luke parallels the martyrdom of Stephen with the death of Jesus.

a. [\[6:1\]](#) [2:45](#); [4:34–35](#).

b. [\[6:6\]](#) [1:24](#); [13:3](#); [14:23](#).

c. [\[6:7\]](#) [9:31](#); [12:24](#); [16:5](#); [19:20](#); [28:30–31](#).

d. [\[6:10\]](#) [Lk 21:15](#).

e. [\[6:11\]](#) [Mt 26:59–61](#); [Mk 14:55–58](#); [Acts 21:21](#).

f. [\[6:14\]](#) [Mt 26:59–61](#); [27:40](#); [Jn 2:19](#).



Chapter 6

