

The
ACTS
of the Apostles



THE CHURCH GROWS
AND THE GOSPEL
SPREADS THROUGH
HEALTHY, CHRISTLIKE
LEADERSHIP

ACTS 6

INTRODUCTION

- In this chapter of Acts, the apostles choose new leaders to meet growing ministry needs.
- Luke also parallels Stephen and Jesus' ministries, showing us how important it is to model our own ministry after Christ.
- Christlikeness in our leaders and ministries helps grow our churches and spread the Gospel.

**CHRISTLIKE LEADERS
ENABLE THE CHURCH
TO GROW**

ACTS 6:1-7

OVERFLOWING CHURCH

- Acts 5 explains that the apostles' teaching and miracles brought multitudes of people to Christ.
- Even under great persecution, they continued to preach the Gospel everywhere they went (5:14, 42).
- Luke begins chapter 6 by reminding the reader that the early church is growing.

OVERFLOWING CHURCH

- While joy abounds in this spiritual harvest, however, there are rising logistical difficulties.
- With the great influx of newly saved people comes an influx of new administrative and leadership problems.
- Ministry, even in times of success, can be messy, because it always involves God's working through messy people with limited abilities and foresight.

OVERFLOWING CHURCH

- Luke summarizes a need that has arisen in this overflowing church and records the apostles' plan to address it.
- The Hellenistic Jews have lodged a complaint against the Hebrews.
- At the time, the majority of Jerusalem was filled with Aramaic-speaking Jews. They had lived in the holy city of Jerusalem for centuries and were very familiar with traditional Jewish customs and language.

OVERFLOWING CHURCH

- There was also a large minority of Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists) that Luke mentions. These Jews spoke no Hebrew because they had lived abroad for centuries and returned to Jerusalem to finish their days in the Holy Land.
- They were not familiar with every Jewish custom and rule upon returning to Jerusalem, and the most devout Jews, especially the Pharisees, considered them second-class citizens because of it.

OVERFLOWING CHURCH

- Though thousands of these Jews, both Aramaic-speaking and Greek-speaking, came to Christ at Pentecost, their prejudices did not fade over night.
- Due to the animosity between the two groups, the Hellenistic widows felt they had been neglected in the daily distribution of food provisions.
- These tensions have come to the attention of the church leaders, who see the need for additional leadership to protect the church from factions.

OVERFLOWING CHURCH

- The apostles take the claim of discrimination seriously. They consider meeting the needs of widows a legitimate ministry that needs clear leadership and supervision.
- They do not ignore the issue, but neither do they stop preaching the Gospel (something both Jesus and an angel of God instructed them to do) in order to fulfill this need (Luke 24:46-49; Acts 5:19-20).

OVERFLOWING CHURCH

- Their refusal to wait tables is not because they consider themselves “above” such a task, but because they have already been given a task and need to stay obedient to it.
- The advancement of the Gospel is at stake.
- Not every ministry of the church is theirs to meticulously oversee or else they would have no adequate time for preaching or teaching.

PLAN OF APOSTLES

- The apostles come up with a plan and wisely choose to delegate this issue to other leaders.
- The apostles define the type of leader:
 1. They must be of “good repute” and handle money and resources with a trustworthy character.
 2. They must also be “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” and they have the administrative skills to sort out the details for the widow’s mealtime.

SPIRIT-GUIDED

- The Spirit-guided plan is put into motion and the congregation chooses Stephen and six others.
- The congregation prays over the newly selected leaders, who are the first deacons of the early church.
- We see that the result of the apostle's leadership: the church becomes healthier. Its members are well taken care of, the message of the Gospel advances, and many are saved, even some of the elite Jewish priests.

**CHRISTLIKE LEADERS
HELP SPREAD THE
GOSPEL WITNESS**

ACTS 6:8-15

STEPHEN'S MINISTRY

- We see Stephen ministering in a way that directly parallels Christ's ministry.
- Though Stephen is more a deacon than an apostle, he is concerned with preaching Christ to others.
- He does not just serve the widows and hope that will be enough to convert them.

STEPHEN'S MINISTRY

- Beyond the good deed of ministering to the widows and performing signs and wonders, he also ministers in word by boldly proclaiming the Gospel.
- As we've seen before, properly testifying to Christ requires both.
- Jesus met needs while also proclaiming the Gospel verbally, and Stephen is doing likewise.

ENEMIES OF STEPHEN

- Like Jesus, Stephen has his enemies.
- Hellenistic Jews have a serious problem with Stephen's teaching against the "three pillars" that Jews use as foundations for acceptance before God: the land, the law, and the temple.
- Just as the Jews misunderstood Jesus' teaching on these things, they misunderstand Stephen's teaching as well.

ENEMIES OF STEPHEN

- By examining their sacred beliefs, Stephen is offering them the true way to approach God: through Christ.
- But in the same way that Jesus' convicting words about true worship and obedience sparked rejection, anger and violence in his time, Stephen's faithfulness to offer truth leads to the same outcome (verse 9).
- Stephen's hearers cannot withstand his Spirit-filled wisdom, and begin plotting violence against him by stirring up the crowds (verse 11).

BEFORE COUNCIL

- Stephen is brought before the same council that Jesus faced.
- Stephen's arrest, paralleling Christ's, is also based on charges from false witnesses (verses 12-14). See the parallel in Matthew 26:59-60.
- Stephen's experience here is one of the fulfillments of Jesus' prediction that His followers will be persecuted as He was (John 15:18-21).

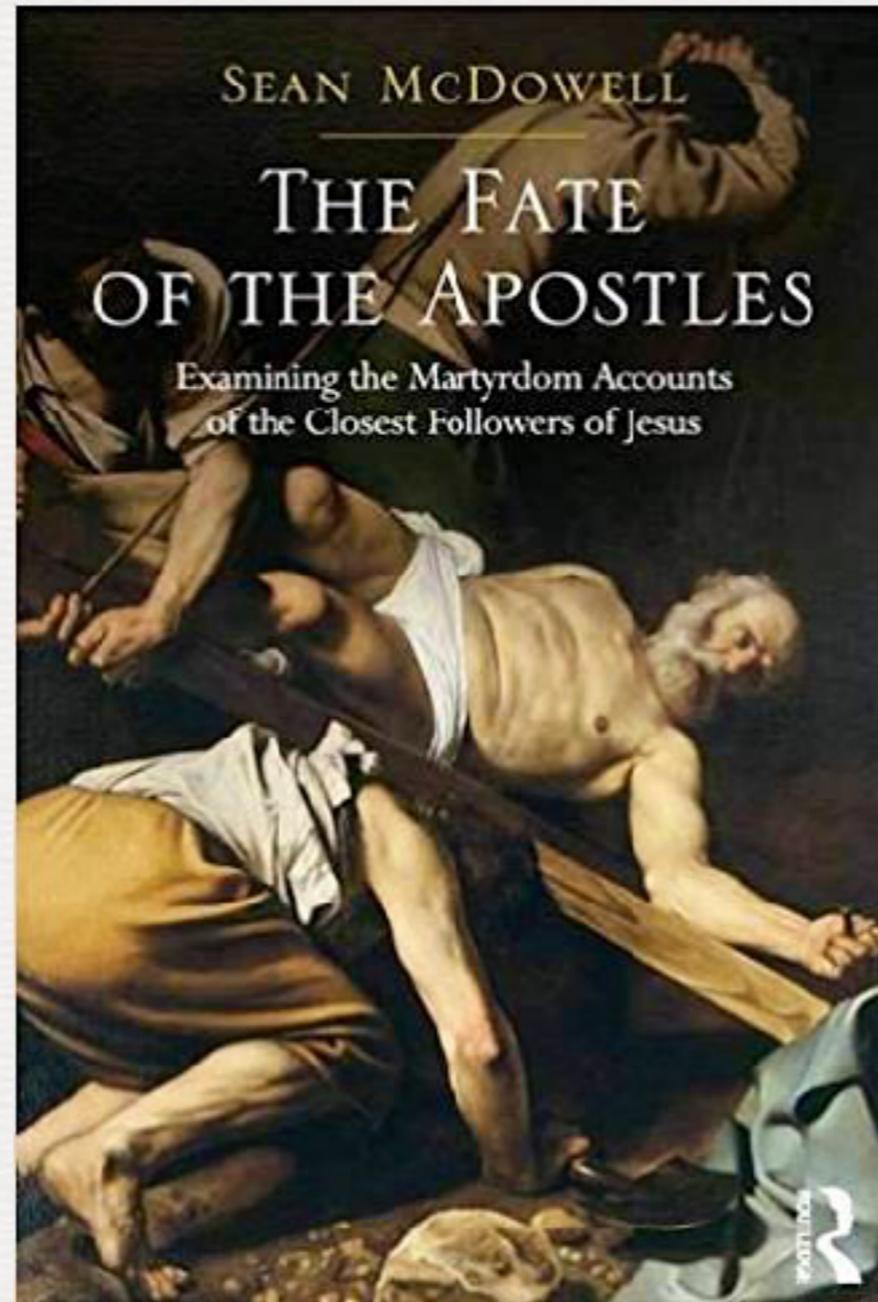
BEFORE COUNCIL

- In verse 15 , we see the last parallel in this chapter.
- Stephen, about to face his own death, radiates the peaceful, confident “face of an angel.”
- To identify Stephen as a faithful hero of history, Luke purposefully uses this phrase to reference the face of Moses on Mt. Sinai and more importantly, Jesus at his transfiguration.

BEFORE COUNCIL

- The peace that Stephen radiates is a direct inheritance of the calm faith Jesus displayed throughout His arrest, trial and Crucifixion.
- In every step of his ministry so far, Stephen has shown the wisdom of the Gospel and the nature of Christ, even in this moment of persecution.

PERSECUTION



PERSECUTION

- Even before the church's beginning, we read of persecution.
 - John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded.
 - Jesus was crucified.
- Early Christian leaders faced a similar fate
 - Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 6-8)
 - James, the brother of John, was killed (Acts 12)

PERSECUTION

- Jesus told his disciples to expect persecution (Matt. 10:16-23; Mark 13:9; John 15:18-27, 16:2-3, 33) and suffering for righteousness (Matt. 5:10-11, 43-44; Luke 6:22-23).
- Jesus warned them that they would be killed, as Israel had killed the prophets (Matt. 21:33-40, 22:6, 23:30-31, 34, 37; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 6:22-23; 11:47-50, 13:34, 20:9-18).

PERSECUTION

- They expected persecution in the same manner Jesus experienced it himself (John 15:18-27) specifically because of their proclamation of the name of Jesus before men (Matt. 24:9; Luke 21:12-13, 17).
- In turn their deaths testified to the truth of their proclamation, as the death of Jesus proclaimed the truth of his.
- Many Romans became Christians when they saw Christians martyred for their faith.

PERSECUTION

Justin Martyr - "For I myself, too, when I was delighting in the doctrines of Plato, and heard the Christians slandered and saw them fearless of death, and of all other things which are counted fearful, perceived that it was impossible that they could be living in wickedness and pleasure."

PERSECUTION

- Mark explains the cost of discipleship by placing the martyrdom of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29) just before the commission of the Twelve (Mark 6:7-13) and their return (Mark 6:30).
- Jesus taught that losing one's life for the sake of the Gospel is necessary to save it. He also taught that his followers must deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow him. And he warned them to expect persecution as they proclaimed the gospel.

PERSECUTION-PAUL

- At his conversion, Paul was told that he would suffer before Jews and Gentiles (Acts 9:15-16).
- Paul's second letter to the Corinthians lays out the suffering he endured (whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, near starvation, in danger from various people and places).
- He also taught that other believers would suffer (Rom. 8:35-36; 1 Thess. 3:3-4; Phil. 1:29).

PERSECUTION-PAUL

- Paul faced the genuine possibility of death while ministering in Asia - “we despaired of life” and “had received the sentence of death” (2 Cor. 1:8-9).
- Paul not only experienced persecutive at the hands of religious authorities but also at the hands of Gentiles. The governor under King Aretas in Nabatea wanted to arrest him (2 Cor. 11:32-33; Acts 9:23-25).
- In Philippi, Paul cast out a demon of divination from a slave girl and was beaten and thrown in prison.

OTHER PERSECUTION

- Hebrews was written to help Christians undergoing trials. Many threatened to apostatize (Heb. 3:12-13; 6:4-6; 10:26-29).
- Hebrews emphasizes the supremacy of Jesus, including his successful trials against temptation (Heb. 2:9-10, 18) as well as the lives of those in the Hebrews so-called “hall of faith” (Heb. 11:4-38).

OTHER PERSECUTION

- James is often called the proverbs of the New Testament because of the practical wisdom for putting faith into action.
- Yet the background assumption of James is that the righteous will suffer for their faith (James 1:2, 12).
- He encourages readers to be patient in suffering and recall the example of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord (James 5:10-11).

OTHER PERSECUTION

- First Peter encourages Christians who faced persecution (1 Peter 1:6: 2:19-23: 3:14, 17; 4:1, 12-16, 19; 5:1, 9-10).
- Peter calls these believers to stand strong in their faith and be holy as Jesus is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).
- They are to stand strong as they face the same kind of “fiery trial” that Jesus faced (1 Peter 1:19-23; 4:12-16).

OTHER PERSECUTION

- First John was written to testify to the truth of the incarnation and encourage Christians to turn from sin and love God and one another.
- John teaches that martyrdom is a testimony of true faith (1 John 5:6-8).
- John testified to the expectation that believers will be hated for their faith: “Do not be surprised brothers, that the world hates you” (1 John 3:13).

OTHER PERSECUTION

- Revelation teaches that Christians must be prepared to face death for Christ's honor (Rev. 1:9; 2:10, 13:6:9; 11:7-8; 12:11, 17; 13:7, 10, 15; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; 20:4, 9).
- Christians are called to witness to their faith, even if it means death: "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. . . . Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

RESOURCE

