

Acts 6

Acts 6:1 there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews

"What distinction was made in New Testament times between Greeks and Grecians?"

"...Jews of the dispersion who adopted Hellenists' customs and who spoke Greek (Acts 6:1; 9:29) were called Grecians. New Testament references to Greeks refer to persons of Greek lineage." (Church News: Question of the Week, *LDS Church News*, 1994, 10/22/94)

"But the difference between the 'Grecians' and the 'Hebrews' was far deeper than merely of language, and extended to the whole direction of thought. There were mental influences at work in the Greek world from which, in the nature of things, it was impossible even for Jews to withdraw themselves... it was only natural that the Hellenists, placed as they were in the midst of such hostile elements, should intensely wish to be Jews, equal to their Eastern brethren. On the other hand, Pharisaism, in its pride of legal purity and of the possession of traditional lore, with all that it involved, made no secret of its contempt for the Hellenists, and openly declared the Grecian far inferior to the Babylonian 'dispersion.' That such feelings, and the suspicions which they engendered, had struck deep into the popular mind, appears from the fact, that even in the Apostolic Church, and that in her earliest days, disputes could break out between the Hellenists and the Hebrews, arising from suspicion of unkind and unfair dealings grounded on these sectional prejudices (Acts 6:1)." (Edersheim, Alfred, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 5-6)

Acts 6:2 It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables

Neal A. Maxwell

"...we allow ourselves to get diverted not only from eternal objectives, but also into tasks that are not actually ours to do. This insightful case is instructive: 'Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.' (Acts 6:2.)

"The Twelve, had they not been inspired, could have easily ended up being very busy as regional welfare administrators and never left Jerusalem! There would have been plenty to do-many widows to be cared for. The

Twelve, of course, realized that they had not been called to serve tables but, rather, to spread the word of God about the earth. Hence, they wisely delegated the welfare task to others. So the needs of the Greek widows- which were real-were met, but without sacrificing the Twelve's higher calling.

"Sometimes in the Church we gravitate toward conspicuous busyness rather than doing what we have really been called to do. Getting thus diverted usually occurs, however, because of bad judgment rather than bad motives. When we fail to accord priority to our real opportunities, we tend to make Martha-like choices instead of Mary-like choices. Remember, it was Martha rather than Mary who 'was cumbered.' (Luke 10:40-42.)

"A bishop who is merely a manager of programs or activities will be more weary and less effective than a bishop who is a shepherd of the flock. Doing those basic things we are supposed to be doing can permit us to proceed with confidence and in patience. Otherwise, indiscriminate busyness will result in trying to do too many things simultaneously, pursuing quickie campaigns and producing only temporary results at best." (*We Will Prove Them Herewith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982], 111.)

Neal A. Maxwell

"The original Twelve were counseled that they were not to "serve tables" (see Acts 6:1-4). Actually, serving tables is easy. It is visible, measurable, and do-able-compared to opening up the nations of the world to missionary work or to keeping wolves out of the flock. But if the Twelve were drawn away from their scriptural and constitutional duties, the whole Church would suffer. Being drawn away can happen to all of us, almost without our knowing it." ("Wisdom and Order," *Ensign*, June 1994, 41)

Acts 6:4 we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word

Howard W. Hunter

"With the rapid growth of the Church and the heavy demands on the Twelve to provide leadership and administration and teach all nations, it becomes clear why the Lord has directed the building up of the First Quorum of the Seventy. The recent decision [1978] to do so by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve reminds us of an interesting

historical parallel of an episode recorded by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. The foreign or Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem were complaining that their widows were being neglected and not taken care of like the widows of the native Jews.

"...In the brief statement of that episode, we learn these facts: First, that the Twelve determined they were not to 'serve tables' or, in other words, occupy their time in the details of administration; second, they appointed seven men, 'full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,' to look after the day-to-day needs; third, the Twelve then devoted their energies to the 'ministry of the word'; fourth, the word of God increased, and the gospel was carried to greater numbers.

"In December 1978, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve made a similar determination that it was no longer advisable for the Twelve to occupy their time in the details of administration of the many Church departments. They delegated seven men, designated as the presidents of the First Quorum of the Seventy, to give supervision to these details so that the Twelve could devote their full energies to the overall direction of the work, and, as directed by the Doctrine and Covenants, 'To build up the church, and regulate all the affairs of the same in all nations.'

"I fully believe that in the near future we will see some of the greatest advancements in spreading the gospel to all nations that have ever taken place in this dispensation or any previous dispensation. I am sure that we will be able to look back in retrospect-as a result." (*The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, edited by Clyde J. Williams [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997], 227.)

Acts 6:5 they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost

The Brethren had determined to delegate authority in welfare matters. As one of these select seven, Stephen is a great example to us. Described as a man 'full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,' he is one of only two non-apostles (the other is Philip-see Acts 8) whose ministry deserved mention in the book of Acts.

His ministry is instructive for many reasons. He was righteous enough to behold the face of God (Acts 7:55-56) but was not selected as an apostle. He was very spiritual and yet he was assigned the menial task of "serving tables." Somehow, we can be sure that he did not think himself greater than the task laid before him. He was not a seeker of callings but a seeker of the Spirit. We

imagine him faithfully ministering to the daily needs of the Grecian widows without murmuring or complaint. Yet the time would come when his knowledge of spiritual things would be needed. His spiritual prowess would be manifested in an unexpected doctrinal dispute in the synagogue (v. 9). All the time he was "serving tables," we imagine Stephen garnishing his thoughts unceasingly with virtue and the doctrine of the priesthood until his time had come (see DC 121:45). Then he spoke with that power which is irresistible, for 'they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.' (Acts 6:10)

Acts 6:6 when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them

"Where does the Church's practice of setting apart come from?"

"The priesthood ordinance of setting apart is the formal process of giving authority to members called to labor in specific responsibilities. It involves a specific priesthood procedure, including the laying on of hands. It has been a practice of the Lord's servants since Old Testament times, even though in some scriptural references it is not clear whether the wording refers to being ordained, set apart, or both. In fact, it may be that earlier dispensations made very little distinction between these two practices.

"...In other Old Testament passages, the word *separate* seems to refer to the procedure of designating someone for the Lord's work. For example, 1 Chronicles 23:13 [1 Chr. 23:13], we read that 'Aaron was *separated*, that he should sanctify the most holy things, he and his sons for ever, to burn incense before the Lord, to minister unto him, and to bless in his name for ever.'

"In the New Testament we find clearer instances of individuals being set apart. In the ancient Church when seven men were chosen to assist the Apostles, they were 'set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.' (Acts 6:6.) Also, when Barnabas and Saul were selected for the Lord's work, the Church leaders fasted and prayed, and 'the Holy Ghost said [to them], Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.' (Acts 13:2.) The Church leaders then 'laid their hands on them,' after which they sent Saul and Barnabas out to do the work. (Acts 13:3.)" (Rex Allred, "I Have a Question," *Ensign*, Mar. 1983, 67)

Acts 6:7 a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith

It's intriguing to look at how the religious establishment responded to the teachings of Christ. John noted, 'among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God' (Jn. 12:42-43).

Elder Maxwell wrote, "some in the ecclesiastical establishment, at one point, would not come forth and confess Jesus publicly. Yet later 'a great company' joined the Christian church. This must have been a remarkable episode. Sympathetic Joseph of Arimathaea may have likewise, and perhaps also Nicodemus. (See Matt. 27:57; John 19:38-39.)" ("The New Testament-A Matchless Portrait of the Savior," *Ensign*, Dec. 1986, 20)

We are tempted to think that these chief rulers repented of their wickedness and were converted. However, the Joseph Smith Translation clarifies, 'And of the *rulers* durst no man join himself to them (the apostles): but the people magnified them' (JST Acts 5:13). We hereby learn that there was a distinction between the "priests" spoken of and the "chief priests" or "chief rulers." Both were apparently impressed with Christ, but only the non-ruling priests had the humility to join the church.

Alternatively, some have wondered if these "priests" were not of the group responsible for the Dead Sea scrolls. Apparently, these cave dwellers considered themselves the "sons of Zadok, the priests who keep the Covenant" (John A. Tvedtnes, *The Church of the Old Testament* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1980], 67.)

Hugh Nibley

"Some scholars have recently suggested that this great company may have been such a band of holy men as we find described in the newly discovered Dead Sea Scrolls and related documents, if not a group actually named in one of them. These men were prepared by their *tradition* to receive the gospel when they heard it. Without that tradition and training the preaching to them might have fallen on deaf ears." (*The World and the Prophets*, 3rd ed. [Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book Co., Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1987], 220.)

Acts 6:11-15 we have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses

"It is certain that Stephen said something about the law of Moses being fulfilled and being no longer in force, or his enemies would not have

accused him of being contrary to Moses and saying that Jesus (already dead) would change the customs of the law (see Acts 6:13). Stephen was something of an eastern Abinadi, who testified that salvation was dependent on the atonement of Jesus Christ, notwithstanding the law of Moses. And like Abinadi, he gave his life for his testimony of Jesus Christ. And like Abinadi, his face shone like an angel's." (*Selected Writings of Robert J. Matthews: Gospel Scholars Series* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1999], 286.)

Acts 6:15 his face as...the face of an angel

On occasion the Spirit will have such a powerful influence on the individual as to transform their being into a source of light. Like the stones that illuminated the Jaredite ship after being touched by Jehovah, the faces of the prophets become luminescent with the power of God. We remember the instance when the face of Moses shone after conversing with the Lord (Ex. 34:29). The brothers Nephi and Lehi had the same experience while conversing with angels, their 'faces...did shine exceedingly, even as the faces of angels' (Hel 5:36). And then Abinadi, whose mission was reminiscent of Stephen's, became so full of the Spirit that 'his face shone with exceeding luster' (Mosiah 13:5).

The Prophet Joseph Smith was noted to have a transcendent luminescence to his countenance when he was particularly full of the Spirit. The following are the accounts of those who witnessed this magnificent transformation:

"Emmeline B. Wells: 'The power of God rested upon him to such a degree that on many occasions he seemed transfigured. His expression was mild and almost childlike in repose; and when addressing the people, who loved him it seemed to adoration, the glory of his countenance was beyond description. At other times the great power of his manner, more than of his voice (which was sublimely eloquent to me) seemed to shake the place on which we stood and penetrate the inmost soul of his hearers, and I am sure that then they would have laid down their lives to defend him.'

"Mary Ann Winters: 'I stood close by the Prophet while he was preaching to the Indians in the Grove by the Temple. The Holy Spirit lighted up his countenance till it glowed like a halo around him, and his words penetrated the hearts of all who heard him and the Indians looked as solemn as Eternity.'" (Truman Madsen, *Joseph Smith the Prophet*, pp. 89-90)