

## **CHOSEN BY GOD TO SERVE OUR LORD AND SAVIOR (ACTS 6-7)**

We're looking today at **Acts 6-7**, which of course means that there are five chapters prior, that give more context to what **Acts 6-7** is saying. Obviously you wouldn't just pick up a book and just start reading it in one of the middle chapters, would you? That wouldn't make much sense. The context to **Acts 6-7** should and does also include the gospel accounts of the life, ministry, and death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, which we can read about in the first four books of the New Testament, in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They also all tell then of the resurrection AND the return of Christ. Then at the beginning of the book of Acts, the fifth book in the New Testament, it tells us of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus had promised, of Whom then leads us to believe on Jesus as being the Christ, the Savior of mankind, to repent of our sins against God, and to receive Him into our hearts to become "saved", to be children of God. And then throughout the subsequent chapters we can read of the beginning of the spread of the gospel of Christ, just as Jesus had commanded in His "Great Commission". That Great Commission is actually mentioned at the end of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, though they are recorded for us with different wording by each of those authors, and the book of John speaks of Jesus' commission specifically to Peter, of which Jesus asked Peter 3 times, "do you love Me?". That speaks to reconciling Peter back to Him, as Peter had denied Jesus 3 times. That is important to all of us, as Jesus is asking each of us, "do you love Me?" Jesus tells us, once again, in the book of John, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—" (**John 14:15-16**) He was speaking of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Peter spoke to that saying "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." (**Acts 5:32**) Right after Jesus had spoken of the Holy Spirit He stated, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me." (**John 14:23-24**) The answer to Jesus' question to each of us, "do you love Me?" is answered before we can even give a reply, as it IS based on our keeping of His commandments, keeping His Word. For those who have answered the call and the question of Jesus with a yes, not just based on what we say but what we do, we demonstrate that by our serving Him, as that is then what we are called by God to do.

Matthew's recording of Jesus' Great Commission, that He gave to His disciples/apostles, and then to us, is as follows, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (**Matthew 28:18-20**) Yes, God is

with us! This is His plan and purpose, not ours alone. Apostle, in the Greek, is "apostellō", meaning "to send away" or "to send forth", of which it is "the concept of being sent with a mission [that] can be related to the Hebrew word "shalach", meaning "to send." The "apostles" were then most specifically those of whom Jesus personally, that is, in person, sent out to preach and spread the gospel, the good news of Christ Jesus. In a much broader sense, based on the Great Commission, we too could be referred to as "apostles", as we are then also sent out by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, according to the Word of God, to preach or share the gospel, the good news of Christ Jesus. Yet, THE apostles/disciples were told to go and make "disciples", of which that is what we then are. With respect to THE apostles, many churches leave it at that and say that we are disciples not apostles. What we are meant to know and believe and take hold of and live our lives accordingly is how the Apostle Peter spoke of each of us. He spoke of those who are disobedient to the Word saying, "They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles [other nations], that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation." (1 Peter 2:8-12) That should be familiar. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

Peter had already qualified those of whom he was speaking to in the first chapter saying, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied." (1 Peter 1:2) When Jesus had said that many are called but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14), the chosen are those who are obedient to the Word. We too then are all being led to believe on Jesus as being the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God who died on a cross for our sins, taking our sins upon Himself, to the grave, and He has risen from the grave conquering death, sin, and evil, making a way for us too to have life eternal in Him, to where we also overcome that sting of death, and sin and evil, as we are obedient to the Holy Spirit and put our trust in Christ Jesus as being, as He said, "the Way, the Truth, and the Life. [And that] No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6) Jesus is still saying, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will

give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:27-30) And we are promised, through the prophesy of Isaiah 11:10, "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious." As Jesus also told His disciples to teach all things that He had commanded them, we get a summary of that in His Great Commandments, to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind, and the to also love others (our neighbors) as ourselves. (Mark 12:30-31) We are led to that place of loving God as He first loved us. (1 John 4:19) We are then, as obedient children of God, based on the Great Commandments and Great Commission, sharing and showing the love and the gospel [Word] of Christ Jesus, regardless of who you are, where you've been or what specifically is your calling in Christ Jesus.

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**Acts 6:1 (Seven Chosen to Serve)**

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.

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[In the Greek language, there is the hellen (hel'-lane), which is "a Hellene, the native word for a Greek; it is, however, a term wide enough to include all Greek-speaking (i.e. educated) non-Jews."<sup>1</sup> That encompassed "Greece's three-century-long Hellenistic era [that] was marked by cultural expansion and exchange." It was then from the time of Alexander the Great through the time of Christ Jesus and then into the time of the spreading of the gospel of Christ that we can read about in the book of Acts. <sup>2</sup> There is also the Greek word "hellenistes" (hellynista), which was the term used in our passage of Scripture which refers to "a Hellenist, Grecian Jew".]

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**Acts 6:2-7**

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. 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; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 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, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. 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.

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1 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1672.htm>  
2 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Hellenistic>

[The 12 disciples/apostles were not saying that "waiting on tables" was beneath them, for it was and is important for all in the service of God to be full of the Holy Spirit and faith and wisdom to do what was required of all of the children of God, to share and show the love and the gospel [Word] of Christ Jesus. As we'll see, the first martyr in Christ was one of those appointed to "wait tables", so to speak. That of course was just a generalization, not a specific duty. As the Apostle Paul tells us, "There are ]diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all." (1 Corinthians 12:4-7) Yet we all share and show Christ for the kingdom of God and His glory.]

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**Acts 6:8-9 (Stephen Accused of Blasphemy)**

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.

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["The term "Libertinos" refers to a member of a group of Jews who were descendants of Jewish slaves freed by the Romans. These individuals were part of a synagogue in Jerusalem known as the Synagogue of the Freedmen."<sup>3</sup> How ironic that they were calling themselves "libertinos" (freedmen) and disputing with "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people." Sound familiar, the Jewish rulers who came up against Christ Jesus? There is but one way to have that freedom or liberty. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. **For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.**" (Romans 8:1-2)

James, the ½ brother of Jesus said, "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:25)]

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**Acts 6:10-15** And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

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3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3032.htm>

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**Acts 7 Stephen's Address: (now for more context to Matthew-Acts)**

Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?" And he [Stephen] said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia [Ur of the Chaldeans], before he dwelt in Haran [haw-rawn], and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. 'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.' Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people. So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.

**God Delivers Israel by Moses**

"But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt till another king arose who did not know Joseph. This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds. Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting,

and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons. And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, saying, 'I am the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. 'Then the Lord said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt." ' "This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years."

#### **Israel Rebels Against God**

"This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, '**The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.**' [Christ Jesus] "This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets: 'Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, images which you made to worship; and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.'" Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built Him a house. However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?' You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! **You always resist the Holy**

**Spirit**; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

**Stephen the Martyr**

When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "**Lord, do not charge them with this sin.**" And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

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In closing, we are **chosen by God** to **serve** our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus. That includes then, as Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (**Matthew 5:43-48**) Jesus also tells us, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (**John 16:33**) So, until He takes us home, we are to be, as Jesus had said, about our Father's business, sharing and showing the love and the gospel of Christ Jesus, that we may bless the Lord at all times (**Psalms 34**), having a kingdom of God and His righteousness perspective (**Matthew 6:33**), for the glory of God!