

# Spirit-filled Lives

<b>Key Text:</b>	Acts 6 & 7:1-29
<b>Key Verse(s):</b>	“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” (Acts 6:3)

## Background to the Study

Acts 6 covers two key events in the Early Church: the appointment of seven individuals to attend to the physical needs of the growing group of believers (vs. 1-7), and the arrest of Stephen for supposed blasphemy (vs. 8-15). The first verse of chapter 7 gives the high priest’s question to Stephen, thus setting the scene for Stephen’s response. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was only a few years past, and the Early Church was growing rapidly. With this increase came a variety of people and cultures, resulting in new challenges. The majority of church members were Hebrew-speaking Jews. However, Greek-speaking Jews (or Hellenists), the returning Diaspora who came from other countries, also joined with the disciples. These Hellenists began to complain that their widows were not getting the help they needed. Whether or not this was the case, the disciples took their concern seriously, and with compassion and wisdom, took immediate action. The task of serving tables, referenced in verse 2, does not refer only to serving food. Trapeza, the Greek word used here, refers more specifically to a money changer’s table. This indicates that the responsibilities of these seven men probably included distributing money or provisions to those in need. The men chosen for this task all had Greek names indicating that they were Hellenists. As such, they would have been accepted by the Greek-speaking Jews and possibly were more sympathetic to their cause. The appointment of these men pleased everyone and helped restore unity in the church, as is evidenced by its continued success and growth. Most Bible historians agree that the Libertines (vs. 9) were descendants of slaves whom Pompey had captured in about 63 B.C., and later were sent back to Palestine, where they had constructed a synagogue. Cyrene was the chief city in Libya, and Alexandria was the capital of Egypt. Cilicia and Asia were both Roman provinces. The statement in verse 10 that those who disputed with Stephen could not resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke, indicates that it was not merely Stephen’s oratorical skill, but the Holy Spirit in him that made such an impact. His accusers could not win a debate against him, so they resorted to false witnesses and untrue accusations. These accusations against Stephen regarding the Temple, or holy place, were the same false accusations that had been brought against Jesus at His trial (Matthew 26:59-61; Mark 14:57-58). Speaking blasphemous words against the Temple, as both were accused of doing, was a crime punishable by death.

In Acts 7, Stephen commenced his address to the members of the Sanhedrin, who were to judge the false accusation of blasphemy (Acts 6:13), by giving a historical summary of God’s calling as illustrated by the lives of

Abraham and Joseph. This Spirit-filled deacon began by outlining the call of Abram into a covenantal relationship with Jehovah including geographical details and quotes from Genesis that were familiar to all who were listening. He continued with the patriarchal genealogy, specifically noting the prophecy of future Egyptian control that began with the sale of Joseph into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. This was Stephen's first example of Israel's opposition to the purpose and plan of God, despite the mighty works of God which they had seen, thus accusing them throughout their history. He reminded the religious leaders how God providentially used what Joseph's brothers intended as evil to accomplish good, both for him and for all his family, as well as succeeding generations. He summarized how Joseph was promoted, his family delivered from famine, and justice and mercy served. Stephen then summarized the birth of Moses— a Hebrew child adopted into and educated in Pharaoh's household, and his calling as a deliverer for Israel. Stephen characterized Moses as being "mighty in words and in deeds" (vs. 22). While the Biblical account does not record much of Moses' young life, Jewish historian Josephus notes his prowess as a military commander and leader, which was a fact known to Jews of Stephen's day. Stephen was careful to make clear God's faithfulness to every generation from the establishment of the Hebrew nation through their deliverance from Egypt and entrance into the Promised Land. In the Hebrew history recited in today's text and the following verses, Stephen went on to make his contention that the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus was a continuation of the Jewish rejection of God's plan for them as a nation.

## Testimony from Our Day

While attending university, I had worked for a local business for about six months when a new manager was appointed—a man who was younger than me. This manager seemingly was intimidated by the fact that I was a "college boy," and set out to prove his worth by minimizing mine. He was quick to give me the most difficult assignments and then speak disparagingly when I completed them. There was no question about the fact that I was not his favourite employee! One time he even questioned my integrity concerning the amount of time I had worked in the shop training one of his relatives. Frustrating and hurtful as this situation was to me, there was little I could do to change anything other than pray, work hard, and try to do my best despite the negative surroundings. The time came when another job opened up for me that was much more pleasant and with a better working environment. I rejoiced that God had provided and I no longer had to endure the hassles of the old job. After I graduated, I started a completely different career. I thought very little about the old job until over ten years later when I was asked to become a pastor and needed to find employment in the small town where I was transferred. Providentially, God provided work in the same trade I had worked in during that difficult employment of the past. I realized at once that even in the challenging period when I was being treated unfairly, God had been with me, training and preparing me for a future which only He knew. In today's text, Stephen drove home the point to the members of the Sanhedrin that God's presence was not restricted to the Promised Land. Though Joseph had to endure being betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery in Egypt, God delivered him out of all his afflictions. The truth Stephen illustrated that day through the example of Joseph was demonstrated in my employment situation as well. Just as God was with Joseph through his many challenges, God was with me. Just as God had a purpose for Joseph, God had a purpose for me. I have been reminded many times over the years that God has promised to be with us. God has a plan for our future. It is not only in the blessings and good times that He is with us, but also in the trials and difficult circumstances. Even when it is not evident to us, God is working for our benefit. Challenging situations and individuals will come and go in our lives, but God will be faithful to deliver and put us exactly where He desires, for His purpose and glory, as we faithfully serve Him.

# A Closer Look

Question 1	Multiple references in chapters 1-7 indicate that the early disciples were people of prayer even after the amazing prayer meeting where they received the infilling of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 3:1; 4:24-31; 6:4-6). What conclusion can we draw from this?
Question 2	Acts 6:1-7 describes the appointment of seven individuals to attend to the physical needs of the growing group of believers. According to verse 3, what qualifications were necessary in those who would fill the position? Why are these qualities important for the service of the Lord?
Question 3	According to Acts 6:4, what would occupy the Apostles' time once helpers had been appointed to take care of managerial duties? What characteristics of the Early Church likely contributed to the fact that "the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied"? Acts 6:7
Question 4	In Acts 7, what can we learn from Stephen's response regarding how to deal with those who oppose our faith today?
Question 5	Why do you think Stephen recited Israel's history to these religious leaders who were well acquainted with the facts he laid out before them?
Question 6	God used adverse circumstances in the lives of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses to accomplish His will and plan for them and their succeeding generations. How is God using circumstances in your life to accomplish His will?

## Take Home

The appointment of the seven men in Acts 6 "pleased the whole multitude," and was a testimony to their godly character and Spirit-filled lives. The question is, are we "of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom"? Let us purpose, with God's help, to be people of integrity, godly discernment, and empathy for others, guided by God's Spirit, so that when a need arises in the work of the Lord, we are qualified to step forward and serve. Similarly, God was at work in the lives of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses as well as the generations in between them. Because of God's faithfulness and mercy, we can trust that He is also at work in our lives no matter what circumstances we face.