

## Lesson 7 Acts 6—7

### STEPHEN, THE MAN GOD CROWNED

**Memory Verse:** “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:4 NIV)

There are two words for “crown” in the New Testament: *diadema*, which means “a royal crown” and gives us the English word diadem; and *stephanos*, the “victor’s crown,” which gives us the popular name Stephen. You can inherit a *diadema*, but the only way to get a *stephanos* is to earn it.

Acts 6 and 7 centre on the ministry and martyrdom of Stephen, a Spirit-filled believer who was crowned by the Lord. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). He was faithful both in life and in death and therefore is a good example for us to follow.

The church was experiencing “growing pains,” and this was making it difficult for the apostles to minister to everybody. The “Hellenistic Jews” were the Greek-speaking Jews who had come to Palestine from other nations, and therefore may not have spoken Aramaic, while the “Hebraic Jews” were Jewish residents of the land who spoke both Aramaic and Greek. The fact that the “outsiders” were being neglected created a situation that could have divided the church. However, the apostles handled the problem with great wisdom and did not give Satan any foothold in the fellowship.

When a church faces a serious problem, this presents the leaders and the members with a number of opportunities. For one thing, problems give us the opportunity to examine our ministry and discover what changes must be made. In times of success, it is easy for us to maintain the status quo, but this is dangerous. Any ministry or organization that thinks its success will go on automatically is heading for failure. We must regularly examine our lives and our ministries lest we start taking things for granted.

The apostles studied the situation and concluded that *they* were to blame: they were so busy serving tables that they were neglecting prayer and the ministry of the Word of God. They had created their own problem because they were trying to do too much. This is not to suggest that serving tables is a menial task, because every ministry in the church is important. But it is a matter of priorities; the apostles were doing jobs that others could do just as well.

Church problems also give us an opportunity to exercise our faith, not only faith in the Lord, but also faith in each other. The leaders suggested a solution, and all the members agreed with it.

Problems also give us the opportunity to express our love. The Hebrew leaders and the predominantly Hebrew members selected six men who were Hellenists and one man who was both a Gentile and a proselyte! What an illustration of Romans 12:10 and Philippians 2:1–4! When we solve church problems, we must think of others and not of ourselves only. What was the result? The blessing of God continued and increased! The church was still unified (Acts 6:5), multiplied (Acts 6:7), and magnified (Acts 6:8).

Let’s look at these chapters which present Stephen as a faithful believer in different areas of ministry.

**Scriptural Reading:** Acts 6: 1 – 8, 7:51-60

**Things to learn:** 1) Servant and Witness 2) Judge 3) Martyr

## Questions

Q1. What makes Stephen stand out as a servant and effective witness for God (Acts 6:1-15)?

Q2. How did Stephen use Scripture of their time to indict the religious Jewish leaders who saw him as a “judge” against them (Acts 7:1-53)?

Q3. What were the implications of Stephen’s death (Acts 7:54-60)?