

OPENING THE FLOODGATES

We hope this series of studies will issue in the floodgates of heaven being opened afresh! You'll find the background to the series [here](#).

3. “..so the word of God spread ..” (Acts 6.1-15)

The challenge with which chapter 6 opens led to the emergence of Stephen: his appointment as a ‘deacon’ led to his ministry as a preacher: his preaching led to his martyrdom: his death led to a great persecution: and that persecution would lead to the first great eruption of the gospel *out of* Jerusalem.

What presented as a delicate problem resulted in dramatic progress: a reminder of the way in which the Lord works all things together for good in fulfillment of His eternal purpose. Although our situation is clearly different, this passage has much to teach us in these days. Please God, we shall benefit greatly from prayerfully applying our minds together to this narrative.

1. **Read chapters 6 and 7**, if you have the time! Luke’s concern is to show not only *that* the word of God spread, but also *what* that word is and *how* that word spread.

How is the preaching of the word of God so integral to the progress of the work of God?

2. **Read 6.1**. A lot of good things were clearly going on in the life of the Jerusalem church – large numbers of people, from a range

of different backgrounds, coming to faith in Jesus, and in the face of personal difficulty experiencing substantial practical help: but these 'good things' were also problematic.

What was the nature of the challenge which the church in Jerusalem found herself facing?

What factors contributed to the problem arising?

What might have been the likely consequences if the issue had not been addressed quickly and sensitively?

3. Read 6.2-4. In the changing circumstances of their life together, the church in Jerusalem found that in order to retain their priorities they had to adapt their practices. That's never easy in a fellowship, and it's invariably fraught with sensitivities.

What were the features of the way the apostles addressed the situation which ensured it helped rather than harmed the work of the gospel?

In our own changing circumstances, there's inevitably a similar need to adapt our practices while retaining our clear priorities: where in our own fellowship can you see this sort of challenge arising?

Where are the tensions likely to come, and what lessons should we be careful to learn from this narrative?

4. **Read 6.5-7.** The seven men were chosen with great care, and it seems that the God-directed choice of these particular men was contributory to the word of God spreading (v.7).

How would you recognise someone *'known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom'*?

Why do you think the church chose seven men all of whom were clearly more Greek than Hebrew in terms of their background?

The 'spread' of the Word of God was in terms of both numbers ("*.. increased rapidly ..*") and constituencies ("*a large number of priests ..*")(v.7): we'd surely love to see both sorts of growth! So, recognizing that it's God who gives the growth, what clues (if any) do vv.1-7 provide as to why and how such growth may come about?

5. **Read 6.8-10.** Given that Tarsus was the capital of the province of Cilicia, it's almost certain that Saul would have heard Stephen preaching in the Synagogue of the Freedmen (perhaps all the more so in the light of the specific mention made of him in 7.58).

Read **1 Cor.1.18-2.5**, where the now converted Saul speaks of the wisdom of God and the work of the Spirit (see v.10 of Acts 6): how can we ensure that the message is brought to our city "*with a demonstration of the Spirit's power*"?

What must have so riled the Jews, and Saul not least, in Stephen's preaching?

6. **Read 6.11-14.** The charges against Stephen were clearly more a distortion of what he'd been saying than a complete fabrication: they didn't like what he was saying about the temple being replaced by Jesus, and the law being fulfilled in Jesus.

How does that same concern for 'the building' and the 'rules' find expression today?

Compare these verses with **Neh.6.5-9** and **Mark 14.55-64**. Why is this 'strategy' of spreading false and distorted reports of what God's people are saying or doing so regularly used? And how is it best countered?

7. **Read 6.15.** Psalm 34.5 declares that "*those who look to Him are radiant: their faces are never covered with shame.*" The reality of that was plainly evidenced in Stephen's very demeanour.

How significant is this 'visual' dimension of our testimony in commending the Lord Jesus and His gospel?

What does 'looking to the Lord' like this involve, and how does such 'radiance' come about?

What challenges do you take away from this passage?