

Acts of the Apostles Study 4:-

Read - The acts of the Apostles, chapter 6, verses 1 – 7.

The short passage this week serves as the introduction to the persecution of the Church in Jerusalem and the dispersion of believers into a wider field of ministry. The number of disciples appears to have increased dramatically, however the leadership still depended on ‘the Twelve’ (verse 2). The way that this was solved is worth our consideration!

Verse 1:- There is no suggested date as to when these events took place. The rapid growth of the number of disciples implies that it could have happened within a short period of time. What is apparent is that the distribution of monetary relief was causing resentment by the Greek speaking Jewish members - ‘incomers?’ - against Hebrew speaking, long time residents. The rift that was opening up needed healing and the distribution of funds needed constant oversight by those in authority.

Verse 2:- With the leadership being limited to the Apostles themselves, the oversight of relief distribution had become a distraction from the preaching / teaching ministry of those commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Acts chapter 1, verses 1 – 8 and Matthew chapter 28, verses 16 – 20).

Verses 3 - 4:- The fact that the Apostles left it to the wider membership to choose the new administrators is worth noting! This was not a decision imposed from above but one taken by those who would be most affected by the change. Much of the tension in smaller rural churches in the established Church of England is caused by the lack of consultation on the administration of funds. Those making decisions are often two or three times removed from the parish and Parochial Church Council.

The requirements for selection are worth noting:- “*of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom*”. They needed to be those already recognised as showing the abilities required. Note especially that they were already “*full of the Spirit*”. It does not imply that on this occasion they received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. They are not specifically called “Deacons” in the text but their role would be “*to serve tables*” freeing up the Apostles for the ministry of prayer and preaching.

Verses 5 – 6:- There was full agreement within the fellowship for this way forward. The list of names – Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicholaus are all from the Greek speaking membership! Nicholaus being noted as an ‘incomer’. As a proselyte he would not even been from a Jewish family. That the imbalance of support between the Hebrew and Greek widows was corrected by the selection seven Greek administrators shows how open to the love and care for each other the early membership was.

The ‘laying on of hands’ was, and is still, a recognised means of authorisation for ministry in the Christian Church. It was a custom practised in the Old Testament (see for example the Book of Numbers, chapter 27, verses 18 – 23), the commissioning of Joshua, and was the practice in New Testament times for the membership of the Jewish religious leadership of the Sanhedrin.

Verse 7:- The result of this decision was a renewal of rapid growth in the membership which came to include “*great many of the priests*”. Again the situation would lead to more persecution!

*O Zion, haste, thy mission high fulfilling,
To tell to all the world that God is light;
That He who made all nations is not willing
One soul should perish, lost in shades of night.*

Chorus

*Publish glad tidings, tidings of peace;
Tidings of Jesus, redemption and release.*

*Proclaim to every people, tongue, and nation
That God, in whom they live and move, is love;
Tell how He stooped to save His lost creation,
And died on earth that we might live above.*

Chorus

*Publish glad tidings, tidings of peace;
Tidings of Jesus, redemption and release.*

Mary A. Thomson 1871

Sung to the tune “Pilgrims” - (‘Hark, Hark my soul, angelic songs are swelling’)