

BIBLE STUDY – ACTS Chapter 6 – Leader Notes

1. In verse 1 we see Saul's eagerness to support Stephen's death anticipates his future persecution of Christians. (TLSB)

"On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme" (Acts 26:1-11). He had approved of Stephen's execution, and he wanted to follow through by destroying the church. The Sanhedrin provided temple guards for the raids which he conducted. (PBC)

2. With hindsight, Luke shows that Christ's command to proclaim the Gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth (1:8) was partially fulfilled because of this persecution and the scattering of the Church. (TLSB)

3. The gap left by Stephen's death is quickly filled by other witnesses. Stephen's preaching will be carried on and extended by Philip, and his role of suffering witness will be taken over by the young man, Saul, introduced at the moment of Stephen's death. The experience and work of Stephen and Saul will be similar, and both of these figures resemble their Lord. The continuity between Stephen and Saul could encourage the conviction that the Lord will continue to have powerful witnesses despite human opposition, which cannot halt the divine purpose.

4. Because it is the Lord's work it will continue and not be stopped by any human forces.

5. From this point on the apostles must repeatedly catch up with a mission that is sparked by other persons and other forces. This shift does not make the apostles unimportant. They become the stabilizing, verifying, unifying element in a mission that moves to new areas and groups without their planning or control. As the mission begins to move beyond Jerusalem and Judea, it is useful to distinguish two roles within it: the role of the initiator and the role of the verifier. The apostles shift at this point from the former to the latter role. That is, their function is reduced to recognizing and confirming the work of the evangelists who bring the gospel to new areas and groups. The twelve intended to perform the "ministry of the word" themselves while the seven cared for the daily ministry of serving tables (6:2-4), but now those scattered, including Philip, appear as preachers of "the word", with no indication that the twelve have authorized this. The fulfillment of Jesus' commission in 1:8 does not wait until the apostles are ready to include Samaria. While they are trying to maintain Jesus' claim on Jerusalem, the mission moves forward through Philip. (Tannehill)

The outward gift of the Spirit through the apostles' prayers and laying on of hands served to unify the Church, binding together Jew and Samaritans who practiced different yet related religions. The two elements of Baptism are water and the Word (Eph 5:26; cf Mt. 29:19; John 3:5; Acts 2:38). Notice that Peter and John did not re-baptize those who had been baptized. The one Baptism conveyed the gifts of faith in Christ and eternal salvation which are worked by the Spirit through water and the Word. (TLSB)

6. a. He practiced magic, was very powerful and had a great following.

b. Simon assumed that his money and former persuasive ability would bring him new powers. (TLSB)

The Holy Spirit is God's gift, not to be bought or in any way earned. To imagine that a gift can be bought is to turn grace into a business transaction. (PBC)

The bitterness in Simon of which Peter spoke was not anger or hatred toward the apostles.

c. Simon is enslaved to sin. Cf Rm 6:17. (TLSB)

d. Some have questioned whether Simon's faith was genuine. Since he was baptized, he had faith, as Luke states. But later, as it happens to other believers, he misunderstood the reception of special spiritual gifts, and his heart was "not right before God" (v. 21). We hope that Peter's admonition (vv. 20–23) resulted in Simon's repentance. (CSB)

7. a. The Ethiopian was not from the area we know as Ethiopia today. "Ethiopian" simple means that he was a black man. He was from the kingdom of Nubia, which was located on the upper Nile River between Aswan (in modern Egypt) and Khartoum (in the Sudan). (PBC)

The eunuch was a convert to Judaism and was likely returning from an annual festival. Cf Ex 34:23. (TLSB)

Candace was not a name, but a title like Pharaoh, given to the queen mother, who was the real head of state. Her husband, the king, was unimportant because the ruling king, her son, was considered the son of the Sun. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 2)

b. He was a man of considerable means (affording a large scroll) and education. (TLSB)

c. He was reading Isaiah but did not understand it.

d. God's word that Philip shared in his witness worked faith in the eunuch.

8. God placed Philip near the Mediterranean Sea. Caesarea was a city rebuilt by Herod and with an excellent harbor, it served as the headquarters of the Roman procurators. The account leaves Philip in Caesarea at this time; his next appearance is 20 years later, and he is still located in the same place (21:8). (CSB)