

Central Study Hour – Sabbath School Lesson Notes

“Book of Acts”: Lesson 4, “The First Church Leaders”

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Who were the first church leaders overall? The apostles.

Who were the first leaders in the local church situation? Deacons.

Read the Memory Text. *What is the context of the memory text?* Adding the work of deacons.

For background to better understand the new office of a deacon, read the 1st paragraph.

Share the key point of the 2nd paragraph.

Which Jews would be more open to gentiles being saved? Read the last paragraph.

Who were the Hellenistic Jews that took the gospel to the world? Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Stephen, Timothy.

SUNDAY: “The Appointment of the Seven”

Background terms: In the KJV Hellenistic Jews are called *Grecians*. These Grecians were 100% Jews not Greeks. Here the Judean Jews are called *Hebrews*.

Read Acts 6:1. *What was the complaint of the Hellenistic believers?* Read the 1st paragraph (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 88).

Note or read Acts 6:2 + 4. Read 1st sentence of the 2nd paragraph (“The solution proposed....”). “The two main elements of the early church’s daily life [were] teaching (‘the word’) and fellowship (‘tables’)....the apostles would occupy themselves mostly with the believers’ doctrinal teaching and with prayer, while the seven would be in charge of the fellowship activities, in the several house churches.”

So, the deacons were “the first congregation leaders of the church.” Later, elders were appointed in new churches raised up by Paul (Acts 14).

Read Acts 6:3 + 5. *What was the criteria for choosing the seven deacons?* See verse 3.

Who chose the seven? The multitude of believers.

Read Acts 6:6. *How were they recognized, set apart, or designated for their work?* The apostles laid their hands upon them. This seemed “to indicate public recognition and the bestowal of authority to work as deacons.”

MONDAY: “Stephen’s Ministry”

How did the selection of the 7 deacons affect the church? See Acts 6:7 and opening paragraph.

Read Acts 6:8-10. *What is noted about Stephen in verses 8 + 10? What type of synagogues are being referred to in verse 9?* See following paragraph (“As a Hellenistic...”).

Share highlights of **Acts 6:11-14.** *What did Stephen preach that caused the outrage?* They thought he blasphemed against the laws of Moses and against the temple (vs. 11 + 13).

See key points in 3rd paragraph (“Stephen was accused....totally false.”) and (“he understood the deeper....its ceremonial services.”).

Read the last paragraph.

TUESDAY: "Before the Sanhedrin"

Read Acts 6:15. Charges have been made against Stephen. *What is the significance of them seeing his face as an angel?* Conviction of his innocence and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Hit highlights of Stephen's answer in **Acts 7:1-36**. (Do not read whole verses; just note key pts.) **3, 5+8** on the promises and covenant with Abraham.

9, 10, 15, 18-19 on Joseph in Egypt, Jacob and sons moving there, and the change in treatment. **20, 28-30, 33-34 + 36** on the call of Moses and the Exodus out of Egypt. Remember Stephen was accused of being against Moses. So, by his words in these verses, they know he's moving toward answering their charge.

Read Acts 7:37-39, 41. *How was Stephen answering his critics in these verses?* He's saying that it was their forefathers that were against Moses all along.

Read Acts 7:43. It was getting uncomfortable in the council.

What was Stephen's point in reciting all this history? He's bringing a rib (a covenant lawsuit) against them like an OT prophet. "His long review of God's past relationship with Israel was intended to illustrate their ingratitude and disobedience."

Read Acts 7:44 + 47. They also accused him of being against the temple so he begins recounting the history of the temple.

Read Acts 7:48-50. *Why would these words be so challenging to the Jews? What was Stephen saying?* The temple was nothing compared to God Himself. Because the temple had become an idol, had become their God; they were enraged. Stephen could tell that his time was up and quickly came to his conclusion.

Read Acts 6:51-53. Read the final paragraph ("Indeed, by Acts 7:51-53....")

For sobering thought, ask the questions from the box at the bottom of the page.

WEDNESDAY: "Jesus in the Heavenly Court"

Read Acts 7:54-56. *What is most encouraging about Stephen's vision? What was the meaning of Stephen's vision?* This vision has a judgment quality. Stephen has made the case against them in their own history of rebellion against God, and in their rejection of the "just One." Christ appearing at the right hand of the Father seems to seal the removal of their national privilege as God's chosen people. Since this is the end of the 490 years of Daniel 9, there is no call to repentance as a nation (see 4th paragraph for more insight about "Israel's theocracy... coming to and end.")

Read Acts 7:57 - 8:2. *What important points are made in Luke's account of Stephen's death?*

- 1.) Stephen's end was similar to that of Jesus in his attitude of forgiving his murderers.
- 2.) Noting the leadership of one named Saul.
- 3.) Persecution caused the believers to scatter.

THURSDAY: "The Spread of the Gospel"

Read Acts 8:3-4. Read the opening two paragraphs.

From the top of Friday's page, Read or share highlights from *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 105.

Read Friday's "Discussion Question" #1. Note the tendency of conferences to put most of their resources into maintaining the present churches (pastor salaries) compared to reaching the general population with present truth. *How can this change?* One thing is clear. Churches have to actually be led by the elders and not be so pastor dependent.

Hit highlights of **Acts 8:5-25.** (Be careful not to get into too many of the details. Move it along.)

5-8. 1st time gospel went to gentiles. Note points in 3rd paragraph ("The Samaritans were...").

9-17. See key points of the 4th paragraph ("The unexpected conversion..."). This was also for the Samaritans and others to see that the apostles as leaders were to be respected, to value church order and organization.

18-25. (Only if time).

Note that **Acts 8:26-39** is the story of Philip and the Ethiopian, a foreigner who had come to the temple to worship, one who had obviously accepted and was following the OT teachings.

Conclusion:

Read Acts 8:40. *What seems to have been the primary work of Philip the deacon?* Evangelism.

Read the final paragraph ("First there were the..."). Discuss if time.

Note: If your highlight summaries are well planned and concise, it will go a long way toward controlling the time.