

Acts 6

Any time that I have read this chapter in the past, I read it somewhat independently from the context of the surrounding chapters. This time, I feel that God has shown me what led up to the situation at hand. It is also helpful for me to see that even the biggest blessings in the bible are going to be accompanied with a little bit of irritation.

We just read about the great events surrounding the celebration of Pentecost in Jerusalem. What does that mean at ground level? It means that the largest settlements of Jews outside of Israel made their pilgrimages back to the old country to pay homage to God. Historically, the largest areas of Jewish faith abroad at that time was in Alexandria, Egypt, Antioch, Turkey, and in Syria. In other words, foreign Jews from these three regions (and more) kind of took over Jerusalem for a couple of weeks. The first-century Pentecost, specifically during the event described in Acts 2, was notable for its diverse gathering of people. It is estimated that about 9% of the participants were local Israelites (Jews from Judea), while the majority, approximately 91%, were from abroad, including various regions such as Mesopotamia, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and parts of Libya. In the first century, it is estimated that around 100,000 to 300,000 pilgrims came to Jerusalem for the annual Pentecost celebrations, also known as Shavuot. This festival attracted a diverse group of Jews from various regions, including those from abroad, due to its significance as one of the major Jewish pilgrimage festivals. The influx of pilgrims contributed to the vibrant atmosphere in the city during this time. That would be the relative equivalent of 5.5 million people coming to a Fresno State football game. There is just no room to place, house or feed them. It was probably a very claustrophobic situation.

These people had to bring enough food and money to make sacrifices, eat and lodge and return. There was a limitation on how much of their possessions that they could bring. Any thought of staying extra weeks would create financial and logistical problems.

This is part of why the previous chapters spoke of the local saints selling land and possessions. There was no real reason to dump your life savings for your next door neighbor. The collection and money gathering was to feed and lodge this massive wave of thousands of extended worshipping pilgrims hundreds or thousands of miles from home who got caught up into this wave of worship. The whole Pentecost miracle was about Jewish foreigners of different languages being

able to speak to each other. It was like the first Promise Keepers that kept going day after day. Then the local miracles started just happening everywhere. These people may have thought about not going back home. Somebody had to supply all of the pizzas for 300,000 people.

Read Acts 6:1-4: Life on earth is different than life in heaven. Even the blessings come with a little *kick in the shins*. The evil forces show up any time that there is an outpouring of God's goodness. Just like today; they want to change the narrative. All of these displaced foreign families needed to figure out food and provisions. The locals tried to help and display oriental hospitality by providing for their guests. To such a degree that they liquidated assets to get a piece of the action. Everyone had a heart to make this worship wave last another week or two. If a family could feed these thousands for a week, it would be like a lifetime achievement to savor.

Visualize all of this money being pooled; and makeshift food preparations and supplies being purchased for lines of appreciative foreigners. It would look like the displaced Hurricane Katrina victims living in gyms and empty warehouses all over Houston.

It is logical that you will feed the folks in your own known circle before you feed some visitor from Africa or Persia, whom you have never met. The end result was that the least -connected visitors missed out on the food lines. They did not know where to go or who to get food from. Nobody knew them. It is not hard to imagine that complaints started to build as these unknown folks missed meal after meal. It seems ungrateful; but it is also a logistical reality.



One factor that added to the discord and division between the locals and the foreign Jews was related to the whole idea of **Hellenization**. Alexander the Great had taken over the Known world and he required all conquered nations to speak Greek and observe many Greek customs. To be a Hellenized Jew was to speak Greek and be less likely to follow all of the cultural habits of a Jerusalem Jew. Some of that may have had substance; but a lot of it was just format stuff of no real significance. Regardless, the local Jews were somewhat prejudiced against Hellenized Jews as they arrived from Africa, Asia and Persia. They did things differently. Jews are famous for not changing their daily habits. The Hellenized were treated with suspicions and assumed compromise, and to be sell outs. Any multi national businessmen had to speak Greek and be part of the world business community. The Septuagint Bible was the translation from Hebrew to Greek.

Purpose of the Septuagint

The **Septuagint** was written primarily to provide a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures for the Jewish community in Egypt, particularly in Alexandria. This effort arose from several key factors:

Hellenistic Influence

- **Cultural Context:** Following Alexander the Great's conquests, Greek culture and language spread throughout the Mediterranean, influencing many regions, including Egypt.
- **Language Barrier:** Many Jews in Egypt spoke Greek rather than Hebrew, making it difficult for them to access their sacred texts.

Religious Need

- **Preserving Tradition:** The Septuagint aimed to preserve the Jewish religious traditions and texts in a language understood by the Jewish diaspora.

It could have seemed like spiritual warfare to have to stop the bible studies and worship gatherings to run around town and track down and prepare bread. That could have caused a little consternation. On the other hand, we can consider things that resist our vision of progress as unspiritual. The honest responsible response had to be to meet the physical needs to their own people. The decision was made to choose the most unprejudiced and trustworthy guys to do all of this running around and parsing out the funds for the people fairly. There were probably no checks and balances to handle a lot of money. It would involve a lot of money and a system of administration that worked like a clock. You would choose the *Mary* type of worshippers instead of the *Martha* type of worshippers. These guys were capable, honest, and nonsense.

In reality, this creation of the food ministry team was not a dilution of the movement of the Holy Spirit. It was the creation of the next wave of miracle workers, as Peter and others took a back seat to the next wave of miracle workers. Stephen and Phillip were involved in all kinds of Holy Spirit miracles. This is one reason that we have to be flexible to the movement of the Holy Spirit; though it may just seem like a step backwards. The Holy Spirit knows where he is going. Beyond all of this, the names of the seven new helpers all suggest that they were Hellenized Jews themselves...so they were more in touch with the nuances of the problem.

This could all be compared to people driving and flying in to attend a Billy Graham outreach; and then deciding to all meet at the Ramada Inn afterwards and continue the prayers and worship for weeks. That would require all kinds of unique challenges. Any time that I have gone to some great gathering of the saints I also did not want it to end.

Read Acts 6:5-15: In the end, these Hellenized food ministry administrators became the first line ministers. They were preaching, healing, and making great public messages like super statesmen. Nobody could hold a candle to them or begin to argue against any of his discussion points without looking foolish. It is likely that God chose these men to minister to the visiting Hellenized Jews; instead of letting this move of God be lost in a *click* of local Jews who knew each other. As you can imagine, the scrutiny and envy from religious Jews re-focused from Peter, to Stephen and his buddies.

The religious Jewish critics were reduced to lying and personal attacks to sideline him and stop his speeches. We see a lot of that kind of thing today. Who would imagine that Charlie Kirk would be called a racist or a hater? Its just not true; but people are committed to hatred of biblical views.