

# THO 3157 Acts of the Apostles

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Prof. L. G. Bloomquist  
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# Acts 6-7

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From this point on, we will integrate the three areas of interpretation (world of the text, world that intersects the text, world that the text seeks to create).

# Acts 6:1-7

- Vocabulary and themes that we have seen to this point:
  - oneness (being committed to one purpose)
  - commonality of goods (especially in the case of those who are dependent)

This vocabulary strongly suggests that, like Acts 4:32 ff., this narrative also has to do with the issues of oneness and commonality of goods.

# New vocabulary and new context

- Introduction of terms that probably relate more to ethnic identity than just to language:
  - "Hebrew": Semitic-speaking Jewish Christians (i.e., speak primarily Hebrew or Aramaic and THEREFORE are more likely Palestinian): Jews who were less comfortable in Greek and in Greek culture (possibly intentionally, possibly by class, etc.)
  - "Hellenists": Greek-speaking Jewish Christians (who are THEREFORE more likely Galilean or diaspora Jews): Jews who were comfortable in Greek and in Greek culture

A dispute arises between "Hebrew" widows and "Hellenist" widows

The problem: "Hellenist" widows are being overlooked in the daily administration (e.g., of food, goods, etc.)

# New vocabulary to meet the new context

- New terms:
  - "distribution" or administration of goods: DIAKONIA

# The response

- The 12 adjudicate (though note the absence of Peter as someone named)
  - 12 are clearly the ones who are responsible for the leadership of this community
  - 12's responsibility expressed:
    - the prayer (understood as praise?)
    - the "word" (vs. 4: "administration of the word")
    - not "administration of household matters"
  - 12 assemble the "disciples" and ask them to appoint, from among the community members, 7 men to administer daily affairs ("tables"), while 12 will administer "word" and "prayer"
    - character of 7: full of spirit, wisdom, faith, holy spirit
      - NB: not capable of being filled, but already full!
    - this IS part of the work of the 12 (NB: use of "word" in vs. 5: "this word pleased the community")
  - Community chooses 7 men, whose names suggest that they are all "Hellenists"
  - 12 lay hands on 7

# Important notes

- no presence of God (divinity), or of Jesus (holy persons)
- Holy spirit has already been poured into those who are appointed (NB: they are not appointed and then filled)
- does the practice here recall Exodus 18.17-23 (Moses' choice of elders to help him administer the Exodus people?)

# The world created by this text

- A new administration of the religious community that has been formed
  - based on division of labour within the community
- Creation of a new group, not the 12 (i.e., not those who had been with Jesus from his baptism until his ascension)
- From this point on, the focus will shift from the apostles, first to two members of this serving group, Stephen (6:8 – 8:4) and Philip (8:5-40), and then from chapter 9 on, the focus will be on someone who has no direct connection with either the apostles (characterized by Peter) or the “servers” (characterized by Stephen and Philip).

# Acts 6:8 – 8:1a Stephen

- The story of Stephen is presented in a similar narrative form to the previous stories that involved Peter:
  - Narrative introduction (usually leading to a speech in a trial form)
  - Speech (with stereotypical form) in a trial form
  - Consequences of the speech
- The narrative points to Stephen's actions can be seen to be very similar to those of the 12

# How is Stephen presented?

- Stephen is
  - confirmed as a person who is indeed full of grace and power (vs. 8; cf. vss. 3 and 5 but also 4.30!)
  - "signs and wonders" (the "apostolic teaching") also characterize Stephen's ministry
  - Stephen, though an "administrator of household goods", is shown to be primarily a preacher

# Where does Stephen exercise this ministry?

- The venue of Stephen's preaching is the diaspora synagogue network in Jerusalem (i.e., places where Hellenist Jews would be found)
  - Libertini: Jews from Italy who had settled in Jerusalem
  - Cyrenians: Jews from Libya and/or Crete (a single Roman senatorial province) who had come to Rome
  - Alexandrians: Jews from Alexandrian (northern) Egypt
  - Cilicians: Jews from the Roman province of Cilicia (in southern Asia Minor), whose cities included Tarsus
  - Asians: Jews from the Western Asia Minor province of Asia, whose cities included Ephesus

# What causes the reaction to Stephen?

- Stephen is seized by men from these synagogues for preaching much the same as what Jesus was accused of (11-14)
  - against Moses and God (cf. Mt 26.59-66 par esp. 26.65 / Mk 16.64)
  - against the Temple (cf. Mt 26.59-66 and par.)
    - even to the point of having it be in the mouth of "false witnesses"

We will see this at the end in Stephen's final vision, where we find an even fuller comparison with Jesus from the same trial scene of Jesus!

- cf. the vision of Stephen in vs. 15

# Stephen's Speech

- Immediate occasion for it? Occurs at the invitation of the High Priest
  - **UNLIKE** Jesus, Stephen will speak at length!

# Narrative structure of Stephen's speech (7:2-53)

- Introduction (cf. Peter's speeches)
- Outline of sacred history from Abraham to Temple (different from Peter's *pesher*-based speeches, in which the what has happened in Christ is related to sacred history):
  - Abraham: 7:2-8 (Canaan)
  - Joseph: 7:9-19 (Canaan to Egypt)
  - Moses: 7:20-44 (Egypt to Canaan)
  - Tabernacle (7:44-46)
  - Temple (7:47-50)
- Conclusion (7:51-53)

# Abraham: 7.2-8 (Canaan)

- Abraham promised land, but does not receive land; he only passes through it
- Isaac and Jacob mentioned in passing (vs. 8) but they do not inherit the land either!

# Joseph: 7.9-19 (Canaan to Egypt)

- Israel removed from the land into bondage and exile
  - It is in that land that Joseph "shines" (cf. Joseph with Luke's picture of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke!)
- Concludes with a link between the promise to Abraham and the promise fulfilled after Joseph

# Moses: 7.20-44 (Egypt to Canaan)

- Antitype to Jesus:
  - powerful in word and deeds, signs and wonders (7.22, 36)
  - a life characterised by salient events having to do with "40"
  - opposed by his own people
  - prophesies the arrival of one like himself (7.37; cf. Dt 18.15)
  - concludes with apostasy of his priestly brother and the subsequent idolatry of his people
    - Text from Amos 5.25: the people offered BOTH sacrifices to God AND to idols ("division" or "double-mindedness" as a characteristic of the people)

# Tabernacle (7.44-46) vs. Temple (7.47-50)

- Tabernacle:
  - built at command of Moses
  - mobile: God meets with his people wherever He and they are
- Temple:
  - Solomon presumes to build God a house
  - immobile: God and people are limited to one spot ("...but, God does not live in a house...")

# Conclusion: 7.51-53

- Stephen's speech concludes abruptly after his introduction of the Temple
- Cf. Peter's speeches which call for a response. Here the conclusion is simply an indictment: the one on trial has become the accuser!
- The indictment is based in large part on the falling away (apostasy) of priestly persons (Moses' brother), successors to whom allowed the Temple to replace the Tabernacle.

# Notes on Stephen's speech

- Stephen's speech represents a different kind of speech from those that we have seen thus far:
  - "Up to this point the speeches in Acts used the OT to interpret the Christ event or to demonstrate that the prophetic promise finds its fulfillment in Jesus. Now the OT is used to show that salvation history, the story of God's promise, predictions, and benefactions is also a story of failure to respond in obedience and faith" (G. Krodel, Acts, p. 36).
- It appears that one of the main accusations in Stephen's speech concerns the contrast between
  - those who followed God, even when they were denied an enduring place in the land, and
  - those who became double-minded toward God when they had secured such a place

# Stephen as Samaritan?

- There are remarkable parallels between the Jewish Samaritan picture of Israel's history and that narrated by Stephen (see the chapter on "Stephen's Samaritan Background" by Abram Spiro in Johannes Munck's commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, the first Acts commentary in the Anchor Bible Series).
- Who are the Samaritans? (for further information see: <http://www.bloomquist.ca/SPU%20Courses/THO%203103%20Johannine%20Literature/chapter6.pdf> esp. pp. 10-13)
  - Samaritans could easily have been classed as “Hellenist” Jews.
- Objections:
  - It is possible that Stephen is a Samaritan or sees history in the same way as a Samaritan would, but the incorporation of prophetic materials in Stephen's speech would mean that he was not JUST a Samaritan

# The penultimate words of Stephen

- At the end of his trial, Stephen sees a vision of Jesus as Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (55-56), a vision and words that appear to be connected with the prophesy of Jesus at his own trial (cf. Lk 22.69 and parallels)

# The Death of Stephen

- Stephen is then taken and stoned (apparently for blasphemy)
  - Process
  - NB: The death of Jesus could have followed the same course as the death of Stephen
    - Jesus's death as a public attempt to dishonour him
      - death on a cross
      - death at the hands of Gentiles
    - Jesus needed to be dishonoured
      - death was not sufficient to quash Jesus' movement, since he could have remained in death a martyr
      - Jesus had to be dishonoured (all his "wealth" taken away)
        - one way to do that was to have him die at the hands of Gentile "dogs"
    - Stephen's trial was instigated by Diaspora Jews but the judgment was under the authority of the High Priest, just as Jesus' was

# The final words of Stephen

- Stephen's final words continue to reflect the words of Jesus:
  - Receive my spirit: 59 (cf. Lk 23.46)
  - Do not hold this sin against them: 60 (cf. Lk 23.34)
- Stephen, then, is a further reflection of Jesus, just as the apostles have begun to be seen in Acts 1-5

# The introduction of Saul (Paul)

- Saul is introduced briefly at this point as
  - A guarantor of the legitimacy of the process of Stephen's stoning (thus, a main agent of the High Priests and/or their party)
  - Someone in his prime (about 30 years old)
  - A willing participant (not a reluctant bystander)

# The consequences of the death of Stephen (8:1b-3)

- The narrative continues with the same participants
  - The church has been persecuted before, but now, after the death of Stephen, a persecution of the church begins that scatters the members of the church to "Judaea and Samaria"
    - This is the next "installment" of the very mission plan laid down by Jesus in his programmatic mission statement Acts 1.8: from Jerusalem --> "Judaea and Samaria"
  - Only the apostles are not scattered
    - The implication is that the apostles, though "sent ones", remain in Jerusalem (probably still as recognized leaders and administrators of the church)
  - Saul continues to hunt down Christians wherever he finds them
    - NB the emphasis on hunting Christians in their "homes" (not in Temple)
      - We later learn that Paul will also go outside of Jerusalem to hunt down Christians