

**1174 Food management, Stephen's testimony, and Joseph – Acts(6)1–(7)16
(by Whirlwind)**

First, we see the seven people was filled with the Holy Spirit and chosen to manage the distribution of food. We realize that Luke was a Gentile, and understand that physical circumcision was no longer required in the New Testament era. Second, we see Stephen, endowed with the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, whose face shone like an angel's, confronting the hardness of human hearts. Third, we witness the beginning of Stephen's public defense, where he seized the opportunity to preach, recounting the story of Abraham and his prophetic dreams. This reveals God's great mercy and grace, and shows that prophetic timelines are often approximate in this event. Finally, it recounts Joseph's sufferings and Jacob's family's descent into Egypt, revealing God's place in Joseph's heart. He entrusted his life into God's hands, thus becoming a man of great faith—precisely what God delights in.

Please note: This article is based on the Sunday (1/4/26) topicwise Bible study. Unless otherwise specified, verses refer to those in NASB95. Past articles referenced can be found on our website, '<https://a-christian-voice.com/>', under 'On spiritual understanding about life.'

1. The seven men filled with the Holy Spirit who managed the distribution of food

"Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith."(Acts 6:1-7)

From these scriptures, we learn that when the Jerusalem church was small and shared everything in common, the apostles themselves managed the distribution of food. Now that the number of disciples had increased, they needed others to handle this task so they could focus on prayer and preaching. We also see that even for what many might consider a minor task like managing meals, one must be filled with the Holy Spirit to have sufficient wisdom to perform it properly. Thus, seven men were chosen for this responsibility. Another mention of these seven occurs in this verse: "On the next day we (Paul and Luke) left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him."(Acts 21:8) In Chinese Union Version, it translates that Philip as "deacon (G1249, minister servant)." But neither of the two original texts contains the word "deacon."

Here, "we" refers to Paul and Luke. Why? Let us examine how the New Testament mentions Luke. His name appears only three times: "Only Luke is with me. ..." (2 Timothy 4:11)," "Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas. (Colossians 4:14)," and "as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers." (Philemon 1:24) We know Luke was a physician who worked alongside Paul. Since Paul said clearly, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come." (2 Timothy 4:6), Luke remained with Paul until his final sacrifice. He was originally a Gentile, as Scripture states: "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ...Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me." (Colossians 4:7-11) Luke was uncircumcised, so he became a believer in the New Testament era. The Bible does not explicitly state when Luke became Paul's co-worker. When he used the plural "we" in Acts 21:8 mentioned earlier, he was already Paul's co-worker. Clearly, it was not considered crucial to pinpoint exactly when he began accompanying Paul, out of respect for God and to avoid unnecessary confusion. If the exact timing were so crucial, He would have told us in Scripture.

We see that among these seven men was Nicolas of Antioch, who had been converted to Judaism. Since it states he had been converted to Judaism, it is clear he was originally a Gentile. We also see that Gentiles could be converted to Judaism at that time. This is clearly stated in the Law of Moses: "But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you." (Exodus 12:48-49) This is what Solomon said: "Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name's sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name." (1 Kings 8:41-43)

Note that the conversion to Judaism mentioned here refers to conversion in the New Testament context, as this passage states: "Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes (G4339) followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God." (Acts 13:43) In the New Testament era, conversion to Judaism did not require circumcision: "Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness." (Galatians 5:2-5)

If referring to the Judaism of the Old Testament, Paul uses different words: "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism (G2454), how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism (G2454) beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions."(Galatians 1:13-14) This word G2454 appears only these two times.

As for G4339, it appears only four times, another instance being: "Now when the meeting of the synagogue had broken up, many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes (G4339) followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God."(Acts 13:43) Another instance in the Book of Acts is found in this passage: "Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes (G4339)."(Acts 2:10) The meaning is the same. Note the final instance of this verse: "'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte (G4339); and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.'"(Matthew 23:15) This refers to the Judaism Paul addressed in Galatians 1:13-14 by using a different word in the English translation. Though the Book of Matthew uses this term only once here using the same term and thus without explicit distinction in Chinese Union Version, the context makes its meaning clear.

2. Stephen was filled with grace and power of Holy Spirit, whose face shone like an angel's

"And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel."(Acts 6:8-15)

Not only did "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; ..." (Acts 5:12), but Stephen, as a disciple filled with the Holy Spirit, likewise became a channel for miracles and wonders. The same holds true today—if God permits, we too can become such channels.

The Bible clearly states that Stephen spoke with wisdom and the Holy Spirit, and those who debated him came from. Some knew Paul was from Cilicia because "...Paul said, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; ..." (Acts 21:39) They assumed Paul must be among those debating, but Scripture does not state this.

Unable to refute him, the crowd resorted to buying false testimony—just as Jesus faced. Scripture makes this clear: "Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. ..." (Matthew 26:59-60)

The Ten Commandments plainly state, "“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”(Exodus 20:16) To minimize false testimony, the Law of Moses also stipulated: "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed."(Deuteronomy 19:15) Yet "...God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."(Ecclesiastes 7:29) Even when "...all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel (G32, messenger)," (Acts 6:15) they disregarded this. How hardened the human heart can be!

3. Beginning of Stephen's public defense

"The high priest said, “Are these things so?” And he said, “Hear me, brethren and fathers! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, ‘Leave your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.’ Then he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. From there, after his father died, God had him move to this country in which you are now living. But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke to this effect, that his descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. ‘And whatever nation to which they will be in bondage I Myself will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place.’ And He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs.”(Acts 7:1-8)

When the high priest said, “Are these things so?”, these are false testimonies, of course not so. Stephen seized this opportunity to preach, concisely outlining the events recorded in the Old Testament. Let us now examine the opening portion. This concerns Abraham, who lived in Haran because of his father, as the scripture states: "Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there."(Genesis 11:31) We see Abraham as a man of great faith: "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going."(Hebrews 11:8)

Then it is said that Abraham had a strange dream: "Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”"(Genesis 15:12-16) Here we see that God is a God of mercy and grace, granting the Amorites at least four hundred years of opportunity. But they didn't repent. The precise time of Israel's exodus from Egypt is recorded: "And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all

the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt."(Exodus 12:41) From this we see that prophetic timelines often seem to indicate approximate periods.

When the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, God said this: "“When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.”(Deuteronomy 7:1-2) This was "so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God.”(Deuteronomy 20:18) Therefore, at the city of Jericho, "They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.”(Joshua 6:21)

Some might ask: Does this include infants? What sin have infants committed? Isn't this cruel? It may seem so, but it is not. Consider how many infants were born during those four hundred years, raised in such an environment, and ultimately became people who committed crimes and refused to repent. God is an all-knowing God who foresaw this outcome long ago. This is like when "...the LORD said to Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.””(Exodus 17:14) This principle parallels the stubborn persistence of weeds that spring up again with the spring breeze. Sin must be utterly eradicated, just as God did with the Amalekites. Some might ask: even if Israel was commanded to kill all adults, why not spare the infants and give them a chance at life? At that time, the Amorites had reached the full measure of their sin. To ask Israel to carry the infants of others into battle—you decide for yourself if that is reasonable! Moreover, when the nest is destroyed, no egg remains intact. For the infants, this might have been the best choice.

Yet as we have stated, God is merciful and gracious. Consider Nineveh in the Book of Jonah: "When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.”(Jonah 3:10) This displeased Jonah, but "...the LORD said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?””(Jonah 4:10-11) In fact, when the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, "...the LORD allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.”(Judges 2:23) It was not a complete annihilation.

4. Joseph's trials and Jacob's family's journey to Egypt

"“The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him, and rescued him from all his afflictions, and granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he made him governor over Egypt and all his household. “Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction with it, and our fathers could

find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers there the first time. On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. Then Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all. And Jacob went down to Egypt and there he and our fathers died. From there they were removed to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem."(Acts 7:9-16) "Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian."(Genesis 39:1-2) "It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"(Genesis 39:7-9) We see God's place in his heart.

The events described in this passage are detailed in the Book of Genesis. Please refer to the corresponding scripture passages yourself. Here, we will only discuss this passage. Because of Joseph's master's wife, "...Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer."(Genesis 39:20-21) Notice he did not plead his own case, but fully entrusted himself to God until God worked to enable him to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. He declared, "Now as for the repeating of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it means that the matter is determined by God, and God will quickly bring it about."(Genesis 41:32) "So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you."(Genesis 41:39-40) He truly trusted God completely, for when he interpreted the dreams, the events had not yet occurred. If they did not come to pass, he would lose his life. He placed his very life in God's hands, proving himself a man of great faith—and this is what pleased God. The same God who existed in the Old Testament era also existed in the New Testament era, and thus remains the same in the New Testament era.