

The Acts of the Apostles Chapter 7



Review of Chapter 6

- The burgeoning Church and the meeting of both Hebrew and Hellenistic Jews precipitates the need for better organization and more ministry in the Church.
- As the Church grows, the need for better organization grows with it, that all can be better ministered to. Rather than a burden, it becomes an opportunity to expand ministry in the Church. In this case, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to introduce the ministry of the diaconate.
- The Apostles and their successors, the episcopacy and priesthood (presbytery), are those who pray and serve the Sacraments and equip the Saints for their ministry; the deacons serve to support them and minister the word in the community.
- The Apostles do not just decide matters on their own. Rather, we see them here giving the laity a part to play in resolving the needs of the Body. While instructing the faithful what to do, they allow the faithful a part suited to them: “seek out among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.” (v. 3)
- The 7 men were then brought to the Apostles, who then prayed over them and ordained them (laid hands on them—v. 6)
- Christ has established His Church as a Body of which He is the head. Authority in the Church is shared by the Apostles with the foremost Apostles Peter and John (and later, Peter and Paul) as the foremost, or, as would later be called, “primus inter pares,” (first among equals).
- The laying on of hands (ordination) was vital in that it conferred the grace and charisms of the Holy Spirit on those ordained so that they could be better equipped to fulfill their ministry.
- We see the fruit of this ordaining exemplified in the ministry and charisms of the Protodeacon and Protomartyr, Stephen.
- After working many signs and wonders, Stephen is brought before the Jewish authorities.
- We read that no one could refute his wisdom and that all who gazed on him “saw his face as the face of an angel,” reflecting his deification (unity) with Christ.

Chapter 7

Q: How does St. Stephen answer the High Priest’s question? How does he demonstrate the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in his answer?

Q: What is the purpose or point of Stephen’s defense in which he begins with Abraham?

n.b. “The promise of God to Abraham” (v. 17) consisted of 3 parts: the **promised** land. the **promise** of the descendants. the **promise** of blessing and redemption for all the earth through his seed.

“In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (Gen. 22:18)



Q: How does Moses and Israel's deliverance prefigure Jesus Christ in Stephen's defense? What sins of Israel also prefigure Israel's rejection of Christ?

"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, 'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me' (v. 36,37) ... Him likewise Herod wished to kill, and in Egypt He found preservation; just as it was with the former, even when He was a babe, He was aimed at for destruction." (St. John Chrysostom, Homily XVII on Acts 7:35)

Q: In what way does Israel's sojourn from bondage in Egypt also prefigure the journey of the Church, the New Israel?

Q: How did the Jewish leaders "resist the Holy Spirit," according to St. Stephen vv. 51-53)?

Q: How did God validate St. Stephen's testimony (vv. 54-56)?

Q: What stands out to you in St. Stephen's martyrdom (vv. 57-60)?

"...He shows, therefore, that it is they that blaspheme, and that their blasphemy is not only against Moses, but against God... that while saying that he opposed Moses, they themselves were opposing the Spirit: and not only opposing but with murder added to it." (ibid.)

Q: What are the similarities in St. Stephen's martyrdom and that of Christ's passion?

"I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life." (I Kingdoms 19:10)

"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church"—Early Orthodox Church saying

