

Notes on the Greek New Testament Day 159 – June 8th – Acts 6:1-15

Works frequently referenced in these notes on Acts

Bruce, FF, *The Acts of the Apostles*, London, 2nd ed. 1952

Polhill, John B, *Acts: The New American Commentary*, Nashville, 1992

Stott, John R W, *The Message of Acts*, IVP (The Bible Speaks Today), Leicester, 1990

Chapters 6-8

"Chapters 6-8 may be described as transitional. They show Christianity breaking out of the bounds of its Jewish heritage, taking a first step towards its mission to the wider world. This is more than a story of the geographical spread of Christianity. It is much more the story of the gospel becoming a truly universal gospel, breaking the racial, national and religious barriers in which it was born and carrying out a genuinely worldwide witness. It is the triumphant story of the inclusive gospel." Polhill.

Verse 1

Ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις πληθυνόντων τῶν μαθητῶν ἐγένετο γογγυσμὸς τῶν Ἑλληνιστῶν πρὸς τοὺς Ἑβραίους ὅτι παρεθεωροῦντο ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ αἱ χῆραι αὐτῶν.

δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις introduces a new section. Maybe five years after Pentecost.

πληθυνῶ increase, multiply
μαθητῆς, ου m disciple, pupil, follower
γογγυσμὸς, ου m complaining, quarreling

The cognate verb is used in the LXX to denote the 'murmuring' of the Israelites against Moses (cf. Ex 16:7; Num 14:27; 1 Cor 10:10).

Ἑλληνιστῆς, ου m Hellenist (one who uses the Greek language and customs)

The word here refers to Greek speaking Christian Jews, though in 11:20 it is used of Gentiles. The Greek speaking Jews would have had separate synagogues from the Aramaic speakers (cf. v.9), and so tended to form a separate community.

Ἑβραῖος, ου m Hebrew person

Here used of Hebrew or Aramaic speaking Jews

παρεθεωροῦντο Verb, imperf pass indic, 3 pl
παραθεωρῶ overlook, neglect
διακονία, ας f ministry, contribution
καθημερινός, ης, ου daily

"We gather that a daily distribution was made out of the common funds provided by the voluntary pooling of resources (2:44f; 4:34f)." Bruce.

χῆρα, ας f widow

Widows would have been in special need, cf. Jas 1:27; 1 Tim 5:9ff.

Verse 2

προσκαλεσάμενοι δὲ οἱ δώδεκα τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν εἶπαν· Οὐκ ἀρεστόν ἐστιν ἡμᾶς καταλείψαντας τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ διακονεῖν τραπέζαις·

προσκαλεσάμενοι Verb, aor midd dep ptc, m
nom pl προσκαλεομαι call to oneself,
summon

πλῆθος, ους n crowd, multitude

Note that the larger congregation were involved in the matter of addressing this problem. The apostles did not merely hand down a decision or command.

ἀρεστός, ης, ου pleasing; οὐκ ἀρεστόν ἐστιν
it is not right

καταλείπω leave, neglect, abandon
διακονεῶ serve, wait on

Having noted that the verb διακονεῶ is used here, Bruce says, "These words are not used here in any restricted or technical sense. Nor are the Seven called διακονοί, though of course they were διακονοί in the ordinary sense of 'servants'. It is an anachronism to apply to NT persons and conditions names which have acquired a stereotyped ecclesiastical sense. The NT has, generally speaking, no *technical* vocabulary for functions in the churches and for those who discharge them but uses ordinary Greek words, which had best be rendered by ordinary English words."

τραπέζα, ης f table, food, meal

The apostles refused to wait on tables, not because it was beneath their dignity, but because they had other pressing work to do which it would have been wrong of them to neglect. Stott writes, "The issue was more ... than one of cultural tension. The apostles discerned a deeper problem, namely that social administration (both organising the distribution and settling the complaint) was threatening to occupy their time and so inhibit them from the work which Christ had specifically entrusted to them, namely preaching and teaching."

Verse 3

ἐπισκέψασθε δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρας ἐξ ὑμῶν μαρτυρουμένους ἑπτὰ πλήρεις πνεύματος καὶ σοφίας, οὓς καταστήσομεν ἐπὶ τῆς χρείας ταύτης·

ἐπισκέψασθε Verb, aor midd dep imperat, 2 pl ἐπισκεπτομαι look upon or after, visit, look out for
μαρτυρεω bear witness, testify; pass be well spoken of

'of whom good witness is borne' i.e. of good repute, cf. 10:22; 16:2; 22:12.

ἑπτὰ seven
πληρης, ες (sometimes not declined) full, complete, full-grown
σοφια, ας f wisdom, insight, intelligence
καταστήσομεν Verb, fut act indic, 1 pl
καθιστημι put in charge, appoint
χρεια, ας f need, want

"They were not, however, restricted to this service: Stephen and Philip, for example, shone as public speakers. The NT force of χρεια is usually 'need', but in Hellenistic Gk. it generally means 'office', as here." Bruce.

Verse 4

ἡμεῖς δὲ τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ διακονίᾳ τοῦ λόγου προσκαρτερήσομεν.

προσκαρτερεω devote oneself to, continue in

I.e. in the regular worship of the church. Stott comments, "It is noteworthy that now the Twelve have added prayer to preaching (probably meaning public as well as private intercession) in specifying the essence of the apostles' ministry. They form a natural couple, since the ministry of the word, without prayer that the Spirit will water the seed, is unlikely to bear fruit."

Verse 5

καὶ ἤρρεσεν ὁ λόγος ἐνώπιον παντὸς τοῦ πλήθους, καὶ ἐξελέξαντο Στέφανον, ἄνδρα πλήρης πίστεως καὶ πνεύματος ἁγίου, καὶ Φίλιππον καὶ Πρόχορον καὶ Νικάνορα καὶ Τίμωνα καὶ Παρμενᾶν καὶ Νικόλαον προσήλυτον Ἀντιοχέα,

ἤρρεσεν Verb, aor act indic, 3 s ἄρρεστω
please
ἐνώπιον prep with gen before, in the presence of

Again, note the involvement of the entire congregation.

ἐκλεγομαι choose, select
πιστις, εως f faith, trust, belief
προσηλυτος, ου m proselyte (a convert to Judaism)

Note that all have Greek names. "They were probably regarded as the leaders of the Hellenists in the church. Their appointment, therefore, was a step forward towards the equality of Jew and Gentile in the church, although there was as yet no question of admitting Gentiles who were not already proselytes." Bruce.

Verse 6

οὓς ἔστησαν ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀποστόλων, καὶ προσευζάμενοι ἐπέθηκαν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας.

ἔστησαν Verb, aor act indic, 3 pl ἵστημι
προσευχομαι pray
ἐπέθηκαν Verb, aor act indic, 3 pl ἐπιτιθημι
place on
χειρ, χειρος f hand

"The ceremony in this case indicated the conferring of authority by the twelve on the seven whom the people had chosen. See further on 8:17; 9:17; 13:3; 19:6 for various circumstances in which a similar ceremony took place. The root idea seems to have been the transference of something already possessed by the person performing the ceremony; so in Lev 4:4; 16:21 ... [it] is used in connection with the sin-offering for the symbolical transference of sin." Bruce.

Stott comments, "A vital principle is illustrated in this incident, which is of urgent importance to the church today. It is that God calls all his people to ministry, that he calls different people to different ministries, and that those called to 'prayer and the ministry of the word' must on no account allow themselves to be distracted from their priorities."

Verse 7

Καὶ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ ἤϋξανεν, καὶ ἐπληθύνετο ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν μαθητῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ σφόδρα, πολὺς τε ὄχλος τῶν ἱερέων ὑπήκουον τῇ πίστει.

"This verse is one of several reports of progress which serve to punctuate the sections of the narrative of Ac.: cf. 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:31.

αὐξανω and αὐξω grow, spread, increase

Note the imperfect tenses denoting continuous action.

πληθυνω increase, multiply, spread
ἀριθμος, ου m number, total
σφοδρα very much, greatly
ἱερευς, εως m priest
ὑπακουω obey, be subject to

For a similar phrase relating obedience to faith, see Rom 1:5.

Verse 8

Στέφανος δὲ πλήρης χάριτος καὶ δυνάμεως ἐποίει τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα μεγάλα ἐν τῷ λαῷ.

πληρης see v.5
χαρις, ιτος f grace

Of the phrase 'grace and power' Campbell Morgan comments, "sweetness and strength ... merged into one personality."

τερατα και σημεια see 2:22,43; 4:30; 5:12

See also 7:36; 8:13; 14:3.

μεγας, μεγαλη, μεγα large, great
λαος, ου m people, a people

I.e. the Jewish people.

Verse 9

ἀνέστησαν δὲ τινες τῶν ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης Λιβερτίνων καὶ Κυρηναίων καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας συζητοῦντες τῷ Στεφάνῳ,

Λιβερτινος, ου m Freedman (either a former slave or a descendant of former slaves)

Κυρηναιος, ου m a Cyrenian
Ἀλεξανδρευς, εως m an Alexandrian
Κιλικια, ας f Cilicia

Some argue that there are 5 synagogues mentioned here but Bruce thinks that the reference is to only one, made up of Jewish freedmen from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia. This, suggests Bruce, is the synagogue Paul would have attended – he was a Cilician Jew.

συζητεω argue, discuss, question

Verse 10

καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυον ἀντιστῆναι τῇ σοφίᾳ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι ᾧ ἐλάλει.

ἴσχυω be strong, be able, be sufficient
ἀνθιστημι resist, oppose, withstand

Lit. 'stand against' ἀντι + ἴστημι

σοφια, ας f wisdom, insight, intelligence
λαλεω speak, talk

Cf. Lk 21:15.

Verse 11

τότε ὑπέβαλον ἄνδρας λέγοντας ὅτι Ἀκηκόαμεν αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος ῥήματα βλάσφημα εἰς Μωϋσῆν καὶ τὸν θεόν·

τοτε then, at that time
ὑποβαλλω put (someone) up to (something),
bribe

Not being able to defeat his arguments they resort to bribes and slander.

ἀκηκόαμεν Verb, perf act indic, 1 pl ἄκουω
ῥημα, ατος n word, thing, matter
βλασφημος, ον speaking against God,
blasphemous, slanderous

Cf. Num 15:30.

Verse 12

συνεκίνησάν τε τὸν λαὸν καὶ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ τοὺς γραμματεῖς, καὶ ἐπιστάντες συνήρπασαν αὐτὸν καὶ ἤγαγον εἰς τὸ συνέδριον,

συγκινεω stir up, arouse
πρεσβυτερος, α, ον elder
γραμματευς, εως m scribe, expert in
Jewish law

ἐφιστημι come up to, approach, appear
συναρπαζω seize, drag
ἤγαγον Verb, aor act indic, 1 s & 3 pl ἄγω

Verse 13

ἔστησάν τε μάρτυρας ψευδεῖς λέγοντας· Ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος οὐ παύεται λαλῶν ῥήματα κατὰ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ τοῦ νόμου,

μαρτυς, μαρτυρος dat pl μαρτυσιν m
witness

ψευδης, ες false, lying
παυω stop, keep from
ῥημα, ατος n see v.11.
κατα with gen, against
τοπος, ου m place

"With the terms of Stephen's accusation we may compare the charges brought against Christ (Mk 14:56ff, 64) and against Paul (Acts 21:28). As in our Lord's accusation, so in Stephen's the charges were perversions of what had actually been said. What Stephen had said may be judged from the tenor of his reply. His declaration (7:48) that the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands might easily be interpreted as blasphemy 'against this holy place'. It is clear that Stephen advanced beyond the apostles' earlier position in relation to official Judaism, and saw more clearly the inevitability of a break. In more ways than one he was a forerunner of Paul and of the writer to the Hebrews." Bruce.

Compare the face of Moses which shone on his return from Sinai (Ex 34:29ff) and Christ at his transfiguration (Mt 17:2). Stott comments, "Was it not God's deliberate purpose to give the same radiant face to Stephen when he was accused of opposing the law as he had given to Moses when he received the law? In this way God was showing that both Moses' ministry of the law and Stephen's interpretation of it had his approval."

Verse 14

ἀκηκόαμεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ λέγοντος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος οὗτος καταλύσει τὸν τόπον τοῦτον καὶ ἀλλάξει τὰ ἔθνη ἃ παρέδωκεν ἡμῖν Μωϋσῆς.

ἀκηκόαμεν see v.11

καταλυω destroy, tear down, do away with

Compare Mk 14:58, also Jn 2:19-22.

ἀλλασσω change, alter, exchange

ἔθος, ος n custom, practice

παρέδωκεν Verb, perf act indic, 3 s

παραδιδωμι hand or give over

"Out of the mouths of his accusers we have here a tribute to Stephen's far-sighted comprehension of what was involved in the Gospel. No wonder his teaching was anathema to orthodox Jews!" Bruce.

Stott comments, "So far as we can tell, Stephen was teaching much the same as Jesus taught.

The false witnesses accused him of saying that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the temple and change the law. That is, they portrayed the work of Christ in negative, destructive terms.

But what Stephen was really doing was preaching Christ, positively and constructively, as the One in whom all that the Old Testament foretold and foreshadowed is fulfilled, including the temple and the law."

Verse 15

καὶ ἀτενίσαντες εἰς αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ καθεζόμενοι ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ εἶδον τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ πρόσωπον ἀγγέλου.

ἀτενίζω fix eyes on, look intently at

καθεζομαι sit down, seat oneself, sit

εἶδον Verb, aor act ind, 1s & 3pl ὄραω see, observe

προσωπον, ον n face, appearance

ὡσεὶ like, as