

## **THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR (1) Acts Six**

### **Introduction:**

- 1. The church in Jerusalem continued its amazing growth.**
- 2. Instead of additions, we read the number of believers was multiplying!**
- 3. Perhaps four to six years had passed since Pentecost.**
- 4. The apostles seem to have forgotten Christ's Commission: "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).**
- 5. Soon the church will be scattered and the Gospel will go to other places.**
- 6. Satan will always bring division and persecution to stop the spread of the Gospel.**

### **Discussion:**

- I. SATAN STIRRED UP TROUBLE WITHIN THE CHURCH (1-7).**
  - A. There "arose a complaint" (murmuring).**
    - 1. The unity of the church was threatened - a favorite ploy of Satan.**
    - 2. An old preacher used to say when he came to this point, "Now I've found my brethren."**
  - B. The Hellenists complained against the Hebrews.**
    - 1. The Hellenists were Greek speaking Jews who had come from other nations to Israel.**
    - 2. The Hebrews were Hebrew speaking Jews who had grown up in Israel (Phil. 3:5).**
    - 3. They were of the same faith, but different cultures.**
    - 4. They had become Christians, but had not grown out of their old prejudices.**
  - C. The Hellenists complained their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food.**
    - 1. Widows were very vulnerable in ancient society.**
    - 2. The church provided for those who had no one to care for them (1 Tim. 5:3-14).**
    - 3. This is practicing pure religion: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (Jam. 1:27).**

- D. The apostles solved the problem without delay.**
- 1. They called the whole church together.**
  - 2. They gave the qualifications for the men needed.**
  - 3. They left it up to the church to select them.**
  - 4. The apostles had a greater work to do than to serve tables: the great work of the church is to evangelize.**
  - 5. Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas were chosen.**
  - 6. All the men have Greek names; the Hebrews were putting the Hellenists over the entire distribution.**
  - 7. The apostles appointed the seven by praying and laying hands on them.**
    - a. Only the apostles had worked miracles so far.**
    - b. After they had the apostles' hands laid on them, both Stephen and Philip worked miracles.**
  - 8. The church grew greatly and many priests were "obedient to the faith" (Jude 3).**

**II. SATAN STIRRED UP TROUBLE FROM WITHOUT (8-15).**

- A. Stephen did many signs and wonders among the people.**
- 1. Members of the Freedmen's synagogue disputed with him.**
  - 2. They could not answer the arguments he presented.**
  - 3. They then resorted to slander.**
  - 4. They bribed witnesses to accuse Stephen of blasphemy.**
- B. Stephen was brought before the Council of the Jews.**
- 1. This was the same body which condemned Jesus.**
  - 2. It was the same body that had persecuted the apostles.**
  - 3. The charges against Stephen are similar to those brought against our Lord.**
  - 4. The Council will not even make a pretense of following the Roman law this time.**
  - 5. "And all who sat in the Council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel."**
    - a. The emotion and excitement of the occasion shone on Stephen's face.**
    - b. Stephen's love, concern, and the thought that he would soon be with the Lord also shone.**

**Conclusion:**

- 1. In Revelation, chapter 12, John saw a wondrous scene in heaven.**
  - a. A woman about to give birth appeared.**
  - b. A great fiery red dragon appeared before the woman.**
  - c. The dragon was waiting to devour the woman's Child as soon as**

