
a *Grace Notes* course

The Acts of the Apostles

Section I: Acts 1 to 7

an expositional study
by Warren Doud

Lesson 116: **Acts 6:7-15**

Acts 6:7-15

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Instructions

Begin each study session with prayer. It is the Holy Spirit who makes spiritual things discernable to Christians, so it is essential to be in fellowship with the Lord during Bible study.

1. Study the lesson by reading the passage in ACTS, studying the notes, and studying the other passages of the Bible which are cited. It is a good idea to read the whole book of Acts regularly, perhaps at least once a month. This will give you a good overall view of the events in ACTS.
 2. Study the topics in the same way, paying close attention to all of the Bible verses which are mentioned.
 3. Review all of the notes in the ACTS study and the topics
 4. Go to the Quiz page and follow the instructions to complete all the questions on the quiz. The quiz is “open book”. You may refer to all the notes and to the Bible when you take the test. But you should not get help from another person.
 5. When you have completed the Quiz, be sure to SAVE the file.
 6. Return the completed Quiz to Grace Notes, either by e-mail or regular mail. There are instructions below in the Quiz section.
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Acts 6:7-15

Acts 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.[KJV]

There were several reasons why there should be an increase in the ministry of the Word of God, which resulted in an increase in the numbers of people coming to Christ. First, the apostles had more time to devote to teaching and evangelizing. Then, we see that the selected seven began, or continued, their own teaching ministries, with great effectiveness.

Notice that Stephen and Philip both began teaching, and in later chapters of Acts, we see Philip going to Samaria, and to the desert, to evangelize. This is spite of the duties for which we suppose they were chosen, namely those of helping with the daily ministrations. It just points out that everyone in a local church, regardless of office, can have an effective witness and teaching ministry.

“AND A GREAT MANY PRIESTS WERE OBEDIENT TO THE FAITH”

This was one of the greatest miracles brought about by the grace of God, that people so intent on the destruction of Christ and his apostles, should believe the gospel message. Christ’s death is an atonement for all people’s sins, including the priests, even those who may have been involved in the death of Christ and persecution of Christians.

But there were thousands of priests in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. A “great company” of these priests might be converted, but a very large majority left behind.

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from Alfred Edersheim, “The Temple.”

“The number of priests to be found at all times in Jerusalem must have been very great, and Ophel a densely inhabited quarter. According to Jewish tradition, half of each of the twenty-four courses, into which the priesthood were divided, were

permanently resident in Jerusalem; the rest scattered over the land.

“About one-half of the latter had settled in Jericho, and were in the habit of supplying the needful support to their brethren while officiating in Jerusalem. ... When a course was on duty, all its members were bound to appear in the Temple. Those who stayed away, with such 'representatives of the people' as, like them, had been prevented from going up to Jerusalem in their turn, had to meet in the synagogues of their district to pray and to fast each day of their week of service, except on the sixth, the seventh, and the first--that is, neither on the Sabbath, nor on the days preceding and succeeding it, as the joy attaching to the Sabbath rendered a fast immediately before or after it inappropriate.

READ Luke 1.

Zacharias’ prophecy in Luke 1:67-79, is a great illustration of the extent of insight a devout priest could have had into the principles of salvation through Jesus Christ.

From this we can suppose that many priests, having had great exposure to the Old Testament scriptures, and the teaching which was inherent in the temple ceremonies and sacrifices, would have readily accepted that Christ was Messiah, once they were exposed to the gospel message and information about the Lord Jesus.

TOPIC: THE OFFICIATING PRIESTHOOD

Acts 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.[KJV]

TOPIC: STEPHEN

Acts 6:9, 10 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke.[KJV]

The Jews and proselytes from many foreign countries had come to Jerusalem to bring offerings and to attend the Feast of Pentecost, as we have

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already seen (Acts 2:9-11). The people mentioned here are foreign Jews; and they seem to have had a synagogue for themselves at Jerusalem, which may have been kept open permanently to accommodate visiting Jews.

It is not clear whether only one synagogue is described here, or five, one for each of the nationalities mentioned. The Jews of Jerusalem would probably not have welcomed the “Grecians” into their own synagogues, and the Hellenists from abroad would not choose to take part in public services conducted in Hebrew or Aramaic.

Regardless, wherever Stephen appeared and preached Christ, he met opposition.

The Libertines (from the Latin, *liber* => *libertinus*, meaning “freed man”) were Jews which were once slaves of Rome, who were now set free and settled in Jerusalem or the surrounding areas. Some of these may have been descendants of the Jews which Pompey took to Rome as captives. Some of these may have been residents of Jerusalem, and others may have come from other countries.

Cyrenia (the coast of Libya), Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia, were other centers of Jewish life. One of the synagogues had men from Cilicia in it, making it very likely that young Saul of Tarsus was present and trying his wits with Stephen. If so, he didn’t fare any better than the others in the debate.

When Stephen spoke to these people, some of them stood up and debated with him. This type of interruption was common among the Jews, and the questioning and dissent would give any speaker a good opportunity for reply, if he is quick with his responses. Evidently Stephen was doing very well in the debate, because his detractors were not able to “resist” his arguments.

“NOT ABLE TO WITHSTAND”

“not able is from ἰσχυω, “to have strength.” The arguers did not have the force of argument to withstand the facts Stephen presenter.

“BY WHICH HE SPOKE”

This is actually “by WHOM he spoke”, the pronoun *whom* is in the instrumental case and

agrees grammatically with “Spirit”. Stephen spoke by means of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 6:11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.[KJV]

“THEY SUBORNED MEN” [NAS: “THEY SECRETLY INDUCED MEN”]

From Greek *ὑποβάλω* “to cast under; to suggest; to instigate.” The idea is to bring men under control by offering some incentive, like money, or in this case, an opportunity to exercise religious hatred against Stephen. The detractors found men they could influence and persuaded them to lie about Stephen.

“BLASPHEMOUS WORDS”

The punishment for blasphemy was stoning to death, so they used the most condemnatory accusations they could think of.

Blasphemy against God is speaking falsely about His nature, attributes, or works. It is slander against God.

Blasphemy against men (in this case Stephen is accused of blasphemy against Moses) is slander, libel, or some other form of character assassination.

The false witnesses, then, were claiming that Stephen slandered Moses, by representing him falsely, and God, by denying His works, etc.

The purpose of this charge is to stir up the prejudices of the people about Jewish rights and customs.

At this point in Acts, we don’t know exactly what Stephen had said in his preaching; but we can surmise that the content was similar to the speech he makes in chapter 7.

Acts 6:12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,[KJV]

“STIRRED UP”

From *sunekinhsan*, “to stir up as a mob; to move people together,” from *sunkinew*, “to

throw into commotion.” They incited the people, elders, and scribes into a mob action.

“CAUGHT HIM”

They seized Stephen. The mob “came upon” Stephen, perhaps in a synagogue where he was speaking, or on the street where he was preaching, and dragged him before the council.

This was not an arrest. When the apostles were arrested, on three previous occasions, they were at least formally arraigned by legitimate police officers; first, Peter and John (Acts 2), then all the apostles (Acts 5, two arrests). But this is an uncontrolled mob activity that brought Stephen before the Sanhedrin. Nevertheless, the Council made no objection to this and were ready to aid and abet this evil work.

Acts 6:13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceases not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:[KJV]

Acts 6:13 And they put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law; [NASB]

The high priest, Caiaphas, had no problem with the false witnesses, as far as Christians were concerned. Notice that there was no cross-examination of any of the accusers. The high priests consistently used false witnesses; notice in Luke 14 the use of false witnesses in condemning Christ.

These accusations were wild charges against Stephen that he was making blasphemous remarks, these witnesses stating that he was speaking against the Temple and the Law.

Acts 6:14, 15 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.[KJV]

This is the only direct testimony against Stephen, and it is a deliberate misrepresentation of his comments. Stephen probably said something like

what Christ had said before Caiaphas, that he “would destroy the temple and build it up again in three days.” But the accusers changed these statements into half-truths, which are very easy to state and very hard for an accused person to clear up.

Stephen

from Encyclopedia Britannica (excerpts)

Stephen [Gk Stephanos] was one of the seven men elected to attend to the social welfare of the Hellenistic Jewish Christian widows (Acts 6:5), who made his mark through his understanding of the newness of Christianity over against Judaism. Because of his convictions he became the early Church’s first martyr. His name means “crown.” In some churches, a saint’s day is celebrated for him on December 26, and some Christians regard him as the patron saint of stonemasons.

Stephen and Early Hellenistic Jewish Christianity

It is virtually certain that Stephen was a Hellenistic Jew, despite attempts to describe him as a Gentile (Blackman), an Essene (or Essene-influenced, M. Simon), a Samaritan (Spiro), a proto-Ebionite (Schoeps), a Hebrew-speaking Jew (Munck), etc. The dispute between “the Hellenist” and “the Hebrews” referred to in Acts 6:1 was not between Gentiles and Jews, but between Greek-speaking Jews (thus *Helleenistai* is used rather than *Hellenes*, “Greeks”) and Aramaic (Hebrew)-speaking Jews. The latter were mainly native Palestinians who took a strong, patriotic stand against the hellenization that had been forced upon them following the conquest of Alexander the Great. The former, on the other hand, were mainly Diaspora Jews, highly influenced by Hellenism, who had immigrated to Israel for religious reasons and hoped to finish their lives and be buried in the Holy Land. Thus, while both groups had very strong religious convictions, significant cultural differences separated them, and it is not surprising that there were certain tensions between them.

The Hellenistic Jews were more familiar with and accommodating to the gentile world, and more universal in their outlook. They were less narrow culturally than the native Palestinian Jews, and

some at least were probably less rigid in their interpretation of the Law. With this kind of background, Stephen and his colleague Philip were able to break through cultural and religious barriers more easily than any of the twelve apostles would have been able to do.

Stephen had much in common with the Diaspora Jews who worshiped at the Jerusalem synagogue(s) mentioned in Acts 6:9, and he himself may have worshiped there regularly. How he had become a Christian is not known, although he may have been one of the 120 of Acts 1:15 or among the three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost. He is described not only as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (6:5; cf. 7:55), but as “full of grace and power” and as having performed “great wonders and signs among the people” (6:8).

Stephen was almost certainly a leader among the Hellenistic Jewish Christians of Jerusalem before his ordination as one of the Seven. It was probably precisely because he was a Hellenistic Jew that the stir he created could not be overlooked by the Hellenistic Jews who did not share his views. Thus some of them challenged his teaching (presumably about Jesus and the implications of what He had accomplished), but none could “withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke” (6:10).

His View of the Law and the Temple

Luke reported in Acts neither the content of Stephen’s teaching nor the exact nature of his debate with the Hellenistic Jews. These must be inferred from the charges made by Stephen’s accusers and from the speech that he gave in his defense. The general accusation that Stephen spoke “blasphemous words against Moses and God” (6:11) involved two specific charges: (1) that he spoke against the temple, saying that Jesus would destroy it; and (2) that he spoke against the Law, claiming that Jesus would “change the customs which Moses delivered to us” (vv 13f).

It is sometimes argued that these accusations cannot be taken as accurate, since the men who made them were “secretly instigated” to do so and are explicitly described as “false witnesses” (6:11, 13). Without question, there is a sense in which

from Luke’s perspective Stephen, like Jesus, was disloyal to neither the temple nor the Law. Because Jesus had fulfilled what both the temple and the Law pointed to, there was no truth to the charge that Stephen’s views on the obsolescence of the temple and the possibility of fundamental changes in the Law amounted to blasphemy against Moses and God.

At the same time, however, Stephen had clearly begun to see the discontinuity implied by Christ’s work. There must have been some substance to the charges, distorted though they were, brought by the false witnesses (cf. the charges brought against Jesus at His trial). It seems certain that Stephen came to his convictions through the stimulus of some of Jesus’ sayings, known to him through oral tradition. Regarding the temple and its destruction (6:13f), therefore, Stephen probably had in mind Jesus’ saying recorded in Mk. 13:2 (par Mt. 24:2; Lk. 21:6; cf. also Jn. 2:19; Mt. 12:6). Jesus’ anticipation of the imminent demise of the temple opened the door to rethinking its significance, especially in the light of His atoning death. Similarly, Stephen must have been aware of Jesus’ words and deeds that taught a new freedom concerning the Law (e.g., Mk. 2:27; 7:15; cf. 10:4f; Mt. 8:22). While it is improbable that Stephen went as far in articulating this newness as Paul was later to do, he probably had begun to explore (in a more radical way than M. Simon allows) the implications of what Jesus had said and done.

His Trial and Speech

Stephen was brought to a formal trial before the Sanhedrin (“council”), which included “the elders and the scribes” (6:12) as well as the high priest (7:1), although all seventy-one members may not have been present. Acts 6:12–7:58 gives a very abbreviated account of the proceedings, but the testimony of witnesses and the opportunity for defense indicate a legal process.

Stephen’s speech (Acts 7:2–53) is a strange kind of defense, however, since it is designed not so much to defend himself as to instruct and even to indict his hearers. The considerable space given to this long speech, much of which has only an indirect relevance to the charges brought against

Stephen, has often been noticed. The speech near the end does address the issue of the temple (vv 44–50), but not that of the Law. Instead it is a general defense of Christianity against those who have not believed. The genre of the speech is similar to the later anti-Judaistic polemic of the early Church, which may to some extent have been modeled on this speech.

Stephen's speech, taking the well-known form of a review of the history of Israel, begins with the call of Abraham in Mesopotamia, thereby implying that God's presence is by no means limited to Palestine or the temple (7:2–8). In a similar way, God was with Joseph in Egypt (vv 9–16). Here a further, increasingly prominent motif is introduced: God's people have habitually rejected the leaders He has sent to them. Thus Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers (v 9), but he was responsible for their survival. Moses (vv 17–43) was also rejected by the Israelites, but "this Moses whom they refused ... God sent as both ruler and deliverer" (v 35). In v 37 the Moses-Jesus typology is made even more explicit by the quotation of Dt. 18:15.

The speech next turns to the wilderness tent of witness and to Solomon's temple, drawing the conclusion that "the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands" (Acts 7:48) and sealing that point in vv 49f with the forceful quotation of Isa. 66:1f. The speech reaches its climax in the crushing indictment of vv 51–53. Although it does not say so explicitly, the speech clearly implies that the pattern of failure exemplified in Israel's history finds its climax in the Jewish leaders' rejection of the truth brought by Jesus (cf. v. 52). The Law is mentioned only briefly at the very end of the speech, where Stephen says that although the Jews honored the Law, they "did not keep it" (v 53).

Stephen may well have said more than what is recorded in Acts, but it is also probable that he was cut short by the crowd's hostile reaction. Thus the speech as it stands seems to lack a suitable conclusion. Even so, it is clear that the key to Stephen's unorthodox teaching about the temple and the Law lies in the truth brought by "the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and

murdered" (7:52). The vision of the Son of man (vv 55f), with its high Christology, confirms this point. Although Stephen does not articulate it in these terms, the reader of Luke-Acts will know that a new era in the history of salvation has been inaugurated.

His Martyrdom

Acts 7:54 notes the rage of the crowd at what Stephen was saying, and that "they ground their teeth against him." At this point Stephen received the vision of "the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (v 55), which, when he articulated it to the Sanhedrin, was what finally sealed his fate.

The members of the Sanhedrin could not tolerate this statement about one whom they themselves had recently condemned to death. In this unique reference to the Son of man title outside the Gospels (the only time in the NT that this is spoken by someone other than Jesus Himself), Stephen, alluding to Dnl. 7:13f, clearly understands Jesus to be on the same level as God, ruling with God as His vicegerent. It is evident that Stephen and the Hellenistic Jewish Christians held to a high Christology.

It is no coincidence that it was also a reference to the Son of man that finally led to Jesus' death (cf. Lk. 22:69). In presenting the story of Stephen's martyrdom, Luke went out of his way to portray Stephen as an archetypal witness who followed exactly in Jesus' steps. Just as there are similarities in the charges brought against Jesus and Stephen (see II above) and in the references to the Son of Man, so too there are striking similarities in the two martyrdoms. Like Jesus, Stephen prayed for the forgiveness of his persecutors (Acts 7:60; cf. Lk. 23:34) and committed his spirit to divine safekeeping (Acts 7:59; cf. Lk. 23:46). The striking difference, however, is that whereas Jesus began His prayers with "Father," Stephen began his with "Lord Jesus" (Acts 7:59f). This further indicates the exalted — indeed, divine — status of Jesus in Stephen's Christology.

The narrative of Acts (esp 7:57) gives the impression that Stephen's death resulted from spontaneous and uncontrollable hostility rather than from due legal process. This would accord

with the fact that the Romans did not allow the Sanhedrin to exact the death penalty. On the other hand, there was at least a semblance of legal process in the testimony of witnesses before the Sanhedrin and in the manner of the execution: Stephen was stoned (the penalty for blasphemy) outside the city by (at least to begin with) the witnesses against him (7:58; Lev. 24:14; Dt. 17:5–7).

His Significance

Stephen is a pivotal figure in the book of Acts and in the history of the early Church. Stephen and the other Hellenistic Christians provide the first indication of the variety that existed in the early Church. But most important, Stephen's new understanding of the temple and the Law in the light of the new situation inaugurated by Jesus' recently accomplished work made it impossible for Christianity to remain a sect within Judaism. The new freedom that Stephen articulated with respect to the temple and the Law not only facilitated the spread of the gospel among Hellenistic Jews both within and outside of Palestine, but also implied a universalism that ultimately made the mission to the Gentiles a reality.

It would be going too far to conclude that Stephen's views concerning the temple were as developed as those of the author of Hebrews, or that his view of the Law was the same as that held by Paul, or that he ever contemplated the gentile mission that Paul was to fulfil. But that was a pioneer who helped to make possible these developments, is beyond question. It is no coincidence that the mission to Samaritans and Gentiles quickly follows Stephen's death in the narrative of Acts (cf. 8:4). Stephen may indeed be viewed as a forerunner of Paul, as Acts seems to hint by the note about Saul's presence at Stephen's execution (8:1). Stephen's courage in contending for the truth in the face of the hostility of his Jewish brethren and at the cost of his life was later to be mirrored in Paul's own experience.

From Conybeare and Howson

St. Stephen the Forerunner of St. Paul

The council assembled in solemn and formal state to try the blasphemer. There was great and general excitement in Jerusalem. "The people, the scribes, and the elders" had been "stirred up" by the members of the Hellenistic Synagogues (Acts 6:12). It is evident from that vivid expression which is quoted from the accusers' mouths, "this place" – "this holy place" – that the meeting of the Sanhedrin took place in the close neighborhood of the Temple. Their ancient and solemn room of assembly was the hall Gazith, or the "Stone Chamber" partly within the Temple court and partly without it. The president sat in the less sacred portion, and around him, in a semicircle, were the rest of the seventy judges.

Before these judges Stephen was made to stand, confronted by his accusers. The eyes of all were fixed upon his countenance, which grew bright as they gazed upon it, with a supernatural radiance and serenity. In the beautiful Jewish expression of the Scriptures, "They saw his face as it had been that of an angel." The judges, when they saw his glorified countenance, might have remembered the shining on the face of Moses, and trembled lest Stephen's voice should be about to speak the will of Jehovah, like that of the great lawgiver. Instead of being occupied with the faded glories of the Second Temple, they might have recognized in the spectacle before them the Shekinah of the Christian soul, which is the living sanctuary of God.

But the trial proceeded. The judicial question, to which the accused was required to plead, was put by the president, "Are these things so?" And then Stephen answered, and his clear voice was heard in the silent council hall as he went through the history of the chosen people, proving his own deep faith in the sacredness of the Jewish economy, but suggesting, here and there, that spiritual interpretation of it which had always been the true one, and the truth of which was now to be made manifest to all.

He began, with a wise discretion, from the call of Abraham, and traveled historically in his argument through all the great stages of their national

existence – from Abraham to Joseph – from Joseph to Moses – from Moses to David and Solomon. And as he went on he selected and glanced at those points which made for his own cause. He showed that God’s blessing rested on the faith of Abraham, though he had “not so much as to set his foot on” in the land of promise, on the piety of Joseph, though he was an exile in Egypt, and on the holiness of the burning bush, though in the desert of Sinai. He dwelt in detail on the Lawgiver, in such a way as to show his own unquestionable orthodoxy; but he quoted the promise concerning “the prophet like unto Moses and reminded his hearers that the Law, in which they trusted, had not kept their forefathers from idolatry.

And so he passed on to the Temple, which had so prominent a reference to the charge against himself, and of the prophet Isaiah, who denied that any temple made with hands could be the place of God’s highest worship. And thus far they listened to him. It was the story of the chosen people, to which every Jew listened with interest and pride.

It is remarkable, as we have said before, how completely St. Stephen is the forerunner of St. Paul, both in the form and the matter of this defense. His securing the attention of the Jews by adopting the historical method is exactly what the Apostle did in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia. (Acts 13:16-22) His assertion of his attachment to the true principles of the Mosaic religion is exactly what was said to Agrippa; “I continue unto this day witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.” (Acts 26:22) It is deeply interesting to think of Saul as listening to the martyr’s voice, as he anticipated those very arguments which he himself was destined to reiterate in synagogues and before kings.

There is no reason to doubt that he was present, although he may not have been qualified to vote in the Sanhedrin. And it is evident, from the thoughts which occurred to him in his subsequent vision within the precincts of the Temple, how deep an impression St. Stephen’s death had left on his memory. And there are even verbal

coincidences which may be traced between this address and St. Paul’s speeches or writings. The words used by Stephen of the Temple call to mind those which were used at Athens (Acts 17:24). When he speaks of the Law as received “by the disposition of angels,” he anticipates a phrase in the Epistle to the Galatians (3:19).

His exclamation at the end, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart ... who have received the law ... and have not kept it,” is only and indignant condensation of the argument in the Epistle to the Romans; “Behold, thou callest thyself a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will ... Thou, therefore, that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God?” ... He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of man but of God.” (Rom. 2:17-29)

The rebuke which Stephen, full of the Divine Spirit, suddenly broke away from the course of his narrative to pronounce, was the signal for a general outburst of furious rage on the part of his judges. They “gnashed on him with their teeth” in the same spirit in which they had said, not long before, to the blind man who was healed, “Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?” (John 9:34) But, in contrast with the malignant hatred which had blinded their eyes, Stephen’s serene faith was supernaturally exalted into a direct vision of the blessedness of the Redeemed. He, whose face had been like that of an angel on earth, was made like one of those angels themselves, “who do always behold the face of our Father which is in Heaven.” (Matt. 18:10). “He being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into Heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.”

The scene before his eyes was no longer the council hall at Jerusalem and the circle of his infuriated judges; but he gazed up into the endless courts of the celestial Jerusalem, with its “innumerable company of angels,” and saw Jesus, in whose righteous cause he was about to die. In

other places, where our Savior is spoken of in His glorified state, He is said to be not standing but seated, at the right hand of the Father. Here alone He is said to be standing. It is as if (according to Chrysostom's beautiful thought) He had risen from His throne to succor His persecuted servant and to receive him to Himself. And when Stephen saw his Lord, perhaps with the memories of what he had seen on earth crowding into his mind, he suddenly exclaimed, in the ecstasy of his vision, "Behold! I see the Heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God!"

This was too much for the Jews to bear. The blasphemy of Jesus had been repeated. The follower of Jesus was hurried to destruction. "They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord." It is evident that it was a savage and disorderly condemnation. They dragged him out of the council hall and, making a sudden rush and tumult through the streets, hurried him to one of the gates of the city, and somewhere about the rocky edges of the ravine of Jehoshaphat, where the Mount of Olives looks down upon Gethsemane and Siloam, or on the open ground to the north, which travelers cross when they go towards Samaria or Damascus, with stones that lay without the walls of the Holy City, this heavenly minded martyr was murdered.

The exact place of his death is not known. There are two traditions, an ancient one, which places it on the north, beyond the Damascus gate, and a modern one, which leads travelers through what is now called the gate of St. Stephen, to a spot near the brook Kedron, over against the garden of Gethsemane. But those who look upon Jerusalem from an elevated point on the northeast have both these positions in view; and anyone who stood there on that day might have seen the crowd rush forth from the gate, and the witnesses (who according to the law were required to throw the first stones cast off their outer garments and lay them down at the feet of Saul.

The contrast is striking between the indignant zeal which the martyr had just expressed against the sin of his judges, and the forgiving love which he showed to themselves when they became his murderers. He first uttered a prayer for himself in

the words of Jesus Christ, which he knew were spoken from the cross, and which he may himself have heard from those holy lips. And then, deliberately kneeling down, in that posture of humility in which the body most naturally expresses the supplication of the mind, and which has been consecrated as the attitude of Christian devotion by Stephen and by Paul himself (at Miletus, Acts 20:36, and at Tyre, Acts 21:5), he gave the last few moments of his consciousness to a prayer for the forgiveness of his enemies; and the words were scarcely spoken when death seized upon him, or rather, in the words of Scripture, he fell asleep.

"And Saul was consenting to his death." A Spanish painter, in a picture of Stephen conducted to the place of execution, has represented Saul as walking by the martyr's side with melancholy calmness. He consents to his death from a sincere, though mistaken conviction of duty; and the expression of his countenance is strongly contrasted with the rage of the baffled Jewish doctors and the ferocity of the crowd who flock to the scene of bloodshed. Literally considered, such a representation is scarcely consistent either with Saul's conduct immediately afterward, or with his own expressions concerning himself at the later periods of his life (Acts 22:4; 26:10; Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:13). But the picture, though historically incorrect, is poetically true. The painter has worked according to the true idea of his art in throwing upon the persecutor's countenance the shadow of his coming repentance. We cannot dissociate the martyrdom of Stephen from the conversion of Paul. The spectacle of so much constancy, so much faith, so much love, could not be lost. It is hardly too much to say with Augustine, that the "church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen." *Si Stephanus non orasset, ecclesia Paulum non haberet.*

Funeral of St. Stephen

The death of St. Stephen is a bright passage in the earliest history of the church. Where in the annals of the world can we find so perfect an image of a pure and blessed saint as that which is drawn in the concluding verses of the seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles? And the brightness which

invests the scene of the martyr's last moments is the more impressive from its contrast with all that has preceded it since the crucifixion of Christ. The first apostle who died was a traitor. The first disciples of the Christian apostles whose deaths are recorded were liars and hypocrites. The kingdom of the Son of Man was founded in darkness and gloom. But a heavenly light reappeared with the martyrdom of St. Stephen. The revelation of such a character at the moment of death was the strongest of all evidences, and the highest of all encouragements. Nothing could more confidently assert the divine power of the new religion; nothing could prophesy more surely the certainty of its final victory.

To us who have the experience of many centuries of Christian history, and who can look back through a long series of martyrdoms to this which was the beginning and example of the rest, these thoughts are easy and obvious; but to the friends and associates of the murdered saint, such feelings of cheerful and confident assurance were perhaps more difficult. Though Christ was indeed risen from the dead, His disciples could hardly yet be able to realize the full triumph of the Cross over death. Even many years afterwards Paul the Apostle wrote to the Thessalonians concerning those who had "fallen asleep" (1 Thess. 4:13) more peaceably than Stephen, that they ought not to sorrow for them as those without hope; and now, at the very beginning of the Gospel, the grief of the Christians must have been great indeed, when the corpse of their champion and their brother lay at the feet of Saul the murderer. Yet, amidst the consternation of some and the fury of others, friends of the martyr were found, who gave him all the melancholy honors of a Jewish funeral, and carefully buried him, as Joseph buried his father, "with great and sore lamentation." (Gen. 1:10)

After the death and burial of Stephen the persecution still raged in Jerusalem. That temporary protection which had been extended to the rising sect by such men as Gamaliel was now at an end. Pharisees and Sadducees, priests and people, alike indulged the most violent and ungovernable fury. It does not seem that any check was laid upon them by the Roman authorities. Either the procurator was absent from the city or

he was unwilling to connive at what seemed to him an ordinary religious quarrel.

The eminent and active agent in this persecution was Saul. There are strong grounds for believing that if he was not a member of the Sanhedrin at the time of St. Stephen's death, he was elected into that powerful senate soon after, possibly as a reward for the zeal he had shown against the heretic. He himself says that in Jerusalem he not only exercised the power of imprisonment by commission from the High Priests, but also, when the Christians were put to death, gave his vote against them. From this expression it is natural to infer that he was a member of that supreme court of judicature.

However this might be, his zeal in conducting the persecution was unbounded. We cannot help observing how frequently strong expressions concerning his share in the injustice and cruelty now perpetrated are multiplied in the Scriptures. In St. Luke's narrative, in St. Paul's own speeches, in his earlier and later epistles, the subject recurs again and again. He "made havoc of the Church," invading the sanctuaries of domestic life, "entering into every house;" (Acts 8:3: see 9:2) and those whom he thus tore from their homes he "committed to prison;" or, in his own words at a later period, when he had recognized as God's people those whom he now imagined to be His enemies, "thinking that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ... in Jerusalem ... he shut up many of the saints in prison. (Acts 26:9,10; cf. 22:3)

And not only did men thus suffer at his hands, but women also, a fact three times repeated as a great aggravation of his cruelty (Acts 8:3; 9:2; 22:4). These persecuted people were scourged "in many synagogues." (Acts 26:10) Nor was Stephen the only one who suffered death, as we may infer from the apostle's own confession. And what was worse than scourging or than death itself, he used every effort to make them blaspheme that holy name whereby they were called. His fame as an inquisitor was notorious far and wide. Even at Damascus Ananias had heard (Acts 9:13) "how much evil he had done to Christ's saints at Jerusalem." He was known there (Acts 9:21) as

“he that destroyed them which called on this Name in Jerusalem.” It was not without reason that in the deep repentance of his later years, he remembered how he had “persecuted the Church of God and wasted it,” (Gal. 1:13; cf Phil. 3:6) how he had been a “blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious,” (1 Tim. 1:13), and that he felt he was “not meet to be called an Apostle,” because he “had persecuted the Church of God.”

From such cruelty, and such efforts to make them deny that Name which they honored about all names, the disciples naturally fled. In consequence of “the persecution against the Church at Jerusalem, they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.” The Apostles only remained (Acts 8:1). But this dispersion led to great results. The moment of lower depression was the very time of the church’s first missionary triumph. “They that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.” (Acts 8:4; 11:19-21) First the Samaritans and then the Gentiles received that Gospel which the Jews attempted to destroy. Thus did the providence of God begin to accomplish, by unconscious instruments, the prophecy and command which had been given, “Ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Sources:

Conybeare and Howson, “The Life and Epistles of St. Paul”

Encyclopedia Britannica

The Officiating Priesthood

from Alfred Edersheim, “The Temple,” Chapter 4.

THE PRIESTHOOD

Among the most interesting glimpses of early life in the church is that afforded by a small piece of rapidly-drawn scenery which presents to our view 'a great company of the priests,' 'obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7). We seem to be carried back in imagination to the time when Levi remained faithful amidst the general spiritual defection (Exodus 32:26), and then through the long vista of devout ministering priests to reach the fulfilment

of this saying of Malachi--part admonition, and part prophecy: 'For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts' (Malachi 2:7). We can picture to ourselves how they who ministered in holy things would at eventide, when the Temple was deserted of its worshippers, gather to speak of the spiritual meaning of the services, and to consider the wonderful things which had taken place in Jerusalem, as some alleged, in fulfilment of those very types that formed the essence of their office and ministry. 'For this thing was not done in a corner.'

The trial of Jesus, His condemnation by the Sanhedrim, and His being delivered up to the Gentiles, must have formed the theme of frequent and anxious discussion in the Temple. Were not their own chief priests implicated in the matter? Did not Judas on that fatal day rush into the Temple, and wildly cast the 'price of blood' into the 'treasury'? On the other hand, was not one of the principal priests and a member of the priestly council, Joseph of Arimathea, an adherent of Christ? Did not the Sanhedrist Nicodemus adopt the same views, and even Gamaliel advise caution? Besides, in the 'porches' of the Temple, especially in that of Solomon, 'a notable miracle' had been done in 'that Name,' and there also its all-prevailing power was daily proclaimed. It specially behoved the priesthood to inquire well into the matter; and the Temple seemed the most appropriate place for its discussion.

THE NUMBER OF PRIESTS

The number of priests to be found at all times in Jerusalem must have been very great, and Ophel a densely inhabited quarter. According to Jewish tradition, half of each of the twenty-four 'courses,' into which the priesthood were divided, were permanently resident in Jerusalem; the rest scattered over the land. It is added, that about one half of the latter had settled in Jericho, and were in the habit of supplying the needful support to their brethren while officiating in Jerusalem. Of course such statements must not be taken literally, though no doubt they are substantially correct. When a 'course' was on duty, all its members were bound

to appear in the Temple. Those who stayed away, with such 'representatives of the people' (or 'stationary men') as, like them, had been prevented from 'going up' to Jerusalem in their turn, had to meet in the synagogues of their district to pray and to fast each day of their week of service, except on the sixth, the seventh, and the first--that is, neither on the Sabbath, nor on the days preceding and succeeding it, as the 'joy' attaching to the Sabbath rendered a fast immediately before or after it inappropriate.

SYMBOLISM OF THE PRIESTHOOD / MEDIATION

It need scarcely be said, that everything connected with the priesthood was intended to be symbolical and typical--the office itself, its functions, even its dress and outward support. The fundamental design of Israel itself was to be unto Jehovah 'a kingdom of priests and an holy nation' (Exo 19:5,6). This, however, could only be realised in 'the fulness of time.' At the very outset there was the barrier of sin; and in order to gain admittance to the ranks of Israel, when 'the sum of the children of Israel was taken after their number,' every man had to give the half-shekel, which in after times became the regular Temple contribution, as 'a ransom (covering) for his soul unto Jehovah' (Exodus 30:12,13).

But even so Israel was sinful, and could only approach Jehovah in the way which Himself opened, and in the manner which He appointed. Direct choice and appointment by God were the conditions alike of the priesthood, of sacrifices, feasts, and of every detail of service. The fundamental ideas which underlay all and connected it into a harmonious whole, were reconciliation and mediation: the one expressed by typically atoning sacrifices, the other by a typically intervening priesthood. Even the Hebrew term for priest (Cohen) denotes in its root-meaning 'one who stands up for another, and mediates in his cause.' *

* This root-meaning (through the Arabic) of the Hebrew word for priest, as one intervening, explains its occasional though very rare application to others than priests, as, for example, to the sons of David (2 Samuel 8:18), a mode of

expression which is thus correctly paraphrased in 1 Chronicles 18:17: 'And the sons of David were at the hand of the king.'

For this purpose God chose the tribe of Levi, and out of it again the family of Aaron, on whom He bestowed the 'priest's office as a gift' (Numbers 18:7). But the whole characteristics and the functions of the priesthood centred in the person of the high-priest. In accordance with their Divine 'calling' (Hebrews 5:4) was the special and exceptional provision made for the support of the priesthood. Its principle was thus expressed: 'I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel'; and its joyousness, when realised in its full meaning and application, found vent in such words as Psalm 16:5, 6: 'Jehovah is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.'

HOLINESS

But there was yet another idea to be expressed by the priesthood. The object of reconciliation was holiness. Israel was to be 'a holy nation'--reconciled through the 'sprinkling of blood'; brought near to, and kept in fellowship with God by that means. The priesthood, as the representative offerers of that blood and mediators of the people, were also to show forth the 'holiness' of Israel. Every one knows how this was symbolised by the gold-plate which the high-priest wore on his forehead, and which bore the words: 'Holiness unto Jehovah.' But though the high-priest in this, as in every other respect, was the fullest embodiment of the functions and object of the priesthood, the same truth was also otherwise shown forth. The bodily qualifications required in the priesthood, the kind of defilements which would temporarily or wholly interrupt their functions, their mode of ordination, and even every portion, material, and colour of their distinctive dress were all intended to express in a symbolical manner this characteristic of holiness. In all these respects there was a difference between Israel and the tribe of Levi; between the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron; and, finally, between an ordinary priest and the high-priest,

who most fully typified our Great High-priest, in whom all these symbols have found their reality.

THE TWENTY-FOUR COURSES

This much it seemed necessary to state for the general understanding of the matter. Full details belong to the exposition of the meaning and object of the Levitical priesthood, as instituted by God, while our present task rather is to trace its further development to what it was at the time when Jesus was in the Temple. The first peculiarity of post-Mosaic times which we here meet, is the arrangement of the priesthood into 'twenty-four courses,' which undoubtedly dates from the times of David. But Jewish tradition would make it even much older. For, according to the Talmud, it should be traced up to Moses, who is variously supposed to have arranged the sons of Aaron into either or else sixteen courses (four, or else eight, of Eleazar; and the other four, or else eight, of Ithamar), to which, on the one supposition, Samuel and David each added other eight 'courses,' or, on the other, Samuel and David, in conjunction, the eight needed to make up the twenty-four mentioned in 1 Chronicles 24. It need scarcely be told that, like many similar statements, this also is simply an attempt to trace up every arrangement to the fountain-head of Jewish history, in order to establish its absolute authority.*

* Curiously enough, here also the analogy between Rabbinism and Roman Catholicism holds good. Each claims for its teaching and practices the so-called principle of catholicity--'semper, ubique, ab omnibus' ('always, everywhere, by all'), and each invents the most curious historical fables in support of it!

THE COURSES AFTER THE CAPTIVITY

The institution of David and of Solomon continued till the Babylonish captivity. Thence, however, only four out of the twenty-four 'courses' returned: those of Jedaiah, Immer, Pashur, and Harim (Ezra 2:36-39), the course of 'Jedaiah' being placed first because it was of the high-priest's family, 'of the house of Jeshua,' 'the son of Jozadak' (Ezra 3:2; Haggai 1:1; 1 Chron 6:15). To restore the original number, each of these four families was directed to draw five lots for those

which had not returned, so as to form once more twenty-four courses, which were to bear the ancient names. Thus, for example, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, did not really belong to the family of Abijah (1 Chronicles 24:10), which had not returned from Babylon, but to the 'course of Abia,' which had been formed out of some other family, and only bore the ancient name (Luke 1:5). Like the priests, the Levites had at the time of King David been arranged into twenty-four 'courses,' which were to act as 'priests' assistance' (1 Chronicles 23:4,28), as 'singers and musicians' (1 Chronicles 25:6), as 'gate-keepers and guards' (1 Chronicles 26:6 and following), and as 'officers and judges.' Of these various classes, that of the 'priests' assistants' was by far the most numerous, * and to them the charge of the Temple had been committed in subordination to the priests.

* Apparently it numbered 24,000, out of a total of 38,000 Levites.

It had been their duty to look after the sacred vestments and vessels; the store-houses and their contents; and the preparation of the shewbread, of the meat-offerings, of the spices, etc. They were also generally to assist the priests in their work, to see to the cleaning of the sanctuary, and to take charge of the treasuries (1 Chronicles 23:28-32).

IN THE TEMPLE OF HEROD

Of course these services, as also those of the singers and musicians, and of the porters and guards, were retained in the Temple of Herod. But for the employment of Levites as 'officers and judges' there was no further room, not only because such judicial functions as still remained to the Jews were in the hands of the Sanhedrim and its subordinate authorities, but also because in general the ranks of the Levites were so thinned. In point of fact, while no less than 4,289 priests had returned from Babylon, the number of Levites was under 400 (Ezra 2:40-42; Nehemiah 7:43-45), of whom only 74 were 'priests' assistants.' To this the next immigration, under Ezra, added only 38, and that though the Levites had been specially searched for (Ezra 8:15,18,19). According to tradition, Ezra punished them by depriving them of their tithes. The gap in their number was filled up by 220 Nethinim (Ezra 8:20), literally, 'given

ones,' probably originally strangers and captives, * as in all likelihood the Gibeonites had been the first 'Nethinim' (Joshua 9:21,23,27).

* This is also confirmed by their foreign names (Ezra 2:43-58). The total number of Nethinim who returned from Babylon was 612--392 with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:58; Nehemiah 7:60), and 220 with Ezra (Ezra 8:20).

Though the Nethinim, like the Levites and priests, were freed from all taxation (Ezra 7:24), and perhaps also from military service (Jos. Anti. iii. 12; iv. 4, 3.), the Rabbinitists held them in the lowest repute--beneath a bastard, though above a proselyte--forbade their intermarrying with Israelites, and declared them incapable of proper membership in the congregation.

DUTIES OF PRIESTS AND LEVITES

The duties of priests and Levites in the Temple may be gathered from Scripture, and will be further explained in the course of our inquiries. Generally, it may here be stated that on the Levites devolved the Temple-police, the guard of the gates, and the duty of keeping everything about the sanctuary clean and bright. But as at night the priests kept watch about the innermost places of the Temple, so they also opened and closed all the inner gates, while the Levites discharged this duty in reference to the outer gates, which led upon the Temple Mount (or Court of the Gentiles), and to the 'Beautiful Gate,' which formed the principal entrance into the Court of the Women. The laws of Levitical cleanness, as explained by the Rabbis, were most rigidly enforced upon worshippers and priests. If a leper, or any other who was 'defiled,' had ventured into the sanctuary itself, or any priest officiated in a state of 'uncleanness,' he would, if discovered, be dragged out and killed, without form of process, by 'the rebels' beating.' Minor punishments were awarded to those guilty of smaller offences of the same kind. The Sabbath-rest was strictly enforced, so far as consistent with the necessary duties of the Temple service. But the latter superseded the Sabbath law (Matthew 12:5) and defilement on account of death. If the time for offering a sacrifice was not fixed, so that it might be brought on one day as well as another, then the service did not supersede either the Sabbath or

defilement on account of death. But where the time was unalterably fixed, there the higher duty of obedience to a direct command came in to supersede alike the Sabbath and this one (but only this one) ground of defilement. The same principle applied to worshippers as well as priests.

THE WEEK'S SERVICE

Each 'course' of priests and of Levites (as has already been stated) came on duty for a week, from one Sabbath to another. The service of the week was subdivided among the various families which constituted a 'course'; so that if it consisted of five 'houses of fathers,' three served each one day, and two each two days; if of six families, five served each one day, and one two days; if of eight families, six served each one day, and the other two in conjunction on one day; or, lastly, if of nine families, five served each one day, and the other four took it two in conjunction for two days. These divisions and arrangements were made by 'the chiefs' or 'heads of the houses of their fathers.' On Sabbaths the whole 'course' was on duty; on feast-days any priest might come up and join in the ministrations of the sanctuary; and at the Feast of Tabernacles all the twenty-four courses were bound to be present and officiate. While actually engaged on service in the Temple, the priests were not allowed to drink wine, either by day or by night. The other 'families' or 'houses' also of the 'course' who were in attendance at Jerusalem, though not on actual duty, were, during their week of ministry, prohibited the use of wine, except at night, because they might have to be called in to assist their brethren of the officiating 'family,' which they could not do if they had partaken of strong drink. The law even made (a somewhat curious) provision to secure that the priests should come up to Jerusalem properly trimmed, washed, and attired, so as to secure the decorum of the service.

THESE FUNCTIONS NOT SACERDOTAL

It would be difficult to conceive arrangements more thoroughly or consistently opposed to what are commonly called 'priestly pretensions,' than those of the Old Testament. The fundamental principle, laid down at the outset, that all Israel

were 'a kingdom of priests' (Exodus 19:5,6), made the priesthood only representatives of the people. Their income, which even under the most favourable circumstances must have been moderate, was, as we have seen, dependent on the varying religious state of the nation, since no law existed by which either the payment of tithes or any other offerings could be enforced. How little power or influence, comparatively speaking, the priesthood wielded, is sufficiently known from Jewish history. Out of actual service neither the priests nor even the high-priest wore a distinctive dress (comp. Acts 23:5; see also chapter 7), and though a number of civil restrictions were laid on priests, there were few corresponding advantages. It is indeed true that alliances with distinguished priestly families were eagerly sought, and that during the troubled period of Syrian domination the high-priest for a time held civil as well as religious rule. But the latter advantage was dearly bought, both as regarded the priests and the nation. Nor must we forget the powerful controlling influence which Rabbinism exercised. Its tendency, which must never be lost sight of in the study of the state of Palestine at the time of our Lord, was steadily against all privileges other than those gained by traditionary learning and theological ingenuity. The Pharisee, or, rather, the man learned in the traditional law, was everything both before God and before man; 'but this people, who knoweth not the law,' were 'cursed,' plebeians, country people, unworthy of any regard or attention. Rabbinism applied these principles even in reference to the priesthood. It divided all priests into 'learned' and 'unlettered,' and excluded the latter from some of the privileges of their own order. Thus there were certain priestly dues which the people might at will give to any priest they chose. But from some of them the 'unlettered' priests were debarred, on the ostensible ground that in their ignorance they might have partaken of them in a state of Levitical uncleanness, and so committed mortal sin.

TRAINING OF PRIESTS

In general, the priests had to undergo a course of instruction, and were examined before being allowed to officiate. Similarly, they were subject

to the ordinary tribunals, composed of men learned in the law, without regard to their descent from one or another tribe. The ordained 'rulers' of the synagogues, the teachers of the people, the leaders of their devotions, and all other officials were not necessarily 'priests,' but simply chosen for their learning and fitness. Any one whom the 'elders' or 'rulers' deemed qualified for it might, at their request, address to the people on the Sabbath a 'word of exhortation.' Even the high-priest himself was answerable to the Sanhedrim. It is distinctly stated, that 'if he committed an offence which by the law deserved whipping, the Great Sanhedrim whipt him, and then had him restored again to his office.' Every year a kind of ecclesiastical council was appointed to instruct him in his duties for the Day of Atonement, 'in case he were not learned,' or, at any rate, to see to it that he knew and remembered them. Nay, the principle was broadly laid down--that 'a scholar, though he were a bastard, was of far higher value than an unlearned high-priest.' If, besides all this, it is remembered how the political influence of the high-priest had decayed in the days of Herod, and how frequently the occupants of that office changed, through the caprice of the rulers or through bribery, the state of public feeling will be readily understood.

At the same time, it must be admitted, that generally speaking the high-priest would, of necessity, wield very considerable influence, and that, ordinarily, those who held the sacred office were not only 'lettered,' but members of the Sanhedrim. According to Jewish tradition, the high-priest ought, in every respect, to excel all other priests, and if he were poor, the rest were to contribute, so as to secure him an independent fortune. Certain marks of outward respect were also shown him. When he entered the Temple he was accompanied by three persons--one walking at each side, the third behind him. He might, without being appointed to it, officiate in any part of the Temple services; he had certain exceptional rights; and he possessed a house in the Temple, where he lived by day, retiring only at night to his own home, which must be within Jerusalem, and to which he was escorted by the people after the solemnities of the Day of Atonement, which devolved almost exclusively upon him.

OFFICE HEREDITARY

Originally the office of high-priest was regarded as being held for life and hereditary; * but the troubles of later times made it a matter of cabal, crime, or bribery.

* According to the Rabbis, he was appointed by the Sanhedrim.

Without here entering into the complicated question of the succession to the high-priesthood, the following may be quoted from the Talmud (Talmud Jer. Ioma, I.), without, of course, guaranteeing its absolute accuracy: 'In the first Temple, the high-priests served, the son succeeding the father, and they were eighteen in number. But in the second Temple they got the high-priesthood for money; and there are who say they destroyed each other by witchcraft, so that some reckon 80 high-priests during that period, others 81, others 82, 83, 84, and even 85.' The Rabbis enumerate 18 high-priests during the first Temple; Lightfoot counts 53 from the return from Babylon to Matthias, when the last war of the Jews began; while Relandius reckons 57. But there is both difficulty and confusion amid the constant changes at the last.

There was not any fixed age for entering on the office of high-priest, any more than on that of an ordinary priest. The Talmudists put it down at twenty years. But the unhappy descendant of the Maccabees, Aristobulus, was only sixteen years of age when his beauty, as he officiated as high-priest in the Temple, roused the jealousy of Herod, and procured his death. The entrance of the Levites is fixed, in the sacred text, at thirty during the wilderness period, and after that, when the work would require less bodily strength, but a larger number of ministers, at twenty-five years of age. *

* It is thus we reconcile Numbers 4:3 with 8:24, 25. In point of fact, these two reasons are expressly mentioned in 1 Chronicles 23:24-27, as influencing David still further to lower the age of entrance to twenty.

DISQUALIFICATIONS FOR THE PRIESTHOOD

No special disqualifications for the Levitical office existed, though the Rabbis insist that a good voice

was absolutely necessary. It was otherwise with the priest's office. The first inquiry instituted by the Sanhedrim, who for the purpose sat daily in 'the Hall of Polished Stones,' was into the genealogy of a candidate. Certain genealogies were deemed authoritative. Thus, 'if his father's name were inscribed in the archives of Jeshana at Zipporim, no further inquiry was made.' If he failed to satisfy the court about his perfect legitimacy, the candidate was dressed and veiled in black, and permanently removed. If he passed that ordeal, inquiry was next made as to any physical defects, of which Maimonides enumerates a hundred and forty that permanently, and twenty-two which temporarily disqualified for the exercise of the priestly office. Persons so disqualified were, however, admitted to menial offices, such as in the wood-chamber, and entitled to Temple support. Those who had stood the twofold test were dressed in white raiment, and their names properly inscribed. To this pointed allusion is made in Revelation 3:5, 'He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.'

THE INVESTITURE

Thus received, and afterwards instructed in his duties, the formal admission alike of the priest and of the high-priest was not, as of old, by anointing, but simply by investiture. For even the composition of the sacred oil was no longer known in the second Temple. They were called 'high-priests by investiture,' and regarded as of inferior rank to those 'by anointing.' As for the common priests, the Rabbis held that they were not anointed even in the first Temple, the rite which was applied to the sons of Aaron being valid also for their descendants. It was otherwise in the case of the high-priest. His investiture was continued during seven days. In olden days, when he was anointed, the sacred oil was not only 'poured over him,' but also applied to his forehead, over the eyes, as tradition has it, after the form of the Greek letter X. The coincidence is certainly curious. This sacred oil was besides only used for anointing such kings as were of the family of David, not other Jewish monarchs, and if their succession had

been called in question. Otherwise the royal dignity went, as a matter of course, by inheritance from father to son.

THE DRESS OF THE HIGH-PRIEST

The high-priests 'by investiture' had not any more the real Urim and Thummim (their meaning even being unknown), though a breast-plate, with twelve stones, was made and worn, in order to complete the eight sacred vestments. This was just double the number of those worn by an ordinary priest, viz. the linen breeches, the coat, the girdle, and the bonnet. To these the high-priest added other four distinctive articles of dress, called 'golden vestments,' because, unlike the robes of the ordinary priests, gold, the symbol of splendour, appeared in them. They were the Meil, or robe of the ephod, wholly of 'woven work,' of dark blue colour, descending to the knees, and adorned at the hem by alternate blossoms of the pomegranate in blue, purple, and scarlet, and golden bells, the latter, according to tradition, seventy-two in number; the Ephod with the breast-plate, the former of the four colours of the sanctuary (white, blue, purple, and scarlet), and inwrought with threads of gold; the Mitre; and, lastly, the Ziz, or golden frontlet. If either a priest or the high-priest officiated without wearing the full number of his vestments, his service would be invalid, as also if anything, however trifling (such, for instance, as a plaster), had intervened between the body and the dress of the priest. The material of which the four vestments of the ordinary priest were made was 'linen,' or, more accurately, 'byssus,' the white shining cotton-stuff of Egypt. These two qualities of the byssus are specially marked as characteristic (Revelation 15:6, 'clothed in pure and shining linen.'). and on them part of the symbolic meaning depended. Hence we read in Revelation 19:8, 'And to her--the wife of the Lamb made ready--was granted that she should be arrayed in byssus vestments, shining and pure; for the byssus vestment is the righteousness of the saints.'

ALLUSIONS TO THE DRESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We add some further particulars, chiefly in illustration of allusions in the New Testament. The

priest's 'coat' was woven of one piece, like the seamless robe of the Saviour (John 19:23). As it was close-fitting, the girdle could not, strictly speaking, have been necessary. Besides, although the account of the Rabbis, that the priest's girdle was three fingers broad and sixteen yards long (!), is exaggerated, no doubt it really reached beyond the feet, and required to be thrown over the shoulder during ministration. Hence its object must chiefly have been symbolical. In point of fact, it may be regarded as the most distinctive priestly vestment, since it was only put on during actual ministration, and put off immediately afterwards. Accordingly, when in Revelation 1:13, the Saviour is seen 'in the midst of the candlesticks,' 'girt about the paps with a golden girdle,' we are to understand by it that our heavenly High-Priest is there engaged in actual ministry for us. Similarly, the girdle is described as 'about the paps,' or (as in Revelation 15:6) about the 'breasts,' as both the girdle of the ordinary priest and that on the ephod which the high-priest wore were girded there, and not round the loins (compare Ezekiel 44:18). Lastly, the expression 'golden girdle' may bear reference to the circumstance that the dress peculiar of the high-priest was called his 'golden vestments,' in contradistinction to the 'linen vestments,' which he wore on the Day of Atonement.

THE BREASTPLATE/MITRE/PHYLACTERIES

Of the four distinctive articles in the high-priest's dress, the breast-plate, alike from its square form and the twelve jewels on it, bearing the names of the tribes, suggest 'the city four-square,' whose 'foundations' are twelve precious stones (Revelation 21:16,19,20). The 'mitre' of the high-priest differed from the head-gear of the ordinary priest, which was shaped like the inverted calyx of a flower, in size and probably also somewhat in shape. According to the Rabbis, it was eight yards high (!!). Fastened to it by two (according to the Rabbis, by three) ribbons of 'blue lace' was the symbol of royalty--the 'golden plate' (or Ziz), on which, 'Holiness unto Jehovah' was graven. This plate was only two fingers wide, and reached from temple to temple. Between this plate and the mitre the high-priest is by some supposed to have worn

his phylacteries. But this cannot be regarded as by any means a settled point. According to the distinct ceremony of the Talmud, neither priests, Levites, nor the 'stationary men' wore phylacteries during their actual service in the Temple. This is a strong point urged by the modern Karaite Jews against the traditions of the Rabbis. Can it be, that the wearing of phylacteries at the time of Christ was not a universally acknowledged obligation, but rather the badge of a party? This would give additional force to the words in which Christ inveighed against those who made broad their phylacteries. According to Josephus, the original Ziz of Aaron still existed in his time, and was carried with other spoils to Rome. There R. Eliezer saw it in the reign of Hadrian. Thence we can trace it, with considerable probability, through many vicissitudes, to the time of Belisarius, and to Byzantium. From there it was taken by order of the emperor to Jerusalem. What became of it afterwards is unknown; possibly it may still be in existence. *

* When Josephus speaks of a triple crown worn by the high-priest, this may have been introduced by the Asmoneans when they united the temporal monarchy with the priesthood. Compare Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, i. 807a.

It only requires to be added that the priests' garments, when soiled, were not washed, but used as wicks for the lamps in the Temple; those of the high-priest were 'hid away.' The high-priest wore 'a fresh suit of linen vestments' each time on the Day of Atonement.

THE FOURTEEN OFFICERS

The priesthood ministering in the Temple were arranged into 'ordinary' priests and various officials. Of the latter there were, besides the high-priest, * the 'Sagan,' or suffragan priest; two 'Katholikin,' or chief treasurers and overseers; seven 'Ammarcalin,' who were subordinate to the Katholikin, and had chief charge of all the gates; and three 'Gizbarin,' or under-treasurers.

* The Rabbis speak of a high-priest ordained 'for war,' who accompanied the people to battle, but no historical trace of a distinct office of this kind can be discovered.

These fourteen officers, ranking in the order mentioned, formed the standing 'council of the Temple,' which regulated everything connected with the affairs and services of the sanctuary. Its members were also called 'the elders of the priests,' or 'the counsellors.' This judicatory, which ordinarily did not busy itself with criminal questions, apparently took a leading part in the condemnation of Jesus. But, on the other hand, it is well to remember that they were not all of one mind, since Joseph of Arimathea belonged to their number--the title by which he is designated in Mark 15:43 being exactly the same word as that applied in the Talmud to the members of this priestly council.

THEIR DUTIES

It is difficult to specify the exact duties of each of these classes of officials. The 'Sagan' (or 'Segen,' or 'Segan') would officiate for the high-priest, when from any cause he was incapacitated; he would act generally as his assistance, and take the oversight of all the priests, whence he is called in Scripture 'second priest' (2 Kings 25:18; Jeremiah 52:24), and in Talmudical writings 'the Sagan of the priests.' A 'Chananjah' is mentioned in the Talmud as a Sagan, but whether or not he was the 'Annas' of the New Testament must be left undecided. The two Katholikin were to the Sagan what he was to the high-priest, though their chief duty seems to have been about the treasures of the Temple. Similarly, the seven Ammarcalin were assistants of the Katholikin, though they had special charge of the gates, the holy vessels, and the holy vestments; and again the three (or else seven), 'Gizbarin' assistants of the Ammarcalin. The title 'Gizbar' occurs so early as Ezra 1:8; but its exact meaning seems to have been already unknown when the LXX translated that book. They appear to have had charge of all dedicated and consecrated things, of the Temple tribute, of the redemption money, etc., and to have decided all questions connected with such matters.

LOWER OFFICIALS

Next in rank to these officials were the 'heads of each course' on duty for a week, and then the 'heads of families' of every course. After them

followed fifteen overseers, viz. 'the overseer concerning the times,' who summoned priests and people to their respective duties; the overseer for shutting the doors (under the direction, of course, of the Ammarcalin); the overseer of the guards, or captain of the Temple; the overseer of the singers and of those who blew the trumpets; the overseer of the cymbals; the overseer of the lots, which were drawn every morning; the overseer of the birds, who had to provide the turtledoves and pigeons for those who brought such offerings; the overseer of the seals, who dispensed the four counterfoils for the various meat-offerings suited for different sacrifices; the overseer of the drink-offerings, for a similar purpose to the above; the overseer of the sick, or the Temple physician; the overseer of the water, who had charge of the water-supply and the drainage; the overseer for making the shewbread; for preparing the incense; for making the veils; and for providing the priestly garments. All these officers had, of course, subordinates, whom they chose and employed, either for the day or permanently; and it was their duty to see to all the arrangements connected with their respective departments. Thus, not to speak of instructors, examiners of sacrifices, and a great variety of artificers, there must have been sufficient employment in the Temple for a very large number of persons.

SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR THE PRIESTS

We must not close without enumerating the twenty-four sources whence, according to the Talmud, the priests derived their support. Of these ten were only available while in the Temple itself, four in Jerusalem, and the remaining ten throughout the Holy Land. Those which might only be used in the Temple itself were the priest's part of the sin-offering; that of the trespass-offering for a known, and for a doubtful trespass; public peace-offerings; the leper's log of oil; the two Pentecostal loaves; the shewbread; what was left of meat-offerings, and the omer at the Passover. The four which might be used only in Jerusalem were the firstlings of beasts, the Biccurim, * the portion from the thank-offering

(Leviticus 7:12; 22:29,30), and from the Nazarite's goat, and the skins of the holy sacrifices.

* To prevent mistakes, we may state that the term 'Therumoth' is, in a general way, used to designate the prepared produce, such as oil, flour, wine; and 'Biccurim,' the natural product of the soil, such as corn, fruits, etc.

Of the ten which might be used throughout the land, five could be given at will to any priest, viz. the tithe of the tithe, the heave-offering of the dough (Numbers 15:20; Romans 11:16), the first of the fleece and the priest's due of meat (Deuteronomy 18:3). The other five, it was thought, should be given to the priests of the special course on duty for the week, viz. the redemption-money for a first-born son, that for an ass, the 'sanctified field of possession' (Leviticus 27:16), what had been 'devoted,' and such possession of 'a stranger' or proselyte as, having been stolen, was restored to the priests after the death of the person robbed, with a fifth part additional. Finally, to an unlettered priest it was only lawful to give the following from among the various dues: things 'devoted,' the first-born of cattle, the redemption of a son, that of an ass, the priest's due (Deuteronomy 18:3), the first of the wool, the 'oil of burning' (a term meaning 'defiled Therumoth.'), the ten things which were to be used in the Temple itself, and the Biccurim. On the other hand, the high-priest had the right to take what portion of the offerings he chose, and one half of the shewbread every Sabbath also belonged to him.

Thus elaborate in every particular was the system which regulated the admission, the services, and the privileges of the officiating priesthood. Yet it has all vanished, not leaving behind it in the synagogue even a single trace of its complicated and perfect arrangements. These 'old things are passed away,' because they were only 'a shadow of good things to come.' But 'the substance is of Christ,' and 'He abideth an High-Priest for ever.'

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Lesson 16 Quiz

The following questions relate to your study of this lesson.

To answer a question, type your response in the space provided after the word "Answer:". A question may be True/False, multiple choice, fill in the blank, or short answer type.

The last question requires you to write one or two paragraphs in "essay" form. Use the space provided; it will expand to accommodate your response.

You have choices about sending the quiz back to Grace Notes.

- If you received an email file containing the quiz, you can use the REPLY feature of your e-mail application to open the quiz. Enter your answers in the reply message. Then SEND the message to Grace Notes.
- You can enter your answers on these pages, then send the whole file back to Grace Notes as a file attachment. As an alternative,
- After you answer the questions here, copy and paste the whole list of questions into a new MS Word document; then, send the new file to Grace Notes as an attachment. The new file will, of course, be much smaller than this main file.
- Finally, you can print the Quiz pages on your printer and send your response back to Grace Notes in the regular mail. If you do this, send the mail to:

Grace Notes

% Warren Doud

1705 Aggie Lane

Austin, Texas 78757 USA

Whichever transmission method you use, when Grace Notes receives your completed Quiz, the next lesson will be sent to you, by the same means you received this one. EXCEPT: when you have sent in the FINAL QUIZ, we will send your certificate to you, by regular mail.

This Quiz may have Multiple Choice, True/False, Fill-in-the-Blank, and Short Answer questions. Type your responses after the word "Answer:" following each question. The last question is an essay question and requires you to write a few sentences. Type your response following the questions.

Quiz

1. What caused the number of Christians in Jerusalem to increase greatly in the days after the seven men were selected for office?

Answer:

2. According to Jewish tradition, how many "courses" of priests resided in Jerusalem?

Answer:

3. None of the Temple priests in Jerusalem had knowledge of the Messiah or information about principles of salvation. [True/False]

Answer:

4. The Apostle Paul's birthplace, Tarsus, was in the province of Cilicia. [True/False]

Answer:

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5. The usual punishment for blasphemy was _____.

Answer:

6. Where in Scripture do we read that the Sanhedrin used false witness in their trial of the Lord Jesus?

Answer:

7. Stephen's name means _____.

Answer:

8. Stephen was a Hellenistic Jew. [True/False]

Answer:

9. In what Scripture do we find the following statement: "Behold, thou callest thyself a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will ... Thou, therefore, that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonorest thou God?" ... He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of man but of God."

Answer:

10. The office of High Priest was supposed to be hereditary, but in later times there were other methods by which the High Priest was chose. [True/False]

Answer:

End of Quiz
