

The First Seven Deacons

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Introduction

Toward the end of the first year of the Church, the Twelve Apostles were still together in Jerusalem (Acts 6:2). We can put a rough date on this since the first deacon Stephen was stoned to death in the first year¹ after Pentecost. The Church in Jerusalem had increased rapidly and included a great number of widows². Some of the widows had gotten neglected in the daily distribution³, and the Twelve decided to appoint responsible men to handle the situation (Acts 6:1-3), and ordained seven men: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas.

Demetrius of Rostov characterized⁴ these Greek-speaking widows as Jews obedient to the Law of Moses, but whose primary language was Greek, not Hebrew.

“When a murmuring of the Grecians arose against the Hebrews (Acts 6:1), the Greeks here referred to were not the pagan idolaters generally called the heathen in the Scriptures, for the time had not come for the door of faith to be

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¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

² We may have difficulty appreciating a large number of widows, since that is usually not a major part of our culture. To put this in perspective, the Church in Antioch in the 4th Century supported 3000 widows and virgins (John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXVI, 3), where supporting widows was a major task of the Church. For more information on the support of widows in the 1st Century, see the Study for the Third Sunday of Pascha.

³ If there were several thousand widows, it is understandable that some might get unintentionally neglected. For more on possible reasons for this unintentional neglect, see the section on the “Early Distribution by the Myrrh-Bearing Women”.

⁴ Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, tr. Fr Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, December 27.

opened to these, nor had the word of salvation been preached to them. The Greek Christians who grumbled against the Jews soon after the day of Pentecost were not converts from heathenism, but Jews obedient to the Law of Moses, dispersed among other nations. The Apostle James addressed them, opening his epistle, ‘To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting’ (James 1:1). Though they had not adopted the beliefs and customs of the Hellenes, they were called Greeks by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, because they spoke Greek.”

Chrysostom writes⁵, “The Greeks mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles were, I believe, Greek-speaking Jews”. It was among Greeks of the Dispersion that there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution (Acts 6); they were assigned the lowliest tasks, or given poor and insufficient food and clothing.

There were many Jews throughout the world that did not speak Hebrew well; in Alexandria alone, there was such a large number of Jews who only spoke Greek, that Pharaoh Ptolemy III commissioned the Septuagint⁶ to make the Hebrew Scriptures available to his people.

The Ministry of the Word

When the Twelve said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables”, what did they mean by “leaving the Word of God?” Their impact on Jerusalem was nothing short of incredible. The life of the Church had developed very quickly, and an amazingly mature life of the Church had developed in the first year after Pentecost. John Chrysostom characterized⁷ the Early Church after Pentecost as full of wonder, from the character of the Apostles, but also from the virtuous character of the people. It was like earth had become a heaven, even though there was danger from their enemies.

Cyril of Jerusalem quickly summarized⁸ the working of the Holy Spirit in the Early Church. The healing from Peter’s shadow (Acts 5:15) was not an isolated event, but represented the spirit of the times.

John Chrysostom noted⁹ that when, “All that believed were together, and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44), this early Christian community was a collection of cheerful givers. The result was very beneficial not just to them but also to the community. They immediately obtained a reward, that is, the ‘hundredfold’ that Jesus spoke of (Mark 10:29-30), for having left everything for Christ’s sake. In this case, the reward was ‘the favor with all the people’ (Acts 2:47).

“They had become angels all of a sudden, all of them; continuing in prayer and hearing, they saw that spiritual things are common. No one there had more than another, and they speedily came together, to the same thing in common. This does not mean that they were together in one place, but that this was an angelic

⁵ Demetrios of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, tr. Fr Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, December 27.

⁶ The Septuagint, called the LXX from the seventy translators, was a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. It was widely used in the 1st Century, and most Old Testament quotes in the New Testament are taken from the Septuagint and not from the Hebrew original.

⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XII.

⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVII, 21-22, 25-27.

⁹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, VII, v. 46.

commonwealth, not to call anything of theirs their own. The root of evils was cut out; by what they did, they showed what they had heard. This was what Peter said, ‘Save yourselves from this perverse generation’ (Acts 2:40), and ‘daily continuing with one accord in the Temple’ (Acts 2:46). Daily they went up as to a sacred place, and frequently we find Peter and John doing this; for at present they disturbed none of the Jewish observances¹⁰. Observe the increase of piety; they abandoned their riches, rejoiced and had great gladness, for greater were the riches they received without labor.”

This was the “ministry of the Word”, and the Twelve were getting a very strong reaction from the Sanhedrin. Chrysostom noted¹¹ that the Sanhedrin thought that the Apostles were bloodthirsty and bent on revenge for Jesus’ crucifixion. “You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this Man’s blood on us” (Acts 5:28). But yet the Apostles did not answer with defiance (Acts 5:29), even with the whole city backing them (Acts 5:26) and being endowed with so great Grace at Pentecost. Instead they pleaded with them that they, too, might obtain forgiveness (Acts 5:31). Hearing this, the Sanhedrin “was furious and plotted to kill the Apostles” (Acts 5:33). Yet what was there that was deserving of death? Such was the intoxication of the Sanhedrin; they did not even see what had taken place.

As a result of all this, the Twelve couldn’t just stop what they were doing and start serving tables. They had much greater responsibilities in Jerusalem; plus they were making preparations to “go and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). The Twelve had divided the world up into regions, and had drawn lots to determine where each Apostle would go. A few months after choosing the first Seven Deacons, they would be scattered (Acts 8:1) and would leave on their various missionary journeys. The choosing of the first Seven Deacons was a turning point in the life of the Church.

John Chrysostom noted¹² that it was the Twelve that had the “ministry of the Word” committed to them, at least initially. The deacons needed great wisdom, however.

“Do not think, because the deacons did not have the word committed to them, that they had no need of wisdom; they did need it, and greatly also. ‘But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word’ (Acts 6:4). They pleaded for themselves, beginning and ending with this, ‘Will give ourselves continually’. The Twelve needed to do what they did not in any chance way, but to be continually doing them.”

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, made an analogy¹³ of the ministry of the Word to the distribution of grain in a time of famine. Those who shrink back from doing it out of humility, hide their talent in the ground. For the Twelve to drop the Ministry of the Word and serve tables would be akin to a doctor refusing to treat a badly wounded patient.

“Those who are able to preach, but are afraid by reason of excessive humility, should consider by a lesser matter how faulty they are in a greater one. If

¹⁰ This is interesting to note that their worship in the Temple did not bother the Jewish leaders, only their teaching about Jesus. This suggests that they used a liturgy similar to the Old Testament liturgy, and even participated in the on-going Temple liturgy.

¹¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Acts, XIII.

¹² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIV, v 4.

¹³ Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, III, 25.

they were to hide money from their poor neighbors, they would be promoters of their famine. They are guilty of hiding away the remedies of life from dying souls, by withholding the word of preaching from their sinning brethren. Solomon says well, ‘Wisdom that is hidden, and treasure that is unseen, what profit is in them both’ (Ecclesiasticus 20:30 LXX)? If there were a famine plaguing the people, and they kept hidden grain, they would be the authors of death. Let them consider what punishment is theirs, when souls are perishing from famine of the word, and they do not supply the bread of grace, which they have received. Solomon said, ‘He that hides grain shall be cursed among the people’ (Proverbs 11:26). To hide grain is to selfishly retain the words of sacred preaching. Everyone that does so is cursed, because through his fault of silence, he is condemned in the punishment of those, whom he might have corrected. If doctors were to see a wound that required attention, and yet refused to treat it, by their inactivity they would be guilty of a brother’s death. Let them see in how a great guilt they are involved, knowing the wounds of souls, if they neglect to cure them by the treatment of words.”

Ambrose stated¹⁴ that Paul’s sense of the ministry of the Word was so strong that it dwarfed concern for his own life.

“He follows Christ who is able to say, ‘It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me’ (Galatians 2:20). Paul denied himself, when, knowing that chains and tribulation awaited him in Jerusalem, he willingly offered himself to danger, saying, ‘Nor do I count my life dear to myself, if only I can accomplish my course, and the ministry of the Word, which I have received from the Lord Jesus’ (Acts 20:24). And at last, though many were standing around, weeping and begging him, he did not change his mind, so stern a censor of itself is ready faith.”

Choosing the Seven Deacons

“The Twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said: ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word’” (Acts 6:2-4). John Chrysostom stated¹⁵ that not just Stephen, but each of the Seven were “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”, implying that all seven performed miracles, not just Stephen and Philip.

One might ask why the Twelve would appoint others for this, since the Lord had told them that the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven is the servant of all (Matthew 18:4, 20:26-27). The answer is that the Lord had also told them to go to all nations with the Gospel (Matthew 28:19-20), and they had to prepare for that.

Some have pointed out that these first seven are not called deacons in the Scripture. This is correct, but the Greek word *diakonos* is used to describe their activities. For example (Acts 6:1), the widows were “neglected in the daily deaconing” (i.e. *diakonia*). The Twelve did not think it desirable that they should “leave the Word and deacon (i.e. *diakonein*) tables” (Acts 6:2). Instead the Twelve gave themselves “continually to prayer and to the deaconing (i.e. *diakonia*) of the

¹⁴ Ambrose of Milan, “Epistle 63”, Letters, 72-73.

¹⁵ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIV, v 2.

Word” (Acts 6:4). Modern usage refers to these seven as the first deacons, even though their role does not correspond to later deacons.

As the Church developed, the office of deacon, as distinct from that of a presbyter (or priest) and bishop, came into being. In this later context, a deacon had a defined liturgical role that these first seven don’t seem to have. They were not deacons in the sense that we know deacons today. Chrysostom stated¹⁶ that their designation was neither deacon nor presbyter. However in Orthodox ordinations, a presbyter is first ordained as a deacon, then as a presbyter. A true Bishop still considers himself as a deacon at heart. (Compare 2 Timothy 4:5, Titus 1:7, Colossians 1:23, 25).

According to Hippolytus¹⁷, all seven of these men had been members of the Seventy Apostles that Jesus sent out two by two in late 29 AD (Luke 10:1-20). Chrysostom pointed out¹⁸ that the Apostles did not choose them by lot, although they could have done that, but they wanted the testimony of the people. The fixing of the number, the ordaining them, and the setting them for this kind of business rested with the Apostles. But the selection of the men they left to the people, just as God left it to Moses to choose elders from those he knew (Numbers 11:16).

John Chrysostom noted¹⁹ how necessary the ordination of the Seven Deacons was; it was the result of alms and good order.

“They separated the Seven from the multitude, and it is the people that draw them, not the Apostles that lead them. Observe how he avoids all that is superfluous: he does not tell in what way it was done, but that they were ordained with prayer: for this is the meaning of the Greek word *xeirotonia*, (i.e. putting forth the hand or ordination). The hand of the man is laid upon the person, but the whole work is of God, and it is His hand, which touches the head of the one ordained, if he is to be properly ordained. ‘And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied’ (Acts 6 :7). Luke says this purposely to show how great is the virtue of alms and good order.”

John Chrysostom stated²⁰ that Titus later served as a deacon to the Apostle Paul in very much the same manner that the first seven deacons served James in Jerusalem. Both were appointed to this work to become a dispenser of the sacred money; and this was not a small matter. Both were chosen because of a good report from the people (Acts 6:3), and with both there was a vote of the people.

The Work of the Seven Deacons

John Chrysostom also pointed out²¹ that these men needed a great deal of wisdom and discernment.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIV, v 7.

¹⁷ Hippolytus, “On the Seventy Apostles”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 5, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1995.

¹⁸ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIV, v 3.

¹⁹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIV, v 5-6.

²⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians, XVIII, v. 19.

²¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIV, vv 5-6.

“This business was not simply handed over to them without further ceremony, but the Apostles prayed over them, that power might be given to them. But observe, if there were need of seven men for this, great in proportion must have been the sums of money that flowed in, great in proportion also the number of widows²². So then, the prayers were not made in an off-hand way, but with much deliberate attention. This office, as well as preaching, was thus brought to good effect, for what they did, they effected mostly by the means of their prayers. Thus they were enabled to give their attention to things spiritual and the Apostles were also free to undertake long journeys. Thus the Seven Deacons were gradually put in trust with the word. But Luke does not say this, nor praise them for it; only that it was ‘not reasonable’ that the Apostles should leave the work given to them.”

These were Peter’s criteria for selecting the seven men (Acts 6:3):

1. A good reputation
2. Full of the Holy Spirit
3. Full of wisdom

This implies that all seven men chosen had continued to perform miracles regularly. All of the Seventy had done so a year earlier (Luke 10:9), but when the Seventy returned from their mission, their ability to perform miracles had been temporarily suspended. Jesus had given them the authority to perform miracles, but they had not received the Holy Spirit yet. Following Pentecost, when they received the Holy Spirit, the ability to perform miracles returned.

Chrysostom also noted²³ that Stephen (and the others) received rewards just for faithfully distributing the alms donated to the Church in Jerusalem. Similarly we can receive similar rewards, but more so if we distribute our own alms ourselves

“Instead of giving your alms to those in the Church to distribute alms, give it yourself, that you may have the reward not of giving merely, but of kind service. Give with your own hands. Here it is not required to handle the plow, to yoke the ox, to wait for the season, to break up the earth or to contend with the frost. No such trouble is required, when you sow for heaven, where there is neither frost nor winter. You sow in souls, where no one takes away what is sown, but it is firmly retained with all care and diligence. Cast the seed yourself; why deprive yourself of your reward. There is great reward in dispensing even what belongs to others. There is a reward not only for giving, but also for dispensing well the things that are given. Why will you not have this reward? That there is a reward for this, hear how we read that the Apostles appointed Stephen to the ministry of the widows” (Acts 6:5-7).

“Be the dispenser of your own gifts. Your own benevolence and the fear of God appoint you to that ministry. Vainglory is excluded. This refreshes the soul, this sanctifies the hands, and this pulls down pride. This teaches you philosophy, this inflames your zeal, and this makes you to receive blessings.”

²² John Chrysostom was born and raised in Antioch, and thus he would know about the 3000 widows and virgins that the Church in Antioch supported.

²³ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, XIV, Moral.

Cyril of Jerusalem noted²⁴ that it was not just the Twelve Apostles who worked by the grace of the Holy Spirit, but also their first-born children, the seven Deacons, of whom Stephen was the first fruits of the martyrs.

It is interesting to note that the complaint against the Hebrews by the Greek widows that they were neglected in the daily distribution resulted in the ordaining of seven men with Greek names to oversee the entire daily operation. These men were Greek-speaking Jews except for Nicolas, who may have been a Gentile proselyte (Acts 6:5). The Greek widows were also Greek-speaking Jews; their being left out was probably not intentional, but it was rectified rather dramatically. The Apostles could have been democratic and chosen three Greeks and four Hebrews to oversee this, but they didn't. Care and attention for the poor was a very high priority in the Early Church (Galatians 2:10).

Their first task was to even out the daily food distribution. This was a considerable task since 3,000 people (mostly visitors from out of town) were added to the Church on Pentecost alone (Acts 2:41). Additional people were added to the Church daily after that (Acts 2:47) including 5,000 at one time (Acts 4:4). One can conclude that because many were from out-of-town and had no livelihood in Jerusalem, everyone "sold their possessions and divided them among all, as anyone had need" (Acts 2:45). Another interpretation is that everyone had begun to imitate the Apostles, who were following the words of Christ, "Sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven" (Mark 10:21). The Twelve had already done those things three years earlier (Matthew 19:27).

As persecution developed later, especially at the hand of Saul (Acts 8:3), the Jewish leaders would raid houses occupied by Christians, drag people off to prison, plunder the house of food and clothing and confiscate the property. In Jerusalem and vicinity the long-term effect of the persecution was the impoverishment of the Jerusalem church. By 57 AD, it was so bad that the Apostle Paul took up a major collection among the Gentile churches in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea), Achaia (Corinth, Athens) and Galatia (Iconium, Lystra, Derbe), to bring relief to the Jerusalem church (Romans 15:25-27, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, 2 Corinthians 8:1-4, Acts 24:17). The deacons and their successors were responsible for distributing what Paul brought.

Earlier Distribution by the Myrrh-Bearing Women

During the Lord's three-year ministry, the Twelve and the Seventy left everything (Matthew 19:27), including their jobs to follow Jesus wherever He went. The eight Myrrh-Bearing Women had filled in the gap to bankroll Christ's ministry out of their substance (Luke 8:3). Thus Myrrh-Bearing Women served as deaconesses to the Lord during His earthly ministry. After Pentecost, when everyone had everything in common, people sold their possessions, brought the proceeds of the things that were sold and laid them at the Apostles' feet. They (the Apostles) distributed to each as anyone had need (Acts 4:32-34; 2:44-45). Over the next year or so, some of the Holy Women had a hand in the distribution since that was what they did during the Lord's three-year ministry.

²⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XVII, 24.

However, there was a bit of a problem here. Of the eight Myrrh-Bearing women, Mary Magdalene and Mary the wife of Cleopas had left town because they were called to other things²⁵. Mary and Martha of Bethany had left town because they were forced to do so due to a murder plot against them and their brother Lazarus (John 12:10-11). This left a hole in the operation that others needed to fill; the first seven deacons were chosen to continue this ministry. During transitions, something often gets overlooked; in this case, it was the Greek-speaking widows who were overlooked and neglected in the daily distribution (Acts 6:1).

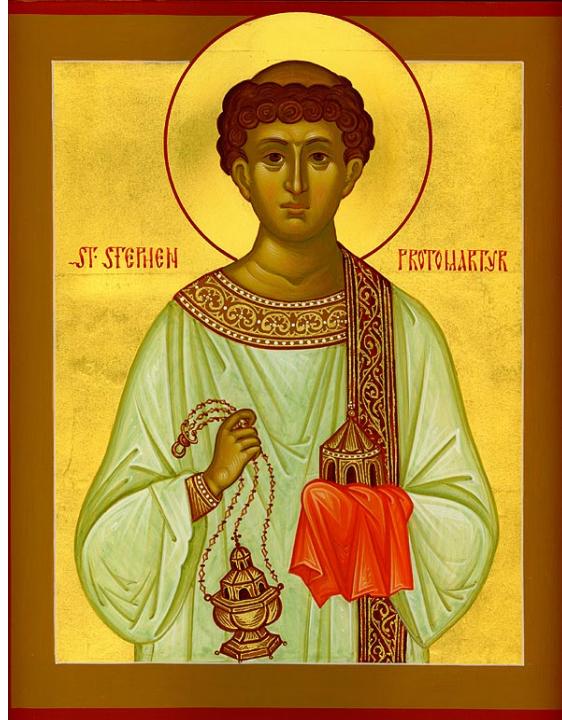
At this point, it is instructive to look closely at the Scriptures to see both what it says and what it doesn't say. If the issue was for the Twelve to leave the Word of God and serve tables, this implies that they weren't serving tables at that time. They were busy teaching the people daily on Solomon's porch (Acts 3:11, 4:1-3, 5:12, 20-21) and in every house (Acts 5:42). But it also says that the Twelve "distributed to each as anyone had need" (Acts 4:35) of the proceeds of the things that were sold. This seems to make a compelling case for the distribution to have been delegated to someone, and the Holy Women stand out as the most likely. Regarding delegations, John Chrysostom mentioned²⁶ that the Twelve "had been taught by Moses' example (Numbers 11:14-17, Exodus 18:14-27) not to undertake the management of everything by themselves".

²⁵ Mary Magdalene left for Rome; Mary, the wife of Cleopas, left for Spain.

²⁶ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIV, vv 5-6.

Archdeacon Stephen

Figure 1
Stephen the Protomartyr²⁷



Stephen was a kinsman of the Apostle Paul²⁸ and was the first of the seven deacons whom the Apostles ordained and appointed to the service of assisting the poor in Jerusalem. Since Paul came from Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 22:3), we may presume that Stephen came from Cilicia also. Stephen was the eldest²⁹ of the seven deacons, and therefore he is called “archdeacon”. He was the first Christian martyr, and he suffered for Christ when he was about thirty years old. Stephen was a Hebrew³⁰ and, like Paul, was disciple of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), the renowned teacher of the Law. Stephen’s name, meaning “crown” in Greek, could indicate that he was a Hellenist or Greek-speaking Jew. The significance of the Hellenist is seen first in their numbers and the need for seven men to be in charge of the distribution of relief.

There were many Jews who came long distances to be in Jerusalem at certain Feast Days. For example, when Peter spoke to the crowd at Pentecost, he addressed people in 13 different languages from areas remote from Jerusalem (Acts 2:8-11). Some of these people had come 1400 miles to be in Jerusalem at that time³¹. Most of these visitors spoke Hebrew, but Hebrew was not their first language, and they may not have been able to read Hebrew. If they had received an

²⁷ See <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>.

²⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

²⁹ See the OCA web site at <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>.

³⁰ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, December 27.

³¹ For example, the route from Parthia (Acts 2:9) went by land around the forbidding Arabian Desert, and was about a 1400-mile journey; by sea around the Southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, it was still a 900-mile journey by land. Mesopotamia and Media were not quite as far (600 and 900 miles respectively). Figuring 20 miles per day on foot, this represents a journey of 30 to 45 days, not including Saturday, which required the Sabbath rest.

education, it had probably been taught in Greek. For these people to be dedicated enough to make a 7-week journey (and then turn around and take 7 weeks traveling home), one can surmise that they were very dedicated to their faith. They had a natural barrier between them and the Gentiles back home, but they had learned to live with the Gentiles peacefully. These Jews living away from Judea were called “The Dispersion” (John 7:35, 1 Peter 1:1), and they had adopted their faith to a Greek language basis, where they had access to the Old Testament Scriptures via the Septuagint. Stephen, being a disciple of Gamaliel, was fluent in Hebrew (i.e. Aramaic).

Stephen’s Role in the Church

Stephen’s life in the first year of the Church was characterized by the great wonders and signs that he did among the people (Acts 6:8). But there was a reaction to the signs and wonders that Stephen performed, just as there was a reaction to those that Jesus performed. Many people that encountered Stephen, but disagreed with what he said, were forced to admit like Nicodemus, “No one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). In speaking with Stephen, those that encountered him were not able to resist the wisdom and Spirit by which he spoke (Acts 6:10), and this angered them further.

As a member of the Seventy, Stephen had traveled with Christ for three years, and had heard Him speak differently than the religious leaders in Jerusalem. For example:

1. Jesus had treated the Gentile Centurion with kindness, and remarked that he had more faith than anyone in Israel (Matthew 8:5-13).
2. To demonstrate the faith of the Gentile Syro-Phoenician woman, He tested her before granting her desire (Mark 7:24-30).
3. When some Gentiles came to see Him from Edessa in Persia³², asking Him to come with them to heal their king of leprosy, He couldn’t go with them, since the Cross was immanent. But He let them hear the Father’s voice from heaven, and He told them His purpose, making an analogy to a grain of wheat (John 12:20-28).
4. Stephen heard Jesus speak to the Samaritan woman (named Photini) that the Father seeks people to worship Him in spirit and truth, not necessarily in Jerusalem (John 4:21-24).
5. He heard Jesus predict that the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed, with not one stone left upon another (Mark 13:2).

Stephen had discovered³³ the inadequacy of a mere formalism and ceremonialism in the Temple worship. The observance of legal minutiae was not an absorbing concern with many of the early Christians. Stephen, with his broad background among those of the dispersion, maintained these important aspects of Jesus’ message and opened the way for future advance into Gentile evangelism. Being a man³⁴ mighty in word, he confirmed the believers in the faith as well, and from the Law and the Prophets proved to the Jews that Jesus, Whom they slew out of malice, was the Son of God, the Messiah awaited from ancient times.

³² For more details regarding these Gentiles and the development of Christianity in Edessa, see the Study: Mark Kern, The Apostle Thomas, St Athanasius Press, Goleta, CA 2001.

³³ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, December 27.

³⁴ Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, tr. Fr Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, December 27.

Ignatius of Antioch stated³⁵ that Stephen served as a deacon to Bishop James in Jerusalem just as Timothy and Linus³⁶ did to Paul, and Anencletus and Clement³⁷ did to Peter. We might add that Deacon Prochorus served in a similar role to the Apostle John.

John Chrysostom noted³⁸ that Stephen was preeminent among the Seven Deacons, because he drew greater grace upon himself.

“Notice how even among the seven, one was preeminent. Though the ordination was common to him and the others, yet he drew upon himself greater grace. Notice also how he worked no signs and wonders before this time, but only when he became publicly known. Grace alone is not sufficient; there must be ordination also, so that there was a further access of the Spirit. For if they were full of the Spirit (Acts 6:3), it was from the Laver of Baptism.”

At this time, “the Word of God spread and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the Faith” (Acts 6:7). These priests were Levitical priests who ceased serving under the Old Covenant priesthood, becoming obedient to the direction of the Holy Spirit in the Church. This does not imply that they automatically became presbyters (or priests) in the Church, although some may have done so. Paul referred to this, “We have an altar from which those who serve the Tabernacle (i.e. Old Covenant) have no right to eat” (Hebrews 13:10). John Chrysostom made it a point³⁹ to say that even the High Priest under the Old Covenant was not permitted to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

Demetrius of Rostov added⁴⁰, “Each group of Jews sent its own children to Jerusalem to learn the Law of God. The foreign Jews and proselytes living in Jerusalem assembled at separate locations with their countrymen, and not at the Temple. Every year Jews from the Dispersion came to the Holy City to worship in Solomon’s Temple, and they assembled at separate synagogues with their compatriots.”

During the first year of the Church, Stephen had a dispute with the Synagogue⁴¹ of the Freedmen. Stephen did not hesitate⁴² to preach his views in the Hellenistic synagogues. John Chrysostom referred⁴³ to the diversity of the synagogues of the Freedmen.

³⁵ Ignatius, Epistle to the Trallians, 7.

³⁶ Timothy: Acts 16:1, 17:14-15, 18:5, 19:22, 20:4-5, Romans 16:21, 1 Corinthians 4:17, 16:10, 2 Corinthians 1:19, Philippians 2:19, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-6, Hebrews 13:23; Linus: 2 Timothy 4:18.

³⁷ According to Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, iii, 3, Anencletus (also called Anacletus and Cletus) was Bishop of Rome after Linus. Clement was Bishop of Rome after Anencletus, and was ordained by Peter just before Peter’s death in c. 67 AD. This Clement may not be the same as the Clement referred to by Paul (Philippians 4:3).

³⁸ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XV, v. 8.

³⁹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, XXXIII, 3.

⁴⁰ Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, tr. Fr Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, December 27.

⁴¹ The term “Freedmen” is of Latin origin. Philo, On the Embassy to Gaius, XXIII, 155-156, the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria (d. 50 AD) refers to Jews who had been bought as slaves, but who had been freed under Pompey (108-46 BC). Gaius Pompeius Magnus, the Roman general, had been very kind to the Jewish people, supplying them with food and allowing them to build synagogues.

⁴² The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, December 27.

⁴³ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XV, v. 9.

“The synagogues of the Freedmen were diverse, where they seem to have had synagogues according to their different nations. Many stayed behind there, that they might not be obliged to be continually traveling. The Libertines perhaps were freedmen of the Romans, and the Cyrenians were from those parts beyond Alexandria. There were many foreigners dwelling there, so they had their synagogues, where the Law was to be read.”

This incident began when Stephen came upon Hebrew Jews, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Greek Jews quarreling about the Lord Jesus Christ: some of them saying that He was a prophet, others that He was a deceiver, still others that He was the Son of God. Standing on a high place the saint proclaimed Christ the Lord, saying, “Brethren, why are you at odds with one another, disturbing all Jerusalem? Blessed are they that believe in Jesus Christ, Who bowed the heaven and came down to cleanse our sins, and was born of the holy maiden chosen before the world's creation. He took upon Himself our infirmities, granting sight to the blind, cleansing lepers, and expelling demons”. At this the Jews began to argue with him, blaspheming the Lord.

The Hellenistic Jews considered their ancestral faith the one thing worth living for; therefore, they were bitterly opposed to anything that might undermine their traditional faith. Paul, who was also a Hellenistic Jew, had a similar viewpoint prior to his conversion. The Hellenistic Jews did three things to Stephen, which the Jews from Jerusalem had also done to Christ:

1. They secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God” (Acts 6:11).
2. They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council (Acts 6:12).
3. They set up false witnesses, who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us” (Acts 6:13-14).

John Chrysostom stated⁴⁴ that the real issue with the Jews in the conflict with the Christians was over their traditions. This was what angered them about Jesus and Stephen. If it weren't for the issue of circumcision, the resentment of the Jews would have been appeased.

“Not even the Cross was so great an offense to the Jews, as the doctrine that their father's customs ought not to be obeyed. When they brought Stephen before the council, they didn't say that this man adores the Crucified, but that he speaks ‘against this holy place and the Law’ (Acts 6:13). They accused Jesus of this, that He broke the Law. Therefore Paul says, ‘If we concede circumcision, the strife you are involved in would be appeased; from now on, no enmity to the Cross and our preaching remains. But why do they bring this charge against us, while waiting day after day to murder us? It is because they thought I brought an uncircumcised man into the Temple (Acts 21:29) that they fell on me. Am I then so senseless, after giving up the point of circumcision, vainly and idly to expose myself to such injuries, and to place such a stumbling block before the Cross? For you observe that they attack us for nothing else with such vehemence as about circumcision. He calls it the offense of the Cross, because circumcision was forbidden by the doctrine

⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 5, v. 11.

of the Cross; and it was this, which principally offended the Jews, and hindered their reception of the Cross.”

Stephen’s Trial and Murder

Before the Sanhedrin, Stephen’s face glowed brilliantly like the face of an angel (Acts 6:15), similar to Moses’ face (Exodus 34:29-34) after he had returned from receiving the Law on Mt. Sinai. Aaron and Moses’ Seventy elders had been afraid to speak to Moses when they saw his glowing face. The members of the Sanhedrin, except for Gamaliel, were not impressed with this, but looked at his face steadfastly to find some reason to condemn him. For the Sanhedrin to stone Stephen as his face glowed was equivalent to the people stoning Moses as he came down from Mt. Sinai with a glowing face.

Gamaliel was secretly a Christian at this time, but didn’t say anything. After Stephen’s death, it was either Gamaliel or Paul, who drafted the account that appears in Acts 7 of Stephen’s testimony before the Sanhedrin.

The illumination of Stephen’s face with the light of grace was an immaterial effect, but it was not the essence of God. Gregory Palamas described⁴⁵ it as follows:

“Stephen’s face shone forth with divine grace, even as had the face of Moses. The saints know the hypostatic light exists, since they have seen it; it is an immaterial and divine illumination, a grace invisibly seen and ignorantly known. What it is, they do not pretend to know. This light is not the essence of God, for that is inaccessible and incommunicable. Sometimes it makes a man go out from the body or else, without separating him from the body; it elevates him to an ineffable height. At other times, it transforms the body, and communicates its own splendor to it when, miraculously, the light which divinizes the body becomes accessible to the bodily eyes. Similarly with Stephen, and such was the case with Paul” (2 Corinthians 12:4).

Tertullian compared⁴⁶ Stephen’s glowing face to that of Moses in the wilderness, and to Christ, Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration. Our bodily appearance can change without our human nature changing, and without us becoming a different person. If our human nature changed, Saul became a different substance at his conversion, and Satan would do so also when he transforms himself into an angel of light.

“That which is destroyed is not changed, and that which is changed is not destroyed. To perish is to cease altogether to be what a thing once was, whereas to be changed is to exist in another condition. Now, if a thing exists in another condition, it can still be the same thing itself, for since it does not perish, it still has its existence. It has experienced a change, but not destruction. A man may be quite himself in substance even in the present life, and for all that undergo various changes — in habit, in bodily bulk, in health, in condition, in dignity, and in age — and still lose nothing of his human nature, nor to be made another man or another thing.”

⁴⁵ Saint Gregory Palamas (Archbishop of Thessalonica 1347-1359), *The Triads: Deification in Christ*, II, iii, 8, 9.

⁴⁶ Tertullian, On the Resurrection of the Flesh, II, vi, 55.

“The Holy Scripture gives us examples of this form of change. The hand of Moses was changed, and it became like a dead one, bloodless, colorless, and stiff with cold; but on the recovery of heat, and on the restoration of its natural color, it was again the same flesh and blood (Exodus 4:6-7). The face of the same Moses was changed; with brightness which eye could not bear (Exodus 34:29-30). But he was still Moses, even when people could not look at him. Stephen had already put on the appearance of an angel (Acts 6:15), although it was none other than his human knees which bent under the stoning (Acts 7:59-60). The Lord, on the mountain, changed His clothing for a robe of light; but He still retained features, which Peter could recognize (Matthew 17:2-4). In that same scene Moses and Elijah gave proof that the same condition of bodily existence may continue even in glory — Moses in the likeness of a flesh, which he had not yet recovered, Elijah in the reality of one which he had not yet put off. It was as full of this splendid example that Paul said, ‘Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body’” (Philippians 3:21).

“But if you maintain that a transfiguration amounts to the annihilation of any substance, then it follows that ‘Saul, when changed into another man’ (1 Samuel 10:6), left his own bodily substance; and that Satan himself, when ‘transformed into an angel of light’ (2 Corinthians 11:14), loses his own proper character. Such is not my opinion. So likewise changes and conversions will necessarily take place to bring about the resurrection, but the substance of the flesh will still be preserved safe.”

John Chrysostom stated⁴⁷ that the glow in Stephen’s face was God’s grace to awe those that he was speaking to.

“It is possible even for one in a lower degree to shine. For what, I ask, did Stephen have that was less than the Apostles? He didn’t lack miracles, and great was the boldness he exhibited. ‘They saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel’ (Exodus 34:30). For this was his grace; this was the glory of Moses. God made him gracious of appearance, when he was about to say something, that by his appearance he might awe them. Faces full of spiritual grace are lovely to those that love, but awful to enemies and those that hate.”

After all the false witnesses and accusers had spoken, Stephen was allowed to speak in his defense. He was accused of (1) speaking blasphemy against Moses and against God; and (2) plotting with Jesus of Nazareth to destroy the Temple. The High Priest asked him whether the charges brought forward by the false witnesses were true (Acts 7:1). Stephen began a brief history of the nation of Israel, where he treated Moses and God very respectfully and reverently, but he noted that the fathers of Israel had been blasphemers and rebellious against Moses and God. In doing this, he answered the first charge. Stephen also stated that Solomon had made a house for God that was made according to the pattern shown to Moses on Mt. Sinai. However, he quoted Isaiah, “Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool. What house can you build for Me?” (Isaiah 66:1) There are no plans for the destruction of the Temple here; there is just a perspective on where the Temple fits into the larger scheme of things. Thus they had no justification to condemn him.

⁴⁷ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XV, v 15.

John Chrysostom stated⁴⁸ that Stephen's accusers intended to humiliate him, but Stephen overthrew their conceit. Without their realizing it, Stephen's whole defense implied that the Temple and the Jewish customs are nothing.

"When they allowed Stephen to speak, the intent was to put him down, but with conceited mildness. Then the high-priest said, 'Are these things so?' (Acts 7:1) For this reason Stephen too begins his speech in a tone of gentleness, and says, 'Men, brethren, and fathers, listen; the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran' (Acts 7:2). Immediately at the outset Stephen overthrew their conceit, and made it appear by what he says, that the temple is nothing, that the customs are nothing either, without their suspecting his drift. He also implies that they shall not overcome the preaching; and that God always contrives powerful instruments for Himself from powerless things. These threads pervade the texture of the whole speech."

The Sanhedrin undoubtedly saw things according to the provisions in the Mosaic Law for heretics. Stephen may have fit their interpretation, since he had given many signs and wonders, and he seemed to be leading them away from their concept of God. Moses had said,

"If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods', which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn *you* away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst. If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods', which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him. You shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deuteronomy 13:1-10).

The world of Islam today still adheres very strongly to this intolerance of other religious points of view, especially someone criticizing their beliefs.

Like Paul, Stephen may have been a Roman citizen, and he could have appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:8-12) or he could have had the right to obtain protection by the local Roman authorities (Acts 22:22-29). Later when Paul was in a similar situation, he created a diversion by playing the Pharisees against the Sadducees by referring to their theological differences (Acts 23:6-10). Paul

⁴⁸ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XV, v 2.

was probably present at Stephen's defense and he may have learned from Stephen how to conduct his own defense. In presenting his case, Stephen did not try to create a diversion or appeal to higher authorities, but he confronted his accusers. When Paul came to Jerusalem three years after his conversion, he could only stay 15 days due to a murder plot against him (Acts 9:26-30, Galatians 1:18-19). The brethren in Jerusalem did not want the same thing to happen to Paul that happened to Stephen.

Stephen followed his defense by comparing his accusers to the blasphemers and rebellious figures of Israel's past. They thought he was a heretic. He said, "You are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears; you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did. Just as they persecuted the Prophets that foretold of Christ, so you have become His betrayer and murderer. You have received the Law by the direction of angels, but you have not kept it."

Stephen judged Old Testament history from the prophetic viewpoint; the council represented the legalistic view. For Stephen, the Faith of the Apostles was the divinely ordered development of the Old Testament. The real blasphemers were the disobedient Jews who rejected the revelation and killed Christ.

After Stephen said these things, they were cut to the heart and they gnashed their teeth at Stephen. The Sanhedrin had passed no sentence, however, and Stephen was still entitled to finish his defense. Still having a glowing face, he saw heaven opened⁴⁹ and reported that he saw Jesus standing at the Right Hand of God. At this, they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears and ran at him with one accord. They hauled him outside the city and stoned him to death in the Valley of Jehoshaphat⁵⁰, with Stephen's kinsman Saul (the future Apostle Paul) holding the clothes of those throwing the stones. Before he died, Stephen said two things: (1) "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"; and (2) "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:54-60).

There are a number of references to Christ being seated at the Right Hand of the Father following the Ascension. Daniel predicted it (Daniel 7:9-10), Christ predicted it (Mark 14:62), and Paul said that it had happened⁵¹. His normal posture as Judge is in the "seated" position, with everyone else standing around Him (1 Kings 22:19, Matthew 25:31-33). Stephen's martyrdom is the only time following the Ascension where Christ was described as standing at the Right Hand of the Father. This may indicate Jesus taking a personal interest in Stephen, and standing to receive him.

Ambrose of Milan noted⁵² that the account of Stephen seeing Christ standing is the only account where He was not sitting. He stood to offer His martyr as a sacrifice and as the Umpire at a hard-fought contest.

"There is just one place in the Scriptures, where Stephen said that he saw the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Learn now the impact of these

⁴⁹ The Scriptures speak of "heaven opened" on a few special occasions. For example, heaven was opened at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:16), at Ezekiel's vision of the Throne of God (Ezekiel 1:1), at Peter's vision of the Gentile Church (Acts 10:11), at John's vision of the Throne of God (Revelation 4:1), and at Jesus' Second Coming (Revelation 19:11-14).

⁵⁰ The valley of Jehoshaphat is situated between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. Through it runs the brook of Kedron, which has many rocks scattered on its banks.

⁵¹ See Colossians 3:1, Ephesians 1:20, Hebrews 8:1.

⁵² Ambrose of Milan, Exposition of the Christian Faith, III, xvii, 137-138.

words, that you may not use them to raise a question. Why, you would ask, do we read everywhere else of the Son as sitting at the right hand of God, but in this one place of His standing? He sits as Judge of the living and dead; He stands as His people's Advocate. He stood, then, as a Priest, while He was offering to His Father the sacrifice of a good martyr; He stood, as the Umpire, to grant, as it were, on a good wrestler the prize of so hard-fought a contest."

"Receive also the Spirit of God that you may discern those things, just as Stephen received the Spirit; and you may say, as Stephen said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7:56). He who has the heavens opened to him, sees Jesus at the right hand of God; he whose soul's eye is closed, does not see Jesus at the right hand of God. Let us, then, confess Jesus at God's right hand, that to us also the heavens may be opened. They who confess otherwise close the gates of heaven against themselves."

Ambrose also counseled⁵³ his people to get to a place in their walk with Christ, where He is standing in their midst, like with Stephen; this way the heavens will be opened for us. If we get to the point where Christ is seated, this represents judgment.

"Make yourselves worthy that Christ should be in your midst. For where peace is, there is Christ, for Christ is Peace; and where righteousness is, there is Christ, for Christ is Righteousness. Let Him be in your midst, that you may see Him, lest it be said to you also, 'There stands One among you, whom you do not see' (John 1:26). The Jews didn't see Him, in Whom they didn't believe; we look on Him by devotion, and behold Him by faith."

"Let Him therefore stand in your midst that the heavens, which declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1), may be opened to you, that you may do His will, and work His works. He who sees Jesus, to him are the heavens opened as they were opened to Stephen, when he said, 'Look! I see the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7:56). Jesus was standing as his advocate; He was standing as though anxious, that He might help His athlete Stephen in his conflict; He was standing as though ready to crown His martyr."

"Let Him then be standing for you, that you may not be afraid of Him sitting; for when sitting He judges. As Daniel says, 'Thrones were put in place, and the books were opened, and the Ancient of days was seated (Daniel 7:9-10). But the Prophet Asaph writes, 'God stands in the congregation of gods, and decides among the gods' (Psalm 82:1). So then when He sits He judges, when He stands He decides, and He judges concerning the imperfect, but decides among the gods. Let Him stand for you as a defender, as a good shepherd, lest the fierce wolves assault you."

John Chrysostom noted⁵⁴ the similarity between how Christ was treated and how Stephen was treated. Both were slandered and treated as criminals, but neither returned the malice on their enemies. Both Christ and Stephen tried to bring their enemies over to the Faith.

"Before the Jewish leaders were perplexed, saying, 'What are we to do with these men?' (Acts 4:16); so now these are 'cut to the heart' (Acts 7:54). And yet it was Stephen that had good right to be incensed, who, having done no wrong, was

⁵³ Ambrose of Milan, "Epistle LXIII", Letters, 4-6.

⁵⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, vv 54-60.

treated like a criminal, and was spitefully slandered. Yet Stephen, in his charges against them, did not resort to slander, but proved what he said. When Stephen accused them, it was not his doing, if they were insulted; it was the Prophet's accusation of them. Besides, they did not wish it to look as if they killed him because of what he had said against them, just as they acted in the case of Christ, but for impiety. However, Stephen's words were the expression of true piety. Therefore, besides killing him, they wished to hurt his reputation also. They were afraid that he should become an object of even greater reverence. Therefore, just what they had done in Christ's case, the same they do here also. Just as Christ had said, 'You shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of God' (Matthew 26:64), and they called it blasphemy; just so was it here. There, they 'tore their clothes'; here, they 'stopped their ears'" (Acts 7:57).

"Stephen wished to bring them over to the Faith. Since he had spoken of Christ's death, and had said nothing of His resurrection, he added this also, 'Standing at the right hand of God'. In this manner Christ appeared to Stephen, that the Jewish leaders might receive Him. The idea of Christ's sitting at the right hand of God was offensive to them; for the present Stephen just brought up only what relates to the Resurrection. This is the reason also why his face was glorified. God, being merciful, desired to make their machinations the means of recalling them to Him. Notice how many signs⁵⁵ are given! This is meant to show them that he is not perishing, and to teach them. To clear himself, and show that neither were his former words prompted by passion, he says, 'Lord do not charge them with this sin' (Acts 7:60), wishing even in this way to win them over. By forgiving their rage in murdering him, Stephen showed that his soul was free from passion, which was his way of making his words to be favorably received."

We might note that the Jewish leaders were not authorized by Roman law to institute capital punishment in executing Stephen. In executing Jesus, they had to get Pontius Pilate to agree (John 19:10). When James the son of Zebedee was beheaded, it was because Herod was trying to please the Jewish leaders (Acts 12:1-3). The Jewish leaders don't seem to have been punished by the Roman authorities for executing Stephen, but they may have been reprimanded. It may have been that the subsequent bloodbath⁵⁶ overshadowed Stephen's death, and quelling the budding insurrection was all the Romans cared about. In c. 62 AD when the Jewish leaders executed James the Lord's brother, the Bishop of Jerusalem, Herod Agrippa punished⁵⁷ them by stripping Ananus of the High Priesthood.

In describing Stephen's death, Luke noted particularly the role of Saul (Paul). John Chrysostom noted⁵⁸ that even at this time, the power of God was at work in Paul.

⁵⁵ That is, Stephen's miracles, his glowing face, the heavens opened, Stephen's lack of malice, his prayer for his murderers.

⁵⁶ Along with Deacon Stephen, Deacon Nicanor and 200 others were also murdered. This generated such a bloodbath that the Church was scattered to other parts of the world. See:

Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.

Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles, 9.

See also <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>, July 28, December 28.

<http://www.goarch.org/en/chapel/saints.asp?contentid=144>, July 28.

⁵⁷ Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, XX, ix, 1, 200-203.

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, Recapitulation.

“Observe how Luke particularly relates what concerns Paul, to show you that the power which worked in him was of God. But after all these things, not only did Paul not believe, but also aimed at Stephen with a thousand hands; this is why it says, ‘And Saul was consenting to his death’ (Acts 8:1). Stephen does not simply pray, but does it with earnestness, ‘having kneeled down’. Note his divine death! He prayed as long as the Lord permitted his soul to remain in him.”

We might note that one of the people that Stephen was praying for was the future Apostle Paul.

Jerome commented⁵⁹ on the great lamentation by the saints over the death of Stephen. We might ask why they would mourn what can be called a sacrifice and a victory. The “lamentation” referred to the others as well as Stephen, but it also referred to the huge funeral procession and the crowds that accompanied it. There was a similar lamentation for Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Absalom and Jacob, but only for Absalom was there a reason to mourn.

“Why should we mourn? Jacob put on sackcloth for Joseph, and when his entire family gathered around him, he refused to be comforted. ‘I will go down into the grave to my son mourning’ (Genesis 37:35). David also mourned for Absalom, covering his face, and crying, ‘O my son, Absalom, my son, Absalom! If only I had died in your place, O Absalom, my son!’ (2 Samuel 18:33). Moses (Deuteronomy 34:8) and Aaron (Numbers 20:29), and the rest of the saints were mourned with a solemn mourning. Jacob, it is true, mourned for Joseph, whom he thought was dead, and thought he would meet Joseph only in the grave, but he only did so because Christ had not yet broken open the door of paradise, nor quenched with his blood the flaming sword and the whirling of the guardian cherubim (Genesis 3:24). Thus in the story of Dives and Lazarus, Abraham and the beggar, though really in a place of refreshment, are described as being in Hades (Luke 16:23). David, after interceding in vain for the life of his infant child, refused to weep for it, knowing that it had not sinned (2 Samuel 12:15-24). But he did well to weep for a son (Absalom), who had tried to kill his father, in will, if not in deed (2 Samuel 17:1-4). When we read that lamentation was made for Moses and Aaron after ancient custom, this ought not to surprise us. Even in the Acts of the Apostles, in the full blaze of the Gospel, we see that the brethren at Jerusalem made great lamentation for Stephen (Acts 8:2). This great lamentation, however, refers not to the mourners, but to the funeral procession and to the crowds, which accompanied it. This is what the Scripture says of Jacob, ‘Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the house of Joseph and his brethren’. ‘Chariots and horsemen went up with him; and it was a great company’. ‘They mourned with a great and very solemn lamentation’ (Genesis 50:7-10). This solemn lamentation does not impose prolonged weeping upon the Egyptians, but simply describes the funeral ceremony. In like manner, when we read of weeping made for Moses and Aaron (Deuteronomy 34:6-8, Numbers 20:29), this is all that is meant.”

“I cannot adequately extol the mysteries of Scripture, nor sufficiently admire the spiritual meaning conveyed in its most simple words. We are told, for instance, that lamentation was made for Moses (Exodus 34:8); yet when the funeral

⁵⁹ Jerome, Letter to Paula, XXXIX, 4.

of Joshua is described no mention at all is made of weeping (Joshua 24:30). The reason, of course, is that under Moses, that is, under the old Law, Hades bound all men; they were rightly accompanied with tears. As Paul says, ‘death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those that had not sinned’ (Romans 5:14). But under Jesus, that is, under the Gospel of Christ, who has unlocked for us the gate of Paradise, death is accompanied, not with sorrow, but with joy. The Jews go on weeping to this day; they go barefoot; they crouch in sackcloth; they roll in ashes. And to make their superstition complete, they follow a foolish custom of the Pharisees, and eat lentils⁶⁰, to show, it would seem, for what poor fare they have lost their birthright (Genesis 25:34). Of course they are right to weep; since they do not believe in the Lord’s Resurrection, they are being made ready for the advent of antichrist.

The Results of Stephen’s Martyrdom

When Stephen was led to the place of execution⁶¹, the Virgin Mary followed at a distance along with the Apostle John, who was charged with her care (John 19:26-27). When they reached⁶² the Valley of Jehoshaphat, by the brook of Kedron, she stood at a distance on a nearby hill with the Apostle John. Witnessing his end as a martyr, the Virgin Mary fervently prayed to the Lord that He strengthen His martyr and receive his soul into His hands.

Stephen's corpse was thrown out⁶³ to become food for dogs and birds, and lay a day and a night without burial. Luke records that “devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him” (Acts 8:2). What happened was that on the second night, Gamaliel, the renowned teacher of the Jews of Jerusalem (who later, with his son Habib, believed in Christ), sent honorable and trustworthy men to remove the relics secretly. Shedding tears, they reverently buried the holy remains on Gamaliel's property in the village called Kaphargamala, which was two miles from Jerusalem. Gamaliel's actions were similar to what Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did with the body of Jesus (John 19:38-42).

And who would not have wept, asked John Chrysostom⁶⁴, seeing the gentle lamb's dead body, battered by stones?

“Who would not have wept to see that mild, lamb-like person stoned, and lying dead? A fit eulogy to be spoken over his grave has the Evangelist recorded, in this one speech, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin’” (Acts 7:60).

Gregory Nazianzen stated⁶⁵ that the specially distinguishing mark of Stephen was the absence of malice. Not even when in danger did Stephen hate his assailants, but was stoned while praying for those who were stoning him as a disciple of Christ. On their behalf he was allowed to suffer, and so, in his long-suffering, bearing for God a nobler fruit than his death.

⁶⁰ This is still a practice during mourning among the Jews of the East. Tur Joreh Deah. Paragraph 378.

⁶¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

⁶² The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, December 27.

⁶³ Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, tr. Fr Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, December 27.

⁶⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, v. 2.

⁶⁵ Gregory Nazianzen, Oration on the Death of His Father, XVIII, 24.

Many years later⁶⁶ in 415 AD, the Priest Lucian discovered Stephen's relics, after having received a vision. In 423 AD, the pious Empress Eudocia, wife of Theodosius the Lesser went to Jerusalem. At the place where Stephen was killed and his blood stained the ground, the Empress, wishing to honor Christ, built a magnificent church dedicated to Stephen and interred his relics there.

Stephen was just over 30 years old⁶⁷ when he suffered on December 27th during the year following the Ascension. Part of the "great lamentation" included the mourning for a major bloodbath in Jerusalem. Nicanor, another of the seven "deacons" was martyred that same day also, along with 200 others in short succession⁶⁸. According to tradition, Nicodemus died at this time also as he and others were lamenting the death of Stephen, Nicanor and the others. Gamaliel buried Nicodemus in the same crypt as Stephen, and was later buried there himself⁶⁹.

"Now Saul (Paul) was consenting to Stephen's death" (Acts 8:1). At that time a great persecution arose against the Church, which was at Jerusalem; and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except for the Apostles. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church entering every house and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison" (Acts 8:1, 3). In Paul's testimony nearly 30 years later, he admitted that he forced them to blaspheme (Acts 26:11). This persecution lasted for about three years or until 34 AD when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. With Paul not leading⁷⁰ the attack against the Christians, "the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and were edified" (Acts 9:31).

When Paul was converted on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6), immediately, he began to preach Christ in the synagogues of Damascus, saying that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:20-22). Everyone that heard him was amazed, knowing that he had come to Damascus to arrest and imprison Christians. John Chrysostom stated⁷¹:

"As an expert in the Law, Paul stopped their mouths, and didn't allow them to speak. They thought that they had gotten rid of arguments about such matters by getting rid of Stephen; and now they found another, more vehement than Stephen."

John Chrysostom noted⁷² the gain to the Church resulting from the death of Stephen. They prayed fervently, but did not take vengeance against their enemies, which is what Christ had taught (Matthew 5:39-48).

"Observe the saints praying in the night, how much they achieved by it, including Peter's release. What a good thing affliction is; how wakeful it made them! Do you see how great was the gain resulting from the death of Stephen? Do you see how great the benefit resulting from Peter's imprisonment? It is not by taking vengeance on those who wronged them that God shows the greatness of the

⁶⁶ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, December 27.

⁶⁷ Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, tr. Fr Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, December 27.

⁶⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.

⁶⁹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, August 2.

⁷⁰ For more details on Paul's early life, see the Epistle Lesson for the 20th Sunday after Pentecost.

⁷¹ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XX, v. 21-22.

⁷² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXVI, v. 12.

Gospel. But in the wrong-doers themselves, without any harm happening to the saints, he shows what a mighty thing the afflictions in themselves are, that we may not seek any kind of deliverance from the afflictions, nor the avenging of our wrongs.”

In considering the spread of the Early Church, one might think about how terrible the persecutions were. However, as Chrysostom put⁷³ it: “The persecution turned out to be no light benefit. As ‘to those who love God all things work together for good’” (Romans 8:28).

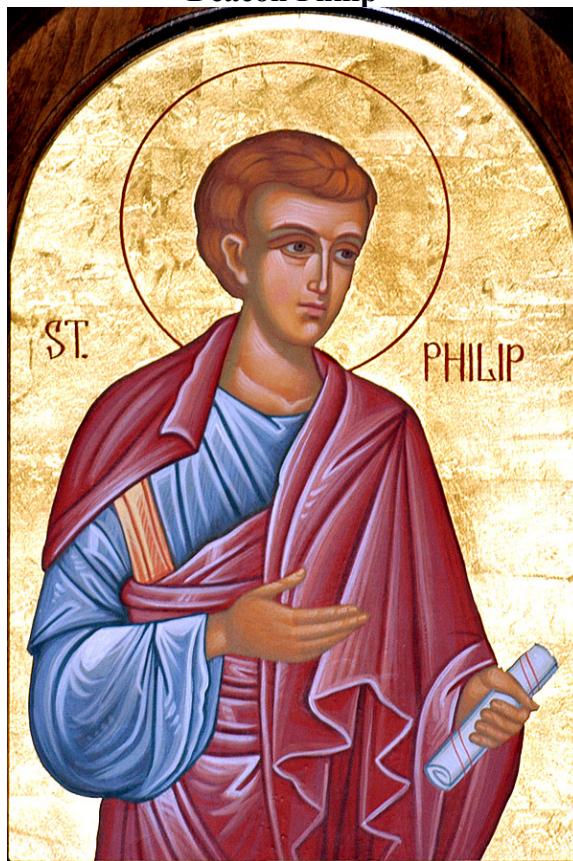
“If they had made it their express study how best to establish the Church, they would have done nothing else but this; they would have dispersed the teachers. When Stephen was slain, when Paul was twice in danger, when the Apostles were scourged, then the Gentiles received the word, and also the Samaritans. Paul declared: ‘It was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken to you (the Jews) first; but since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles’ (Acts 13:46). Truly this is the reason why it was there they were appointed to be called Christians, because Paul spent so long a time in Antioch!”

⁷³ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXV, v.22.

Deacon Philip

There were two Apostles named Philip in the Early Church, one numbered⁷⁴ among the Twelve (Matthew 10:3) and the other numbered among the Seventy. The Philip from the Seventy was ordained as one of the first seven deacons, where the Apostle Philip of the Twelve was one of the ones laying hands on Deacon Philip of the Seventy to establish him in his office (Acts 6:2, 6). Both Apostles were married and had young children prior to their call as Apostles. The Apostle Philip had three daughters and the Deacon Philip had four daughters (Acts 21:8-9).

Figure 2
Deacon Philip⁷⁵



Deacon Philip was a Samaritan, born in Caesarea, on the Mediterranean coast. Caesarea was about 20 miles Northwest of the Samaritan city of Samaria. Prior to his call as one of the Seventy Apostles that Jesus sent out two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go (Luke 10:1), Philip was married and had four young daughters. Jesus sent out the Seventy in late 29 AD; thus Philip's daughters were probably born between 23 and 29 AD.

⁷⁴ For more information on the Apostle Philip of the Twelve, see Mark Kern, The Apostle Philip, St Athanasius Press, 2004.

⁷⁵ See <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp>

Philip's Role in the Early Church

Like the rest of the Twelve and the Seventy, Philip practiced celibacy even though he was married. Peter had asked Jesus about this saying, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” (Matthew 19:27) Jesus replied, “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My Name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life” (Matthew 19:29). The point was that the Twelve and the Seventy had left behind the things of this world, both possessions and pleasure, and they were rewarded for this. They didn’t abandon their wife and children; instead their wives and children became part of their work. Just prior to these comments by the Lord, He had offered a young synagogue ruler (Matthew 19:16, Luke 18:18) the lot and reward of an apostle, but the young man went away sorrowful, because he couldn’t give up his great possessions (Matthew 19:21-22).

When Philip went out with the Seventy, he traveled very simply, carrying nothing but the clothes on his back (Luke 10:4). Some of the Apostles took their wives and families with them when they were old enough to travel (1 Corinthians 9:5). Philip may not have done so when his children were very young. After he was ordained as a Deacon by the Twelve, Philip applied himself to the work that he was called to do; that is, he dealt with the offerings of the faithful and attended to the concerns of the widowed, the orphaned and the needy.

Luke records Philip’s work right after the death of Stephen. He went back to Samaria to get away from the bloodbath, and continued what he had been doing in Judea. “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. The multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles, which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:5-8).

If the Apostle Paul was converted⁷⁶ on the road to Damascus in 34 AD, Philip’s work in Samaria would have occurred in 31 or 32 AD. Paul’s actions in going to Damascus to round up Christians (Acts 9:2) may have been in response to the surge from Philip’s evangelism.

Because of Deacon Philip’s evangelism, Luke refers to him as “Philip the Evangelist” (Acts 21:8). As he proceeded through the city of Samaria, many people were baptized. “When they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized” (Acts 8:12).

We note that the multitudes “with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip”. Thus Philip created a situation similar to what he had seen the Master do for three years. Philip’s miracles were limited to healing and casting out unclean spirits (Acts 8:7), just as the Seventy had been so limited when Jesus sent them out (Luke 10:9) in 29 AD. Philip is not recorded as raising the dead like the Twelve (Matthew 10:8). Just as the Seventy returned to Jesus then with great joy (Luke 10:17), so the people of Samaria experienced great joy (Acts 8:8).

⁷⁶ For a calculation of the date of Paul’s conversion, see Mark Kern, “20th Sunday After Pentecost”, in The Whole Counsel of God, St Athanasius Press, 2006.

Philip's baptism was similar to the baptism of John the Baptist in that those baptized did not receive the Holy Spirit. When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard about Deacon Philip's work in Samaria, they sent Peter and John. Peter and John prayed for the new converts that they might receive the Holy Spirit, which they did. John Chrysostom noted⁷⁷:

“This was not to be done in any ordinary manner, but it needed great power to give the Holy Spirit. For it is not all one, to obtain remission of sins, and to receive such a power. By degrees it is, that the Samaritans receive the gift. It was a twofold sign: both the giving it to the Samaritans, and the not giving it to Simon Magus.”

We might note that the city of Samaria was about 7 miles northwest of Sychar, where Jesus had spoken to the Samaritan woman (named Photini). When Jesus spoke to the people of Sychar for two days, John says that they believed He was the Christ (John 4:39-43), but it doesn't say that they were baptized. Philip may have started baptizing these people that Jesus converted.

Philip and Simon Magus

As Philip was preaching Christ to the Samaritans, he ran into Simon Magus, a sorcerer, who had astonished the people of Samaria for a long time. Simon claimed to be someone great, and everyone had been saying, “This man is the great power of God” (Acts 8:9-10).

Simon was born in the Samaritan village of Gettai⁷⁸. He was by profession a magician, which he learned⁷⁹ in Alexandria, Egypt, but he didn't begin his self-promotion until after the death of John the Baptist in c. 28 AD. He was even referred to⁸⁰ as a disciple of John the Baptist for a while. He was a very learned man, and was exceedingly well trained in Greek literature. As a magician, Simon was very much like Jannes and Jambres, Pharaoh's magicians who opposed Moses (2 Timothy 3:8). Just as Jannes and Jambres were able to duplicate some of Moses' miracles, so Simon was very powerful in magic, and Simon learned the black arts from similar sources in Egypt where Jannes and Jambres had learned them.

Simon produced “miracles” using his secret arts. Clement of Rome wrote⁸¹ of some of these “miracles” that the people of Samaria witnessed.

“He makes statues walk, and he rolls himself on the fire, and is not burned; and sometimes he flies. He makes loaves of bread out of stones; he becomes a serpent; he transforms himself into a goat; he becomes two-faced. He changes himself into gold; he opens locked gates; he melts iron. At banquets he produces images of all manner of forms. In his house he makes dishes fly through the air of themselves to wait upon him. I wondered when I heard them say this; but many bore witness that they had been present, and had seen such things”.

⁷⁷ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, vv 13-14.

⁷⁸ There are various spellings of the town of Simon's birth, each phonetically similar to Gettai.

⁷⁹ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 22, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸⁰ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 23, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸¹ Roberts and Donaldson, “The Clementine Homilies”, II, 32-34, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

Prior to Christ's baptism, Simon had been a follower⁸² of John the Baptist, putting his secret arts on hold for a while, and became one of John's thirty chief men. When John was beheaded, Simon was in Egypt practicing his secret arts. When Simon returned, a man named Dositheus had taken over as leader of John's followers. Simon murdered Dositheus, making it seem like he died of natural causes, and then took over the leadership of John's followers.

This didn't last too long, however. Simon revealed his exalted views⁸³ of himself to fellow members of the Thirty, where he claimed to be God, and born of a virgin, just like Christ. The other members of the Thirty did not go along with Simon in this heresy, but instead inquired of him as to the extent of his opinions. They were all aghast at what Simon rushed headlong into, and they were ashamed of their association with him⁸⁴, and counseled him to change. Unlike Simon, they were not after personal glory and honor. All their efforts were to no avail however.

In the 40's AD, Simon went to Rome and he so impressed⁸⁵ the Emperor Claudius and the Roman Senate by his secret arts that Claudius erected a statue of Simon along the Tiber River with the inscription, "To Simon, the Holy God". Thus Simon was very prominent across the Empire in the 1st Century. Justin Martyr stated⁸⁶ that the statue was still there over 100 years later. Simon was so influential that four of the original Seventy Apostles apostatized to follow him.

When Simon encountered the Deacon Philip in the city of Samaria, Simon was struck with the fact that Philip could do things that he could not, just as Jannes and Jambres were struck with the fact that Moses could do things that they couldn't. In order to get a closer look at Philip's technique, Simon asked to be baptized, and became a follower of Philip (Acts 8:13). When Peter and John came from Jerusalem, Simon saw the Holy Spirit conferred on people by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17-18). Simon offered to purchase this ability from Peter, but Peter rebuked him saying, in effect, "Take your money and go to hell!" (Acts 8:20)

John Chrysostom noted⁸⁷ that great signs had been done by Philip, but yet how was it that the people had not received the Holy Spirit? This is unusual! They had received the Spirit of remission of sins, but the Spirit of miracles they had not received. When the Apostles Peter and John came and laid hands on the new converts, they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:16-17) and the ability to work miracles. To show that this was the case, and that it was the Spirit of miracles they had not received, observe how, after seeing the result, Simon came and asked for this.

John Chrysostom stated⁸⁸ that Peter saw right through Simon Magus. Simon was an unbeliever throughout his contact with Philip, and did everything from malice. His only "belief" was such as is expressed by the demons (James 2:19). Philip's miracles made Simon's sorcery look impotent, and Peter read Simon's thoughts. Simon didn't care to receive the Holy Spirit; he only wanted the ability to confer it on others to show how powerful he was.

⁸² Roberts and Donaldson, "The Clementine Homilies", II, 23-26, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸³ Roberts and Donaldson, "Recognitions of Clement", II, 14-15, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸⁴ Roberts and Donaldson, "The Clementine Homilies", II, 27-28, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

⁸⁵ Justin Martyr, First Apology, XXVI.

⁸⁶ Justin Martyr, First Apology, LVI.

⁸⁷ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, vv 10-15.

⁸⁸ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, v. 18-20.

“Simon had such a low conception of the gift of God, that he imagined it to be entirely a thing of man. It is not this! Peter well calls the affair a gift, ‘You thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money’ (Acts 8:20). Do you observe how on all occasions the Apostles are not interested in money? ‘For your heart is not right in the sight of God’ (Acts 8:21). Do you see how Simon does everything from malice? To be simple, however, was what was needed. For had it been done with simplicity, Peter would have welcomed Simon’s willing mind. Do you see that to have low conceptions of great things⁸⁹ is to sin doubly? Accordingly, Peter asks Simon to do two things, ‘Repent and pray, if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven’ (Acts 8:22). It was a wicked thought Simon had entertained, and Peter knew him to be incorrigible. ‘For I perceive that you are poisoned by bitterness, and bound by iniquity’ (Acts 8:23). These are words of tremendous wrath! But otherwise Peter did not punish him, that faith may not be of compulsion, and that he may introduce the subject of repentance. Also, it sufficed for correction to convict him, to tell him what was in his heart, to bring him to confess himself. Simon said, ‘Pray for me’; this is a confession that he had done wrong. Notice what an unbeliever he is; when he was convicted, and then he “believed”. When he was convicted again, then he became humble. That is, seeing Philip’s miracles, Simon was amazed (Acts 8:13), and came over. He thought he would be able to escape detection; he thought the thing was an art. But when he didn’t have power to defeat the Apostles, again, he fears the multitude, and is afraid to deny it. He might have said, ‘I did not know; I did it in simplicity’. But he was struck with dismay first because he was blown away by the miracles and secondly, that his thoughts were made clear. As a result, Simon eventually went a long way off, to Rome, thinking that Peter would not soon come there.”

Chrysostom also stated⁹⁰ that one reason why the Apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria was to rid the Samaritans of the influences of Simon’s sorcery. After all, Simon had been working his sorcery on the Samaritans for a long time, and his influence was extensive throughout Samaria (Acts 8:9-10).

“Why do they go there where the tyranny was really bad, where those most bent on killing them were? Just as generals do in wars, they occupy that part of the scene of war, which is most distressed. That is, ‘They preached the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans’ (Acts 8:25). Observe how they do not of set purpose come to Samaria, but driven by the stress of persecution, just as it was in the case of Christ. When the Apostles go there, it is to men now believers, no longer just Samaritans.”

“When you see thorns, you cut them up, you burn them, and you utterly destroy them, to rid your land of the hurt that arises from them. If you see the laborers overrun with thorns, and do not cut them up, wouldn’t you be afraid of the Owner, Who shall call you to account?”

We might ask why the Evangelist Luke included mention of Simon Magus at all in Acts. Simon a major heretical force to be reckoned with in the 1st Century, and the 1st Century was a time of great turmoil due to the extreme heresies that the Church had to deal with. Simon was

⁸⁹ That is, (1) to not recognize the work of the Holy Spirit; and (2) to blaspheme the Holy Spirit by calling His work a thing of man.

⁹⁰ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XVIII, v 25.

referred to as the source of all these heresies, and had many followers, where each added a little twist to make their own teachings unique. Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, writing at the turn of the 1st Century (c. 107 AD) referred⁹¹ to Simon as the firstborn son of Satan. Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd Century) documented⁹² Simon's heresies, referred to Simon as the father of all heretics and described many of his followers. Cyril of Jerusalem (4th Century) stated⁹³ that Simon was the source of all the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Century heresies.

As Luke was writing his account of the Acts of the Apostles in the early 60's AD, where he ended his account before Paul was released from house arrest in 62 AD, Simon was still alive and had become good friends with Emperor Nero. Peter had already had a major encounter with Simon in Rome in the mid 50's AD, where he debunked Simon and incurred the Emperor's wrath; as a result of this, Peter had to leave Rome quickly. To continue the fight against Simon's influence in Rome, Peter and Paul had 18 of the original Seventy move to Rome temporarily. These are (Romans 16):

Table 1
The Seventy in Rome in 55 AD

Aquila	Epaenetus	Andronicus
Amplias	Urbanus	Stachys
Apelles	Aristobulus	Herodion
Narcissus	Rufus	Asyncritus
Phlegon	Hermas	Patrobas
Hermes	Philologus	Olympas

As Luke was finishing his account of the Acts of the Apostles, one of the original Seventy had already apostatized to follow Simon, and three more would soon follow. These four are:

Table 2
The Seventy Who Apostatized

Name	Reference
Nicolas of Antioch	Revelation 2:6, 15
Demas	Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24, 2 Timothy 4:10
Hermogenes	2 Timothy 1:15
Phygellus	2 Timothy 1:15

The Evangelist Luke had good reason to include the early encounter of Simon Magus with the Evangelist Philip and the Apostle Peter. Luke's account served as a warning for the Churches to beware of Simon and his followers.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

After Peter and John left the city of Samaria, an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza" (Acts 8:26). This road heads southwest from Jerusalem in the mountains, to Gaza on the Mediterranean Coast,

⁹¹ Ignatius, "To the Trallians", 10-11, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 1.

⁹² Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, Preface.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, I, xxvii, 4.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, Preface, 1.

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, II, ix, 1.

⁹³ Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, VI, 14.

about 48 miles. There were major trade routes running along the Mediterranean Coast that headed South back to Ethiopia, and this desert road connected to these trade routes in Gaza. There was also a road that went due south from Samaria to Jerusalem, a distance of about 37 miles. To get to this location would take Philip the better part of three days.

Along this road from Jerusalem to Gaza, Philip met the Ethiopian eunuch, who was a man “of great authority under Candace⁹⁴ the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship” (Acts 8:27). He had come a long way to worship in Jerusalem, and was returning home. The eunuch was not traveling alone; he had at least one driver for the chariot (Acts 8:38), and probably a number of attendants. Since at least two people could sit in this chariot (Acts 8:31), it was probably the kind of chariot used by royalty when they traveled.

Eusebius stated⁹⁵ that a woman ruled Ethiopia according to ancestral custom even to his day (4th Century), and that this was the case in the 1st Century also. The eunuch was the first to proclaim the knowledge of God among men in Ethiopia. Through him in truth the prophecy obtained its fulfillment, which declares that ‘Ethiopia stretches out her hand to God’ (Psalm 68:31). Irenaeus stated⁹⁶ that the eunuch was sent back to Ethiopia to preach what he had learned.

“The eunuch was sent into the regions of Ethiopia, to preach what he had himself believed, that there was one God preached by the prophets, but that the Son of this God had already made His appearance in human nature, and had been led as a sheep to the slaughter; and all the other statements which the prophets made regarding Him.”

There had been a large Jewish community in Ethiopia ever since the days of Solomon, when the Queen of Sheba visited him (1 Kings 10:1-10). This Jewish community converted to Christianity in the 4th Century AD. The term “eunuch” originally referred to a male who had been castrated, often as a boy, and raised for a specific purpose, such as to take charge of the women or the children. However the term was often used of any high official, whether castrated or not. One outstanding characteristic of people who were “eunuchs” was their trustworthiness.

When Philip arrived on the road to Gaza, the Ethiopian eunuch was sitting in his chariot, reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot”. Philip ran to him and heard him reading (aloud) the Prophet Isaiah; Philip said to him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The Ethiopian replied, “How can I unless someone guides me?” He then asked Philip to come up into the chariot to sit with him. The eunuch had been reading a prophecy of Christ’s Crucifixion, but didn’t understand whether it referred to Isaiah himself or someone else (Acts 8:28-34). Philip began at this part of Isaiah and explained how Jesus fulfilled them.

As they went down the road to Gaza, Philip’s explanation to the eunuch was undoubtedly thorough, since the eunuch pointed to some water as they passed and asked to be baptized. Philip

⁹⁴ The term “Candace” was a title, not a name, and was used by successive queens, similar to the term “Pharaoh” in Egypt. See Merrill Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 173.

⁹⁵ Eusebius, *Church History*, II, 1. See also:

John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Acts*, XIX, v. 27.

⁹⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, xii, 8.

said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may”. The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37).

The eunuch commanded the chariot to stop, and he and Philip went down into the water, where Philip baptized him. As they came up out of the water, something strange happened. “The Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found⁹⁷ at Azotus” (Acts 8:39-40).

Tertullian mentioned⁹⁸ that usually there is no rush to Baptism, but the Church waits to be assured that the candidate for Baptism is worthy. In the case of the eunuch, this is obvious: he has just come 900 miles to worship God, and is in the process of reading the Scripture, but doesn’t understand. His faith is not questionable, and he was thus a candidate for immediate Baptism.

“Baptism is not to be administered rashly. ‘Give to everyone who begs you’ (Luke 6:30), has a reference of its own, pertaining especially to almsgiving. On the contrary, this precept is rather to be looked at carefully, ‘Give not the holy thing to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine’ (Matthew 7:6); and, ‘Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins’ (1 Timothy 5:22). If Philip so ‘easily’ baptized the eunuch, let us reflect that clear and conspicuous evidence that the Lord considered him worthy had been given (Acts 8:26-40). The Spirit had commanded Philip to proceed to that road; the eunuch himself was not idle; he was not suddenly seized with a desire to be baptized. But, after going up to the temple for prayer’s sake, intently engaged on the divine Scripture, Philip discovered him. Without his asking, God had sent an Apostle, whom the Spirit told to overtake the eunuch’s chariot. The Scripture, which he was reading⁹⁹, gave an opportunity with his faith. Philip, being requested, was taken to sit beside him; the Lord is pointed out; faith does not linger; there is no need to wait for water; the work is completed, and the Apostle is snatched away.”

Irenaeus noted¹⁰⁰ that the Prophets and the Law had already prepared this eunuch. The only thing he didn’t know was that Jesus was the Christ; and the same was true of the large numbers that the Apostles baptized.

“Nothing else but baptism was lacking to the eunuch, who had been already instructed by the prophets. He was not ignorant of God the Father, nor of the rules as to the proper manner of life, but was merely ignorant of the Advent of the Son of God. When he had become acquainted with this, in a short space of time, he went on his way rejoicing, to be the herald in Ethiopia of Christ’s Advent. Therefore Philip had no great labor to go through with regard to this man, because he was already prepared in the fear of God by the prophets. For this reason, the Apostles, in collecting the sheep, which were perishing in the house of Israel, spoke to them from the Scriptures, to prove that this crucified Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. They persuaded a great multitude, who already possessed

⁹⁷ The city of Azotus is called Ashdod in Hebrew. There are several creeks that cross the road from Jerusalem to Gaza near the town of Marisa. One of these creeks may be where the eunuch found the water. These creeks flow down the mountain and all of them converge near the city of Azotus, about 15 miles away.

⁹⁸ Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 18.

⁹⁹ That is Acts 8:28-33, Isaiah 53:7-8 LXX. The quote in Acts is nearly identical to the text in the Codex Alexandricus.

¹⁰⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, xxiii, 2.

the fear of God. As a result they were able to baptize in one day 3000, 4000 and 5000 men.”

Following the baptism of this black man, the eunuch returned¹⁰¹ to his home and began to preach Christ. He was the first Apostle of Faith among the blacks in Ethiopia, and he later died a martyr.

John Chrysostom spoke¹⁰² at length about the eunuch, and how he had been prepared by the reading of Isaiah. He was so desirous of God that he would have stayed in Jerusalem if Philip hadn’t disappeared. We note that an angel and the Holy Spirit work together in directing Philip to the eunuch. In dealing with the eunuch, Philip used a great deal of wisdom; this was why he had been selected as a deacon (Acts 6:5). In speaking with the eunuch, Philip made the connection between the prophecy of Isaiah that the eunuch was reading, and the recent events in Jerusalem. The eunuch was probably aware of these events, but hadn’t connected them to Isaiah’s writings.

“Very praiseworthy is this eunuch, residing in Ethiopia and occupied with so much business, when there was no festival going on, and living in that superstitious city, came ‘to Jerusalem to worship’. Great also is his studiousness that even ‘sitting in his chariot he read’. Observe also his piety; that though he did not understand, he read, and then after reading, he examines.”

“Observe how it is providentially ordered. First he reads and does not understand; then he reads the same text, which contained the Passion, the Resurrection and the Gift” (Isaiah 53:8-12).

“Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, ‘See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?’ (Acts 8:36) Note the eager desire; note the exact knowledge! ‘So he commanded the chariot to stand still. Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:38-39). But why did the Spirit of the Lord carry Philip away? By doing so, the occurrence was shown to be more wonderful. Even then, the eunuch did not know Philip. Consequently this was done that Philip might, in retrospect, be a subject of wonder to the eunuch. For he went on his way rejoicing!”

“It was expedient therefore that the Spirit caught Philip away; otherwise the eunuch would have desired to go with him, and Philip would have grieved him by declining to comply with his request, the time being not yet come. But at the same time here was an encouraging assurance for them that they shall also prevail over the heathen, for the high character of the first believers was enough to move their converts. If however the eunuch had stayed in Jerusalem, what fault could have been found? But the eunuch didn’t know Philip; for this is why it says, ‘he went on his way rejoicing’”.

“When an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip (Acts 8:26), this was an example of angels assisting the preaching, and not themselves doing the preaching, but calling men to the work. The wonderful nature of what happened is that what of old was rare, here takes place with ease! Philip did not yet know for whose sake he had come to the desert. This road was desert; observe at what time: in the most

¹⁰¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, January 4.

¹⁰² John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XIX.

violent heat of the day. Then the Spirit spoke to him and not the angel. First the vision to go to this desert road took place through the angel; this is for those that are more in tune with bodily things; but the Spirit is for the more spiritual. And how did the Holy Spirit speak to him? Of course, He suggested it to him. Why doesn't the angel appear to the eunuch, and bring him to Philip? Because it is likely he would not have been persuaded, but rather would be terrified."

"Observe the wisdom of Philip; he did not accuse him; he did not say, 'I know these things exactly'. He did not pay homage to him, and say, 'Blessed are you that read'. Note his speech, it is not harsh or praising; his words are rather of a kind and friendly man. 'Do you understand what you are reading?' (Acts 8:30) For it was necessary that the eunuch should himself have a longing desire. Philip plainly intimates, that he knows that the eunuch knew nothing, and at the same time he shows him that great was the treasure that lay there in Isaiah. The eunuch did not look at the outward appearance of the Philip; he did not say, 'Who are you?' he did not chide Philip or put on airs; he did not say that he knew. On the contrary, he confesses his ignorance; therefore he learns. He shows his hurt to the physician, who sees at a glance that he both knows the matter, and is willing to teach. Look how free Philip is from haughtiness; his outward appearance announced nothing splendid. So desirous was the eunuch of learning, that he listened to Philip's words; the saying, 'He that seeks, finds' (Matthew 7:8), was fulfilled in him."

"The eunuch asked Philip to come up and sit with him (Acts 8:31). Do you note the eagerness, the longing desire? But should anyone say the eunuch ought to have waited for Philip to speak, the answer is that he does not know what is the matter; he could not tell what Philip was going to say to him, but supposed merely that he was about to receive some lesson of prophecy. This was more respectful, that he did not draw him into his chariot, but asked him. 'Philip ran to him, and heard him reading' (Acts 8:30); even the fact of his running, showed that he wished to say something. The place that he was reading was this, 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter' (Acts 8:32). This circumstance is a token of the eunuch's elevated mind, that he had in hand this prophet, who is more sublime than all others. Philip does not say anything until he is questioned. The eunuch then says, 'I ask you of whom does the prophet speak this?' That he should know that the Prophets speak in different ways about different persons, or that they speak of themselves in another person, suggests a very thoughtful mind."

"Let us be put to shame, both poor and rich, by this eunuch. Of his own accord he requests, saying, 'What hinders me from being baptized?' (Acts 8:36) Again notice his modesty; he does not say, 'Baptize me', neither does he remain quiet; but he utters somewhat midway between strong desire and reverent fear, saying, 'What hinders me?' Do you observe that he has the doctrines of faith perfect? The Prophet had the whole: Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Judgment to come. He shows great earnestness of desire. Be ashamed, all you who are not baptized. 'He commanded the chariot to stand still' (Acts 8:38). He spoke and gave the order at the same moment, before hearing Philip's answer. 'When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away (Acts 8:39) in order that the occurrence might be shown to be of God; that the eunuch might not consider it to be merely of man. 'And he went on his way rejoicing.' This hints that he would have been grieved had he known what

happened. Because of the greatness of his joy, having had the Spirit granted to him¹⁰³, he did not even see present things.”

“But Philip was found at Azotus’ (Acts 8:40). Great was the gain to Philip also. That which he heard concerning the Prophets, concerning Habakkuk¹⁰⁴, concerning Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:12-15), and the rest, he saw done in his own person.”

“Note how the eunuch was in a station of great authority, how he was in possession of wealth, and even on his journey didn’t allow himself to rest? What must he have been like at home, in his leisure hours, this man who didn’t rest even on his travels? What must he have been like at night? You that are in stations of dignity listen, imitate his freedom from pride, his piety. Though about to return home, he did not say to himself, ‘I am going back to my country; there let me receive baptism’. Those are cold words, which most men use! He had no need of signs, no need of miracles; from the Prophet merely, he believed. But why was it so ordered that he didn’t see Philip before he went to Jerusalem, but after he had been there? It was not proper that he should see the Apostles under persecution, because he was still weak. The Prophet was not easy, but yet the Prophet catechized him. If any of you would apply himself to the study of the Prophets, he would need no miracles. And, if you please, let us take in hand the prophecy itself. ‘He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation his judgment was taken away; who shall declare his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth’ (Isaiah 53:7-8 LXX). It is likely he had heard that Jesus was crucified, and now he learns that ‘His life is taken away from the earth’, and the rest that ‘He did no sin, nor was deceit in His mouth’ (Isaiah 53:9); that He prevailed to save others also; and who He is, Whose generation is unutterable. It is likely he had seen the river rocks¹⁰⁵ there on the spot, and had heard how the veil was torn, and how there was darkness, and so forth. All these things Philip mentioned, merely taking his text from the Prophet. It is a great thing, this reading of the Scriptures! That was fulfilled which was spoken by Moses, ‘Sitting, lying down, rising up, and walking, remember the Lord your God’ (Deuteronomy 6:7). For the roads, especially when they are lonely, give us opportunity for reflection, there being none to disturb us.”

“Truly one has reason to admire this eunuch. He did not see Christ; he saw no miracle; he beheld Jerusalem standing yet entire; he believed Philip. How did he come to behave thus? His soul was eager. Yet the thief on the cross had seen miracles; the wise men had seen a star, but this man, nothing of the kind. So great a thing is the careful reading of the Scriptures!”

“Conversant with these wonders, let us show ourselves worthy. But many in these times, even when they come to church, do not know what is read; whereas the eunuch, even in public and riding in his chariot, applied himself to the reading of the Scriptures.”

The sudden translation of Philip from near Marisa to Azotus is not unprecedented. A similar occasion of a sudden translation occurred when Daniel was locked in the lion’s den. The

¹⁰³ We note that Philip didn’t grant the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans, but he did do so to the Ethiopian Eunuch.

¹⁰⁴ Lancelot C. L. Brenton, “Bel and the Dragon 1:33-39”, The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson, Peabody MA, 1990.

¹⁰⁵ That is, where Stephen had been stoned.

prophet Habakkuk was translated¹⁰⁶ to meet Daniel to give him some food, and then returned to Judea. Another occasion occurred at the time of the funeral of the Virgin Mary, where the Twelve Apostles were translated from whatever part of the world, where they were working, to be present for her last few days. Then they were translated back after the funeral.

After his encounter with the eunuch, Philip continued doing what he had been doing in Azotus. “And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea” (Acts 8:40). The next time Luke mentions Deacon Philip was in c. 57 AD, when Paul returned from his 3rd Missionary Journey, where Paul, Luke and their traveling party stayed at Philip’s house in Caesarea. Philip had been in Caesarea, his hometown, at this time for over 20 years, and he has been regarded as the first Bishop of Caesarea¹⁰⁷.

Philip’s Daughters

Caesarea was the location where Cornelius the Centurion had his vision (Acts 10:1-8) leading to what might be called the “Gentile Pentecost” (Acts 10:44-48). This had occurred after the conversion of Paul in c. 34 AD (Acts 9:1-25), but before the beheading of James the son of Zebedee in c. 44 AD (Acts 12:1-2). Peter referred to this event at the Council of Jerusalem in c. 48 AD as a turning point in his understanding of God’s grace to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7-11). Thus Christianity in Caesarea had a solid beginning, and Philip served as an evangelist in Caesarea for a number of years. Cornelius left Caesarea¹⁰⁸ sometime after the “Gentile Pentecost” to travel with the Apostle Peter on Peter’s missionary journeys

When Paul, Luke and the others came to Caesarea in c. 57 AD, after their 3rd Missionary Journey, they met Philip’s four virgin daughters, who prophesied (Acts 21:9). The prophet Agabus, also one of the original Seventy, joined them and prophesied about what would happen to Paul in the next few years. If Philip’s daughters had been born between 23 and 29 AD, they would now be in their late 20’s to mid 30’s.

Luke doesn’t give any more information about Philip’s daughters, but tradition¹⁰⁹ gives us the names of two, Hermione and Eutychia, and an account of the martyrdom of Hermione. Jerome stated¹¹⁰ that Philip’s humble house; and the bedrooms of his daughters, the four virgins ‘who prophesied’, were still there in the 4th Century. This indicates that the people in Caesarea received Philip’s daughters very well.

Figure 3

¹⁰⁶ Lancelot C. L. Brenton, “Bel and the Dragon 1:33-39”, The Septuagint with Apocrypha, Hendrickson, Peabody MA, 1990.

¹⁰⁷ Hippolytus, “On the Seventy Apostles”, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 5, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1995.

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>, September 13.

¹⁰⁹ <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp>

The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, September 4.

¹¹⁰ Jerome, Letter to Eustochium, CVIII, 8.

Hermione¹¹¹, the Daughter of Deacon Philip



“The Holy Martyr Hermione was a daughter of the Deacon Philip. When she was about 70 years old, she wished to see the Apostle John¹¹²; Hermione, with her sister Eutychia, went to Asia Minor in search of the saint. During their journey, they learned that John had died. Continuing on, the sisters met a disciple of the Apostle Paul named Petronius; imitating him in everything, they became his disciples. Hermione, having mastered the healing arts, rendered help to many Christians and healed the sick by the power of Christ.”

“During this period, the emperor Trajan (98-117) waged war against the Persians¹¹³ and he came with his army through the village where the saint lived. When they accused Hermione of being a Christian, he gave orders to bring her to him.”

“At first the emperor, with casual admonitions, sought to persuade the saint to renounce Christ. When this did not succeed, he commanded that she should be struck on the face for several hours, but she joyfully endured this suffering. Moreover, she was comforted by a vision of the Lord, in the form of Petronius, sitting upon the throne of judgment. Convinced that she was steadfast in her faith, Trajan sent her away. Hermione later built a hospice in which she took in the sick, treating their infirmities both of body and soul.”

“Trajan's successor, Hadrian, again commanded that the saint be brought to trial for confessing the Christian Faith¹¹⁴. At first, the emperor commanded that she be beaten mercilessly, then they pierced the soles of her feet with nails, and finally they threw her into a cauldron with boiling tar, lead and sulphureous brimstone. She bore everything, giving thanks to God.”

¹¹¹ For this and other icons, see <http://www.archangelsbooks.com>. Hermione is often shown in icons with Petronius and Babylus, since their Feast Day is also September 4th. Babylus lived in the late 3rd Century in the same area of Asia Minor.

¹¹² The Apostle John died in c. 97 AD. Philip's daughters would be between 68 and 74 years old at this time.

¹¹³ Trajan entered Persia during the years 115-116 AD. Philip's daughters would be between 86 and 92 years old at this time.

¹¹⁴ Hadrian became emperor in 117 AD. Philip's daughters would be between 88 and 94 years old at this time.

"The Lord granted her His mercy: the fire went out, the lead spilled out, and she remained unharmed. Hadrian in surprise went up to the place of torture and touched the cauldron, to ascertain whether it had cooled. When he touched at the cauldron, he burned the skin on his hand, but even this did not dissuade him."

"He gave orders to heat a sort of skillet and put the holy martyr in it naked. Here again another miracle took place. An angel of the Lord scattered the hot coals and burned many who stood by the fire. Hermione stood in the skillet, as though on green grass, singing hymns of praise to the Lord."

"When she was removed from the skillet, she said to the emperor, 'O emperor, I must tell you that my Lord caused me to sleep in the skillet. Then in a dream, I saw that I greeted the big deity Hercules'. The delighted emperor gave orders to take her off to the temple. When the saint prayed to God, a loud thunderclap was heard, and all the idols in the pagan temple fell and shattered. Leaving the temple, she said to Emperor Hadrian, 'Go into the temple and assist your gods, for they have fallen and are unable to get up!'"

"In a rage, the emperor ordered that Hermione be led out of the city and beheaded. Two servants, Theodoulos and Theotimos, were entrusted to carry out the execution. Since they were in such a hurry to execute the saint, not allowing her time for prayer, their hands withered. Then they believed in Jesus Christ and with repentance they fell at the feet of Hermione. They asked her to pray that the Lord would call them to Himself before her. This is what transpired, through her prayers. After this, she also fell asleep in the Lord."

Philip as Bishop

After Philip's daughters were grown, Philip returned to Jerusalem¹¹⁵. At Jerusalem the Apostles made him Bishop of Tralles¹¹⁶, an ancient city of Lydia in Asia Minor, on the north side of the Meander valley. On account of his teachings, many of the inhabitants came to believe in the Christ. After he had built the church in that city, he reposed peacefully in the Lord in deep old age.

Deacon Prochorus

Overview of Prochorus' Life

After serving as a deacon in the Church in Jerusalem, Deacon Prochorus was ordained¹¹⁷ by the Apostle Peter to be the bishop of Nicomedia, but he only served there for a short time. For

¹¹⁵ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, October 11.

Demetrius of Rostov, The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, tr. Fr Thomas Marretta, Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 2000, October 11.

¹¹⁶ Tralles is now Aydin.

¹¹⁷ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.
See also <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>

about 40 years, he was in the service of the Apostle John, both in Ephesus and on the Island of Patmos, much like Luke was in the service of Paul. During Prochorus' service with John, incredible miracles were commonplace, just like with Peter's shadow (Acts 5:15) and Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons (Acts 19:12). After that he returned to Nicomedia where he exerted much effort and labor to convert the people to the Faith. He died a martyr's death in Antioch¹¹⁸, where he was slain by unbelievers after converting many pagans to Christ.

Prochorus During the Missionary Journeys of the Apostle John

Prochorus kept a journal that chronicled the events of his work with the Apostle John for over 30 years, just as the Evangelist Luke did with the Apostle Paul, and which is recorded in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. Prochorus began¹¹⁹ his account, "To me, Prochorus, fell the lot to follow after John". Following is a summary of Prochorus' account.

After the death of the Virgin Mary in c. 55 AD, whom the Apostle John had been charged with the responsibility to care for (John 19:26-27), John and Prochorus left Jerusalem for Joppa and stayed at the house of Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43). After three days, they left by ship for Ephesus. Before leaving, John told Prochorus that they were going to be shipwrecked, but John didn't know if they would survive. If Prochorus survived, he was to go to Ephesus and wait for John for 3 months. If John didn't arrive, Prochorus was to return to Jerusalem to Bishop James, the Lord's brother and do whatever he said.

As John had predicted, they were shipwrecked and all hands were thrown ashore a mile from Seleucia; but John was missing at sea. The other 41 survivors accused Prochorus of being in cahoots with John to steal the cargo, and Prochorus was put on trial. Prochorus explained who he was and the purpose of his mission. He told the magistrate that this shipwreck had occurred because John had sinned in hesitating to go to Ephesus immediately when the Lord told him to go. After much difficulty, Prochorus was released.

Walking for 40 days toward Ephesus, Prochorus arrived at Mareotis, which is by the sea, and went to stay at the inn by the sea. In sorrow, Prochorus was looking out at the sea, and watched a huge wave break on the shore, leaving a man lying on the beach. Prochorus ran to help the man, remembering his own recent experience. As he raised the man out of the sand, Prochorus recognized the man as the Apostle John. After embracing and discussing their experiences, they headed for Ephesus. As the Lord had predicted for John, this was the beginning of a long series of experiences, where John would "drink the cup that the Lord drank" (Mark 10:35-39).

Arriving in Ephesus they stayed near the house of Dioscorides, the city chief, but John told Prochorus not to tell anyone who they were or what their purpose was until God revealed to them what they were to do. They both went to work for a woman named Romana who ran a bathhouse. John worked at stoking the fire; Prochorus worked at fetching water. After four days, she came by and saw John standing around trying to figure out how to stoke the fire properly. Romana, a stout woman who used to serve in the army, punched John in the face, knocking him to the ground, and called him a lazy, good-for-nothing. John remembered how Jesus was struck, and he told Prochorus that this was an encouragement for them to always bear good will. For the

¹¹⁸ See <http://www.ocafs.oca.org>, January 4th.

¹¹⁹ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, September 26.

Lord had told them, ‘by your patience, possess your souls (Luke 21:19). This happened repeatedly as John began learning the trade. He never gave a word of back talk and Romana thought he was an uneducated peasant¹²⁰. She then had forged legal papers drawn up saying that John and Prochorus were her slaves. John and Prochorus bore this patiently, knowing that it would work out for Romana’s salvation. This is an extremely good example of how we can possess our own souls.

When the bathhouse was first built, Satan had incited the deluded idolaters to bury a teenager in the foundation. As a result, there was demonic activity at the bathhouse. Three months after John and Prochorus arrived, Domnus, the 18-year-old son of Dioscorides, who owned the bathhouse, came in and was strangled by a demon that dwelt there. Prochorus and Domnus’ servants watched helplessly. Romana was in profound grief over how to explain this to her boss. She prayed to Artemis (i.e. Diana) and pulled out her hair and tore her clothes.

John paused in his work to come ask what happened. Before Prochorus could explain, Romana grabbed John, accused him of being a warlock, punched him in the face and demanded he raise Domnus from the dead. John stayed calm, withdrew to pray, then raised Domnus from the dead and brought him to Romana. Romana was so ashamed of how she had treated John that she couldn’t even look him in the face but cried bitterly at his feet and wanted to die. John then explained who he was and forgave her, and she believed. This is really possessing your own soul to be able to be as patient as John was with people who abuse you.

Meanwhile, Dioscorides had died of profound grief on learning that his only son was dead. John, Prochorus, Romana and a crowd of others went there and John raised him from the dead also. Dioscorides offered John all his wealth out of gratitude, but John told him that he had already left all his own wealth behind to follow Christ; he had no need of Dioscorides’ wealth. Dioscorides, Domnus and Romana were then baptized, and John and Prochorus began rooming at Dioscorides’ house.

Later at a festival of Artemis, where everyone wore white clothes, John stood on the high place near the statue of Artemis in his sooty work clothes. This angered the crowd and they hurled a number of stones at John; all these missed John and hit the statue. The “son of thunder” then spoke to them of their delusion and challenged them to have their broken statue punish him. They threw more stones, which only turned back and hit the ones throwing them.

John prayed that the Lord would show these people who’s Lord. An earthquake and sudden heat wave struck and 200 people died; the rest begged John for mercy. John prayed again, raised up the 200 and they all believed, were catechized and baptized.

Following this, John performed many other signs similar to those he and Peter did back in Jerusalem in the early 30’s AD. The demon that dwelt in the temple of Artemis, however, began to fear that John would cast him out and destroy the temple. So the demon assumed the appearance of a magistrate and persuaded some citizens that he was escorting two sorcerers, John and Prochorus, to prison when they escaped. He offered a large bounty for their capture, dead or alive.

¹²⁰ In fact, the Apostle John was very enlightened in the deep matters of the Faith, and is known today as St. John the Theologian.

At first, Romana and Dioscorides rescued John and Prochorus. But then the demon aroused a whole mob against them while they were in Dioscorides' house. John voluntarily surrendered to the mob and they took him to the Temple of Artemis. By his prayers, the "son of thunder" caused the statue of Artemis to topple and the temple to collapse¹²¹. John then forced the demon to confess to his plot and directed him to leave the area. Numberless crowds came to believe and abandoned the worship of idols.

However, certain Jews brought news of this to Emperor Domitian in about 81 AD. Domitian began a great prosecution of Christians and had John arrested. After many beatings, John was forced to drink a cup of strong poison, and then was boiled in oil. Neither of these had any effect. Domitian thought John was immortal and had him exiled to the island of Patmos, a penal colony. On the ship, John was put in irons and Prochorus was punched unmercifully.

On the way to Patmos, one of the sailors fell overboard, drowned and was lost at sea. Everyone on board was grief-stricken except John. John asked each sailor in turn which deity they worshipped. After inquiring of everyone on the ship, John exclaimed how many gods, yet none could save one drowned man. John prayed and a large wave broke over the ship depositing the drowned man alive on the deck at John's feet.

Later on in the voyage, a storm arose and the ship was in danger of breaking up. The crew asked John to pray again, which he did and calmed the sea. Still later, when they ran out of water, John turned seawater into fresh water. Near the end of the voyage, John healed one of the sailors of dysentery. At this, the entire crew wanted to become John's disciples and go wherever he wanted. John replied that this was not proper; they still needed to take him to Patmos lest the emperor punish them. John catechized them and baptized them that day, and then they set sail for Patmos. When they arrived on Patmos, John instructed the entire crew for 10 more days, then blessed them for their return home.

The ship had landed at the city of Flora, and a wealthy man, Myron the governor's father-in-law, took John and Prochorus into his home. At first, a demon afflicting Myron's eldest son set the family against John, but John cast out the demon by writing it a letter telling it to leave. As a result, the entire family believed and was baptized. The governor, Lawrence, sent his wife and son to be baptized also, saying that he would do so also after his term as governor had ended. The wife wished to remain celibate in her father's house, but John would not agree to this. John sent her back to her husband saying that he too would come to believe soon. This happened two years later when his term of office expired.

Many of people in the city came to Myron's home to be catechized, healed and baptized by John. One couple named Basil and Grace, who were barren, asked John to bless them and their house. John catechized them, baptized them, and Grace soon conceived a son, whom she named John. Many wealthy people wanted to offer John large amounts of money. John instructed them to give it to the poor with their own hand in order that they might have treasure in heaven.

¹²¹ One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World was the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus. It burned down in 356 BC and was rebuilt. The Goths burned down the second temple in 256 AD. The Temple was made of marble; it had 106 forty-foot columns, and a tile-covered wooden roof. If this was the same structure that John caused to collapse, perhaps the entire building did not collapse, but only the roof fell in.

Three years after arriving on Patmos, John and Prochorus were in the market place near the temple of Apollo. Some of the priests of Apollo began to sneer at John, ridicule what he taught and deride the Christians that were present. The “son of thunder” prayed, and the temple of Apollo collapsed. The priests immediately grabbed John and inflicted many lashes on him; then they had him thrown into the deepest dungeon. When Myron and his family heard, they got John out, since they were very influential.

The next day, John and Prochorus met a paralytic in the marketplace, who offered to share his small amount of food with them. He apologized that he was not able to serve them. John healed him, and he prepared the lunch with joy and gladness.

Leaving Myron’s house, John and Prochorus went to Proklo and spoke to a Jew named Karos, who was contentious at everything John said. Finally Karos told John to “Shut up!” However, Karos himself became deaf and mute. All present marveled at this and believed in Christ. A philosopher Areotes standing nearby gestured for Karos to fall at John’s feet, which he did. Areotes asked John to free Karos for the sake of love and compassion, which John did. Karos then asked to be baptized.

A magician named Coenops, a master of illusion, lived in the wilderness of Patmos. The priests of Apollo went to him to get him to take revenge on John and kill him. This began a battle between the “son of thunder” and the son of perdition. First Coenops sent demons three times to kill John; but John sent them to torment in the abyss. Finally Coenops was so mad he came to the city to challenge John face to face with his illusions.

Several times, Coenops appeared to raise the dead relatives of grieving bystanders by having demons take the form of the loved ones. Coenops challenged John to do the same, but John calmly and humbly said that the Lord did not send him to do that but to teach deluded people. Then John said that Coenops’ signs would soon come to nothing. Hearing this, the people jumped on John and beat him until they thought he was dead. At 2 AM, Prochorus found John. John told Prochorus to hurry to Myron’s house to tell Myron that all is well. Everyone rushed to see John, whom they found standing in prayer. John asked them all to stay out of Coenops’ way, and remain in Myron’s house.

The next day, Coenops returned with his demons in the form of the “resurrected” loved ones and announced to John how he planned to disgrace and shame John further. At the shore of the Aegean, Coenops clapped his hands together and plunged into the sea out of sight, saying he would return in glory. Then the “son of thunder” prayed that the same fate might befall Coenops as befell Pharaoh. At this, there was a peal of thunder and a “boiling” or stirring of the waters where Coenops went under; after that there was nothing. The people waited for three days for Coenops to return, all to no avail. As for the demons that served Coenops, John ordered them to depart from the island.

Sometime later, a Jew named Philo¹²² met John in the market place and debated John on the Scriptures for two days. As they were debating, a young man brought a sick man for John to heal, which John did. Philo replied, “Teacher, what is love?” John responded, “God is love and

¹²² This is not the same person as the Jewish philosopher Philo, whose writings we have today. The Philo we know today died in c. 50 AD, whereas these events occurred much later.

he who has love has God.” Philo replied, “Therefore show the love of God and come home with me.” John did so and healed Philo’s wife of leprosy while he stayed there. Philo and his wife believed and were baptized.

After John left Philo’s house, he came across two of the priests of Apollo who had urged Coenops against John. One priest asked John to heal his lame son that he too may believe. John said, “First believe, then God will heal your son.” The priest replied, “First heal my son, then I’ll believe.” The “son of thunder” raised his voice, “Do not tempt God that your lack of faith becomes blasphemy. In the Name of Jesus Christ, you shall have your son’s crippled feet.” Then, John sent the other priest with Prochorus to the first priest’s house to bring back the son. When Prochorus got there the child was healed. When the crippled priest saw his son, he cried out with tears in a loud voice, “Have mercy on me, disciple of the Compassionate God.” John then healed him by making the sign of the Cross three times; the priest and his son were then baptized with his entire household.

The next day John and Prochorus went to a long arched building called Domestia where John taught the new Christians. Nearby was a man who had a severe swelling for six years such that he was not able to speak. He motioned for parchment and ink and wrote to John asking for mercy. John took the parchment and wrote back, “In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, regain your health”. When the man received the parchment back, he was healed. The crowds were stunned and many more, including the man who was healed, came to be instructed and baptized.

At about that time, Governor Aquila’s wife was in labor for three days, was unable to deliver the child, and was near death. The governor sent men to get John; as soon as John approached the house, the woman gave birth. The governor and his wife asked to be baptized. John instructed them and baptized Aquila; he told Aquila’s wife that he couldn’t baptize her for 40 days (Leviticus 12:1-4). Aquila wanted to give John a large sum of money to bless his house. John replied that it is not possible to bless a house for money, but that if Aquila would take the money and distribute it to the poor with his own hand, his house would be blessed. Three days later, John ordained presbyters for the city of Flora and they celebrated the Divine Liturgy¹²³.

All the above happened in the city of Flora on Patmos. After three years, John and Prochorus went to Myrinousa where they observed a young man in chains about to be sacrificed to a wolf-god that was actually a demon. John asked a bystander what was going on, and the bystander took him to see the wolf-god coming out of the river. John commanded the demon (wolf-god) to leave the island. The man was very impressed and asked to become a servant of Christ; John baptized him in that river.

As John was exhorting the newly illuminated man, the priests of Zeus came with the young man in chains to prepare their sacrifice. They waited for a long time for the wolf-god to come out of the water, but nothing happened. After a while, John approached the priests and spoke to them about their deception by the demon, and told them that he had sent the demon to the outer darkness by the power of God. Everyone stood in astonishment as John released the young man; no one spoke back to John since no one had ever questioned the worship of the wolf-god. Later in the day, they went back to the city and many listened intently as John taught them about Christ.

¹²³ This was probably the Liturgy of St. James that John was familiar with from living in Jerusalem from 30 to 55 AD.

The priests of Zeus, who worshipped the wolf-god, were very angry with John. One day, one of the priests' sons, Monan, was strangled in a bathhouse of Myrinousa by the same demon that John had cast out of Romana's bathhouse six years earlier. The priest confessed to John that he, too, had come to believe and asked if John would raise his son. John did so, then sent the demon to uninhabited places and baptized the priest, his son and many others.

After seven days, John and Prochorus left for the suburb of Phlogeon where nearly the entire city assembled to listen to John. John cast a demon out of a widow's only son, then catechized and baptized the widow, her son and many others.

On the fourth day that they were there, John stood near the temple of Dionysus (Bacchus) as the pagans were starting an orgy. To keep John from hindering the festival, the priests bound John, took him away and beat him until he was half-dead. John prayed that He would do to this temple as He did to the Philistines' temple by Samson. The temple then collapsed, crushing the twelve priests inside who were preparing the orgy. The rest of the people were horrified and untied John, asking him not to slay them also.

A renowned sorcerer, Noetian, was furious at John for leveling the temple of Dionysus. He conjured up twelve demons to pose as the resurrected twelve priests, pretending that he had raised them. Noetian asked the twelve demons to kill John, but they said they couldn't even get near him, never mind kill him. They told Noetian that he needed to introduce them (in disguise) to the people to trick them into killing John.

Knowing Noetian's intent, John sent Prochorus around the other side of the collapsed temple before Noetian could introduce the demons, and had Prochorus send the demons to a waterless place. When Noetian arrived with the people he had deceived, he tried to "raise" the 12 priests, but nothing happened and he was embarrassed after trying for many hours to "raise" the dead priests. The townsfolk would have killed him if John hadn't prevented them. John instructed them, "Let darkness pass into darkness; you are sons of light, go to the light".

The next day, as John was baptizing 220 people, Noetian turned the water John was using as a baptismal font into blood. John turned it back to pure water and also struck Noetian with blindness. At this, Noetian begged John's mercy, repented, and was baptized. Noetian implored John to come to his house; when John entered Noetian's house, all the idols fell and were smashed. This further strengthened Noetian's faith, and his wife, sons, and servants were also baptized.

After this, John and Prochorus went to the city of Karo, three miles distant. One young man in the crowd, Sosipater, who was listening to John, wanted to follow Christ, but was being hounded by his wealthy mother into incest with her. He invited John to his house to help him resist his mother. The mother, in turn, denounced John and her son to Mark, the governor of Patmos and the governor ordered John and Sosipater sown into leather bags full of poisonous snakes. Before they could do so, John caused the right hands of the governor and the mother to wither.

The governor, who was secretly a Christian, then confessed his faith and begged John's forgiveness. John restored the judge's and the mother's hands and the judge invited John, Prochorus and Sosipater to his house for two days. During this time, the governor and his family

were catechized and baptized. Leaving the governor's house with many honors, John instructed Sosipater to return to his house. Sosipater only wished to follow John, and didn't want to see his wicked mother again.

Meanwhile, the mother had come to profound repentance. When John and Sosipater came to her house, they found her weeping bitterly. She couldn't even look at John, but kept crying on his feet. John comforted her, announced the forgiveness of God to her, then catechized and baptized her and her son. She lived the rest of her life in fasting and prayer and in distributing her wealth to the poor.

Sometime during John's stay on Patmos, he wrote the Book of Revelation. One day John and Prochorus left the city for a grotto in the wilderness, where they spent ten days. Prochorus then left, and John spent ten more days in prayer without food. The Lord then spoke to John that He would reveal great things to John in ten more days. At that time, angels came to John and spoke to him about many things. When Prochorus returned, John sent him back to get parchment and ink; John then dictated to Prochorus for two days the revelations he received.

By the end of John's exile on Patmos, nearly the entire island had come to believe in Christ because of his words, signs and wonders. In c. 96 AD, Emperor Domitian was assassinated and his successor, Nerva, did not persecute the Christians. John was free to return to Ephesus, but all the inhabitants of Patmos wanted John to stay. When he told them that the Lord had instructed him to return to Ephesus, they asked him to draft a written document that they could use to remain steadfast in the faith.

John and Prochorus went about a mile outside the city and spent three days in fasting and prayer on a mountain. John then sent Prochorus back to the city to fetch parchment and ink, and to return in two days. Prochorus returned to find John standing in prayer; John instructed Prochorus to write what he heard John say. For two more days, John spoke and Prochorus wrote. When they finished, they both prayed, and descended the mountain, arriving at Sosipater's house for dinner.

The next day, Prochorus began to copy John's Gospel onto good parchment supplied by Sosipater. While Prochorus copied the Gospel with a fine hand and with great diligence, John ordained bishops and presbyters for all the Churches. After Prochorus finished transcribing John's Gospel, John brought it into the Church, and with everyone assembled, John read the entire Gospel. John then ordered that the Gospel should be copied exactly so that he might take one copy with him.

Just before departing for Ephesus, John went into the countryside to teach the people there. One of the priests of Zeus had a blind son who sat eagerly listening to John. After listening for a long time, the blind son asked John if he could ask God on his behalf to allow the son to see John's face. John made the sign of the Cross on the blind son and said, "In the Name of Jesus Christ, recover your sight". His father, seeing the healing of his son, fell at John's feet and begged him to come to his house and make him and his house servants of Christ. John did so, and after lengthy instruction and baptized them all.

After bidding farewell (with many tears) to the residents of Patmos where John had spent 15 years, John and Prochorus sailed to Ephesus where they were received with great joy, saying,

“Blessed is he that comes in the Name of the Lord”. Dioscorides had died during John’s absence, so his son, Domnus, took them to his home. John remained there while the brethren came to visit and be taught by John. John was in his 80’s at this time.

Clement of Alexandria told¹²⁴ of an event in the life of the Apostle John following his return to Ephesus from Patmos. A young man that he had entrusted to the care of one of the bishops he ordained had wandered away from the Faith to become a robber. John sought the young man out and brought him back to the Church.

“After John returned to Ephesus from Patmos, he left for the territories of the neighboring nations, here to appoint bishops, there to set in order whole Churches, there to ordain such as were marked out by the Spirit. Having come to one of the cities not far off, he put the brethren to rest in other matters. Looking to the bishop he appointed, and seeing a young man, strong, good looking and zealous, he said, ‘This young man I commit to you in all earnestness, in the presence of the Church, and with Christ as witness’. On the bishop accepting, he repeated the same injunction and returned to Ephesus. The presbyter took home the youth committed to him, reared, kept, cherished, and finally baptized him. After this he relaxed his stricter guardianship, under the idea that the seal of the Lord he had set on him was a complete protection to him. But after the young man obtained his premature freedom, some young men of his age, adept at doing evil, corrupted him. First they enticed him by costly entertainment; then afterwards by night, going out for highway robbery, they took him along with them. Then they dared to execute together something greater. By degrees he got accustomed to this and like a hard-mouthing and powerful horse, which had taken the bit between his teeth, rushed with all the more force toward more depravity. Having entirely despaired of salvation in God, he made up his mind to a fate like the rest. Forming a band of robbers, he was the captain of the bandits, the fiercest, the bloodiest, and the cruellest.”

“Time passed, and some necessity emerged in the Church, and they sent again for John. When he had settled the matters that he came for, he said, ‘Come now, bishop, restore to us the deposit which Christ and I committed to you in front of the Church over which you preside, as witness’. The bishop was at first puzzled, thinking that it was a false charge about money, which he didn’t get. But when John said, ‘I demand the young man, and the soul of the brother’, the old man, groaning deeply, burst into tears and said, ‘He is dead’. ‘How and what kind of death?’ John asked. ‘He is dead to God’ the bishop said. ‘For he turned wicked and abandoned the Church, and became a robber; and now he has taken possession of the mountain in front of the Church, along with a band like him’. Tearing his clothes, and striking his head with great lamentation, the Apostle said, ‘It was a fine guard of a brother’s soul I left! But let a horse be brought to me, and let someone be my guide on the way’. He rode away, just as he was, straight from the Church. Coming to the place, he was stopped at the robbers’ outpost; calling out, ‘It was for this I came; lead me to your captain’. The young man was waiting there, armed to fight. But when he recognized John as he advanced, he turned, ashamed, to flight. John followed with all his strength, forgetting his age, calling out, ‘Why, my son, do you run from me, your father, old and unarmed? My son, pity me. Do not be afraid; you still have hope of life. I will give account to Christ for you. If need be,

¹²⁴ Clement of Alexandria, On the Salvation of the Rich Man, 42

I will willingly endure your death, as the Lord did die for us. For you I will surrender my life. Stand, believe; Christ has sent me”.

“The young man, when he heard, first stood looking down; then he threw down his weapons, trembled and wept. As the old man approaching, he embraced him, speaking for himself with lamentations as he could, and baptized a second time with tears. John pledged, assuring him with an oath, that he would find forgiveness for him from God. Leading him back to the Church, John prayed a great deal, striving along with him in continual fasting, subduing his mind by various words, and did not leave until he restored him to the Church. John presented in him a great example of true repentance and a great token of regeneration, a trophy of the resurrection for which we hope. At the end of the world, when the angels, radiant with joy, open the heavens, and receive those who truly repent; before everyone, the Christ Himself goes to meet them and welcome them, conducting them to the Father’s bosom, to eternal life, to the kingdom of heaven.”

During John’s travels in Asia Minor with Prochorus the use of the sign of the Cross was common among the people of God, and unbelievers were also aware of it. This can be illustrated by an example¹²⁵. A Christian had fallen into debt and had nothing to repay his creditors. He went to a Jewish sorcerer and requested some poison with which to kill himself. The Christian returned home, and after a long consideration, he made the sign of the Cross over the poison and drank it. Nothing happened! Unable to escape his creditors, he went back to the Jew and asked for a stronger poison. Astounded that the man was still alive, the Jew gave him something stronger. Again after a long debate over whether to drink it, the Christian made the sign of the Cross over it and drank. Again nothing happened!

Once more he went to the Jew and complained that he was incompetent in his sorcery. The Jew was embarrassed and asked him what he had done, how he drank the poison. The Christian explained how he just made the sign of the Cross over the poison and drank it. The Jew perceived that the sign of the Cross had prevented the man’s death; to know for sure, the Jew gave some of the poison to a dog, and the dog immediately dropped dead. The Jew asked the Christian to take him to the Apostle John, and he told him what had happened. John taught the Jew to believe in Christ and baptized him. John then told the poor Christian to bring him an armful of hay, which the Apostle turned into gold, also using the sign of the Cross and prayer. He told the poor Christian to use this to pay off his debts with half, and use the other half to get his household in order.

John spent the rest of his life in Ephesus in strict fasting and prayer, living as a Nazirite (Numbers 6). Because of his age, he didn’t have the strength to preach anymore but taught just the bishops privately. Tradition states¹²⁶ that the faithful carried him to Church where he would say over and over “Little children, love one another” (1 John 3:10-18). When his disciples asked him why he just said this, he replied, “This is the Lord’s commandment; and if you keep it, it is enough.”

¹²⁵ The Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church, translated and published by Holy Apostles Convent, Buena Vista CO, 2003, September 26.

¹²⁶ Attributed to Jerome.

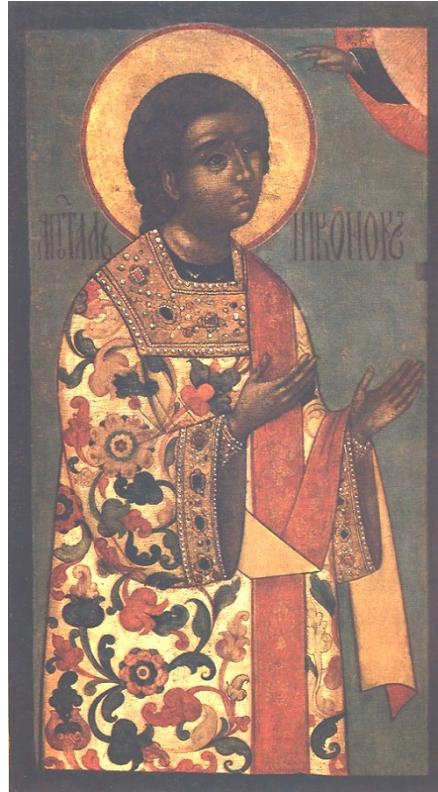
John died in the third year of Trajan (c. 101 AD) at the age of about 94. Most accounts state that John instructed seven of his disciples and six others to go outside the city with him and dig a cross-shaped trench as long as he was tall. As the men dug, John went off to pray. After prayer, John then climbed in the trench and lay down. To Prochorus, he said to go to Jerusalem, for that is where you must end your life. John then gave them instructions to cover him with dirt, and he died as he lay in the grave. The seven then buried him. Later the faithful dug up the grave to give John a more prominent resting-place, but the grave was empty; only his sandals remained.

Deacon Nicanor

Deacon Nicanor was a black man (see Figure 4) that we know little about. Jesus chose him as one of the Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-17), and the saints in Jerusalem chose him as one of the first seven deacons for being “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). This implies that he performed miracles along with the other six deacons. In his icon he is shown in prayer to God, and he is portrayed as being blessed by God. Along with Deacon Stephen, Nicanor was murdered¹²⁷ by stoning along with 200 others.

¹²⁷ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.
Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles, 9.
See also <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>, July 28, December 28.
<http://www.goarch.org/en/chapel/saints.asp?contentid=144>, July 28.

Figure 4
Deacon Nicanor¹²⁸



Deacon Timon

Jesus chose Timon as one of the Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-17), and the saints in Jerusalem chose him as one of the first seven deacons for being “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). This implies that he performed miracles along with the other six deacons.

After serving as deacon in Jerusalem, Timon was established¹²⁹ by the Apostles as bishop of the city of Bostra¹³⁰ in Arabia and suffered from the Jews and pagans for preaching the Gospel. He was thrown into a furnace, but by the power of God, he came out of it unharmed. The tradition of the Roman Church says that Timon died by crucifixion.

¹²⁸ See <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp>

¹²⁹ <http://www.oca.org/FSlives.asp>, July 28.
Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, July 28.

<http://www.goarch.org/en/chapel/saints.asp?contentid=144>, July 28.
Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles, 10.

¹³⁰ Also called Bastoria.

Figure 5
Deacons Timon¹³¹ (front left) and Parmenas (front right)



Deacon Parmenas

Jesus chose Parmenas¹³² as one of the Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-17), and the saints in Jerusalem chose him as one of the first seven deacons for being “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). This implies that he performed miracles along with the other six deacons.

Parmenas zealously preached¹³³ Christ in Macedonia, and Hippolytus lists¹³⁴ him as Bishop of Soli. He died¹³⁵ after being afflicted with an illness, and died before the eyes of the Apostles and was mourned and buried by them. Some are of the opinion that Parmenas suffered under Trajan (98-117) in the final year of his reign, and suffered martyrdom.

Ex-Deacon Nicolas of Antioch

Although Jesus chose Nicolas of Antioch as one of the Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-17), and the saints in Jerusalem chose him as one of the first seven deacons for being “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3), Nicolas later abandoned the Faith to follow the teachings of the sorcerer and arch heretic Simon Magus. This has rather dire implications since he performed

¹³¹ See <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsViewer.asp>

¹³² For an icon of Parmenas, see the icon of Timon.

¹³³ See www.oca.org.

¹³⁴ Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles, 11.

¹³⁵ See <http://www.ocafs.oca.org>, July 28th.

miracles when Jesus sent him out with the Seventy, and he did so again along with the other six deacons.

Hippolytus referred¹³⁶ to Nicolas as the Bishop of Samaria. The Apostles must have sent Nicolas to Samaria to oversee the work started by Deacon Philip (Acts 8:5-13). Simon Magus, who had grown up in Samaria, must have turned Nicolas from the Faith. This occurred after Philip, Peter and John left Samaria (Acts 8:25-26). Simon remained in Samaria for some time, and a great debate occurred¹³⁷ later between him and the Apostle Peter in c. 40 AD. After his debate with the Apostle Peter, Simon went to Antioch, and Nicolas may have followed Simon there.

When Simon went to Antioch in the 40's AD, Nicolas began to follow Simon's teaching that God is the author of evil. Nicolas took this to its extreme, and ended up¹³⁸ with "lechery that knew no rest by night or day, where Nicolas indulged in his filthy dreams".

Simon taught that only the spirit was resurrected (and that at baptism); it did not matter what one did with the body. Nicolas' followers therefore engaged in grossly immoral practices in keeping with the teachings of Simon¹³⁹, who said that to enter fully into their mysteries, they needed to practice all the worst kinds of wickedness in order to escape the cosmic powers¹⁴⁰. Because of the grossness of his practices, early writers¹⁴¹ were too embarrassed to even write down the details of what Nicolas and his followers did.

Eusebius gave a good description regarding how Nicolas came to be this way. Nicolas tried to imitate the holiness of the Apostles, where they gave up the things of this world for the Kingdom of God (Matthew 19:29). Since the Apostles had given up the pleasures of the flesh in their relationship with their wives (those Apostles that were married), Nicolas did this also. But whereas the Apostles traveled with their wives (1 Corinthians 9:5), living as brother and sister¹⁴², Nicolas gave blanket permission to anyone to marry his wife. Nicolas' followers took his words literally and practiced open fornication with her (Revelation 2:6, 15), and Nicolas was branded a heretic because he didn't correct them. Thus he sought to be perfected in the flesh instead of setting his mind on the Spirit (Galatians 3:3, 4:9). Eusebius stated¹⁴³:

"At this time the sect of the Nicolaitans made its appearance and lasted for a very short time. They boasted that the author of their sect was Nicolas, one of the deacons who, with Stephen, were appointed by the Apostles. Clement of Alexandria¹⁴⁴, relates the following things concerning him. 'They say that he had a beautiful wife, and after the Ascension of the Savior, being accused by the Apostles of jealousy, he led her into their midst and gave permission to anyone that wished to marry her. For they say that this was in accord with that saying of his,

¹³⁶ Hippolytus, On the Seventy Apostles, 12.

¹³⁷ For details of this debate, see Mark Kern, Simon Magus the Heresiarch, St Athanasius Press, 2002. Also see Clement of Rome in Roberts and Donaldson, "Recognitions of Clement", I:72 to III:49, PseudoClementine Literature, Ante-Nicene Fathers, v. 8.

¹³⁸ Jerome, "Dialogue Against the Luciferians", 23, Treatises, Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, v. 6.

¹³⁹ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Eusebius, Church History, IV, 7.

¹⁴¹ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

¹⁴² Paul referred to the other Apostles, including Peter and the brothers of the Lord (Jude and Justin Barsabas) as traveling with "a sister, a wife" (1 Corinthians 9:5).

¹⁴³ Eusebius, Church History, III, 29.

¹⁴⁴ Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, III, 4

that one ought to restrict the flesh. And those that have followed his heresy, imitating blindly that which was done and said, commit fornication without shame. But I understand that Nicolas had to do with no other woman than her to whom he was married, and that, so far as his children are concerned, his daughters continued in a state of virginity until old age, and his son remained uncorrupt. If this is so, when he brought his wife, whom he jealously loved, into the midst of the Apostles, he was evidently renouncing his passion; and when he used the expression, ‘to restrict the flesh,’ he was advocating self-control in the face of pleasures. For I suppose that, in accordance with Jesus’ command, he did not wish to serve two masters, pleasure and the Lord. But they say that Matthias also taught in the same manner that we ought to fight against and restrict the flesh, and not give way to it for the sake of pleasure, but strengthen the soul by faith and knowledge”.

The effect of Nicolas doing this was the same as Balaam’s counsel to the king of Moab, and the Apostle John criticized Nicolas very strongly for doing this. Balaam had been hired by Moab to get God to curse Israel, but he couldn’t curse what the Lord had blessed (Numbers 23-25). Therefore he taught Moab to entice Israel into fornication using young Moabite prostitutes, telling them that by doing so, Israel would become defiled and the Lord would then curse Israel.

Matthias, in his life, illustrated what the Apostle Paul later wrote down regarding restricting the flesh. Paul counseled his Churches that in our flesh nothing good dwells (Romans 7:18). If we set our mind on the things of the flesh and live according to the flesh, this is death. But to be spiritually minded is life and peace (Romans 8:5-6, 13). This happens because the fleshly mind is at enmity with God and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:7-8). Therefore, Paul counseled, do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:4), and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts (Romans 13:14).

Doing this generates a conflict. Paul wrote of the lust of the flesh against the Spirit, “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Galatians 5:17). For example, Paul described how this works, “The good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the Law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:19-25).

To deal with this conflict, Matthias taught a strengthening of the soul by faith and knowledge. Paul, in his eloquence, stated this as follows: “We do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. That you may be strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light” (Colossians 1:9-12). This strengthening, however, occurs in the inner man, not in the flesh (Ephesians 3:16).

While Nicolas worked at being “spiritual” by restricting the flesh, he did not do so as Paul stated, but as the Pharisees did.

Hippolytus stated¹⁴⁵ that Nicolas had something to do with organizing the other heretics, and that his heresy was more serious than many of the others.

“There are among the Gnostics diversities of opinion; but we have decided that it would not be worthwhile to enumerate the silly doctrines of these heretics, inasmuch as they are too numerous, devoid of reason and full of blasphemy. Some are of a more serious turn with regard to the Divinity. Nicolas has been a cause of the widespread combination of these wicked men. The Apostles appointed him as one of the seven that were chosen for the diaconate. But Nicolas departed from correct doctrine, and was in the habit of instilling indifference of both life and food. When the disciples of Nicolas continued to offer insult to the Holy Spirit, John reproved them in the Apocalypse as fornicators and eaters of things offered to idols” (Revelation 2:6, 15)

The Apostle John had to deal extensively with Cerinthus and Nicolas. Irenaeus stated¹⁴⁶ that John wrote his Gospel specifically to contradict what these heretics were saying, and that this is apparent in the words that John used to begin his Gospel.

“The Apostle John preached this faith, and sought, by the proclamation of the Gospel, to remove that error which Cerinthus had disseminated among men, and a long time previously by those termed Nicolaitans. The Nicolaitans are an offset of that ‘knowledge’ (Greek: *gnosis*) falsely so called. John desired to persuade them that there is but one God, who made all things by His Word. They allege that the Creator and the Father were not the same; and that the Son and the Christ were not the same. They say that He descended upon Jesus, the Son of the Creator, and flew back again into His Pleroma”.

“John desired to put an end to all such doctrines, and to establish the rule of truth in the Church, that there is one Almighty God, who made all things by His Word, both visible and invisible. He showed at the same time, that by the Word, through whom God made the creation, He also bestowed salvation on the men included in the creation. Thus John commenced His teaching in the Gospel, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. He made all things, and without Him was nothing made. What was made was life in Him, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it’ (John 1:1-5). ‘All things’, he says, ‘were made by Him’. Therefore in ‘all things’ this creation of ours is included, for we cannot concede to these men that the words ‘all things’ are spoken in reference to those within their Pleroma”.

Tertullian also wrote¹⁴⁷ of these 1st century heretics, Menander, Saturninus, Basilides and Nicolas, how they were related in their teachings.

“A brother heretic emerged in Nicolas. He was one of the seven deacons who were appointed by the Apostles. He claims that Darkness was seized with sexual desire for Light. Out of this mixture it is a shame to say what fetid and

¹⁴⁵ Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies, VII, 23.

¹⁴⁶ Irenaeus, Against Heresies, III, xi, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Tertullian, Against All Heresies, II, ix Appendix, 1.

unclean combinations arose. The rest of his teachings, too, are obscene. He tells of certain Aeons, sons of turpitude, and of conjunctions of obscene embraces, and certain yet baser outcomes of these. He teaches that there were born seven demons, and gods, and spirits, and other things sufficiently sacrilegious alike and foul, which we blush to talk about. Enough it is for us that this heresy of the Nicolaitans has been condemned by John, with the weightiest authority, saying, ‘But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate’” (Revelation 2:6).

One technique of these heretics that Paul warned Timothy about was the leading captive of the gullible, especially those loaded down with sins (2 Timothy 3:6-7). Jerome wrote¹⁴⁸ that it was common for Simon and the heretics that followed him to use women for fornication and other purposes:

“What object is served by ‘Gullible women laden with sins, carried about with every wind of doctrine, ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth?’ (2 Timothy 3:6-7, Ephesians 4:14) Or how do the men with itching ears help things (2 Timothy 4:3)? They know neither how to hear nor how to speak? They confound old mire with new cement and, as Ezekiel says, plaster a wall with whitewash; so that, when the truth comes in a shower, they are brought to nothing” (Ezekiel 13:10-16).

As examples of this, Jerome noted, “It was with the help of the harlot Helena that Simon Magus founded his sect. Bands of women accompanied¹⁴⁹ Nicolas of Antioch (Revelation 2:14-15), that deviser of all uncleanness. Apelles possessed in Philumena an associate in his false doctrines. Montanus, that mouthpiece of an unclean spirit, used two rich and high born ladies Prisca and Maximilla first to bribe and then to pervert many churches”.

Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians was written in the early 60’s AD from the rented house, where he was staying in Rome under house arrest (Acts 28:16, 30-31). Paul had founded the Church in Philippi on his Second Missionary Journey in the early 50’s AD, and he had made two brief visits to Philippi (Acts 20:1, 6) on his Third Missionary Journey c. 58 AD.

Prior to the founding of the Church in Philippi, Nicolas of Antioch had joined Simon’s heresy. The influence of the Nicolaitans and others in Philippi is evident from Paul’s Epistle, where Paul warned the Philippians to beware of the sensuality and depravity of the Nicolaitans and other followers of Simon. Paul said,

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and whose glory *is* in their shame, who set their mind on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19).

Prior to saying this, Paul had warned the Philippians to beware of those who follow the practices of the Nicolaitans, “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit” (Philippians 3:2-3). The term “dog” was used in the Mosaic Law to refer to a Sodomite, where the Law stated:

¹⁴⁸ Jerome, Letter to Ctesiphon, CXXXIII, 4.

¹⁴⁹ Nicolas was said to be celibate, but those that accompanied him were not. Nicolas did not rebuke his followers who were immoral.

“There shall be no temple prostitute of the daughters of Israel, or a perverted one of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the wages of a prostitute or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 23:17-18).

Paul contrasted the term¹⁵⁰ “mutilation” with the term “circumcision”, again referring to some of the gross practices of the Nicolaitans. By saying that the Philippians were the “circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit”, Paul was referring to the Mosaic Law. The Law had taught that true worshippers of God were circumcised in heart (Deuteronomy 10:14-17, 30:5-6), and that the flesh was just an outward sign of something greater within.

Nicolas seems to have lived a long life, without noticeable persecution like the Christian community, but accounts of his life do not focus on this.

¹⁵⁰ Jesus had said, “There are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake” (Matthew 19:12). Those who were born eunuchs are the people who are comfortable remaining celibate. Those who were made so by men are the “mutilation”, also known in medieval times as the “Castrati”, or singers who were castrated as a boy to preserve a soprano voice. Those who made themselves eunuchs are the Twelve Apostles and others, who voluntarily gave up the pleasures of the flesh, along with other things of this world.