

Who was Prochorus in the Bible?

Prochorus was one of seven men chosen by the apostles to care for widows and assist with the distribution of food to the poor in the Jerusalem church. In other words, Prochorus was one of the very first deacons.

In Acts 6, the early church in Jerusalem was rapidly increasing in numbers. With that growth came problems. A question of discrimination arose between the Greek-speaking believers and the Hebrew-speaking believers. The point of contention revolved around the distribution of food to widows, but the trouble went far beyond that to the age-old problem of prejudice.

It is likely that Prochorus was one of the Greek-speaking Jews in the early church. Even though these Greek-speaking Christians were Jewish (called “Hellenists”), they were considered outsiders among the “pure-blooded” Jews in Jerusalem and were often treated like lower-class citizens. Since the Greek-speaking widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food, the Hellenist Christians complained to the church leadership.

The language Luke uses in Acts 6 seems to indicate that the neglect of the widows was purely an oversight and not intentional. The Greek-speaking widows had simply slipped through the cracks. Having their hands full with the ministry of the Word and prayer, the apostles had not assigned anyone to handle these practical matters. So, they gathered all the believers together and made a proposal: “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to

prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2-4).

The believers liked the idea and chose seven men for the job. Prochorus was one of them: "And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch" (Acts 6:5, ESV). Since all seven had Greek names, they were likely all Hellenist Jews. The name Prochorus means "leader of the chorus (or dance)" in Greek.

This episode involving Prochorus illustrates how God uniquely equips believers for distinct types of service in His church. Everyone is called to minister, but different tasks require different giftings and qualifications. The seven men in Prochorus's group served as forerunners of the formal office of deacon in the church. The term deacon is used in Acts 6 only in a general sense to indicate the type of ministry or service that these seven performed. It wasn't until later in the development of the church that the term was applied to the distinctly structured church office of deacon (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Apart from this mention in Acts 6:5, Prochorus is otherwise unknown in the Bible. Tradition suggests that he was one of the seventy-two sent out by Jesus in Luke 10:1, that he became bishop of Nicomedia, and that he died a martyr at Antioch.