

Episode #1133 Acts 6 Part 2-Accusation Against Stephen

I. Acts is unique in the New Testament. Rather than the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth, it focuses on what came after, when the Lord had ascended back into heaven. The Lord left His disciples with many commands to carry out, and Acts tells us how they did them.

II. The believers were all in a Great Unity in Jerusalem, Acts 4:32. This was in answer to the Lord Jesus' request in John 17:21. In Acts 5 we saw two great challenges to that unity: one from within, and one from without. In Acts 6 we saw a second great challenge to that unity from within, as the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews. The Lord answered that challenge by having His apostles choose the seven. Now a second challenge from without arises in an accusation against Stephen.

III. The Ministry of Stephen. Acts 6:7-8.

- A. Acts 6:7. This was largely the Old Testament, interpreted now in the light of Jesus Christ. The word of God continued to grow, It being a living thing, it must grow. A passage which has spoken its message to one generation may speak much more truth to later generations. The Word of God is inexhaustible, and no one verse in it can ever be exhausted. The number of disciples continued to multiply greatly, as the Lord proved nothing could destroy the unity He built. This in spite of the attack of the Sanhedrin, the beating of the apostles, and the murmuring of the Hellenists. It must now have grown from five thousand to tens of thousands of believers in Jerusalem...the majority of the population! Yet every single one was an Israelite, with not a single Gentile in the picture. Even a great number of priests!
- B. Verse 8. The seven did not just distribute food and money. Stephen was working the same kinds of works the twelve had been doing. It is evident that these signs and miracles were used to confirm a teaching ministry, as we see in the next verses. He now has a greater influence, due to his identification with the Seven, and God increases the work He is doing through him.

IV. A Plot for Stephen's Arrest. Acts 6:9-15.

- A. Verse 9. Stephen has a teaching ministry in a Synagogue of the Freedmen.
 - 1. There were many synagogues in Jerusalem, in spite of the fact that the temple was there. The temple was the only holy building. Synagogues were community centers for the Jews.
 - 2. Some of the Jews who moved to Jerusalem from other countries built their own synagogues. They would have been composed mostly of Hellenists. The *Companion Bible* suggests, "During the Civil Wars, many Jews had been enslaved, and afterwards set free by their masters. A manumitted slave was called *libertinus*. These were probably the descendants of such freedmen who had returned to Jerusalem, after the decree of Tiberius expelling Jews from Rome about 20 A.D."
 - 3. Tarsus was the capital of Cilicia in Asia, so Saul probably comes in here.
- B. Verse 10. Those who opposed Stephen cannot argue with him, since God's Spirit was inspiring him. "The Spirit" here has the article, and means the Person of the Spirit. They couldn't argue with Stephen any more than anyone could argue with the Lord Himself! They could hardly attack the apostles since they were Hebrews, but they could attack Stephen, himself a Hellenist.

- C. Verse 11. Since they cannot defeat him fairly, they act unfairly. They pay off false witnesses. Moses was revered in Israel, perhaps too much, elevated next to God. They do this in their accusation.
- D. Verse 12. They stir up the people and appeal to their emotions. They probably fan their religious zeal with this story of blasphemy. Then they come with this mob and the elders and scribes to officially charge him. They bring him before the Sanhedrin, the same corrupt senate of Israel that condemned the Lord to death, and commanded the twelve to obey them rather than God. God will now charge the Sanhedrin with their guilt.
- E. Verse 13. They set up the false witnesses, probably talking them up as honest, zealous, and patriotic men. They imply that Stephen blasphemes continually. They charge him with blaspheming the temple and the law. Notice that this trial takes place in the temple, the same place the believers were also meeting!
- F. Verse 14. Compare this to the accusation against the Lord Jesus brought before the Sanhedrin in His trial in Matthew 26:61. This is an even more garbled version of that same charge. Though this was a false charge, many today who call themselves “Preterists” teach that the Lord actually did this in 70AD! The Lord did not seek to change the customs Moses gave either. What He sought to change was the traditions the rabbis had built up around the law to make it of no effect.
- G. Verse 15. God was not silent then as He is now, and so He steps into the trial to miraculously change Stephen’s appearance. Even though his life is to end, the Lord shows everyone that He is with His faithful martyr.
 - 1. What does an angel’s face look like? The word *angelos* in Greek means messenger or agent, and can be used for heavenly or human messengers. Here it means a heavenly angel, since human messengers have no special appearance. Genesis 18:2; 19:1. Heavenly messengers look much like men.
 - 2. Matthew 28:3. The angel’s face was “like lightning.” Luke 24:4. The two angels are described as men in shining clothes. Stephen’s face must have started to shine, like an angel’s face.
 - 3. Who was the only other man whose face shone in the Bible? Exodus 34:29-30. Moses! The same sign that showed that Moses had been in God’s presence now proved that God was with Stephen! How could they accuse Stephen of blaspheming Moses, when Stephen’s face now shone like Moses’ face had after he met with God?

V. Conclusion: Stephen was God’s man and God’s agent. He must have had a great ministry through the power of the Spirit. When his enemies could not contradict him by fair means, they turned to foul, as unjust men will often do. Their charges were trumped up and false, yet made to look legitimate and serious. The Lord was with His witness, and showed it openly, even though He would not stop his death.