

- A Study in Acts -

**Chapter Six – First Church Problem – Stephen Accused**

**ACTS 6:8-15:**

As we began the **sixth chapter**, we were introduced to the first problem that the early church in Jerusalem would face. It did not surface until after murmuring had first occurred; but once on the surface, it was swiftly solved in an orderly, wise manner. Once solved and unity returned, the result was something we all should seek:

**Acts 6:7** “Then 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.”

In this lesson, we will now focus on one of the seven chosen by the body to assist in the resolve of the previous issue: Stephen. This will start a new discourse that will last through the **seventh chapter**. It is in this opening that we will learn what Stephen’s defense in the next chapter will be for.

**Text #1:**

**Acts 6:8** “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.”

**Full of Faith and Power:** In the opening portion of this chapter, as the brethren selected out the seven men who would be appointed to take care of the distribution to the widows; Stephen is described as “**full of faith and the Holy Spirit**” (Vs. 5).

Being full of the Spirit was one of the qualifications for the work he had been selected for. Here it is described, in the case of Stephen (as it will be described in the case of Philip as well – **Acts 8:6-7**), as one of the spiritual gifts that were bestowed on some by the hands of the Apostles (**1 Corinthians 12:8-10**).

Being full of faith, is being full of the word unto righteousness (**Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6** – belief combined with the act of seeking Him); we will additionally see at the end of the **seventh chapter** that this faith may also be that of the spiritual gifts in **1 Corinthians 12:8-10**, as well. The power mentioned here is described in the things he is going to do alongside of the words he is speaking.

**Great Wonders and Signs:** These are not random acts (**Mark 16:20** – confirmation!), nor were they done in corners, or among the unknown (thus the universal wonder caused by their performance). These signs are substantial and cause legitimacy surrounding the words to be spoken.

## Text #2:

**Acts 6:9** “Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.”

**Antagonists:** Even in the face of the wonders and signs being performed, these men have chosen to dispute the words of Stephen. This always causes me to think of brethren who I have heard say, “*I wish the Lord were here, things would be different!*” Really?

The Lord when He was here; was also confirmed with signs and wonders (**Luke 4:14-15; John 3:2; Acts 2:22**), this did not stop His enemies, it did not stop those who wished to do what they wanted (**John 3:19**), it did not stop these men from disputing with Stephen, and it would not stop anyone today with the same mentality!

It stands as testimony as to why we must continue to educate ourselves and submit to the pure wisdom of God (**James 3:17-18**), and avoid this self-inflicted denial and ignorance (we walk by faith and not by sight! -**2 Corinthians 5:6-7**).

**Synagogue of the Freedmen:** Also referred to in other translations as “**Libertines**”; which is universally describing Jews from the countries mentioned in parenthesis (having come from areas in north Africa, and Asia Minor), who have acquired their freedom. It does not mention the method of this transition from slavery to freedom; however, we know that this took place at this time, historically, in two ways:

**One**, it was awarded to the individual. Usually for some great deed, performance of a duty, etc...

**Two**, it was purchased for a sum of money (the third way, one avoided slavery that does not apply to these, is by being born to it, either born to privilege, or as a citizen of Rome).

These men, having gained their freedom, have banded together in synagogue assembly, and in disputing with Stephen.

## Text #3:

**Acts 6:10-14** “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. <sup>11</sup> Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” <sup>12</sup> And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council. <sup>13</sup> They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; <sup>14</sup> for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.””

**Not Able to Resist:** As it was with the Lord when He was here on earth, when He silenced His critics with the sound truth, they turned to attempting to attack Him. These Freedmen cannot resist the wisdom of Stephen, as he speaks concerning the Christ from their own Law (Law of

Moses). There is no indication that Stephen had to become angry, yell, or any other aggressive tactic; just speak the truth!

The lesson for us:

**2 Timothy 2:24-25** “**And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,** <sup>25</sup> **in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth**”

This wall of truth would not stop these men; on the contrary, when they could not match the wisdom of Stephen’s words, they set out to have false accusation brought against him (once again similar to the enemies of the Lord – **Matthew 26:59-63**). These men who would offer this false testimony were induced; this insinuates that they were bribed to offer their false charges.

Two of these false accusations would be sufficient to stir up “**the people, elders, and scribes**”; which would lead to Stephen being brought before the council.

Once before the council, two more false accusations would be brought against him. This would make four charges that Stephen would have to answer for now, to the council (Sanhedrin).

**The Charges:** All the charges being brought against Stephen are preceded by the universal charge of blasphemy (to speak evil of God – to revile, is to speak evil of men). He is charged with speaking blasphemous words against; “**Moses and God**” (**Vs. 11**), then “**this holy place and the law**” (**Vs. 13**).

None of these charges are legitimate, as it was Moses himself, as a prophet of God, who spoke concerning the Messiah as the greater prophet whom the people should hear in all things or be judged by God (**Deuteronomy 18:15-18; Acts 3:22-24**; Peter has already reminded those whom he preached to in the temple of this statement of Moses). Stephen has only spoken to the fulfillment of the events the Old Law has pointed to!

**Text #4:**

**Acts 6:15** “**And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.**”

There is no indication of anything miraculous happening here; simply that Stephen, in the presence of the council and accusation is displaying an aura of calmness, dignity, and confidence in God and Jesus Christ as Lord. All those present are simply witnesses to his countenance that speaks as clearly of his innocence as his coming words.