

**"The Trial of Stephen"****Part 1****Acts 6:8-7:60**

**Introduction:** Last week in our study we looked at Acts 6:1-7 and it was in these verses that we were made aware of a problem that arose within the early church. The Grecian Jewish women were complaining because they were not treated as the Hebrew Jewish women. The Grecian Jews seemed to be treated as outsiders. The apostles were very alert to the fact that this was a problem that needed to be addressed and it was a problem that could result in a distraction. The apostles knew they had the responsibility of studying the Word of God and praying over the Word so that they could feed the believers with the Word of God. Therefore, they suggested that the church chose 7 men to take care of meeting the needs of the widows. These 7 men make up the first deacon board. One man in this group was named Steven.

**Notice Acts 6:3-5**

From these verses we can see that Stephen is a man who was full of faith, wisdom, and the Holy Spirit. Now as we move on in our study Stephen is going to become the focus starting in 6:8 and the Holy Spirit will follow Stephen right up to his martyrdom at the end of chapter 7.

Now, before we get into the life of Stephen, I want to raise a question. Why is there so much Scripture and time given to Stephen? In order to answer this question we need to see several other verses.

**Acts 1:6-9**

*<sup>6</sup> When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*

*<sup>7</sup> And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

***<sup>8</sup> But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.***

*<sup>9</sup> And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.*

The last Words Jesus spoke to the disciples was that they would be witnesses to the uttermost part of the earth. This means that the Gospel would be carried out into all the world.

Getting back to Acts 6, by the time this chapter opens the Gospel has only been preached in Jerusalem, but this is all about to change.

### Acts 7:59-60

*<sup>59</sup> And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

*<sup>60</sup> And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

### Acts 8:1

*And Saul was consenting unto his death. **And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.***

The death of Stephen will be the trigger that launches the Gospel out into the world as the persecution increases and causes the Christians to be scattered. Stephen is a transitional man in the sense that his death is used to send the Gospel into all the world. This is why there is so much emphasis placed upon Stephen.

## I. Stephen's Stand

### Notice Acts 6:8

Stephen went from deacon to miracle worker. We are told two important points about Stephen here.

1. He was full of faith.
2. He was full of power.

The order of these two points is very important. It was Stephen's faith that allowed the power of God to flow through him.

### Hebrews 11:6

*<sup>6</sup> **But without faith it is impossible to please him:** for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Stephen was a man of faith, and his faith was pleasing to the Lord and therefore the Lord chose us him in a powerful way. Let us now consider Stephen's faith.

We are told that Stephen was FULL of faith. This means that he was completely controlled by his faith in God. He believed that God was in complete control of every situation in his life and therefore he would live his life for God and trust God with every detail of his life. Stephen was a man who did not worry about things, he simply trusted the Lord. Stephen lived the Words of Jesus in Matthew 6.

**Matthew 6:31-34**

*<sup>31</sup> Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*

*<sup>32</sup> (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*

*<sup>33</sup> But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

*<sup>34</sup> Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

Stephen's life was filled/controlled by faith. Faith was a controlling action in his life. But there is yet another question, "What did Stephen have faith in?" I believe his sermon in Acts 7 helps us to see what Stephen's faith was resting in.

**Notice Acts 7:1-5**

This is just a small part of Stephen's sermon and I read this to help you to see that Stephen was telling the high priest how God started the nation of Israel.

**Notice Acts 7:51-52**

Stephen explains that from the nation came the Promised One whom they killed. So we can see two major points in Stephen's faith.

**1. He believed that God was sovereign over history.**

Man does not control what unfolds in the world, but God does. God was the One who called Abram and made of him a great nation. It was God who decided that Jesus Christ would come from the nation of Israel. God had planned all of this, and Stephen believed this.

Application:

Let me just say that when we understand that God is the One who controls the events of this world, and we rest our faith in Him to work His will then there is a great peace that settles in our hearts.

**Daniel 2:20-22**

<sup>20</sup> Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:

<sup>21</sup> And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

<sup>22</sup> He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

**Daniel 4:34-35**

<sup>34</sup> And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation:

<sup>35</sup> And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

When we understand and we believe this Truth then there is a rest that God has for us to enter into.

**Hebrews 4:3, 6, 9-10**

<sup>3</sup> For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

<sup>6</sup> Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

<sup>9</sup> There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

*<sup>10</sup> For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.*

Stephen knew and lived in this rest because he believed God to be in control over all the events of this world.

**2. Stephen also believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah.**

**Notice Acts 7:51-52**

Stephen explains that from the nation came the Promised One whom they killed. He believed that Jesus died for his sins, was buried, and rose from the grave. He believed that Jesus was coming back just as He promised. He believed the Old Testament, so he believed in the New Covenant and the spiritual blessings that were attached with it.

**Notice Acts 6:9**

Stephen went to the synagogue of the Libertines which means "THE SYNAGOGUE OF THE FREEDMEN." These were freed slaves that had returned to Jerusalem to worship. It is believed that there were over 400 synagogues in Jerusalem at this time. Stephen went to this particular synagogue to proclaim the Truth. It is believed by many that Saul of Tarsus/Paul attended this synagogue because of the mention of Cilicia because that is where Tarus was. The Jews that were in the synagogue disputed with Stephen.

He was not invited here but he made a choice to go into the synagogue to share the Truth of the Gospel. The Jews there were deep into Judaism and Stephen was all about grace and Truth.

**Notice Acts 6:10**

These men could not stand against Stephen in a debate. They were all about the Law and every time they pointed to the Law Stephen pointed them to Jesus Christ who was the fulfillment of the Law. Stephen did not attack the Law but would have used the Law to show them their sinfulness and their need of the Savior.

**Matthew 5:17**

*<sup>17</sup> Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*

**Application:**

This is why it is so important that believers know the Word of God today. Our society today is trying to change the Truth and therefore there is a need for believers to proclaim the Truth. Let me share with you a small section of a letter from James Dobson.

*We are at a critical moment in America. What happens on Election Day this November will have a profound impact on the future of our country. The sanctity of life, religious liberty, and our children's future are all at stake. In fact, truth itself is up for a vote.*

*A close colleague shared this article with me that was written by her pastor, Phil Congdon. He shepherds the New Braunfels Bible Church in Texas. His writing sheds tremendous light on the epic battle that now grips our nation. As you take in the words, I pray God will move you toward action in this upcoming election, and never let the lies of the world overcome the truth that our Lord has graciously revealed to us through His Word.*

***"This past summer, the federal government announced the creation of a "Disinformation Governance Board" to define whether something is: true" or not. The idea of political leaders determining what is true is hauntingly Orwellian. Politicians are far better known for distorting the truth! Thankfully, this bureaucratic creation was put on hold-hopefully never to return. But don't count on it. The desire to control what is "true" has been seen all too often in recent history"***

Let us get back to Stephen and see what the opposition did when they could not win the debate.

#### **Notice Acts 6:11**

They "suborned" men to testify against Stephen. This means "they secretly and unlawfully brought men in to be false witnesses." Most likely they bribed man to come to testify against Stephen.

#### **Conclusion:**

We will start here next week but as I close, I need to point out something here that is very important. Up to this point the people showed favor toward the disciples of Jesus Christ. The Sanhedrin were not happy, but the people had no problem. But right here where we stopped this is all about to change. This is the beginning of what will bring the persecution.

#### **Application:**

Let us not forget that we must be grounded in the Word of God because within a short period of time things can quickly turn around.