

Acts 6:8-7:60 **Stephen – Ministry – Martyrdom**

Stephen the man

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Opposition from Synagogue of the Freedmen

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. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council.

False Witnesses before the Council

13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."

Face of an angel

15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

Acts 7:1-60

1 Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

Witness of Stephen before the Council – History of Israel

2 And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, 3 and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.'

4 Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell.

5 And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. 6 But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years. 7 'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.'

8 Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot the twelve patriarchs.

9 "And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

11 Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers

first. ¹³ And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. ¹⁴ Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people.

¹⁵ So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. ¹⁶ And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem.

¹⁷ "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸ till another king arose who did not know Joseph. ¹⁹ This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.

²⁰ At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. ²¹ But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. ²² And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

²³ Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. ²⁴ And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. ²⁵ For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. ²⁶ And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' ²⁷ "But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? ²⁸ 'Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?'

²⁹ Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons. ³⁰ And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. ³¹ When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, ³² saying, 'I am the God of your fathers-- the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. ³³ "Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. ³⁴ "I have surely seen the oppression of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt." '

³⁵ This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

³⁷ "This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.' ³⁸ This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, ³⁹ whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, 'Make us gods to go before us; as for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has

become of him.' ⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

⁴² Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets:

'Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices during forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? ⁴³ You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, And the star of your god Remphan, Images which you made to worship; And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.'

⁴⁴ "Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, ⁴⁵ which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, ⁴⁶ who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.

⁴⁷ But Solomon built Him a house. ⁴⁸ However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

⁴⁹ 'Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what is the place of My rest? ⁵⁰ Has My hand not made all these things?'

Application to the Council

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, ⁵³ who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

Wrath of the Council

⁵⁴ When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

Vision of Heaven – Jesus beside God

⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Stoning of Stephen – Introduction of Saul (Paul)

⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. NKJV

Facts Revealed:

Stephen the man – Power of the Holy Spirit

✠ And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. [Acts 6:8]

- ✧ Stephen, one of the seven appointed by the Apostles to oversee the serving of tables in the distribution of support for the needy. The qualifications required that he was known to be: a man with a **good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.** [Acts 6:1-5]
- ✧ Not only did Stephen enjoy a **good reputation, Holy Spirit, and wisdom,** but he also was full of **faith,** having his ministry confirmed by the **power** of the **Holy Spirit working great wonders and signs through him among the people.**

Opposition from Synagogue of the Freedmen

- ✧ Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. [Acts 6:9-10]
- ✧ The work of the Holy Spirit was evident in the power of Stephen's wisdom and Spirit by which he spoke that could not be resisted. [Acts 6:9-10]
- ✧ Jesus had promised power to be witnesses would accompany the gift of the Holy Spirit. [Luke 24:49, Acts 1:8]
- ✧ This power of the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples of the early Church and not restricted to the Apostles alone. Stephen and Philip were Deacons not Apostles, yet both had the power given by the Holy Spirit to work miracles, and Wisdom to answer those who opposed the message, and Boldness to face hostility of religious leaders with their false witnesses.
- ✧ Fulfillment of the promise of Jesus:
 - But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. [Matthew 10:17-20, Mark 13:11]

False Witnesses before the Council

- ✧ Then **they secretly induced men** to say, "**We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.**" And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also 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 6:11-14]
- ✧ Religious people then as now, when confronted by a testimony and witness they can not refute, often resort to trumped up charges and false witnesses. Human nature has not changed much over the past two thousand years.
- ✧ This was the same reaction to the truth that Jesus had experienced when the Chief Priests and members of the Council had called false witnesses seeking to condemn Jesus to death. [Matthew 26:59-60, Mark 14:55-58]

Face of an angel

- ✧ And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. [Acts 6:15]
- ✧ This was a Holy Radiance similar to the Transfiguration of Jesus. [Matthew 17:2, Mark 9:2]
- ✧ It was proof as a visible sign of evidence that demonstrated that Jesus was present with Stephen at the stoning, and that Stephen was on his way home to be with Jesus in rest and comfort.

High Priest's question

- ✧ Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?" [Acts 7:1]

Witness of Stephen before the Council – History of Israel

- ✚ Stephen began his testimony before the Council by reciting a brief summary of the history of Israel which was well known by those examining him, This account was acceptable to them. [Acts 7:2-50]

Application to the Council

- ✚ "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it." [Acts 7:51-53]
- ✧ Being full of the Holy Spirit and speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit, Stephen drew the application to the religious leaders of the Council before whom he stood to give his testimony.
- ✧ The application was direct and forceful and he identified the Council members with the leaders of Israel who in the history of Israel had resisted all the prophets God had sent to them to call them to repentance that they could be helped. Not only were they guilty of persecuting the prophets sent to them, but they had even killed the Just One Who had been sent to be their Savior.
- ✧ They have no excuse, because they had received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.

Wrath of the Council

- ✚ When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. [Acts 7:54]
- ✧ The fury of religious leaders who reject God's plan of Salvation is unmatched with viciousness.

Vision of Heaven – Jesus beside God

- ✚ **But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"** [Acts 7:55-56]
- ✧ As with Joseph, when his brothers were angry with him and wanted to kill him, God stepped in and gave him two dreams which infuriated them even more. [Genesis 37:2-36]
- ✧ The same way now that the Council is furious at the accusation of Stephen, God steps in and gives Stephen a vision that drives them to viciously stone Stephen to death.
- ✧ In both cases, the dream and vision are true, but the adversaries can not accept it.
- ✧ This again shows the contrast between the ways of human beings and the ways of God.
- ✧ Stephen's reward is secure, as Jesus stood up to receive him home.

Stoning of Stephen – Introduction of Saul (Paul)

- ✚ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. [Acts 7:57-58]
- ✧ The Council of Jewish leaders cast Stephen out of the city of Jerusalem and stoned him.
- ✧ Saul (Paul) the zealous young Pharisee stood guard over their cloths approving of the stoning. [Acts 22:19-20]
- ✧ This is the first mention of Saul who was to become Paul the greatest of the Apostles to the Gentiles who wrote most of the epistles of the New Testament.
- ✚ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. [Acts 7:59-60]

- ✧ Stephen died at the hands of the Jewish Council calling on God to receive his spirit.
- ✧ And like Jesus had done as He was dieing, Stephen also prayed for the forgiveness of the ones who were killing him. [\[Acts 7:60, Luke 23:34\]](#)