

Stephen Seized



Ice-Breaker

Are you more likely to "rock-the-boat" or keep "peace-at-any-price"?



Scripture Passage

Acts 6:8-15

⁸Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. ⁹Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, ¹⁰but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

¹¹Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

¹²So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

¹⁵All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.



Bible Study

1. What do you think Stephen was like?

2. Immigrant Jews often formed their own synagogues in Jerusalem. How is their opposition to Stephen like and unlike the opposition the apostles faced from the Sanhedrin (5:27-28)?



Reference Notes

6:9 *Synagogue of the Freedmen.* Commentators differ on whether Luke was referring to one synagogue composed of Jews from all these areas, or to two (or more) synagogues. Since the Jews from outside of Palestine were not fluent in Aramaic, they had their own synagogues. It is probable that Stephen, as a Greek-speaking Jew, was a member of this synagogue. The Freedmen were former Roman slaves (or their descendants) released by their masters and granted Roman citizenship. The Greek-speaking Jews who left home and family to settle in Jerusalem were especially devoted to the temple and its religious system.

6:14 The root of the complaint against Stephen was the charge that the followers of Jesus threatened to destroy the temple and replace the laws of Moses with their own ways. The fact is that Stephen, following Jesus, probably did preach something that could have been misconstrued in this way. Jesus spoke of destroying the temple in a way that was likewise misunderstood (Mark 14:58; John 2:19-22). Stephen taught that since Jesus himself was the new "place" of worship where the presence of God could truly be known, the temple was no longer necessary since Jesus offered the final, ultimate sacrifice (see also Hebrews 9-10). Jesus also spoke of the destruction of the temple that was to come (Luke 21:5-6); Stephen, in repeating this warning of judgment that would result if

the Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah, may have been misunderstood as inferring that the Christians were plotting an all out attack on the temple. Regarding the second charge, Jesus repeatedly challenged the oral traditions that had developed around the Law (Matthew 5:21-22,27-28,31-32, 33-34,38-39,43-44; 9:14-15; 12:2ff). As far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, to challenge this tradition was to challenge the Law itself. If Stephen followed Jesus' lead in this matter, then he too would be seen as one who was advocating carelessness about the Law.

6:15 like the face of an angel. His face radiated with divine glory. Ironically, the only other biblical character who shared this experience was Moses whom Stephen was charged with defying (Exodus 34:29-31; 2 Corinthians 3:13).

Caring Time

What two adjectives best describe your spiritual life? What would be different if you were "full of grace and power"?