

Introduction:

The church as Jerusalem is growing but that doesn't mean they were problem free. Think of the letters written to Christians about "Christian Living"; handling personal sin, sin within the camp, personal problems, abuse of Lord's Supper and spiritual gifts, Jew/Gentiles, etc. It must have been real interesting in a lot of those churches. **Acts 6.1-7** the neglect of the Hellenist widows was handled. Now we turn our attention to a new preacher and a hostile crowd.

Acts 6:8 *And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 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. 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." 15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.*

I) Church at Jerusalem

A) A bunch of new Christians.

1. A lot of changes were taking place; from Sabbath to Sunday, daily sacrifices to only one sacrifice and its remembrance, eventually things like dietary laws would be an issue.
2. Everything new creates challenges and problems. (New math, new routines, new exercises, etc.)

B) New Christians meant learning the “milk of the word,”

1 Peter 2:1 *Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

1. While a lot of attention was given to these new Christians, we see the efforts of evangelism continued.
2. They did not say, let's us teach these twenty to 30,000 people and then look for more converts.

C) Synagogues

1. Development was during the Babylonian captivity when temple worship, daily sacrifices stopped.
2. Estimated Jerusalem had 480 synagogues.

II) Stephen

A) Proof of someone other than the Apostles teaching.

1. He had been selected as one of the 7 to serve with the Hellenist widows.
2. Notice he had a job, but that did not stop him from doing more.

B) Description of Stephen

1. Full of faith and power.
 - a. Faith can refer to knowledge of God's word, also personal conviction. Can we doubt Stephen's conviction in this passage?
 - b. Power – the Gospel is the power of God to salvation,

Romans 1.16.

2. This word power is used in connection to the preaching of the Gospel in other passages.

1 Corinthians 2:4 *And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

3. First person mentioned besides the Apostles with the ability to perform miracles.

- a. Wonders and signs –

Hebrews 2:4 *God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?*

- b. These given by the laying on the Apostles hands, **Acts 8.18**
- c. For the purpose of confirming the word of God. Notice the power of salvation is in the word not the miracles.
- d. The miracles was secondary to the message being preached.

III) The Audience

A) Synagogue of the Freedmen

1. Synagogues in larger cities tended to have their own cultures.
 - a. Freedmen NTCN translates as Libertines – people who had been slaves but were now free.
 - b. Pompey had enslaved a lot of Jews but Rome later on released many.

2. Four distinct groups mentioned but all were Hellenist Jews - **Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia**
 - a. Asia minor would be Cilicia and Asia.
 - b. All key places in the Book of Acts – Apollos from Alexandria **(18.24)**, Antioch **(11.20)**, Saul of Tarsus from Cilicia **(7.58)**
3. When the church was scattered later on a lot of these people would go back home to teach the Gospel. I often speak of God using major cities to spread the Gospel but here God used this one city.

B) The message

1. We are not told exactly what Stephen preached but it had to of been consisted with the teaching of the Apostles.
 - a. Death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
 - b. Jesus being at the right hand of God today.
 - c. Christ died for our sins and it is through baptism our sins are remitted.

C) The reaction

1. First time we have recorded a negative reaction by the crowd.
 - a. Temple was the domain of the Sadducees.
 - b. The Pharisees were more prominent among the people.
2. “Disputing with Stephen”
 - a. Protesting the message.
 - b. Unable to answer Stephen’s message they sought to discredit, prove false.

3. Stephen was doing what God wants us to do, preach the truth.

a. Defend the truth when attacked.

Jude 1:3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

b. To be ready to give an answer for the hope within us,

1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

4. Secretly tried to stop Stephen, charged him with blasphemy.

a. This was equal to our charge of racism today.

b. Made against Jesus - ***John 10:30*** "I and My Father are one." ***31*** Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. ***32*** Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" ***33*** The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

5. Set up false witnesses - speaking against the temple and Law of Moses.

a. Jesus never threatened the temple

John 2:19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ***20*** Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this

temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

b. Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses.

Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

c. The "customs" which Moses delivered to us. A lot of these "customs" were not part of the Law of Moses but man-made traditions.

IV) Application

A) What kind of faith and spirit do you have?

1. Are you full or only half way full in your faith?
2. Are you fully convicted or only partly convicted in your service to God?

B) What is your "spiritual gift?"

1. What role are you fulfilling?
2. Look for more and not less to do.

C) Anger and false charges are often the devises of people when they cannot refute the truth.

1. I don't read of Stephen getting angry.
2. Don't be surprised when others do get angry but keep on preaching.

Conclusion:

The Gospel is intended for all. Sincere people may get angry but they will also study

to see what the truth is and when convinced they will obey.