

## **ACTS 6:8-7:60, STEPHEN: THE THIRD CHALLENGE TO THE SANHEDRIN**

To this point, the Apostles and early believers enjoyed general popular favor and tolerance in the city of Jerusalem. Multitudes honored the Twelve (2:43, 5:13). Even the opposition of the Sanhedrin was moderated by the advice of Gamaliel (5:34-39). But all of this ends with the misrepresentation, arrest, trial and martyrdom of Stephen which Luke records in detail (indicating its considerable import to the Book).

### **Acts 6:8-7:1, The Arrest & Charges Against Stephen**

6:8, "*Stephen kept doing* (Imperf. Act. Ind.) *miracles and wonders...*" The confirming gifts were not limited to the Twelve. "Miracles" among the people brought popular favor for Jesus, the Twelve, and Stephen.

6:9-10, Conversely, preaching and teaching brought disfavor and often hostility! Those of the Synagogue of Freedmen ("Libertines," KJV) argue, but are defeated by Stephen's spirit-directed-wisdom.

Synagogues devoted themselves to instruction and discussion: The temple was devoted to unique worship.

"Synagogue of the Libertines:" a synagogue of Jewish freedom and/or their offspring who came from the 4 place names mentioned. Was Saul (Paul) among them (21:39)? It is possible that the reference is to more than one synagogue: the *Talmud* says there were 480 in Jerusalem at this time!

6:11-14 Defeated in debate, the Jewish freedom take the following action:

- v. 11 "they secretly induce, bribe(?), suborn men" to charge Stephen with blasphemy against the Law (Moses) and God (the temple). These were the same charges made against Jesus: when left without defense in the face of truth, religious leaders often resort to deceit, distortion, lies and to men without integrity.
- v. 12a "They pressed these inflammatory chargers on the people and the religious leaders.
- v. 13, 14, They set-up false witnesses who bring 4 charges against Stephen:
  1. That he persistently blasphemed the Holy Place, the Temple;
  2. That he persistently blasphemed the Law of Moses;
  3. That he claimed that Jesus would destroy the temple;
  4. That he asserted that Jesus would change the customs of Moses.

6:15-7:1 All eyes turn on Stephen whose face radiates like an angel sent from the presence of God. The High Priest Caiaphas asks, "Are these things so?"

### **Acts 7:2-53: Stephen's Defense**

Summary: in historical retrospect, Stephen rehearses the history of Israel from the call of Abraham to the building of Solomon's Temple. He was really more interested in declaring the truth of Israel's persistent resistance to God than in mounting a personal defense, so he recites the privileges of Israel as God's chosen, their historical rejection of God's messengers, and their personal responsibility in the slaying of Jesus. Stephen's speech is the longest recorded message in *Acts*.

### **7:2-38 Stephen's Answer, Pt. I: A Biblical Philosophy of History**

EMPHASIS: God is the Originator, Sustainer, Mover and Shaker of Israel's history.

The Israelites were the first people to understand and write what history is all about: Stephen follows the Psalm 105 & Neh. 9 Hebrew Philosophy of History.

**(OVER)**

### **8:39-50 Stephen's Answer, Pt. II: "As to your Accusations..."**

- v. 39 "our fathers rejected Moses again and again; they would not obey!"
- v. 40, 41 "our fathers rejected the God of glory for false gods and even worshipped the golden calf.
- v. 42, 48 "God gave up our fathers to worship the host of heaven" (Quotes Amos: 5:25-27)!
- v. 44-50 "our fathers had the tabernacle and the Temple, but it is impossible to shut-up our omnipresent infinite, God in a building just as Isa. 66:1,2 clearly states!"

### **8:51-53 Stephen's Answer, Pt. III: "As for you personally..."**

- v. 51a "You are stiff-necked and uncircumcised of heart and ears;" you are stubborn, obstinate and refuse the truth.
- v. 51b "You are always resisting God's Holy Spirit." Note: the H.S. strives with men, but men can resist; compare Gen. 6:3.
- v. 51c "You reject God just as your fathers did."
- v. 52a "Your fathers persistently persecuted and killed those who prophesied of the coming of Messiah the Righteous One."
- v. 53 "It is who you have not kept the Law, just as your fathers!"

### **Acts 7:54-60, The Martyrdom of Stephen**

7:54, 57, 58 The priests, scribes, members of the Sanhedrin and the populace religiously murder Stephen by stoning in accord with Lev. 24:13-16.

FROM DIVINE VIEWPOINT, THOSE OF JERUSALEM HAD RECEIVED AND REJECTED THE MAXIMAL LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL: FROM THIS POINT ON, THAT LIGHT IS DIMINISHED MORE AND MORE IN THAT CITY. THE GOSPEL NOW GOES TO THE SAMARITANS AND ON TO THE GENTILES.

7:55, 56, 59, 60 Stephen's celestial vision includes the Lord standing to receive him. As the stones begin to crush his body, he calls upon the Lord to welcome his spirit and to forgive his murderers. That is grace in action!

"*And having said this he fell asleep.*" "Sleep" is an appropriate metaphor for the believer in death because 1) there is a similarity of bodily appearance in both sleep and death, that of rest and peace; 2) as the sleeper continues to exist in sleep, so also the person in death; and 3) both states are temporary: the sleeper will rise and the person in death will be raised. John 11:11; Acts 13:36; I Thess. 4:13-15; I Cor. 15:6, 51; 2 Pet. 3:4 all use the metaphor this way.

"AND SAUL WAS CONSENTING UNTO HIS DEATH"  
(to be continued)