

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 23

I. Exposition of Chapter Six (Continued).

A. Stephen's Ministry, Witness and Arrest.

1. Verse 8 – “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.”

- a. Here we see again that Stephen is referred to as a “filled” man! (verses 3, 5 – “full of the Holy Spirit, full of wisdom, full of faith.”) In the New King James, King James and a few others, it reiterates that he is full of faith. It seems, however, that most translations use the word “grace” here. For example:

“And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.”

New American Standard Version

- b. The word “grace” can mean different things, depending on the context. Here it probably means, “...the blessing of God on his life and ministry”¹, and, denotes the idea of God’s favor on someone to carry out certain works.
- c. Stephen was also full of “power.” The word “power” is the common Greek word we’ve seen before, “*dunamis*”. This word means; “strength, power, ability. Inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts and puts forth power for performing miracles.” Dr. Stanley Horton adds; “Luke-Acts often connects the word ‘power’ (Gr. *dunamis*) with the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is a gift, not a reward for merit. *Dunamis* also suggests the fearlessness of Old Testament prophets such as Micah, who said, ‘I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord’ (Mic. 3:8).”²

Dr. Horton also points out:

“The fact that the seven had been chosen to carry out a rather routine service did not limit their ministry. The anointing of the Holy Spirit was on their obedience and faithfulness. Soon they were stepping out in new ministries. Stephen is the first example of one who did this. Full of God’s ‘grace and mighty ‘power’, he began to do (and kept on doing ‘great wonders’ and startling, supernatural ‘signs among the people.’”³

2. Verse 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.”

- a. There is some uncertainty as to what this “Synagogue of the Freedmen” was. A simple explanation is that this was comprised of a group of Jewish slaves who had been freed by Rome and had formed their own synagogue in Jerusalem.⁴
- b. They were “...disputing with Stephen.” – The word “disputing” means; “to express forceful differences of opinion without necessarily having a presumed goal of seeking a solution”⁵ In other words, these individuals just argued with Stephen without any intention of being persuaded. Some other translations use the word “debate.”

3. Verse 10 – “And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.” – The word “resist” means; “to set one’s self against, to withstand, resist, oppose”⁶

“But they were not able to resist the intelligence and the wisdom and [the inspiration of] the Spirit with which and by Whom he spoke.” – Acts 6:10 – Amplified Bible

- a. The Gospel of Christ is said to be “...the power of God to salvation...” (Romans 1:16). It’s also called the “sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:17), and as Horton states, “...the Spirit used Stephen to wield it with telling effect.”⁷ I Howard Marshall asserts:

“Jesus had promised the help of the Spirit (Lk. 12:12) and wisdom (Lk. 21:15) to his disciples when they were called upon to defend themselves. The early church proved the truth of this promise. Its members were able to put up a case for their faith which could not be knocked down by argument.”⁸

4. Verse 11 – “Then they secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.’”

¹Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 94.

²Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 139.

³Ibid., 138-139.

⁴Life Application Study Bible, (Wheaton, IL, Tyndale House Publishers, 1996). 1700.

⁵Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 437.

⁶Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House., 1977)

⁷Horton, 139.

⁸I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 129.

a. The words “secretly induced” are one word in the Greek and mean, : “to hire a person to act in a particular way, often involving dishonest activities”⁹ It could have been translated as the word “bribe”.

b. Dr. Robert Utley asserts the following:

“This is the same technique used against Jesus (cf. Matt. 26:61) and Paul (cf. Acts 21:28). Their charge was a violation of Exod. 20:7, which carried the death penalty.”¹⁰

c. “Blasphemous words” – “pertaining to being insulting and slanderous”¹¹

“Failing to prove Stephen wrong by intellectual argumentation, his adversaries falsely accused him of slandering Moses and God (cf. Matt. 26:61, 65). The Greek word *blasphemia* means ‘slander, detraction, speech injurious to another’s good name.’ At this time in history, the Jews defined blasphemy as any defiant sin.”¹²

5. Verse 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.”

a. “...they stirred up the people...” – The words “stirred up” means; to stir up hostility against¹³

b. “...seized him...” – “To seize or catch or grasp with great violence.”¹⁴

“Then they violently ‘stirred up the people’ into a vicious mob that included ‘the elders and the teachers of [experts in] the law’ of Moses. With all these supporting them, they came upon Stephen suddenly and unexpectedly, seized him (took hold of him violently and kept a firm grip on him), put him under arrest, and brought him to the Sanhedrin (or to the place where the Sanhedrin was meeting).”¹⁵

6. Verses 13-14 – “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.’”

a. They set up “false witnesses” against Stephen. The hypocrisy exhibited here is so blatant! They claimed to have respect for the law yet they are breaking the law which commanded them to not bear false witness (cf. Exodus 20:16).

b. In verse 11 they accuse Stephen of speaking against Moses and God, now they expand their accusations by accusing Stephen of threatening the temple’s existence and attempting to change the customs of Moses. Dr. Horton states the following about the temple:

“This, of course, refers to Matthew 26:61, Mark 14:58, and John 2:19-21, where Jesus was really speaking of the temple of His body and of His death and resurrection...Stephen may have referred also to the prophecy Jesus gave of the destruction of the temple (Matt. 24:2) – a prophecy that was fulfilled in A.D. 70. More likely, he emphasized the positive message: The Law and the temple pointed to, and found their fulfillment in, Jesus.”¹⁶

c. David Guzik in his “Enduring Word Commentary” states the following:

“Why would they make such accusations? Because Stephen was clearly teaching that Jesus was greater than Moses; that Jesus was God; that Jesus was greater than the temple; that Jesus was the fulfillment of the law; and that Jesus was greater than their religious customs and traditions.”

“The enemy is always at work, and before long Stephen was arrested. They accused him of blaspheming Moses and the Law and charged him with saying that the temple would be destroyed; this may be a reference to Christ’s words in John 2:19–21. The Jews treated Stephen the way they treated Christ: they hired false witnesses, made dubious accusations, and did not give him the benefit of a fair trial. (See Mark 14:58 and 64.) God gave witness to Stephen’s faith by radiating His glory from his face (2 Cor. 3:18).”¹⁷

7. Verse 15 – “And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.” – Marshall asserts: “The description is of a person who is close to God and reflects some of His glory as a result of being in his presence (Exo_34:29 ff).”¹⁸

⁹Louw and Nida, 576.

¹⁰Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 95.156.

¹¹Louw and Nida, 433.

¹²Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019),

¹³Louw and Nida, 492.

¹⁴Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, (AMG Publishers; Revised edition, 1993)

¹⁵Horton, 141.

¹⁶Ibid., 142.

¹⁷Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 292.

¹⁸I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 131.