

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for August 21, 2011

“Stephen Dragged Before the Council”
Acts 6:8-15

Acts 6:8-8:1 concludes the focus of Acts on Jerusalem with the climax of the growing persecution of the church.

1. The confirmation of Stephen (6:8)

The ability to do miracles was not limited to the apostles. Stephen is described in much the same way as the apostles were described in order to show Stephen’s ministry as continuing the ministry of the apostles (cf. Acts 4:33).

Being full of grace, power, wisdom, faith, and the Spirit (Acts 6:3, 5, 8) enabled Stephen to speak on behalf of Christ in the midst of opposition.

2. The contention against Stephen (6:9-10)

There were apparently three synagogues involved in this opposition to Stephen:

- The synagogue of Freedmen who were former slaves.
- The synagogue of Cyrenians and Alexandrians with people who were originally from northern Africa.
- The synagogue of those from Cilicia and Asia with people who were originally from Asia Minor.

As we see the ministry developing among the Greek Jews, we also see the growing persecution against the church spreading to the Greek Jews. Wherever the gospel goes it finds both reception and rejection.

God’s promises include the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enable us to contend earnestly for the faith (cf. Jude 3; Luke 21:15).

3. The conspiracy against Stephen (6:11-12)

The Greek Jews opposed Stephen by (1) recruiting others to speak against him; (2) riling the people up against Stephen; (3) dragging him to the council and (4) putting forward false witnesses.

As the elders (family leaders) and scribes (Pharisees) were stirred up by the false accusations, they overcame Stephen by force and brought him before the same council as Jesus and the apostles had been brought to earlier.

4. The charges against Stephen (6:13-14)

The initial, informal, false accusations that moved the mob to seize Stephen became more specific in order for him to be charged before the council. Like Jesus, Stephen was charged with speaking against God's temple (cf. Matthew 24:1-2; 26:59-61; John 2:19-21), which was governed by the Sadducees, and against the Law of Moses (cf. Matthew 5), which was the authority for the Pharisees.

Like most conspiracies, these false charges were rooted in a misrepresentation of the words spoken by Stephen. The charge of blasphemy, speaking against God's temple and law, was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16).

5. The countenance of Stephen (6:15)

The emphasis on the face of Stephen would remind the reader of the face of Moses as he descended from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 34:29, 35). Luke includes this because Stephen was not against Moses, but was rather like Moses as being part of the revelation of the new covenant.

May we, by God's grace, be willing to courageously contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3), so that God's Spirit may work through us in service to the Lord and in service to others.