

ACTS 6:8 - 7:1

We now come to one of the most **critical** portions of Scripture concerning the Prophetic Program of Israel. Chapters 6-7 will be Israel's (that generation's) last opportunity to receive their kingdom offer.

*Acts 6 shows the beginning of their **final** failure and rejection of Jesus Christ as their Messiah.

A. Stephen Steps Forward:

Acts 6:8-10 - And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.
Acts 6:9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called *the synagogue* of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.
Acts 6:10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

1. Stephen's out there preaching and performing great miracles among the people. Though picked to be one of the seven men to help organize the finances and food distribution, God has a **higher** task for him to do. What is that task? He is to **die**!
2. There were certain Jews of the Libertines in the synagogue. These were foreign Jews, many who had been slaves but had won their **freedom**, who would attend the feast days. Many also sent their sons to Jerusalem for their **education**.
3. As Stephen was speaking, he came into contact with some of these students and synagogue members. They began to **dispute**, or question, Stephen's Messiah-Kingdom message. But Stephen, full of the Holy Ghost, was scripturally **too** advanced for them, their questions, and heckling.
4. Note: More than likely Saul of Tarsus was **involved** in this whole thing with Stephen. The verse mentions Cilicia, and Tarsus was a city in Cilicia - where Saul came from. Also, we know Saul **was** there in Jerusalem because he studied under Gamaliel.

Acts 22:3 - I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city in Cilicia*, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

Also: Acts 7:58 - And cast *him* out of the city, and stoned *him*: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

Then: Acts 8:1 - And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

* Since Saul immediately became the **chief** persecutor of the early Pentecost-Messianic Church, it
* seems probable that Saul was **one** of the company that tried to overcome Stephen in this debate.

5. Notice it says in verse 9 [Alexandrians]. This city was associated with apostasy of Israel and their **corrupted** scriptures (texts).

B. The Bribe:

Acts 6:11-14 - Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and *against* God. Acts 6:12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon *him*, and caught him, and brought *him* to the council, Acts 6:13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: Acts 6:14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

1. These students and synagogue members were **unable** to answer Stephen and their pride had been hurt. Other people were listening to Stephen, not them, and that had to be **stopped**!
2. Human depravity takes over and it is **ugly**! As their leaders had done with Christ, these students now do to Stephen. They hire (payoff-bribe) some **false** witnesses to testify that Stephen had spoken blasphemous words against the temple and their Law. Perjury means nothing to them if it helps to stop Stephen.

Matthew 26:59-61 - Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; Matt. 26:60 But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, *yet* found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, Matt. 26:61 And said, This *fellow* said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

- a. Remember, they were using the **wrong** scriptures (Talmud) which included oral sayings, traditions, and preferences. Jesus and Stephen used the Torah scriptures.
- b. It is true that Jesus said the temple would be destroyed (Luke 19:41-44), but He did not say **He** would destroy it. Who would?
- c. Jesus did speak of His body as being a temple and if they (religious leaders) would destroy it, He would raise it **up** in three days (John 2:19).
- d. Concerning the Law, Jesus said He came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. When Jesus or Stephen would say [Ye have said, but I say unto you], they weren't correcting the Law. They were correcting their **false Bible** (Talmud)!
- e. Also, Stephen's offering of the kingdom showed the Jewish people that the coming Messianic (living Christ) reign would be a higher moral standard, because the Jewish believers would be empowered and controlled by the Spirit. This would **help** them obey the Law spontaneously from their **hearts**.

Ezekiel 36:24-27 - For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Ezek. 36:25 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. Ezek. 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. Ezek. 36:27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*.

C. The Glory:

Acts 6:15 - And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

1. As Stephen stands before the council to be tried, the men of the council fixed their eyes on Stephen. To their surprise, Stephen was supernaturally transformed [as it had been the face of an angel].

*As Stephen stood before the council to be accused of evil blasphemy, God shows him far from being evil!

2. God Himself answers their false charges by putting holy glory upon Stephen's face. By doing this, God was showing His approval of Stephen's kingdom offer message.

Note Again: This was such a critical day in Israel's history. John the Baptist had called upon Israel to repent and pointed them to Christ. They responded by beheading John. The Lord had taken up the call where John had left off and they crucified Christ. Peter and the 11 at Pentecost had again called upon Israel to repent and believe Jesus to be Messiah. They were persecuted. Now Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, is divinely transformed with glory before them. Now Stephen is to make one final appeal. What is their answer?

D. The Council's Question:

Acts 7:1 - Then said the high priest, Are these things so?

1. They are asking Stephen if he was really guilty of blaspheming God, the temple,

and the Law. Of

course they want to convict him, for they believe he did those things with his message of Christ.

2. Stephen is calm, controlled, and not crying out. Stephen is not defending himself, but is actually on the offence and getting ready to indict them for their help in murdering Christ-Messiah. Israel is on trial! What will her final answer be?

*As we will see, Israel will reject Stephen's message. I personally believe (since Stephen represented the Holy Spirit) that this was the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 12:31-32 - Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. Matt. 12:32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

E. Stephen's Address to Israel's Supreme Court:

1. *Stephen, in a masterful demonstration of Scripture skill and ability, shows the leadership of Israel that it was not he, nor the Little Flock, that blasphemed God - Law - Temple - Spirit, but it was them...the apostate leaders of Israel! "It is you!"

Acts 7:48, 53 - Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Acts 7:52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

2. *If you want to understand the Bible, you have to understand the Nation of Israel. Most say that dispensationalists (Mid-Acts) only view Scripture written by Apostle Paul (13 books - Romans-Philemon). That is not true. Since I have learned (still learning) Right Division, I have learned more of the Old Testament and the four Gospels than I ever had previously!

3. J.C. O'Hair said, "There are 5 chapters in the Bible that give the history of Israel in a synopsis form. They are: Psalm 78, Psalm 106, Acts 7, Acts 13, and Romans 11."
 - a. *These 5 chapters will give us the history of Israel from the time of the calling of Abraham all the way through to where we are now - and then into the future kingdom (Millennium- 1000-year reign).
 - b. *You will see that the past history of Israel will happen again. Their past was a dress rehearsal of events that will take place in the Tribulation - Jacob's Trouble - Daniel's 70th Week - and then into the Kingdom.
 - c. Example - their wandering in the wilderness after coming out of Egypt. In Revelation, you will find that the very plagues that were brought upon Egypt by Moses will once again be thrown upon the earth in the Tribulation period.

*And amazingly, you will see Moses in the early part of the Tribulation as one of the witnesses of God to the Nation of Israel doing the signs and wonders.
 - d. So, as we go through Acts 7 and see parts/clips of Israel's history, it is more than just history. It is lessons we learn as to why we are at this point in time in Acts 7. It reveals why God sets Israel temporarily aside with Israel's Prophetic Program. That will lead to the calling of Saul/ Paul and the beginning of the Mystery program, the Body of Christ, the Gospel and Dispensation of Grace. Acts 7 will help us to understand: Why Paul and not the 12?
4. Stephen will again, one last time, present Jesus Christ as Messiah to the Nation. Stephen will remind them of Israel's former heroes and how at first they were rejected and separated from them. Then later, these same heroes returned to be accepted by Israel as their Deliverer and Redeemer.
 - a. * Stephen does this in order that they might reconsider the claims of Christ as to being Messiah.
* Yes, they had rejected Him, but now in the mercy of God, they have this historic opportunity
* to believe in Him.
 - b. Note: Acts 7:13 - And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

Acts 7:27, 35 - But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Acts 7:35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

*Stephen is actually preaching Christ's 2nd coming in relation to Israel. As Joseph and Moses were rejected at first but believed upon the 2nd time, Stephen says that, yes, Israel rejected Christ the first time...what should they do now? They should in faith receive Him!
 - c. Stephen, in a masterful argument for Christ to his nation, does so in a convincing fashion - they will be without excuse.
5. A lesson for us in communication should be learned as we study Stephen's message. When you get your message across successfully, you have communicated. A lot of Christians think the measure of a good message is the results. What kind of results did Stephen get?

*They had a stoning committee waiting for him.

- a. Sometimes you communicate successfully and the people don't like what you have communicated to them! It is our responsibility to get the message (truth) across; then the responsibility belongs to the people hearing.
- b. Sometimes we don't get the results we desire - as Stephen did not.

*He desired for the Nation to repent, to change their mind to the truth of Christ, believe and receive Him as their Savior-Messiah. What was their answer?