

**The Book of Acts**  
**Lesson 18**  
**Stephen (Acts 6:8-15)**

**Acts 6:8-15**

*8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. 10 But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. 11 Then they secretly instigated men who said, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 12 And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, 13 and they set up false witnesses who said, "This man never ceases to speak 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 will change the customs that Moses delivered to us." 15 And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*

---

Stephen's miracles are the first instance of a non-Apostle doing great signs and wonders. Remember, these supernatural gifts were intended to attract people to Christ, not to glorify the instrument. Miracles helped many and they stirred the Jews to respect the Apostles and evangelists of the early church so that they welcomed their message. Stephen's death introduces a new level of persecution, which dampens those who were interested in believing. The Church will no longer grow exponentially. This will be the last of the church's high popularity in Jerusalem. Satan has found an effective tool in persecution.

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, leaves an example of a godly, courageous witness. His name means "victor's crown." He is a key figure in the book of Acts occupying much of chapters 6 and 7. His godly character provides a solid foundation for his powerful witness. God often uses persecution to convict sinners, used by God for the same purpose as He uses miracles. Paul's approval of Stephen's martyrdom may have been one of the "goads" of conviction that brought Paul to Christ (Acts 26:14).

Jesus told His disciples, that there would come a time when they would be delivered up before synagogues and rulers. The Holy Spirit would teach them in that very hour what they needed to say. (Luke 12:12) Stephen's wisdom and spirit in arguing with the Hellenistic Jews came from knowledge of Scripture and wisdom produced by the fullness of the Spirit. Later, we will note that Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit in his defense before the Sanhedrin. (Acts 7:55) The primary evidence of the filling of the Spirit is the kind of fruit one produces in difficult events and experiences. The fruit of the Spirit's filling is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23), all at one time. They are not produced overnight nor do they come through an ecstatic experience.

Months and years of walking in the Spirit and resisting one's walking in the flesh (Galatians 5:16) gives the believer a good reputation with both the saved and unsaved producing a consistent Christian life. Being filled by the Spirit does not imply sinless perfection. No one achieves that in this life, even when we give the Spirit freedom to produce in our lives that which pleases Him. All believers have their areas of imperfection and weakness.

The fullness of the Spirit is a matter of progressive maturity. A new believer may be as yielded to the Holy Spirit as he knows how to be, but he will not demonstrate the fullness of the Spirit in the same manner as those who have walked in the Spirit for years. The key is to walk in submission to and dependence on the Spirit of God. Then, He will grow His fruit in the heart and life of the believer.

After a good reputation, the second requirement (full of the Spirit and of wisdom) to serve tables (Acts 6:3) is observable in Stephen (Acts 6:10). The Greek word for “wisdom” is used only four times in the book, twice of Stephen (Acts 6:3, 10) and twice in his message before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:10, 22). Proverbs 2:6: ***“For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.”*** Proverbs 9:10: ***“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”*** Wisdom comes from knowing God, and knowing His Word. God’s wisdom is seen in His plan to deliver man completely from sin by Jesus Christ through His death on the cross. To those who are perishing, the cross is foolishness, but to those who believe, Christ is both “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18, 24).

Stephen is full of faith, referring to his faith or trust, his confidence and loyalty in God (Acts 6:5). The fullness of faith begins with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, that is God is in control of good and bad. He is never the source of evil or sin, but His wisdom is able to use the depravity of man, the rebellion of Satan as well as the work of His obedient children, all, to produce His will. He uses the wicked deeds of people and the physical suffering that unfolds in our lives to accomplish His eternal purpose. Stephen trusted a God who worked all things after the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11) and works them for our good (Romans 8:28). God is sovereignly weaving Stephen’s suffering and martyrdom into His plan. That quality of confidence in Him-- when life is difficult-- means we are full of faith. Even our death, which is the last and most powerful work of sin in the believer, is part of His specific plan for His child.

Stephen was full of grace and truth. So was Jesus: (John 1:14). Jesus was God’s grace wrapped into humanity; He was grace personified. Stephen had a personal understanding and personal experience of God’s grace in the work of Christ on the cross. Salvation is not by our works of righteousness, but rather by the undeserved favor of God, shown to us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8; Titus 3:5-6).

Stephen’s inner qualities-- being full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, faith, grace, and power, show his godly character. Stephen’s preaching was convicting. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were cut to the heart for their sins and pride. Because of Stephen’s godly character, he preached powerfully and courageously to the Hellenistic Jews from the Synagogue of the Freedmen, probably descendants of Jewish slaves captured in 63 BC by Pompey, taken to Rome, and later expelled. Some settled in Jerusalem and formed a synagogue. The synagogues mentioned in verse 9 represent two groups: the Freedmen, Cyrenians, and Alexandrians; and the Jews from Cilicia and Asia, representing some of the 460 synagogues in Jerusalem at that time. Paul was from Cilicia (a province in southern Asia Minor). He may have been one of the synagogue debaters. Stephen, too, may have been a member of one of these synagogues. Early Christians often stayed in their synagogues to witness until they were forced to leave.

The persecution of Stephen came first through those representatives of Judaism, sent to debate using words to resist the moving of God upon Jerusalem. When the debates did not work because of Stephen’s wisdom, they used false witnesses to stir the people to believe he had committed a crime against the nation of Israel. They dragged him before the Sanhedrin and accused him of speaking against the Temple (“this holy place”), and the Law (Acts 6:13). They charged him with claiming that Jesus would destroy the Temple and the customs that Moses had handed down (Acts 6:14). Similar false charges had been leveled against the Lord Jesus.

What does the face of an angel look like? I presume that Luke got this information from Paul, who was there. Was Stephen's face surrounded by a radiant glow like the shining of Moses' face when he came down from the mountain? Those who compared Stephen's face to an angel's face alone know what they mean, but his face did not look like a normal human being. Stephen's miracles, supernatural wisdom in debating and his martyrdom did not break through the hardness and blindness of the Jews. What his martyrdom did was dampen the enthusiasm of those in Jerusalem to join themselves to the disciples. Stephen was accused of speaking against the Law and the Temple, and yet violating of the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment, they used false witnesses to slander and to condemn him!