



Acts 6:13-7:53 | Session 17 | Turning the Tables on the Jews

Acts 6:13-15

Verse 13—

Last time we read the Jews had *suborned men* (Read 6:8-12 for the context), that is they bribed men to give a false witness against Stephen (6:11). The people were *stirred up* and Stephen was *caught up* by a mob and taken to the *council* (the Sanhedrin). Two charges by **false witnesses** were levied against Stephen as he stood before the council, 1) He **ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this place** (the Temple), 2) **and against the Law** (of Moses).

Verse 14—

We have heard him say. Since they are false witnesses, they obviously had not heard Stephen say that, **this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place.** False witnesses take partial truth and twist it. Jesus did say, in John 2:19; “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” Jesus was speaking, not of the actual building of the Temple, but rather *the temple of his body*. Stephen may have quoted Jesus. It is also possible Stephen had given reference to an Old Testament prophecy by Daniel (9:26), that the people of the *antichrist would come and destroy the city and the sanctuary*. They went on to accuse him of **changing the customs which Moses delivered us**. If Stephen taught that, then he would have been teaching that the Jews were no longer under the law, but under grace. There is no evidence of this. In fact, just the opposite was true, the Jewish assembly was still practicing the Law, going to the Temple at the hour of prayer and sacrifice. This is just another trumped up lie.

Verse 15—

All that sat in the council (That is, the Sanhedrin), **looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.** We can only speculate what they saw and what this means. Luke, the author doesn't explain. Our cultural understanding of the *face of an angel* might be that Stephen *had a sweet, peaceful look on his face*. We shouldn't read our own concepts into passages. Let's consider the context of what is happening—there is no peace in the room. Stephen is being falsely accused being against Moses. It is interesting that after receiving the Tablets of Stone (the Law), Moses, when he had come down from Mt. Sinai covered his face because it shone brightly with the glory of God (Exodus 34:30), and the people were fearful of Moses. Was this *face of angel* God's glory being reflected from Stephen? If so, God's glory is not sweet and peaceful, it is terrifying. There is another account in the Bible about one having the *countenance of an angel*, in Judges 13:6. In this case the countenance was *very terrible*. Whenever angels were encountered in Scripture, the experience was one of fear. Are the council members seeing something strong, and frightful, and terrible in the face of Stephen? Stephen was a man *full of faith and power* (6:8). The Greek word for power is *dunimais*. We can only speculate.

Chapter 7:1-53

Then said the high priest, Are these things so? What the high priest is actually anticipating by asking Stephen this question is difficult to tell. Was he giving him a chance to defend himself, or was he thinking Stephen might give in to the charges, take a beating (like the 12 did earlier), and move on?

Verse 2-8—



Stephen begins respectfully (1 Peter 3:15), **Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken.** The Jews erred in their faulty thinking that because Jesus did not set up his kingdom, he therefore was not the Messiah, and is why they rejected him.

Over the next 49 verses Stephen lays out several historical Biblical accounts that shows the Jews that their rejecting the Messiah for what they perceived as failure was a grave mistake. His historical examples include, *Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon...all these men failed in some form and fashion, and yet they were not rejected by the Jews. Rather, it was often the prophets who spoke the truth who were killed and rejected.*

First up: **Abraham** (7:2-8). The point Stephen makes: Abraham never saw or experienced the inheritance of the Land of Promise, but he was not rejected.

Verses 9-16—

Next up: **Joseph** and **Jacob**. The point here is that of Joseph who was thrown into slavery in Egypt. And yet while **God was with him**, his family (Jacob and his brothers) suffered famine and had to leave the land of **Chanaan**¹. Even in their seeming failure these patriarchs were not rejected. There seems to be a lot of typology in these passages. For example, is Joseph a type of the Messiah? Verse 13, **And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren...** After Joseph had been given up for dead, his brothers made the sojourn to Egypt for food, but they did not recognize Joseph who had become powerful and second only to Pharaoh. It wasn't until they saw him the second time (Genesis 45) that they recognized him as their brother. Is Stephen giving a subtle message to the council that: *You may not have recognized the Messiah at his first coming, but make no mistake you will recognize him at his second coming!*

Jacob went down to Egypt and died. Seemingly a failure, dying in a foreign land, and yet Jacob was not rejected.

Verses 17-50—

The next failure: **Moses**. Moses was not able to fulfill his role and the *savior* until he came back a second time (Exodus 4:19-31; (Acts 7:34)

Another failure: **The church** (Greek: *ekklesia*) **in the wilderness** (Acts 7:38). Israel would not obey and cried out for Aaron (Moses's brother, Exodus 32:1-6)), **Make us god to go before us...and they made a calf in those days and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.**

Finally, **Joshua** (Greek word *Iesous*, translated **Jesus**). He did not drive out all the inhabitants of the Land. **David**, he failed to build the Temple, and it was left to his son **Solomon** and yet failed by taking foreign wives. And, **the house** Solomon built for the Lord was in many ways a *failure* because **the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands.**

From the beginning Stephen is not defending himself, he is turning the tables on the religious leaders. He is being accused of blasphemy, but his response is that through their own history they are the ones who have failed.

Verses 51-53—

Stephen accuses of being **stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears**, and **resisting the Holy Ghost. As your fathers did, so do ye.** The bottom line of his charge to them is that *the fathers put to death and persecuted the prophets, and you didn't reject them; instead you are just like them.* You have become **betrayers and murderers...of the Just One.**

¹ This is the word Canaan, but spelled with a **Ch**. For some reason, the KJV translators used the Hebrew spelling of the word, also in Acts 13:19.

*You **received the law** handed down by **angels, and have not kept it!***

Hypocritical phonies. This doesn't go over too well, as we will see next week.

