

ACTSFACTS

C@G Supplementary Study Notes for ACTS



Message #15

“THE MAN WITH THE FACE OF AN ANGEL”

Acts 6:8-15

This passage marks a significant transition in Acts. Up to this point Peter has been the dominant figure. Soon, Saul/Paul will take over as the dominant figure for the rest of Acts.

Linking these two giants of the church is **Stephen**.

PETER

Ministered mainly to Jews.

He ministered mainly in Jerusalem.

PAUL

Ministered mainly to Gentiles.

He ministered throughout the Roman Empire.

STEPHEN

Ministered mainly to Jews from Gentile lands.

His ministry was the catalyst that catapulted the Church out of Jerusalem and into the rest of the world. (Acts 8:1)

The latter part of Acts 6 and all of chapter 7 focus on Stephen, the first martyr of the church. Stephen has already been introduced to us in **Acts 6:5** as one of the deacons chosen by the congregation.

Stephen's greatest gift to the church was not the mere fact that he was its first martyr but also his vital role in promoting the mission and the life of the church.

Stephen's ministry impact was more than just historical. His brief ministry shows that the length of a person's life does not define its impact and effectiveness.

STEPHEN'S CHARACTER (6:8)

Read Acts 6:8-15. What do you learn about Stephen from these verses (and, also, from 6:5)?

Luke describes Stephen as someone who was fully committed to following Christ...in life and in death.

DISCUSS:

It has been said that it is a sad indictment of our modern, western Christian church that we say we trust God for our eternal destiny yet find it hard to trust Him with the concerns of everyday life!

What do you think?

Stephen was a man full of *faith, the Holy Spirit, grace and power*.

If someone were writing about your life as a Christian, how do you think they would describe you?

How would you like to be described?

Interesting Point:

Acts 6:8 says that Stephen “performed great wonders and signs among the people”.

We are not told whether he was performing such things BEFORE his election as a deacon (**6:1-7**) or only subsequently. However, it is worthy of note that in the New Testament, apart from Jesus, only the apostles, Stephen (**6:8**), Philip (**Acts 8:6-7**), and Barnabas (**Acts 15:12**) performed miracles.

STEPHEN'S COURAGE (6:9-14)

The Talmud estimates there were approximately 480 synagogues in Jerusalem at this time!

The word "synagogue" referred to both a "place of assembly" and a "congregation" (much like the usage of the word "church" today).

Commentators think the references in these verses refer to three distinct synagogues, not just one....

The Synagogue of the Freedmen....the synagogue of the Cyrenians and Alexandrians...and the synagogue of those from Cilicia and Asia. (In other words....Jews from Gentile lands.)

Men from these synagogues came together and debated with Stephen...most likely on things like the *death, resurrection and messiahship of Jesus, as well as the inability of the Mosaic Law and the Temple rituals to save.*

What were the accusations made against Stephen (6:13-14)?

The accusations against Stephen were extremely serious. Nothing was more sacred to the Jews, and nothing more precious, than their temple and their law. The temple was their "holy place", the sanctuary of God's presence, and the law was "holy scripture," the revelation of God's mind and will. Therefore, since the temple was God's house and the law was God's word, to speak against either was to speak against God or, in other words, to blaspheme.

When the men from the synagogues realised they could not refute the wisdom of Stephen (see **Luke 21:15**) they resorted to deceit and treachery. They brought in false witnesses to stir up the people against Stephen, resulting in Stephen being arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin (**6:11-12**).

Whilst we will not read Stephen's response to these charges until Acts 7, we do see evidence of his great courage in the face of severe opposition, including the likelihood of facing death.

He did not back down. He did not falter. He did not compromise.

Put yourself in Stephen's position. How do you think you would have handled yourself?

"True godliness often kindles the world's fierce opposition". Have you ever experienced this? Did you see it as a reassurance or as a reason for compromise?

STEPHEN'S COUNTENANCE (6:15)

This chapter ends with a rather perplexing verse: "and gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel" (v 15). Far from being an evil blasphemer, as charged by the Sanhedrin, Stephen radiated the glory of God.

(Only one other time in Scripture do we see a similar thing happen....with Moses. See **Exodus 34:27-35**)

What does "having the face of an angel" mean? We are not told. However, it was probably not the cute, sweet, "cherubic", image that is often seen as a modern-day idea of angels.

In the Bible, angels are messengers of God. They inspire awe and fear. Their purpose was to bring a message from the one true God. Thus, for Luke to say that Stephen had the face of an angel was, perhaps, to comment on his role as a true messenger of the word of God. Maybe Luke is asking us to picture Stephen with a determination to speak God's word fearlessly, faithfully, and forcefully to the end.

(R. Albert Mohler Jr)

Alternatively, it may have been some other form of visible demonstration of God's holiness, glory, love, compassion, and mercy that shone forth from Stephen. We do not really know for certain.

But we do know that his countenance reflected God and the relationship he had with God through Jesus.

It is true that our faces can be a reflection of our hearts and the experiences of our lives.

What does your "face/countenance" tell others about your heart and experiences of life and faith?

What would it mean for you to have "the face of an angel" today?
