

The Turning Point



Acts 6:8-15

Now Stephen, a man full of God`s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God." So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law.

They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.



Introducing Stephen - again

Now Stephen, a man full of God`s grace and power,

We've already met Stephen in Acts 6:5 in connection with those chosen to help in the care of the widows in the church.

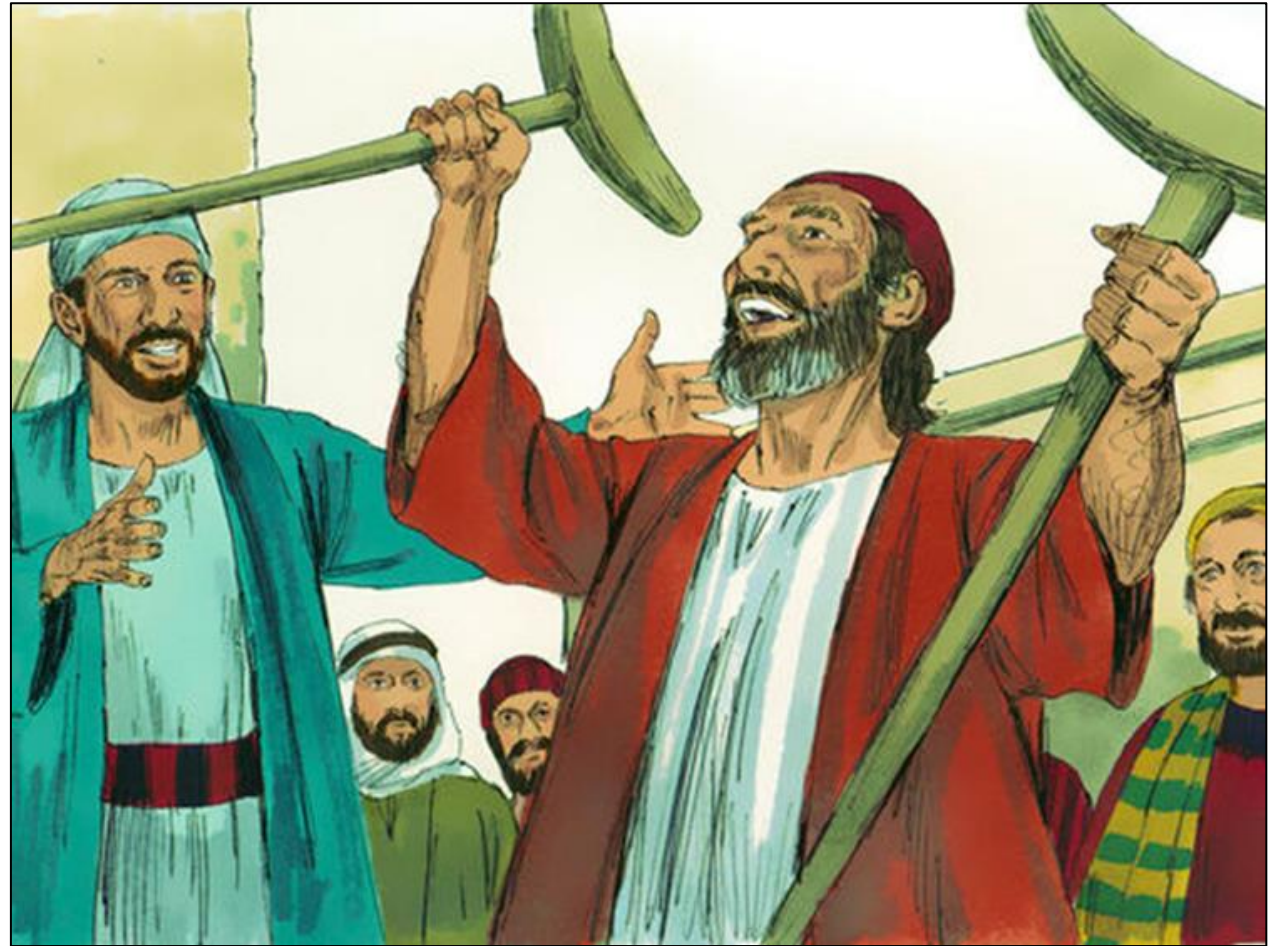
There he is described as a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.



Something New

Now Stephen, a man full of **God's grace and power**, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.

What has changed?
It is not just the Apostles
who are now doing
miracles.



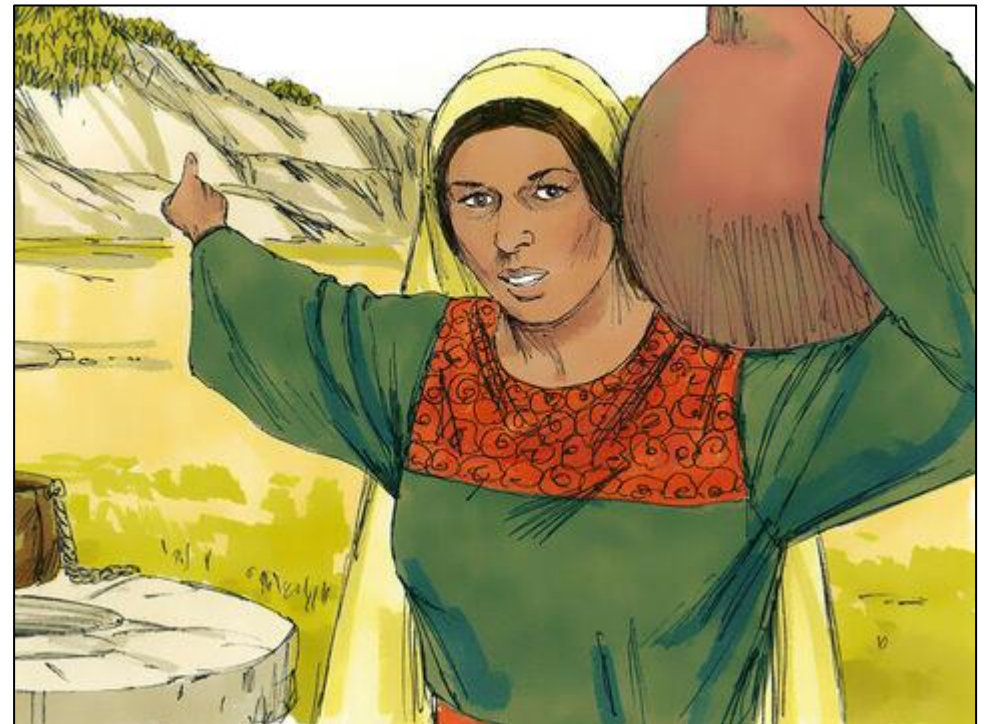
Changing circumstances

Opposition arose,

Things had been changing before this point because of the different views of the Messiah and the Kingdom

Jesus' teaching and the Samaritan woman

John 4:21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.



John's expectations

His view of of the Messiah and the Kingdom
Fire – judgement – Kingdom now

John the Baptist's question suggest he was confused.

Matthew 11:3 and *John's disciples* said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"



Before Pentecost

The disciples' question Jesus in Acts 1:6

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"



Changing Understanding

For many people, including the disciples at first they had a local – nationalistic view of the Kingdom and the kind of Messiah who would lead it. Before the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, it may have been difficult to understand the role of the Messiah as the suffering Servant and his reign as King over the nations.

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”



Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia.

Who are these people?
Where are they from?
What do they believe?



Who are these people?

Opposition arose, however,
from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)

The Synagogue of the Freedmen was made up of those who had been slaves and somehow had gained their freedom as citizens and formed a society together in Jerusalem.



Where are they from?

Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia.

They are from the 'Diaspora' having formerly lived in areas around the Mediterranean North Africa, and present day Turkey. Frequently it seems that 'exiles' are more keen on their traditions than the locals.



What do they believe?

Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia.

Traditional Jewish beliefs

God is one

The Law – given to Moses

The Temple the focus of
worship

The traditions of the elders

They naturally would find it
hard to understand and accept
this apparently new teaching.



Challenging the messianic believer

These men began to argue with Stephen,

It may have started with questions but it became heated as they heard Stephen powerfully challenging their opinions.



These men began to argue with Stephen, but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.

They were unable to answer – since they were wrong!

Just as Jesus had promised, Stephen was able to answer their questions/accusations.

The Spirit's help is truth and light

Matthew 10:19-20 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

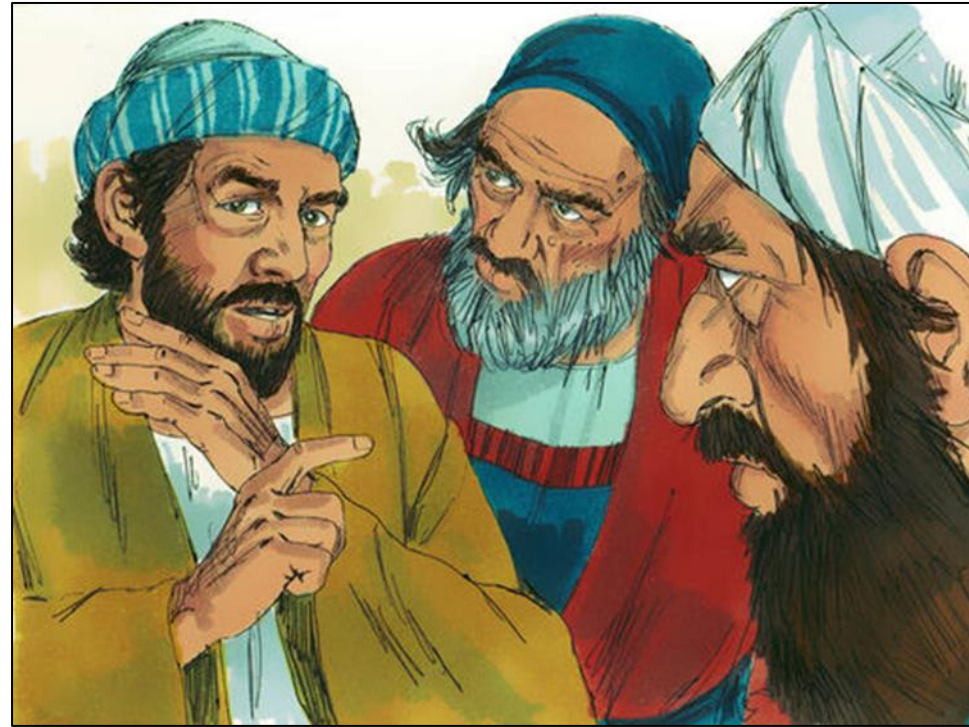


Dishonest tactics

Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

This shows their ungodly mindset

John 15:20 Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.



A very serious and false charge

"We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

Blasphemy against Moses? This seems like an idolatrous position to hold regarding Moses.



This accusation/lie is aimed to turn public opinion against Stephen and his associates – the messianic believers.

The turning point -

So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law.

This is the turning point for the followers of Jesus, the Messiah. The authorities were not entirely favourable already! But previous public opinion and acceptance is being poisoned and turned into rejection of them and their message.

BEFORE AFTER ?

Acts 2:46-47 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and **enjoying the favour of all the people**. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

they stirred up the people



PUBLIC OPINION

is important

But it can be manipulated

A fair trial coming up?

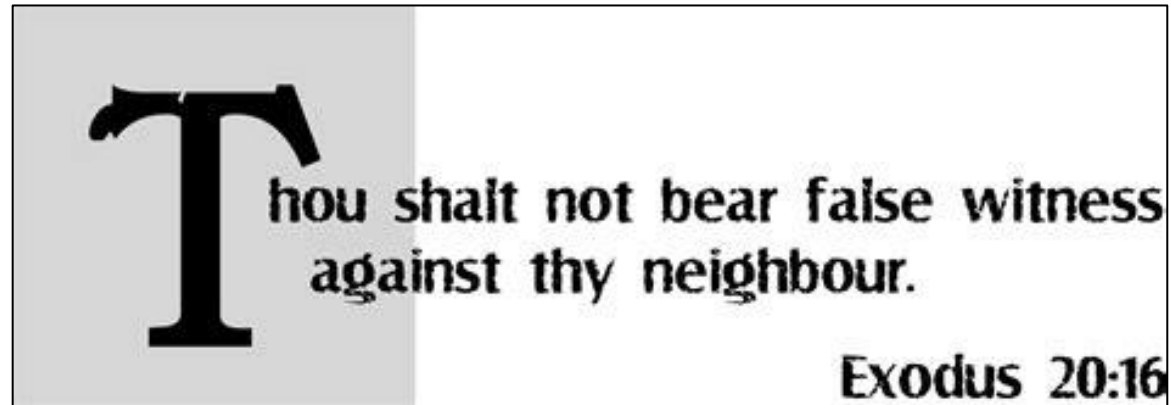
They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.

They take the law into their own hands – these are angry and violent men



They produced false witnesses, who testified,

Liars – they claim to keep the commandments and violate the 9th.



They feel threatened – and they are. By the truth because they have their own ways and ideas (traditions) and are not prepared to see that God's purposes are bigger than their limited ideas.

Where did they invent/twist those ideas from what Stephen said?

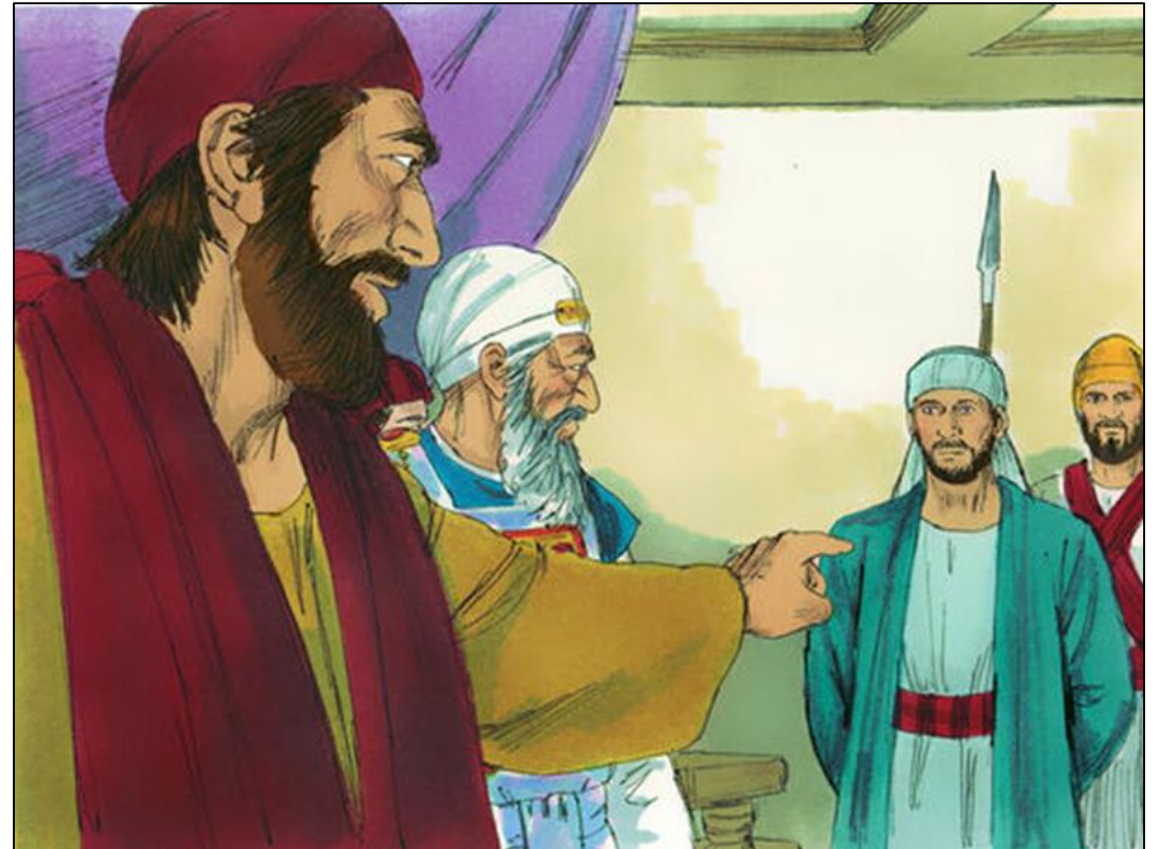
They produced false witnesses, who testified,
"This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.

“This fellow” – is not meant to be a compliment

Never say ‘never’. It’s not true.

What was Stephen’s message and focus?

Jesus – crucified- risen- exalted
Messiah and Saviour



They produced false witnesses, who testified,
"This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law."

The Holy Place:

Stephen's focus was on the sacrifices having been fulfilled
(Temple rituals becoming redundant)



The Law:

Salvation was through faith in what Jesus had done, not by
observing a thousand rules, many of which were man-made.

This could be twisted to mean that the Law had no place in
the believer's life – not true either. Cf. Romans 13:10 etc.



Destroy this place ?

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

What someone says and what you hear may not be the same thing

"This Jesus of Nazareth" – is an insult

"Blessed is the one who is not offended by me" Matthew 11:6

They misquoted Jesus before about 'destroying this temple'

Cf. in Jeremiah's day

Jeremiah 7:4 Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!"

Change the customs?

For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

Change the customs that God had given to Moses?

Some parts had been fulfilled – eg. the sacrificial offerings

Some customs were Pharisee additions – they called them 'a fence around the law' leading at times to contradictions and also impossible burdens for people to keep them.

(pandering to pride for 'the keepers' vs. the 'sinners')

Matthew 11:29-30 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

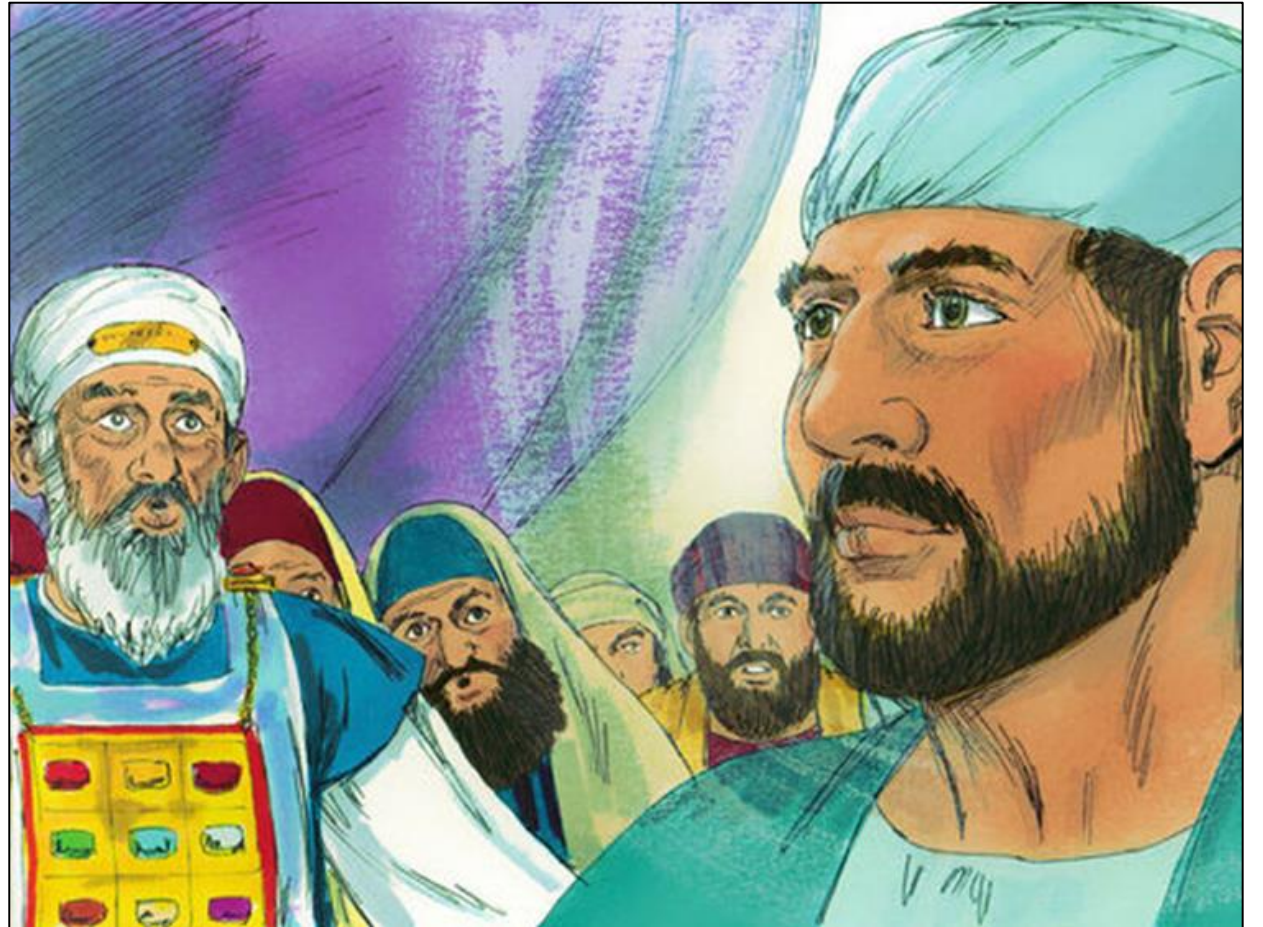
Give us an answer!

All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

What can he say to all that?

His appearance tells us about his state of mind/spirit - at peace, composed.

Had they ever seen an angel to know what one looked like?





2 Corinthians 10:4-5 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

What can he possibly say? ... see chapter 7

A spiritual messianic guide to the history of Israel