

The background is a sepia-toned landscape painting. It depicts a calm body of water, possibly a lake or a wide river, with a small, dark figure of a person standing on a rocky outcrop in the foreground. The far bank is covered in dense evergreen trees, and a large, hazy mountain rises in the background under a pale, overcast sky. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

THE BOOK OF ACTS

Acts 6:8-15 - Stephen Seized

⁸ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ 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 began to argue with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. ¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." ¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." ¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

➤ One of those seven men was doing more than serving the widows. The Holy Spirit was empowering him to do signs and wonders among the people, not just among the church. This caught the attention of countless enemies, who publicly brought charges against him. But the wisdom of the Spirit is stronger than any argument.

❖ What charges were brought against Stephen in the following verses:

1. 6:11

2. 6:13

3. 6:14

❖ What charges were brought against Jesus in **Matthew 26:59-63** and **Mark 14:57-64**?

❖ Are there any charges that are similar to those against Stephen?

- Stephen's enemies incited men against him, set up false witnesses, and accused him of things he never said or did. Those who didn't believe Jesus was God would view it as blasphemy to say Jesus was greater than Moses and equal with God.
- Those who didn't believe in Jesus didn't understand that His words about the destruction of the temple (**John 2:19-21**) were His way of referring to His own death and resurrection. And they certainly didn't understand that He came to fulfill the law, not to abolish it (**Matthew 5:17**).
- ❖ As Stephen faced these powerful men in **6:15** who wanted him dead, what did his face look like? What must he have been radiating?
- Contemporary culture sees angels as benevolent beings who come to serve and protect us and fill us with peace. We tend to think someone with "a face like an angel" is sweet and innocent. This leads to an assumption that Stephen looked harmless, benevolent, or peaceful. That's not necessarily false, but the ancient concept of "angels" wasn't docile or quiet.

- Angels are massively powerful warriors in God's army, not chubby infants with wings sitting on clouds and playing cute harps. To say Stephen's face reminded his audience of an angel speaks more to the evidence of God's power in his life than anything else.
- Stephen is clearly not defenseless. He is filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly speaking words of truth that his adversaries are powerless to refute (**Acts 6:10**). The only reason he is before the council is because his opponents have resorted to lies and deceit (**Acts 6:11**) and the council is more than willing to condemn a Jesus-follower.
- The humble confidence in the goodness and sovereignty of God that Stephen emanated, isn't just available to Stephen, it is available to all of us through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. No matter what we face, the Holy Spirit is where the joy and confidence is.
- ❖ In what circumstances do you most need to learn to lean into the confidence and joy that comes from the Holy Spirit's presence?
- ❖ What stood out to you most in this week's study? Why?

Acts 7:1-8 – Stephen’s Speech to the Sanhedrin

Then the high priest asked Stephen, “Are these charges true?”

² To this he replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. ³ ‘Leave your country and your people,’ God said, ‘and go to the land I will show you.’

⁴ “So, he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. ⁵ He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. ⁶ God spoke to him in this way: ‘For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. ⁷ But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,’ God said, ‘and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.’ ⁸ Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

- The religious leaders had accused Stephen of blaspheming Moses, God, and speaking against the temple and the law. At first glance, it may seem like he ignored these accusations. But Stephen didn't just give a history lesson. He cleverly emphasized key people, events, places, and actions of God in his account of Israel's history.
- God chose people through whom He would bring His plan of salvation. God showed up in places outside of the promised land. But despite God's actions, His people were often disobedient and rebellious.
- ❖ Who are the key people, places, events, and actions of God in **7:1-8**?
- ❖ In the context of defending the spread of the gospel message, why do you think Stephen talks about Abraham's nomadic lifestyle as the starting point of his defense?

Acts 7:9-16

⁹ “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰ and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So, Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

¹¹ “Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. ¹² When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. ¹³ On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. ¹⁴ After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. ¹⁵ Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. ¹⁶ Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.