

January 04, 2026 Message Notes

Stephen Resolutions

There's been a handful of people as recorded in scripture who have seen God's throne room in heaven...his dwelling place...while alive.

- Isaiah: (Isaiah 6)...when he was called and commissioned to prophesy against Israel
- Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19)...when he was prophesying against Ahab the king of Israel
- Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1)...when he was called and commissioned to prophesy against Israel
- Daniel (Daniel 7:9)...when he had a vision
- John (Revelation)
- Stephen (Acts 7)...before he was stoned to death
- Possibly Paul (caught up into the third heaven...2 Corinth 12:2-4)

Different responses.

- Isaiah and Ezekiel were terrified
- Daniel was troubled
- Stephen was awestruck and affirmed

Acts 6:1: Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

3 to 3.5 years after Pentecost. The church is growing like crazy. Remember...the church at this time is basically a sect of Judaism called "The Way"...it consisted of Jews who believed Jesus to be the Messiah.

Notice the link between multiply and complaint. There is often messiness and challenges when the church is growing. We are growing.

Acts 6:2-4: Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

Apostles were smart...they delegated. They needed to focus on the things they were called to.

They decided to designate seven men to manage and administer the daily distribution tasks. This was primarily a practical administrative need. Not glamorous.

Notice how they dealt with the problem.

1. They didn't throw the complainers out.
2. They didn't divide into two congregations.
3. They didn't ignore the problem.
4. They didn't form a committee and discuss the problem to death..."paralysis by analysis."
5. They did realize that identifying unmet needs was a great reason to bring more people into ministry.

Seven men of good reputation and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom

- These men were to be both spiritually minded and practically minded. This can be a hard combination to find

Notice that the apostles were looking for godly character (good reputation) not giftings or talents. Often we look for those with the greatest gifting.

Possibly they chose seven so that one could oversee the needs of the widows a different day of the week. Genius!

Acts 6:5-6: And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicander, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Proselyte...one who converted from gentile to Judaism.

They all had Greek names...meaning they were all likely Hellenists. Shows great wisdom and sensitivity by the Apostles towards the offended Hellenists.

It was important to lay hands on them even if their service was mainly for the practical needs of the widows and the poor. Practical service is spiritual service!

Notice that the Apostles made the final decision...not the congregation. Interesting commentary on the church leadership model of that day.

Acts 6:7: Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

This potential seed of disunity was handled with such wisdom and sensitivity that the church continued to grow...even GREATER!

How? Because everyone did the right thing!

Acts 6:8: And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

Pairing up of faith and power...we see it a lot in scripture.

Example: Mustard seed faith moving mountains. Matthew 17:20.

Cycle of activation. Faith leads to action which results in God working in power which in turn creates more faith. Self-sustaining.

Stephen was a man of character full of the Holy Spirit...internal attributes of the Holy Spirit which are found in Galatians chapter 5...the fruits of the Spirit..."love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"...but he was also a man full of faith and power...which alludes to the external attributes stated in 1 Corinthians 12...the gifts of the Spirit..."wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophesy...".

Acts 6:9-10: Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.

The term "Freedmen" refers to Jews who had been captured by Romans and made slaves and later freed, becoming a distinct Jewish community in Jerusalem.

Acts 6:11-14: Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."

The council was the Sanhedrin...the Jewish supreme court...presided over important cases like Jesus and Stephen. Made up of about 70 high priests, elders, and Scribes.

Note: The false accusations leveled against Stephen were similar to those leveled at Jesus at His trial.

- Blasphemy against the temple and Law of Moses.
- That Jesus would destroy the temple. Recall that Jesus spoke metaphorically and prophetically of his own body/temple being destroyed and it being raised up on the third day. The leaders misinterpreted what He said.

Acts 6:15: And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

Chapter 7. Key takeaways from Stephen's sermon...

- Stephen gives a panorama of Old Testament history and underemphasizes the temple.
- Stephen confronts and convicts his accusers:

Stephen's message was essentially the supremacy of Jesus!

- Jesus was greater than Moses
- Jesus was God
- Jesus was greater than the temple
- Jesus was the fulfillment of the law
- Jesus was greater than their religious customs and traditions

Acts 7:54-56: When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

Gnashing of teeth reminds us of the imagery of hell in the bible. Seven different times Jesus described hell as a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. These were well respected religious men who were associating themselves with hell, not heaven.

Why did God give Stephen this window into heaven just prior to his execution? We don't really know.

- Perhaps he just needed to see Jesus.
- Perhaps he needed to be distracted...overcome with awe.

Significantly he sees Jesus standing on the right-hand side of God. This is different from other descriptions of Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father in...

Matthew 26:64. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.

Colossians 3:1. If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

The passage doesn't tell us why Jesus was standing...

- Perhaps He was standing in solidarity with Stephen
- Perhaps He was standing to "cheer him on".

Acts 7:57-58: Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

When Stephen spoke out that he saw the crucified Jesus standing in a place of authority at the right hand side of God, it was too much for the Sanhedrin.

Otherwise distinguished law abiding men acting like crazy men when confronted with Jesus as Lord. We see this in our world and in our country today don't we?

Here we see that Saul who would later become Paul the Apostle present and overseeing the stoning of Stephen.

Acts 7:59-60: And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Standard practice according to Jewish law for stoning.

He knelt down. Perhaps a posture of worship or of volitional submission?

Stephen pleads with God to forgive his murderers as he is being stoned. Radical love. Luke 23:34. 34, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

Forgiveness...the highest form of love. Stephen didn't waste his suffering. He used it to change the world. How?

- First, God answered Stephens prayer by eventually touching the heart of Saul of Tarsus.
- Second, the persecution that followed Stephen's stoning forced the gospel outward into the surrounding areas.

It says that Stephen "fell asleep".

Stephen was a man filled to his core with the Holy Spirit. I don't think any of us have any idea how great we can be used when we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Follow your calling.
2. Invite the Holy Spirit to fill you daily.

3. Let your words be used to bless and not curse others.
4. Pray for the persecuted.
5. Rediscover the awe of the Lord.
6. Forgive those who have hurt you.
7. Be ready to give a defense of the gospel.
8. Connect to Community.