

Sports & Rec Plus  
THE BOOK OF ACTS  
Lesson 14: Stephen Is Seized  
Acts 6:8-15 (NIV®)  
Rev. Rick Mitchell and Rev. Rod Morris

Welcome to the teaching ministry of **Sports & Rec Plus (S&RP)**. S&RP is a worldwide church planting ministry serving the Lord in ninety countries with an emphasis of taking the Gospel to unreached people groups. We do these using sports, recreation, leisure time activities, and life skills training to open doors for us so that the Word of God can be shared. As God's Word is shared relationships are begun, Bible studies are started, people get saved, then as the Lord leads churches are established, and church leaders are trained.

This message today is part of a series from the book of Acts. You can listen to all of our messages by going to our website: [sportsreplus.org](http://sportsreplus.org) and clicking on the media tab. There you will find over two hundred messages from the Bible.

### *Stephen Seized*

*<sup>8</sup>Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.*

*<sup>11</sup>Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."*

*<sup>12</sup>So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. <sup>13</sup>They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. <sup>14</sup>For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."*

*<sup>15</sup>All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*

## INTRODUCTION

In these eight verses we see four short divisions that outline the workings of the Holy Spirit in Stephen's life and witness.

1. The account of Stephen and his work for Christ verse 8
2. Opposition Stephen met from the enemies of Christianity verses 9 and 10
3. The calling together of Stephen and the Sanhedrin verses 11-14
4. God's owning him, not deserting him upon his trial verse 15

It is said that behind every successful husband is a supportive wife. For just a few minutes I would like for us to think about what kind of a family or more specifically what kind of a relationship did Stephen and his wife have? We are not told if he was married or not, but let us just assume that he was. Even if he was not married, this passage of Scripture will give us a good insight into how a pastor and his wife should relate to each other.

First let us ask ourselves what is the greatest thing a pastor and his wife can give to their church. The answer: an example of what a Christian marriage is and by that what a Christian family looks like.

The wife should participate with her husband and have a ministry (*that she is involved in*) at their church. She is not a full-time staff member, but as a Christian she too has responsibilities in the Kingdom of God as does her husband.

Here are a few principles to think about:

- Wives participate with your husbands in the ministry.
- Support your husband by praying for him daily. Encourage him in his work as the pastor. Also, you should give him support emotionally and physically and stop thinking about the things you do not have.
- Maybe think about the other women in the church and how you can minister to and with them.

This is not an exhaustive list, but it is just to get us thinking about Stephen and his family. He had real responsibilities apart from his church work, and how did he work them all together?

## **Rick's Part**

### **Acts 6:8-11**

## **Stephen Seized**

**6:8 Now Stephen.** We met Steven in our last lesson in the first seven verses of this chapter. He was a man described as being full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. He was chosen, along with six others, to carry out the responsibilities of the daily administrative needs of the church in the daily distribution of food—described as waiting on tables—to the widows.

**a man full of God's grace and power,** This continues the description of Steven and his qualifications.

**performed great wonders and signs among the people.** This doing of signs and wonders were often done by the Holy Spirit through the apostles (Acts 5:12-16) and their associates (Acts 6:8) to authenticate them as messengers of God's truth (2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

**6:9 Opposition arose, however,** not only did we see opposition arise in verse seven but here in verse nine we see it again.

**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.**

The synagogue was the place where Jewish people gathered for worship. Synagogue is a transliteration of a Greek word meaning “to gather together.” There are three different types of Synagogues mentioned here.

- The first, the synagogue of the Freedmen.
- A second type composed of Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and
- A third type composed of those from Cilicia and Asia.

Cultural and linguistic differences among these three groups made it highly unlikely that they attended the same synagogue.

Synagogues originated during the Babylonian captivity after the 586 BC destruction of the temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Synagogues were meeting places that served as places of worship and instruction that began at this time when the dispersed Jews (usually Hellenists), who did not have a temple because the Temple

in Jerusalem had been destroyed, could meet in their local community to worship and read the Old Testament. Jesus frequently taught in the synagogues as did the Apostle Paul.

Those opposed began to argue with Stephen. The word “argue” signifies a formal debate. Without question they probably focused on such themes as the death and resurrection of Jesus and the Old Testament evidence that Jesus was the Messiah—the long-awaited One, sent from God.

**6:10 But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.** They could not stand up against him because his wisdom was from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit always gives you what to say when you must speak on God’s behalf (Luke 12:11-12).

In 2 Corinthians 1:18-25 the Apostle Paul tells us of the power of the wisdom that is from the Holy Spirit.

*<sup>18</sup>For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written:*

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”*

*<sup>20</sup>Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?<sup>21</sup>For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom,<sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.*

*1 Corinthians 1:18-25*

**6:11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, “We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.”** Unable to prevail over Steven in open debate, his enemies resorted to deceit and conspiracy. As with Jesus (Matthew 26: 59-61), they secretly recruited false witnesses to spread lies about Stephen. The charges were serious, since blasphemy was punishable by death (Leviticus 24:16).

So, they begin to tell lies about Stephen. Just think about this. You can always count on Satan, through lies and gossip, to stir up problems. People enjoy hearing about other people and their faults while not realizing that they also have faults of their own. Usually, these faults are greater than the faults of the people they are criticizing.

### **Rod’s Part Acts 6:12-15**

**6:12 So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.** They stirred up the people: The opponents of Stephen could do nothing against the followers of Jesus until they got popular opinion on their side. Previously, persecution against the apostles had been limited because popular opinion was with them (Acts 2:47, 5:26).

- Popular opinion can be easily shaped. The same crowds that praised Jesus (Luke 19:35-40) soon called for His crucifixion (Luke 23:18-23). The crowds that loved the apostles (Acts 2:47, 5:26) are now crying out against Stephen. This is why we should never let popular opinion shape the vision or focus of the church, but let it rest solely on God’s eternal Word. When the church changes Biblical standards and truths, we are no longer following the Bible but are following the lost. Our focus must always be anchored in God’s Word!

**6:13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, “This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.** We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God... This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law... Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs: These were the accusations against Stephen. Significantly, many of the same false accusations were leveled against Jesus (Matthew 26:59-61). It is a good thing to be accused of the same things Jesus was accused of.

- Of course, Stephen never taught against Moses and God, but his glorification of Jesus was twisted.

**6:14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.** Stephen never spoke **blasphemous words against this holy place** (the temple), but he would not make it an idol as many Jewish people in that day did. Stephen had his words twisted, and false accusations were brought against him.

- They accused him of these things because Stephen clearly taught that:
  - Jesus was greater than Moses (blasphemous words against Moses).
  - Jesus was God (blasphemous words against...God).
  - Jesus was greater than the temple (blasphemous words against this holy place).
  - Jesus was the fulfillment of the law (blasphemous words against...the law).
  - Jesus was greater than their religious customs and traditions (Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs).

**6:15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen,**

- Stephen was on trial before the highest religious court he could face—examined by honored, educated, and powerful men. He had been falsely accused and seemed to have lost popular support.

**and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.**

- **His face as the face of an angel:** Stephen’s face did not have that mild, soft, angelic look that we see in so many paintings; nor was it a look of stern judgment and wrath. Instead, his face reflected the perfect peace and confidence of one that knows and trusts his God. His face could have had the same reflected glory that Moses had as he beheld God intimately.
  - “The description is of a person who is close to God and reflects some of His glory as a result of being in his presence (Exodus 34:29ff).” (Marshall)
  - It is reasonable to assume that Saul of Tarsus was in this council, and it is also reasonable to conjecture that he told Luke how Stephen’s face looked that day. As to what his face actually looked like we don’t know. But what we do know is that Paul is describing with an objective observation. Whatever Stephen’s appearance was, Paul never forgot Stephen’s face; nor could he ever erase from his memory the sorrow of that tragic day when the first martyr of the Christian religion sealed his faith with his blood.
- Whatever Stephen’s appearance was, we know that **the face of an angel** means that Stephen was at perfect peace. His face was not filled with fear or terror, because he knew his life was in God’s hands and that Jesus never forsakes His people.

## CONCLUSION

We can learn a lot from Stephen on the day he stood before the council being tried simply because he was obeying the commands of Christ to proclaim the Gospel to all the world. How would you react when falsely accused? Would you lash out at your accusers? Would you defend yourself? Or would you stand there with the face of an angel knowing that you are in God’s hands? He stood there with the **face of an angel**. I imagine he was closer to the Lord than he had ever been in his life as he prayed for the perfect words for his reply.

Too often when faced with adversity, we respond with anger and maybe even a tone of violence in our speech without looking at the situation from the perspective of God. It is obvious that Stephen having the **face of an**

**angel** was seeking to respond to this situation from the perspective of God. Stephen's demeanor before the highest religious court in all of Israel should also be ours. I cannot think of a higher compliment that could have been said of Stephen that day. And remember that this was written by Luke with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This means that God was pleased with Stephen's actions that day.

My question to you today, "What would God say about you as you face the storms of life?" Would He be pleased or saddened? We need to learn from Stephen.

Let's pray.

Next week we will look at Stephen's response to the council.

---

Our prayer here at Sports & Rec Plus for you is that every message we send out is an inspiration and blessing in your personal walk with the Lord. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about this or any of our messages. And take a few minutes to visit our website and see how we can come alongside you, as you take the Gospel to your community and the world. Here is our contact information:

Website: [sportsrecplus.org](http://sportsrecplus.org)

Phone: 571-278-5987

Rick's email: [sportsrecplus@cs.org](mailto:sportsrecplus@cs.org)

Rod's email: [coloradoredbird@gmail.com](mailto:coloradoredbird@gmail.com)