



The Book of Acts
Bringing in a New Dispensation
Acts 7:54-8:13

Verse 54 —

When they heard these things. Stephen gave his *defense* against the accusations that had been levied against him: 1) He blasphemed Moses and God. 2) He blasphemed the Temple of God. Each charge was untrue and made up by *suborned men, i.e. men who had taken a bribe to accuse him*. But Stephen put it all back on the Jews (The Council/Sanhedrin) in verses 51-53, telling them they were the bad guys and they had betrayed and killed the *Just One, the Messiah*.

With that accusation by Stephen, **They were cut to the heart**. In chapter 5:33, that same phrase, *they were cut*, was used by the Council; the Greek word *diaprio*, *dia=through* and *prio=to cut in two with a saw*. The idea being they were thoroughly enraged against Stephen. **And they gnashed on him with their teeth**. Literally, *they chewed him up*. They had SDS (Stephen Derangement Syndrome).

Verse 55 —

In our last class, we looked at several fillings of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts (Acts 2:4; 4:8; 4:31; 6:3; 9:17; 13:52). The phrase, **full of the Holy Ghost**, that we see in verse 55 is used five times in the N.T. (Luke 4:1; Acts 6:3; Acts 6:5; Acts 7:55; Acts 11:24). This is the third time we see this phrase in relation to Stephen (6:3, 6:5, 7:55). The first time we see it was in Luke 4:1 where Jesus, after his baptism, was *full of the Holy Ghost*.

In both cases, Jesus and Stephen, this fullness of the Holy Ghost came on them along with some kind of manifestation. It was to prepare them for some encounter. We don't get any sense that after Stephen there is a special filling of the Holy Ghost for believers. And we should be careful of not making a doctrine for ourselves from a historic account.

The Apostle Paul, as we will see later, is *filled with the Holy Ghost* after he meets Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:17). Later, in Romans 15:13, which was written about 25-30 years later, the apostle Paul wishes for the Romans to be filled *with all joy and peace in believing, and that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost*. But he doesn't pray or wish for their *filling of the Holy Spirit*.

It is common for Christians to say that once we believe; we are all filled with the Holy Spirit. And maybe we are, but where is that specifically stated? And what exactly does it mean for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit? How would we know if we are filled with the Holy Spirit?

Paul states in Ephesians 2:18 that through Jesus, both Jews and Gentiles have access to the Father through Christ, by one Spirit. However, it is unclear if he means being filled with the Holy Spirit. That would require us to read it into the passage. In 1 Corinthians, there are several passages that discuss the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. However, we don't see these same manifestations today, at least not in the same way they are described in 1 Corinthians.

Many people may derive their understanding of being filled with the Holy Spirit from 1 Corinthians 12:13. However, it is important to note that Paul does not specifically instruct the Corinthians to be filled with the Spirit. Instead, he informs them that they were all immersed into one body, which is the body of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The closest we may have to *being full of the Holy Ghost* for our dispensation is in Ephesians 5:18: *...but be filled with [the] Spirit*. The time period of Acts is a transitional time. The apostolic dispensation in which the Holy Ghost came upon people in the same fashion as we see with Stephen, has passed away.

There are many passages that refer to walking in the spirit, but these are never used as an imperative, that is they are not commands (Romans 8:1; 8:4; 2 Corinthians 12:18; Galatians 5:16; 5:25),

Today, the spiritual empowerment we can have for certain, again is what Paul prayed in Romans 15:13: To be filled with joy and peace in believing (which comes from the Spirit), and our abounding in hope (which also comes by one Spirit, which it seems all believers have access (Ephesians 2:18; Ephesians 4:4).

With all that said, my goal is to encourage you to take what we are discussing here, and do more study for yourself. Don't believe a certain doctrine just because you have heard it repeated over and over again. Actually, read and study the passages for yourself. If you find new information, that sheds more light on a particular doctrine, no matter how long you have held that belief, be humble enough to make an adjustment to your theology. That is called maturity.

Looked up steadfastly into heaven (vs. 55), Greek *atenzio*. As his body was pelted with stones, his attention was taken off the human scene before him and directed toward heaven. We usually bow our heads when praying as a sign of reverence. The Jewish people, along with Gentiles, often prayed to God in heaven by looking up. Our posture in prayer is irrelevant.

Stephen's attention *atenzio* was focused on **the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God**. In the New Testament, there are several references to the Son of Man (Jesus) *sitting at the right hand of God* (some examples: Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 10:12; 12:2). This is the

only place where we see Jesus **standing** after His ascension. There are some who believe that Jesus is standing in honor of Stephen who is giving his life for the gospel. I can't prove or disprove that is the case, but I think there is more to it than Jesus standing in honor. The next verse might help us see more clearly what is taking place.

Verse 56 —

Behold, I see the heavens opened. In some passages in the Bible, when heaven opens and the Lord stands, it is in relation to judgment, for example Psalm 7:6; 9:19. At the return of Jesus Christ, which is what those Psalms refer to, **heavens open** and Jesus Christ who is called Faithful and True will return as King of kings, and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:11). I believe Stephen's statement described God's impending judgment on the Council. This threat God **standing** in judgment is what angered the high priest and the others.

Verse 57 —

Then they cried out with a loud voice. The word **cried** can mean, *to croak, or the cry of a raven*. The Greek word is *krazo*. It is the same word used when the crowd *cried out to Pilate, Crucify him (John 19:6)*. Although it can apply to any loud speech, we might even speculate that this was a demonic guttural cry (Mark 1:26; 5:7; 9:26). But it can also be a cry of torment, as when just before Jesus died on the cross he *cried out with a loud voice (Matthew 27:50)*. Stephen also *cries out* in verse 60.

This *cry of the Sanhedrin* was loud (Greek: *megas*). **Stopped their ears, and ran upon him, or, to run violently.** Stephen is not getting a trial, he is getting lynched by the hostile mob. There was no *Gamaliel* this time to calm them and to reason with them and to stop them from killing Stephen (See Acts 5:33-39). All **with one accord** were against Stephen. They were in unison. We should also ask, was *Gamaliel (Acts 5:34)* part of this accord?

This is in contrast to the Jewish believers who were *in one accord* in their devotion to their Messiah (Acts 2:46).

Verse 58 —

And cast him out of the city, (Greek: **cast**, *ekballo*—to throw out), **and stoned him.** Execution by stoning was a common way for mobs to execute vengeance (See Luke 20:6; John 8:59). According to the Law of Moses, which apparently the Council follows when it is convenient, stoning was to take place outside of the city (Numbers 15:35-36). The first to cast the stones were the witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:7), although in this case they were all false witnesses. **And the witnesses laid down their clothes.** Probably their outer garments. **At a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.** For the first time we are introduced to Saul, who will later be known as Paul, the apostle.

We will find out in subsequent chapters that Saul was a devout Jew. Saul, a man of the tribe of Benjamin (Acts 13:21) was probably named after King Saul, the first king of Israel.

Luke, the author does not say why Saul was present at the stoning. Since he was a Jew from Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3), the chief city of the Roman province of Cilicia in Asia Minor, with a large Greek presence, he may have been a part of the *synagogue of the Libertines...* (Acts 6:9).

Saul, however, probably moved to Jerusalem when he was young according to Acts 22:3, and grew up being schooled by Gamaliel (See Acts 5:34). It could be that he is observing his teacher and mentor, Gamaliel throwing stones at Stephen. We will see next time that Saul follows in his mentor's footsteps and will himself make havoc in the assembly.

The term **young man** could mean he was between fifteen and thirty. If we speculate Saul was born around A.D. 10, he would be around 23 years old here. In the book of Philemon (written by the apostle Paul, vs. 9), Paul refers to himself as "Paul the aged" (Greek: *presbutes*). Philemon was written in A.D. 64 (thirty years later), when he would have been in his mid to late 50s. That was probably the life expectancy for many living in the Roman Empire in the first century. Owing to what Paul had been through in his brief life, being 50 or 60 could have aged him further (2 Corinthians 1:8,9; 11:24-27).

Verse 59, 60 —

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God. Stephen, as they were stoning him was **calling upon God** in a similar fashion of Jesus (Luke 23:46). **Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down.** This is not a formula for prayer. Prayer can be accomplished in any posture or position. There is no right or wrong way to pray. A good rule of interpretation is to not use a historical event to form a doctrine. But oftentimes people do fall on their knees in prayer. Some may touch their face to the ground. Stephen most likely continued looking up, as he **cried with a loud voice.**

What is amazing is not his posture, but what he said, **Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.** The Greek word for **lay** is *histemi*. It means, stand. Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God in anticipation of judgment, now he **cried** Lord, don't stand! Literally, I think he could be saying, Lord, do not stand in judgment of these men. This is not a model of forgiveness for us to follow, rather it could be a cry by Stephen to give these religious men, who were so wrong, another chance to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

He fell asleep. This is one Greek word, *koiao* which literally means to fall asleep unintentionally, and it is used for death in most cases where it is used. Here the context indicates he died, since he was being stoned, and chapter 8:1,2 makes it completely clear that he died.

What happens when a believer dies? First, there is never an indication that our soul sleeps as some religions, like Seventh Day Adventists, teach. Second, Paul indicates that when we are absent from the body (i.e., dead), we are present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Again, while the word “sleep” is used, it’s most always used as a euphemism (a nice way of saying something) for “death.”

Most Christian churches teach that since our bodies do not rise until the resurrection at the Rapture that our spirit goes to be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18). Are we simply spirits when we die? Or, do we receive some kind of temporary body? Are we always human and never are just spirits? Maybe. Some of my thinking comes from 2 Corinthians 5:1-4. At this point, this needs more study, but it is certainly something to consider.