

Historical Perspective**Acts 6:8—7:51**

Although the Hebrew assembly was growing quickly, the Little Flock of believers constituted a small percentage of Israel. Population estimates vary widely, but knowing that the believers were called the *Little Flock* (Luke 12:32) indicated that it was a minority of Israel who believed Jesus was the Messiah. Even if 25% believed, that meant 75% did not. Also, almost all of the leaders of Israel rejected anything to do with Jesus Christ. Where the leaders go, the nation goes meaning if the leaders reject the Messiah, the nation rejects the Messiah. The key for Israel's future was faith in Jesus Christ.

Stephen

Stephen was one of the men who were chosen to help serve tables to free up the Apostles so that they could serve the spiritual needs of the people. Stephen didn't just serve the people, he was also a man filled with the Holy Spirit, and, as verse 8 states, he was full of faith and power and did great wonders and miracles among the people. He had a ministry that complimented what the Apostles were doing.

Having the power of the Holy Spirit working through Stephen apparently got the attention of the religious leaders of Israel. Many came up against Stephen to dispute with him. However, they were unable to stand against the wisdom he received through the Holy Spirit. Since they were unable to take him down through debate, they needed to resort to underhanded trickery, paying people to lie about what he said. These false witnesses accused him of blaspheming against Moses and against God, and against the temple and the Law. This is the same thing they did against Jesus Christ, which ultimately led to His death on the cross (Matthew 26:59). These leaders are doing everything they can to stamp out the name of Jesus Christ and His believers.

Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin and accused of saying that Jesus will destroy the temple and change the customs which were given by Moses. Similar false allegations were also used against Jesus when they condemned Him of saying He would destroy the temple, and that He did not follow the tradition of the elders when it came to special washings (Matthew 15:2). These leaders put their traditions on the same level as the Mosaic Law, so they could accuse Stephen of teaching that it was okay to break the Law of Moses since he was a follower of Jesus, who also did not follow the traditions of the elders (Matthew 15:1—3).

As he sat in the midst of the council, his face became as the "face of an angel." So, what does the face of an angel look like? Apparently, it is a reference to having a face that glowed. This is what happened to Moses as he came down from Mt. Horeb after receiving the Law, indicating that he had been in the presence of God (Exodus 34:29—35; 2 Corinthians 3:7—8). Instances of heavenly beings shining are found in Daniel 10:5—6 and Luke 2:9. It's interesting to note that Israel looked to Moses in fear as he came down the mountain while the leaders looked steadfastly at Stephen, seemingly without any fear of God.

History lesson

Stephen, under the power of the Holy Spirit, gives these leaders a historical perspective to what was happening within Israel at that particular moment in time.

Abraham

God came to Abraham while he was living with his family in Ur (Genesis 11:31; Acts 7:2). Instead of going to the land that God was to show him, he and his family traveled northwest along the Euphrates River to Haran (Charran). Once Abraham's father, Terah, died, Abraham traveled to the land that God showed to him.

Even though God brought Abraham to the land that would eventually become Israel's possession, he had no land that he could call his own (verse 5). The fulfillment of that promise would come through his descendants, specifically through the son of promise, Isaac. However, before that happens, God sent them down to Egypt to be enslaved for over 400 years (Genesis 15:13—21). God gave Abram the sign of circumcision to remind him that the promises given to him would indeed be fulfilled. From God's promise came Isaac and Jacob, the father of 12 sons who would form the nation of Israel.

Stephen brought up Abram because he was the forefather of Israel. Abraham was also promised a future "seed" who would be the Savior of Israel (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16). Stephen connected this promised seed to Jesus the Messiah. Interestingly, Abraham is a type for God the Father and God the Son. This type was obviously demonstrated when Abraham offered up his son Isaac on the altar, just as the Father offered up His Son to die for our sins. Abraham is also pictured as Christ when he left his home and eventually became the father of all believers.

Joseph

The story of Joseph continues Stephen's narrative about the formation of the nation of Israel and their struggle to free themselves from Egypt. Just as Jacob was rejected by his brothers, Jesus would be rejected by His brothers, the nation of Israel. As Jacob was raised to a glorified position, Jesus will be glorified in the Millennial Kingdom.

Stephen was using this patriarch of Israel to show the religious leaders that they were now the ones rejecting the Messiah, just as their forefathers rejected Joseph. He is continuing to build his case that the leader of Israel have not changed for hundreds of years, and that they have evil, self-serving hearts.

Moses

Stephen next spends a fair amount of time sharing details of Moses' life that parallel that of Jesus, and show how the leaders failed to identify Jesus as Messiah.

Moses was called by God to lead Israel out of enslavement and into the promised land. Moses understood that God had singled him out for this purpose, and so when he sees the Egyptian mistreating the Hebrew man, Moses took action and killed the Egyptian. Unfortunately, he was acting on his own, not under God's direction. God was not ready for him to lead Israel out of captivity. Forty years later, God appeared to Moses at the burning bush telling him it was now time to take action. Notice the parallel of Moses and Jesus. Moses was first rejected then ultimately lead Israel to the Promised Land. Jesus was also first rejected, then will bring Israel to the Promised Land.

Just as God raised up Moses to save the people from the Egyptians, God gave Israel Jesus Christ to save them from their sins (Genesis 18:15—18). If Israel had understood that Moses was a picture of Jesus Christ, they would know He came to Israel as their Savior. They once again missed what God was telling them because they were a stiff-necked people (Acts 7:51).

Joshua, David, Solomon

Joshua, David and Solomon are all mentioned next, as Stephen continues his condemnation of the Jewish leaders, comparing them to the former leaders who killed God's men in past generations. Each one is a picture of Jesus Christ. Joshua (in Hebrew the name is spelled Yeshua which is transliterated as Jesus in the Greek) lead Israel into the Promised Land. David was king over Israel, just as Jesus Christ will be the King over Israel in the Millennial Kingdom (Jeremiah 33:14—17). Solomon is also a type of Christ ruling in the Millennial Kingdom in all His splendor.

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