**The Fullness of God and Men**

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

 Two flies were buzzing around a picnic one day when they spotted a baloney sandwich. After they had eaten their fill, they flew over to an outdoor well for a drink. After resting a while on the well pump’s handle, one of them took off—but fell down dead just a few feet away. After a few seconds, the other one took off from the well pump handle, but he too got only a few feet before falling down dead. And the moral of the story is: don’t fly off the handle *when you’re full of baloney!*

As we return to our study of Acts 6, we find a man named Stephen who was full *of faith.* But he’s about to go head to head with some unsaved Jews who were full of *hate.* Talk about the fullness of God and men!

 **“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:8).**

Now that word *faith* has more than one meaning, but here it means *faithfulness,* as it does when Paul asked,

**“…what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make *the faith of God* without effect?” (Romans 3:3).**

As you can see, the word “faith” there has to refer to God’s *faithfulness.* In speaking of the Jews, Paul argued: “Just because they weren’t faithful to God doesn’t mean God was unfaithful to them.” So Stephen was filled with *faithfulness.*

But you’ll notice that our text also says he was filled with “power.” And we don’t have to guess as to what kind of power we’re talking about here, for it goes on to say he “did great wonders and miracles.” Stephen was filled with *miracle-working* power.

 And the *reason* he was filled with faith and power is that he was one of the ones we read about in Acts 2:4:

**“…*they were all filled with the Holy Ghost,* and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”**

And faithfulness and miracle-working power were *also* gifts of the Spirit, in addition to the ability to speak in tongues, as we see when Paul wrote:

**“…For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom*…*To another *faith* by the same Spirit…To another *the working of miracles…*to another divers kinds of tongues” (I Corinthians 12:8-10).**

 So Stephen was full of faith and power because he was filled with the Spirit.

 But there’s something *about* the filling of the Spirit at Pentecost that I’d like to point out here. We know that they were filled with the Spirit in such a way that the Spirit actually *controlled* them, for that’s what God predicted He would do in Ezekiel 36:27:

**“I will put my spirit within you, *and cause you to walk in my statutes…”***

The Spirit caused them to walk in God’s ways in such a way that they literally *could not sin.* That’s why John could write them and say,

**“Whosoever is born of God *doth not commit sin*…he *cannot* sin…” (I John 3:9).**

But just because the Spirit *controlled* them, that doesn’t mean He overpowered their will, and made them into a bunch of mindless robots. They still had different and distinct personalities. And you know that because of something we saw in our last study, when these disciples were looking for men to settle a dispute. Let’s review the first three verses of Acts 6 to refresh our memories of the details of that dispute:

 **“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.**

**“Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.**

**“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:1-3).**

Now when it says they looked for men filled with the Holy Ghost and wisdom, we’ve already seen in our glance at I Corinthians 12:8-10 that *wisdom* was one of the gifts of the Spirit. And at Pentecost, they *all* had the gift of wisdom, just like they all spoke in tongues. Later in Corinth, wisdom was given to “one” and tongues to “another,” but all the believers had all the gifts at Pentecost. Remember, the Lord had predicted that those signs would follow “them that believe” (Mark 16:17), and they did.

But if all the disciples at Pentecost were filled with the Spirit and had the gift of wisdom, how were they supposed to choose seven men to settle that disagreement? If they all had the gift of wisdom, what might prompt them to choose one man over another?

Well, you’ll notice that the apostles *also* told the disciples to pick seven men “of honest report.” And one of the definitions of the word “honest” is *impartial,* and *equal,* and *fair.* Doesn’t that sound like the kind of men you’d want setting a dispute?

But the thing about honesty is, it wasn’t one of the gifts of the Spirit. The disciples were being told to choose men who were honest *in and of themselves.* That word “report” means *repute,* as in they were *of good repute—*they had a *reputation* for being honest, for being able to decide things fairly, and equitably, and impartially.

And *that’s* what they were told to look for when choosing these seven men. They all had the gift of wisdom. They needed men who were *also* known for being fair and impartial.

But that means that the Spirit with which they were filled didn’t *eclipse* their personalities. And remember, they were being given a taste of the world to come in the kingdom of heaven on earth (Heb. 6:5). That means when we get to the kingdom of heaven *in heaven,* you too are going to be unable to sin. And you’ll probably have some pretty amazing powers too, just as they did in that taste of the kingdom of heaven on earth. But that doesn’t mean your personality will be eclipsed, and we’ll all be a bunch of mindless robots. We’ll still have all of our different and distinct personalities.

You see, these disciples weren’t a bunch of marionette dolls, with God up above pulling the strings, forcing them to move at His every whim. They were still their same old selves, governed by their individual personalities and their individual wills. Men who were naturally honest could use that honesty to render a fair and equitable decision in the matter of the Grecian widows.

But that means you’ll still be you when you get to heaven. All of the charming and delightful idiosyncrasies that make you *you* will still make up your personality in heaven.

And the reason for this is that *God likes it that way.* He delights in our different personalities. That’s why He created us with the capacity to develop them. Even if Adam hadn’t sinned, we wouldn’t have all been cookie-cutter human beings with the exact same character and temperament. And we won’t all be identical in heaven either. They say variety is the spice of life, and it is. But it’s also the spice of *God’s* life. How boring would heaven be if we were all exactly the same? That would be boring for God, and boring for us too. And heaven is *not* going to be boring!

Now as we read on in our text, we see how the Jews reacted to Stephen’s ministry:

**“Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen” (Acts 6:9).**

Now when it says that these men rose up and disputed with *Stephen,* did you ever wonder who died and left him in charge, so to speak? I mean, how come Stephen seems to be God’s man of the hour here in Acts 6, and not Peter, as was the case in the first five chapters of Acts, where he is mentioned 19 times.

Well, it’s because a *year* has passed since “the day of Pentecost was fully come” (Acts 2:1). We know this to be so because of the Lord’s parable in Luke 13:6-9:

**“A certain man had a fig tree…and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, *these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree*, and find none: *cut it down;* why cumbereth it the ground? And he...said…*let it alone this year also*…if it bear fruit, well: *and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down”***

If you know the Old Testament well, these words may sound familiar. The Lord probably had Isaiah 5 in mind when He spoke these words, for in that passage the owner of the vineyard was Isaiah’s “well beloved” Father, and “the vineyard…*is the house of Israel”* (Isa. 5:7). In that passage, there was a dispute between God and Israel, and the prophet was trying to get his countrymen to see that this dispute wasn’t God’s fault. He had done everything He could do to make His vineyard fruitful. When His people brought forth “wild” fruit instead of the cultivated fruit you’d expect in a cultivated vineyard, the fault had to lie with the vineyard, not with the owner of the vineyard.

Back in Luke 13, the “dresser” of the vineyard represented the Lord Jesus. His Father sought fruit in Israel during the “three years” of the Lord’s ministry among them, but found none, not even wild fruit! At that point, the Father wanted to cut the tree of the nation Israel down after they crucified His Son, and understandably so. But His Son persuaded Him to give His people *one more year.* If they didn’t bear fruit then, *then* they could cut the tree down.

And we know that this additional year had passed, for Stephen is about to be stoned here in Acts 6, after which God *did* cut the tree of Israel down and introduced the dispensation of grace shortly after.

And that’s why *Stephen* is God’s man of the hour, and not Peter. You see, Stephen’s name means “crown,” and he’s about to become an example of something we read about in Revelation 2:10:

 **“…be thou faithful unto death, *and I will give thee a crown of life”***

And that’s talking about a crown of *eternal* life. Once God saw that the people of Israel were going to *reject* the preaching of the twelve, just as they rejected the preaching of the Lord Himself, He wanted the man leading Israel to be an example of how those saints will have to be faithful unto death to obtain eternal life.

So this man Stephen, whose name *means* “crown,” is the one God chose to illustrate this type. God needed the twelve apostles to keep on living, so they could keep preaching the kingdom program that would need to be preached during the transition period from law to grace. And He needed them alive to write letters to those kingdom believers, some of which would become part of the Bible, ready to guide Tribulation saints through that terrible time. So He didn’t want *Peter* to die. He chose Stephen to be a type of Tribulation saints who will have to be faithful unto death.

Here we see again that what we are reading here in the Book of Acts is not dry history. Israel’s past is a dress rehearsal for her future, and Acts is filled with these kinds of types. We’ve seen some already, and we’ll see more in our studies to come.

Now the first thing we notice about these men who were disputing with Stephen is that they weren’t Israel’s *leaders.* This opposition seems to be coming from the rank and file among the Jewish people. Israel’s *leaders* lived in Jerusalem, and these men were all from out of town. So this was sort of a grass roots movement against the preaching of Christ. And this was something the Lord saw coming, as we see when He foretold it in Matthew 10:17:

**“…they will deliver you up to the councils, *and*…scourge you *in their synagogues”***

We’ve already seen the Jewish “council” persecuting the disciples (Acts 5:40,41), and here we see the rest of the Lord’s prophecy come true, as the average run of the mill Jew in the synagogue is now disputing with the Lord’s disciples.

 Now the “Libertines” are only mentioned here, so we can’t know anything about them for certain. But whenever the Jews were in captivity, they were always looking for *liberty,* as we see when they were in captivity to Babylon (Jer. 34:7,8). And here in Acts 6, they were in captivity *again,* this time to Rome. That’s why Isaiah predicted that the Lord would say,

**“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek…*to proclaim liberty to the captives…”* (Isa. 61:1 cf. Luke 4:18).**

Now that’s not saying that God sent His Son to bust criminals out of the county jail. The “captives” there are the people of Israel! God anointed His Son to give the Jews liberty *from their Roman captors,* as well as from their sins. Remember, when the Lord was born, it was said of Him:

 **“the Lord God…hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David…*That we should be saved from our enemies*, and from the hand of all that hate us” (Luke 1:68-70).**

So the Libertines might have been a movement that was established to seek liberty from captivity from Israel’s enemies in Rome. But even if it was, here in Acts 6, their main enemy was no longer Rome, it was the twelve apostles and the disciples in the little flock! So I believe the Libertines were now fighting for a *different* kind of liberty, the kind we read about in Psalm 119:45:

**“…I will walk at liberty: *for I seek thy precepts”***

I think these Libertines were fighting for the precepts found in the law of Moses, and the liberty *from sin* that the law could give, as we see when the psalmist went on to say,

**“Order my steps in Thy word: and let not any iniquity *have dominion over me”* (Psalm 119:133).**

As strange as it may sound, in the measure the Jews followed the law, in that measure they had liberty from sin. That’s what those verses are saying.

Now if you’re wondering why I think the Libertines were championing the liberty from sin found in the law, its because of what they later charge Stephen with in Verse 13 of our text. Let’s peek ahead:

**“This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law” (Acts 6:13).**

The Libertines believed that the law could give them liberty from sin, but Stephen was saying that *Christ* could give them liberty from sin, for he was preaching what the Lord preached when He told the Jews,

**“…ye shall know the truth, *and the truth shall make you free.* They answered…We …were never in bondage… Jesus answered them…*Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin*…If the Son therefore shall make you free, *ye shall be free indeed”* (John 8:32-36).**

That’s another reason Isaiah said God would anoint the Lord to preach liberty to the captives. They were in captivity to *sin* as well as to Rome.

 And like the Lord, Stephen was *also* preaching that Christ could give them liberty from the captivity of their sins. And the Libertines thought that He meant to grant them that liberty *apart from the law.* But the Lord planned to free them from their sins by *dying* for their sins, and then sending His Spirit to fill and control them so that they could keep the law perfectly, and give them liberty from their sins in *that* way.

 Did you ever wonder why James called the law “the law of *liberty”* (James 2:12)? You know he was talking about the law of Moses, for he *quotes* the ten commandments in the context (v.10,11). Without the Spirit, the ten commandments were “a yoke of bondage” (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1). But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. At Pentecost, the Spirit gave the disciples liberty from their sins by giving them the power to keep the law *perfectly.*

That’s how they knew a man was saved! In that same passage in the epistles of James, he told those Jews,

**“…commit no adultery…and so do, *as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty”* (James 2:11,12).**

That’s how they “judged” whether a man was saved or not. We know that even unsaved men were working miracles at Pentecost, for Hebrews 6:4-6 warned that some of those who tasted the powers of the world to come might fall away. But saved men were free from sin. That’s why one of the themes of the Book of I John is that when a man sinned it made “manifest” that he wasn’t a child of God (I John 3:9,10).

And this was the message that Stephen was preaching, that of liberty from sin that could be obtained by believing on Christ and letting Him fill you with His Spirit. But these Libertines didn’t want that kind of liberty, for they thought they didn’t *need* that kind of liberty. They thought they could keep the law well enough to be saved by their own efforts (cf. Luke 18:11,12). You know. Like most people think even to this day!

Now the “Alexandrians” that Luke mentions in our text here in Acts 6:9 were probably *also* champions of the law. They were from Alexandria, of course, and guess who else was from Alexandria? In Acts 18:24, we read about

**“…a certain Jew named Apollos, *born at Alexandria,* an eloquent man, *and mighty in the scriptures*, came to Ephesus.”**

And you know *which* Scriptures he was mighty in, the *Old Testament* Scriptures—the law! That suggests that perhaps *all* the Alexandrian Jews were mighty in the law. And if so, can you see why the Alexandrians would join the Libertines in disputing with Stephen about the law?

And when it says that “them of Cilicia” disputed with Stephen as well (6:9), guess who lived in Cilicia? Paul later told the men of Israel,

**“I am…a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city in Cilicia,* yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers”* (Acts 22:3).**

Who knows, maybe the reason Saul of Tarsus hungered to *learn* the law perfectly was that he was born in a city that was big on the law as well.

 There’s a reason why the ones disputing with Stephen were all from out of town. After a year, the Jews in Jerusalem probably *gave up* on trying to dispute with the disciples. But the Jews who lived out of town were more zealous of the law.

 Why might that be? Well, Jews who lived out of town were more apt to be persecuted for their faith, for they had to live among people who thought their laws and customs were strange. And it’s just human nature to persecute people who are *different* than you are. If you don’t believe that, ask the first black boy to grow up in the town in which I was raised back in the ‘60s. I was his Cut Scout leader, and all of the Cub Scouts accepted him. But he didn’t have it so easy with some of the other kids, for it’s natural to persecute people who are different.

 And if you’re persecuted because your *religion* is different, it makes you stand *stronger* and cling *tighter* to your faith. That’s why I always say that I hope persecution of the Christian faith doesn’t come to us here in the United States, but if it does, it will make us stronger. God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness.

 But here’s another thought about “them of Cilicia.” Saul of Tarsus was probably one of the ones from Cilicia who were disputing with Stephen. We just heard him say that he was from Cilicia (Acts 22:3), and if you know your Bible you know that Saul is about to show up for the very first time in Acts 7. So he was probably here with the rest of the men from Cilicia, disputing with Stephen and trying to convince him to stick with the law.

 Okay, now that we know what a formidable lineup of heavy hitters for the law we have disputing with Stephen about the law here, you’d think they would give Stephen a run for his money, so to speak, and put up quite a fight. But as we read on, we see that’s not what happened!

**“And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10).**

 Now when it says they weren’t able to resist Stephen’s wisdom, don’t forget, we’re not talking about the wisdom *of an apostle* here. We’re talking about the wisdom of *a waiter.* Stephen was one of the ones chosen to “serve tables” (Acts 6:2), making sure the Grecian widows weren’t neglected in the daily ministration. This shows that if you have the truth of God on yoru side, *no one can resist your wisdom either.* It doesn’t matter if you’re a waiter, or a plumber, or a mom, or whatever, you don’t need to be a pastor or a Bible teacher to be able to teach the truth in a *powerful* way!

 That is, if you’re teaching the truth *rightly divided.* These unsaved Jews had the truth, but they had the truth of the law of Moses, the truth of the past dispensation! The only *irresistible* truth is the truth *rightly divided!*

And Stephen was able to speak rightly divided truth *perfectly,* for he was filled with the Spirit, and the Lord had promised him,

**“…they will scourge you in their synagogues…But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: *for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak*. For it is not ye that speak, *but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you”* (Matthew 10:17,19,20).**

Now that didn’t mean they’d open their mouths and words would come out like you see in those horror movies where the devil possesses a little girl, and she speaks in a deep, frightening voice. The Spirit spoke through Stephen like He spoke through the prophets when they made their prophecies, and like He spoke through them when they wrote the words of the Bible. They didn’t write with some mysterious force guiding their hands and overpowering their will. They spoke using their own words, and wrote in their own handwriting. God reached into their vocabulary and prompted them to use words that were *the very words of God.*

 Now He doesn’t do that for us, of course. But do you know what our apostle says about us in Colossians 3:16?

**“*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom;* teaching…one another…”**

If you let the word of God dwell in your richly, Paul says *you* can teach the Word like Stphen! If you’re thinking, “But not *as well* as Stephen,” I would reply, “Is there really that much difference?” Paul told the Corinthians, “we have the mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16). Now those carnal saints were “babes in Christ” (3:1). The only place the Corinthians had the mind of Christ *was in the Bible.* Any time they wanted to know what Christ thought about something, all they had to do was open the Book to find out. And that’s all you have to do too!

And if that mind of Christ dwells in you richly, you can then teach it to others using your own words out of your own vocabulary—you know, like Stephen did!

Listen, if you think God is using an inferior method of communicating His Word today compared to how Stephen communicated it, look what Paul said to the Romans:

**“I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, *filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another”* (Romans 15:14).**

Now when it says they were “filled with all knowledge,” that doesn’t mean they knew everything there is to kno about the Bible. It means they knew all they *needed* to know to be able to teach and admonish one another. And you do too, if you know Paul’s gospel!

 Now when it *also* says they wren’t able to resist “the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10), that’s not talking about the Holy Spirit. That’s talking about the spirit of his words, the manner in which he spoke, the gracious spirit in which he articulated his words. And that’s something *else* that Paul says you can have. He told the Colossians,

**“Let your speech be *always with grace”* (Colossians 4:6).**

Speaking the truth *graciously* is just as important as speaking it *accurately.* Stephen wasn’t crushing the arguments of these proponents of the law with a wicked gleam in his eye and contempt in his voice, like many grace believers articulate truth to non-grace believers. He spoke to them with humility and love in his heart, and so should we!

 Well, there’s an old saying that says, “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em!” And that was certainly an option for these unsaved Jews here when they found they couldn’t resist Stephen’s wisdom. But as we read on in our text, we see that that’s not the option they chose:

 **“Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God” (Acts 6:11).**

Now that word “suborned” means to induce someone to do something wrong, often by bribery. About the only time we hear the word used today is in court, where they talk about suborning witnesses. And that’s how it’s being used here, for you see, Stephen was on trial for his life! And the prosecutors were doing what they did at the Lord’s trial and finding “false witnesses” (Mt.26:59-61).

 And what we’re seeing here with these false witnesses here in Acts 6 was pictured back in I Kings 21:1-10, where we read,

**“Naboth…had a vineyard…And Ahab spake unto Naboth…Give me thy vineyard …And Naboth said…The LORD forbid it...And Jezebel his wife…set two men, sons of Belial...to bear witness against him, saying, *Thou didst blaspheme God and the king*” (I Kings 21:1-10).**

If you know the story here, these men bore false witness against Naboth, the legitimate owner of the vineyard, so Ahab could get possession of it. And what did Isaiah say the vineyard represented? Wasn’t it “the house of Israel” (Isa.5:7)? And these false witnesses here in Acts 6 were bearing false witness against Stephen, one of the legitimate owners of the vineyard of Israel after the Lord took it from Israel’s rulers and gave it to His little flock, in order to get possession of it for the ones who suborned them to bear false witness—just like they killed the Lord to get possession of the vineyard:

**“*…when the husbandmen saw the son,* they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, *let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance”* (Matthew 21:38).**

Now maybe you’re thinking, “How can they charge Stephen with blasphemy against Moses? Isn’t blasphemy always against God? Well, my dictionary says that blasphemy can either be against God or against sacred things. And Moses and his law were certainly a sacred thing in Israel. So by strict definition, they could charge Stephen with blasphemy against Moses—if it were true! But it *wasn’t* blasphemy to say that you needed the Spirit to help you keep the law of Moses perfectly. It was blasphemous to think you could keep it *without* the Spirit, however, for God’s Word says you can’t!

 But if it is legitimate to say that it was blasphemy to speak against Moses because he was God’s man of the hour in time past, what do you think we should call it when men speak against Paul today? What’s good for the Moses goose is surely good for Paul’s gander! After all, he’s God’s man of the hour in the dispensation of grace!

 Okay, now that these unsaved Jews had their false witnesses all lined up, it was time to poison the minds of the jury and arrest the defendant! Speaking of those out of town Jews, we read:

 **“And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council” (Acts 6:12).**

Now when it says they “caught” Stephen, that means he was trying to get away! Remember, if the leaders of our nation decide to come after you for preaching Christ, you can run, like Stephen and David did when King Saul was trying to kill him without a cause. But you have to follow David’s example and not lift so much of a finger of resistance.

 But now, do you know what Stephen was doing while they were arresting him and bringing him to the council?

 **“And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law” (Acts 6:13).**

 See if that doesn’t sound like what the psalmist wrote in Psalm 35:11-16:

**“*False witnesses did rise up*…But as for me… *I humbled my soul with fasting; and…prayer*…I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother…But…*they gnashed upon me with their teeth”***

Didn’t they eventually gnash on Stephen (Acts 7:54,60)? Well, if the psalmist said they bore false witness and gnashed on him, and in between he prayed for his enemies, then when they bore false witness against Stephen and gnashed on him, I have to believe that he prayed for them in between. I have to believe that Psalm 35 was written about Stehen and other Tribulation martyrs, telling them what to do when unbelievers come after them.

 And what *we* must do as well! I know it’s hard to pray for those who lie about you and gnash on you. When it happens to me, I have to remind myself to pray for those lying gnashers! I know what God says about this, I even *teach* what God says about this. But my unsaved flesh is no better than yours. When I’m the victim of such venom, I find it hard to remember to pray for those dishing it out. I find it much easier to think imprecatory thoughts about them, something that was certainly in place in the psalms, when God was dealing with the people of Israel, but something that is completely out of place today in the dispensation of grace.

 Now before we leave verse 13, did you notice they added a charge against Stephen? So far they’ve just been charging him with blaspheming God and Moses and the law. Now they claim he blasphemed the “holy place” of the temple,” another of Israel’s sacred things. But we know that this charge was baseless as well, for the disciples have been hanging out exclusively in the temple during this entire year in early Acts! The word “temple” has been mentioned *twelve times* thus far, because this is where the Lord’s disciples were teaching!

 By the way, did you also notice that here in Verse 13 they mentioned the temple before the law in charging Stephen with blasphemy? And in Verse 11, hey mentioned Moses before they mentioned God? Do you thik maybe they had their priorities somewhat askew? I’d say so!

 But you know why they added this charge, don’t you?

 **“For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:14).**

These false witnesses claim they heard Stephen say the Lord would destroy the temple. Now while it sounds bad to say that, lots of prophets predicted that God would destroy the temple, using the scourge of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon! So even if that were true, it wouldn’t be blasphemous to say that. But it wasn’t true, of course, and you know why. At the Lord’s trial

**“*At the last came two false witnesses,* And said, This fellow said, *I am able to destroy the temple of God,* and to build it in three days” (Matthew 26:60,61).**

And you know what He meant by that!

**“Jesus…said…Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up…*But He spake of the temple of his body”* (John 2:19-21).**

The Lord was saying, in effect, “Kill me and I’ll raise Myself up in three days.” And Stephen was preaching the resurrection of Christ! So his enemies charged him with saying the Lord would destroy the temple.

 Now when they charged him with saying the Lord would change the “customs” of Moses, there’s only two things in the law called customs. One of them was circumcision (Acts 21:21), and there was no indication that the Lord or Stephen had ever sought to change that custom. We read about the other in Luke 2:41,42 where, speaking of the Lord Jesus, we read,

**“Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem *after the custom of the feast”* (Luke 2:41,42).**

As you can see, one of the customs of the law was the observance of Israel’s seven feasts (Lev. 23). Well, if you’ve read the New Testament you know that the Lord is often seen to have observed Israel’s feasts! And we know that Stephen did too, for he was here on the feast of Pentecost, the feast that brought all those out of town Jews to Jerusalem again, a year after the Pentecost mentioned in Acts 2:1.

 Now as you may know, Stephen will address these charges in full in Acts 7. But in the meantime, God Himself had a unique way of answering these false charges, as we see in the last verse of our text in Acts 6:15:

 **“And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”**

Now what do you suppose the face of an angel looks like? Probably like what we read in Exodus 34:29-34:

**“…when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand…*the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone.”***

I’ll bet Stephen’s face shone just like Moses’ face. It was God’s way of saying, “You wanna charge him with speaking against Moses and the law? I’ll make him look just like Moses the day he *received* the law!”

And every Jew standing there knew it. And they perhaps *should* have known what God was trying to tell them, that the dispensation of law was ending the way it began: with a man of God facing the people of God with a face that shone like an angel of God.