

When Heroes Fall

Acts 6:8 – 8:1

I. STEPHEN'S CHARACTER (Acts 6:8-10)

"And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5, NKJV).

But look at verse 8: "And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8, NKJV).

Five remarkable qualities:

1. Full of **faith** (6:5, 6:8)
2. Full of the **Holy Spirit** (6:5, 6:10)
3. Full of **grace** (6:8)
4. Full of **power** (6:8)
5. Full of **wisdom** (6:10)

"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" (Acts 6:9-10, NKJV).

The Synagogue of the Freedmen consisted of Jewish former slaves who had been freed and returned to Jerusalem. They spoke Greek rather than Hebrew and had their own synagogue.

II. STEPHEN'S CONFRONTATION (Acts 6:11-7:53)

"Then they secretly induced men to say, 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God'" (Acts 6:11, NKJV).

"And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15, NKJV).
This reminds us of Moses coming down from Mount Sinai, or Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Stephen's face was glowing with heavenly radiance.

Stephen addresses every false accusation by taking his audience through Jewish history, showing them a consistent pattern:

- **Abraham (7:2-8)**: God's promise and presence existed without a temple. God can dwell anywhere.
- **Joseph (7:9-16)**: Initially rejected by his brothers, he later became their savior. The pattern of rejection and redemption begins.
- **Moses (7:17-44)**: Initially rejected by Israel when he tried to deliver them, yet ultimately became their deliverer.

Stephen's point is becoming clear: *Israel has a long history of rejecting the very people God sends to save them.* This winsome, wise, gracious Stephen suddenly becomes direct and calls them (Acts 7:51-52):

- **Stiff-necked:** Unrepentant, unbending, unwilling to listen to God
- **Uncircumcised in heart and ears:** Their religion is external only, not heart transformation
- **Resisters of the Holy Spirit:** Following the pattern of their ancestors
- **Betrayers and murderers:** They killed the very Messiah the prophets foretold

III. STEPHEN'S **COURAGE** (Acts 7:54-60)

"When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth" (Acts 7:54, NKJV).

The religious leaders were furious. They weren't just angry because Stephen was winning the argument with superior reasoning and a gracious spirit - they were enraged because he was being used by God to expose their spiritual condition.

"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" (Acts 7:55, NKJV). The Message paraphrase says, "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, **hardly noticed—he only had eyes for God,** whom he saw in all his glory with Jesus standing at his side."

Someone has said, "When you bow before God, you can stand before anyone." When you fear God in a reverent way, you don't have to be afraid of anyone. Stephen got his courage from where he was looking. The longer we focus our eyes on God, the less we care about what other people think.

"And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58, NKJV).

Standing there, holding the coats of those doing the stoning, was a young man named Saul who would later become Paul the Apostle.

IV. STEPHEN'S **CONTRIBUTION** (Acts 8:1-3)

"Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1, NKJV). The Message paraphrase says, "Saul was right there, congratulating the killers..."

APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

1. **God uses fullness, not position.** Stephen wasn't an apostle yet God used him mightily because he was full of faith, the Holy Spirit, grace, power, and wisdom.
2. **Preparation precedes powerful moments.** Stephen could defend his faith because he was full of God's Word. Are you prepared to defend your faith when challenged?
3. **Focus determines your courage.** The longer we focus on God, the less we fear people.
4. **Grace reveals spiritual maturity.** True maturity shows under extreme pressure, not in good times.
5. **God's perspective transcends apparent failure.** Stephen's "failed" sermon that led to his death actually planted seeds for Paul's conversion and the gospel's spread.