1. **Intro:**

1.1. Henry Varley said, “The world has yet to see what God can do with & for & through & in a man, who is fully & wholly consecrated to Him.” (Stephen!!)

1.1.1. It says of Stephen he was: full of faith(6:5); full of Grace(6:8); full of Power(6:8); full of Light(6:15); full of Scripture(ch.7); full of Wisdom(6:3,10); full of courage(7:51-56); full of Love(7:60).

1.2. Stephen reminds us so eloquently, by his words by his life: God wants a personal relationship with His people. Not a system, nor a dead religion. He wants you! He wants to be your God & friend. He wants a partnership with His creatures! He wants them to love him & enjoy Him forever!

1.3. In a commencement address at Harvard University, Alexander Solzhenitsyn tried to summarize the root problem facing Capitalism & Marxism. He said that the trouble w/both systems is that men have forgotten God. One system does it by its materialistic philosophy; the other system by its materialist economy.¹

1.3.1. But “the sin of forgetting God” is not just the sin of economics & governments. It can be the sin of religion as well!

1.3.1.1. Religious people forget God by setting up a religious system in His place!!!

1.3.1.2. Stephen was up against such a system!

2. **DYING TO PLEASE GOD! (6:8-7:60)**

2.1. **STEPHEN!** (8-15)

2.2. (8) From serving tables to doing miracles –

2.2.1. In the parable of Talents, in Mt.25:21, Jesus said, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”

2.2.2. Being faithful in the little things, in the small things, the Lord honors!

2.2.3. D.L.Moody, “There are many of us that are willing to do great things for the Lord; but few of us are willing to do little things.”

2.3. (9) The Synagogue of the Freedmen – According to the Talmud, Jerusalem had 480 synagogues at the time.

2.3.1. Freedmen – may have referred to their identity as former slaves, or descendants of captives taken from Palestine during the Dispersion.

¹ The Acts of God; George & Donald Sweeting; pg.59.
2.4. (10) This will make more sense when you hear his argument for His Messiah.
2.4.1. His message was so reasonable & he could defend it so well, that he won all the arguments.

2.5. (11-15) Well they thought, if you can’t beat em…Lie!
2.6. The unbelievers treated Stephen the way the Sanhedrin treated Jesus.
2.6.1. They arrested him on trumped-up charges & hired false witnesses.

2.7. (13) Blasphemous words against the law – The council was behind the times as the law had been nailed to the cross!
2.7.1. Col.2:14 “having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”
2.7.2. The veil had been torn & in a few years both the Temple & the City would be gone, & Hosea 3:4 would be fulfilled, “For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol.” Then what?

2.8. (15) This reminds me of Charles Spurgeon when he was training young ministers he said to his students, "When you talk about heaven let your face light up with a heavenly glory. When you tell about hell, your everyday face will do."

2.9. Interesting, they said Stephen was opposing Moses, but he had a shining face just like Moses! (Ex.34)
2.9.1. Q: Is this what your face looks like when someone’s lying about you?
2.9.2. Here’s the true sign of God’s presence!

2.10. Shine, Stephen…shine!
2.10.1. Phil.2:15 “among whom you shine as lights in the world,”
2.10.2. “Don’t expect God to use you as a lighthouse somewhere else, if He can’t use you as a candle where you are!”

2.11. But what did they mean the face of an angel? [not fat pink winged/babies with bow & arrows]
2.11.1. Scripture shows an angelic face as something to be feared!
2.11.2. The angel who appeared to Manoah was said to of been “very awesome/terrible!”
2.11.3. When Moses face shone they were afraid to come near him! Ex.34:35
2.11.4. The angel that appeared at the tomb was explained “like lightening!”
2.11.5. Maybe we can picture Stephen’s face as expressing both strength & sweetness!

2.12. ABRAHAM! (7:1-8)
2.13. Are these things true – in our present day court system, “How do you plead guilty, or not guilty?”
2.14. This trial provided a **forum** for Stephen to speak with **passion & persuasion** in the triumph of the Spirit.

2.14.1. Stephen’s speech is important in understanding the way in which the gospel moved from its **Jewish** beginnings to a **Gentile** world.

2.14.2. God is not “tied down to a land” (i.e. Israel) though He gave that as a blessing to the Jews.

2.14.2.1. God worked in their lives much more **outside** the Promised Land than within.

2.14.2.2. Think of the “landless” Abraham (in Mesopotamia); Moses in the wilderness; the Joseph down in Egypt; Esther in Persia; Daniel, Jeremiah & Ezekiel in Babylon.

2.15. The Jews tended to think that God is a **tribal God**, “the God of Israel, His chosen people.”

2.15.1. From this **Jewish Nationalistic point of view**, access to God could only be attained through the **priests** in Jerusalem & the **sacrifices** in the Jewish Temple. [Multiple **synagogues** were not substitutes for the **Temple**, only **reflections** of it]

2.15.2. From **Stephen’s Biblical view point**, he realized God was **not** a tribal God, but was Sovereign over the whole universe.

2.15.2.1. He was not only God of **Israel**, but of **every nation** on earth!

2.16. Stephen knew the **Temple & Law** were **valid**, yet not the **exclusive** means of finding God. (a person doesn’t need to become a Jew in order to get to God!)

2.16.1.1. He is paving the way here for the **Samaritans & the Gentiles**.

2.17. Note 2 indirect references to Samaria:

2.17.1. (16) Shechem [which is in Samaria]

2.17.2. (37) A prophet like me [only Messianic prophecy that the Samaritans had accepted]

2.18. He knew the **Samaritans** would never accept worship at the **Jewish Temple** as a precondition for salvation through Jesus as Messiah.

2.18.1. Here Stephen **contextualizes** the gospel for the Samaritans!

2.18.2. There was nothing wrong with the Temple (he himself worshiped there) – but **cross-culturally** it was **excess baggage** if loaded onto the simple gospel of repentance for sin, & faith in Jesus Christ.

2.19. **JOSEPH**! (9-16)

2.20. God **protected** Joseph the prisoner in Egypt (9): God was always with him.


2.22. **MOSES**! (17-36)

2.23. (34) Now come – Now? (after 40 years…now?)

2.24. 1st 40 years he was down in Egypt (vs. 20-22). God **promoted** him.

2.25. 2nd 40 years Fled to Midian (vs. 23-29). God **prepared** him.
2.26. **Final** 40 years led the children of Israel in the wilderness (30-36). God **empowered** him.

2.27. **40 yrs** is a long time to wait for a mission! Yet when God **delays**, He is not **inactive**!

2.27.1. This is when He **prepares** His instruments & **matures** our strength.

2.28. God is **never in a hurry**. He spends **years** preparing those He plans to greatly use.

2.28.1. Sometimes he uses the **fires** of **prolonged pain** (like Joseph’s long trial)

2.28.2. There is a **reason** behind every lesson!

2.29. God is in the process of educating us for **future service & greater blessings**.

2.29.1. And if we have gained the qualities that make us ready for a **throne**, nothing will keep us from it, once His timing is right.

2.29.2. He is **never late**...learn to **wait**!

2.29.3. The **second, minute, & hour hand** must all point to the precise moment for action!

2.30. Never refuse God’s **incubator** to form you in His image!

2.30.1. **Broiled Steaks** – took them out too soon (too red in center).

2.30.1. **Don’t come out of His incubator too soon!**

2.31. **ISRAELS REBELS!** (37-43)

2.32. Esp. vs.39.

2.33. **TABERNACLE!** (44-50)

2.34. The **portable tabernacle** in the wilderness, which also was **outside** the Holy Land, could be used **any place** to bring people into contact with God!

2.35. (50) The main thrust of Stephen’s message is that Israel always **resisted the truth** & rejected the **deliverers** God sent to them.

2.35.1. They opposed **Moses** & repeatedly wanted to return to Egypt.

2.35.2. They opposed **Joseph** & he later became their redeemer.

2.35.3. They rejected the **many prophets** God sent to warn them & call them back to His way.

2.35.4. Finally, the rejected **their own Messiah**, & crucified Him.²

2.36. Israel’s history reveals the **patience** of God, & the **hardness** of man’s heart.

2.36.1. But it also reveals a **ray of hope**: Israel rejected their deliverers the **1st time**, but accepted them the **2nd time**.

2.36.2. That was true of **Moses & Joseph** & it will be true of **Jesus** when He returns.

2.37. **PERSONAL INDICTMENT!** (51-53)

2.38. His speech climaxed by accusing them of denying God’s **prophets, Spirit, & Messiah**.

2.38.1. They are **heathens at heart** and **deaf to the truth** (51).

2.38.2. They **betrayed** and **murdered** their own Messiah (52).

2.38.3. They are **deliberately disobeying** God’s laws (53).

² Warren Wiersbe; With The Word; pg.711
2.39. **PROTO-MARTYR!** (54-60) [Proto-martyr = 1st in long line of “martyrs of Jesus”]

2.40. (54) No time for an altar call…as he’s abruptly cut off.

2.40.1. Before the Roman soldiers could be alerted, they drag him off, & throw him into a stoning pit, & quickly bludgeon him to death.

2.40.2. His enemies couldn’t silence him **intellectually**, so they decided to take their only viable recourse & silence him **physically**.

2.40.2.1. Can’t beat em…then beat em!

2.41. (55) He gazed into heaven – He looked **up**, not **back** to the cross.

2.41.1. We fellowship with a **living, exalted, reigning, coming** Lord!

2.41.2. Poem: It is not **looking back** down the list of years,

To see failures, sins, temptations, follies, fears,…and tears;

Nor is it **looking on**, with hope all bright & fair,

To meet, so often, bitter disappointment there,…and care.

No, it is **looking up**, a living Christ to see,

And leaning calmly, Lord, and, oh, so trustingly on Thee.3

2.42. (57) What was the trigger for violence? That he called them stiff-necked & uncircumcised in heart & ears? Nope!

2.42.1. It was when he said vs.56 – “If Jesus was standing on the **right hand** of God, this would show the Christians **right** in the sight of God”…this was just **too much** for them!

2.43. (58) Maybe this victorious death, was the human agency God used in Saul’s life that conquered Saul’s heart, to become the worlds greatest Christian missionary.

2.44. (56,59) Both quotes are from Jesus during His ministry.

2.45. (60) Stephen’s death was the 3rd murder in Israel’s history that became a turning point in God’s dealings w/the nation:

2.45.1. They had rejected the **Father** when they allowed John the Baptist to be slain.

2.45.2. They had rejected the **Son** when they asked for Jesus to be crucified.

2.45.3. And now they had rejected the **H.S.** here wit Stephen’s death.4

2.46. He fell asleep – because **death** for all believers is only the **sleep of body & the awakening of the soul** with Christ in glory!

2.47. The name **Stephen** {stephanos} “**a crown**”.

2.47.1. Be faithful, even to the point of death, & I will give you the crown of life. Rev.2:10

2.48. **Stephen** serving, shining, sharing, suffering,…shining!

2.48.1. Full of **faith**(6:5); full of **Grace**(6:8); full of **Power**(6:8); full of **Light**(6:15); full of **Scripture**(ch.7); full of **Wisdom**(6:3,10); full of **courage**(7:51-56); full of **Love**(7:60).

2.49. Stephen’s death was not the **end**! - His death was another **phase** in the beginning of a **new community** that God was bringing into existence.

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3 S.T.F.(?); Griffith Thomas; Luke; pg.135
4 Warren Wiersbe; With The Word; pg.712