

17 JUNE

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 6:10

LESSON
Excel in the Word

VERSE 10
*And they were not able to
resist the wisdom and the spirit
by which he spake.*

These men who opposed Stephen could not overcome his arguments. Stephen spoke the divine message from the Lord God Almighty, not mere man's words. He was declaring that Jesus was the Messiah [v. 11, 14]. The Lord Jesus had forewarned His disciples that they would be persecuted and delivered before kings and rulers for His name's sake [Luke 21:12]. But He also reassured them: "For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist" [Luke 21:15].

"But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost" [Mark 13:11].

Stephen's message was God-given, as was his empowerment. Stephen knew the Scriptures well and he could proclaim it boldly because he was full of the Holy Spirit [Acts 6:3]. This was the Spirit that Jesus promised to His disciples and all who believe in Him. And this was fulfilled and manifested at Pentecost [Acts 2:1-4] as He had told His disciples in the Upper Room: "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, Whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" [John 14:26].

Stephen excelled in God's Word because he had received the apostles' teaching, applied himself to it, lived his life by it and was thus enabled by God's Spirit for God's effective use.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JEREMIAH 8
1 CORINTHIANS 3

THOUGHT

Be filled with the Spirit [Ephesians 5:18b] and let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom [Colossians 3:16a].

18 JUNE

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 6:11

LESSON
False Allegations:
Subornation

VERSE 11
*Then they suborned men,
which said, We have heard
him speak blasphemous words
against Moses,
and against God.*

The Jewish religious leaders in the synagogues were very upset with Stephen and opposed his preaching. What he preached went against everything that they had been taught and were teaching. They were so angry with Stephen that they induced people to lie and fabricate testimonies against him.

They even secretly persuaded and bribed some to testify that they had heard Stephen blaspheming Moses and God. Stephen had spoken no such blasphemy, being filled as he was with the Holy Spirit and wisdom from God [Acts 6:3].

The members of the “Synagogue of the Libertines (Freedmen)” were not able to overcome Stephen in their open debates, he possessing God-given wisdom from the Holy Spirit within him. Hence, they resorted to false accusations. One can see how evil deeds cause much destruction, and how one evil deed often leads to more being perpetuated.

As Christians, we need to stand firm on our beliefs. We will be accused of things we have not committed and have false allegations made against our faith. Jesus had foretold that His disciples would face difficulties because the world hated God. Therefore, those who belong to God will face similar troubles. So John 15:18-19 states “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JEREMIAH 9
1 CORINTHIANS 4

REMEMBER

Do not spread false allegations. “Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about.” – Psalm 32:9-10

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19 JUNE

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 6:12

LESSON
False allegations:
provocation

VERSE 12
*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.*

Here in Jerusalem, members of the “Synagogue of the Freedmen”, Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria, as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia secretly induced people to make false allegations against Stephen. With these false testimonies, they were able to stir up the people, even the elders and teachers of the law against Stephen. They could not accept the gospel of grace that Stephen preached, that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who shed His blood to redeem sinners. Stephen’s message was that Christ is the mediator between God and man, thus animal sacrifices were now no longer necessary and the high priests were ministers and servants of God but not man’s mediator.

The Grecian Jews were furious with Stephen as he was undermining the high priests. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish court, to judge him. In today’s context, it is similar to hauling Stephen before the criminal courts and charging him without proper investigation and proof.

As believers of Christ, we need to stand firm and hold steadfastly to our faith. Do not be swayed by the crowd. The Holy Spirit that dwells in us is divine power. Do not despair as God is in control of every situation and He is able to overcome man’s slandering of His children. Although Stephen was stoned to death by the Jews, God gave him the ultimate victory by receiving him into heaven.

Let us be strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness [Colossians 1:11] with the help of the Holy Spirit.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JEREMIAH 10
1 CORINTHIANS 5

REMEMBER

“These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” [John 16:33]. Thank God that He is in control always. Draw strength from God’s power.

20 JUNE

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 6:13

LESSON
False allegations:
false witnesses

VERSE 13

*And set up false witnesses,
which said, This man ceaseth
not to speak blasphemous
words against this holy place,
and the law:*

The men of the synagogue hated Stephen and sought to cast him out. Their plot was to accuse Stephen of blaspheming against the Mosaic law — a devious accusation, as those who blaspheme Moses are blaspheming God Himself. They pretended to be on the Lord's side, seeking to weed out "false teachers", but were actually liars, opposed to Him.

Their accusations about Stephen were groundless. Stephen did not blaspheme Moses, the law or the temple. On the contrary, Christ, and the preachers of His gospel, quoted Moses' writings and the ceremonial laws often with the respect due to them. Bear in mind that the apostles themselves took a long time to change their views on Jewish customs, such as eating of unclean animals [Acts 10:14], or the practice of circumcision [Acts 11:2]. Therefore, the testimony of the false witnesses was fabricated, and cleverly designed to confuse the Jews on their beliefs regarding the Messiah. The Jews expected the coming Messiah to make changes to their religion, but not to their traditional customs which were very dear to their hearts.

In fact, the false witnesses were the ones perverting Stephen's words. Stephen spoke the truth, that Christ had come to establish a new covenant that was superior to the old. It would be reflected by a new relationship between God and man. This was supported by what Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JEREMIAH 11
1 CORINTHIANS 6

REFLECTION

Are we expecting God to achieve things in a certain way? Are we focusing too much on outward achievements and results, and neglecting the work of Jesus in our hearts? God may be working a great work that seems strange to others, but we can only know His direction if our hearts are tied to His. Let us be like Stephen, full of faith and power.

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21 JUNE

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 6:13

LESSON
Blasphemy
against the Temple

VERSE 13
*And set up false witnesses,
which said, This man ceaseth
not to speak blasphemous
words against this holy place,
and the law:*

The Jews had always been taught that the temple was the only dwelling place of God. They accused Stephen of speaking against the temple (“this holy place”). They were upset when Stephen preached that God lives in the hearts of people, not in the physical place of the temple. But Stephen was right. Our Lord God is omnipresent. He rules over all kingdoms and fills heaven and earth with His glorious light. “Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord” [Jeremiah 23:23-24]. God is everywhere but He dwells within the believer’s heart.

Stephen was not saying that God no longer dwells in a temple. He was saying that the hearts of God’s people was now the temple. He lives in us. We are to be the testimony of God’s love. It is therefore vital for us to demonstrate God’s love and be a shining light for Him by our lives.

Looking at John 14:15-26, Jesus clearly promises that the Counsellor, the Spirit of God Himself, would be sent to dwell in the believer’s heart. The Holy Spirit is the very presence of God within us. He guides us, convicts us of our sin and gives wisdom on how we should live a holy life pleasing to God. He is also our comforter. He provides us with deep joy and lasting peace when we follow and obey God’s will and guidance.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JEREMIAH 12
1 CORINTHIANS 7

THOUGHT

Ephesians 2:22 states that “in Whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit”. God’s household is not a building but a group of people.

22 JUNE

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 6:13

LESSON
Blasphemy
against the Law

VERSE 13

*And set up false witnesses,
which said, This man ceaseth
not to speak blasphemous
words against this holy place,
and the law:*

The Jews were charging Stephen in their court, accusing him of blasphemy against the law of Moses. The Jews were referring to their Scribal Law, the commentaries and interpretations of the Scriptures. But Stephen was preaching that Christ fulfils the law without destroying it. Jesus came to fulfil all that was written in the Law and the Prophets.

As stated in Matthew 5:17-18, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”

Christ accomplished what the law required. Christ was not saying that He had done away with the law. All His actions and thoughts embodied every intent of the law. The law was kept perfectly by Christ. All the punishments against God’s sinful people were poured out on Christ. So we ought to look to Christ and not to our law-keeping for our righteousness.

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” [Romans 10:4]. We have a standard far higher than that which is expressed in the Law. Man’s standard is now Christ Jesus, the embodiment of divine love and divine law. We should act and think as Jesus did. God’s commandments teach us how to show love toward Him and toward one another. When we ask what Jesus would do and do likewise, then we become like Him.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JEREMIAH 13
1 CORINTHIANS 8

MEDITATION

O Lord, be merciful to me and forgive all my sins. Help me to become more Christ-like and obey your commandments. Set my thoughts on the things of God and His Word.

23 JUNE

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 6:14

LESSON
Attacking
the traditions

VERSE 14

*For we have heard him say,
that this Jesus of Nazareth
shall destroy this place, and
shall change the customs which
Moses delivered us.*

This is the first mention of martyrdom in the New Testament. Stephen was falsely accused and brought before the Sanhedrin. However, those false witnesses could not make good their accusations against Stephen. It was a very serious charge concerning the traditions and the laws of the Jews. The Pharisees were angered by Stephen's attack on their legalism.

We read of a similar prophecy of the destruction of the temple foretold by the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 26 verses 12 to 16. Likewise, it is also mentioned in Daniel 9:26. The argument of Stephen in this passage is similar to that of Paul in Galatians chapter 4 where the temporary and intermediate character of the Levitical law and the covenant of circumcision were spoken of.

Note the phrase "this Jesus of Nazareth". Spoken derogatively, the false witnesses were belittling and mocking Jesus, accusing Him of wanting to bring down the whole Mosaic system of laws and traditions. They were also displeased at the reference to the ultimate, supreme dignity and authority which Stephen claimed for Christ as the head of that new economy which would supersede the old.

There is nothing wrong with the keeping of laws and traditions. However, we must remember that Christ is greater than the Law. Do not be surprised by the accusations of unbelievers. Believers who desire to live godly lives will always be ridiculed by unbelievers. Oftentimes our words and actions are misunderstood and misjudged. God will give us the strength to overcome such spurious accusations.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JEREMIAH 14
1 CORINTHIANS 9

THOUGHT

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. – 2 Timothy 3:12

24 JUNE

BIBLE LESSON
Acts 6:15

LESSON
The face
of an angel

VERSE 15
*And all that sat in the council,
looking steadfastly on him,
saw his face as it had been
the face of an angel.*

Continuing with the court scene, let us note what Stephen's accusers beheld. On his countenance, an undisturbed serenity, undaunted courage and an unaccountable mixture of mildness and majesty. Those present witnessed on Stephen a face like that of an angelic being. Perhaps at this juncture, through such an unusual occurrence, the Sadducees would have been convinced of the existence of angels.

Those who formed the council were priests, scribes and elders. Stephen was a stranger to them. Yet they observed intently this accused man who stood before them. Judges would often observe the countenance of their prisoners, for that at times can betray guilt or indicate innocence.

According to the Adam Clark's Commentary, Rabbi Gedalia noted that, "when Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh, they appeared like those angels which minister before the face of the Lord; for their stature appeared greater, and the splendor of their faces was like the sun, and their eyes like the wheels of the sun; their beard like clusters of grapes, and their words like thunder and lightning; and that, through fear of them, those who were present fell to the earth."

Stephen's countenance showed his utter confidence in the Lord. God bore witness to him with the same glory He had shown to Moses. Stephen's supernatural radiance attested to all present that day that the divine calm of the Spirit was within him. This showed a good conscience and a definite conviction that his cause was just. There was no fear at all.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JEREMIAH 15
1 CORINTHIANS 10

THOUGHT

And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone.
– Exodus 34:30a