

In response to the murmuring of the Hellenists, that their widows were being overlooked, seven men, Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch, all of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom were appointed to oversee the daily 'ministrations' of the widows.

Acts 6:7: *'And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. ⁸ And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.'*

Verse 9: *'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.'*

Stephen was a Jew from outside of Israel, where Greek was the predominate language. We're not told his country of origin; he could have been from Greece or Turkey or somewhere else around the Mediterranean or Black Sea area. He'd've been a member of one of the Synagogues of that city but now that he had trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, he'd remained in Jerusalem where all the new Christians were gathered but it was never God's will and plan that the Church remain in Jerusalem.

The synagogue of the Libertines: the Greek word is *libertinos* which means one who has been liberated from slavery, a freedman or the son of a freedman. These are Jews who'd been taken captive by the Romans under Pompey but were afterward set free. They remained in the country of their enslavement where opportunity for work, business and freedom was better than in Israel; remember, Israel is, at this time, a vassal state, heavily taxed and held under the rule of often tyrannical governors. These Hellenist Jews built synagogues in the cities where they now lived and had, at their own expense, built synagogues in Jerusalem, also, to which they traveled often so as to gather and worship with other Jews who spoke their same language; they were looked down upon by the Israeli Jews as is evidenced by the treatment of Hellenist widows even within the Church. The name, Libertines, set them apart from free born Jews who had freely moved to Rome or other localities.

Cyrene, an important Greek colony with a large Jewish population, is in Lybia,; Alexandria, Egypt, was named for Alexander, the Greek conqueror. Cilicia, in Asia Minor, near Syria also had a large Jewish colony. In Cilicia, we find Tarsus from whence came Paul; that would have been Paul's synagogue and he would have been among these who were disputing/discussing/challenging Stephen's doctrine and preaching...

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

Paul, at this time, was not born again; the Spirit of God did not indwell him to give him Godly wisdom and understanding; this was Saul, not yet Paul who would later be used so mightily, by God, to give us so much of our understanding of the New Covenant and our Eternal Salvation by God's Grace, through faith, the gift of God. He, also, would have been unable to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which Stephen spoke which may have led to the murderous hatred young Saul held toward Christians and Stephen in particular which caused him to willingly hold the tunics of those who will soon stone Stephen to death. All of that must surely have flashed through Saul's mind, later, when the blinding light of the Lord Jesus Christ flattened him while on his way to Damascus to arrest even more Christians! Then his name was changed to Paul who later would write: *'... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.'*

His name, Saul, means 'desired.' Long before, the Jews complained to God that they wanted a king to rule over them. God gave them their desire, Saul, who turned out to be a colossal failure, replaced by Gods choice, David, which means, 'beloved.'

Paul would have been named for Saul: desired; he was proud in his wisdom and training in the Scriptures but was left with no understanding of the deeper fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. Part of God's drastic humbling of Paul was in the Lord Jesus Christ changing his name from Saul, desired, to Paul which means: *small or little*; what a thing! From being a brilliant Pharisee, named from Israel's first King, to now being called, by everyone... Paul: small/little; 'Here comes little old Paul!

Paul really was telling the truth when he wrote: *'Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: ⁵ Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. ⁷ But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, ⁹ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: ¹⁰ That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; ¹¹ If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. ¹² Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴ I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'* Philippians 3:4

That is Paul, later, but this is Saul now:

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

Lies, of course, but when did that ever stop a mob... back then, or today!

They believed they were doing 'God's great work!' that it is wholly permissible to lie and murder in defense of God... selah... think about it...

What Stephen would have preached was the Truth that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did fulfill all the Law of Moses, not that it was done away with but that it was fulfilled by the perfect Sacrifice for sin, the slain Lamb of God.

Stephen was a brilliant speaker who knew the Scriptures very well, as we'll soon see.

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

They are coming after Stephen just like they came after the Lord Jesus Christ: with lies and false testimony.

Shortly, we'll see just how fully Stephen understood the true scope of all that the Lord Jesus Christ did for us in His fulfillment of the Law and Prophets.

Stephen represents the growth and transition of the True Church from Peter to Paul. Peter was the Apostle to the Jews while Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. The Church began as primarily Israeli Jews, transitioned outward with Hellenist Jews and finally pushed and persecuted out to the entire Gentile World which was God's plan all along.

The True Church has always been on one track: *Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life*; no one comes to the Father, to Salvation, except through faith in His Son. The only 'need' in society which the True Church is tasked with meeting is the 'sin need' in every heart. They/we were never commanded to veer off into any form of 'social gospel' at all! The Church has never been commanded to change the 'culture' or change the World! We are simply commanded to take the Gospel everywhere while trusting the Holy Spirit to call and save all whom He wills.

Jesus said that the True Church would be hated, despised and persecuted. I believe that all the areas of 'social gospel' undertaken by so many churches have been the direct response to this hatred and persecution: they are desperately trying to be like the World in order to make the World like them so that the World will want to be like them so that they will be loved by the World which they do love! Then the World will accept them and not hate and persecute them.

James, writing to Jewish Christians: *'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.'* James 4:4

The True Church's mandate is one thing: Preach the Word while loving and caring for one another.

Do not love the World! It will always hate you if you are a True child of God.

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.'*

Jesus never said **He** would destroy the Temple; He said, *'See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.'* Matt 24:2

He was simply being a Prophet; if only they had heeded His Prophecy.

Stephen explained how the customs which Moses delivered were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, as we shall see.

Verse 15: *'And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as if it had been the face of an angel.'*

When Jesus took Peter, James and John up on the Mount of Transfiguration, *'... And (He) was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.'* Matt 17:2

When John sees the Lord Jesus Christ in The Revelation. 1:14: *'His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;'*

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai: *'And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. ³⁰ And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him.'* Ex 34:29

'And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.' Acts 12:7

'The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee' Num 6:25

Speaking of the Last Days, which began at Pentecost, Gabriel tells Daniel: *'And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.'*

Daniel 12:3

'They that be wise shall shine...' what did we learn of Stephen? *'...full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom', 'Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost', 'Stephen, full of faith and power,' ' they were not able to resist the **wisdom** and the spirit by which he spake.'*

The council saw the miraculous shining of Stephen's face, like an angel. Angels shine because they reflect the Glory of God in Whose presence they reside. Doubtless, Stephen also resided in God's presence; his face was shining as he reflected the Glory of God... another great and mighty work!

Acts 7:1: *'Then said the high priest, Are these things so?'*

The high priest knew they were not true which is why he was willing to accept false testimony.

Now, Stephen is going to give a brief but very good rehearsal of Israel's history...

Verse 2: *'And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, ³ And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. ⁴ Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. ⁵ And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. ⁶ And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. ⁷ And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. ⁸ And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. ⁹ And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, ¹⁰ And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in*

the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. ¹¹ Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. ¹² But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. ¹³ And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. ¹⁴ Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. ¹⁵ So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, ¹⁶ And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. ¹⁷ But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, ¹⁸ Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. ¹⁹ The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. ²⁰ In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: ²¹ And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. ²² And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. ²³ And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. ²⁴ And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: ²⁵ For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. ²⁶ And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? ²⁷ But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? ²⁸ Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? ²⁹ Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons. ³⁰ And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. ³¹ When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the LORD came unto him, ³² Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. ³³ Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. ³⁴ I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt. ³⁵ This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. ³⁷ This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. ³⁸ This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: ³⁹ To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, ⁴⁰ Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. ⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. ⁴² Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? ⁴³ Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. ⁴⁴ Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. ⁴⁵ Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; ⁴⁶ Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But Solomon built him an house. ⁴⁸ Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, ⁴⁹ Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? ⁵⁰ Hath not my hand made all these things?'

Next time we'll see Stephen, through the Holy Spirit, blast these Jews with both barrels!' Read it at home...