



Discussion Notes

Stephen's Story, Part 1 • Acts 6:8–15

March 15, 2026 • Luke Knight

Stephen's story is an inflammatory and brief cameo in the book of Acts, yet his influence is profound — a life full of the Holy Spirit breaking new ground and stirring fresh imagination.

There were three invitations:

- Pharisees (and Jewish religious leaders) — they did not come to the banquet.
- Verse 21: "Into to the streets and alleys." (Gentiles) — they came to the banquet.
- Verse 22: "Go, ask everyone so that room will be filled." — they came to the banquet.

Background of Stephen's Involvement:

- We first meet Stephen because of a problem in Jerusalem's first Jesus' community which already numbered in the thousands at this point.
- They needed to set up a kind of equitable feeding program for those among them in need because some folks were being overlooked on the bases of background; a cultural difference. This was not simply a growth challenge in the new community — or a conflict to be managed — but a threat to their unity.
- The danger was being distracted by their *difference* rather than remaining unified under Jesus. The solution was to refocus the community by choosing seven individuals to help manage and meet the need, and Stephen was one of them.
- He's Jewish, but he's likely not from Jerusalem originally. He's Greek speaking, which is to say he's probably relocated from somewhere in the wider Greek world, though by heritage an Israelite. This is probably one of the reasons he was chosen to help set up the feeding program.

Full of the Spirit:

- At the first mention of his name we hear, "they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (6:5) This is in addition to what was already a prerequisite to serve as one of the seven leading the feeding program. In Acts 6:3, we read that the seven selected should be known to be "full of the Spirit and wisdom."

- The solution to this administrative problem came not from brilliant conflict management, but an insistence of the Spirit's prominence in the lives of those selected to serve. As the community was in danger of cultural division, the solution came from a re-focusing on what united them in the first place.
- Stephen is chosen to serve. And in a matter of just a couple of verses, the clearest thing we learn about him is that he is full of trust in the LORD, full of the Holy Spirit, and wisdom. He's even singled out among the seven particularly, highlighted not because of his leadership acumen, not because of his social status, not based on age or rank. Stephen is highlighted because of his trust in God and because he is full of the Holy Spirit. Hot on the heels of that, Luke, the author, adds more: *"Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people."* (6:8)
- Stephen was already noted as being full of wisdom, trust, full of the Spirit, and *now* full of grace and power, which translated to signs and wonders. He may have been selected to meet a practical need in the church, but what makes him stand out — even beyond the other seven selected — is the *power* of the Holy Spirit at work through him.
- Next, Luke tells us that people of a similar background to Stephen, folks who were Jewish but Greek speaking, had a problem with him since he'd joined the new believing community. Notice this is the first instance the believers get push back from beyond Israel's high council, as the opposition comes from a synagogue in Jerusalem, a smaller house of worship. As the gospel spreads, it's disrupting things increasingly in the city.
- *"But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke."* (6:10) That's the *third* mention in short span about the role of Spirit in Stephen. Not once, not twice, but three times Luke spells out how powerfully Stephen walked in the Spirit.

Face of an Angel:

- *"All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel."* (6:15)
- Stephen has been dragged before the high council with accusations aimed to ruin him. As Stephen stands before the most powerful men in Israel, Luke adds an otherworldly note: "his face was like that of an angel." First, it evokes both Moses' face after he'd come down from Mount Sinai and spoken with the LORD, and it also carries echoes of Jesus' face at the mount of transfiguration. Second, based on the accusations against him, that he speaks against the Law of Moses and the temple, the writer is hinting that Stephen is about to say something incredibly important about both Israel's relationship to the Law and its place of worship. What's the place of the Mosaic law in light of Jesus? And what's the place of the temple in light of Jesus?



Study Questions

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Engage:

- Read the text. At your initial reading, what stands out to you? Think about key themes, words, phrases, or people.
- What questions do you have about the text?

Observe:

- Context — How does this connect with what has happened in the passage before this, or in other pertinent texts. What historical information is critical to our understanding?
- What happens in the narrative, what could potentially be happening that would cause the author to write what he does?
- What are you learning about Stephen that you haven't learned before?

Apply:

- What is your key take-away from this passage?
- Is there anything that you feel is important for you to understand or believe?
- Is there anything that God wants you to desire or do in response to this passage?
- Pray for each other.