

THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

SESSION 21 | ACTS 6:8-15

ACTS 6:8-15 | STEPHEN'S ARREST

- Verse 8 –
 - This is the first time we see **wonders and miracles** being performed by a non-apostle. It is significant that-
 - We are not told what the **wonders and miracles** were (thus they must not have been the focus)
 - Stephen had been “ordained” by the apostles, and now served as their emissary.
 - The assembly has grown this large and had so many miracles but never at the hands of “the populace.”
 - Clearly miracles were phenomenal, but to construe them as the focus of the early assembly would be false.
- Verse 9 –
 - Yet another indication that this early “church” was no church at all, but rather a sect **of the synagogue**, such as this one that now came up against Stephen.
 - The group **of the Libertines** are *freed Jewish slaves who, by birth, were Cyrenians, and Alexandrians* as well as from **Cilicia and of Asia**. The members of this synagogue were likely descendants of political slaves of the Romans, and because of this heritage took their Judaism very seriously.
 - They were **disputing with Stephen**, though the actual topic of the dispute is not given. The Greek word συζητέω [suzeteo] is simply a word for *looking for answers together*.
 - The word *dispute* comes into the English from the Latin (the Vulgate uses *disputare*), and *putare* means “to recon, to consider,” and is the root word of *compute/computer*.
 - The prefix *dis* (and all *di/dis* prefixes) means “two,” referring to the multiple people working together to get answers.
- Verse 10 –
 - Every witness should attempt to be like Stephen: giving **wisdom** in a gracious **spirit** so that no fair opposition might be given.
 - Note that KJV does not view **spirit** as diety, but simply as the *spirit of Stephen by which he spake*. The use of spirit/Spirit is often an interpretive matter except in places where it is made explicit.
- Verse 11 –
 - The Greek word ὑποβάλλω [hupoballo] is only used here in the New Testament, leaving us no comparison in Scripture.
 - It comes from *ballo* (to throw) with the prefix *hupo* (sometimes *hypo*) which is *under*, thus *under-throw*, or *throw under*. Its meaning is *to put forth by collusion* (as per Zodiahtes).
 - The English word **suborned** is not often used, but is not archaic (Anthony Bourdain used it in a 1997 book).
 - This precise word (wherein it has its greatest value) carries the *hupo* prefix in the use of *sub* on the root word *orn*, which is the root of *ornament* and *adorn*.

- The usage of **suborned** is to *underhandedly adorn* a person with a false pretense. The word is more precise than “secretly induced” (NKJV), which does not show the underhanded nature of the libertines who found men to “*throw under the bus*,” men who had no idea they were being used for such an agenda.
 - All of this is important to recognize that the testimony of these men, **We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses...** is testimony that is not to be trusted, it is an *adornment* that was *underhandedly* contrived.
- Verse 12 –
 - These same *Libertines* **stirred up the people** and they also **came upon...and caught Stephen and brought him to the council**, that is, the συνέδριον [sunedrion], the Sanhedrin.
- Verses 13-14 -
 - It is vitally important to recognize that these men have been **suborned** and are **false witnesses**. Therefore, their testimony is *patently false*, thus they have not heard Stephen say **words against this holy place and the law**. Thus far in the book of Acts, there has been *nothing* which supports this claim.
 - Sadly, many commentaries immediately ignore these words and assume Stephen is guilty as charged.
 - “Hitherto the people had favoured the work of the Apostles, but the opponents of Christianity, trading on the words of Stephen, stirred up their prejudices, and so for the first time in Acts we find them siding with the authorities.” ¹
 - “Jesus has destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and had previously foretold their destruction; he has also changed the *customs* which Moses delivered; and the character of Stephen’s speech leads to the belief that he perceived the catholicity of the Christian religion and the transitoriness of Judaism better than the Hebrew disciples. It is not, therefore, improbable that the testimony of these witnesses was measurably true; false in spirit rather than in words. ²
 - “...he had undoubtedly taught that the Christian Dispensation was superior to that of Moses; that the gospel was designed to supersede Judaism; that the law was unavailing as a source of justification; that henceforth true worship would be as acceptable to God in one place as another. In the clearness with which Stephen apprehended these ideas, he has been justly called the forerunner of Paul.”³
- Verse 15 –
 - This appears to be a miraculous element that should not be overlooked. God had given Stephen some kind of manifestation of glory.
 - It is interesting that they had been speaking of Moses, and now, just as for Moses, Stephen’s face becomes a display of heavenly glory.
 - Note that this was not a passing moment, but that the council looked **steadfastly on him**. Yet, in the end, they will still not hear the argument he is about to bring.

¹ H. T. Andrews, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Westminster New Testament (London: Andrew Melrose, 1908), 95.

² Lyman Abbott, *The Acts of the Apostles with Notes, Comments, Maps, and Illustrations* (New York; Chicago; New Orleans: A. S. Barnes & Company, 1876), 80.

³ Horatio B. Hackett, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Alvah Hovey and Ezra Abbot (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1882), 88.