

Acts 6:8-15, The Attack on Stephen
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H. Van Dyke Parunak

Overview

Contrast the divine reality manifested through Stephen, with the devious and underhanded methods employed by his adversaries. Begins and ends with a testimony to the power of God through him, and in the middle we see the machinations of the enemy.

In particular, the signs of his genuineness recall the ministry of Moses, whom he is accused of rejecting.

A. 8, Stephen's Ministry

1. His Character, "full of faith and power."

Compare the twofold descriptions in

- a) 3, "full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom"
- b) 5, "full of faith and the Holy Ghost"
- c) 10, "wisdom and Spirit"

and recall the characterization of the Spirit in ch. 1 as the one who gives power. Each description has two parts, one identifying a particular gift of the Spirit, the other describing the Spirit who gives the gift. Thus the point here is that Stephen is characterized by faith produced by the power [of the Holy Spirit]. These men do not minister in their own strength or skill, but are channels for the Spirit.

2. His Performance, "did wonders and signs."

These sprang from the spiritual power within him, and strongly urged his audience to attend to the Gospel (cf. Peter and John in ch. 3). See 7:36 for ascription of such work to Moses.

Application: Our lives should similarly be marked by the work of the Spirit, in ways that our colleagues and associates cannot deny.

B. 9-14, The Opposition

1. 9, Their Origin.

Five descriptions, in three categories:

- a) Libertines, "the liberated ones." That is, freed slaves. Many Jews taken captive by Pompey in 63 BC; later freed.
- b) Cyrenians (upper Libya) and Alexandrians (Egypt): African Jews.
- c) Cilicia and Asia: modern Turkey. Paul came from this area, and may have been part of this group.

All three are descriptive of Jews of the diaspora. The opposition against the Hellenist Stephen comes from other Hellenists.

Application: It's relatively easy to be a missionary to those who are different from ourselves. The hardest ones to reach are those closest to us. They will resist us the most strongly. Yet that's often where we are most effective.

2. 10, Their Impotence.

His spoken ministry manifests spiritual wisdom even as the works he wrought show spiritual faith, and as the Lord had promised (Luke 21:15), they cannot resist him.

3. 11-12a, Their public efforts

By inducing people to spread rumors about Stephen, they succeed in stirring up not only the elders and scribes, but also the people at large. "Suborn" means "to induce to commit perjury"; the record thus explicitly states that this was NOT what Stephen was teaching.

Note the difference here from the earlier effort of the high priests, whose hands were tied because of the popularity of the believers with the people. Now the adversaries *begin* by undercutting that base of popular support.

Two charges introduced here, which will be amplified in the next section: Stephen is accused of blasphemous words in two directions:

a) against Moses, the lawgiver;

b) against God himself.

4. 12b-14, Their private efforts

Once before the Sanhedrin, they repeat the same charges, perhaps bringing the hired liars who had previously stirred up the crowd to bear false witness now in a court of law. Same two claims, here repeated twice:

a) "against this place" (13), "Jesus ... will destroy this place" (14), correspond to blasphemy against God, whose house the temple is. The latter allusion is the same perversion of John 2 that had been brought against Jesus at his trial.

b) "against the law" (13), "change the customs ... Moses" (14) pick up the blasphemy against Moses.

Unable to match his integrity and genuine spiritual power and wisdom, they resort to deception and perjury. It's completely clear now that the opposition to the gospel is not due to a misunderstanding or lack of exposure, but to deliberate hatred on the part of those who reject it. How great the contrast, then, when we turn back to Stephen, and find him at the end of the episode, as at its beginning, giving full evidence of divine power.

C. 15, Stephen's Composure

God's glory shines out through Stephen supernaturally. This description of Stephen recalls two OT stories.

1. Exod. 34:35 refers to people seeing a face that was unusual in some sense: Moses' face, which shone after he had been speaking

with God. The allusion to Moses is probably intentional on Luke's part, here as in v.8, since Stephen in the following speech will compare the rejection of his message with the rejection of Moses' message by the Jews.

2. Jud. 13:6 is the only other place that comes close to describing "the face of an angel." When Manoah's wife, about to become the mother of Sampson, observes to her husband that her visitor has "the countenance of an angel," they are filled with fear and awe. Such should be the response of the Sanhedrin before such a manifestation through Stephen. Unfortunately, it is frequently the case that simple peasant people have better spiritual instincts than professional theologians.

Summary

1. Don't be surprised if unbelievers use "dirty tactics" to oppose your witness. No other tactics are available to them!
2. Those whom we would expect to be closest to us often oppose the gospel the most intensely.
3. We should seek to manifest the glory of God in the genuineness of our lives. Don't stoop to their level.

Psalm: 15

Analysis

A. The Instigation

8 Ste/fanos de\ plh/rhs pistews [MT] kai\ duna/mews e)poi/ei te/rata kai\ shmei^a mega/la e)n tw^| law^|.

B. The Opposition--Hellenists against a hellenist.

1. 9 a)ne/sthsan de/ tines

a) Roman: tw^n

1) liberated Jewish prisoners from Rom:

e)k th^s sunagwgh^s th^s legome/nhs Liberti/nwn

2) North African:

kai\ Kurhnai/wn kai\)Alecandre/wn kai\

b) Asian: tw^n a)po\ Kiliki/as kai\)Asi/as suzhtou^ntes tw^| Stefa/nw|,

2. 10 kai\ ou)k i)/sxuon a)ntisth^nai th^| sofi/a| kai\ tw^| pneu/mati w(^| e)la/lei. (cf. qualification in v.3) (cf. Luke 21:15)

3. Public opposition

(te marks close similarity between the clauses, Levinsohn II 2.1, thus something like paraphrase or result going on here.)

a) quote p

1) quote f: 11 to/te u(pe/balon a)/ndras le/gontas o(/ti

2) quote:

)Akhko/amen au)tou^ lalou^ntos r(h/mata bla/sfhma ei)s

Mwu+sh^n kai\ to\n geo/n:

b) 12 suneki/nhsa/n te to\n lao\n kai\ tou\s presbute/rous kai\

- tou\s grammatei^s,
4. Private opposition

te here marks 13 as the high point of the episode, leading into the next section.

 - a) kai\ e)pista/ntes sunh/rpasan au)to\n
 - b) kai\ h)/gagon ei)s to\ sune/drion,
 - c) quote p
 - 1) quote f: 13 e)/sthsa/n te ma/rturas yeudei^s le/gontas,
 - 2) quote: evidence p
 - a> claim: (O a)/nqrwpos ou(^tos ou) pau/etai lalw^nr(h/mata kata\ tou^ to/pou tou^ a(gi/ou [tou/tou] kai\ tou^ no/mou:
 - b> evidence: quote p
 - 1> quote f: 14 a)khko/amen ga\r au)tou^ le/gontos o(/ti
 - 2> quote:
 - a:)Ihsou^s o(Nazwrai^os ou(^tos katalu/sei to\n to/pon tou^ton
 - b: kai\ a)lla/cei ta\ e)/qh a(\ pare/dwken h(mi^n Mwu+sh^s.
 5. 15 kai\ a)teni/santes ei)s au)to\n pa/ntes oi(kaqezo/menoi e)n tw^| sunedri/w| ei)^don to\ pro/swpon au)tou^ w(sei\ pro/swpon a)gge/lou. (Cf. Jud. 13:6; they should have responded with fear.)