

**Date** : 7<sup>th</sup> June 2026  
**Theme** : The work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification and service.  
**Topic** : How the Holy Spirit works alongside with His servants.  
**Passage** : Acts 6 & 7

### **Introduction:**

When the Holy Spirit builds His church, Satan fights back. Today a war is being waged against the church, daily, in the spiritual realm. In the physical realm, this is reflected in the form of conflicts within the church, and intimidations from without. These intimidations, which originate from the kingdom of darkness, are designed to hinder the growth of His church.

The Holy Spirit, foreseeing the persecution tactic Satan always uses, strengthened Stephen. He demonstrated courage, wisdom and power. Stephen's courage would inspire the new church to keep preaching the gospel, inspite of persecutions.

Acts chapters 6 and 7 show us how the Holy Spirit worked powerfully through Stephen. Today we will look at some questions from this narrative:

1. Was Stephen's selection (as one of the 7 Acts 6:3) crucial in pushing the fledgling church out to the nations?
2. What interactions between Stephen and the Sanhedrin demonstrated that spiritual warfare was waged?
3. Why did God not intervene to save Stephen?

### **1. Was Stephen's selection crucial in pushing the fledgling church out to the nations?**

#### **a. Who was Stephen?**

- A Greek-speaking Jew, whose name means victor's crown. His life journey reflected the Lord's journey.
  - Brought before the Sanhedrin and judged by Caiaphas, the High Priest.
  - Accused for the same "offence", and executed illegally without due process.
  - Uttered the same words as Jesus did at His death.
- He was full of Holy Spirit and qualified as an outstanding leader, by his...
  - Wisdom — which no one from the opposition could overcome.
  - Power — great wonders and miracles performed.
  - Faith — supernatural faith manifested in unusual boldness in the face of death.

#### **b. The reach of the multi-cultural Grecian Jews Acts 6:3,8.**

7 men were chosen in Acts 6:3. They were primarily Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenists) and formed the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation leaders. They were Spirit-led obedient young men who reached out to the Gentiles (non-Jews). These 7 men, Stephen and Philip being the most well-known of the 7, began performing great miracles and preaching fearlessly to other Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem. They *...did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people...Acts 6:8* (This was a fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy regarding the era of the Greek Empire.)

Stephen led by example in preaching boldly.

Philip brought the gospel to Samaria and later to an African (the Ethiopian Eunuch).

Saul, a fanatical Jew was impacted. He related this in his testimony years later *Acts 22:20*. Saul, a Pharisee, was a Hellenistic (Grecian) Jew.

- c. The Holy Spirit worked in tandem with the Apostles, Stephen and the Hellenists *Acts 6:6-7*. This arrangement, with the appointment of the 7 deacons, freed the apostles to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. As the Word of God spread so did the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly.

## 2. What interactions between Stephen and the Sanhedrin demonstrated that spiritual warfare was waged?

- a. The Sanhedrin members focused their gaze intently at Stephen. Why? They noticed something unusual. Stephen's face was beginning to glow with radiance. As Jews, they would recall only one other person, Moses, whose face had a radiant glow.

Did they understand what was going on?

Yes, Dr Luke used the word *saw* – *eidon* to imply that they understood this phrase ...*as the face of an angel Acts 6:15*. By this, the Sanhedrin members should have realised that something supernatural was taking place.

When the high priest asked Stephen whether the accusations were true, he refuted point by point. But more than just answering the question, Stephen presented Christ and Him crucified.

- b. Stephen's powerful preaching showed his mastery of Scripture *Acts 7:2-53*.
- Though appointed to attend to practical needs in the church, Stephen was a profound Bible scholar. He brilliantly recounted the history of Israel from Abraham to Moses, proving he understood how God worked throughout history.
  - He argued that God's presence was not limited to a physical temple in Jerusalem. ...*the Most High does not live in houses made with hands...Acts 7:48*.

There was a long history of spiritual stubbornness and resistance to the Holy Spirit. Israel had historically rejected God's prophets who prophesied about Christ. But now, worse! The present religious leaders killed Christ himself.

- Instead of repentance, the Sanhedrin responded vehemently. They were...
  - Cut to the heart, filled with rage, covered their ears as they could not take it anymore.
  - Yelled loudly with one voice. Rushed together and dragged him out through the gate.
  - Stoned Stephen to death.

In so doing they had, unjustly, without due process, carried out the execution themselves. They did not take the vote to decide whether Stephen was guilty or not. No debate. They had put to death a person without the authorization of the governor (appointed by Rome).

Such violent behaviour suggested that the Sanhedrin had come under the control of spirit forces. They could not wait. This was obviously the attempt at pushing back the surge of the fledgling church from moving to the Gentiles.

- When God works, Satan pushes back.  
This is spiritual warfare. Recognise Satan's intimidation tactics.  
We must be aware of this and choose to fight on the side of the Kingdom of God.

### 3. Why did God not intervene to save Stephen?

#### a. What was Stephen thinking?

Acts 7:55-56 gives us some clues.

- At that moment of crises:
  - Firstly, Stephen looked up.  
Dr Luke use the word *atenizo* = focussing intently toward heaven.
  - He saw the glory of God and Jesus Himself.  
(Dr Luke used the word *eidon* = he understood what he saw, the glory of God)  
Stephen was taken up with the greatness, power and presence of Jesus Himself.
  - This revelation surfaced because he was full of the Holy Spirit. *Acts 7:55*  
Nothing gives one more courage in suffering than to see the glory of God.
  - Unpacking what *...glory...* means. (see Appendix)
- Stephen's reward.  
Stephen saw (*eidon*) Jesus standing at the right hand of God. This is not merely visibility. Stephen understood what it meant for the Lord to be standing at the right hand of God. The Lord always seats on His throne.

When we appear before Him, He will always be seated and we stand or kneel before Him. We are servants and serving Him is what we do without even expecting anything. When the King of Glory stands up for you, heaven's angels will watch with a jaw-dropping stance.

- What does it mean when He stood up for Stephen?  
The Lord was bestowing the highest honour on him. Stephen had passed the test!

#### b. What test is this?

Firstly, the Lord had taught that *...he who saves his life will lose it but he who loses his life will save it*. Stephen didn't lose his life, he slept and then stepped into eternity.

Didn't the Lord also teach in Matthew 5:12 about how He will reward those who are persecuted for His Name's sake?

He said *...Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven ... Matthew 5:11, 12*. Stephen believed this promise. How great is this reward that the Lord had in mind. It is beyond our wildest dreams. So Isaiah puts it this way...

*...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man.*

*The things which God has prepared for those who love Him. Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9*

One thing we do know – it is the victor’s crown. Paul calls it the glory which our suffering is not worth comparing with.

Many, like Stephen, who understood these promises, rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer.  
*Acts 5:41*

c. Could God have saved Stephen from death?

He certainly could as He had done with His other servants.

But why didn’t He?

- Could it be that Stephen had finished his assignment?  
Hanging around further would yield no other benefit.  
Paul recognised this. He declared *I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race.*

- Did God take Stephen’s life lightly? Certainly not.  
The death of His saints is precious to Him.  
*...Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints... Psalm 116:15*

It seems that the church is founded upon the blood of Jesus and His saints.

- Thirdly: Persecution was coming. Stephen’s example of courage and faith inspired the church to stay faithful. God always need examples of faithfulness to be demonstrated in flesh and blood, even though our warfare is not against flesh and blood.

Stephen responded exactly as Jesus did in the face of death.

Hebrews 12:2 describes *...for the joy set before Him (Jesus), He endured the cross...*

### Application

God will always keep us alive and well but sometimes He may do otherwise.

Ultimately He will make our lives to count for eternity.

The Holy Spirit will empower us as He did for Stephen. We will lack no provision to finish well.

Stephan’s example can spur us to do so, whether through life or death.

- Am I willing to be exemplary as a faithful servant, even to the point of death?
- I want to trust the supernatural empowerment of the Holy Spirit when I preach the gospel.
- I want to trust Him to convict men of sin and of the truth of the gospel.

## Appendix: Unpacking key words

- Glory
  - Honoured by God.
  - Magnificent, being magnified by God. *Job 7:17*
  - Radiance, shining.  
*...Those who turn many to righteousness shall shine... Daniel 12:3*
    - Good works done for Christ glorify the Father. *Matthew 5:16*
    - Share Jesus' glory when we suffer for Him. *Romans 8:18*
    - Jesus is glorified through His saints. *2 Thessalonians 1:12*
  
- Attain to glory
  - By beholding His glory (like Stephen)
  - Sharing in suffering for His sake. *Romans 8:17*  
But our suffering cannot be compared to the glory He has prepared.  
*Romans 8:18, 1 Corinthians 2:9*
  - Winning the victor's crown (Stephanos)  
i.e. No Combat No Crown.
  - Setting eternal glory as our goal. *1 Peter 5:10*
  
- Wisdom
  - Discernment – understanding will of God.
    - grasping what is happening.
  - Direction – know where we are heading.
  - Decision making – choosing correctly in the light of your situation.
  
- See
  - *Atenizo* : intently focus in the subject.
  - *Eidon* : seeing and understanding the spiritual significance, beyond the visible object.