



A just weight  
and balance

are the  
LORD'S:

Thus saith the Lord...

- The Church's appointment of the seven men to serve the Grecian widows had far-reaching consequences.
  - Let us note that not one of the seven has a Jewish name.
  - In essence the great struggle had begun.

- To the Jews two things were specially precious:
  - The Temple, where God could be truly worshiped
  - The Law which could never be changed.

- The Jews always looked on themselves as the chosen people;
- But they had interpreted “chosen” in the wrong way,
- Believing that God had no use for any other nation.

- They never dreamed that they were chosen for service to bring all men into the same relationship with God as they themselves enjoyed.

- They were the to be the gateway to a promise given to Abraham in

Genesis 12:1-3

- **A promise given to Abraham.**

- **Genesis 12:1-3**

- **1** Now the LORD had said unto Abram,  
**Get you out of your country,**  
**and from your kindred,**  
and from your father's house,  
unto a land that I will show you:
  - **2** And I will make of you  
a great nation,  
and in you shall.....  
**all families of the earth**  
**be blessed.**

- **Acts 6:8**

**And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.**

- **6:9 Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.**

- Stephen,  
one of the seven,  
however, said that
- The Temple must pass away,
- That the Law was but a stage  
towards the gospel
- And that Christianity must  
go out to the whole wide world.



- The defense that Stephen made before the Sanhedrin was not designed to win its approval.
- He outlined Israel's history to demonstrate three main points.

- First,

God had never shown himself  
to be limited to  
one dwelling place,  
or even one locality,

- Therefore the Jews were  
mistaken in attaching  
such importance to the  
temple in Jerusalem.

- Second,  
the people of Israel  
had always rejected the  
messengers of God,
- Therefore their  
rejection of the Messiah  
was not surprising.

- Three,  
that the Law was  
but a springboard  
to sprint the gospel  
into all the world.

- **For there was to be neither Jews nor Greeks, slaves nor free people, males nor females. You are all the same in Christ Jesus.**

**If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants and heirs, as God promised.**

**(Galatians 3:28-29)**

- None could withstand his arguments and so the Jews resorted to violence.
- Stephen was arrested.
- His career was to be short.

- But he was the first to see that Christianity was not for the Jews only,
  - But God's offer of salvation to all the world.
  - Thus fulfilling God's promise to Abraham.

- It was to the history of the Jewish people that Stephen appealed.
- Taking a bird's eye view of the history of the Jewish people, Stephen began to cited certain truths.
- However, in the end he is accused of blasphemy and stoned.
- Let us note his defense.



- **# 1** Stephen stated that the men who played a really great part in the history of Israel **were the men who heard God's command,**  
**"Get thee out,"**  
and were **not afraid**  
**to obey it.**

- Stephen then **contrasted the spirit of the Jews** of his own day,
- whose desire was **to keep things as they were** and who regarded Jesus and his followers **as a danger to their religious traditions.**

- **# 2** He insisted that men had worshiped God **long before there ever was a Temple.**

- To the Jews the Temple was **the most sacred of all places.**

- **# 3** Stephen insisted that when the Jews crucified Jesus **they were only maintaining a policy they had always followed;**
- For all through the ages **they had persecuted the prophets** and abandoned the leaders whom God had raised up.

- **These were hard truths**  
for men who  
believed themselves  
to be the chosen people,
  - And it is little wonder  
**that they**  
**were infuriated**  
when they heard  
these words.

- Stephen's method of defense **is to take a panoramic view of Jewish history.**

- To him every **person** and **event** symbolized something.

- He began with Abraham,  
for in the most literal way  
it was with him that,  
for the Jew,  
history began.
- In him Stephen sees  
three things.

- **# 1 Abraham** was a man who answered God's summons.
- As the writer to the Hebrews put it, Abraham left home without knowing where he was to go (**Hebrews 11:8**).
- He was a man willing to answer God's call.



- **# 2** **Abraham was a man of faith.**

- He did not know where he was going but he believed that,

**under God's guidance,**  
**the best was yet to be.**

**(Hebrews 11:8)**

- Even when he had no children and when, humanly speaking, it seemed impossible that he ever should have any,
- He believed that some day his descendants would inherit the land God had promised to them.

- **# 3 Abraham was a man of hope.**

- To the end of his days he never saw the promise fully fulfilled **but he never doubted that it would be.**

- So Stephen challenged the Jews to be ever ready **to answer God's call**

in contrast to their desire to cling to the past.

- The picture of Abraham is succeeded by the picture of Joseph.
- The key to Joseph's life is summed up in his own saying in:
  - Genesis 50:20

**As for you, you meant to harm me,  
but God intended it  
for a good purpose,  
so he could preserve  
the lives of many people,  
as you can see this day.**

- Joseph was the man for whom seeming **disaster turned to triumph.**
  - **Sold** into Egypt as a slave,
    - Wrongfully **imprisoned**,
  - **Forgotten** by the men he had helped,
    - But the day yet came when **he became prime minister of Egypt.**
- Stephen sums up the characteristics of Joseph in **two words**
  - **Grace** and **Wisdom.**

- Grace is undeserved mercy.
- It would have been extremely easy for Joseph to become embittered.
  - But he trusted in God that all things would work for good.  
(Romans 8:28)
- Serving with equal devotion as slave  
or  
as prime minister.

- Wisdom is more than cleverness.
- But the life of Joseph gives us the clue to its meaning.
- True wisdom is the ability to see things as God sees them.

- So Stephen draws a contrast for them.
- The Jews were lost in the reverence of their own past
- Imprisoned in their own Law.
  - But Joseph welcomed each new chapter in his life,
- And accepted God's view of life.



- Next upon the scene comes the figure of Moses.
  - For the Jew, Moses was above all the man who answered God's command to go out.
  - He was quite literally the man who gave up a kingdom to answer God's summons to be the leader of his people.

- So once again Stephen **is making the same point.**

- This great man **is not like the Jews,**  
**in clinging to the past;**

- He is the man who **is ready to answer**  
God's summons,

- And hurl himself **into his faith in God.**

- The speech of Stephen begins to accelerate.
- All the time by implication it has been condemning the attitude of the Jews;
  - Now that implicit condemnation becomes explicit.

- Stephen continues to point out their **continued disobedience.**
- In the days of **Moses** they rebelled by **making the golden calf.**
- In the time of **Amos** their hearts went after **Moloch and the star gods.**  
(**Acts 7:43; Amos 5:26**)

- Insisting that they have had the most amazing privileges.
  - They have had a long line of prophets;
  - The tabernacle,
  - The Law which was given by angels.  
(**Acts 7:53**)

- **Continuous disobedience**  
and  
**continuous privilege**  
are listed side by side.
  - The more privileges  
a man has  
**the greater his condemnation**  
if he goes the wrong way.

- Stephen is insisting that the condemnation of the Jewish nation **is complete**
- Because in spite of the fact that **they had every chance to know better** they continuously rebelled against God.

- He insists that they **have wrongly limited God.**
- The Temple which should have become their **greatest blessing** was in fact their **greatest curse;**
- They had come **to worship it** instead of worshiping God.



- They **limited** their Jewish God to dwelling in Jerusalem
  - And **failed** to see with the eye of faith the God of:
    - **Abraham**,
    - **Joseph**,
    - **Moses**,
    - **Prophets**.

- He insists that they have consistently persecuted the prophets;

- And now, the crowning charge, they have murdered the Son of God.

- And Stephen does not excuse them on the plea of ignorance as Peter did.

- **It is not ignorance now**  
but rebellious disobedience.

- Too much **time**  
has passed now.

- **Before** the  
death and resurrection,  
ignorance was plausible.

- Now, it is  
**rank disobedience.**

- There is anger in Stephen's closing words,
- But there is sorrow too.
  - There is the anger that sees a people commit the most terrible of crimes;
  - And there is the sorrow that sees a people who have refused the destiny that God offered them.

- A speech like this could only have one end;
  - Stephen had courted death and death came.

- But Stephen did not see the faces distorted with rage.

- His gaze had gone beyond earthly time and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God.  
(Acts 7:56)

- In the mind of his audience he had committed the greatest of blasphemies;

- And the penalty for blasphemy was stoning to death (Deuteronomy 13:6ff.).

- There are in this scene **certain notable things about Stephen.**
- **# 1** We see the **secret** of his courage.
  - Beyond all that men could do to him he saw **”the Son of man”** awaiting him.
  - Our Lord, **standing** and not seated.  
(**Acts 7:56**)



- **# 2** We see Stephen following his Lord's example.
- **Act 7:59** And they stoned Stephen, calling upon *God*, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.
- **7:60** And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.
- **When a man follows Christ**  
he will find the strength to do things which seem humanly impossible to do.

- **# 3** We see Stephen  
“**faithful unto death**”  
(**Revelation 2:10**)
- To Stephen came the peace  
which comes to the man  
**who has done the right thing**  
even if the right thing kills him.

➤ **Acts 8:1**

**And Saul  
was consenting  
unto his death.**

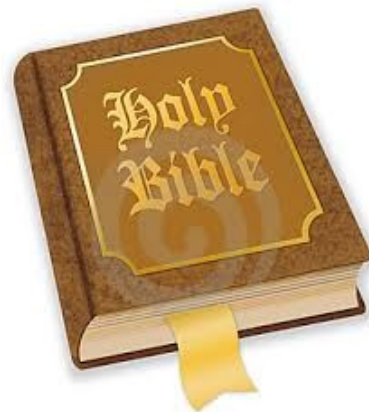
➤ The man who was to  
**become the apostle  
to the Gentiles**  
agreed with the  
execution of Stephen.

- The blood of the martyrs fertilized the seed of the church.

**The doors of the church  
are open.**

**The Spirit and the Bride  
Say  
“Come”.**

**Revelation 22:17**



- 08-04-2019 Tryon, NC



