

STEPHEN: FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT *Acts 6:1-10; 7:54-60*

by Francis Dixon

We read of Stephen in Acts 6:5-15; 7:1-60; 8:2; 11:19; 22:20. He was “**a man full...of the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 6:5). It is important we understand that the Spirit-filled life is God’s plan and provision for every Christian. On the Day of Pentecost “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4); the promise is to “all” (Acts 2:39), and the command is to every Christian (Ephesians 5:18). What are the characteristics of a Spirit-filled Christian as seen through Stephen?

AVAILABLE TO THE LORD FOR WHATEVER SERVICE HE MAY APPOINT

In Acts 6:1-5, we read of a problem that arose in the early Church, of the way the apostles dealt with it and of their decision to select seven men to administer the benevolent fund. The qualifications required for these men are seen in verse 3, and their names are mentioned in verse 5, the first of which is “Stephen, a man full...of the Holy Spirit”. These men were wanted not for preaching or any prominent task, but to “wait on tables”. It is clear, therefore, that a Spirit-filled Christian is one who is available to the Lord for whatever work He may appoint. Are we available to the Lord in this way? Are we ready to obey Him? – look up 2 Samuel 15:15.

PRAISE the Lord for:

- ★ A fruitful trip to Canada (Andrew and Carl in March) where orders have been placed for around 12,000 copies of Challenge newspaper from several church planting ministries
- ★ Crossroads Prison Ministry in Canada has placed an order for 2,500 papers to go into 100 prisons as a test run. Funding is secure at this stage
- ★ A businessman in Canada who has agreed to fund the distribution of the street edition in Toronto

A CHANNEL FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD’S POWER

In Acts 6:8 we read that Stephen became a mighty preacher and performed miracles in the name of the Lord; but although verse 8 says, “Stephen...did great wonders and miraculous signs...”, was it Stephen who did these things? No! It was the Holy Spirit working through him; he was the channel, and through him flowed the power of God, and wherever there is a person full of the Holy Spirit the same thing will happen. Wherever a Spirit-filled Christian goes, lives will be touched, for God the Holy Spirit does His work through human channels today, just as He did in the first century.

REACTS GRACEFULLY UNDER PROVOCATION

Acts 6:9-14 tells us of the terrific onslaught that was made on Stephen by the religious people. They disputed with him, secured false witnesses and hatched up an evil plot to get rid of him. Have people said unkind or untrue things about you? Stephen had that – and much more! How did he react under this fierce provocation? – look at verse 15 and see, for this is how we shall react if we are “full of the Holy Spirit”. We would have sympathised with Stephen if he had retaliated under such pressure from his enemies, but he reacted graciously when he was provoked and pressed almost to the limit. What a tremendous testimony he bore in his life and on his face!

Continued over

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IS MIGHTY IN THE SCRIPTURES

In Acts 7:2-53, we have the record of the defence that Stephen made before his accusers, and notice that his "sermon" was filled with quotations from the scriptures

- 1 He **KNEW** the Scriptures. Only one who was familiar with the record of God's dealings with His people could so accurately relate such a story.
- 2 He **BELIEVED** the Scriptures. He believed the historical parts of the Old Testament; he referred to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the twelve Patriarchs, Joseph, Moses and the deliverance at the Red Sea...He also believed the prophetic scriptures, as verse 52 makes perfectly clear.

- 3 He **PREACHED** the Scriptures. How skilfully he wielded the "sword of the Spirit"! – look up and compare Hebrews 4:12 and Ephesians 6:17.

- 4 He presented **CHRIST** in the Scriptures. He spoke of the Lord's incarnation, His sinless nature, His trial and of Calvary.

- 5 He **APPLIED** the Scriptures to his listeners. He did this powerfully and fearlessly, as verse 51 tells us. A Spirit-filled Christian is one who is full of the Word of God – see also Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 2:15.

PRAYER needed for:

- ★ Prison edition Canada. There are 300 prisons in Canada and Crossroads Prison Ministry has access to 100 currently
- ★ Andrew and Karen Trezona (Challenge USA). Andrew is also part time Missions Pastor at Urbancrest Baptist Church. Pray for the Trezona family as they juggle these roles
- ★ Impact Africa team. We are seeking to raise project funding for prison ministry, Bibles, vacation bible school and hospital ministries
- ★ Local churches to catch the vision for their communities and how they will share the gospel

IS SUSTAINED IN THE HOUR OF TRIAL AND ADVERSITY

In Acts 7:54-59 we read of the furious situation that built up around Stephen, ending with his death by stoning. Was he filled with self-pity? Did he cry out to his accusers to spare him? No, he was wonderfully sustained, he rode the storm of trial triumphantly, and Acts 7:55-56 tells us how he was able to do this – "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up..." This is what a Spirit-filled man does when death itself comes; he knows how to look up and to see Jesus exalted and glorified, and he is upheld in the hour of trial by the clear vision he has of his Lord - compare Hebrews 11:27; 2 Corinthians 9:8; 12:9-10.

IS LIKE HIS LORD AND MASTER

Acts 7:59-60 gives us a moving picture of Stephen's martyrdom. What was he doing while he was being stoned? He was doing what Jesus did when He was dying on the cross – compare Luke 23:34 and 46 with Acts 7:59-60. Also consider 2 Corinthians 3:18.

IS ALWAYS LAMENTED WHEN HE DIES

In Acts 8:2 we read of the sorrow that filled the hearts of the "godly men" who carried Stephen to his burial; they "mourned deeply for him." What a loss it was to the Church when Stephen went to Heaven! A Spirit-filled man will always be missed.

This, then, is what "Stephen, a man full...of the Holy Spirit", was like. Are you ready to be so emptied of sin and self that the Holy Spirit may fill and use you?

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