

**Cometh The Hour  
Acts 6:8-15 (29 Jun 2025)**



A proverb arose in the fourteenth century – *Opportunity Maketh The Thief.*

Over time this saying was adjusted to become – *Opportunity Maketh The Man.*

Variations of this saying continued to arise over the years.

In Walter Scott's novel *Guy Mannering*, Meg says, 'Because the Hour's come, and the Man'.

When the American Civil War began, William Yancey, said this about Jefferson Davis, the President-elect of the Confederacy: 'The man and the hour have met.'

Today, the saying usually comes in this form – **Cometh The Hour, Cometh The Man.**

The idea is that when an hour, a time of great need arises – then providence will see a man or woman rise up who is able to meet the need.

That has been the theme of countless Hollywood Blockbusters – Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, the Matrix, Robin Hood.

In a time of need – a hero will rise.

This morning, I want to suggest that this is partially right.

There is a sense in which an hour of testing does come on us all.

A time to stand for Christ – and when that hour comes – we shouldn't look around for one hero to rise.

Because God will cause an army of ordinary men and women to rise.

And there will be nothing special **about** them – but there will be something special **in** them.

And we should expect to be counted among their number.

It is the Spirit of Christ who will help us to stand in the time of need.

**Cometh The Hour, Cometh The Spirit.**

We are in the book of Acts and we have seen that the message in this book is:

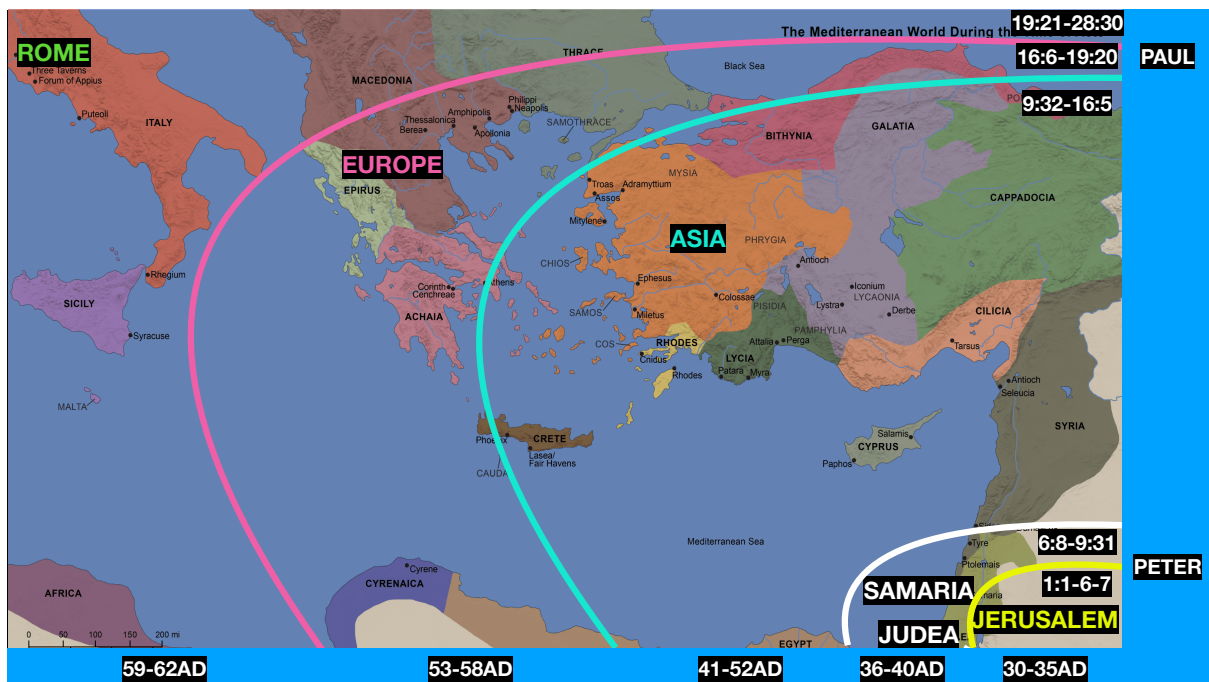


**We must strive to see His kingdom come, through the empowering of His Spirit, by witnessing to the nations, until He comes again.**

We have seen that the book of Acts is structured around Acts 1:8:



You will be my witnesses in **Jerusalem**, in all **Judea and Samaria**, and to the **ends of the earth**.”



And as Acts unfolds the gospel spreads across these geographic, ethnic and cultural barriers.





But another key point we noted is that each extension of the gospel:



Is occasioned by **Jesus acting**.



The Jerusalem expansion began with Jesus acting to begin His church.

Last week we saw this expansion end in Acts 6:7:

So **the word of God spread**, the disciples **in Jerusalem** increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.

There is now a healthy witnessing, growing church in Jerusalem.

So, today, we begin the *second* expansion.

The gospel is about to spread beyond Jerusalem throughout **Judea and Samaria**.

And this section starts with another divine act – **Jesus Acts To Scatter His Church**.

Basically, the Lord uses persecution to scatter His church.

At the end of this section, Acts 8:1 says:

All except the apostles were **scattered throughout** the land of **Judea and Samaria**.

It seems that many if not most of the church had to flee Jerusalem and were spread throughout Judea and Samaria.

The one large church was divided into many smaller groups – and as they spread – the gospel went with them.

So, let's put this in perspective. What we have seen so far is that Jesus commissions the Apostles to take the gospel to the nations and begins the church in AD 30.

The church begins, grows but comes under attack from within and without.

A question for us to consider is how long after Pentecost are these events beginning in Acts 6:8?

It is hard to know – estimates vary from 1 year to 7 or 8 years.

Most think somewhere around 5-6 years – but since we don't have any date markers, no one can be certain.

But what we can say is that whatever the length of time, the Apostles and the church at Jerusalem were still too focussed on Jerusalem.

They know they are supposed to go to the rest of Israel – Judea. They know they have to go to the half-breeds of Samaria and one day to the wilds of the ends of the world and the Gentiles.

But the reality is the tyranny of the urgent – and the fact that they still had reservations about Samaritans and Gentiles – means these challenges are left as tomorrow's problem.

Perhaps there had been some outreach to other parts of Judea – but there does not seem to be any deliberate organised outreach. We don't know of any leaders who have been sent and churches planted.

They are still coming to grips with the rapid expansion of the church in Jerusalem, getting leaders and processes installed, dealing with the growing opposition.

So, if Jesus did not act – when would the outreach in Judea and Samaria have happened? Would it ever have happened? We simply don't know.

What we do know is that in His providence, Jesus does act.

He acts at a time when the church has grown and when there is a level of leadership other than the Apostles in place to take the gospel to these areas.

And because God acted through persecution to scatter the church, the inference seems to be that the Lord expected them to be making an effort to reach these areas.

Why act through persecution?

He could have sent an angel to tell them – guys – look you have over 10,000 people and some awesome leaders – time for ten church plants in Judea – thus says the Lord.

But, He should not have to. They already had the commission of Jesus to reach these lands.

Now this is certainly not how I would have done it – it seems a bit drastic.

It is not as if that church was sitting on their hands – 120 people to 10,000 in a few years.

Constantly out preaching.

And they have a pretty full plate – persecution, organising a huge church.

Part of me asks – did they even have the bandwidth to have trained and organised leaders for new church plants?

Stephen, Philip – others were just being trained and they need them there.

And were there people ready to go to places like Samaria for the kingdom?

To me – I think a divine message to start planning for churches in Hebron, Gaza, Jericho, Bethany, Samaria, Caesaria would have been the way to go.

However, I suspect without God moving in a way like this – the church would have taken decades to plan, prepare – before they finally planted.

So, instead of reaching Rome in a couple of decades – they would possibly be reaching the outskirts of Samaria.

In His divine providence – this is how the Lord acts.

Now, the point for us is not that if Jesus wants us to act – we should do nothing until He sends persecution forcing us to act.

The point is – we have His clear explicit command – we should plan to act – and if we don't He will do whatever it takes to see His kingdom come.

The result is that here in Acts 6:8-8:3 we have a turning point. The church is driven out from Jerusalem and the gospel spreads.

Christians are seeded throughout these lands. They will share the gospel and form churches.

I also want you to notice that this is a turning point in other ways.

The opposition to the church is now coming not just from the elite leaders like the Sanhedrin. Members of very ordinary synagogues are now turning on the church.

Then in 6:12 – we are told **the people** – ordinary Jews are stirred up against Stephen.

This is significant. Up until this time the leaders of the Jews had shown a measure of restraint because they feared the people. The people were favourably disposed towards the Apostles and the church.

But now the people are beginning to turn on the church so the need for restraint is removed – which leads to an escalation in opposition.

Notice also that this is the first time the persecution and opposition is directed against those in the church who are not the Apostles.

Up until this time only the Apostles have been called in, questioned, lashed and imprisoned.

Now, Stephen – who is not one of the 12 is squarely in the firing line.

And by the time we get to Acts 8:1-3, the persecution is organised, widespread and falls on the whole church – men, women – everyone dragged off and imprisoned – and the rest scattered – but it leads to the spread of the kingdom.



This morning, we are only going to look at the **beginning** of this persecution. And, as we look at our passage – here is what I want you to get from this morning's passage:





Faith in Christ puts a target on your back, but when the hour comes the Spirit will sustain you

**Faith in Christ puts a target on your back, but when the hour comes the Spirit will sustain you.**

Here in Australia, we may not be facing imminent prison, beating or death – but you need to realise that every Christian does have a target on them in one way or another.

And you need to know, when the hour of testing comes – so will the power of the Spirit.

To see this, turn with me to Acts 6:8.

First:



Faith in Christ puts a target on your back but the Spirit in your heart

8-10 Speak truth and opposition will arise

## **8-10 Speak truth and opposition will arise**

Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from some members of the Freedmen's Synagogue, composed of both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, and they began to argue with Stephen. But they were unable to stand up against his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking.

The first we ever hear of Stephen is in verse 5 of this chapter – and he is dead by the end of chapter 7.

The only information we have on him comes from these chapters.

We know he is very likely a Hellenistic Jew. He has a Greek name and likely was raised speaking Greek and probably grew up outside Israel. But his heritage was Jewish.

We know he came to faith, joined the church in Jerusalem and was one of the seven appointed to be deacons in the church.

He was a man full of faith, grace, power and the Holy Spirit. He is enabled to perform great wonders.

We are going to see that he is a brilliant biblical theologian.

He gives the longest speech in Acts.

He is the first Christian martyr.

However, the list of what we don't know about him is long.

We don't know how old he was, if he's married, if he had children, what his occupation was, which country he was born or raised in.

We don't know exactly when he came to Christ. We don't know if he was saved at Pentecost or afterwards.

We don't know how long he had lived back in the Promised land or how long he had been a member of the church.

What we do know is his life was radically changed in a short space of time.

Whatever his life was a few years ago – it had now changed completely.

Let's assume he travelled to Jerusalem for Pentecost and comes to Christ and joined the church.

He chose to stay and leave the life he had back in some part of the Empire.

The fact he had the means to travel to Israel likely indicates his life had been somewhat comfortable.

But coming to faith meant he found himself part of a weak, persecuted minority – often struggling to find the daily necessities.

Then his godliness and gifts are recognised and he is appointed a deacon. I am sure that ministry had its challenges.

But, how long is it between him becoming a deacon and this account of his martyrdom? – we simply don't know.

But clearly, once Stephen begins preaching the truth about Jesus he became a man with a big target on his back.

We are about to see this man give the longest speech in Acts and then become the first Christian martyr.

Question – why is the longest speech in Acts not by an Apostle?

Question – why is the first martyr not an Apostle?

Why this shift away from the focus on the 12?

I think we are supposed to see in Stephen a man who was living an ordinary life – came to Christ – served faithfully – but just doing that meant he found himself with a big target on his back.

He is meant to be someone we can identify with. **This could be us.**

You might think Stephen is as hard to identify with as the Apostles.

I mean – He is Stephen – godly, brilliant, brave, face like an angel, dies a brave death.

I am me. Sinful, failing, anxious, doubting my salvation.

Perhaps – but there is a real sense in which we **are** Stephen in the sense that coming to faith and proclaiming Christ puts a target on our back.

Not just on the John Pipers or Mark Devers – on all of us.

Persecution is **not** just for the top leaders – it **can** – and **does** – and in some way **will** come on each of us.

2 Timothy 3:12:

**All** who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus **will** be persecuted.

Not some but **all**. Not might be persecuted – **will** be persecuted.

Matthew 10:17:

Beware of them, because they will hand you over to local courts and flog you in their synagogues.

Mark 10:29–30:

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus said, “there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, who will not receive a hundred times more, now at this time—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, **with persecutions**.”

No Christian will live life in this world without some persecution.

Now don't think this means you will all inevitably end in prison or on death row – nor are we to think if I die of old age without being imprisoned, I did not live godly.

Australia would have to change or you would have to move overseas with Rob – but those things *could* happen.

It **does** mean – there is a target on you and opposition in some form will arise.

There may be a sword that comes in your family. Some in your family will hate it when you share Christ or refuse to join in their sin.

There may be a division among friends. They will think you are foolish if you don't sleep around and enjoy the world while you are young.

It might come in the workplace when you can't bend a few rules, cut a few corners or you stand up for a biblical truth.

This might not sound like real persecution but frankly for many of us prison would be easier for us to face than shame and mocking from people we care about.

Here is what the Bible consistently says – **if** you speak the truth about Jesus – opposition **will** follow.

Stephen was a relative nobody.

A couple of years back, few in Jerusalem would have any idea who he was.

Just another pilgrim and maybe back home he was a merchant selling dried meat or making cloaks or he ran the family farm.

Then the next day he finds himself joined to this group who are facing a rising tide of opposition.

And then before he knows it, he is a deacon and a preacher in mortal danger.



And I think part of him had to be crying out – ummm – what just happened – how did I get here?

And more than that – I am sure he was asking himself – who is adequate for such things? I am just ordinary Stephen.

But ordinary Stephen had the power of the Spirit. Our text tells us that Stephen is full of grace and power and performed wonders and signs.

These are terms Luke uses in his Gospel of Jesus but also of the Apostles here in Acts.

Now if all Stephen was doing was some healings and other miracles – the people would probably build a statue for him.

But, what puts a target on his back is that he is *also* preaching the gospel of Christ.

And in verse 9, a particular group rose up and took issue.

They were part of the Freedmen's Synagogue.

Freedmen were those who had once been slaves but had earned their freedom. They earned enough to buy their freedom or they served in the army long enough or were freed by an owner for years of loyal service.

These freedmen were Jews – but Hellenistic Jews.

Jews born outside the land in Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia.

They were older and probably had come back to the Promised Land to live out their days.

In some ways you have to think this is an unlikely group to rise up.

They were Hellenistic Jews like Stephen. They were former slaves not theologians or Priests. Most had come back to live out their days not take up a new battle.

You wouldn't think making a fuss over theology would be their thing.

But something riled them up. They heard Stephen preaching about salvation in Jesus – not salvation in Moses and the Temple.

Preaching about grace not Law.

Preaching about an eternal kingdom not an earthly kingdom.

It was not what they had been taught. Not what they had based their lives around.

And they began to argue with him.



On our recent trip I walked out of Central Station in Hamburg and there was a street preacher – right at the exit – preaching loudly and very animatedly for all he was worth.

I don't speak any German, so I just assumed he was a Christian and was preaching the gospel. I hope he wasn't a JW or the like because I amenned.

He was speaking very powerfully and maybe 20 or 30 were stopped and seemed to be listening.

But some sure didn't like it and were interjecting.

This is sort of what I picture happening with Stephen.



**Faith in Christ puts a target on your back  
but the Spirit in your heart**

**8-10 Speak truth and opposition will arise**

Out on the streets of Jerusalem or more likely – in the Temple precinct – Stephen was preaching Christ and Him crucified and resurrected with power.

These Freedmen hear something they don't like and are interjecting – but are unable to stand up against the wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking.

From his later speech – I assume Stephen was using the Old Testament to show Jesus is the Messiah and the one way of salvation.

They didn't like it, but they couldn't refute it or counter it. So, they played dirty.



**Faith in Christ puts a target on your back  
but the Spirit in your heart**

**8-10 Speak truth and opposition will arise**

**11-14 Don't be shocked when they don't fight fair**

## **11-14 Don't be shocked when they don't fight fair**

We are often shocked at just how dirty the world plays.

Don't be – expect it. To them – the end justifies the means.

When you read the entire account of Stephen, it is clear that there are many direct parallels between the ministry, persecution, trial and death of Jesus and that of Stephen.

In his commentary on Acts, Ben Witherington lists out ten of them.

1. Trial before high priest/Sanhedrin
2. False witnesses
3. Testimony concerning the destruction of the temple
4. Temple “made with hands”
5. Son of Man saying
6. Charge of blasphemy
7. High priest's question
8. Committal of spirit
9. Cry out with a loud voice
10. Intercession for enemies' forgiveness

1. Trial before high priest/Sanhedrin
2. False witnesses
3. Testimony concerning the destruction of the temple
4. Temple “made with hands”
5. Son of Man saying
6. Charge of blasphemy
7. High priest's question
8. Committal of spirit
9. Cry out with a loud voice
10. Intercession for enemies' forgiveness<sup>1</sup>

Others have expanded the list.

11. Both were full of grace and power and performing wonders
12. None able to stand against His wisdom and Spirit

---

<sup>1</sup> Ben Witherington III, [\*The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 253.



Some also add:

**13. Face like an angel**

**So up to seven of these parallels occur in verses 8-15:**

1. Both full of grace and power and performing wonders v. 8
2. None able to stand against His wisdom and Spirit v. 10
3. False witnesses v. 11
4. Charge of blasphemy v. 11
5. Trial before high priest/Sanhedrin v. 12
6. Testimony concerning the destruction of the temple v. 14
7. Face like an angel. v. 15

1. Both full of grace and power and performing wonders v. 8
2. None able to stand against His wisdom and Spirit v. 10
3. False witnesses v. 11
4. Charge of blasphemy v. 11
5. Trial before high priest/Sanhedrin v. 12
6. Testimony concerning the destruction of the temple v. 14

**And possibly:**

7. Face like an angel v. 15.

The point is that Stephen was a disciple of Christ, preached Christ – and found Himself right in the crosshairs – *just like Christ*.

The Bible makes it very clear – **if** you are following Jesus and preaching Jesus – the world **will** hate you and treat you just like it treated Jesus.

John 15:18-20:

If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you. ... If they persecuted me, they **will** also persecute you.



Brothers and sisters – they certainly did not fight fair with Jesus – so why should we expect anything different?

If you live righteously, speak truth, love others, play nice – something in us says – that should win them over. They are not going to attack someone really nice.

Well – they attacked Jesus and He is far nicer than any of us could ever be.

Don't be shocked when they don't fight fair – when you find yourself unjustly accused.

Rejoice.

He was the sinless Son of God – no accusation could stand.

They had to twist His words, find false witnesses and misuse the Law.

Unfortunately, the reality is that with us – they often don't even have to fight all that unfair.

We are not sinless. Our lives are littered with careless words, deliberate sin, unfortunate outbursts.

If they can, they will find our sin and mistakes and will use it to smear us.

And if they can't find it – they **will** make it up. That is what happened with Stephen.

Verse 11:

Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God."

Interesting that Moses comes before God.

Judaism had become so focussed on Moses and the Law as the centre of their religion – that it is Moses ... *and* God.

You get to God through Moses and keeping the Law of Moses.

Stephen would not have said anything directly blasphemous against Moses or God – but to the Jews – just saying that Jesus is God and is the one and only way to God – would be considered blasphemous and in opposition to Moses.

It probably wouldn't take much to twist something Stephen said into something seen as blasphemous.

You know full well that it does not take much to twist what we have said about topics like abortion, homosexuality, other religions – into something that sounds discriminatory and hateful.

The world hates the truth and is well versed at making good sound evil and evil sound good.

Acts 6:12:

They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; so they came, seized him, and took him to the Sanhedrin.

This mention of stirring up the people is significant.

Up until this point the people had generally sided with the Apostles.

Even if they didn't want to join the church they spoke well of them. They saw their love for one another and they loved the miracles.

This meant the authorities were somewhat restrained in their actions for fear of the people.

What changed?

Hard to know?

Likely a relentless whispering campaign made people come to see Christians differently. **They** do blaspheme Moses and God. **They** do speak against the Temple and the Law.

Perhaps throw in a charge of hypocrisy – **they** speak of righteousness – but God even had to kill some of them. **They** speak of unity – but they have divisions.

Or perhaps whisper – **they** must do these miracles in the power of Satan.

The result is that they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes.

The tide had turned. The people – ordinary Jews – now viewed the church as opposed to Moses and the Law. Dangerous. A group to be removed.

The elders and scribes were fine with that and joined the condemnation.

Stephen quickly finds himself right where Jesus – Peter and John – had stood – on trial before the Sanhedrin.

But this trial will look and end more like Jesus' than that of the Apostles.

Verses 13–14:

They also presented false witnesses who said, "This man never stops speaking against this holy place and the law. For we heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us."

The end justifies the means – so they have no problem fighting dirty.

Again – there is a kernel of truth in the accusations – but presented with a twist of malice that makes it sound far different.

To the Jews – the way to God was through the Temple – sacrifices, Priests, intercession and through the Law – keeping the commandments.

Stephen would have tirelessly taught that this was a wrong understanding.

It wouldn't take much to turn his words into an attack on the Temple and the Law.

What about the charge – he says Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place?

In John 2, Jesus drove those selling animals and changing money out of the Temple. He said that the Temple was the house of His Father.

Then, He was asked what sign He will do to show He has the authority to say and do this?

In John 2:19:

Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days."

We are told that He meant He will destroy the temple of His body and raise it to life in three days.

It is His resurrection that will prove He is the Son of God.

But the Jews didn't understand that. In John 2:20 they showed they only heard Him speaking against the physical Temple:



The Jews said, “This temple took forty-six years to build, and will you raise it up in three days?”

This charge that Jesus threatened to destroy the Temple keeps coming up again.

They make Him sound like a political revolutionary and this threat to the Temple would be a big deal to a Jew.

Remember, the Temple was the centre of Jewish worship. The Feasts, the sacrifices, the priesthood all centred on the Temple.

Messiah will come to the Temple.

It was the focal point of their faith.

So, they would not take kindly to someone saying – I plan to destroy this temple.

And later in the Olivet Discourse Jesus had also prophesied that the physical Temple would be destroyed.

Matthew 24:1–2:

As Jesus left and was going out of the temple, his disciples came up and called his attention to its buildings. He replied to them, “Do you see all these things? Truly I tell you, not one stone will be left here on another that will not be thrown down.”

It doesn't take much to say Jesus was making threats to totally destroy **our** Temple.

But that was *not* what He was teaching.

Under the New Covenant Jesus Himself becomes the Temple – the way to God – and so the shadow – the physical Temple must pass.

When you read Acts 7, it is clear that Stephen clearly understood that is what Jesus meant.

The destruction and raising of the temple of His body – His death and resurrection is what provides the way to God.

But, it is clear that this meaning is either missed or deliberately twisted.

And don't forget that this same charge was explicitly made at Jesus' trial. Mark 14:57–58:

Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, stating, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with human hands, and in three days I will build another not made by hands.’ ”

It is **false** testimony because Jesus never said He would destroy the temple **made with human hands**. They added to His words – and completely changed their meaning.

Brothers and sisters, whether our words are true, false, twisted – we will be made to look, sound and seem dangerous and wrong.

When you hear media or the world describe our beliefs, our values – we often sound like perverse fools.

Our meaning is often changed just enough to make us seem so out of step with what is obviously right.

But read the so-called trial of Jesus. Read the so-called trial of Stephen.

If that is how they treated Jesus, the Apostles and Stephen – don't be surprised when we are treated the same way.

We need to follow the example of the early church and rejoice if we are treated shamefully on behalf of the Name.

Finally:



## **15 When the day comes so will the Spirit**

Verse 15:

And all who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Let me see if I can tell you why I described the point of this verse the way I have.

I think – face of an angel means – the Spirit rests on us to help us in these times.

However, I need to note that this is hotly debated.

I might say – Dena my wife has the face of an angel – and while that is true – I don't think that Luke means what I mean.

Some say it means Stephen's face shone to show God was with him.

Angels were shining beings of light. Their faces shone.

In Scripture, when a man draws near to God he can reflect the glory of God and at times his face shines.

We see that with Moses. He was given a glimpse of the glory of God and his face shone.

We see this in other Old Testament figures.

Significantly, we also see this when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration His face shone. Or the description of Him in Revelation 1.

So, it is possible that Stephen's face shone to further show His association with Jesus and also Moses – that God is with him.

Others think it shows he is a messenger of God.

Angels were messengers of God. They are often seen as involved with the spokesmen of God.

In his speech – Stephen himself makes this connection. Acts 7:53:

You received the law under the direction of angels and yet have not kept it.

Others think it is more that they looked and saw a man who should be quaking in his boots. He is facing the same charges as Jesus before the same group who killed Jesus.

And instead they see a man with a calm and peace that can only come from above.

I think a number of these may be true.

Whether his face actually shone or not – I think the main point we are meant to take away is this – when the hour of testing came – this ordinary man was strengthened by the Spirit to face what would come – and those watching realised this.

He did not shy away and spoke the words of truth.

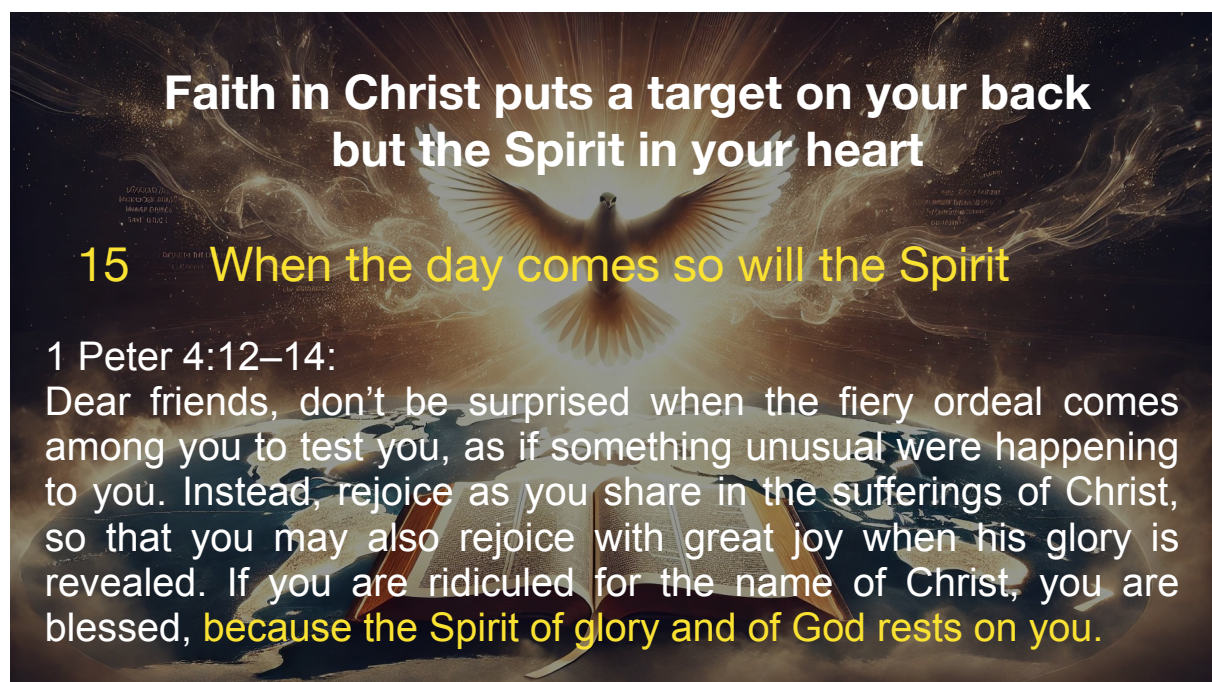
The speech Stephen gives in chapter 7 is inspired and powerful and does not pull any punches.

Acts 7:55 affirms he is full of the Holy Spirit as he speaks.

I think this is a fulfilment of the promise in Luke 12:11–12:

Whenever they bring you before synagogues and rulers and authorities, don't worry about how you should defend yourselves or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what must be said.

So, I think face of an angel here means that the Spirit of God is resting on him such that he does not face this trial with merely human grit and strength.



And this verse is particularly relevant for us – 1 Peter 4:12–14:

Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, **because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.**

Don't be surprised when the testing comes – it is not something unusual.

Rejoice because this happened to Jesus – you are just walking in His footsteps.

If you are ridiculed for truth – you are blessed.

**Because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.**

I think face like an angel conveys the same idea.



Don't get me wrong. I don't think this necessarily means the Spirit will always inspire us to give a speech as powerful as Stephen's.

I don't even think this means we will never waiver when the day comes.

I think this means when the day comes – the Spirit within us will empower us to act in ways we could not normally act – to stand in some way before the world.

I think we can still fail – still not respond as we should – but our faith will not fail and in many if not most cases we will face the test well.

And by the power of the Spirit, they will know one who speaks for God has been among them.

I get **Voice of the Martyrs**. I read of these men and women standing firm when the hour of testing comes.

I often wonder – would I?

Maybe – maybe not.

Magazines and biographies tend to tell the stories of the Christians who stood tall during testing. But, many others struggled – we just don't tend to write their stories.

I mean we have all failed at times to be bold in our witness for Christ.

I don't think we always get it right the first time – and at times we may fail to stand up for Christ the way we should.

But ultimately our faith does not fail in the sifting – Jesus holds us fast – and I think the Spirit does come and help us to stand firm in one way or another.

Maybe we don't ultimately act as we would like – but we don't turn from Christ.

At times we may fail the first time or second time – but ultimately we stand.

One of the most fascinating men of the English Reformation was Thomas Cranmer.

He was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in the days of King Henry VIII. Henry appointed him because he thought he could manipulate him into giving him the divorce Rome had refused.

Cranmer came to believe that God had appointed him as Archbishop to oversee the introduction of Protestantism – salvation by faith – to England. He became the chief architect of the English Reformation.

He urged the King to place Bibles in England's churches. He wrote the first Book of Common Prayer. When Henry began to turn back to Rome, he testified for three days against Henry's Six Articles which went back to Roman Catholic forms.

After Henry died and Edward came to the throne, Cranmer's hands were completely freed to advance Protestantism. He moved the worship of the Church from Latin into English and instituted new forms of worship. He was instrumental in helping draft the doctrines which became the basis for the Church of England's *Thirty Nine Articles*.

But then suddenly, Edward died at a young age. Cranmer supported Lady Jane Gray – a good Protestant – to succeed Edward. But it was not to be. Mary, the staunchly Catholic Queen took the throne.

Mary had him charged with treason and heresy. He was imprisoned, tortured and ordered to recant and return to Catholicism.

He was unsure if he had it in him to face imprisonment and torture and death.

Under heavy pressure, he wrote a letter of submission to the Pope and to Roman Catholic doctrines. But he just couldn't put his name to it and tore it up.

Under heavy coercion, he wrote the letter again – and tore it up again.

Five times he wrote the letter. Four times he tore it up. The fifth time he signed the letter and he handed it over.

However, it was clear his letter wasn't sincere so Mary ordered that he be burned at Oxford on 21 March 1556.

This man who had doubted if he could stand and finally crumbled signing a letter recanting his faith – repented – and when the hour came – he was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

As the fire was prepared he proclaimed loudly, "As for the pope, I refuse him, as Christ's enemy and Antichrist, with all his false doctrine."

Then when the fire was lit, he confessed, "I have sinned, in that I signed with my hand what I did not believe with my heart. When the flames are lit, this hand shall be the first to burn. This unworthy right hand."

As the fire was lit, he held the hand that had signed the recantation into the flame until it was charred to a stump.

As death approached, he kept repeating, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Look – will we be put to the test like Cranmer? Most likely not.

When the test comes will we respond with courage the way Cranmer did? Maybe – maybe not.

I think we all have various levels of bravery and giftedness and godliness.

Peter denied Jesus at his first hour of testing – not once but three times.

But later, he stood firm.

The Bible tells us – in some way a day of testing will come where we find ourselves on the wrong side of a hostile world.

When you read the Koran – you find no concept of living as a marginalised and persecuted minority.

However, when you read the Bible – you find no concept of living as anything except a marginalised and persecuted minority.

This is how they treated Jesus.

This is how they treated the Apostles.

This is how they will treat you.

But, the Spirit will rest on us. I don't think that means we always cover ourselves with glory. Some will struggle – others will rise well.

Some will not do well initially, repent and face the next challenge better.

But the day of testing will come.

So, prepare now.

Don't be surprised when it comes – instead rejoice when it comes.

Remember how God uses these trials.

He used the persecution and death of Jesus to save His people.

It is the death of Jesus that pays for our sin. Whatever you have done or will do – the death of Jesus can wash it clean. These martyrs knew this was the truth – a truth worth standing firm for.

God used the persecution and death of the Apostles and ordinary Christians like Stephen to spread His gospel and be a witness to the world.

God can use your testimony to witness to family, friends, neighbours that the only hope for this world is the death of the one treated so unfairly.

And on that day the Spirit will come – Christ will hold you fast – and by His grace and His grace alone – we will stand – to the glory of God.

## Cometh The Hour Acts 6:8-15 (29 Jun 2025)

**Main Point: Faith in Christ puts a target on your back, but when the hour comes the Spirit will sustain you.**

### General Questions:

1. What is the point of the number of similarities in the trial and deaths of Stephen and Jesus?
2. In what ways is Stephen meant to be a picture of what any one of us might face?
3. When Paul says this in 2 Timothy 3:12:

All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

What are the types of persecutions we are likely to face in a land like Australia?

4. What is it about the gospel that the world finds so offensive and off-putting?
5. Why is it often easier to attack the messenger than the message?
6. Why did the world hate Jesus? Why do they hate us?
7. In what ways were the words and message of Stephen twisted and misused?
8. How are we to respond when our words and message are twisted and misused?
9. What could – face like an angel in v.15 mean? What do you think it does mean?
10. Consider these promises:

Luke 12:11–12:

Whenever they bring you before synagogues and rulers and authorities, don't worry about how you should defend yourselves or what you should say. **For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what must be said.**

1 Peter 4:12–14:

Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, **because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.**

In what ways does the Spirit rest on us and empower us at these times?

11. What does it mean to stand firm in the hour of testing? What if we fail at times? What if we continue to struggle?

**Application Questions:**

1. Have you ever faced ridicule or opposition just for being a Christian or sharing the gospel? How did you handle it?
2. Do you have answers and responses ready for those who might oppose you?
3. How can you be prepared to rejoice when you are opposed?

**What convicted me in the message?**

**What moved me in the message?**

**What will I do in light of the message?**