

Acts 06 - Appointment of First Deacons; Stephen's Arrest

I. Outreach in Jerusalem (Acts 1:1—7:60)

- (13) Deacons appointed (6:1-7)
- (14) Stephen's martyrdom (6:8—7:60)
 - (A) Stephen's effectiveness and arrest (6:8-15)

Acts 6

- (13) Deacons appointed (6:1-7)

This passage shifts back to life within the Church (Cf. 4:32—5:11), where Luke explains some administrative changes that the growth of the Church made necessary. He also wanted to introduce the Hellenistic Jews, who took the lead in evangelizing the Gentiles. Their activity began shortly after the event recorded here.

In this chapter we see two of Satan's favorite methods of assailing the Church that he has employed throughout history: internal dissension (v1-7) and external persecution (v8-15).

1 Now **at this time**, as the **disciples** were increasing *in number*, a **complaint developed on the part of the Hellenistic Jews** against the **native Hebrews**, because their **widows** were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*.

1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*.

1 In those days, as the number of the disciples was growing larger and larger, a complaint was made by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.

1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

- "...at this time" - following the second persecution of the Church, by the Sanhedrin (5:17-42)

- "...disciples" - *mathētēs*, not referring to the 12 apostles, but rather a subset of believers in the early church who were saved and were growing in the second tense of their salvation — This name for believers later gave way to "saints" and "brethren"

- This shows that the early church was fulfilling one of the three primary purposes of the local church: fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) by making disciples
- Many Christians believe that if we evangelize the entire world, we're fulfilling the Great Commission. But that's not necessarily true. The Great Commission commands us to "make disciples" which are very different than believers. It means to "grow people up" in the knowledge of the Lord.
- "...a complaint developed" - this is the second internal attack against the church
- The word emphasizes a "smoldering discontent," which, if not handled, could easily split the Church; this secret whispering buzzed until it was finally heard
- There were two types of Jews who made up the Jerusalem church:
- "...Hellenistic Jews" - *diaspora* Jews (who were widows) who traveled to Jerusalem for Pentecost from long distances (Cf. 2:9-11)
- Many returned to their homeland to live out the remainder of their days
- These widows were being overlooked by the church
- "...native Hebrews" - widows who lived in and around Jerusalem; they primarily spoke Aramaic but also Greek, and they used the Hebrew Bible
- These widows were being taken care of by the church
- The lack of attention and love being shown to the Hellenistic Jews (widows) had the potential to cause a church split because they were being neglected. All the resources were going to the native Jews who lived within the borders of Israel.
- Whether this neglect was because of some type of discrimination or just due to the rapid growth of the church, we do not know. Could've been a combination of the two.
- "...widows" - widows should have received special protection under the Law of Moses (Deut 14:29; 24:19; 26:12); under Pharisaical rule, widows were often ignored (Mark 12:38-40)
- Widows were a special concern of the Jerusalem Church, as we know from the pastor of that church (James 1:27)
- While the church was deeply concerned about taking care of widows, there seemed to be a preference in favor of the locally born Hebrew widows over the Greek speaking widows who immigrated into the country
- The Greek widows felt neglected in the daily ministration, a common fund that was distributed (Cf. 2:43-45; 4:32-35)

Since the time of Alexander the Great, there was both Hebraic (Semitic) and Hellenistic (Greek) branches of Judaism. The Hebraic branch was more faithful to traditional ways of life and attitude, including racial-cultural isolationism. The Hellenists accepted at least some elements of Greek culture and tended to be broader, more inclusive in their outlook. Hebrews observed the Mosaic Law much more strictly than their Hellenistic brethren;

Hellenists typically regarded the Hebrews as quite narrow-minded and self-centered. These different cultural outlooks caused the Hebraic Jewish Christians to see the nature and implications of their new faith differently than did the Hellenistic Jewish Christians.

The primary difference between Hebraic Jews (Hebrews, Jewish Jews) and Hellenists was language: those who could speak Hebrew were Hebrews, and those who could not were Hellenists. Within Judaism, frequent tensions arose between these two groups, and this cultural problem carried over into the church.

The Hebrews and the Hellenists had separate synagogues in Jerusalem, but when they became Christians, they came together in one fellowship. As the Church grew, some of the Christians believed that the leaders were discriminating against the Hellenists unfairly (Cf. Eph 4:31; Heb 12:15). A conflict arose over the distribution of food to church widows (Cf. 2:44-45; 4:32—5:11). Care of widows and the needy was a priority in Judaism (Ex 22:22; Deut 10:18). The Jews provided for their own widows weekly—in their own synagogues—along with the poor.

Progress Reports in Acts

- Clearest: 2:47; 4:4; **6:1,7**; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31
- Less clear: 1:15; 2:41; 4:31; 5:14,42; 8:25,40; 11:21; 13:49; 17:6

Alternating Attacks

- 1st external attack: arrest of Peter & John (3:1—4:31)
- 1st internal attack: Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11)
- 2nd external attack: arrest of the apostles (5:17-42)
- 2nd internal attack: potential schism over smoldering resentment (6:1-7)
- 3rd external attack: arrest and martyrdom of Stephen (6:8—8:3)

2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not **desirable** for us to neglect the word of God in order to **serve** tables.

2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.

2 So the Twelve called the whole group of disciples together and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect messages from God in order to wait on tables.

2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

- The congregation made the twelve apostles aware of the problem, so the apostles summoned the congregation to discuss and resolve the matter

- Notice that the authority lay with the apostles, not with the congregation, on how to resolve this issue
 - "...desirable" - *arestos*, pleasing; agreeable; fitting
- The apostles told the congregation that, while this was a worthy endeavor (to feed the widows, and ensure all believers in the church were properly cared for), it wasn't "fitting" or "pleasing" (to God) for them to get involved in the distribution of food.
- It would not be appropriate for the apostles, functioning as elders, to be involved in this worthy project because it would hamper (take time away; deprioritize) their ministry of the Word of God
- This was a crisis of the Word of God...the apostles did not believe it was right for them to take time away from study, ministry, and teaching of God's Word, even if what they would be deferred to was a worthy cause
 - "...serve" - *diakonia*, where we get the word "deacon"
- So the apostles, serving as elders, recommend that the church raise up a new office of "deacon" to resolve this widows/food issue, otherwise the church is likely going to split or the elders will be pulled away from what they are supposed to be doing, which is studying/ministering/teaching the Word of God.

Local Church Governance

All three forms of local church governance claim Scripture to support their models:

- Episcopalian/bishop rule (Acts 15:2,6)
 - The church(es) are ruled by a denomination or organization of which they are a member
- Congregational rule (Acts 6:1-7)
 - Uses Acts 6:5 as its basis, which says "The announcement found approval with the whole congregation..."
 - However, one of the three purposes for the church is to bring believers to a state of maturity. So a congregational rule model gives many who have not yet reached maturity authority to direct the church.
- Presbyterian/elder rule (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:17)
 - A plurality of elders (mature believers with a set of strict standards) are the final arbiters and rulers who govern the church

3 Instead, **brothers and sisters**, select from among you seven **men of goodreputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom**, whom **we** may put in charge of this task.

3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

3 Therefore, brothers, appoint seven men among you who have a good reputation, who are full of the Spirit and wisdom, and we'll put them in charge of this work.

3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

- The apostles asked the congregation to nominate seven qualified men, whom the apostles would officially appoint
- This verse, along with 1 Tim 3:8-13, lay out the scriptural requirements/standards for those who will fill the office of deacon— The five "qualifications" are character traits, not special talents or abilities (Cf. 1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9)
 1. "brothers and sisters"; "among you" - believers
 2. "men"
 3. "good reputation" - reputable, having clear ethical qualifications
 4. "full of the Spirit"
 5. "full of...wisdom"
- The start of "deacons"—men who serve. These were *impressive credentials*: nothing trivial or incidental here!
- "...brothers and sisters" - a deacon had to be selected from among the brethren; they are required to be believers and come from the congregation of which they are serving
- "...men" - mentions men specifically; doesn't mention women as eligible for deacon
- 1 Tim 3:12 says deacons "must be husbands of only one wife." This confirms that ladies are not to hold the office of deacon.
- "...good reputation" - reputable men; those who have a good reputation, within the church, in business, within the community, and personally (Cf. 1 Tim 3:7)
- "...full of the Spirit" - they are living out the spiritual life. They would be categorized as one who is "spiritual" in 1 Cor 3:1-3.
- "...[full of] wisdom" - *sophia*, not just knowledge or data in our minds, but living out that knowledge in our daily life
- "...we" - the apostles
- Notice that those who would fill the office of deacon were nominated by the congregation, but appointed by the apostles (elders)

4 But **we** will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

4 Then we'll devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

- "...we" - the apostles (elders)
- This verse shows a clear distinction between the roles of elder and deacon

- Deacons are to serve the body of Christ in order to free up time so elders can study, minister, and teach the Word of God to the church
- If the decision to raise up deacons would not have occurred, the apostles would have been buried in service projects and the ministry of the Word would've suffered severely.
- This would have severely stunted the early church's growth because "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God"
- This is the second time the early church overcame an internal attack
- The announcement on how to handle this particular situation was very similar to how Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) suggested that Moses handle judging the people of Israel (Cf. Ex 18:13-27)

Prayer

Prayer is the most powerful and effective means of service in the church...it is the most dynamic work which God has entrusted to His saints, but it is also the most neglected ministry open to the believer. The Bible clearly reveals that believing prayer is essential for the advancement of the cause of Christ. It is the essential element for Christian victory. We may marvel at the spiritual power and glorious victories of the early apostolic church, but we often forget that its constant prayer life was the secret of its strength. If the church today would regain the spiritual power of the early church, it must recover the truth and practice of prayer as a vital working force.

5 The announcement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose **Stephen**, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and **Philip**, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a **proselyte** from Antioch.

5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

5 This suggestion pleased the whole group. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch.

5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

- Just because the announcement found approval with the whole congregation doesn't mean the congregation had the authority to implement or change the decision
- The congregation made the apostles/elders aware of the problem and they nominated deacons for the position, but the deacons were not appointed or installed until the apostles became involved. This is an example of an elder-led model of church governance.

- Each of the names listed as the first deacons are Greek, meaning they were *diaspora* Jews who traveled to Jerusalem for Pentecost and were saved
- It was the Hellenistic (Greek *diaspora*) Jews/widows who were being overlooked, so the apostles installed Greek/diaspora Jews as deacons to ensure that practice would no longer take place
- Thus, Hellenists were given responsibility for settling a Hellenist complaint, a wise approach. Those who had the greatest vested interest in solving a problem were put in charge of solving it.
- "...Stephen" - described as full of faith and filled with the Holy Spirit (contrary to Ananias and Sapphira, Cf. 5:3)
- "...Philip" - will later start a revival in Samaria and lead an Ethiopian eunuch to Christ (Cf. 8:5-17), which is the doorway for the gospel into Africa
- "...proselyte" - a Gentile who wanted to follow God, who converted to Judaism

6 And **they** brought these men before the apostles; and after praying, **they laid their hands on them.**

6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

6 They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

- "...they" - the congregation

- "...they" - the apostles

- "...laid their hands on them" - a biblical ritual/custom where elders or those appointing someone to an office will lay hands on them (Cf. Num 27:22-23; 1 Tim 4:14)

7 The word of God kept spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in **Jerusalem**, and a great many of the **priests** were becoming **obedient to the faith.**

7 The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

7 So the word of God continued to spread, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem continued to grow rapidly. Even a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

- Three good things resulted from the appointing of these deacons:

1. The Word of God continued to spread; notice the emphasis on the Word of God (v2-4). Freeing up the elders (apostles) to focus on the Word of God instead of waiting tables. They were now able to devote themselves to prayer and the Word, resulting in an increased number of disciples.
2. An internal crisis was averted; the internal crisis that would have resulted was a crisis of the deprioritization of the Word (Cf. Is 55:10-11)
3. Peace was restored in the congregation. No longer facing possible division, the resulting unity in the Body would allow the church to grow even further.
 - "...Jerusalem" - the growth of the early church in Jerusalem is the primary topic of the first part of Acts (chapters 1-7; Cf. 1:8)
 - "...priests" - the Sadducees
 - "...obedient" - doesn't mean that these priests began living a Christian life; it means that they obeyed the single command given by Christ whereby one can be saved (Cf. John 3:36)
 - The Greek has an imperfect active, meaning repetition: one after another, priests were coming to the faith; these "priests" probably refer to Sadducees
 - "...the faith" - apostolic doctrine (a specific "faith" indicated by the definite article "the")
 - These Sadducees, who were in power in Israel at the time and did not believe in the resurrection, were being converted to the apostolic doctrine of the resurrected Christ that the apostles were preaching

Eight Numerical Progress Reports in Acts

1. Acts 2:47: "...And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."
2. Acts 4:4: "But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand."
3. **Acts 6:7: "The word of God kept spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith."**
4. Acts 9:31: "So the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria enjoyed peace, as it was being built up; and as it continued in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it kept increasing."
5. Acts 12:24: "But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied."
6. Acts 16:5: "So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily."
7. Acts 19:20: "So the word of the Lord was growing and prevailing mightily."

8. Acts 28:30-31: "Now Paul stayed two full years in his own rented lodging and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching things about the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered."

Lessons

1. The church showed concern for both spiritual and physical needs. It's leaders gave priority to spiritual needs (prayer and ministry of the Word), but they also gave attention to correcting injustice and helping the poor.
2. The early church was willing to adapt its organizational structure and administrative procedures to minister effectively and meet needs.
3. The early church did not practice some things that the modern church does: blaming one another for problems; instead, they corrected in justice and continued to give priority to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Rather than micro-managing control over every aspect of church life, they delegated authority to a group within the church that had the greatest vested interest.

(14) Stephen's martyrdom (6:8—7:60)

The events surrounding Stephen's martyrdom were the means God used to scatter the Christians and the gospel from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth.

(A) Stephen's effectiveness and arrest (6:8-15)

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

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

8 Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people.

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

- Stephen was not just a gracious person, he was "full" of grace

— Grace = undeserved favor; Stephen had discovered who he was in Christ, a person benefitting from God's grace (undeserved favor). When we come to that realization, we tend to be gracious toward others.

- We learn from v13b that one of the things that Stephen was teaching was that the dispensation of Law had passed, and that God had inaugurated the dispensation of grace

- "...wonders" - *teras*

- "...signs" - *semēion*

- All three Greek words used here describing Stephen are also used to describe Jesus' miracles
- Jesus, from the right hand of the Father in heaven, is replicating His earthly ministry through the apostles and deacons
- It's important to note that in Acts, only the apostles and apostolic delegates (in this case, Stephen), who were appointed by the apostles by the laying on of hands, were able to perform miracles, signs and wonders.
- This fact has been confirmed 4x earlier in Acts (2:43; 3:6-7; 4:22,33), and now again here (v8)
- "...among the people" - although he was appointed to minister to the widows (serving tables), he did not limit his ministry to this alone
- Stephen was the first non-apostle to perform miracles in Acts; only two others who were not apostles performed miracles in Acts (Philip, 8:6-7,13; Barnabas (with Paul), 14:3; 15:12)

9 But some men from what was called the **Synagogue of the Freedmen**, *including* both **Cyrenians** and **Alexandrians**, and some from **Cilicia** and **Asia**, rose up and argued with Stephen.

9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, *including* both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.

9 But some men who belonged to the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), as well as some Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and men from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and began to debate with Stephen.

9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

- As was normative in the early church as it is now, when God begins to use someone mightily, immediate resistance occurs

— Each of these people-groups who resisted Stephen were *diaspora* Jews who traveled to Jerusalem for Pentecost

- "...Synagogue of the Freedmen" - Libertines; freed slaves who had likely traveled to Jerusalem from Rome

- "...Cyrenians" - Jews from North Africa

- "...Alexandrians" - Jews from Egypt

- "...Cilicia" - Jews from the area of Asia Minor that includes Tarsus

- "...Asia" - western Asia Minor

— These were all Jews from the Diaspora who were disputing with Stephen, who was himself a Jewish man from the Diaspora

- This is the first instance in Acts of someone presenting the gospel in a Jewish synagogue; until now, the disciples taught in the Temple and from house to house (5:42)

10 But they were unable to cope with his **wisdom** and the Spirit by whom he was speaking.

10 But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

10 But they could neither refute the wisdom nor withstand the Spirit by which he kept speaking.

10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

- "...wisdom" - *sophia*, those who resisted/argued with Stephen could not handle this oratory or refute his arguments

— The wisdom of Stephen is on full display in Acts 7...

- Today we often lower the office of deacon to the facilities or maintenance guy, but not so with Stephen. He was able to articulate the Word of God with wisdom, a vessel for the Holy Spirit to speak the things of God.

— In 1 Tim 3:9, deacons are to "hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience" meaning that they should have a good handle on God's Word to be able to refute arguments and speak the gospel clearly.

Mark 13:11: **And when they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you at that time; for you are not the ones speaking, but *it is* the Holy Spirit.**

11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."

11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and *against* God."

11 So they secretly got some men to say, "We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God."

11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

- When their arguments fell flat, they did the next best thing: they lied about Stephen and conspired against him

- They accused Stephen of speaking against the Law of Moses

— The Pharisees accused Jesus of the same "crime" (Cf. Lev 24:16)

— However, in order to blaspheme God's name, you had to say His name, which Stephen never did

— But they accused him of blaspheming God because they couldn't refute what he was teaching

12 And they stirred up the people, the **elders**, and the **scribes**, and they came up to him and dragged him away, and brought him before the **Council**.

12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council.

12 They stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes. Then they rushed at Stephen, grabbed him, and brought him before the Council.

12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

— "...elders" - Sadducees

— "...scribes" - Pharisees

— Now the Pharisees begin getting involved, which will lead to the third persecution (Acts 8). In the prior persecutions, only the Sadducees were involved.

— "...Council" - the Sanhedrin

13 They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man does not stop speaking against this **holyplace** and **theLaw**;

13 They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law;

13 They had false witnesses stand up and say, "This man never stops saying things against this Holy Place and against the Law.

13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

— "...holy place" - the temple; this accusation was designed to get the Sadducees upset

— Jesus was falsely accused of doing the same thing (Cf. Matt 26:60-61)

— Stephen never really spoke against the temple, he simply articulated what Jesus taught about the temple (about its imminent destruction)

— "...the Law" - the Law of Moses, which was designed to get the Pharisees upset

14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses handed down to us."

14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us."

14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus from Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us."

14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

- Stephen is simply repeating what Jesus already said/taught about the temple (Cf. Matt 24:1-2; Luke 19:41-44)

Matt 24:1-2:

1 Jesus left the temple area and was going on *His way* when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.

2 But He responded and said to them, "**Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down.**"

Luke 19:41-44:

41 When He approached *Jerusalem*, He saw the city and wept over it,

42 saying, "**If you had known on this day, even you, the conditions for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes.**

43 **For the days will come upon you when your enemies will put up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side,**

44 **and they will level you to the ground, and throw down your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.**"

15 And all who were sitting in the Council stared at him, and they saw his face, *which was like the face of an angel.*

15 And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

15 Then everyone who was seated in the Council glared at him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

- The Sanhedrin looked at Stephen to see his reaction to these false charges

— As the false accusations against him were articulated, all the Sanhedrin could see to gauge Stephen's reaction was that his face looked like the face of an angel (simile)