

## 21st April – Dangerous Faith - Stories – Acts 6:8-15

### *Stephen seized*

*Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) – Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia – who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.*

*Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, 'We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.'*

*So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, 'This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.'*

*All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.*

1. What do we learn about Stephen in this passage?
2. Read Acts 6:1-6 in the Amplified Bible. What other insights do we get about Stephen's character, and his commitment to service in the early church, from these verses?
3. What do we learn about the opposition Stephen faced?
4. In Acts 7, when asked to respond to the accusations being made against him, Stephen gives a potted history of the Jewish faith. Then he quotes a couple of verses from Isaiah. Read Acts 7:51-53 in the New Living Translation for his message to the Jewish leaders. How would you describe what he said and how he said it?
5. Finish reading Acts 7. How do the Jewish leaders respond to what Stephen said?
6. How does Stephen's conduct contrast with theirs?
7. How does Stephen's death resemble Jesus' death?
8. Read Acts 8:1-4. How did Stephen's death affect the early Christians?
9. Terrible though the situation was for those early believers, and costly the price they paid, what positive effect did the adverse circumstances they faced have?

Persecution of, and discrimination against, Christians now - (For answers, go to [opendoorsuk.org](https://www.opendoorsuk.org))

1. How many Christians face persecution and discrimination for their faith across the globe in 2024?
2. What proportion of believers face persecution and discrimination? How many would that be in your small group, or at St Paul's, if persecution and discrimination were evenly distributed throughout the world?
3. How many of the countries where Christians face extreme levels of persecution (13) can you name?
4. How many countries where we might choose to go on holiday, where levels of persecution are very high (37), can you name?
5. How many Christians were murdered for their faith last year?
6. What can we do as Christians in the UK to support the persecuted church?

PRAY – Father, help us to do everything we can to support our persecuted sisters and brothers