**Lesson 8**

**Acts 7 – 8:3 Stephen’s Discourse and Martyrdom**

*In last week’s lesson we see growing pains in the Jewish-Christian community. The Apostles are over worked and they decided to choose seven men to be deacons who would help to serve the community both spiritually and physically. Stephen is one of the seven chosen. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and was described as wise and “angelic”. Stephen was arrested for his teaching and is accused of blasphemy.*

1. **When did you feel closest to God this week? Was there a particular verse or lesson in Acts 7 that you found inspiring or insightful?**
2. **What are the charges being brought against Stephen? Refer to Acts 6:11, 14.**

**Acts 6:11**“We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God.”

**Acts 6:14** “This man never stops saying things against [this] holy place and the law. **14**For we have heard him claim that this Jesus the Nazorean will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us.”

1. **As you read the chapter, does Stephen ever answer these charges?**
2. **Reflection: How would you defend your faith should someone challenge your beliefs or practices?**
3. **Stephen’s speech seems to highlight the times in history where the Jews and Jewish leadership failed to act wisely or seemed to defy God. What examples does he use to make his point? See Acts 7:9, 23-29, 37-39, 42-43.**

 **Acts 7:9**

**9**“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into slavery in Egypt; but God was with him **10**and rescued him from all his afflictions. He granted him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, who put him in charge of Egypt and [of] his entire household.

**Acts 7:23-29**

**23**“When he was forty years old, he (Moses) decided to visit his kinsfolk, the Israelites. **24**When he saw one of them treated unjustly, he defended and avenged the oppressed man by striking down the Egyptian. **25**He assumed [his] kinsfolk would understand that God was offering them deliverance through him, but they did not understand. **26**The next day he appeared to them as they were fighting and tried to reconcile them peacefully, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why are you harming one another?’ **27**Then the one who was harming his neighbor pushed him aside, saying, ‘Who appointed you ruler and judge over us? **28**Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ **29**Moses fled when he heard this and settled as an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

 **Acts 7: 37-3937**It was this Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you, from among your own kinsfolk, a prophet like me.’ **38**It was he who, in the assembly in the desert, was with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai and with our ancestors, and he received living utterances to hand on to us. **39**“Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him; instead, they pushed him aside, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, **40**saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will be our leaders.’

**Acts 7:42-43**

**42**Then God turned and handed them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: ‘Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings for forty years in the desert, O house of Israel?
**43**No, you took up the tent of Moloch and the star of [your] god Rephan, the images that you made to worship. So I shall take you into exile beyond Babylon.’

1. **Since the time of King Josiah, sacrifices could only be made in the Temple in Jerusalem because there was only one God and thus only one Temple. What does Stephen seem to say about the Temple?**

**See Acts 7:47-50**

**Acts 7:47-5047**But Solomon built a house for him. **48**Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

**49**‘The heavens are my throne,
    the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house can you build for me?
    says the Lord,
    or what is to be my resting place?
**50**Did not my hand make all these things?’

1. **List three accusations that Stephen made in his conclusion. See Acts 7:51-53.**

**Acts 7:51-53 51**“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, *you always oppose the holy Spirit;* you are just like your ancestors. **52***Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute*? *They put to death those who foretold the coming of the righteous one,* whose betrayers and murderers you have now become. ***53****You received the law as transmitted by angels, but you did not observe it*.”

1. **What was Saul's role in Stephen's death?
See Acts 7:57, Acts 8:1-3**

**Acts 7:5757**But they cried out in a loud voice, covered their ears,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+7&version=NABRE#fen-NABRE-31493d)]and rushed upon him together. **58**They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul.

**Acts 8:1-3 1**Now Saul was consenting to his execution. On that day, there broke out a severe persecutionof the church in Jerusalem, and all were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. **2**Devout men buried Stephen and made a loud lament over him. **3**Saul, meanwhile, was trying to destroy the church; entering house after house and dragging out men and women, he handed them over for imprisonment.

1. **What did Stephen see just before he was stoned to death?**

**Do you believe his vision was the “last straw” that drove the crowd to action against him? See Acts 7:55-60.**

 **Acts 7:55-60 55**But he, filled with the holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, **56**and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” **57**But they cried out in a loud voice, covered their ears,[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+7&version=NABRE#fen-NABRE-31493d)]and rushed upon him together. **58**They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. The witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59**As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” **60**Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them”; and when he said this, he fell asleep.

1. **In what ways is Stephen “Christ-like”? See Luke 23: 34, 46 and Acts 7:55-60.**

**Luke 23:34** 34[Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

**Luke 23:46** 46Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”; and when he had said this he breathed his last.