

STEPHEN'S WITNESS

Acts 6:8-7:60

INTRODUCTION

The explosive growth and popularity of the Church not only brought about logistical challenges internally, it also disclosed the significant theological and doctrinal differences between it and Rabbinic Judaism. The implication of a resurrected Christ meant that the nation's political and religious posture must change. The temple worship, the priesthood, and the relationship Israel had with the Roman and the Greek world were necessarily poised for renovation if Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Many unbelieving Jews rejected this new posture and the martyrdom of Stephen signals the first widespread instance of Christian persecution found in the Bible.

THIS WEEK:

This week, discover from Acts 6:8-7:60 how God provides believers with the boldness and compassion needed to bravely stand for him despite the threats of those who deny Christ.

OBSERVATION *What does it SAY?*

Discover key details of the passage by reading Acts 6:8-7:60 and then answering the following questions:

1. With whom was Stephen in conflict (6:9)?
2. What did these folks specifically accuse Stephen of doing (6:11, 13-14)?
3. What did the members of the Sanhedrin notice about the appearance of Stephen (6:15)?
4. Read 7:2-52 and describe in your own words the main point Stephen was trying to make about the Jewish people (7:51-53):

5. What five or more accusations does Stephen make against his opponents in 7:51-53?
6. How did the people respond to Stephen's accusations (7:54, 57)?
7. What did Stephen say and do when the people got a hold of him (7:56, 59-60)?
8. What new character to the story is introduced in Acts 7:58?

INTERPRETATION *What does it MEAN?*

Use the Bible to interpret the Bible. Look up the cross references and use them to interpret the passage under study:

9. What explains the success Stephen had in the public debate with his opponents in 6:10 (Matt. 10:16-20; Luke 20:12-15)?
10. Notice that the specific complaint against Stephen's preaching was that he spoke "against this holy place", (the temple) "and the law" (6:14). Was this true?
 - a. What did Jesus actually say about the temple in Matt. 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6?
 - b. What did Jesus actually say about the law in Matt. 5:17-18?
 - c. What were some of the actual criticisms that Jesus and the early believers levied towards the Judaism of the first century (Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 12:1-11; John 5:41-47; 7:21-24; 8:42-47)?

11. In 7:2-43, the Holy Spirit leads Stephen to recount how Israel had resisted and rebelled against all the people God had sent their way over the years to deliver them (like Joseph and Moses). Based on the context of this passage, what seems to be the H.S.'s purpose for leading Stephen to bring this up to the Sanhedrin?
12. In 7:44-50, the H.S. leads Stephen to remind the Jews about how the temple eventually came about. Based on the context of this passage, what seems to be the H.S.'s purpose for leading Stephen to bring this up to the Sanhedrin (6:13-14)?
13. In 7:51 Stephen accused his opponents of being "stiff-necked and uncircumcised of heart". What two or more things do the following verses say causes this condition: James 1:22-23; Matt. 7:24-27; Rom. 2:5; 11:25?
14. In 7:56 Stephen had a vision of Jesus at the right hand of God. How does this relate to what this same group had heard before (Luke 22:66-71)? What would be the implications of this claim in the eyes of Stephen's opponents?
15. Notice how Stephen responded to the abuse he endured. How does Gal. 5:22-23, Rom. 15:13, 1 John 4:7, and Luke 6:27-28 explain how this can be possible?

APPLICATION *Why does it MATTER?*

Now that you have discerned what the passage means, how does it apply to your life?

16. The Jews mistakenly thought that they were only debating with a man named Stephen. In reality, with whom were they primarily debating? What measures can we take to ensure that any debates we engage in are initiated by the H.S. and not in our flesh?

17. The statements and teachings of the apostles and early believers were often taken out of context. The same is true today. What are some of the ways you think Christians are misrepresented today by those who are outside of the faith? What is the best way to respond to this mischaracterization?
18. Stephen's sermon hit a nerve because of the rage it produces among those who heard it. What are the reasons for this rage? What elements of the gospel make people angry today?
19. Describe a time in your life when an expression of your faith was not received well by someone. What happened? What was the result?
20. Describe a time in your life when someone you know initially rejected you or what you had to say about your faith, but then came around to accept it. What happened? What was the result?
21. What stands out to you about how Stephen responded to the stoning? What must happen in one's heart to be able to respond like this?

TAKE AWAY *How does this change me?*

22. What does this passage reveal about God?
23. What does this passage reveal about humanity?
24. What is the Holy Spirit revealing in this passage about your life?

Have your kids do the word find puzzle on the next page and read to them Acts 6:8-7:60. Use the following questions to have a discussion about how God knows our secret desires and actions.

Observation Questions:

1. Who was filled with grace and power, doing great wonders and signs among the people? (Acts 6:8)
Possible answer: Stephen was filled with grace and power, doing great wonders and signs among the people.
2. Who argued with Stephen but couldn't stand up against the wisdom and the Spirit? (Acts 6:9-10)
Possible answer: Some members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen argued with Stephen, but they couldn't stand up against the wisdom and the Spirit by which he was speaking.
3. What did the people do when they heard Stephen's speech in Acts 7:54?
Possible answer: When they heard Stephen's speech, the people were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.
4. Who did Stephen see standing at the right hand of God before he was stoned? (Acts 7:55-56)
Possible answer: Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God before he was stoned.

Interpretation Questions:

5. How does Stephen's response to his accusers in Acts 7:51-53 reflect Jesus' teachings about forgiveness and love for enemies? (Matthew 5:44, Luke 23:34)
Possible answer: Like Jesus, Stephen forgave his accusers and prayed for them, asking God not to hold their sin against them. This shows that even when we're treated unfairly, we should forgive others and love them like Jesus does.
6. Why do you think Stephen was willing to die for his faith in Jesus? (Acts 6:8-10, Acts 7:59-60)
Possible answer: Stephen loved Jesus and believed that He was the Son of God. He was willing to die for his faith because he trusted that Jesus would be with him and that he would go to be with Jesus in heaven.

Application Questions:

1. How can we show courage and stand up for Jesus like Stephen did, even when others oppose us? (Acts 6:8-10)
Possible answers: We can show courage by praying for strength, standing up for what is right, and sharing Jesus' love with others, even when it's hard.
2. What can we learn from Stephen's example about forgiving others and praying for those who hurt us? (Acts 7:59-60)
Possible answers: We can learn that forgiveness is important, even when others treat us unfairly or hurt us. We can pray for those who hurt us and ask God to help us love them like Jesus does.
3. How does Stephen's story inspire us to be bold in sharing our faith with others, even when it's difficult? (Acts 6:8-10)
Possible answers: Stephen's story reminds us that God can use us to do great things for Him, even when we're young. We can trust in God's power and be bold in telling others about Jesus, just like Stephen did.

WORD FIND

Acts 6:8-7:60

P R O P H E T M A K E T H P
L L P L O O K R E S C U E O
V M P A S P J A K I L L A W
C I R C U M C I S E D P V E
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ANGEL
DELIVERER
EGYPTIAN
HEAVEN
LOOK
MOSES
OPPRESS
PLACE
PROPHET
RESCUE
STAND

CIRCUMCISED
DWELL
FATHER
JOSEPH
MAKE
NATION
PERFORMED
POWER
RAISE
SACRIFICE
STAR

COME
EGYPT
HAND
KILL
MISTREATED
OFFERED
PHARAOH
PROMISE
RECEIVE
SHOW
STONE