

Stephen

Outline

Setting

Stephen's character

Opposition and Stephen's defence

Stephen's death

why this should be important to us

Setting the Stage – Acts 6

- 6:1 ¶ In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.
- 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.
 - 3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them

- 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”
- 5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.
- 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.
- 7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 6:1-7 (NIV)

Context from Cary

biblefellowshipassembly.ca

www.bfa.church

Stephen's Character

Prerequisite demonstrated through consistent living

- Full of the Spirit and wisdom (v3)
- Full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (v5)
- Ministry bore much fruit (v7)
- Full of God's grace and power (v8)

Upright... godly...

Opposition – Acts 6

- 6:8 ¶ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people.
- 9 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. These men began to argue with Stephen,
- 10 but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.
- 11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God."

12 So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin.

13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law.

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

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

Acts 8-14 (NIV)

Freedmen

Descendants of freed slaves

Synagogue formed

Apostle Paul - possible member

Accusation = blasphemy

Sanhedrin

Religious and legal authority

Third of four times believers brought before them

Stephen's face like that of an angel

Moses' face radiated God's glory (Ex 34:29)

Stephen's Defence (Message) – Acts 7

7:1 ¶ Then the high priest asked him, "Are these charges true?"

Caiaphas still high priest (?)

(accused Jesus of blasphemy in Matt 26:25)

Defence = Message = History Lesson = turning of the tables

Stephen's Message

1. God's grace to the people/nation
2. God's blessings have no geographic limits
Extends beyond the temple and Jerusalem
3. Israel as a nation has disobeyed

God's Grace - No Geographic Limits

Verse 3 Abram called in Mesopotamia, goes to Haran

Verses 9-10 Joseph in Egypt

Verses 29-30 Moses in Midian

Verses 44-47 tabernacle of the Testimony, temple as a dwelling place for God

Bigger than the Temple

Acts 7:48-50

(reference from Isaiah 66)

"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?"

Woman at the Well – John 4

19-20 The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”

21-24 Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

(John 4:19-24 ESV)

Stephen Chastises Accusers

51 ¶ "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—

53 you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

Stephen's Death – Acts 7

- 54 ¶ When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.
- 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
- 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."
- 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,
- 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Stephen's Death Cont'd

59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

1 ¶ And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

Acts 7-54-8:1 (NIV)

Son of Man

Daniel 7:13-14 refers to.... one like a son of man, who will have an everlasting dominion and be worshipped by all peoples, nations and men of every language.

Ps 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

Standing versus sitting

- welcoming Stephen and/or
- standing as judge rendering verdict

Then Versus Now

Many disobeyed

Many disobey

Some followed the
one true God

Some follow the one
true God

False gods, idols

False gods, chart
own path, career,
sports, fame, etc.

Stephen

godly person, or a person of godly character

face appeared like that of an angel

Told people about Jesus regardless of the cost

Looking Ahead

"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."

John 9:39 (NIV)

Whoever believes in him (Jesus) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

John 3:18 (NIV)

Choose Life

Jesus died for your sin

Trust in Jesus as your Saviour

About relationship

The (your) Lord gets first place

Be a “Stephen”

We've all fallen short of God's standard

Priorities

- Time spent with God
- Time spent reading God's word
- Rest, recharge, recalibrate

Remember (how much) You've been Forgiven

- More forgiven = more love
- “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven — for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”

Luke 7:47 (NIV)

Victor's Crown

Well done,
my good and faithful servant