
Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Acts 7:1-60

Lesson 14 – Jesus is standing for me!!

Acts 7:51-60 (NIV)

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." 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. 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. Stephen characterized them and stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts. This means they were headed in one direction and unwilling to change direction. Uncircumcised hearts was an even deeper insult because he was saying they were outwardly religious but inside unrighteous.
 - a. In what ways can a group of believers be a “stiff-necked people?”
 - b. What stiff-necked attitudes prevent us from seeing what God wants us to see personally?
2. How is God’s messaging being attacked and changed to fit the desires of society today?
 - a. What more does the church need to do in order to fight for the sanctity of the Gospel?
3. What kind of opposition or pressure on your faith have you felt from friends, coworkers, or unbelieving family members?
4. What would make it possible for you to be calm and sure in the middle of extreme danger?
5. Give testimony of an instance that you are sure Jesus is standing for you!!
6. Everyone is not going to receive your truth well especially if it is about them.....How can Stephen’s example help you be prepared to handle rejection?

Workshop: Pastors who spend time studying the congregation and praying for the congregation are given insight by the Holy Spirit regarding some things that the congregants need to hear and or are struggling with in a general sense. If this is the case, why do you think Christians get so angry at times with the message and accuse the preacher of talking about them specifically? When your conscience is pricked by a convicting message, how do you tend to react? How can you be more receptive to messages in the future?

P. The First Martyr, Stephen (Scene II): The Tragic History of Israel, [7:1-53](#)

[\(7:1-53\)](#) **Introduction:** Stephen defended himself, but not by offering a legal defense. He defended himself by proclaiming the glorious mercy and grace of God throughout Israel's history. He showed how Israel rejected God time and time again; nevertheless, God reached out to deliver the nation after each rejection.

1. [\(7:1\)](#) Stephen: Stephen was on trial for his life. The charges had been made: he was accused of insurrection, of preaching that the sacred institutions of the nation were to be destroyed, that is, the land, the temple, the law, and the customs ([Acts 7:11-15](#)).

Stephen defended himself by reviewing Israel's history and making the following points. (Note that Stephen's defense was a sermon; he preached the gospel to the court.)

1. The nation and its sacred institutions (the land, the law, and the temple) were being destroyed, but not by Christ. They were being destroyed by the people themselves. From the beginning they had always misunderstood and rejected God's plan. (See [outline points 2-4](#).)

2. God loved Israel—He loved Israel so much that in every instance of misunderstanding and rejection, He had worked out a deliverance. (See [outline points 2-4](#).)

3. God's final plan of deliverance was Jesus Christ, His own Son. But as in the past, the present generation had misunderstood and rejected Him. (See [Acts 7:52](#).)

2. [\(7:2-8\)](#) Abraham— Israel— Promised Land: the birth of Israel, the call and promise to Abraham—an inheritance and a possession. Stephen began his defense (his sermon) from the very beginning of the nation's history. Note the emphasis upon God. God gave birth to Israel—of this there can be no doubt.

1. God appeared to Abraham and called Abraham ([Acts 7:2](#)).
 - a. It was the God of glory (ho theos tes doxes) who called Abraham. (See [Deeper Study #1—Acts 7:2](#) for discussion.)
 - b. It was "our father Abraham" who was called by God. He was the father of Israel: the first Jew called, the man chosen by God to be the great founder of the nation Israel.

Thought 1. Abraham is the great example of faith in the Bible. Men must hear the call of the God of glory even as Abraham did. And men must heed that call.

"In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" ([John 7:37](#)).

"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" ([Romans 10:12](#)).

2. God promised a land, a land for an eternal inheritance—if Abraham would "get out" of his present country and leave all—his past life—for the promised land ([Acts 7:3-4](#)). Note four facts.

- a. The promised land (Palestine) was promised to Abraham by God. The land was...
 - of God's own choosing.
 - "the land which I shall show thee" ([Acts 7:3](#)).
 - an "inheritance" ([Acts 7:5](#)).

- "promised" ([Acts 7:5](#)).
 - to be a "possession" ([Acts 7:5](#)).
- b. The land was promised "to his seed after him." All believers are the seed of Abraham by faith. Abraham is *the father* of all who walk in the steps of faith even as he did. This is made abundantly clear by Scripture
- c. The land promised to Abraham was Palestine. But the promised land is a type of heaven, of the eternal land promised by God, of the new heavens and earth, of the new Jerusalem. When dealing with the promised land this fact must be always remembered
- d. The gift of the promised land was conditional. Abraham had to "get out" of his present surroundings and leave all for the promised land. He had to make a choice, a choice between...
- staying in the world of plenty and comfort (the material world as he knew it), and
 - giving up all for God and His promise of an eternal inheritance.
- Abraham made the right choice: "Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans." God "removed him into this land; wherein ye now dwell." (Note: Palestine is identified as the land of promise, the type of the promised land of heaven.)

Thought 1. Man must do two things.

⇒ Man must "get out" of his present surroundings and leave the world and its material comforts and corruptions.

"And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation" ([Acts 2:40](#)).

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" ([2 Cor. 6:17-18](#)).

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" ([Ephes. 5:11](#)).

⇒ Man must believe in the promise of God, that is, in the "promised land" of heaven.

"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" ([Hebrews 11:10](#)).

3. God promised the land to Abraham and his seed, but it was to be a future inheritance, not a present possession ([Acts 7:5](#)).
- a. God never gave Abraham any land, not during his lifetime on earth. Abraham never possessed the land. He never secured his *possession*, his *settlement*, his *resting place*, his *home*—not while he was on earth.
 - b. God never gave Abraham a son until he was incapable of bearing *seed*, well past years—not until he was 100 years old.

Thought 1. Note three significant points.

- 1) Abraham had to trust God both for the *promised land* and for *seed*. He could secure neither, not in his own strength.
- 2) Abraham had to *believe* God all his life, even up to the last moment. He had to believe God even as he was slipping out of this world into the next, for he had never possessed a single inch of the promised land. (What a picture of the believer and the promised land of heaven, of the absolute necessity for faith and for believing the glorious promise of God.)
- 3) The gift of the *promised land* and *of the seed* was just that, a *gift* of God's grace. In no way did Abraham ever earn or deserve it. Abraham merely believed and obeyed God.

"For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" ([Romans 4:3](#)).

"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world [of the new heavens and earth], was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" ([Romans 4:13](#)).

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" ([Romans 4:20-21](#)).

4. God told Abraham "his seed" would be sojourners upon earth ([Acts 7:6](#). Cp. [Genesis 15:13-14](#)). His seed was not even to possess the land, not for a long time, not for some hundreds of years. They were to be enslaved.

Thought 1. Note the picture painted of the believer: the believer is as a *sojourner* upon the earth. While a *sojourner* on earth the believer is subject to the bondages (sin and death) and evil treatment of the world.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" ([Hebrews 11:13](#)).

"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" ([1 Peter 1:17](#)).

5. God told Abraham his faith would be rewarded: God would deliver "his seed" and bring them to the promised land to serve God ([Acts 7:7](#)).

Thought 1. Faith will be rewarded, abundantly so. Abraham's *seed*, the believer, will be brought to the promised land of heaven. Note why: to serve God.

"His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" ([Matthew 25:23](#)).

"And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath" ([Luke 12:42-44](#)).

6. God assured Abraham with a covenant, the covenant of circumcision ([Acts 7:8](#)). Circumcision was the *seal* of Abraham's faith, just as baptism is the *seal* of the believer's faith. Circumcision was the sign that Abraham was truly trusting God and His promise (see [Deeper Study #1, Circumcision—Phil. 3:3](#)).

3. ([7:9-16](#)) Rejection— Deliverance: the first rejection and deliverance. The forefathers rejected God's choice servant, Joseph. Joseph had been chosen by God to save His people, Israel. What happened was this: God had given Abraham a son, Isaac; and Abraham had circumcised him, sealing the fact that Isaac was the child of promise, that is, the promised seed through whom God's people were to be born. From Isaac came the other patriarchs, the first forefathers of the Jewish nation. Eventually Joseph was born, and as stated, Joseph was to be God's choice servant to save His people, Israel. Note four facts. (Cp. [Genesis 37-50](#).)

1. The forefathers rejected God's plan and schemed against God's choice servant, Joseph. The point is this: from the very first the *fathers* showed...

- that they blinded themselves to God's purpose and plans.
- that they were sinful men, sometimes willing to stand against God's will. Stephen was saying that the present generation was just as guilty as the fathers had been. The same spirit of envy was in their hearts against God's plan, His Messiah and servants (the church).

2. God delivered His choice servant, Joseph ([Acts 7:10](#)). Joseph had a hard road to travel, being enslaved and imprisoned for years. But "God was with him," strengthening him to go through all the trials. And God delivered him, even to exalting him as governor over Egypt. God overcame the evil of the fathers.

Stephen was saying that God delivered Christ from the evil rejection of the present generation just as He had delivered Joseph.

3. God saved the fathers, that is, the patriarchs ([Acts 7:11-14](#)). God always works His plan out no matter how much men try to stop it. In the history of the fathers God had used His choice servant, Joseph, to save them, despite the fact that they had rejected him. He had used an affliction—hunger and famine—to force the fathers down to Egypt. In Egypt God had reunited Joseph and his brothers. All the fathers were brought together again and God's plan was back in line.

Thought 1. Joseph, the choice son, is a picture or a type of Christ—the choice Son...

- in his being rejected by men (cp. [Acts 7:52](#)).
- in his forgiving all those who did evil to him.

"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" ([Ephes. 1:7](#)).

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" ([Ephes. 4:31-32](#)).

Thought 2. The evil spirit of *envy* is characteristic of man. It was present throughout the history of Israel, and it lives on today ([Romans 1:29](#); [Galatians 5:21](#)).

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up" ([1 Cor. 13:4](#)).

"Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another" ([Galatians 5:26](#)).

Stephen was saying that God's will and plan could not be stopped, no matter what the present generation did against Christ and His followers.

4. The forefathers had desired to be buried in the promised land ([Acts 7:15-16](#). Cp. [Joshua 24:32](#); cp. [Genesis 50:13](#)). They had trusted God's promise and had died believing. Therefore, they wanted to be buried in the land, to rest eternally in the great promise of God. (Cp. [Hebrews 11:13-16](#). See note, pt.2—[Acts 7:2-8](#).)

Stephen was saying that the forefathers had their eye on the promised land, on resting there eternally. They could not have been looking only for a *physical land*. The promise was to them, not only to their *seed*. The promised land was the heavenly land, the eternal land to which Jesus leads.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" ([John 14:2-3](#)).

"For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" ([Phil. 3:20-21](#)).

4. ([7:17-29](#)) Rejection— Deliverance: the second rejection and deliverance. The people misunderstood and rejected God's chosen servant, Moses. (Cp. [Exodus 1-2](#).) Note a significant fact: Israel had been in Egypt for about four hundred years. The people had not returned to the promised land, and they had *lost sight* of God's call and promise. They had no plan or intention whatsoever of returning to the promised land. Why? Under Joseph's influence, Pharaoh had given Israel a large, fertile land (Goshen, cp. [Genesis 47:1, 11-12](#)). And the people had grown enormously, both in numbers and prosperity. Simply put, they had become worldly and perfectly satisfied with what the world had to offer. God and His glorious call to the promised land had been set aside and ignored. The people had become comfortable, complacent, lethargic, worldly, carnal.

Now note what Stephen declared.

1. *God prepared* to save the people and to fulfill His glorious promise to Abraham: "the time of the promise drew nigh" ([Acts 7:17](#)). The people needed to refocus and to recommit their lives to God and the promised land. But they were not going to do it, not of themselves, not by their own works. They were happy where they were. If they were to be saved, God would have to do it. He would have to act in their behalf; He would have to do it by grace simply because He loved them. They had rejected Him and still were rejecting Him. Therefore, their salvation depended entirely upon God and His marvelous grace. God loves and is gracious, and God wants to save man. Therefore, God moved world events to save His people. He used an evil Pharaoh and an evil event to make Israel willing to leave Egypt.

The new ruler "knew not Joseph"; that is, he cared nothing about some historical event of the past when a few had helped his nation. He was responsible for Egypt, and the Jews were growing into such a large nation, they were becoming a threat. He feared Israel might join forces with some attacking force against Egypt. So he...

- enslaved Israel, taking away all their rights.
- plotted to stop the growth of the nation by killing all the newborn children.

These two events were the events God used to restir Israel's heart. Israel would soon cry out for God and for the promised land.

2. God protected and prepared the chosen child, Moses. (See [Exodus 2](#) for the story.) Note: as the child of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses was well educated. The "wisdom of the Egyptian" was well known (1 Kings 4:40). It included science, math, astronomy, and medicine.

3. God's servant acted in Israel's behalf.

- a. Moses was forty years old (see [Deeper Study #3—Acts 7:23](#)).
- b. Note: the words "came into his heart" ([Acts 7:23](#)). Apparently Moses had not associated with the Jews during the forty years; he had lived solely among the Egyptians. But all of a sudden, from the deepest part of his being, the thought of his people and their need for his help rose up in his heart. He was compelled (by divine impulse) to go and visit them.
- c. Moses saw an Egyptian slave mistreating a Jewish slave. He delivered the Jewish slave and killed the Egyptian.

4. God's servant was misunderstood and rejected. Moses thought the Jews would understand and know that God was going to use him to deliver them ([Acts 7:25](#)). But they did not understand, and they rejected him. This was made abundantly clear on the very next day when he tried to reconcile two Jews who were fighting among themselves. They rejected his leadership, rejected him...

- as their ruler.
- as their judge.

They even threatened to use the fact that he had killed the Egyptian against him if he did not leave them alone and quit meddling in their affairs. This, of course, forced Moses to flee for his life lest Pharaoh imprison him.

Now note Stephen's point. He was...

- saying that as Moses was raised up to be the ruler and judge, so was Christ.
- saying that as Moses was misunderstood and rejected, so are Christ and His followers.

"Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" ([John 15:20](#)).

"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" ([Phil. 1:29](#)).

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" ([2 Tim. 3:12](#)).

5. ([7:30-41](#)) Rejection— Deliverance: the third rejection and deliverance—the great deliverance planned by God through His servant. Stephen stressed four points.

1. God prepared to save His people again. Once again, He called His servant Moses ([Acts 7:30-33](#)).
 - a. God's call was an act of grace alone. The emphasis is upon God and His call of grace, not upon Moses.
 - ⇒ Moses was in "the wilderness," far removed.
 - ⇒ It was God who "appeared" and sought after Moses, not Moses after God.
 - b. It was God who called Moses. The emphasis is again upon God and not Moses. The God who called Moses was the God of the promised land...
 - the God of Abraham.
 - the God of Isaac.
 - the God of Jacob.
 - c. It was holy ground where God met Moses. The emphasis is again upon God not Moses. It was the presence of God that made the ground holy. (Note: wherever God is, the ground is holy.)
Stephen's emphasis could not be missed by the Jewish people...
 - they were exalting Moses (the law) above God Himself.
 - the promise of God was given long before the law.
 - the reason God was calling Moses was to save the people for the promised land, not for the law.
 - Moses (the law) was only a part of God's plan. Moses and the law were not the end, not the thing God was after. The promise was the end.
 - the temple was not the only holy ground. God's presence was what made ground holy.
Therefore, where God is, there is holy ground.

2. God commissioned His servant to save the people ([Acts 7:34](#)). Again it was God who acted, not the people.
 - It was God who said, "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people," not the people who said, "I have seen, I have seen the promised land of God."
 - It was God who heard their groaning, not the people who heard the groaning of God's heart for His people.
 - It was God who came down to deliver the people, not the people who came to God for deliverance.
 - It was God who sent His servant into Egypt, not the people who raised up a servant to save them.

Stephen's point was well taken. The people failed God at every step. Deliverance and salvation were in the hands of God alone.

3. God sent His servant on a special mission—a mission of extreme importance, a mission that must be understood by the present generation ([Acts 7:35-38](#)).

- a. God's servant was to be a ruler and a deliverer. This servant was the same who had been rejected. He was God's choice, despite the people's rejection. He came with signs and wonders delivering the people. (Note how Moses is a strong type of Jesus Christ.)
 - b. God's servant was to predict a unique Deliverer and Prophet who was to be heard (cp. [Deut. 18:15](#)). This was Moses' great prophecy of the coming Savior.
 - c. God's servant was to bring the living oracles of God to the church of God (Israel) in the wilderness (see [Deeper Study #4, Israel—Acts 7:38](#)).
4. God and Moses were disobeyed and rejected ([Acts 7:39-41](#)). The people would not obey the "living oracles [Word]" of God. The word "obey" means they did not want to obey; their disobedience was deliberate. They rejected both God and His servant. They turned their hearts away from God and back to Egypt (cp. [Exodus 16:3f](#); [Numbers 11:4f](#)). The idea of worshipping a calf had come from Egypt. The Egyptians had worshipped two sacred bulls, Apis and Mnevis. (Cp. [Exodus 32:1f](#) for the story.)

Stephen's point could not be missed. Moses was only a forerunner of Jesus.

 - ⇒ Just as Moses had come with signs and wonders to deliver the people, so had Christ.
 - ⇒ In fact, Moses had actually predicted the coming of Jesus, the greater Prophet and Savior.
 - ⇒ Just as Moses had given the living oracles, the Word of God, to the church in the wilderness, so Jesus had brought the living Word of God to people.

"For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" ([John 12:49-50](#)).

⇒ Just as Moses had been rejected, so Jesus was being rejected.

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not" ([John 1:11](#)).

"I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" ([John 5:43-44](#)).

"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" ([John 12:48](#)).

"To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear" ([Isaiah 28:12](#)).

"For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not" ([Isaiah 30:15](#)).

6. ([7:42-53](#)) Israel, Charges Against— Blessings: the charges against Israel or against the people. The charges are a real eye-opener as to how God saw Israel in the Old Testament.

1. Charge 1: the people (Israel) did not worship God, but worshipped false gods ([Acts 7:42](#)). They worshipped the "hosts of heaven," that is, the sun, moon, and stars (for example, the Zodiac, astrology, cosmic forces. Cp. [Deut. 17:3](#); [2 Kings 17:16](#); [2 Kings 21:3](#); [2 Chron. 33:3](#); [Job 31:26-28](#); [Jeremiah 8:2](#); [Jeremiah](#)

[19:13](#)). Again this was a carry-over of Egyptian idolatry. Note: the charge was dramatic. When Israel was making offerings and sacrifices to God, they were really worshipping false gods. That is, their hearts and thoughts were upon the world (Egypt) and its idols.

God's response was the same as the people's act. What they had sown, they were to reap.

⇒ Just as they had turned away from God, He had turned away from them.

⇒ Just as they had given themselves up to worship false gods, God had given them up to do as they pleased. God had given them up to their own lusts.

"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" ([Romans 1:21-22](#)).

"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves" ([Romans 1:24](#)).

"For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" ([Romans 1:26-28](#)).

2. Charge 2: the people (Israel) did not carry the tabernacle of God, but of false gods ([Acts 7:43](#)). Publicly and outwardly they were carrying the tabernacle of God wherever they went, but again, their hearts and thoughts were upon false gods. (See [Deeper Study #5—Acts 7:43](#) and [Deeper Study #6—Acts 7:43](#).)

God's response was *to give them up* to their lusts. Just as they had *carried* the tabernacle with their hearts focused upon false gods, so God had *carried* them and given them up to the captivity of a heathen nation who worshipped false gods (cp. [2 Kings 17:6](#)).

3. Charge 3: the people were inexcusable. Why? Because they were greatly blessed ([Acts 7:44-47](#)). God had blessed them with three particular things.

- a. God had blessed the people with the tabernacle of His presence and testimony. Note that God had shown Moses a "fashion" (*tupon* [PWS:1446](#)), that is, a figure, a pattern, a picture of the tabernacle; and Moses had constructed it after the picture God had shown him.
- b. God had blessed the people with His presence and favor in leaders. Joshua and David and Solomon are mentioned. All three had the favor and blessings of God upon their lives. Therefore, the people were greatly blessed through these leaders.

"Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" ([Matthew 21:43](#)).

- c. God had blessed the people with the temple. David had desired to build the temple, but it was Solomon whom God appointed to construct it. (Cp. [1 Kings 6-8](#).) When the Jews returned from captivity to Jerusalem, Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple (516 B.C.). Herod the Great rebuilt the temple

and made it one of the wonders of the world around 20 B.C. It was this temple in which the Jews gloried.

The point is this: by being so blessed, the people (Israel) were inexcusable in their rejection of God. They had every opportunity available, yet they still chose the world instead of God.

4. Charge 4: the people did not understand the temple. God is not limited to only one particular place ([Acts 7:48-50](#). Cp. [Isaiah 66:1-2](#)). Now note a significant point: Solomon, the builder of the great temple, had proclaimed this truth.

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded" ([1 Kings 8:27](#); cp. [2 Chron. 6:18](#)).

What Solomon said was true: God never intended for men to think that His presence was limited to the temple. Stephen's point struck home, for Jesus had taught that men must worship God in Spirit and in truth ([John 4:24](#)). Note also that Jesus had spoken these words to a Samaritan. Anyone of any race or land could worship God just so they approached Him in *Spirit* and *truth*. A particular land or temple was not necessary.

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" ([John 4:24](#)).

5. Charge 5: the people of the present generation were resisting the Holy Spirit ([Acts 7:51](#)). Stephen turned to the present generation and charged them with the *very same* resistance and rejection as their forefathers. Note the words, "Ye do always resist." He was identifying them with their fathers. He called them...

- stiffnecked (*sklērotrachēloi* [PWS: 3770](#)): hard necked, obstinate, stubborn.
- uncircumcised in heart" (*aperitmētoi kardiais* [PWS: 4114](#)): heathens, pagans, lost, aliens, idolaters, false worshippers, ungodly.
- resisters: persons who *resist* God; who deliberately oppose or rush against God; who actively struggle and fight against God.

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" ([Acts 7:51](#)).

"Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about" ([Psalm 32:9-10](#)).

6. Charge 6: the people persecuted *all* the prophets—the very servants who predicted the coming (offered the hope) of the Righteous One (the Messiah) ([Acts 7:52](#). Cp. [Acts 3:14](#); [Acts 22:14](#); [Isaiah 11:4-5](#); [Isaiah 53:11](#).) Jesus Christ was the One to whom all the prophets looked, the One who was to secure perfect righteousness for man. He was the One who was to bring righteousness to man. Yet the people rejected,

persecuted, and killed the prophets who proclaimed the glorious message of His coming (cp. the charge of Jesus against the people).

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, if we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets" ([Matthew 23:29-31](#)).

"Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation" ([Luke 11:47](#)).

7. Charge 7: the people, the present generation, fulfilled the prophecies. The present generation betrayed and killed the Righteous One ([Acts 7:52](#). Cp. [Acts 7:38](#)). (See outline—' [Acts 3:13-15](#) and note—' [Acts 3:13-15](#) for discussion and verses.)

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people" ([Hebrews 10:28-31](#)).

8. Charge 8: the people, the present generation, have not kept the law ([Acts 7:53](#)). The law had been given to them by the *hands* of angels. Yet, they had not kept it. They gloried in the law, but violated it just as much as their forefathers (cp. [Acts 7:38-43](#), [52](#); [Romans 2:23](#)).

"And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" ([Mark 7:9](#)).

"Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience" ([Ephes. 5:6](#)).

"But if ye will not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then shall the hand of the LORD be against you, as it was against your fathers" ([1 Samuel 12:15](#)).

"For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" ([Hebrews 2:2-3](#)).

Q. The First Martyr, Stephen (Scene III): A Study of Martyrdom, [7:54-60](#)

[\(7:54-60\)](#) **Introduction:** this is a vivid study of martyrdom, a study that should encourage believers to stand fast in persecution, no matter the cost.

1. [\(7:54\)](#) Martyrdom, Cause: there is the cause of martyrdom—reaction against God. Remember: Stephen was on trial for his life. He had been called upon to defend himself ([Acts 7:1](#)). But instead of actually defending himself, Stephen had preached about the tragic failure of the people to follow and obey God. He had...

- shown how God called and founded the nation of Israel to seek and inhabit the "promised land."
- shown how Israel had rejected God's call and the hope of the promised land, rejected it time and again all through their history.
- shown how God delivered the nation time and again, trying to stir within the people an obedience to Him.
- made eight severe charges against the nation including the murder of the righteous One, God's very own Son.

His message had been effective and convicting. It had done its job. Both the leaders and the people were convicted. The response was up to them. Conviction can go either way. It can either cause a person to turn to God, confessing his sin, or cause a person to react against God. Note three facts about the Jewish court and the people present.

1. "When they heard these things." This is present tense. It was *while* they were hearing Stephen preach that conviction was taking place. He was preaching and the Spirit of God was convicting, trying to get through to the hearts of the people. God was giving the people another chance.

2. "Cut to the heart" (*dieprionto tais kardiais* [PWS: 864](#)). The word "dieprionto" means to saw asunder; to cut through. It is used to show violent reaction. The response of their hearts was anger, not godly sorrow (see [Deeper Study #1, Godly Sorrow—2 Cor. 7:10](#)). They had no intention of confessing that they had been wrong.

3. "Gnashed" (*ebruchon* [PWS: 1707](#)). The word means to bite, to grind, to gnash the teeth just like a pack of snarling dogs. The people were in a rage, filled with anger and malice, ready to do violence, ready to unleash the fury of their emotions.

Thought 1. When the human heart rebels against God, it becomes disturbed and tormented. Rebellion against God causes the human heart to be...

- uncertain & insecure• disturbed & troubled• indignant & reactionary• passive & inactive
- withdrawn & lonely• purposeless & meaningless

"And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people" ([Exodus 32:9](#)).

"Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the LORD; and they testified against them: but they would not give ear" ([2 Chron. 24:19](#)).

"To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear" ([Isaiah 28:12](#)).

Thought 2. Note the faithfulness of Stephen in bearing witness to the truth. His purpose was not to escape condemnation, not at any price. He, of course, was not wishing to die. But he was not willing to deny the truth in order to live. His desire was to proclaim the truth, hoping the *leaders* and *people* of his beloved nation would heed the call of God and be saved. What a dynamic challenge for bearing testimony in difficult situations!

"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" ([Acts 4:20](#)).

"Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city" ([Acts 18:9-10](#)).

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God" ([2 Tim. 1:7-8](#)).

2. ([7:55-56](#)) Deliverance: there was the Lord's provision. God is always present when one of His dear children is facing a crisis, especially martyrdom. But note this: the person must be a true child of God, faithful and obedient to the Lord of glory. Stephen was. He was doing exactly what Jesus had said to do, bearing testimony to the world. Therefore, Stephen had the promise of the Lord, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" ([Matthew 28:20](#)). Jesus was there with Stephen, there in the most wonderful way. Note the marvelous provision of God to those who face martyrdom.

1. God filled Stephen with the Holy Spirit. Stephen was a man who was always filled with the Spirit ([Acts 5:3, 5](#)), but the idea here would be a very special infilling of the Spirit. He received a very special...

- presence and manifestation of the Spirit: a special consciousness; an awareness; a sense surrounding, engulfing, and embracing him; a presence carrying him through the great trial.
- power and grace to bear and go through whatever lay ahead.

2. God gave Stephen a vision *into* heaven: enabling him to see into the other world, the spiritual world, or spiritual dimension of being.

- a. Stephen saw the glory of God. He saw God in the brilliant light of His person, full of splendor and radiance (cp. [1 Tim. 1:16](#); [Rev. 21:11, 23](#). See note, [Glory—' Matthew 17:5-8](#).)
- b. Stephen saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God. Jesus is usually said to be *sitting* on the right hand of God, symbolizing His authority as man's Lord and Intercessor (cp. [Matthew 26:64](#); [Mark 16:19](#); [Luke 20:42-43](#); [Acts 2:34](#); [Ephes. 1:20](#); [Col. 3:1](#); [Hebrews 1:3](#); [Hebrews 10:12-13](#)). But here He is standing, which symbolizes His overlooking the scene and care of His dear follower and the joyful reception of His faithful servant.

Thought 1. Imagine the glorious sight! There will be no difference between the vision of Stephen and the actual experience of God's glory for any believer. We shall all behold every sight in Stephen's vision and

much more. In a moment's time, in the twinkling of an eye, the genuine believer will pass from this life into the next world immediately, never tasting or experiencing death.

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death" (John 8:51).

"And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:26).

3. God gave Stephen a glorious testimony. Seeing such a scene, Stephen just burst forth proclaiming the glorious vision he was experiencing. It was most likely a natural outburst of joy and ecstasy, a testimony of the truth of the other world to those standing around. Note this part of the truth: the Son of Man, Jesus, is there. (See [Deeper Study #3, Son of Man—Matthew 8:20](#).) He is at the right hand of God. Stephen was proclaiming...

- that Jesus is the Son of God.
- that our faith in Jesus is not in vain.
- that Jesus is exactly whom He claimed to be. (See [Jesus Christ, Claims of—Master Subject Index](#).)

"So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19).

3. (7:57-58) Stephen— Persecution: there was the insanity of murdering the believer. This is seen in two things.

1. The insane rejection. The persecutors were actually opposing a person who only wanted...
 - to help and minister to people.
 - to offer the hope of living forever.

The sole purpose of the believer is to minister and to meet the desperate conditions of men:

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| ⇒ being lost | ⇒ hunger |
| ⇒ lack of education | ⇒ disease |
| ⇒ alienation | ⇒ depression |
| ⇒ loneliness | ⇒ lifelessness |
| ⇒ poverty | |

Whatever the predicament, the believer is called to minister. He is not out to destroy, but to build. It is utter insanity to oppose and kill such a person. For men to oppose a genuine believer, their behavior has to reach a peak of insanity. Note what is involved...

- loud voices: to drown out the truth.
- stopped ears: to keep from hearing the truth.
- ran upon: to attack and take vengeance.
- cast out and stoned: to get rid of the convicting message, allowing them to live as they desire instead of living for God.

2. The insane leadership. A person who takes the lead in persecution is in rebellion against God. Those who follow such a leader are following a person who is actually reacting against the Lord, not against a believer (cp.

[Acts 9:4-5](#)). The man who took the lead in Stephen's murder was Saul of Tarsus. He was *kicking* against the pricks, the conviction of conscience (cp. [Acts 9:5](#)).

It is dangerous to follow man in rebellion against God. The path of rebellion leads to destruction. The man in rebellion shall perish. There is no exception.

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" ([Matthew 23:33](#)).

"Maliciousness...murder...malignity...haters of God...proud...covenant breakers...implacable, unmerciful...they which commit such things are worthy of death" ([Romans 1:29-32](#)).

"If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart" ([Malachi 2:2](#)).

DEEPER STUDY #1 ([7:58](#)) Saul— Paul

4. ([7:59](#)) Hope— Heaven: there was the believer's supreme confidence. Note four points.

1. Stephen experienced the pain and suffering of the trial. This is seen in that he called for the Lord's help. Believers are not removed or relieved from the sufferings of trials, but they are given the grace and strength to endure the trials, even martyrdom.

2. Stephen called upon the Lord Himself. It was the Lord Jesus who was *standing*, ready to receive Him. Jesus wishes all believers to be with Him where He is ([John 14:2-3](#); [John 17:24](#)). This is the very reason for which Jesus...

- humiliated Himself in coming to earth,
- sacrificed His life in death,
- prays and longs for believers to join Him in heaven.

3. Stephen called for Jesus to receive his spirit. Stephen was still trusting the grace of God, the righteousness of Jesus, for his salvation. He was not trusting his own works and goodness. He was still depending upon Jesus and the wonderful love of God. But note the key words: *still trusting*, *still depending*. Stephen had trusted and lived for Christ *during life*, so he could expect to trust and live for Christ in *eternity*.

4. Stephen was going to be where Jesus was. He called for Jesus to receive his spirit, to accept him where He was. And remember where Jesus is ([Acts 7:55](#)):

- ⇒ in heaven
- ⇒ at the right hand of God

Stephen and all other believers are to be with Jesus right where He is, in heaven itself.

"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" ([Luke 23:43](#)).

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" ([John 14:2-3](#)).

5. (7:60) Forgiveness: there was the believer's loving and forgiving spirit. Note that Stephen's last act was to kneel in prayer and to plead for his persecutors and murderers. He possessed the very spirit of Christ Himself, who had prayed the same prayer ([Luke 23:34](#)). "Lay not this sin to their charge" says three things.

- ⇒ Stephen was filled with compassion for his persecutors. He wanted them to be saved.
- ⇒ Men will be charged with sin.
- ⇒ Men must have the charge of sin removed from them to be acceptable before God.

Thought 1. Remember: Stephen and other believers would never pay the price demanded if sinful men were going to be accepted by God anyway. Something else: if God was going to accept men as they are in their sinful state, He would have never allowed His Son to die at the hands of men.

6. (7:60) Death: there was the believer's peaceful departure. Scripture simply says, "He fell asleep." There is no death for the believer. Stephen simply passed from this life into the next world, an experience that amounts to nothing more than falling asleep. Sleep is often used to describe *death* for the believer (see [Deeper Study #1—John 11:13](#)).

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" ([John 5:24](#)).

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" ([John 11:25-26](#)).

Believers are to forgive men no matter what the offense may be.