

Lesson 6: Beholding His Glory

Acts 6 and 7

The two chapters of Acts that we are going to consider this week are largely factual and filled with historical detail. Let's refuse to settle, though, for a purely intellectual study. Luke tells us in Acts 7:55 that Stephen "gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God." Let's ask God for that this week – that He would show us His glory, that He would reveal *Himself* to us through His written Word.

"But [Stephen], full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."

Acts 7:55

A Call to Service

Read Acts 6:1-7.

1. Briefly explain the context of this event. What was the problem? Who was involved? How did they decide to resolve it?

The *Hellenists* or *Grecian Jews* of Acts 6 spoke Greek rather than the common Aramaic language of Judea that the *Hebrews* would have spoken. They may have grown up outside of Judea and relocated to Jerusalem at some point in their lives.⁶ The Hellenist believers were Jewish, though, and they professed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, just like the native Hebrew believers. Given the apostles' quick and willing response to the problem with the widows, it is likely that any neglect was unintentional, merely a result of a rapidly growing community separated by some linguistic and cultural differences.

2. What were the qualifications to serve the tables (Acts 6:3)?
3. How does Ephesians 4:11-14 increase your understanding of the need for each of us to serve within the body of believers? What will be the result of each believer serving in his or her given role?

⁶ Polhill, John B. *Acts*. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995.

4. What are some ways that you feel God has equipped you to serve? You may want to look at Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and 1 Peter 4:10-11 for some lists of gifts, but don't be limited by them. They are not complete. Consider the things the Lord has made you good at, the things you enjoy doing. If you aren't sure of your gifts, you may want to have this conversation with a believing friend. Sometimes we are better at seeing the gifts and callings of others.

5. What was the result of the new division of responsibility according to Acts 6:7?

The church was not intended to be filled with idle believers, but with active disciples! We aren't just to know what the Lord teaches, we are to act on it. When we each serve in the way that the Lord equips us, all are encouraged, God is glorified and the Word of God increases. Again we will see that even in the midst of faithful service, the disciples faced increasing opposition.

Read Acts 6:8-15.

6. Describe Stephen from Acts 6:5, 6:8 and 6:10.

7. What was the charge brought against Stephen in Acts 6:11-14, and how did they bring it?

8. Even as they brought these charges, how is Stephen described in Acts 6:15?

Stephen's Sermon

Stephen was now before the Sanhedrin. Peter, John and all of the apostles had had their turn before this Council. Like them, Stephen used this opportunity to proclaim the gospel.

Read Acts 7:1-53. It is a long passage, but Stephen basically summarized the entire Old Testament. Keeping that in mind, his sermon actually seems kind of short!

9. In Act 7:1-8, Stephen taught about the promises God made to Abraham.
 - ❖ What did God promise to give to Abraham and his descendants in Acts 7:4-5? (See also Genesis 17:8.)

- ❖ What had God foreseen and promised regarding the offspring of Abraham in Acts 7:6-7? (See also Genesis 15:13-14.)
 - ❖ Draw a rough diagram of Abraham's family tree from Acts 7:8. You may want to note that Jacob was later renamed Israel by God (Genesis 35:10).
 - ❖
10. In Acts 7:9-16, Stephen focused on the life of Joseph. Joseph was one of the twelve patriarchs, the eleventh son of Jacob.
- ❖ Where did the family of Abraham – the growing nation of Israel – end up during Joseph's life? How and why did they end up there?
 - ❖ How did that set up the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham from Acts 7:6-7?
11. The bulk of Stephen's sermon, Acts 7:17-43, centered on the life of Moses.
- ❖ What were the circumstances in Egypt when Moses was born according to Acts 7:17-19?
 - ❖ How did God preserve Moses?
 - ❖ Moses, having been raised in Pharaoh's home, chose to affiliate with and defend his own people – the Israelites. What did Moses suppose according to Stephen in Acts 7:25? In Acts 7:26-28, how did the Israelites actually react toward him?
 - ❖ How did Moses respond when he was rejected (Acts 7:29)?
 - ❖ During his self-imposed exile in Midian, Moses had his famous encounter with the burning bush. From Acts 7:32-34, how did God identify Himself, and what did He tell Moses to do? (This encounter is recorded in its entirety in Exodus 3.)
 - ❖ How did the people's reaction to Moses compare to God's purpose for Moses (Acts 7:35)?
 - ❖ How did the people continue to reject Moses as God's chosen leader according to Acts 7:39-41?

12. How do you deal with rejection? When you consider that the people's reaction to Moses was so disparate from the way that God saw him, what might God really be thinking about you when you feel rejected by those around you?

In accordance with His promise to Abraham, God raised up Moses at the appointed time to deliver the Israelites from their captivity in Egypt. But the people rejected God's chosen messenger, and in so doing, ultimately turned away from God Himself, choosing instead to worship and serve other gods. We see this first in the incident with the golden calf at Mount Sinai (Acts 7:41), but the sin of idolatry continued among God's chosen people throughout the Old Testament. In His graciousness, God sent prophets to warn the Israelites to turn back to Him, and for a while they would, but then they would turn aside again, and worship other gods. Eventually, God sent them into captivity at the hands of the Babylonians, just as He had warned that He would do (Acts 7:42-43).

13. Why do you think the sin of idolatry is so repulsive to the Lord? See Daniel 5:22-23.
14. How do you see believers today practicing idolatry? More personally, is there a way you are worshipping an idol (putting something above God) in your own life?
15. In the final bit of history in his sermon (Acts 7:44-50), Stephen talked about the dwelling place of God.
- ❖ What did the Israelites have in the wilderness (Acts 7:44-45)? What was its purpose according to Exodus 25:8?
 - ❖ Who built a more permanent house for God according to Acts 7:46-47?
 - ❖ What did Solomon understand about God's dwelling place according to 1 Kings 8:27? What was his prayer regarding the Temple in 1 Kings 8:28-30?

No dwelling place can contain God, but the Lord, in His great mercy, chooses to dwell among men. The Tabernacle and then the Temple were built as places His people could approach and worship a holy God.

16. How did Jesus say that worship would change in John 4:21-24?

17. What do you think it means to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth?

18. How did Stephen rebuke the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:51-53?

The First Martyr

Read Acts 7:54-60.

19. How did the hearers of Stephen's sermon respond according to Acts 7:54-60?

20. Who does Stephen focus upon for his acceptance? How does that compare to Moses' initial reaction to rejection?

Prepare for Life

21. What did Stephen see in his final moments (Acts 7:55-56)?

22. How do Stephen's final recorded words in Acts 7:60 compare with Jesus' prayer in Luke 23:34?

23. According to 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, how does beholding the glory of the Lord change us?

In his final moments on earth, Stephen stared into heaven and caught a glimpse of the glory of God. And it made Him more like Jesus. Oh, that the same would be said of us!

24. What bit of His glory, His character or His truth has the Lord shown you recently? How has that changed you? Ask the Lord to continue to transform you to be more like Christ by revealing His glory to you.

Lecture Notes: Lesson 6