

Use Week of: April 11, 2021

Unit 29 • Session 2

Stephen's Sermon

BIBLE PASSAGE:

Acts 6–7

STORY POINT:

Stephen preached about Jesus no matter what.

KEY PASSAGE:

Romans 12:5

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

What is the church? The church is all Christians everywhere, who gather together in their communities to worship and serve God.

INTRODUCE THE STORY
(10–15 MINUTES)
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TEACH THE STORY
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APPLY THE STORY
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LEADER Bible Study

Stephen was one of the seven men chosen to serve as leaders in the early church at Jerusalem. (See Acts 6:1-7.) God blessed Stephen and gave him power to do wonders and miracles like some of the apostles.

Some of the Jews accused Stephen of blasphemy and dragged him to the Sanhedrin, a group of Jewish leaders who acted as a legal council. Stephen addressed the group. He drew from the Jewish history, which the leaders of the Sanhedrin would have known well. But Stephen taught from the Old Testament things the Jewish leaders had likely never realized.

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As Stephen preached, he showed how the Old Testament pointed to a coming Savior and how that Savior was Jesus. Stephen pointed out that the Jews' ancestors had rejected God's prophets. And they were just like their fathers; they rejected the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Not only did they reject Jesus, they killed Him!

The Jewish leaders rushed at Stephen. As he faced his enemies, Stephen looked into heaven and saw God's glory. Jesus was standing at God's right hand. The Jews forced Stephen out of the city, and they stoned him.

Remind kids of Jesus' words in Matthew 10:22: "You will be hated by everyone because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." Following Jesus will include difficulty and suffering. Jesus gives words of both warning and comfort: "Don't be afraid" (Matt. 10:26).

Stephen was killed because he was a Christian. Jesus told His followers that they would be persecuted—hated, hurt, or even killed—for loving Him. (Mark 13:9-13; John 16:2) Jesus also said that those who suffer for Him would be blessed. (Matt. 5:11) Stephen was not afraid to die because he saw Jesus waiting for him in heaven. We can face suffering in this life because we know great joy is waiting for us in heaven.

The BIBLE Story

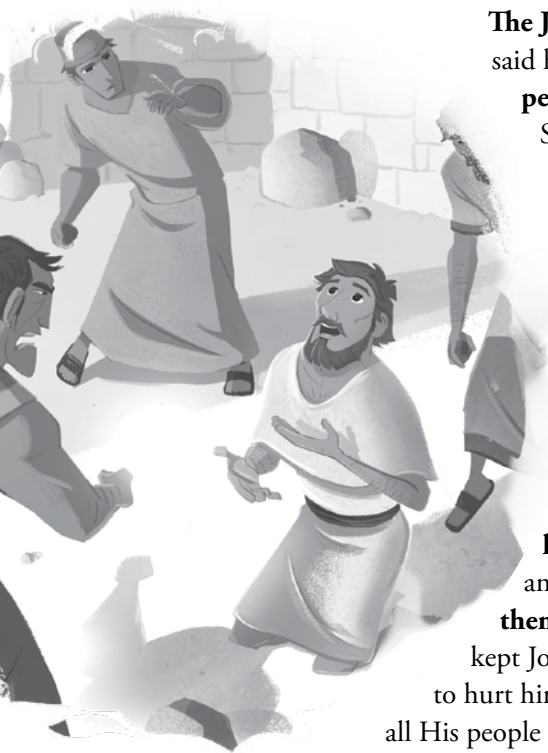
Stephen's Sermon

Acts 6–7

Stephen was one of Jesus' followers. God blessed Stephen and gave him power to do great wonders and signs. One day, some Jews began to argue with Stephen. The Holy Spirit helped Stephen speak with wisdom, so no matter how hard the Jews tried, they could not win the argument.

The Jews lied about Stephen; they said he had spoken against God. **The people dragged Stephen to the Sanhedrin (san HEE drihn), the Jewish court, and told more lies.** "We heard Stephen say that Jesus will destroy the temple and change the laws that Moses gave us," they said. "Is this true?" the high priest asked Stephen.

Stephen began to preach about Jesus. He reminded the court about Abraham. God had made promises to Abraham and his son Isaac. He reminded them about Joseph and Moses. God kept Joseph safe when his brothers tried to hurt him, and God used Joseph to help all His people during a famine. When God's people lived in Egypt, God called Moses to rescue His people from Pharaoh. **Moses led God's people away from Egypt, but they turned against Moses and against God. God did not give up on His people, though.** He was working out a plan. **God worked**



through Joshua and David and Solomon.

The religious leaders knew these stories from the Old Testament. **Stephen told them these stories to explain that Jesus was the Messiah God had promised!** But just like their ancestors rejected and killed the prophets in the Old Testament, these Jewish leaders had rejected Jesus and murdered Him!

Stephen's words made the Jewish leaders so angry!

Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit. He looked up to heaven and saw Jesus standing there.

“Look!” he said. “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

The Jewish leaders screamed at the top of their lungs. **They covered their ears and rushed at Stephen. They threw him out of the city and began throwing stones at him. Stephen called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!”** Then he said, **“Lord, do not hold this sin against them!”** **After this, Stephen died.**

Christ Connection: Stephen was killed because he was a Christian. Jesus told His followers that they would be persecuted—hated, hurt, or even killed—for loving Him. Jesus also said that those who suffer for Him would be blessed. We can face suffering in this life because Jesus suffered first. He died and then rose again, and He is waiting for us in heaven.

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Set up stations:** place stools around the room, each with a prop to help you tell the story, such as a bible, a pyramid, a stone, and so forth.
- **Use the timeline:** As you speak about the different parts of Israel's history, use the Giant Timeline to point out the Bible story art from those stories.

INTRODUCE the Story



SESSION TITLE: Stephen's Sermon

BIBLE PASSAGE: Acts 6–7

STORY POINT: Stephen preached about Jesus no matter what.

KEY PASSAGE: Romans 12:5

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is the church? The church is all Christians everywhere, who gather together in their communities to worship and serve God.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. Prompt kids to tell stories about times they spoke in front of a group. Perhaps they had to make a presentation at school, or had a speaking part in a church play.

SAY • Speaking in front of others can feel a little scary to some. Today we will learn about a man whom God used to preach a message to religious leaders who hated the message of Jesus. How do you think they reacted? We'll learn more soon.

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: The great debate

Provide the group with two opposing options, such as whether they like tacos or pizza better. Form two teams based on who selects which option. Challenge each team to provide reasoning and evidence to explain why their choice is the better choice. Can any of the kids convince others to change teams?

SAY • Something like a favorite food or favorite game to play isn't particularly important. We can all have a different opinion, and no one is wrong. However, something like whether or not Jesus is God's Son, who died on the cross for sin and rose on the third day? Whether you agree with that is super important. Today we will learn about a time Stephen preached to convince religious leaders that Jesus is the Messiah.

OPTION 2: Right hand man

Challenge kids to complete a task—such as drawing a simple figure, writing their name, or tossing and catching a ball—using only their left hands. Then ask them to do the same challenge using their right hands. Compare the results of both.

- paper (optional)
- pencils (optional)
- rubber balls (optional)

SAY • It's tough to complete tasks with your non-dominant hand! The majority of people in the world are right-handed. As a result, it is often considered a great honor to be at someone's right hand. Someone's "right hand" man or woman is their most trusted helper or advisor. Did you know Jesus is at God the Father's right hand? Let's learn more about that.

Transition to teach the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now!* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

APPLY the Story



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KEY PASSAGE: Romans 12:5

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What is the church? The church is all Christians everywhere, who gather together in their communities to worship and serve God.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

• Key Passage Poster

Instruct the kids to stand in a circle. Tell kids to stand on one leg and begin saying the key passage in unison. If anyone wobbles and puts their foot down, stop the group and start them over from the beginning. Challenge the kids to see how many times they can say the key passage while balancing on one leg.

SAY • Surprisingly, it can be tough to do something as simple as balancing on one foot if you are occupying your brain with something like remembering something you have memorized. It doesn't take much to make our bodies struggle to work together! Paul knew that was true about the body of Christ too, so he wrote our key passage to remind believers that they should be united as one in Jesus.

Discussion & Bible skills (10 minutes)

• Bibles, 1 per kid
• Story Point Poster
• Small Group Timeline and Map Set (005802970, optional)

Distribute a Bible to each kid. Help them find Acts 6–7. Remind them that Acts is the only book in the History division of the New Testament. Ask kids if they know who wrote Acts. (*Luke*) Consider pointing out Jerusalem on the New Testament Israel Map. (*H5*)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

1. What was Stephen accused of? (*blasphemy, saying something untrue and dishonoring about God; Acts 6:11*)
2. What did Stephen preach about? (*Stephen used Israel's history to explain Jesus is the Messiah; Acts 7:51-52*)
3. What did the religious leaders do to Stephen as a result of his preaching about Jesus? (*killed him, Acts 7:57-60*)
4. Have you ever faced persecution for your faith? *Guide kids to think about ways they may feel persecuted. Be sensitive to their experiences while taking care not to minimize the harsh persecution Christians face in other parts of the world.*
5. How can we stand up boldly for Jesus in the face of persecution? *Discuss the strength and power available to believers through the Holy Spirit. Remind kids that He can help us be bold in hard times. Encourage kids to trust God and have faith that He turns all things to good, even when we don't see the good results.*
6. What should we do if we are persecuted? *Talk through what Stephen did. Help the kids see that Stephen did not fight his enemies, but instead asked God to forgive them for killing him. Remind kids that Jesus promised troubles and persecution would come. Encourage kids to pray for boldness in hard times, not just for things to get easier.*

SAY • Stephen preached about Jesus no matter what.

We may not face the same kind of persecution. But whatever we face, trusting God is the best option. We can pray for boldness in the face of persecution and that God will use our trials to bless His church.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

· variety of items
(playground ball,
candy, bicycle, first
aid kit, action figure,
baby doll, etc.)

OPTION 2: Upgrade

Place a variety of items around the room. Provide the kids with paper and pencils. Instruct the kids to list the items least to most valuable. Encourage the kids to think about more than just the price, but also how much they would want to own or use each item. Compare different kids' lists.

Suggested items: playground ball, candy, bicycle, first aid kit, action figure, baby doll.

SAY • For some of you, trading one of those items for another might be an easy choice. You might see it as an upgrade to give up a playground ball to get a

bicycle. In a way, that helps us think about our the choices Stephen made in our story today.

What did Stephen give up? [*His life.*] What did Stephen gain? [*He got to be with Jesus in heaven, he got to stand up for the truth, he got to be a part of God's plan to spread the gospel, and so forth.*]

Stephen understood that Jesus is more valuable than anything, even our lives! For believers, even death is an upgrade because we get to be with Jesus forever.

Reflection and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute a sheet of paper to each child. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

Make sure to send the sheets home with kids alongside the activity page so that parents can see what their kids have been learning.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group.

- pencils and crayons
- paper
- Bible Story Coloring Page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's Big Picture Cards for Families to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.