

The Way

Birth of the Church

Lesson 05: Leaders' Responsibilities; Stephen Preached and Martyred

We are indebted to [Ethnos360](#) for providing the basis of these lessons

Review (Where We've Been)

The Way of the Early Church...

- They Believed (Jesus is the only way to God)
- They were Baptized (public demonstration of faith)
- They Behaved
- They were Bold

BIG Idea

When the church and God's people are boldly on mission the enemy is on the attack.

Information (What You Need to Know)

The Church faces increasing problems

■ Peter and John's arrest was just the beginning.

◆ Peter and John are threatened and commanded never to speak about Jesus

Acts 4:17 (ESV) "But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name."

◆ Peter and John would boldly continue to preach Jesus

Acts 4:20 (ESV) for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

PAUSE: Where are these problems coming from and why are they rising?

Ephesians 6:12 (ESV) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

-We face a real enemy and his name is Satan.

-He has not and will not quit.

I Peter 5:8 (ESV) Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

-Jesus has defeated Satan already

Colossians 2:15 (ESV) He disarmed the rulers and authorities[demonic rulers] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Genesis 3:15 (ESV) he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

-The one who is constantly against the church and does not want us to speak boldly of Jesus is Satan.

■ **Complaints and disunity arise in the church**

Are complaints and disunity foreign to the Apostles? No, the disciples argued and fought over status (who was greatest), position (who sits at the right hand of Jesus), grumbled (John 6:61), and couldn't handle others doing work in Jesus' name (Luke 9:49-50). **They saw Jesus deal with these things often.**

John 13:34-35 (ESV) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."

◆ Disagreement and hurt between two groups in the church

- **Hebrews** - Jews who became followers of Jesus who spoke mostly Aramaic and lived in Palestine

- **Hellenists** - Jews who became followers of Jesus who were from all over the Roman Empire (because of exile - diaspora) and spoke only Greek

Acts 6:1 (ESV) Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

Natural distrust and animosity between the Hebrews and Hellenist Christians. Hebrew Christians followed the laws and traditions of the Jewish people (Galatians has not happened yet). Hellenists held none of these and were looked at as free-spirited troublemakers.

◆ The apostles appoint deacons to take care of the practical needs of the church

Acts 6:3 (ESV) Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

■ **7 were commissioned and God blessed and multiplied the church**

Acts 6:5-7 (ESV) And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. **6** These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

■ **Lies and false accusations are brought against Stephen**

■ **Stephen filled with the Holy Spirit speaks**

Acts 6:15 (ESV) And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

***Face of an angel** - Not weak or angry but confident, peace-filled, and determined to speak the truth of Jesus as God's messenger.

God's Promises to His People

God knows how to take care of and protect his people

- Abraham's partial obedience did not remove any of God's promises v. 4
- Abraham never saw God's promises fulfilled - Land, Nation, Leader v. 5
- God's covenant was passed down through Abraham's descendants. v. 8
- God took care of Joseph even though he was rejected v. 9
- God used Joseph to save his family v. 14
- God remembered his people and rescued them v. 6-7 & v. 35-36

God's presence was always with his people

- God came to Abraham v. 2
- God was with Joseph v. 9
- God was with Moses v. 20
- God's presence was with them before the temple or tabernacle v.48-49

God's people always rejected their leaders and prophets

- Joseph was rejected by his brothers v. 9
- Moses was repeatedly rejected by his people v. 27-28 & v. 39-41
- You are guilty of what your ancestors have always been guilty of, rejecting God's messengers v. 51-53

Acts 7:51-53 (ESV) "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. **52** Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, **53** you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

Stephen was using strong very familiar terms that God also used for His people:

-Stiff-necked described Israel about 20 times in the Old Testament -

Ex.32:9

-Uncircumcised in heart and ears - **Jeremiah 9:26**

-Deuteronomy 10:16 - God says for them to circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

■ **The council enraged with evil murders Stephen**

Acts 7:54 (ESV) Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

■ **Stephen filled with the Holy Spirit responds in Christlikeness.**

Acts 7:55-60 (ESV) But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56** And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” **57** But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. **58** Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. **59** And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” **60** And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen’s death did not cause the church to shrink away or crumble. Stephen’s death drove the church outward toward a new harvest. The gentiles.

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. - Tertullian

Application (What You Need to Do)

What does this mean for us?

- Like Stephen, we must be people of the Word - if we want wisdom
James 3:17 (ESV) But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace-loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere.
- Like Stephen, God will give us the strength and words that we need.
Luke 12:12 (ESV) The Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.
- Like Stephen, the enemy wants to stop anyone who is in the Word, filled with the Spirit, and speaking the truth of Jesus
I Peter 5:8-9 (ESV) **8** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. **9** Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

