

Acts 6:8-7:60
CBBC
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Introduction---When the good times end. There are times in our life, looking back at our lives. The early church. This golden age... "but everything changed when the fire nation attacked."

I. Believers are the world's villains.

God equips Stephen to proclaim the faith. Remember that Stephen was already someone who was known for his character and testimony. He would not have been chosen as a deacon otherwise. He is full of grace and power. We also see that he starts being able to do signs and wonders. This is our first indication that God gave the gift of signs to someone outside of the apostles. Remember that the purpose of gifts was to confirm the truth about Christ. We get the idea that he became a center of discussion among some of the people. He is teaching about Christ, although he is a deacon, not an apostle, and not an elder.

There are some Hellenistic Jews, that is, Jews who spoke Greek, who lived in the area and were part of a few different synagogues. One of them was of freed slaves, and others were from various parts scattered around the civilized world, but they were all Jews, and they had come back to Jerusalem. They took issue with Stephen's teaching about Jesus. Remember that people are looking at all of the miracles that are being done, and they know they mean something; they are supernatural. But when you bring in Jesus as Lord and Messiah, they will not accept that.

These people debate with Stephen, and they are unable to win these debates. Scripture tells us that it was the working of the Spirit and the wisdom that he had, which we know had been given him. They can't contest him. They walk away losers from

every discussion. The fact that they lost means that they cannot prove that Jesus is not the Messiah, that He is not the resurrected Lord. When each debate is finished, they walk away with their opponent unswayed. They are so angry about this. They are so angry that they break the Mosaic Law that they claim to love, and they instigate people to give false charges of blasphemy. They then take those charges and go to the people and the priests, and have him brought before the council. Then they get false witnesses who claim that Stephen was preaching directly against the Temple and the Law, and that He was saying that Christ would destroy the Temple and change the Law. I won't say much about that, save that like all effective lies, these have a kernel of truth. Jesus was talking about the destruction of the temple, but He was talking about His own body. He also states in Luke 21 that the temple will be destroyed, but that will be because of the people themselves. He also states that He has come to fulfill the Law, not abolish it. (Matthew 5) The Jewish Christians themselves are still keeping the Law, but they are doing so understanding that it is not salvific; Christ has already completed it.

There is nothing more powerful in the human heart than one's hatred of God. This hatred is irrational. It is self-destructive. It is ugly. It is the world's heartbeat. We have seen faint shadows of this in Acts, with the hostility of the leadership, but now we have the people joining in. Remember when, back in John 15, Jesus talked about the world's hatred. We know it as an abstract, but here we see it in black and white. Even though Jesus' resurrection was established, and Jesus was doing miracles, the hostility against God that we read about in Romans 1, still rose to the surface. It revealed what had always been there all the way along. The Jewish Christians had enjoyed the world's favor for a little while, but it was temporary. It is always temporary. Every single crime

and perversion is slowly being diminished as to its evil and consequence, and the only one that isn't is Christianity.

In the face of that hostility, Stephen shows the face of an angel. It is a term that is not used elsewhere in Scripture, but it tells us that this is the face of one who is close with God, having full confidence in the Lord, even in the midst of his lying, hostile enemies.

Believers reveal the hearts of unbelievers. Stephen is going to preach a message to the crowd. I am not going to preach the message to you. I am going to read through the entirety of it. I am going to point out what is happening, but I am not going to dive deep on it. I will let it speak for itself. When I get to the end, I'm going to summarize what he did, and then I am going to talk about what this message does.

1-7—Abraham 9-18—Patriarchs—17-22—Moses' coming 23-29—Moses' history 30-34—Moses' Call 35-43—The failure of the people 44-50—The tabernacle/temple 51-53—God's covenant people have always rejected their God. What is he doing here? He is taking the Jewish people through their history, showing that as a community, they have rejected God over and over. They have always resisted the Spirit's working. He tells them the truth about themselves using Scripture. He identifies them with the people whom they thought they were above. We are better than they. We are not the same. Stephen shows them through God's Word that it is not the case. What does it say that they do in verse 54? They are angry, so angry that they are grinding their teeth. Stephen does not let them deceive themselves. Liars don't appreciate being around people who love the truth. People who cheat on their spouses are irritated when people celebrate fidelity. People who hate God hate being around people who love Him, because it is a

rebuke to the truth of their hearts. Rebels against God are not noble in any sense. They are petty and evil, as all unbelievers are and as we once were. When we come face to face with that, it is terrible. It is hard. Unbelievers cannot hide their true nature around maturing believers. They won't stand for it.

Jesus will always rescue His children. 54-60 Stephen, full of the Spirit, doubled down. God gave him the vision of reality. He looked up and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He tells that to his audience. He has a vision. He gives a revelation as to where Jesus is, showing that the man they had killed is at the Father's right hand. What is he saying by stating what he sees? That Jesus is indeed God and with the Father, and Stephen knows this, and none of them who claim to be spiritual. It is so offensive to his audience that they rush forward and carry him outside the city to be executed. They stone him to death, which is a horrible, horrific death, given to those who commit blasphemy. They cast their garments at a young man named Saul, who was one of the Pharisees.

Stephen asks Jesus to receive His spirit. He is submitting to his death, and in graciousness and kindness, he asks God not to hold Stephen's death against his killers, which is an echo of what Jesus had stated at his crucifixion. Luke 23:34

We have the whole world turned against us. We have the prince of the power of the air, the world system, and the sin nature of so many people who hate God. Persecution of some sort is always possible, in some context. The call to come to Christ is also the call to die on His behalf. **Matthew 24:9**. God is always going to deliver us. He will either deliver us from our persecution or He will deliver us to heaven.

When we consider the presence of God, the resurrection from the dead, and the eternal Kingdom, our deaths are not the worst thing that can happen. Falling away.

Matthew 10:33.

Being called to be a believer means that we are also being called to be afflicted by this world. The world hates Jesus; sooner or later, it will hate us.

We are to persevere in our faith, proclaiming Christ no matter the cost.

We are to rejoice in our suffering. **1 Peter 4:12-19**

If we are to pass... "To live is Christ, to die is what?? Gain..."