



The following is the summary of the Sunday sermon that is sent to the body at Steadfast in an email called "The Weekly"

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## **Acts 6-7**

### **The Witness of Stephen**

#### **The Jerusalem Church Meets a Ministry Challenge, 6:1-7**

It is late AD 34 into early AD 35. Not everything was working smoothly in the early church. There were ethnic issues to sort out, always difficult in a community open to all types of people. The problem was that Hellenistic women were not being cared for as well as the Hebrew widows in Jerusalem. What was the role of the Apostles here? Will this divert their attention from the priorities God had for them? As the community grew and became more complex, it restructured itself to meet these fresh needs. The Apostles chose seven individuals to solve the problem. This choice introduces us to Stephen, the key character of chapters 6 and 7.

#### **Stephen's Ministry and Arrest, 6:8-15**

It is April AD 35. Stephen began preaching and performing Messianic miracles among the Hellenistic-Jewish synagogues in Jerusalem. Many of these Jews were Jews of the Diaspora. "The Synagogue of the Freedmen" refers to Jews who had been enslaved but were now free. Some in this Hellenistic synagogue rose up against him but could not overcome his brilliant defense of the truth. As they incited others to oppose and trap Stephen, they falsely charged that Jesus would destroy the Temple and cancel the Law (vv. 13-14). Stephen was seized. The center of the hostility toward Stephen was threefold: blasphemy, the Temple in association with the Law and Jesus.

#### **Stephen's Speech Before the Sanhedrin and His Martyrdom, 7:1-60**

This is the longest address in Acts. In his historical overview of Israel, Stephen developed two themes: God had raised up various leaders whom the Jews failed to recognize and, since they fell into idolatry, they responded inappropriately to God's presence in the Tabernacle and the Temple. The Temple was never designed to confine God but was intended to be a place of worship to Him alone as the one true God. Stephen demonstrated their inadequate understanding of Christians, God's will, the Temple, the Law and God Himself.

Stephen's overview of Israel's history moved chronologically:

- Abraham, vv. 2b-8
- Joseph, vv. 9-16
- God and Moses, vv. 17-43
- Tabernacle and Temple, vv. 44-50
- The history of rejecting the Spirit, vv. 51-53.

Stephen was then stoned to death, with Saul present as a witness. Jesus stood to receive Stephen into heaven, clarifying that Stephen did indeed speak for God and was thereby vindicated by Him. The narrative of Stephen also demonstrated that the church was moving away from Judaism.

Take some time this week to read Acts 6 and 7. As you read prayerfully reflect on these questions:

- In chapter 6:1-7 we see two themes: Priorities in ministry and seeking to meet human needs. The Apostles established clear boundaries and priorities so that they could do what God wanted them to do. How important is it for you to set boundaries and set priorities for your life?
- Stephen manifested zeal in his ministry for Jesus. How would you define zeal? Do you exhibit zeal as you represent Jesus? What does that zeal look like?
- As you read Stephen's address, you see a clear understanding of the history of Israel as well as a clear understanding of doctrine. Could you write a brief history of your life, demonstrating God's faithfulness to you, despite your sin and your various struggles? How important is it to have a sense of history and doctrine?
- When Stephen died, he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father, welcoming him to heaven. Does that give you hope? In what sense does it give you hope?

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