

Restore Small Group Questions - Acts Week 11 - The First Martyr —3/30/2025

SCRIPTURES (NIV)

Acts 6:8-10 - Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. **9** Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. **10** But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke. Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." **12** So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. **13** They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. **14** For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us." **15** All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Matthew 10:16-20 - **16** "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. **17** Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. **18** On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. **19** But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, **20** for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Matthew 26:59-63 - **59** The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. **60** But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward **61** and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" **62** Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" **63** But Jesus remained silent.

Acts 7:35-39 - **35** "This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?' He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. **36** He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness. **37** "This is the Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.'^[a] **38** He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us. **39** "But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.

Acts 7:54-60 - **54** When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. **55** But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. **56** "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." **57** At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, **58** dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the

witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Luke 23:46 - ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Luke 23:33-34 - When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Acts 8:1a - And Saul approved of their killing him.

KEY POINTS

In Matthew 6:9-10 (NIV), Jesus taught the disciples how to pray — “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*”. We need to ask ourselves the question: “Could I pray this prayer if I’m faced with a situation of EITHER my life OR God’s kingdom advancing? If God wants His kingdom to advance (come) through my death, could I do it? This is what the early church disciples faced as they proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. Death visited them in the form of Ananias and Sapphira and the martyrdom of Stephen. In the former, death dealt a very hard lesson to early believers and in the latter, death created a stark reality of what following Jesus could cost. Stephen paid the ultimate price with his life but interestingly, his story mirrored and connected with the life, trial, death and love demonstrated by Jesus.

CONNECTION #1 - Stephen’s Life Mirrored Jesus Life — — Like Jesus,

- Stephen was “a man full of God’s grace & power with great signs and wonders”.
- Stephen was a “kingdom bearer” in word and deed that brought the Kingdom of God to earth.
- Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit and demonstrated God’s power on earth.
- Stephen submitted to God’s authority, His rule and reign.

We too are “Kingdom bearers” surrendered to God’s authority in everything we do and everywhere we go. The more we are submitted to Jesus, the more we will be empowered....the more we are empowered by God the more His kingdom is grown....the more His kingdom is grown, the more opposition we will encounter.

CONNECTION #2 - Stephen’s Trial Mirrored Jesus Trial — — Like Jesus, Stephen was falsely accused. But, unlike Jesus, Stephen defended himself with a long oration (Jesus remained silent). Stephen’s speech focused on God’s desire to rescue and fulfill promises through designated men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses who were sent to reach and rescue all humanity....but they were rejected by stiff-necked people who constantly rejected the rescue attempt. (See ACTS Chapter 7 for full speech). Stephen told the Sanhedrin that they were like their ancestors by resisting the Holy Spirit which led to the killing of the Messiah.

We are encouraged not to be stiff-necked, stubborn, obstinate and unwilling to be taught or to understand. As disciples of Jesus we must learn to live with Jesus and love others like Jesus throughout our life’s journey.

CONNECTION #3 - Stephen's death mirrored Jesus death — — Like Jesus,

- Stephen's accusers went into a blind rage and killed him.
- Stephen committed his spirit to God
- Stephen's manner of death reassured the believers that God was with him.

We are encouraged to meditate on the ramifications of this evil scene and think how we would feel and respond. Would we respond like the early church believers?

CONNECTION #4 - Stephen's Love Mirrored Jesus Love — — Like Jesus,

- Stephen forgave his accusers
- Stephen's sacrifice demonstrated God's love that ultimately advanced God's Kingdom.

CONCLUSION - We will face obstacles - Forgive those that have hurt you and we are encouraged to love like Stephen....confronting truth in love for our enemies salvation. We must be "kingdom bringers"!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS -

1. Putting yourself in the sandals of the early church believers, what would be your thoughts about the potential fate of the church after witnessing Stephen's death and the roller coaster ride of the first years after Jesus Ascension?
2. So far in our study of Acts, much of it has dealt with keeping a consistent and complete Gospel message, how it is shared, and how it is lived out in different people groups and cultures. But now we are seeing a growing conflict between the Jewish religious leaders and the leaders of the Christians. Do you think Stephen's trial and death were a catalyst for the continuing spread of the Gospel and God's kingdom? Why? What were the issues causing such a divergence between Judaism and Christianity?
3. How would we have conducted ourselves if we were being executed by wicked religionists because of our faith in Christ? Is this a question too far-fetched to consider today?
4. Discuss the significance of Stephen's choice of topics for his 'defense' speech. Why did he trace Israel's history from Abraham to Moses? Is his speaking the truth of God's word an offensive or defensive weapon?
5. In conjunction with the Holy Spirit's role as the source of conviction, is God's Word of Truth a two-edged sword. What did it do in the case of the Sanhedrin? How could Stephen be so bold? In what ways can we apply Stephen's boldness in proclaiming Christ in our daily lives?
6. What impact did Stephen's martyrdom have on Saul (Paul) initially and then later in Paul's life?
7. Stephen proclaimed he saw the Son of Man (Jesus) standing at the right hand of the Father in a vision. Immediately, the Jewish leaders went ballistic, grabbed him and killed him? What, in the vision, caused them to react so drastically?
8. Discuss some ways that we have learned so far in the book of Acts that God eased the path for early Christianity to spread.
9. Could you speak like Stephen did (in detail) about Israel's history and the gospel of Jesus? What does it take to allow ourselves to do the same today? Is it worth the sacrifice?