



Acts 7

An OCF Bible Study

Acts 7

Who was Stephen? A Hellenistic Jew, he was one of seven hand-picked men chosen to wait on tables in the early church (6:5). He had outstanding spiritual credentials; he was a man full of faith, wisdom and the Holy Spirit.

What had Stephen been (falsely) charged with? Blaspheming against God, the temple, Moses and the Mosaic Law in 6:11, 13-14.

Why did Stephen start his defense with a historical review of the days of Abraham and the Patriarchs—something the Jewish leaders would be very familiar with (vv. 2-16)?

- He started at the very beginning of Judaism, with Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, to show that his Judaism was the standard, accepted, tried and true Judaism. The charges of blaspheming against God were unjustified. His point was “I believe the same thing you understand and believe. I read the same Scriptures. The only difference is that you missed the Messiah.”
- The reason he was reviewing Jewish history was to establish a link between the Jewish past and Jesus. By summarizing Jewish history, he began with a subject the Jews knew and loved—their history/their heritage. Then he used it to show that they had rejected God’s word, just like their ancestors had repeatedly done, and finally they rejected God’s Son—their Messiah. Stephen’s arguments were ultimately designed as a defense, not of Stephen, but a defense of Christianity.

The false witnesses had accused him of blaspheming against Moses. What point was Stephen trying to make in his defense (vv. 35-36)? He showed how God had been faithful to His promise to the nation of Israel by using Moses to deliver His people. By doing so, he was refuting the false charges that he was blaspheming against Moses (6:11) and speaking against the Mosaic Law (6:13). As if to say, “I think just as highly of Moses as you do. I’m not distorting the truth about Moses. I believe the same as you about Moses. Your blasphemy charges against me are baseless because I am speaking the truth about Moses.”

The false witnesses had accused Stephen of blaspheming against Moses’ teaching—the Law. How did Stephen refute their charges (vv. 37-43)? The Jews revered the Law and prided themselves on following it precisely, but Stephen was making a case that the religious leaders really rejected what Moses taught. Moses had prophesied that God would send a prophet (a Messianic promise) whom they were to listen to: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.” (Deuteronomy 18:15)

What two examples did Stephen provide of Israel’s disobedience (vv. 40-43)? Their worship of the golden calf at Mount Sinai and their worship of Moloch and Rephan throughout their forty years in the wilderness. **What was his point?** The people worshiped idols repeatedly throughout their history. God was faithful and kept His promises, but the people disobeyed Him and did not keep their part of the covenant.

The Sanhedrin had accused Stephen of blaspheming against the Temple. What was the Jews’ attitude toward the Temple? To the Jew, the temple was the holiest place on earth, the center of worship as well as the center of God’s dealings with man. The Jewish leaders of Stephen’s day attached inordinate importance to the Temple, as they did to the Mosaic Law. They had distorted God’s view of the temple as they had distorted His meaning in the Law.

How did Stephen address their argument about blaspheming against the Temple (vv. 44-50)? When Stephen said, “... the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands.” (v. 48), he was saying, “I know all about the Temple and its history, but you have turned it into an idol.” He quotes from Isaiah 66:1-2: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the Lord. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.” Isaiah warned that buildings are not what counts with God but rather the moral and spiritual condition of peoples’ lives. God values a broken and contrite heart above all. (Psalm 51:16-17)

How did Stephen conclude his defense to the court (vv. 51-53)? By indicting (formally accusing/charging) his accusers. They had brought charges against him, but now he brought more serious charges against them.

Acts 7

How did Stephen describe the religious leaders of the council? He described them as stiff-necked with uncircumcised hearts and ears. Almost twenty times in the Old Testament God calls Israel stiff-necked, a figure of speech for being self-willed.

What sins did Stephen say the Jews were guilty of? They did the same things as their fathers—resisting the Holy Spirit, persecuting the prophets, murdering those who predicted the coming of the Messiah and disobedience.

The greatness of Stephen’s sermon lies not only in its content, but especially in its courage. He was confronting the same group of leaders who had condemned Jesus to death on the same basis of false testimony by lying witnesses.

How did the Sanhedrin respond to Stephen’s charges (v. 54)? “Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.” Their emotional pain was excruciating!

What did Stephen see (vv. 55-56)? The glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God

Why was Jesus standing? To welcome Stephen home. To honor him as the first Christian martyr.

How did the Sanhedrin then act (vv. 57-58)? Covering their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and stoned him. These were distinguished older men, religious leaders. The reaction of the Sanhedrin seems extreme, but is typical of those rejecting God and lost in spiritual insanity. They wail in agony and cover their ears at the revelation of God, which they regard as blasphemy.

At whose feet did the witnesses lay their garments (v. 58)? A young man named Saul.

What observations do you have about the way Stephen died? Stephen was willing to die rather than compromise. The “first Christian martyr” died calling on Jesus to receive his spirit and to not charge this sin against the murderers. In doing so, he responded just as his Master had on the Cross.

What role did Saul have (8:1)? Watching, approving, an accomplice to murder.

What was accomplished by Stephen’s death? It ignited the first mass persecution of Christian Jews (8:1). Also, Stephen’s death was somehow used by God to influence Saul: there’s a link between Stephen’s death and Saul’s conversion. Saul, the greatest missionary of all time, the one who arguably influenced the world more than anyone else, was watching. Nobody handled stoning before like Stephen. Saul never forgot Stephen’s death (Acts 22:20).

Augustine said, “If Stephen had not prayed, the church would not have had Paul.”

Application: Others are watching us to see how we handle life’s difficulties. How are you responding to those difficulties?

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®) copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. This is copyrighted material provided by Officers’ Christian Fellowship (OCF). Permission is granted for use in local groups. For more information about OCF: www.ocfusa.org.