

Stephen's Defence, and Demise

Acts 7: 1-60

Introduction:

Stephen, the deacon, or servant in the church, is given the task to care for the widows. He does this, but also preaches the Gospel and ministers to the needs of people. God uses him mightily and many come to Christ through his witness and ministry. Satan is furious, and raises up opposition, in the form of the Jewish religious leaders. They hold a trial for him, accusing him of many crimes he never did. Now he is given a chance to respond. Pay attention to the details of his response, and then how it was received. From the beginning days of the church standing up for Jesus was not easy.

Stephen's Speech – Acts 7:1-53

a. The Invitation - 7:1

1. In verse one Stephen is invited to respond to the accusations leveled against him. What kind of a response did the religious leaders expect? Is this what they received? Why might Stephen take this approach?

b. Abraham's Story – 7:2-8

2. How does Stephen address these religious leaders in verse two? What does this tell you about Stephen?
3. Why would Stephen start with Abraham, not Adam or Noah?
4. Reading verses two through eight who is the main actor? What event does Stephen show as predicted in verses 6-7?
5. In verse 8 we jump through several generations and their stories. He stops momentarily on Jacob. Why might this be?

c. Joseph's Story – 7:9-16

6. Who are the “patriarchs (a noble sounding name) mentioned in verse 9? What are they noted for?
7. Stephen jumps over many details in Joseph's life to bring us to the famine (vs. 11). Why was this important?
8. How does Joseph's story end in Stephen's account (vss. 14-16)?

d. Moses' Story – 7:17-43

9. Verse 17 refers to the time of the promise drawing near. What is Stephen referring to?
10. What event is described in verse 19? Why is this important?
11. How does Stephen describe Moses in verse 22? How does this compare to Moses' appraisal of himself in Exodus 4:10? Why the discrepancy?
12. In verses 23-29 Stephen recounts Moses' first attempt at delivering the Israelites (vs. 25). How did that go? What was the result?
13. In verses 30-34 we read of Moses' commissioning – he is chosen and sent back to Egypt. Who calls Moses? In what manner? Why is God sending Moses? What does this tell us about God?
14. In verses 35-43 we get the meat of Stephen's sermon, as he compares Moses to Jesus.
 - In verse 35 how is Moses compared to Jesus?
 - What in verse 36 shows a similarity between Jesus and Moses?
 - Verse 37 prepares us to hear about Jesus. What does Stephen remind the religious leaders of?
 - What interesting note does Stephen give in verse 38? (two actually)

- How did the people respond to Moses despite all God did through him according to verse 39? What story does Stephen recount in verses 39-41?
- What was God's response to the actions of the children of Israel? (vss. 42-43)

e. The Tabernacle – 7:44-50

15. Stephen's attention moves to the tabernacle, the tent of witness or meeting. What was the purpose of the Tabernacle?
16. Stephen then outlines briefly the history of the tabernacle – where did it go? Who wanted to build something more permanent? Who actually built a temple?
17. Stephen goes on to remind the people about the futility of trying to box God up in a building. What do we learn in verses 48-50?
18. Why might Stephen be taking the argument here to the tabernacle and temple (cf. 6:13)? How does Jesus fit into this discussion on the tabernacle?

f. The closing Remarks – 7:51-53

19. Stephen is standing before the Sanhedrin to defend himself for his very life. How does the opening words in verse 51 seem counter-productive? What truth do they contain?
20. Verse 52 zeros in on the crime the religious leaders have committed. What was it? How does this put them in succession of their ancestors? How are they different?
21. What is the final blow Stephen lands in verse 53? Why was this also addressed (cf. 6:13)?

Stephen's Death – Acts 7:54-60

22. As Stephen turned the accusations of violating the Temple and the Law back on the religious leaders, how did they respond? (vs. 54)
23. While the religious leaders looked like demonized animals, how was Stephen doing (vs. 55)? What does he see? What is the position of Jesus in his vision? Is this important?
24. Stephen reveals his vision to the religious leaders. How do they respond? (vss. 56-58)
25. Who do the witnesses (the witnesses must throw the first stones) leave their coats with (vs. 58)? How might what happened here affect this man?
26. What are Stephen's final words? (vs. 60) What does this tell us about the power of the Holy Spirit within him?

Conclusion:

Stephen's ministry is cut short by men who care more for their position and tradition than the Word of the Lord. What a contrast between them and Stephen. One commentator writes:

You who can transfer to canvas such scenes as these, in which the rage of hell grins horribly from men, as they sit condemned by a frail prisoner of their own, and see heaven beaming from his countenance and opening full upon his view—I envy you, for I find no words to paint what, in the majesty of the divine text, is here so simply told.¹

It is so clear who reflects the spirit of Christ. It was not the religious leaders – it was the simple deacon. What set Stephen apart? The presence of the Holy Spirit within him. Who do we want to identify with today – Sanhedrin or Stephen?

¹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). [*Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 181). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

