



Discussion Notes

Stephen's Story, Part 3 • Acts 7:1-60

March 29, 2026 • Kirsten Anonby

Main Theme:

Stephen's speech evokes a violent response in the Sanhedrin. Despite the miracles, new life, and joy that is evident in the new Jesus community, the Jewish religious leaders cannot accept it. They cannot accept Stephen's clear call away from the Temple, nor can they receive his rebuke.

Sermon Outline:

The Accusation

- People from the Greek speaking Synagogue of the Freedmen.
- Accused of speaking against the Temple and against the Law.
- An attack on the temple is an affront to their customs and identity and an economic threat.

Stephen's Speech

- Not a self-defense, but a defense of the way of Jesus.
- A recounting of Jewish history to make two main points:
 - God has always worked outside of Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple.
 - The Jews have rejected God's messengers throughout their history.
- Stephens concluding statements:
 - The Most High does not live in a house made by human hands. By limiting God's activity to the temple, the religious leaders have made the temple an idol.
 - The religious leaders are stiff-necked, just like their ancestors, They have proved that they are like them through their betrayal and murder of Jesus.

Stephen's Death

- The Sanhedrin gnash their teeth — expressing their rage.
- Stephen sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God — an echo of Jesus' words in Mark 14:62, which were seen as blasphemous by the Sanhedrin.

- The Sanhedrin rush at Stephen and take him to be stoned.
- Stephen makes two statements that are an echo of Jesus' words on the cross:
 - "Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit."
 - "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."
- When Stephen, a man full of the Spirit, dies, he dies like Jesus.

What do we learn about the Gospel from Stephen?

- It's more expansive than we know.
- It can be difficult to receive.
- It's relentlessly focused on the person of Jesus.

One key way in which Stephen's death was not like Jesus' death:

- Stephen was joyful when he died because the Spirit is with him. He sees an image of Jesus, he knows he is not alone.
- Jesus is in agony in every way, and is fully and completely alone. He bears the punishment of our sin that he did not deserve.
- Because Jesus faced the worst alone, Stephen didn't have to. Because of what Jesus did, Stephen (and we) are upheld by the Spirit.



Study Questions

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Engage:

- Spend some time looking at Acts 7. This may be too long of a chapter to read out loud, but look at the different sections of Stephen's speech. At your initial reading, what stands out to you? Why do you think he focuses on these particular historical figures?
- What questions do you have about the text?

Observe:

- Context — Take a look back at Acts 6. What's important for us to remember from this earlier chapter about Stephen?
- One of Stephen's key points in this speech is that God has worked powerfully in Jewish history outside of the temple or the promised land. Look at the text and try to find the examples Stephen uses to make this point?
- Another key point Stephen makes is that the Jewish people have always rejected God's messengers. Look through his speech: what examples does he use to make this point?
- What do you think Stephen is saying about the Temple?
- Why do you think this speech gets Stephen killed?
- How does Stephen's death echo Jesus' death: what words of Jesus does he repeat? What point might the author Luke be making here by making those connections?

Apply:

- What challenges or encourages you in Stephen's speech?
- What challenges or encourages you about Stephen's death?
- Pray for each other.