

<sup>57</sup> At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, <sup>58</sup> dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

Ironically this lynch mob substantiates what Stephen had said about them, *Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? Vs. 52*

Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Luke purposely names Saul/Apostle Paul's role as a persecutor. In order to magnify the extent of his coming transformation in Acts Chapter 9.

<sup>59</sup> While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." <sup>60</sup> 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.

**NT Wright:** *Stephen just laid a pretty ferocious charge against the Jewish leaders in his speech. But in his death, he shouts a prayer at the top of his voice as the rocks are flying and his body is being smashed and crushed asking God not to hold this sin against them. If we knew nothing more about Christianity except the fact that their martyrs called down blessings and forgiveness instead of curses and judgement..., we would have a central though no doubt puzzling, insight into the whole business of Christianity.*

#### **Community Group Questions:**

1. Do you think Stephen knew he was going to die this day? If the answer is yes, see if you can imagine such a courage as a follower of Christ?
2. Read all of Chapter 7's defense. Stephen's indictment of the ruling authorities is built upon what argument?
3. Re-read the Roman passages in your notes; what two main arguments does Paul make for why Heaven is open to us?
4. If we're all sinful and Jesus alone can redeem you, why do you still pick at the speck in others eyes?



## The First Christian Martyr Acts Chapters 6 & 7

### The Courage and Witness of Stephen

#### **Stephen's Defense from Acts Chapter 7:**

<sup>17</sup> "As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. <sup>18</sup> Then 'a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.' <sup>19</sup> He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. Acts 7:17-19

[Moses then enters the story in Israel's history.](#)

Which Stephen covers in verses 20-36 of his sermon.

#### **Stephen quotes Moses :**

"This is the Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.' Acts 7:37

The Sanhedrin knew all about this scripture that it pointed to the Messiah who one day would come.

Stephen then reminds the Council that while Moses was up in the mountain of Sinai getting the Law from God, the Israelites were having an orgy down below.

"But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. <sup>40</sup> They told Aaron, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!' <sup>41</sup> That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. Acts 7:39-41

<sup>51</sup> "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! <sup>52</sup> Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— <sup>53</sup> you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it."

Stephen accuses them of being no different than their ancestors who killed the prophets, because they have killed their Messiah.

**Stephen's argument is this:** The history of Moses is like the foreshadowing of the history of Jesus the Messiah.

**Moses** was a deliverer to his own people; so was **Jesus**.

**Moses** was a prince who became a slave to rescue slaves;  
so did **Jesus**.

**Moses** offered himself and was rejected; so did **Jesus**.

**The conclusion of his argument is predictable:**

<sup>54</sup> When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup> 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. <sup>56</sup> "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Acts 7:54-56

## 1. The courage of Stephen, what motivated it?

- He knows in his heart he has the right in Christ to really stand before the face of God.
- Because if you can stand before God and look God in the face, then you don't have to be afraid of anything else.

<sup>56</sup> "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

- Stephen acts like anybody can go in. Heaven is open now. We can go in. It's not closed off.

Stephen says to them, <sup>53</sup> *you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.*"

You have never kept the law, but God's Son did it for you, and yet, <sup>52</sup> *Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—*

The Christian faith says you have to be perfect to get in, but Jesus has done it for you. Every other religion says, *"Try your best. Live up to the standards, and maybe God will let you in. Maybe you'll be saved."*

## Here's our human condition before God:

For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. <sup>10</sup> As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Romans 3:9-12

## Here's God's solution for this condition:

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> **This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.** There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:21-24

"I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God. Luke 12:8

Stephen understood the minute he was being condemned by an earthly court, he looked to heaven and he saw himself being vindicated by the heavenly court.