

Acts of the Apostles

Week 8: Acts 6:8-8:1

Stephen Seized (6:8-15)

- Stephen, one of the seven original deacons, takes center stage in 6:8 displaying many of the same qualities as the apostles (see Acts 4:33).
 - o He is full of grace and power and performs wonders and signs (v 8).
 - o He also faces opposition from the Jewish leaders (v9).
 - o The Spirit fills him with wisdom and gives him the words he needs to respond to Jewish opposition (see Luke 12:12; 21:15) (v 10).
- Stephen, a Greek speaking Jew, was attempting to spread the gospel among Greek speaking Jews in the same way that the Apostles were doing among Aramaic speaking Jews.
- Since the leaders could not overcome Stephen through argumentation, they turned to deceit, stirring up the crowd to turn against Stephen through false accusations that he had blasphemed Moses and God. Stephen was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin (vv 11-14).
 - o The basic charge was that Stephen was attacking the Temple and the Law and attempting to persuade Jewish people to abandon the customs of their faith.
 - o Jesus had talked about the destruction of the Temple (Luke 21:5f) and that he would replace it with another (Mark 14:58; 15:29).
 - o The Synagogue rulers did not pick up on the good news of Jesus's message and instead only viewed Stephen's message as a threat to their way of life.
- Luke notes that when the leaders looked to Stephen for a response, his face was like that of an angel. Marshall explains, "The description is of a person who is close to God and reflects some of his glory as a result of being in his presence" (139).

Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin (7:1-53)

- Stephen responds to the Synagogue leaders' charge with a lengthy speech in which he makes two main points.
 - o The Jews repeatedly rejected the leaders that God raised up as their deliverers.
 - o God was never contained in the Temple. The Temple was only a part of God's overall plan for redeeming the world.
- Lessons from Abraham (7:2-8)
 - o God first spoke to Abraham outside of the Promised Land (vv 2-3).
 - o Even though Abraham settled in the Promised Land, the true fulfillment of God's promise resided in the future (vv 4-8).
- Lessons from Joseph (7:9-16).
 - o Joseph is an early example of a leader called by God but rejected by his people (vv 9-14).

- Joseph's family all died before God had fulfilled his promise to Abraham, but their burial in Canaan served as a sign that God had not forgotten his people (vv 15-16).
- Lessons from Moses (7:17-43).
 - God raised Moses to be a deliverer for his people, but he was initially rejected (vv 17-29; see specifically 7:25).
 - God spoke to Moses through the burning bush, more evidence that God is not limited to the Temple grounds (vv 30-36).
 - Even though Moses was "ruler and judge" (v 35) and performed "wonders and signs" (v 36) the people still rejected his leadership and "in their hearts turned back to Egypt" (v 39) and worshiped false gods (v 41).
- Lessons from the Temple (7:44-50)
 - God made himself known both in the Tabernacle which moved from place to place and the Temple in Jerusalem.
 - Never was God limited to such places for "the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands" (v 48).
 - Failure to remember this is one of the reasons for the Babylonian exile.
- Stephen answers the accusations with accusations of his own (7:51-53).
 - The leaders are "stiff-necked," an echo of the people of God in the OT (see Deuteronomy 10:16; 2 Kings 17:14; Jeremiah 7:26; 17:23; 19:15).
 - They resist the Holy Spirit and are like those who killed the prophets who "predicted the coming of the Righteous One" (vv 51-52).
 - They received the law but did not obey it (v 53).

Stephen Stoned (7:54-8:1)

- The leaders responded to Stephen with anger and the gnashing of teeth, a sign of rage (v 54).
- Stephen experienced a special filling of the Spirit which enabled him to enjoy a heavenly vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of God, a reminder that God vindicated Jesus's faithfulness and would do the same for him (vv 55-56).
- The leaders considered Stephen's words blasphemous and shouted to drown him out. They then seized him, drug him out of the city, and stoned him (vv 57-58).
- Stephen's final act of faithfulness is to pray for himself and for his enemies (v 59).
 - Stephen prays to Jesus as if he is God quoting Psalm 31:5.
 - Stephen has pastoral concern for the very people who are persecuting him.
 - The mention of Saul foreshadows the deep truth that through the grace of God the enemies of the gospel can become its greatest advocates.
- Saul may have been a member of the Sanhedrin (see Acts 26:10) or a leader of the Synagogue that brought the accusations against Stephen.

Sources

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David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teaching the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids MI: BakerBooks, 2017).

I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1980).