

THE MINISTRY OF STEPHEN (Acts 6:1-8:1)

Acts 1– 8 includes three ways Satan seeks to defeat the Church.

First is _____.

Second, we saw that _____ is a tool of Satan. He seduced Ananias and Sapphira to be greedy and jealous.

Third, Satan uses _____ and _____. Acts 6 reveals two types of conflict. The first conflict is between believers. The second is between Stephen and some synagogue members.

How the apostles responded to conflict (Acts 6: 1-7).

Conflicts are like temptations. That is, they come to all people.

First, let us look at the _____. *“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6: 1).*

_____—How they handled the complaint:

1. They didn't become defensive nor attack the ones complaining. They separated the problem from the persons.
2. They were open to change. Sometimes methods need to change.
3. They let the people help make the decisions, choosing deacons who were filled with the Spirit and with wisdom. All seven men had Greek names. This is significant because they were Grecian Jews.

1. A new level of ministry began.

2. The church continued to grow.

“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6: 7).

How the synagogue members responded to conflict (Acts 6: 8-15)

“Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)— Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen” (Acts 6: 8-9).

In Acts 5—“Barnabas” = Son of encouragement

In Acts 6-7—“Stephen” = Crown. (Crowned with Holy Spirit and wisdom)

Stephen’s opponents were from a synagogue. Synagogue is an important word. It appears 56 times in the New Testament. *Synagogues were buildings where Jews met. The purposes of synagogues were worship, education, and government. Some think there were about 400 synagogues in Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Stephen’s opponents made some mistakes:

- They refused to submit to _____ and the _____.
“They could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke” (Acts 6: 10). Stephen did not depend upon himself, but upon the Holy Spirit speaking through him. These men were stubborn.
- They resisted _____. The worst thing they could think to say was that Jesus wanted to “change the customs” (Acts 6: 14)!
- They used _____ and authority to silence truth. *“They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin” (Acts 6: 12).*

Responding rightly to conflict is a skill. The apostles did four things right.

1. They did not become defensive.
2. They did not attack those who disagreed with them.
3. They were open to change.
4. And they let others help make decisions.

In contrast, the synagogue members made four mistakes.

1. They refused to submit to wisdom and the Spirit.
2. They ignored the ideas and attacked the speaker.
3. They resisted all change.
4. Finally, they used force to silence truth.

Think of some of your past conflicts. What did you do right? What mistakes did you make? What conflicts are you in now?

A Study of the Book of Acts

Class 3

FIFTEEN HISTORICAL FACTS IN STEPHEN'S SPEECH

Historical Facts	Scripture
God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia. He called him to leave his relatives and country. Abraham obeyed and left the land of the land of the Chaldeans (Babylonians).	Genesis 11:31-12:5 Nehemiah 9:7 Acts 7:2-5
God promised to give Canaan to Abraham and his seed. First, however, they would be slaves for about 400 years. Then God would punish the nation that enslaved them.	Exodus 1:8-11; 12:40 Acts 7:5-6 Galatians 3:17
Circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham.	Genesis 17:9-14 Acts 7:8
Abraham's descendants were Isaac, Jacob, and the 12 patriarchs, or grandfathers of the Jews.	Genesis 21:2-4; 25:26 Acts 7:8
The patriarchs were jealous of Joseph. They sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him. He rescued Joseph, gave him wisdom, and made him ruler over all of Egypt.	Genesis 37; 41:39-43 Acts 7:9-10
Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and rescued them from the famine. Jacob and his own family, about 75 people, went down to Egypt.	Genesis 42-46 Acts 7:11-14
The time for God to fulfill His promise to Abraham grew near. The number of Israelites greatly increased in Egypt. A new king arose who did not know Joseph. He persecuted the Israelites.	Exodus 1:7-22 Acts 7:17-19
<i>Note in #2 that Stephen uses the round number of 400. Paul refers to a period of 430 years (Galatians 3:17). Paul seems to say the 430 years includes the time from the promises to the Law. God promised Abraham that his seed would be in bondage 400 years (Exodus 12:40-41). God renewed this promise to Jacob (Genesis 46:1-4). Thus Paul probably refers to the period from Jacob's promise to the Law.</i>	
Then Moses was born and hidden for 3 months. Outside, Pharaoh's daughter found him. She raised him as her own son. He was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.	Exodus 2:1-10 Acts 7:20-22
At age 40, Moses thought his own people would recognize that God was using him to rescue them. But they did not. They rejected him as their ruler and judge. He fled to Midian. There, God gave him two sons.	Exodus 2:11-22 Acts 7:23-29
At age 80, an angel appeared to Moses at the burning bush. This is the same Moses the Israelites rejected. God Himself sent Moses to be their ruler and deliverer.	Exodus 3 Acts 7:30-36
Moses promised that God would send a special prophet from among their own people.	Deuteronomy 18:15,18 Acts 7:37-38
The Jewish fathers refused to obey Moses. Instead, they rejected him and turned their hearts back to Egypt. They made a gold calf and worshipped it.	Exodus 32 Acts 7:39-41
God rejected them. He left them to worship their idols. Also, He promised to send them into exile beyond Babylon.	Amos 5:25-27 Acts 7:42-43
The Israelites had the tent in the desert. This tent contained the Commandments. Moses made the tent by the pattern God gave to him. The tent remained until the tent of David.	Exodus 25:8-40 Acts 7:44-45
David desired to build a place for God to dwell. But Solomon built the temple. Still, the Most High does not live in houses built by humans. Heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool. He created everything!	1 Kings 8:17; 6:1-38 Isaiah 66:1-2 Acts 7:46-50

6 Truths Woven Into Stephen's Message

1. God may use laypeople to bring _____. Stephen was the first believer to preach in a synagogue.

2. God works through _____.
3. God is too big to limit to one place.
4. Children usually follow in the footsteps of their _____.
(The greatest theme of Stephen's message is rejection.)
5. We reflect what we gaze at. (*Acts 7:54-60*) Life is a mirror. It reflects back to us what we focus on.
6. God uses problems as a source of blessings. Stephen's death is the first example. He died full of the Spirit. His final words were "*Lord do not hold this sin against them*" (*Acts 7: 60*). But the greatest blessing of his earthly life came as he "*fell asleep*" (*Acts 7: 60*). He "*looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God.*" And he saw "*Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father*" (*Acts 7: 55-56*). Other passages in Scripture speak of Jesus sitting at the Father's right hand (*Mark 14: 62; Luke 22: 69; Heb. 1: 3, 13; 8: 1; 10: 12; 12: 2*).

Saul was present when Stephen was killed.

THE MINISTRY OF PHILIP (Acts 8)

Recall that Acts 1: 8 gives a good outline of Acts.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (*Acts 1: 8*).

Acts 8 is a key chapter. It is a chapter about *evangelism. Evangelism comes from a Greek word that means "to tell the good news." To evangelize is to tell someone the good news of Jesus Christ.

Acts 1– 7 shows us how the good news spread in Jerusalem.

Acts 8 tells how believers began to evangelize in Judea and Samaria.

The chart that follows shows several principles of evangelism in Acts 8.

A Study of the Book of Acts

Class 3

Principle of Evangelism	Scripture
God uses circumstances to spread His Kingdom	Acts 8:1-4
Every believer is a witness for Christ	Acts 8:1,4
The Word is a seed.	Acts 8:4
One reaps where another has already sown. Philip reaped where Jesus had sown earlier. Peter reaped where Philip had sown earlier.	John 4:34-38 Acts 8:5, 40; 9:32-42
Believers should witness first in Jerusalem, in their own culture.	Acts 1:8 and Acts 1-8
The gospel is for the whole world.	Acts 1:8; 8:4
God cares about a multitude or one person.	Acts 8:5-6, 26-29
Miraculous signs help people accept the gospel.	Acts 8:6, 13
God rewards those who seek Him.	Acts 8:26-40
New believers need to be baptized in water and the Spirit.	Acts 8:12-13, 38
God guides Spirit-filled believers to witness for Him.	Acts 8:4, 8, 29
Those who receive Jesus Christ find great joy.	Acts 8:8, 39

The Jews believed all Samaritans were unclean. Why? The Samaritans were only part Jewish. Assyria captured the northern ten tribes of Israel in 722 B.C. As time went on, some of the Jews married with captives from other nations. These mixed marriages had mixed beliefs. Jews of Jerusalem believed Samaritans had rejected Moses. But they offered animal sacrifices like the Jews—only on Mt. Gerazim.

“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8: 14-16).

They were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

God affected crowds. But He still values the individual, and sends us one on one.

Person God Guided	Acts
Philip to the Ethiopian	8:26-29
Ananias to Saul of Tarsus	9:10-19
Peter to Cornelius	10:9-26
Paul to Lydia and others	16:9-15

HOMEWORK:

Are all who are filled with the Spirit full of wisdom? Explain and illustrate.

Why is it unwise to silence truth with force?

Why does the Church need the insights of various nations and people?

How did God use Stephen's death to fulfill His will?