

7. Discussion: (a) What evidence did Stephen offer to back up his accusation that the Hebrew people, including the High Council, were stubborn people? (b) What comfort did the Holy Spirit bring to Stephen when faced with the anger of the Council? (c) What might this experience of Stephen mean to you, if some day, in the future, you were to be threatened with persecution due to your faith? (d) Why was it important for Stephen to speak out about the vision he witnessed? (e) What evidence do we have that Paul must have agreed with the execution of Stephen? (f) What impresses you most about Stephen and how he died?

An Interactive Life Application Bible Study of the Acts of the Apostles for Small Groups

Key: *Blue = New Testament* *Red = Words of Jesus*

Green = Old Testament Quotes

Lesson 10

1. Introduction: In lesson 9 Stephen described to the High Council how God appointed Moses to lead the people out into the desert and away from bondage to the Egyptians. Throughout his defense, Stephen continued to affirm his loyalty to his Hebrew heritage.

2. Stephen describes events in the wilderness.

Acts 7:38-43 *Moses was with our ancestors, the assembly of God's people in the wilderness, when the angel spoke to him at Mount Sinai. And there Moses received life-giving words to pass on to us.*

³⁹ *"But our ancestors refused to listen to Moses. They rejected him and wanted to return to Egypt. ⁴⁰ They told Aaron, 'Make us some gods who can lead us, for we don't know what has become of this Moses, who brought us out of Egypt.' ⁴¹ So they made an idol shaped like a calf, and they sacrificed to it and celebrated over this thing they had made. ⁴² Then God turned away from them and abandoned them to serve the stars of heaven as their gods! In the book of the prophets it is written,*

'Was it to me you were bringing sacrifices and offerings during those forty years in the wilderness, Israel?

[See Amos 5:25]

⁴³ *No, you carried your pagan gods—the shrine of Molech, the star of your god Rephah and the images you made to worship them.*

So I will send you into exile as far away as Babylon.'

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[Note: Angels are *messengers* who speak for God. Stephen briefly summarized the persistent idolatry of God's people. Rather than worshiping the Creator and carefully obeying his Laws, they turned to false gods that were often worshiped by the surrounding nations. Worship of the evil Ammonite god, Molech, included burning their babies in fire as offerings to him. Rephah was probably a goddess representing Saturn. In ancient fertility cults, ceremonies of the gods and goddesses and those who worshiped them, often included evil sexual orgies.]

3. Discussion: (a) Where did Moses get the life-giving words to pass on to the People of God in the wilderness and also to us today? Can you describe some of those words? (b) What are some ways God speaks to his people today? (c) Compare the way the People of God rebelled against Moses and ways people today sometimes rebel against God (reasons, similarities and contrasts). (d) Why do you think God's People preferred idolatry to following the Laws of worship that God gave to the people through Moses. (e) Can you give examples of how even yet today, many people prefer to fit into the evils of our culture, rather than to seek to live by the truth revealed in the Bible? (f) How did God punish the idolatry of his People?

4. Stephen describes the Tabernacle and the Temple.

Acts 7:44-50 "Our ancestors carried the Tabernacle with them through the wilderness. It was constructed according to the plan God had shown to Moses. ⁴⁵ Years later, when Joshua led our ancestors in battle against the nations that God drove out of this land, the Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory. And it stayed there until the time of King David.

⁴⁶ "David found favor with God and asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who actually built it. ⁴⁸ However, the Most High doesn't live in temples made by human hands. As the prophet says, [See Isaiah 66:1-2]

⁴⁹ 'Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
Could you build me a temple as good as that?'
asks the LORD.

'Could you build me such a resting place?

⁵⁰ Didn't my hands make both heaven and earth?'

5. Discussion: (a) Can you describe how the Tabernacle and the Temple symbolically represent how people may enter the presence of God. [Refer to Hebrews chapter 9] (b) What replaces the Temple today? [See 1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19]

6. Stephen rebukes the High Council for their doubt.

Acts 7:51 "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! ⁵² Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. ⁵³ You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels."

⁵⁴ The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. ⁵⁶ And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

⁵⁷ Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him ⁵⁸ and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul. ^[also known as Paul]

⁵⁹ As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.