

ACTS CHAPTER SEVEN

Due to the different format of this chapter, I am asking you to read the entire chapter in one setting. Vs. 1-53 comprise Stephen's sermon to the council. It is the longest address in the book of Acts. As you read the sermon, keep in mind the charges that were leveled at Stephen.

1. *What 3 methods did the leaders used to "frame" Stephen? Refer back to Acts 6:11, 12 & 13.*
2. *Review the charges that were brought against Stephen in chapter 6:13 & 14. Blasphemy against: _____ (vs. 11), _____ (vs. 13) and _____ (vs. 13). Also that Jesus would _____ and change _____ (vs. 14) that Moses gave.*

In chapter 7, verse 1, the high priest asks Stephen if these charges against him were true. In today's court room, the question would be "How do you plead?" Instead of giving a one word reply, Stephen begins a lengthy review involving the history of Israel. The Sanhedrin considered themselves experts in anything connected with the history of the Jews, so they would be very interested in anything he has to say and they would be listening for any error or distortion.

He first addresses the charge of blasphemy against God. He accurately reviews the nation's history and emphasizes the sovereignty of God throughout all of it. He shows his respect for divine authority. He also points out the failings of the patriarchs in their dealings with Joseph.

Next he reviews the history of Moses. Moses was at first rejected by his people, even though God had chosen him to be their ruler and deliverer. (verse 35) Moses told the people of Israel that God would send another prophet like him. (Deut. 18:15 & Acts 7:37) Jesus was that prophet. Consider these similarities, for example:

*Moses was humbled in the desert before he became the deliverer. (Ex. 3:1-12)
Jesus humbled himself by taking on human form. (Phil 2:7&8)*

*Moses was at first rejected by the people. (Ex. 2:14 & Acts 7:27 & 28)
Jesus was rejected by the people. (John 1:11)*

*Moses was a shepherd. (Ex. 3:1)
Jesus was the good shepherd. (John 10:11-14)*

*Moses rescued his people from oppression in Egypt. (Ex. 12:31-42)
Jesus rescued His people from the oppression of sin.*

Even though the Pharisees at the time of Acts held Moses in high regard and referred to him as great leader and prophet, it was only words. The fact is that the Jews made Moses'

life miserable because of their rebellious attitudes and their outright disobedience. The Pharisees were acting more the rebels of the Old Testament than of the godly Moses. Their rejection of Christ showed what was truly in their hearts. Time and again the Jewish nation had killed their own prophets and the Pharisees were continuing the tradition.

Beginning in Acts 7:38, Stephen affirms his belief in the law as the living word of God, but then he goes on to remind the Sanhedrin of how the Israelites rejected the law and returned to idolatry.

Finally, in verses 44-50, he talks about the tabernacle. It was made exactly as God directed and it resided in the middle of their camp. It was truly a holy thing, and yet God is not confined to any space. People can communicate with God and receive His blessing without the tabernacle (or later the temple). Consider I Kings 8:27. Solomon had the right perspective on the temple. He knew that God is greater than the temple and it could never contain Him. Consider also I Kings 9:3 where God accepts the temple and says that His eyes will always be on it.

Stephen has reviewed Israel's history. Instead of being proud and haughty because they were Jewish, the people should have been humbled and repentant. Stephen had reminded them of the sin of the Israelites all throughout their history.

3. *Stephen accused the leaders of being: _____ (vs. 51)*

They didn't have a true godly respect for Moses, the law or the temple; they were just as rebellious as their ancestors had been. Look up the parable of the wineskins in Luke 5:36-39 where Jesus illustrates the unwillingness of the Pharisees to accept Jesus and the things that He wanted to teach them.

4. *Their fathers killed the prophets that told of Jesus' coming and now these leaders had _____ (Vs. 52)*

5. *Even though the angels themselves delivered the law to them , _____ (vs. 53)*

6. *What was the leader's reaction to the sermon? (vs. 54)*

This is the third time that the Sanhedrin has heard the gospel. Compare Acts 4:8-12 and Acts 5:27-32. Each time has enraged them. They have had opportunity to examine the claims and compare the scriptures. They have rejected their Messiah and persecuted those who have witnessed about Him.

7. *What vision did God give Stephen at this time? (vs. 55 & 56)*

Compare Hebrews 8:1 and notice that Jesus is seated. Why was Jesus standing during Stephen's trial? Was He ready to take action immediately if the Jews repented? At the very least it shows that He was intensely interested in the proceedings and very involved with

Stephen, His child.

8. *What was the end result of the trial? (vs. 57 & 58)*

Considering what was just discussed in question 7, could Jesus have stepped in and changed the outcome? Does this show that He didn't care what was happening? Certainly not. God had a larger plan in mind and Stephen brought more glory to God by being killed. Consider the welcome he must have received in heaven! Stephen's ministry was not a long one, but his life and death had great effect on the believers.

9. *Who is mentioned for the first time in verse 58?*

Saul's name is later changed to Paul, the apostle. What a witness Stephen was to Saul. Saul/Paul would always remember this incident and his participation in it.

10. *Read Acts 22:20. What further information is given about Saul's involvement?*

11. *What were Stephen's final words?*

Compare Stephen's words with those of Jesus in Luke 23:34.

12. *According to 2 Cor. 5:8, where was Stephen's soul immediately upon his death?*