

LESSONS THIS QUARTER

- 1) 6 March 2016..... Acts 1 Entrusted
- 2) 13 March..... Acts 2 Empowered and Unified
- 3) 20 March..... Acts 3 Benevolent
- 4) 27 March..... Luke 24 Resurrected!
- 5) 3 April..... Acts 4 Courageous
- 6) 10 April..... Acts 5 Integrity & Faithful
- 7) 17 April..... Acts 6 Selfless
- 8) 24 April..... Acts 7 Forgiving**
- 9) 1 May..... Acts 8 Obedient
- 10) 8 May..... Acts 9 Converted & Bold
- 11) 15 May..... Acts 10 Accepting
- 12) 22 May..... Acts 11 Engaging
- 13) 29 May..... Acts 12 Extraordinary

INTRODUCTION

- The first church martyr, Stephen, was a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. God is not partial to anyone, so what keeps us from being full of faith and of the Holy Spirit? And if we were full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, what would we be like?
- Stephen's story is given a good bit of real estate in Acts (68 vs out of 1,007 for about 7% of the whole book). That's quite significant for a man whose initial responsibility was to relieve the Apostles of some lower priority work, such as taking care of neglected widows.

Passage	Comments
	Hell is a place of eternal pain, and suffering in "outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth" – where "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" and where some seemingly are "beaten with many stripes" and others "with fewer stripes." IOW, there are varying degrees of punishment in Hell Mat 8:12; Mark 9:44; Luke 12:46-48
A Word on For-giveness	Jesus, while He was suffering on the Cross, asked His Father to forgive His tormentors of their deeds Luke 23:34
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This forgiveness did not grant salvation to the Lord's tormentors, but in all probability these tormentors would not be judged eternally for this particular and horrific crime – Though they would be eternally judged for all their other trespasses • If these tormentors were not forgiven, can you imagine receiving many more stripes throughout eternity for the crime of tormenting and murdering the Majestic and Holy Son of God, along with all their other sins? • Yet, Zechariah, before he was slain in the temple, asked God not to forgive his slayers, but to "observe and repay" King Joash and his henchmen for what they were about to do to him. And before the end of the year his slayers were wiped out 2Chron 24:22-26; Mat 23:35 • AND, Jeremiah asked the Lord "Let me see Your vengeance on those who plan to do me harm", and the Lord said that "I will punish them, their young men will die by the sword, and their sons and daughters will die by famine" Jer 11:20-22 • Were Zechariah and Jeremiah less spiritually mature or less loving than Stephen? No, I don't think so. Please note, that destruction came upon the slayers of Jesus and Stephen just as it came upon the slayers of Zechariah and Jeremiah. In 70 AD, Romans demolished Jerusalem and deported the people • As Jeremiah said, God judges righteously Jer 11:20

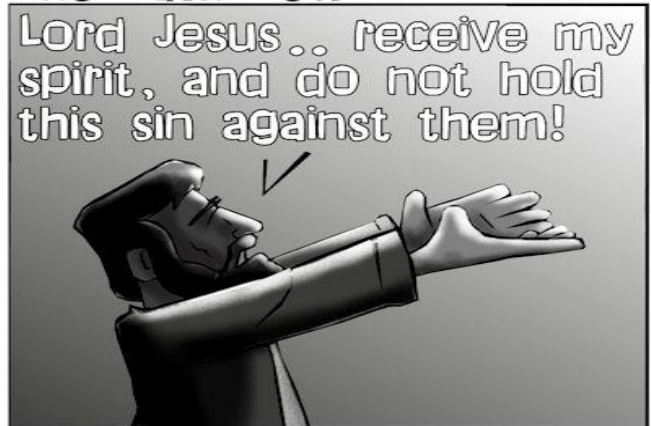
Passage	Comments
Acts 7:1-50	<p>Stephen Responds to the Charges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did Stephen, a Greek Jew, with no bibles at home become so knowledgeable of Scripture? He predominately used familiar stories found in Genesis and Exodus, but he also touched on prophecies found in Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, 2Samuel, 1Kings; and Psalms ♦ Consider this. He listened very intently in Sunday School
7:51-58	<p>Stephen Calls the Baby Ugly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are several similarities between Stephen's death and Jesus': 1) Both asked God to forgive their slayers; 2) Both died horribly; 3) Both died for their words • BUT, where Jesus was relatively silent, as a lamb to the slaughter, Stephen took the opportunity to throw a few punches: 1) You air-heads; 2) You Gentiles; 3) You can't do anything right; 4) You're just like your stupid daddies; and 5) you are godless wonders • Did Stephen needlessly bring about his own death by agitating the crowd and then conveying how much more spiritual he was by telling them of his heavenly vision? • Consider this #1 – Christians don't do well with crowds. 1) Jesus got crucified; 2) Apostles went to jail several times; 3) Paul got stoned; and 4) Paul had to flee several towns • Consider this #2 – Crowd dynamics. Crowds are easily manipulated. They stray to the lowest common denominator
For Highest Impact, Know Your Audience and know Scripture, and be filled with the Holy Spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephen was talking with people who had a similar Greek heritage. He knew what his audience needed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ To have the most impact he focused on familiar OT history, which directly tied into Jesus and the Cross • Another example. When Apostle Paul was speaking to Jews, like Stephen, he would go as far back as Moses or Abraham to make a point <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ BUT when addressing Gentiles, who did not have a Biblical heritage, Paul went to Genesis 1 and talked about God the Creator of all things Acts 17:22-24 • For us, Yes, take the Gospel to the far reaches of the world, but never miss a chance to share the Gospel within your home town, state, and to fellow countrymen
7:59	<p>Stephen Responds with Dying Love and Forgiveness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Father, Forgive them" • Stephen was asking God to extend His grace to these murderers to give them more time to repent and possibly for them to suffer less in Hell (IOW, this event would not be held to their eternal account) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Remember – Harsh judgment awaits those who reject the Truth (Prov 15:10). And every word, thought, and deed will receive just recompense for all eternity

CONCLUSION / APPLICATIONS

- Where do we typically picture Jesus being today? Is He not portrayed as "Sitting at the right hand of God"? [Luke 22:69](#)
 - ♦ EXCEPT in [Acts 7:55](#). Here we see Jesus STANDING as He welcomes Stephen into Heaven. And if Jesus is standing, we can bet so were all the Angels...standing for a man who was fearless to share the truth of the Cross to those who hated it.
 - ♦ The next time Jesus is seen off of His Throne is when He is sitting on a white horse speeding through the heavens with a host of Angels to bring final judgment on the earth [Rev 19](#)

NEXT WEEK: Acts 8. Like Philip, we can't wait for people to come to us asking to be led to the Lord. We must be bold to go and share.

The Back Pew – Jeff Larson



If 'Success in Life' is measured by what is accomplished in the face of adversity then Stephen is one of the great men in church history. [Acts 6:8-7:60](#)