



ACTS:

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Lesson 3:

Stephen and the Scattering

Background Note: *For this lesson it is helpful to know the groups who responded to the early proclamation of the gospel. First, the Palestinian or Hebraic Jews who were descended from Jews who had been exiled to Babylon but later returned to rebuild Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra. These Jews were very nationalistic and traditional – they spoke Hebrew and Aramaic. There were also Grecian or Hellenist Jews who had not returned to Palestine following the exile but had scattered around the Mediterranean Sea and had assimilated the Greek language and culture. They established Greek speaking synagogues in the cities where they lived. Also, into those Greek speaking synagogues came “God-fearing” Gentiles who sought God through the Judaic traditions.*

Read Acts 6 – 8

1. **Acts 6:1- 7** reveals that the differences of the early believers threatened to divide them as they sought to work in unity as the church. Describe how you see the Holy Spirit “with” them helping to resolve this potential conflict. What lessons for our church life can we learn from this passage?

Note: *Stephen is a Grecian Jew visiting a Greek speaking synagogue; while there he entered into the customary religious debate of the time.*

2. **Read Acts 6: 8-15.** As you read the account imagining the atmosphere in the room, why did this debate become such a heated argument?
3. Luke’s phrase, “*they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke*” (vs. 10) seems significant to understanding this event and the theme of this book. From the easy vantage point of an observer, what advice would you give to the men arguing with Stephen?
4. **(Digging Deeper)** Following an accusation that Stephen had blasphemed Moses, Luke inserts a very pointed descriptive detail in Acts 6:15. Read the following verses and share what you think Luke’s point was in including this detail. See **Exodus 34:29-35; Luke 9:28-29**

5. **Read Acts 7:1- 53.** Stephen's sermon is not a defense aimed at securing his own acquittal but is a pointed recounting of Jewish history that ends up leveling charges at the Sanhedrin? What are the historical charges that Stephen outlines? (*p.s. this is a pretty good "big picture" summary of the Old Testament*)

6. **(Digging Deeper)** The high priests asked the most important question when they asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?" (7:1) Since Stephen responded with his own charges, how can we rightly answer the question left hanging, "Which charges are true?"

7. **(Thought Question)** How does the account of the stoning of Stephen help us determine what the truth is regarding the conflict between the Sanhedrin and Stephen?

8. **Read Acts 8:1-25.** The story of Simon the Sorcerer is our first indication that receiving the Holy Spirit will not be a "cookie cutter" experience for everyone. As you compare and contrast this account with the one of receiving the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, what questions are raised in your mind? What answers do you have for those questions?

9. **Read Acts 8:26- 40.** Philip was enjoying a fruitful ministry in the area of Samaria (8:4-8), when an angel came and prompted him to move to the desert! Share a time when you were abruptly moved. With the benefit of hindsight, have you begun to see how God has used that move in your life and the lives of others?

10. With whom do you most identify in chapter 8 and why? How do the events in this chapter exemplify Paul's teaching in **Ephesians 2:11-3:13**?

Closing: Look back over this lesson and consider what you have learned about how God the Holy Spirit sustains, empowers and establishes faith in believers.