



## Aldrich Church Small Group Curriculum Week 6 -- Stephen's Defense, Acts 6:8-8:3

### Who was Stephen?

How is he characterized in Acts 6:5, 6:8-10, & 6:15?  
Our contemporary use of the term "like an angel" is probably far from the 1st century perception. Thinking of biblical stories of angels (rather than Valentines Day

cards), what do you think Luke meant by this description?

### What was Stephen accused of?

Read Acts 6:8-15, which details the accusation of the Jewish Synagogue of the Freedmen. This was a different power structure than Peter & John had encountered in Acts 4-5. This group was composed of Jews who were not originally from Israel.

Stephen's was commissioned as "one of the seven" to distribute food and assist the needy. How is it that he was drawn into these debates with the Synagogue of the Freedmen? Can we gain any insight from this into the integration of our service activities (individual or congregational) and our teaching/preaching activities?

Some groups are known for using service as a ruse to engage in evangelism. How do we unite service and witness (formally or informally) without sacrificing authenticity?

### What did Stephen say?

Stephen's speech is v e r y l o n g . The longest speech in Acts, it comprises 5% of the book. This is a clue to it's importance for Luke. Yet in reading through the speech it can seem like a basic retelling of Israel's history that could be found any number of settings. Use the following outline as a group to help you consider *what was Stephen's point* in selecting these particular aspects of Israel's history?

## **I. STEPHEN'S DEFENSE (1-53)** (adapted from [http://executableoutlines.com/acts/acts\\_07.htm](http://executableoutlines.com/acts/acts_07.htm))

### **A. GOD'S DEALINGS WITH ABRAHAM (1-8)**

1. The call to leave Mesopotamia
2. The promise of possession to his descendants
3. The covenant of circumcision

### **B. THE PATRIARCHS' SOJOURN IN EGYPT (9-16)**

1. Joseph sold into Egypt by his jealous brothers, becomes governor
2. Jacob and his sons move to Egypt during the famine

### **C. GOD'S DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL BY MOSES (17-36)**

1. The children Israel in Egypt become slaves
2. The work of Moses, deliverer of Israel
  - a. Raised by Pharaoh's daughter
  - b. Kills an Egyptian, but despised by his brethren (Stephen's unique interpretation)
  - c. Flees to Midian where he lives for forty years (burning bush)
  - d. Returns to Egypt, delivers Israel and brings them into the wilderness

#### **D. ISRAEL'S REBELLION AGAINST GOD AND MOSES (37-43)**

1. Moses is the person:
  - a. Who said God would raise up another prophet like him
  - b. Who spoke to the Angel on Mount Sinai
  - c. Who received living oracles to give to Israel
  - d. Whom the fathers would not obey but rejected
2. Israel is the nation:
  - a. Who turned back into Egypt in their hearts
  - b. Who pressured Aaron to make a golden calf
  - c. Whom God gave up to wander in the desert 40 years

#### **E. GOD'S TRUE TABERNACLE (44-50)**

1. The fathers of Israel had the tabernacle of witness
  - a. In the wilderness, built according to the pattern shown Moses
  - b. Brought into the promised land by Joshua
2. They also had the temple (Asked for by David, built by Solomon)
3. Yet the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands
  - a. For heaven is His throne and earth is His footstool - cf. [Isa 66:1-2](#)

#### **F. ISRAEL'S RESISTANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (51-53)**

1. Stephen charges the council of resisting the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers did
2. Their fathers persecuted and killed the prophets, so they have killed the Just One
3. They received the law, but did not keep it

Which characters does Stephen identify with the ministry of Jesus and his followers?

Which characters does Stephen identify with his audience and their ancestors?

This speech shows us the power, and danger, of reading Scripture and applying it to your contemporary situation. How can we faithfully engage in reading Scripture this way today? What individual or communal practices can help us identify the Bible's significance for our relationships, social issues, and the challenges that face us as God's people today?

#### **SAVE TIME FOR THIS ONE:**

8:1-3 describe the aftermath of Stephen's killing in the Christian community.

Discuss the ways this was both a hindrance to the church's mission and an aid to it.

Are there clearly negative things in your own life that God could be using to benefit you or others?

Share with each other, and spend some time praying for God's Spirit to be at work in our lives and our church--even through the worst of circumstances. Pray also for the persecuted church around the world who know a much more direct correspondence to this text than we do.