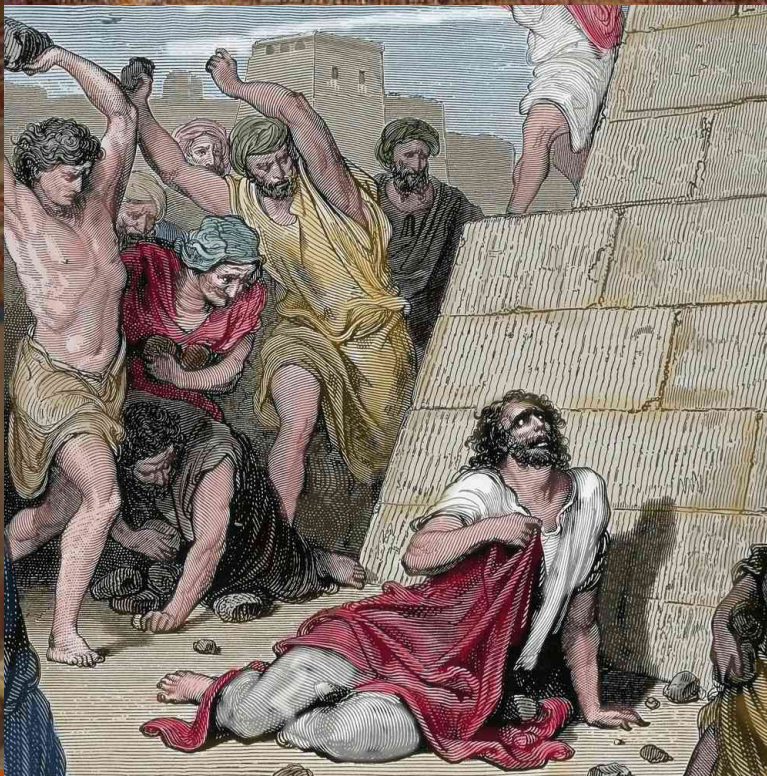


STUDY GUIDE

Reading for week 5: Acts 7-8:1



WHATS THE STORY?

Stephen testifies to how the entire story of God's people has led to Jesus Christ; however, unlike in Acts 2 and 4, the response is no longer a positive one. Stephen becomes the first martyr of the Christian faith, as the church becomes a victim of large-scale persecution in Jerusalem.

LECTIO DEVINA

Prepare: Find a calm and quiet place to read and absorb the passage.

Read: Read through the passage. Listen for any words or phrases that jump out and listen for what God has to say.

Reflect: Try to understand what God could be saying to you through this passage.

Respond: Journal or pray to God, communicating about what you think God was telling you through Scripture.

Rest: Spend time contemplating, allowing God to work.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you see Jesus shaping the story of the world?
- How does forgiveness play a part in our life?



FAMILY STUDY

- Discuss:**
- Who are the Israelites?
 - What is the Temple?
 - Why do you think Stephen saw Jesus?

A Deeper Look

Acts 7 presents us with the upsetting, terrifying, and humbling reality of martyrdom and persecution in Christian history. Stephen, a man known for being full of faith, of God's grace and power, and of the Spirit is arrested and killed for his belief that Jesus the Messiah.

The chapter begins with the Chief Priest asking Stephen if the charges are true that "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law." (6:13) Stephen doesn't answer this question straightforwardly, but takes the opportunity to monologue about Jewish history. He starts with Abraham's journey with God, traveling out of his homeland and into the unknown. Stephen speaks about the Israelites slavery in Egypt and God's punishment of Egypt. Stephen turns to the fathers of Israel: Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and the other brothers of whom the tribes were named. He preaches about Moses' story with God and his leadership of the Israelites during the exodus. Stephen made sure to slip in the prophecy spoken by Moses: "God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people." (Duet 18:15)

Finally, Stephen reaches the pinnacle of his speech: he points to the Tabernacle, saying that it "... had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen." He then makes an interesting comparison between the Tabernacle to the Temple: one ordained by God and the latter pioneered by man. Stephen argues that the Temple was David's idea and Solomon built it.

Stephen then quotes Isaiah 66 in order to juxtapose the Temple being built by human hands and everything in creation being built by the hands of YAHWEH. This 'made by human hands' verbiage called out the idolization of the Temple by Stephen's Jewish culture only fanning the flames before Stephen said this: "Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him" (v52)

While the Sanhedrin was fuming with anger, Stephen exclaimed that he could see Jesus standing at the right hand of God, the first and only time the Son of Man is described as "standing" at God's right hand rather than sitting.