

August 9, 2026

“Stephen, the Unwavering Martyr”
Lesson 2

Acts 6:7-10
Acts 7:54-60

Intro

The book of Acts covers the beginning of the church. That beginning essentially starts with Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost, when over 3000 people come to know Christ. The number of believers increases daily, and leads to the need to develop habits for their gatherings and how to treat each other. The first converts were all Jews, but not all the same. Some had adopted elements of Greek culture while living in Greek-speaking parts of the Roman Empire; others lived in the Jewish region of Palestine. This difference in upbringing led to a conflict regarding the treatment of widows. To resolve the issue, The 12 apostles selected seven men who were “full of the Spirit and wisdom” to handle food distribution to the needy. Among those selected was Stephen.

Read Acts 6:7-10

1. vs. 7: Stephen is part of the early church’s growth
 - First, the word of God is spread
 - Second, the result is that the number of disciples increased “rapidly”
 - It’s noted that “a large number” of new disciples were priests
 - They served in the temple, and many of them opposed Jesus with the Pharisees
 - They have now come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and have converted
2. vs. 8: Signs in the New Testament are confirmations that a person has God’s approval or power
 - Here, Stephen does “great wonders and signs”
 - These confirm God’s approval of Stephen’s ministry, and God’s empowering grace
 - We are not told what these signs are, but they must be out of the ordinary to be noted
 - Stephen is here called “full of God’s grace and power”
 - His life demonstrates the spiritual power Jesus promised in Acts 1:8
3. vs. 9: This verse refers to members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen
 - Four different areas are referred to
 - They may be all of one synagogue, or they might be four different synagogues
 - In Acts 24, Paul says that there are many synagogues in Jerusalem at that time
 - Whether one or many, these people had a dispute with Stephen
 - Acts 6:11-14 (just after this passage) indicates the likely cause of the dispute noted here
 - They disagreed regarding Stephen’s interpretation of the Law and the temple
 - The result is a charge of blasphemy
4. vs. 10: Stephen’s answer (not given to us here) is powerful
 - These synagogue leaders “could not stand up against the wisdom” of his answer
 - They could not refute his teachings
 - Stephen has received his power from the Holy Spirit
 - This appears to be a fulfillment of what Jesus said in Luke 21:15

“words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict”

Read Acts 7:54-60

The conflict begun in chapter 6 between Stephen and the synagogue members escalates. False accusations lead to Stephen’s arrest and trial before the Sanhedrin—the same group that convicted Jesus of blasphemy. Stephens, speaking in his own defense by using Israel’s history of rebellion against God, brings up at least four counter-charges against the Jewish leaders. They are “stiff-necked” and “uncircumcised in heart and ears” (7:51), they resist the Holy Spirit (7:51), they betrayed and murdered the Messiah and His prophets (7:52), and they have not obeyed the Law of Moses (7:53). This is their response to what Stephen has just said, and Stephen’s response to them.

5. vs. 54: The members of the Sanhedrin erupt

They are “furious” and they “gnash their teeth”

This shows both a general and a specific reaction to Stephen’s words

Stephen’s words in the last four verses before this one are all spoken against them

Their anger is at full-boil

6. vs. 55: Stephen here is “full of the Holy Spirit” and sees something only Moses has seen

He sees the glory of God in heaven

He also sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God

The right hand position is one of honor

Jesus here is standing, rather than sitting

Two interpretations are usually given for this posture, both having merit

1) Jesus is rising from His throne, ready to welcome Stephen to heaven

2) Standing shows Jesus ready to judge, either for Stephen or against Sanhedrin

7. vs. 56: Stephen sees two things: heaven open, and Jesus standing at God’s right hand

Stephen calls Jesus “the Son of Man”—one of Jesus’ favorite titles for Himself

That phrase is connected with Jesus’ authority, judgement, and role in salvation

This title shows Stephen recognizing Jesus as the Messiah

Seeing Jesus standing next to God is a clear sign that Jesus is divine

This is the very point that the Sanhedrin used to convict Jesus

8. vs. 57-58a: The actions of the Sanhedrin here show they are not interested in proper procedure

They cover their ears so they won’t hear what Stephen’s saying

They yell as loud as they can to drown out what he says

They rush at him and drag him out of the city and stone him

Stoning someone is the correct OT punishment for blasphemy

But in Jesus’ trial, they acknowledge that only Romans could perform capital punishment

Here, in stoning Stephen, they break two laws

They misapply the Law of Moses by not waiting until the next day to execute

They break Roman law by doing the execution themselves

9. vs. 58b: The witnesses lay down their coats at the feet of a person named Saul

This is practical; they can throw stones easier, and they won't get blood on their coats

This Saul become the apostle Paul, the famous evangelist and author of NT books

What Stephen is going through is exactly what Paul will face later on

He will be attacked by an angry mob

He will have to defend himself against charges involving the Law and the temple

He will be stoned also

10. vs. 59: In the prayer here, Stephen's words lead to several conclusions

First, he acknowledges Jesus' lordship and divinity, calling Him "Lord Jesus"

He asks Jesus to "receive my spirit"

This shows the Christian view of living with Jesus after earthly death

His words echo Jesus' prayer "into your hands I commit my spirit"

11. vs. 60: Stephen's prayer in this verse again echoes Jesus

He asks that this sin of killing him not be held against his killers

He is following Jesus' teaching to "love your enemies", to want the best for them

His "falling asleep" is a metaphor for him dying

Application: Stephen's suffering is a model of courage in the face of opposition. His Spirit-filled obedience to Christ empowered him to act selflessly in the face of unfair treatment. Followers of Jesus can expect opposition, possibly even bitter opposition. What Stephen faced reminds us of what Jesus told His disciples: "If [the world] persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). When we are faced with opposition, we can follow Stephen's example and respond with wisdom, love, and a reliance on God's Spirit. What Stephen did is what God also expects from today's disciples of Christ.

Prayer: Father God, fill us with Your Spirit so that we can be courageous witnesses to Your Son in the worlds we move in. Enable us to respond to opposition with wisdom, love, and dependence on Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.