



Pt. 6 | The Service of Stephen

Acts 6:1-15

Acts 7:1-60

1. Chosen to...

SERVE

Acts 6:1-7

2. Called to...

TESTIFY

Acts 6:8-15

3. Prepared to...

PROCLAIM

Acts 7:1-54

4. Readied to...

WITNESS

Acts 7:55-60



Stephen is a pivotal figure in the Early Church, presenting many firsts. First of the Hellenistic Jews named in Acts 6, he brought cultural diversity to the church & its administrative leadership, reflecting the international & crosscultural reach of Jesus' Great Commission. Stephen's sterling character, scriptural knowledge, & Holy Spirit inspiration make him an exemplar of a ministering disciple of Christ.

Stephen is also the first non-apostle described defending the faith to the Jewish leadership. His witness (GREEK: μάρτυς, martys) to the Truth of Christ is the first in the New Testament to be sealed by his own blood. In other words, Stephen stands out as the first martyr of the Christian faith.

Stephen is a model for all of us who come after the original Twelve Apostles & Jesus' Ascension and yet who remain also actively anticipating Jesus' return. Stephen's witness calls each of us also to be like him: partnering, inclusive, evangelistic, & unafraid—infused with the Word, inspired by the Spirit, and incandescent in the Son.

1. Chosen To SERVE

Acts 6:1-7

¹ In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews [1.E. Jews who had adopted Greek language & cult-URE] among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together & said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brethren, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit & wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 & will give our attention to prayer & the ministry of the word." ⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith & of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, & Nicolas from Antioch, a

1) Chosen to SERVE

Acts 6:1-7

convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed & laid their hands on them. ⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, & a large number of [the Jewish] priests became obedient to the faith.

2. Called To TESTIFY

Acts 6:8-15

⁸ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace & power, performed great wonders & signs among the people. 9 Opposition arose, however [& some Jews from other provinces] began to argue with [him]. 10 But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him. 11 Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses &...God." 12 So they stirred up the people & the elders [&] teachers of the law. They seized Stephen & brought him before the Sanhedrin. 13 They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place & against the law. 14 For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place & change the customs Moses handed down to us." 15 All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, & they saw that his face was like the face of an angel....

3. Prepared To PROCLAIM

Acts 7:1-54

- Genesis 12:1, 7; 13:14-15; 15:13-14; 17:8
- Exodus 1:8
- Exodus 2:14, 15
- Exodus 18:3-4
- Exodus 3:2, 5-8, 10
- Exodus 32:1
- Deuteronomy 18:15
- Isaiah 66:1, 2
- Amos 5:25-27 (LXX)

Stephen's testimony to the court of the Sanhedrin is essentially an extended sermon summarizing the history of Israel in the Torah. He makes direct or explicit quotes (by memory) from no less than 15 specific passages of Scripture in "the Law of Moses," underscoring not only the illegitimacy of the charges against him but also the failure of his accusers to understand that Law.

The Tabernacle of Testimony: Stephen's Witness

ACTS 7:44-54

44 "Our ancestors had the Tabernacle of Testimony [of the covenant law] with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. 45 After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, 46 who enjoyed God's favor & asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. 48 However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: 49 "Heaven is My throne, & the earth is My footstool. What kind of house will you build for Me?' says the Lord. 'Or where will My resting place be? 50 Has not My hand made all these

things?" [Is 66:1-2]. ⁵¹ You stiff-necked people! Your hearts & ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² 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—⁵³ you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it."

⁵⁴ When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.

The Tabernacle of Testimony: Stephen's Witness

ACTS 7:44-54

The essence of Stephen's critique reflects also the essence of the **Jewish prophetic tradition** in several specific ways:

- God's PRESENCE sanctifies the sanctuary. The Tabernacle followed the LORD's Presence, not vice versa.
- God's PROPHET witnesses had characteristically confronted the people & been rejected by the leaders all along.
- God's PURPOSE is to transform the people via a "living way" covenant (CF. HEB 10:20), from the inside-out, rather than to merely impose a dead legalistic construct, from the outside-in.

4. Readied To WITNESS

Acts 7:55-60

55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, [Stephen] gazed intently into heaven & saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; ⁵⁶ and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up & the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears & rushed at him with one impulse.

Gazing Intently: Stephen's Anointing

ACTS 7:55-57

Stephen's beatific vision reveals essential truths about God:

- God's FACE reflects His GRACE: when we see Christ as He truly is, we're transformed to be holy like Him (1 JOHN 3:2).
- "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." (1 COR 13:12)
- "Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, & where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2 COR 3:15-18)

Acts 7:58-60

58 When they had driven [Stephen] out of the city, they [began] stoning [him;] and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 They went on stoning Stephen as he called on [the Lord] & said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" 60 Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.

The Sleep of Saints: Stephen's Grace

ACTS 7:58-60

On Stephen's martyrdom:

- When Jesus had proclaimed His purpose to declare the Good News of God (LUKE 4:18-21; CF. ISA 61:1-2), His own people had also tried to stone Him to death for the crime of blasphemy (LUKE 4:28-29).
- The witness of Stephen is contrasted with the witnesses opposing him, particularly Saul (later called Paul), whose own blinding beatific vision of the glorified Christ will later transform Saul from a prosecutor of Christians to a prime proselytizer of the faith.
- Stephen's identification with & assimilation into the same Spirit as
 Christ is so complete that he speaks the same words of grace &
 forgiveness as his Savior in death: forgive them who are killing me
 (compare Acts 7:60 with Luke 23:34)

The Sleep of Saints: Stephen's Grace

Acts 7:58-60

On "falling asleep" as a metaphor for death of the faithful:

- This euphemism appears frequently in the NT (E.G. Ac 13:36; 1 Co 15:6, 51; 1 TH 4:13-15).
- Saul (later called Paul), who stood silently approving of Stephen's execution that day would later write more about **the sleep of the saints** (i.e. fellow believers in Christ who proceed us into the sleep of death & into the rest of the Lord) *E.G 1 Co 15:49-58; 1 TH 4:13-18.*
- Paul's writings, along with Stephen's witness, reveal to us once again the reality of transformative holiness that comes as "we all... with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory" (2 COR 3:18A).

Acts 7:58-60

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

13 Brethren, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died & rose again, & so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him. 15 According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel & with the trumpet call of God, & the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive...will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Like Stephen, as a part of the Body of Christ, YOU are ALSO...

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