**Acts of the Apostles
A Study of New Testament History**
**Lesson 7
Acts 7:1-60**

**Introduction:**

Resentment toward the apostles and the infant church continued to deepen in the hearts of many members of the Sanhedrin. The apostle's refusal to be intimidated by the council's edicts or obey the council's command to cease preaching Jesus Christ had threatened the Sanhedrin's power and control. The apostles were virtually untouchable due to their enormous popularity among the countless thousands in Jerusalem and the surrounding villages. Any further attempt to arrest and punish the apostles would most certainly lead to riots and the intervention of Roman soldiers. Although Rome governed all Palestine in civil matters, they allowed the high priest and the council to rule the people in religious matters as long as peace was maintained.

Civil disturbances were commonplace throughout Palestine among groups that resented Rome's presence. However, religious uprisings were a direct threat to the high priest and the Sanhedrin. If the high priest and the council could not maintain peace, Rome would demand the removal of the current high priest and the appointment of another. This eventually happened to Caiaphas in 36 AD when he was deposed as high priest. Therefore, the Sanhedrin needed another way to show the people of Jerusalem and Judea they would not tolerate flagrant disobedience and open rebellion among the disciples of the man called Jesus of Nazareth. To do that, the council would turn its attention toward the disciples.

Stephen, a man who was said to be *"full of faith and power"* and who *"did great wonders and signs among the people"* (Acts 6:8) had presented indisputable evidence in local synagogues that Jesus was the Christ. After being falsely accused of blasphemy, Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin to answer the charges that had been brought against him. Rather than deny the trumped up charges, Stephen began his defense by giving a brief history of the people of God from the days of Abraham. He not only outlined God's care for His people, but also provided examples of Israel's disobedience. However, it was the conclusion of this story that enraged the high priest and the other members of the council. Stephen said,

*"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."* (Acts 7:51-53)

The enraged council would hear no more. The supreme court of the Jews, and the very body of men whose solemn duty it was to act as council for the defense in all capital cases (such as blasphemy), became a violent mob. They took Stephen by force, brought him outside of the city, and there stoned him. The irony of this event is found in verse 58: *and the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.* The man known as Saul, who despised the followers of Jesus so much that he personally sent many to their deaths, would eventually become the man known as the apostle Paul.

**Memorization:**

*"Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it."* (Acts 7:52-53)

Key Events of Acts 7:

* Stephen gives his defense before the council.
* Stephen is stoned.
* First mention of Saul (later to be the apostle Paul).

**Link to Online Bible Study Tools:**

These websites contain numerous Bible Versions and Translations, Concordances, Dictionaries, Lexicons and many other useful tools: http://biblos.com/ and http://www.biblestudytools.com/ (Click on "Our Library" at the top of the home page)

**The Exposition:**

**I. Stephen's defense before the council (Acts 7:1-53)**

**A. The call of Abraham (Acts 7:1-8)**

1. How does Stephen address the high priest and the council? What does this say about Stephen?

2. Using the map below identify Mesopotamia (Land of the Chaldeans), the approximate location of the city of Haran, the land of Canaan, and Egypt.



3. What promise did God make regarding the land of Canaan?

4. What promise did God make regarding the descendants of Abraham? What would happen to them, and how long would this occur?

5. What is a covenant, and what was the covenant God made with Abraham?

6. Beginning with Abraham, who are the forefathers of Israel?

**B. The Patriarchs in Egypt (Acts 7:9-16)**

1. Who are the Patriarchs and what did they do?

2. How did God bless Joseph?

3. How many of Joseph's family came to Egypt?

**C. God delivers Israel (Acts 7:17-36)**

1. What was the "promise" God has sworn to Abraham?

2. What happened to the Israelites after the days of Joseph?

3. Why did Moses live with his family only three months after his birth?

4. What became of Moses?

5. What happened when Moses was forty years old?

6. What happened during the next forty years of Moses' life?

7. How long did the Israelites spend in the wilderness?

**D. Israel's rebellion against God (Acts 7:37-43)**

1. What was the prophecy of Moses, and of whom was he speaking? (Compare Deut 18:15 with Acts 3:22-26)

2. What are "the living oracles" mentioned in Acts 7:38? What does the term "living oracles" imply?

3. How does Stephen describe the "hearts" of the Israelites?

4. What did the Israelites demand of Aaron? Why?

5. What did God do?

6. What prophecy did Stephen quote (where is it found in the Old Testament)?

**E. The tabernacle in the wilderness (Acts 7:44-50)**

1. According to whose plan was the tabernacle made? What is the significance of this statement?

2. What did God do with the people of Canaan? Why do you think it is significant to mention God was the one who did this?

3. How long was the tabernacle in use?

4. Where does God *not* dwell?

5. Examine the prophecy of Isaiah mentioned by Stephen (Isaiah 66:1-4) and answer the following:

a. What was the spiritual condition of the people in Isaiah's day?

b. Why do you suppose Stephen quoted this prophecy?

**F. Stephen's charge against the leaders of Israel (Acts 7:51-53)**

1. How did Stephen describe the spiritual condition of the council?

2. How had they resisted the Holy Spirit?

3. What had they done like their fathers before them?

4. What had the council done to the Just One?

5. What did Stephen say about their attitude toward the law?

**II. Stephen is stoned (Acts 7:54-60)**

**A. Reaction of the council (Acts 7:54-58a)**

1. What does "they were cut to the heart" and why is this different from a similar expression in Acts 2:37?

2. What did Stephen see in a vision, and what did he say? Do you believe there is any significance in Luke mentioning that Jesus was "standing" at the right hand of God?

3. Explain the council's reaction upon hearing Stephen say he saw Jesus standing by the right hand of God in heaven.

4. What did they do with Stephen?

**B. The death of Stephen (Acts 7:58b-60)**

1. What did the witnesses do at the stoning of Stephen?

2. To whom did Stephen pray? Reconcile the fact that he "was calling on God" and prayed "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

3. What are the final words of Stephen, and who prayed a similar prayer?

4. What is the significance of saying Stephen "fell asleep"?

**Application:**Be prepared to discuss what lessons can learn from these events, and how those lessons can be applied to present-day situations.