

Reading Through the New Testament

Acts 6-7: The Stoning of Stephen

I. Conflict among the Disciples: (Acts 6:1-7)

1. The gospel continued to spread throughout Jerusalem, and a greater number of people were coming to know Christ as Savior. It wasn't long, however, before these early disciples experienced growing pains. The conflict was between two different groups of believers:

- *Hellenistic Jews* – This group had come from Jewish settlements beyond the borders of Israel, speaking primarily Greek, and were influenced by Greek culture.
- *Native Hebrews* – This group had strong roots in the land of Israel, speaking Hebrew as their primary language, and they resented all foreign influence.
- In what ways was favoritism being shown? Why was this problematic for followers of Christ?

2. Gathering the believers, the twelve recognized that the problem needed to be addressed but recognized, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables." What did they mean by this? Were they suggesting this ministry was unimportant or nonessential?

3. What does Scripture say about showing mercy to the needy? (see Ex. 22:22; Deut. 27:19; Psalm 146:9; James 1:27) Should this be a priority for churches today?

4. This was an important ministry, but the apostles admitted they were not the right ones to oversee it. They simply could not balance this and other ministries. What was their primary role supposed to be?

5. If they could not personally head up the food distribution to the widows, they would make sure someone would. What kind of people did they put in charge of this task? How many did they appoint?

6. There are several principles of leadership we can learn from this passage:

- Good leaders l_____ to the concerns of others.
- Good leaders do not handle problems by pointing fingers or b_____ others.
- Good leaders understand their l_____ (what they can and cannot do).
- Good leaders d_____ responsibility and empower others to serve the Lord.

II. Conflict from the Outside:(6:8-15)

7. Who was Stephen? What made him a target for those who opposed followers of Christ? Were they able to win the argument and discredit his faith in the risen Lord? (see v.10)

8. When his opponents could not get the best of Stephen in a debate, they resorted to lies and false accusations. What charges did they level against him?

9. When people insult us or defame our character, our natural instinct is to lash out striking back with our own harsh words. Describe Stephen's demeanor, as his reputation was called into question (v.15). Who else responded in this way when falsely accused (see 1 Pet. 2:23)? What can we learn from this?

10. We not only proclaim the gospel with our words, but also with our actions. What kind of testimony are we able to have if we continue to show grace even through adversity? ...even when treated unfairly?

III. Faithful unto Death: (7:51-60)

11. Stephen had an opportunity to speak before the people and leaders of Israel. Reflecting back on the history of the nation, he proved two things:

- Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of all the p_____ made to their forefathers
- As a nation, Israel had a long history of rebelling against the Lord and k_____ His prophets
- Scan through the chapter. What are some examples of how Israel resisted God in the past?

12. According to Stephen, in what ways did this generation of Israelites resemble their forefathers? How did they respond to this charge?

13. Who was there giving approval to the violence of the crowd (v.58)?

14. What was Stephen's prayer before he died, concerning those who murdered him (v.60)? Did he ask for justice, retribution, or revenge? Whose example does he imitate here?

15. What kind of attitude should we be willing to demonstrate towards our enemies? (Romans 12:18-21; Matthew 5:43-47)