

The Stoning of Stephen

Scripture Reference: [Acts 6:8- 8:4](#)



Suggested Emphasis: Standing up for God.



Background Study



Story Introduction



Telling the Story



Review Questions



Songs



Learning Activities



Other Online Resources

Story Overview:

Stephen preached to people about Jesus and God. Some of the Jews got very angry because they did not want Jewish people to listen to Stephen and become followers of Jesus. The Jews got so angry at Stephen that they told lies about him and had him taken before the Jewish court (Sanhedrin). Stephen preached a sermon telling them that God's people, Israel, have always rejected those who God sent to them to lead them and save them. And now they have rejected Jesus, the one God wanted Israel to follow as their leader and king. Some of the Jews became so angry at Stephen that they threw stones at him until he died.

Background Study:

[Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts](#)

Stephen was a man who was respected and had a very good reputation. He was one of the Seven appointed by the apostles in [Acts 6:1-7](#) as a servant. [Acts 6:8](#) tells us that He was full of God's grace and power and he performed miraculous signs. [Acts 6:10](#) indicates that Stephen was a dynamic speaker with wisdom. He went to the synagogue to teach about Christ.

A synagogue was a Jewish building, constructed for the purposes of teaching the Scriptures to the Jewish people and as a place of worship. The Synagogue of the Freedman was one such place in Jerusalem. The synagogue's

name, “freedmen” was a reference to people who had been freed from slavery. This synagogue was made up of Jews from a variety of places where groups of Jews lived including Cyrene and Alexandria (north Africa) and Cilicia and Asia (present day Turkey and Syria). Tarsus (the birthplace of Paul) was one of the cities in Cilicia so Paul was possibly associated with this synagogue.

No Synagogue has yet been uncovered by this specific name, however an inscription was discovered in Jerusalem dating to circa 70 A.D. and possible earlier, tells of a man called “Theodotos” a son of a “Vettenus.” Vettenus is a Latin name which indicates the possibility that Vettenus was a former slave who took Vettenus as his name, thus making Theodotus the son of the Freedman. The Theodotus Synagogue may well have been the Synagogue of the Freedmen mentioned in Acts.

The Jews at the Synagogue of the Freedmen spread lies that Stephen was blaspheming (speaking sacrilegiously about God or sacred things; profane talk) against Moses, God and the temple.

The Sanhedrin was the Jewish Council which administered justice. The word Sanhedrin comes from two words; “Sun” meaning “together” and “hedra” meaning “seat”. This Council consisted of 71 members and Jewish tradition traces its establishment back to the 70 elders appointed by God in [Numbers 11:16](#). The Sanhedrin was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees, Elders, Scribes and priests. The Sanhedrin was overseen by the High Priest. The Sanhedrin had the power to carry out justice for all matters of Jewish law. At this time historically the Sanhedrin had a great deal of independence and could judge all cases not involving capital punishment.

[\(Acts 7:1-53\)](#) When the High Priest asked Stephen if the charges were true Stephen went on to show his devotion to God by telling the story of how God worked through his people to bring Jesus to the world even though throughout Israel’s history they kept rejecting those God sent to them to lead and rescue them. This is the longest speech in the book of Acts.

- His accusers said that Stephen taught against the Jews but Stephen talked about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and pointed out that the Jews were God’s nation.
- His accusers said that he was blaspheming Moses but Stephen outlined how the law was handed down through Moses and that God told Moses that a prophet (Jesus) would be sent from among the Jews. Instead of accepting this God’s people had rejected both Moses and God.
- His accusers said that Stephen taught against the temple but he reminded them that before Solomon built the temple there was the tabernacle. God could never be contained in a house made with human hands. Stephen was also implying that they were treating the Temple as an idol.

To put someone to death they required the approval of the Roman Procurator. In most cases though, the Roman procurator bent to the demands of the Sanhedrin. It is interesting to note that the Stoning of Stephen was most likely illegal, as there is no indication of the Sanhedrin seeking the confirmation of the Roman procurator. By comparison the crucifixion of Christ went through all the “proper” routes of justice and was a legal (although unjust) crucifixion.

At the end of the story [\(Acts 7:57-8:1\)](#) Saul is mentioned for the first time in the New Testament. At this time he is zealously opposed to followers of Jesus but later his life and even his name would be changed. He would go on to become the Apostle Paul and write many of the books that make up our New Testament bible. You can learn more about the dramatic change in his life in [Paul \(Saul\) Becomes a Christian](#).

After the Stoning of Stephen followers of Christ began to leave Jerusalem to escape further persecution. The good news about King Jesus began to spread because, wherever they went, they told others about Christ [\(Acts 8:1-4\)](#).

Stephen was a faithful follower of Christ whose only crime was obedience to the Lord. He is referred to as the first Christian martyr (a person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs) because he is the first person mentioned in the bible who died because of the conviction of his faith in Christ. Stephen’s courage to continue to preach even when facing death in an unjust trial remains an inspiration and encouragement to many Christians who are suffering for doing what is right. When encouraging children to stand up for God and be obedient to Him, be sure to remind them that God is always with them, just as God was with Stephen when He

stood up for Jesus.

Some of this Background Information was submitted by Kayla Robinson-Thanks Kayla!



[Previous Lesson](#)



[Next Lesson](#)



[List of all lessons on this website](#)

[top](#)

Way to Introduce the Story:

What would you do if someone came up to you and said, “Only stupid people believe in Jesus”? Would you be quiet or would you tell them that you believe in Jesus. What if they laughed at you? The book of Acts tells us about a man named Stephen who said he believed in Jesus even when people said they would hurt him if he did.

[top](#)

The Story:

Stephen was a Christian man in the city of Jerusalem who loved God and Jesus very much. He understood the power of the Holy Spirit in his life. He was a Deacon (servant) of the church in Jerusalem and helped make sure that the poor widows received their fair share of food. He taught many people about Jesus and even performed many miracles in Jesus’ name.

Stephen wanted everyone to know the good news about Jesus. He knew that there were many Jews who followed God but did not yet believe in Jesus so he went to a synagogue to preach. A synagogue is where Jewish people gathered.

The leaders of the synagogue became very angry. They did not believe what Stephen was saying about Jesus. In fact they became so angry that they began telling lies about Stephen to make everyone else hate him. They said Stephen was saying bad things about the Jews and about God. They said he wanted to destroy their temple and stop them from worshipping God.

Because they were so angry at Stephen they took him to the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a group of Jewish religious leaders who could make decisions like in a courtroom.

Even when the Jewish leaders of the synagogue were saying all of these lies in the courtroom Stephen continued to trust in God. He had so much faith in God that his face was peaceful. The people said, “His face is like the face of an angel”.

When the High Priest (who was the judge) asked Stephen if these things were true Stephen had a very good answer. He answered by telling everyone the story of God and how God had sent his Son, Jesus, to save his people. He talked about many people in the bible like:

- Abraham, who was the very first Jew and the father of a great nation. He also talked about Abraham’s descendants, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.
- Moses, who helped save God’s people from Egyptian slavery and then recorded the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law.

- David and Solomon and how Solomon built the temple.
- Jesus who was killed by the non-believing Jews

Stephen talked about how that God sent His Son, Jesus, and how the Jews had rejected Jesus like they have always rejected those God sent to lead and to save them. Stephen spoke the truth but it made the people in the Sanhedrin very angry.

They took him out of the city to throw stones at him to make him die.

It must have been a very frightening time for Stephen. The bible says the people were so furious that they were "grinding their teeth" yelling at him. But the bible also records that this group of angry people was not the only thing that Stephen saw before he died.

In the Bible we read, "But Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit. He looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God. He saw Jesus standing at God's right side. 56 He said, "Look! I see heaven open. And I see the Son of Man standing at God's right side!" (Acts 7:55-56, ICB)

While they were throwing stones, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" He fell on his knees and cried in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" After Stephen said this, he died. (Acts 7:59-60, ICB)

A martyr is a person who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs. Stephen is remembered as the first Christian martyr because he is the first person mentioned in the bible who was killed because of his belief in Christ.

Stephen is an amazing example of someone who stood up for what they believed in even when it meant they would suffer.

There was one more person in this story who will go on to become a very important person in the church later on. He wanted Stephen to die, too. He even held the cloaks for the leaders so they could throw more stones. This man's name was Saul who later was known as Paul.

Many followers of Jesus began to leave Jerusalem after Stephen's death because Paul and others began to persecute them too. This was a very dangerous time for followers of Jesus.

But even though the Christians were afraid they continued to tell people about Jesus everywhere they went.

[top](#)

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion. [Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#) or [click here to download the pictures to print.](#)

Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

[top](#)

Review Questions:

1. What is a martyr? A person who chooses to die rather than give up his belief
2. Who was the first Christian martyr? Stephen
3. Why was Stephen killed? Because he taught people about Jesus
4. How did Stephen die? He was stoned (rocks thrown at him until he died)

Song Suggestions:

- [I am a C-H-R-I-S-T-I-A-N \(Song\)](#)
- [Books of the New Testament Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Let children act out situations where they would have to stand up for God (school, playing a game, in bible class). Examples might be:
- Someone at your school is spreading rumours about one of the unpopular girls. How would you stand up for God and do the right thing?
- The other children are making fun of a Christian. They ask you, "You aren't a Christian, are you?" How would you stand up for God?
- If you cheat at the board game you will win. No one will ever know. How will you stand up for God and do the right thing?
- Your best friend wants you to go to the movies instead of going to church for worship. How would you stand up for God and do the right thing?
- Make up an imaginary situation and tell what you could do to stand up for God.

Crafts:

- Collect stones with at least one smooth flat side. Use paints to decorate the stone with the words "Stephen, the first Christian martyr." You and the children might find other words or phrases to add to the stones. For example "Stand up for God" or "He will keep you strong to the end" ([1 Corinthians 1:8](#)), or simply "Stephen, Acts 7".

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



[Click here for "The Stoning of Stephen" printables to print \(A4 paper\)](#)
[Click here for "The Stoning of Stephen" to print \(Letter size-USA\)](#)

[top](#)

Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and puzzle worksheets \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Crafts: Decorate stones with Stephen's name. Ideas for rocks or stones \(you'll have to scroll down the page\) from http://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/rockscraftspebblesstonescraftskids.html](http://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/rockscraftspebblesstonescraftskids.html)
- [A good selection of puzzles and games to print at http://www.gardenofpraise.com/bibl55s.htm](http://www.gardenofpraise.com/bibl55s.htm)

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[top](#)



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