

VV STUDY NOTES: 15th APRIL 2023

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The Story of Stephen: Acts 6:8 – 8:2

- **Opening Reflections**

The appointment of the 7 deacons opened doors of opportunity to the development of the new church. It began to shift the focus, in the direction of the universal mission of the Kingdom of Christ. At this time the Apostles would probably not be Greek speaking. That, in and of itself, was a limiting factor in their part of the mission. Of the seven deacons only one (Nicolas) was of a gentile background, and became a Christian, having already converted to Judaism.

Large swathes of Judaism outside Judea were already multi-lingual and many of them Hellenistic. Pentecost itself testifies to this multi-lingual reality.

The new deacons were probably comfortable with the spoken Greek of the day, which opened new doors for the long-term mission of the church.

At this point they had no specific plans for expansion beyond Judea, even though Jesus had instructed them to do so.

Acts 6:8-15.

Of the 7 deacons only Stephen and Phillip feature prominently in Luke's account of the developing church. Acts 6:7 tells us emphatically that their initial mission (the problem of the widows) was handled so well that it had a profound impact.

If you had been selected as one of these deacons, what other things would you have wanted to see on the Agenda. Would you have assumed that your range of responsibilities was limited to waiting tables?

Was the ministry of Stephen outside their remit?

DISCUSS!

Verse 9: Does it surprise you that the opposition to Stephen came from the Synagogue of the Freedmen. The province of Cilicia was Saul's homeland.

Later in our study we will find that it was the Jews from Asia that stirred up the crowd that led to Paul's imprisonment. **## Is there something here we need to understand? Did these Jews from outside of Judea need to prove something?**

What about the tactics used?

Verse 15: Did Luke have an INSIDE SOURCE in the Sanhedrin? What other evidence do we have that suggests this?

Acts 7:1- 53 (Stephen's Speech)

Please read this who section and ask yourself, what is Stephen saying and why?

v.48-50 Is Stephen playing down the importance of the TEMPLE?

v. 51-53 Why does Stephen make such an aggressive condemnation of the Jewish Leadership in their treatment of the prophets?

Is Stephen's assessment of the history of opposition to God's Prophets true?

Is it possible that Stephen is trying to wake up the nation, and its leaders, in view of the pending destruction of the Temple as Christ predicted?

Who do think is on Stephen's mind when he says, "They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One"?

Was he correct when he accused them of not obeying the law as it had been given to them?

Acts 7: 54-60 (The Stoning of Stephen)

We already know that there were individuals in the Sanhedrin and among the priests who were believers at this time. We must realize that it only takes a few powerful individuals to lead a whole nation to destruction. God will always have saints among the powers of men. That's why antisemitism is totally wrong. Would we, as Christians, want to be held accountable for the monsters who have masqueraded as Christians?

Did Stephen die in a way that was a credit to his faith?

In what ways did he follow the example of Jesus?

Is it possible that the Holy Spirit led Stephen to this destination?

Acts 8: 1 and (Acts 11:19)

Saul was directly involved in the whole affair of Stephen's death, but God hadn't finished with him yet. There was another Pharisee yet to be redeemed, and how many others may have joined him?

"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all **except the Apostles** were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria."

Acts 11:19 later tells us that the scattering was even broader than is mentioned here. The believers scattered the word, "*only among the Jews*" in Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch".

OPEN DISCUSSION ON THIS SECTION!!!!