

SHARE THE BIBLE LESSON
WEEK 29

The Jews resist the Holy Spirit

Acts 6:1–7:60



DAY 1

Stephen served full of the Holy Spirit • Acts 6:1–10

READ

Acts 6:1–10

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 6:1–10

The apostles needed spiritual men like Stephen to help them. There were probably more than 20,000 believers in Jerusalem now (Acts 4:4; 5:14), and they were from two different backgrounds: Hebraic Jews were from Judea and spoke Aramaic, and Hellenistic Jews were mostly from other countries and spoke Greek. With the large numbers and contrasting cultures, the 12 apostles could not meet everyone's needs. They could not take care of finances and also focus on prayer and preaching. They knew they needed men with three key qualities to handle finances with integrity. They needed men of "good repute," full of the Spirit, and full of wisdom. All seven men met these qualifications, but only Steven is again described as "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." Stephen and the other six served so well that the apostles were able to stay focused on preaching and bring many more, including many priests, to Jesus. Stephen also performed great miracles, and he defended the truth about Jesus so well that no one could prove him wrong. What gave him such success in living for Jesus? The Holy Spirit (6:10b).

ASK

1. Who was Stephen full of?
Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit.
2. What does it mean to be full of the Spirit?
To be full of the Spirit is to depend on the Spirit's power and obey the Spirit's will.
3. What character qualities did the Spirit produce in Stephen?
Trustworthiness, wisdom, graciousness, and boldness.
4. What did the Spirit give Stephen the power to do?
Power to do miracles. Power to speak about Jesus.

DISCUSS

1. What are the two highest priorities of church leaders (Acts 6:4)?
2. Do you desire to be a person of "good repute," full of the Spirit, and full of wisdom? How can you become this?

DAY 2

The Jews accused Stephen of blasphemy • Acts 6:11–15

READ

Acts 6:11–15

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 6:11–15

Unable to refute Stephen, the unbelieving Jews falsely accused him of **blasphemy**, *saying things that dishonor God*. They claimed he did this by speaking against two things they valued most: the temple and the Law. To them, having the temple in Jerusalem represented their unique access to God, almost as if they owned God. And the Law of Moses was less about Scripture and more about their own human traditions which they claimed came from Moses. Together, the temple and the Law gave them control. So when Stephen said Jesus surpassed the Law and the temple (cf. John 2:19–21), they put him on trial before their supreme court, the Sanhedrin. Stephen answered by the power of the Spirit. His face shined with the holiness and glory of God, showing that instead of opposing Moses, Stephen was speaking with God's approval as Moses had (Exod 34:27–35). Stephen got their attention by repeating Israel's history, something the Jews were very proud of. But as Stephen went on, he would use this history to gradually turn their two accusations against them, as well as adding a third one.

ASK

1. What did the Jews do when they were unable to refute Stephen?
They falsely accused him.
2. What did the Jews accuse Stephen of?
Blaspheming God by speaking against the temple and the Law of Moses.
3. What two things did the Jews value most?
The temple and the Law.
4. What happened to Stephen's face?
It shined with the holiness and glory of God.

DISCUSS

1. Why did Stephen's enemies resort to lies? How did Stephen use wisdom in the way he began his answer?
2. What are ways Christians sometimes treat God and the Bible like the unbelieving Jews did?

DAY 3

The Jews resisted the Holy Spirit • Acts 7:1–53

READ

Acts 7:1–53

EXPLAIN

The truth of Acts 7:1–53

Stephen used Israel's history to turn the Jews' two accusations against them. First, he said it was the Jews who violated the temple, because they were wrong to think they could tie God down to one place (Exod 20:24). Even when Solomon built the first temple, Solomon knew it could not contain God (1 Kgs 8:27; Isa 66:1–2a). Instead of humbly submitting to the Spirit, the Jews used the temple to try to control God

(Isa 66:2b). As a result, they rejected the presence of God in Jesus. Second, the Jews were the ones who were rejecting the Law. The Sanhedrin thought they were not like their ancestors (Matt 23:30), but by killing Jesus, they had illegally killed an innocent man. Even worse, by rejecting the one God sent, they had rebelled against God just like their ancestors. Then Stephen added a third and more severe accusation. The Sanhedrin had rejected the prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15; John 6:14). Israel had a history of rejecting the men God sent to save them, but the Sanhedrin had rejected not just a righteous man, but the one and only Righteous One.

DAY 3 CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ASK 

1. How did the Jews misunderstand the temple?
By focusing on the place, they failed to see that God can appear anywhere, so they failed to recognize Jesus when He came.
2. How were the Jews the ones violating the Law of Moses?
They rebelled against God by rejecting Jesus, and they broke the law by crucifying an innocent man.
3. When the Jews rejected Jesus, how were they like their ancestors?
They rejected Jesus just like their ancestors rejected Joseph and Moses.

DISCUSS 

1. Why couldn't the temple (or anything else) contain God (Isa 66:1-2a)?
2. If you resist God's Spirit, what will happen to your heart (Acts 28:25-26; Heb 3:7-19)?

DAY 4*Stephen died full of the Holy Spirit • Acts 7:54-60***READ** 

Acts 7:54-60

EXPLAIN **The truth of Acts 7:54-60**

While the Sanhedrin ground their teeth in fury, Stephen enjoyed the most beautiful sight ever: he saw Jesus in His glory. Peter had seen Jesus like this once, and it was so amazing that Peter thought heaven had come (Mark 9:1-5). But Stephen did not just see Jesus; he saw Him standing. Normally, Jesus is sitting (Matt 22:44; Acts 2:34; Heb 1:3), but here He stands to honor His faithful servant and welcome him home. Stephen called Him "the Son of Man," a title for the Lord of the universe (Dan 7:13-14). The Sanhedrin recognized the name, for they had sentenced Jesus to death when He had claimed to be the Son of Man, (Mark 14:62-64). Still refusing to admit the truth, they threw Stephen out of the city and began to stone him. In contrast to the shrieking mob, Stephen was so controlled by the Spirit that he became like Jesus. Like Jesus, He willingly gave up his life (Luke 23:46). Like Jesus, He prayed for his murderers to be forgiven (Luke 23:34). Then, as his killers raged, Stephen died as peacefully as one falling asleep.

ASK 

1. How did the Sanhedrin respond to Stephen?
They resisted the Spirit. They became so angry they lost control and illegally and unjustly stoned Stephen.
2. What did Stephen see before he died?
Jesus standing in heaven.
3. What did Stephen call Jesus?
Stephen called Him "the Son of Man," a title for the Lord of the universe.
4. How was Stephen like Jesus?
He willingly gave up his life, and he prayed for his murderers to be forgiven.

DISCUSS 

1. What makes heaven so good (Rev 21:23)?
2. Who won, Stephen or the Sanhedrin?

DAY 5

The prayer of a righteous person has great power • James 5:16b

READ

James 5:13–20

EXPLAIN

The truth of James 5:16b

In the end, the Sanhedrin did not listen and Stephen died, so what had the Spirit accomplished? Because Stephen was a righteous man, God used his prayer, like the prayers of Moses (Num 11:2) and Elijah (Jas 2:17–18), to accomplish much. Jesus answered Stephen's prayer by transforming one of the Jews there that day, Saul, from a prideful persecutor into a humble preacher (Acts 8:1; 9:1–20). Stephen had prayed for his murderers to be forgiven (Luke 23:34), and God granted his request. Because Stephen prayed, Saul (Paul) would one day spread the good news about Jesus all the way to Italy (Acts 28:14). And because Stephen prayed, God would direct Paul to write much of the New Testament. The prayer of a righteous person really does make a difference. So, like Stephen, depend on the Holy Spirit and allow Him to control your life. And, like Stephen, pray for God's will to be done, even if it comes at great personal cost. As you do, God will make you a faithful witness to Jesus, and one day He will bring you peacefully home to Jesus.

ASK

1. What did Stephen pray for the people stoning him?
He prayed that God would forgive them.
2. How did Jesus answer Stephen's prayer?
He saved Saul (Paul), who then wrote half of the New Testament and spread the gospel all the way to Rome.
3. Why was Stephen's prayer so powerful?
He was righteous.
4. Who else accomplished much by their prayers?
Moses and Elijah.

DISCUSS

1. Did God answer Stephen's prayer right away?
2. Is prayer the first thing you rely on or the last thing you try when nothing else works?

NEXT WEEK

The Church is persecuted and the gospel spreads

Acts 8:1–25

