

=THE BOOK OF ACTS=

Lesson 7

Stephen's stoning - Acts 7

AIM: to teach my pupils the truths found in the death of Stephen.

POINT OF CONTACT: Ask the class members to name a deacon who has been a blessing to them and in what way. A testimony or two about a challenge or a blessing that a deacon has been to the class would certainly be a good attention-getter.

Another good point of contact might be for the teacher to call off some names—some who are deacons and some who are not deacons. Ask the class to say “yes” or “no” and see if they can identify the ones who are deacons. A little prize might be given to the winner.

INTRODUCTION: The story of Stephen is one of the most beautiful in all the Bible. You will remember the Sanhedrin meeting in a previous chapter. The Sanhedrin met in a semicircle with the president in the middle of the semicircle and the person on trial out in front. (You might draw this picture again on the chalkboard or act it out in front of your class.) Stephen is the one on trial, and he is speaking to them concerning Jesus Christ. Let us notice some tremendous things about this story.

- I. THIS STORY REVEALS THAT STEPHEN WAS CHRISTLIKE. See Acts 7:59, 60. He died like Christ. This is because he lived like Christ. If one would die like Christ, he first must live like Christ. Ask the class to share with you some things we can do like Jesus did. See how many can be listed. Philippians 2:5 says we are to have a mind like His. We are also to be baptized like Jesus was baptized.
- II. THIS STORY SHOWS US THE KIND OF DEACONS THAT THE EARLY CHURCH HAD. You will notice that Stephen preached. You will notice also that he was willing to give his life for Jesus Christ. This he did. It is significant that the first martyr of the New Testament church was not a preacher, but rather, a deacon.
- III. THIS STORY INTRODUCES SAUL, WHO WAS TO BECOME THE GREAT APOSTLE PAUL. Notice Acts 7:58. He was a part of those persecuting Stephen. He hated the Christian people, and yet it was through the witness of Stephen's death that Saul was converted. This teaches us that someone is always watching us. Little did Stephen realize that he was winning to Christ the soul that would be the greatest preacher, apart from Jesus, in the history or future of the church. We never know the influence that we are having on another, whether by life or by death. Let us be careful about our influence on others.
- IV. THIS STORY SHOWS THE CONDITION OF THE UNSAVED. In Acts 7:58, we find the word “Saul” which means “hell.” You will remember that his name was later changed to Paul. Though he was an aspiring young man, and though he was to be in the Sanhedrin, nevertheless his life was hell! Here we have the condition shown of a person who is unsaved.
- V. THIS STORY TELLS US SOMETHING ABOUT FORGIVENESS. See Acts 7:60. Each of us could learn a similar lesson concerning forgiving those who persecute us, who curse us, who criticize us, who hate us, etc. Stephen certainly showed the right kind of Christian spirit toward his enemies.
- VI. THIS STORY ALSO TEACHES US SOMETHING ABOUT HEAVEN. (Acts 7:56) You will notice that Heaven was opened, and Stephen saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God. In verse 55, we read that he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on

the right hand of God. Hence, we have a picture that in Heaven we will see the glory of God and also Jesus. In this particular place, Jesus was the High Priest pleading our case, even as He is doing now. This teaches us certainly that when we are in Heaven we will see Jesus personally and be able to recognize Him.

VII. THIS STORY TEACHES US SOMETHING ABOUT JESUS' DESIRE TO SEE HIS OWN. See Acts 7:56. You will recall that the Scripture teaches that Jesus, when He finished the work on Calvary and ascended back to heaven, sat down on the right hand of the Father. This explains to us that His work is finished; there is nothing else to do to save a person. Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father. Here, however, we find Him standing. Why would He be standing? He is welcoming home the saint. Picture, if you would please, a mother whose son has been away in service. She is sitting one day in the rocking chair sewing or reading. A knock comes on the door, and she says, "Come in," only to see her son. She no longer sits; she stands and runs to meet him. This is exactly what Jesus is doing. He is standing to meet Stephen. The inspired writer said, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." (Psalm 116:15)

VIII. THIS STORY PRESENTS SOME TEACHING ABOUT DEATH. In Acts 7:59, notice the words, "...receive my spirit." Stephen's body fell asleep, as is mentioned in verse 60b. However, his spirit went to be with Christ. It should be noted here that when a Christian dies, his body goes to the grave. His "new man," his spirit, that which is born again, goes to be with Jesus. It remains this way until the resurrection of the just, when Jesus comes at the rapture. The body will rise from the grave; the spirit will come from Heaven and be reunited with the body. It will then be, however, a glorified body. Then both body (glorified) and spirit shall be with Christ forever. People who are in Heaven now are there in their spiritual body only. However, at the rapture and first resurrection, the body and spirit will be together again, and we shall have a body just like the body of Jesus Christ. (Explain this very carefully to the pupils.)

CONCLUSION: Spend a few minutes with the pupils reviewing the main subject about each chapter we have studied thus far in our lessons from Acts.

Chapter 1 - Ascension

Chapter 2 - Pentecost

Chapter 3 - Lame Man Healed

Chapter 4 - The First Persecution

Chapter 5 - Ananias and Sapphira

Chapter 6 - The First Deacons

Chapter 7 - Stephen's Stoning

Review this. Try to catch the pupils on it, and see if they know where to find each of these. If this is all they learn in these lessons, it will be worthwhile.

MEMORY VERSE: "...Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God," Acts 7:56.