Aug 09, 2026

Oaks Early Risers Bible Class

Stephen, the Unwavering Martyr
Acts 6:7-10; 7:54-60

The Oaks Baptist Church
Grand Prairie, Texas

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Lesson Leaders:
James Haymon
Barry Hosford

Class Leaders:
Deacon: C M Hester

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK:
Paul understood how a faithful worker might win others' respect, offering a quiet testimony to how the gospel can infuse even seemingly small acts of service for others with dignity and purpose

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK:
Father, please help me to remember that there are no small jobs in Your kingdom and to faithfully serve You each day

SCRIPTURE FOR THE WEEK:
Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you
(1 Thess 4:11 NKJV)

(from "Our Daily Bread", Jan 04, 2024)

Series: The Testimony of Faithful Witnesses

UNIT 3: Faithful Witnesses Spread the Good News

NEXT WEEK
Saul of Tarsus, the Unlikely Apostle (Acts 22:3-15)

Lesson Background and Introduction

Today's lesson presents a servant of God who faced a catastrophic blow. It was a blow that led directly to his death. The story of God's servants is stained with the blood of prophets and apostles who paid the price for speaking the truth, and today's lesson presents this reality in vivid detail. The book of Acts begins the story of the earliest church by focusing on its development within Jerusalem. The theme of "witnesses" in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8) is like of a "Table of Contents" for Acts as it sketches the birth of the church. The narrative starts with events on the Day of Pentecost (2:1-41). Predominant in the account is the divine power behind the dynamic Jerusalem fellowship. The church increased in number from only about 120 believers to more than 3,000 in a single day (compare 1:15; 2:41). The number of believers in Jerusalem continued to increase over the weeks and months after Pentecost (Acts 2:47b; 5:14; 6:1). The expanding number of believers led them to develop habits for their gatherings and expectations for how they would treat each other (2:42-47a; 4:32-35). During that time, almost all followers of Jesus were of Jewish heritage. However, not all had the same cultural upbringing. Some had adopted elements of Greek culture while living in the Greek-speaking (Hellenistic) portions of the Roman Empire (compare 9:29), while others lived in Jewish regions of Palestine. The distinction between Grecian Jews and Hebraic Jews was revealed in a conflict regarding the treatment of widows (6:1). To resolve conflict, the Twelve selected seven men "full of the Spirit and wisdom" to handle food distribution to the needy. These men included Stephen (Acts 6:3-5).

Stephen's suffering was not in vain. The tragedy of his death led to the spread of the gospel (Acts 8:1-8). His Spirit-filled obedience to Christ empowered him to act selflessly in the face of unfair objection. As a result, Stephen is a model of courage in the face of opposition. Followers of Jesus can expect opposition, possibly even bitter opposition, from others. Stephen faced fierce resistance from many of his fellow Jews. Synagogue members argued with him, false witnesses testified against him, and religious leaders responded with murderous rage. The actions taken against Stephen remind us of Jesus' promises to his disciples: "If [the world] persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). When faced with opposition, we can follow Stephen's example and respond with wisdom, love, and a reliance on God's Spirit. God's Spirit and wisdom filled Stephen, which allowed him to present such compelling arguments that no one could effectively counter or refute. And though he rebuked his fellow Jews, he did so out of love and a desire for them to repent and believe in Christ. Indeed, Stephen loved his opponents even to his death, courageously defending the gospel and graciously praying for their forgiveness. The Lord expects nothing less from us today (Luke 6:27-36; 1 Peter 3:15-16).

(*Adapted from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*)

NOTES AND CROSS-REFERENCES

A Unwavering Servant in Ministry (Acts 6:7-10)

A ministry with power (7-8)

Power that is glorious (2 Cor 3:7-11)
Power that is at work in us (Gal 2:8)
Power that comes from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:4-5)
Power that is part of the kingdom of God (1 Cor 4:20)
Divine power (2 Cor 10:3-6)
Power that strengthens the inner being (Eph 3:16)
Power of the gospel (1 Thess 1:5)
Power that keeps one from being ashamed to testify about God (2 Tim 1:8)

A ministry that can't be resisted (9-10)

Can't be resisted because it is God who empowers the ministry (Ex 4:11-12)
Can't be resisted because it is of the Holy Spirit (Matt 10:19-20)
Can't be resisted because God gives the words and wisdom (Luke 21:15)
Can't be resisted because it is like fighting with God (Acts 5:38-39)
Can't be resisted because it is based on God's power (1 Cor 2:4-5)

A Unwavering Servant in Death (Acts 7:54-60)

A death that sees heaven versus earthly harm (54-56)

By fixing our eyes on the eternal (2 Cor 4:16-18)
By realizing the present sufferings do not compare to the future glory (Rom 8:18)
By having a living hope (1 Peter 1:3-7)
By the restoring of God (1 Peter 5:10)
By regarding the future reward greater than the temporary pleasures of earth (Heb 11:24-26)

A death that can be caused and approved of by man (57-58)

Death can be caused by man, but fear God only (Matt 10:28)
Even though man can cause death, God wants us to be faithful to Him even to the point of death (Rev 2:10)
Men who seek to cause death have no regard for God (Ps 54:3)
Ungodly and wicked men seek the death of the righteous (Prov 29:10)
Men who seek to cause death belong to Satan (1 John 3:12)

A death that allows forgiveness (59-60)

Allows forgiveness because God commands loving enemies (Matt 5:44)
Allows forgiveness because Jesus provided the example to do this (Luke 23:34)
Allows forgiveness because God will handle the vengeance (Rom 12:17-19)
Allows forgiveness because God forgave us (Matt 6:14)
Allows forgiveness regardless of the number of times someone harms us (Luke 17:3-4)
Allows forgiveness because we are commanded to bear with others and to forgive them (Col 3:13)