

Acts 6:8-8:1a Bible Study

1. Have you ever been able to help someone understand the truth of the gospel in a way that they couldn't argue against, but found that they still didn't believe? Discuss.

If some can't think of such a time, have they heard of it happening to others?

2. Read Acts 6:8-15. Given what we know of Stephen (see also vv3-5), is what happened to him a surprise?

At one level – yes. He was a gracious and godly man who served others and was clearly doing God's work. But at another level – no, Jesus said to expect this sort of thing, John 16:1-4, see also 2 Tim 3:12.

3. What are the two accusations brought against Stephen? What do you think might have been the basis for such accusations?

*That Stephen spoke against the Temple and the law of Moses (and 'customs') **Temple:** It's likely that he pointed to Jesus as the Fulfiller of the Temple and that the Jerusalem temple was not a permanent part of God's plans, eg Mat 12:6 & Matt 24:1-2. **Law:** see Matt 5:17-20 – Jesus fulfilled the Law too.*

4. NB "his face was like the face of an angel", v.15, is perhaps an echo of Moses' face when he came down the mountain after meeting with God (Ex34:29-35, also 2 Cor 3:7-18), suggesting that Stephen is not against Moses, rather he is in the same line of God's messengers (the literal meaning of "angel") and speaks God's word.

5. Read Acts 7:1-50 noting anything that helps explain the right way to understand the temple and Law. How does Stephen answer the charges against him?

Temple

Some suggestions:

* v2 God appeared to Abraham a long way from Jerusalem

* v5 Relationship with God based on

* v8 God was worshiped on Mt Sinai

* v9 God with Joseph in Egypt

* v30 God appeared on Mt Sinai

Temple

* v33 "Holy ground" was not limited to the temple – God can be anywhere

* v44-47 It was David's, not God's

Idea to build the temple

* v48-50 The temple was only a symbol of God's presence, it could never 'contain' him

Law

* v2 God had relationship with Abraham well before the Law

trusting God's promise, not temple or Law

* v8 Covenant of circumcision given

centuries before Law

* v38 The Law is "living words" for a

Law

living relationship, not a set of customs to enshrine

* v39,53 It's Israel who never kept the

Law!

6. What was Israel's (including the Sanhedrin's) track record for treating those sent to them by God? Why was this?

They rejected them – Joseph (v9), Moses (v27-28, 35, 39), Jesus (v52, cf v37) and finally Stephen himself. Their hearts were hard and so they resist God's Spirit (v51), having a form of 'religion' but not wanting to believe or trust God in his word.

7. What perspective do the last words of v60 give us on Stephen's death??

It was not the end – death is transformed for the believer, and beyond it awaits life forever with Christ, the one who stands to receive Stephen (vv55-56)

8. What can you gain from Stephen's example and experience when it comes to sharing your faith?

9. Are there ways in which you might be drawn into the same error of the Jews in Acts 7 with regards to limiting God to certain places or situations, and reducing your relationship with him to certain practices or habits? Discuss & pray about these things.