

ACTS

Stephen & the
Story of Israel



LET US PRAY | KIA IINOI TAATOU

Almighty God, we remember Saint Stephen, Your first martyr, chosen to serve the Church in charity and faith. You filled him with the Holy Spirit, he spoke with wisdom and truth, unafraid of threats and persecution. Grant us the courage to bear witness to our faith, and face the consequences. Amen.



WELCOME | NAU MAI HAERE MAI

Today:

- Recap(itulation) - week four
- Acts 6-7: Stephen - Saint and Martyr
 - The Story of Israel
 - Jesus is the culmination of God's redemptive plan





OVERVIEW

- **ACTS 6:**

- a. **Food Distribution and Selection:** To resolve a dispute over overlooked Greek-speaking widows, the Apostles appointed seven spiritually mature men, including Stephen, to manage the daily food ministry.
- b. **Stephen's Arrest:** Stephen performed powerful miracles but was falsely accused of blasphemy by members of a local synagogue, leading to his arrest and trial before the Sanhedrin.

- **ACTS 7:**

- a. **Stephen's Defense Speech:** Standing before the high council, Stephen delivered a long speech reviewing Israel's history, highlighting how their ancestors consistently rejected God's messengers and prophets.
- b. **The First Christian Martyr:** After Stephen directly accused the council of murdering the Messiah, the furious crowd dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death while a young man named Saul watched.

TERMS

HELLENISTS

Jews who immigrated into Jerusalem from other parts of the Roman empire, for whom Greek was their first and perhaps only language. As such, when wives lost their husbands they would likely not have had a kinship network close at hand to care for them (and thus the “complaint;” in 6.1) (TGC)



TERMS

PHARISEES

A popular religious/political party in NT times characterized by strict adherence to the law of Moses and also to extrabiblical Jewish traditions. The Pharisees were frequently criticized by Jesus for their legalistic and hypocritical practices. The apostle Paul was a zealous Pharisee prior to his conversion. (TGC)



TERMS

BLASPHEME

- To insult Torah or Temple
- Claiming divine attributes or authority
- Idolatry and pagan practices
- Defaming God's appointed leaders



QUESTIONS

Early-Church Conflict Resolution

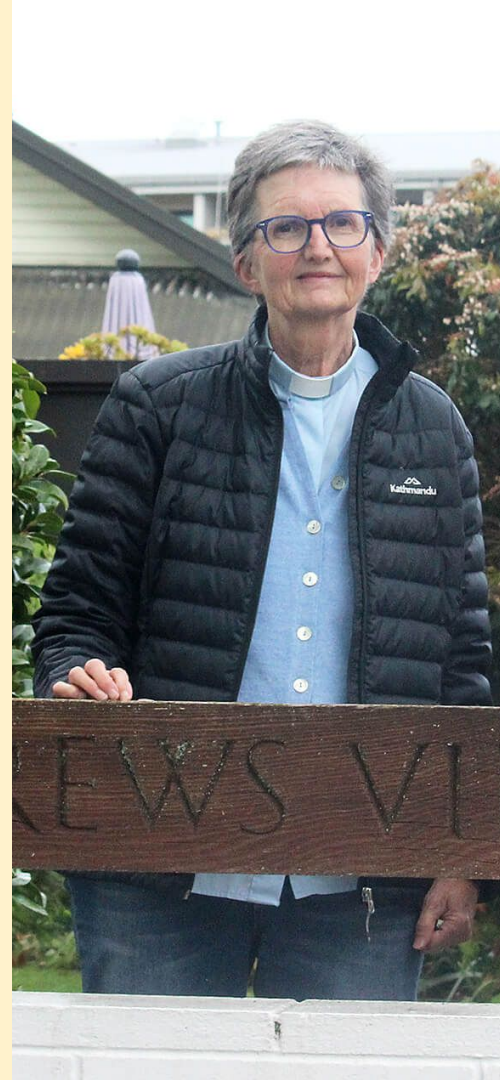
- What was the conflict and how was it resolved?
- What were the solutions and how were they authorised?



DEACONS

Diakonos

- *Servant, waiter, minister*
- *“In everyday Koine Greek and the New Testament, it refers to anyone who performs tasks or ministers to the needs of others, carrying an attitude of helpfulness rather than subservience”*



DEACONS

Deacons in the Church of God serve in the name of Christ, and so remind the whole Church that serving others is essential to all ministry.

They have a special responsibility to ensure that those in need are cared for with Christlike compassion and humility.

When called upon to do so, they may baptise, preach and give instruction in the faith.

When the people are gathered for worship, deacons are authorised to read the Holy Scriptures, lead the prayers, and distribute the bread and wine of Holy Communion. (ANZPB 891)

STEPHEN & SALVATION HISTORY

Moses

- What do you notice about vv 27, 35, 39 in ch 7?
- How does God respond to those who reject Him?
- What is all that communicating to the Jewish Leaders?



STEPHEN & SALVATION HISTORY

Tabernacle, Temple and ...

- “the Most High doesn’t live in temples made by human hands” (7.48)
- OK, so where does the Most High live?
- What was Stephen accused of? (see 6.13-14)



STEPHEN & SALVATION HISTORY

Prophets

- Read vv 51-53 in ch 7
- Thoughts?





The "Stoning of Saint Stephen" is an 11th-century Romanesque mural from the church of Sant Joan de Boí in the Vall de Boí, Catalonia, Spain.

STONING

SCRIPTURE

Lev 24.16

“Anyone who blasphemes the Name of the Lord must be stoned to death by the whole community of Israel. Any native-born Israelite or foreigner among you who blasphemes the Name of the Lord must be put to death.”



STEPHEN'S CHARACTER/CHARISMA

- How would you describe Stephen?
- What is the 'final straw' before stoning and why is it significant?
- What two things did Stephen pray for?



BIBLICAL CONNECTIONS

Christ & OT (Jesus as fulfilment; continuity)

Jesus & Moses (“a prophet like me” Dt 18)

Prophets (Rejection; foretelling “righteous one to come” until ...)

God’s Presence (Tabernacle, Temple, Jesus)



THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Son of Man (Jesus' title for himself; key figure in Daniel 7:13-14 who receives supreme authority.

Holy Spirit (Conflict resolution; Peace during martyrdom; Enabler)



INVITATION

- What are the risks of you sharing your faith with others?
- What are the risks you are prepared to take?



FURTHER THOUGHTS & QUESTIONS

The following thoughts and questions are sourced from the “Pulpit Fiction Podcast”. You may find them useful as you continue to ruminate on this passage.

<https://www.pulpitfiction.com/narrative-notes/3-41>



Willie James Jennings, Acts: “The church was born in the tight space between faith and fear and forever lives in that space. Only the Holy Spirit keeps that space from collapsing in on us.” Do we feel that tension? Do we fear only the loss of institutional power, or do we fear something more existential, more rooted in God’s justice and shalom? If our only fear is to keep the budgets filled and doors open, then perhaps our fear is misplaced, and we are no longer “The Church,” but a club grasping for relevance in a world that no longer needs us.

Awkward responses to the Spirit:

- Response to Peter’s sermon is explosive growth and building of community.
- Response to Stephen’s rise is jealousy, culminating in an ugly, violent act.

Response to the gospel is not always positive.

Is the church prepared for an ugly and violent response to the Good News?

- Just because the response is negative, doesn’t mean you are doing it wrong

Was Stephen stoned for blasphemy? Or for being prophetic and judgemental instead of pastoral and loving?

Jesus is placed in the same arc as Moses and the prophets, as the culmination - not as the replacement.

NEXT WEEK

Week 6: Saul (Acts 8.1-9.31)

