

Life as a witness

Don Thampy

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What to expect?

- Discussion
 - Meaning of being God's *witness*, God's definition
 - What are some of the *practical challenges* of being a witness of our Lord?
 - What is the *root of the challenges* of being a witness?
 - *Source(s)* that enable us be a witness?
- Examples from the Word of God: *Daniel and Stephen*
- *Practical steps* that we can take to be a *courageous witness* as God empowers and expects.

Daniel's witness

- *Honoring God in his heart:* But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Ch1:8
- *Faith, fellowship and prayer:* He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Ch2:18
- *Honoring God beyond personal consequence:* But even if he does not, we want you to know, You Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up. Ch3:18
- *Trusted relationship:* My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries. Ch4:19b
- *Steel and courage:* You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means. Ch5:17
- *Silence, thanks and reliance:* Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went to home to the upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Ch6:10

Life as a witness

As our Lord commissioned His first disciples our Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, He said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The root word used for witness is "Martys" or "Martur". There is a death of self which our Lord calls us to in our everyday lives, at work places (specially), in our homes (importantly) and in our neighborhoods, where we spend our lives. Come be challenged as we study from the word of God examples of witnesses!

Book of Daniel

Chapter 1

Vs 1-2 The king of Israel was given over to the King of Babylon by God's sovereign will. "The Lord gave". Not only did he give the kingdom but also the vessels of the temple of God which Nebuchadnezzar took and put those vessels in the temple of his god. God gave up the king, the kingdom and the temple.

VS 3-4a God also gave up the people to become subjects and slaves of Nebuchadnezzar. The King now instructs his chief of Eunuchs to select the best crop from the Israelite royalty and the nobility.

- Part of the royalty/ nobility
- Youth
- Without blemish
- Good appearance
- Skillful in all wisdom
- Endowed with knowledge
- Understanding learning
- Competent to stand in the king's palace

VS 4b-5 The King instructs to have the selected candidates to be immersed in the culture of Babylon

- Teach them the literature of Babylon
- Language of Chaldeans
- Daily portion of the food that the King ate
- Wine that the king drank
- They were to be educated for three years
- At the end of three years they would be ready to stand before the king

The King wanted the young royalty to assimilate with the Babylonian culture and become part of the administration class for the King's service.

VS 6-7 The chief of the Eunuchs even changed the names of the young men. The men were to lose all of their identity and take on this new identity in this new land with this new outlook and serve this new king that God had given his people up to.

VS 7-16 God finds **one young man** in his nation Israel to be **faithful** to start the revolution and eventually to bring king Nebuchadnezzar to his knees to acknowledge that God of Israel is the only true God. Daniel is unwilling (**in his inner man**) to compromise by eating the food that is served to them. "Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the King's food". Everything that the Assyrians did was on the outside and to influence the mind. The food was something that was to be consumed and Daniel seemed to draw the line in the sand on this particular issue as he considered the foods to be defiling him. What was deposited in Daniel as part of his religious training while in Judah was starting to bear fruit under duress.

- Daniel requested the chief of the Eunuchs to allow him not to eat the food. Daniel was willing to risk his life while seeking favor to honor God as a young lad.
- God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the Eunuchs. Knowing Daniel and his friends, there is no doubt that they would have bathed this request in prayer to God and as an answer to their prayers God showed favor and compassion.
- Chief of the Eunuchs explained why he could not allow him to do that. He was in danger of having his head "chopped off" if he hadn't followed the king's orders. And he did not have any incentive to go to the King to get an "exception approval" for this request and did not want to exercise any authority in making an exception only to be found out.
- Daniel was relentless, he went to the steward that the chief of Eunuchs had placed over these young men and asked him to try out an experiment for ten days and test them with a different diet and compare them against other such young men that were trained. They were unwilling to give into what would pollute them.
- The steward relented for ten days and tested what Daniel had suggested to look, compare their appearance to the appearance of others and the young men stood out, better, fatter in flesh than all the other youth. The steward when he saw what had

happened to the young men decided to take away the king's food. It was nothing short of a miracle that they would be distinctly different than the rest of their cohort.

VS 17-20 Daniel and his friends were blessed by God. He gave them learning, skill in all literature and wisdom. Daniel had special understanding of visions and dreams. After the three years of training, they were brought to King Nebuchadnezzar. In every matter of wisdom and understanding they were ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers in the kingdom (Not just the young men, but all wise men). It just took ten days of experimentation of food that helped them honor God and they became ten times better than the rest of the young men.

VS 21 Daniel served under four kings faithfully.

We see how God in his providence moves and how Daniel wanted to honor God. This combination of uncompromising obedience and unmerited favor, launches one of the greatest stories of a beloved and faithful man in God.

The Lord gave:

- The **Lord gave** Jehoiakim king of Judah into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar
- The **king assigned them** a daily portion of the food
- The chief of the Eunuchs **gave** them names
- Daniel resolved not to defile himself and then **he asked**
- **God gave** Daniel favor and compassion
- The **steward took** away the food
- **God gave** them learning and skill better than anyone in Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom

Chapter 2

VS 1-12 Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and it troubled him in his spirit and he lost sleep. He does not reveal what the dream is, there seems to be no indication that he forgot, in fact VS 9b we see that he challenges them to "tell him the dream" to gain confidence that they knew what they were talking about. The challenge that is presented by Nebuchadnezzar to the magicians, enchanterers, sorcerers and the Chaldeans. They are asked to reveal the dream and the interpretation of the dream. They ask the king to reveal the dream and they would interpret it to which the king denies them the dream.

This back and forth happens twice and then the wisemen throw their hands up and conclude that "There is not a man on earth who can meet the King's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter or Chaldean. the thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king

except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh". If we were to break down their conclusion to the demand of the king we see the below:

- No man on earth can do this
- No king has ever asked this of anyone, implying you are crazy!
- This is difficult, seemingly impossible in the earthly realm
- They are categorical to say that only the gods can reveal this, no flesh can

Their answer infuriated the king and he ordered that "all" wise men be killed. It is with that order Arioch the captain of the King's guard searched for Daniel and his friends so that they could be put to death. They were not at the scene when the challenge played out, probably because they did not rank to qualify to be with the elites yet.

VS 12-16 Daniel has learnt the art to persuade, it says "Daniel replied with prudence and discretion". A characteristic of a humble servant, he was not defending, but asking questions around why the order was so urgent. He sought audience with the king to ask him time, so that he could fulfill what the king had asked. Similar to the scene when Daniel was introduced in chapter 1, he was diligent and he sought in wisdom to show him the interpretation of the dream. This was not a personal challenge of not eating food with regards to his conscience and for the sake of obeying the laws but this challenge had many lives on the line, if he did not deliver against the king's challenge.

VS 17-19 Daniel exemplifies the approach when we face a massive challenge, he goes to his friends and shares the challenge before them. He exhorts to plead with the mercies of God so that this dream would be revealed and the interpretation, so that they didn't have to die with the wisemen. After they had prayed God revealed the dream to Daniel. There was no where to go, but this road was familiar to seek God

- Fellowship with one another
- Prayer to God seeking his mercy

VS 20-23 We get another sneak preview into Daniel's prayer. It is succinctly brilliant and relays the sovereignty of God, his nature, how he is the source of things and passes them onto his creatures. Closes that section by praising, theology always leads to —> doxology.

1. Blessed be the name
2. God is eternal
3. Wisdom and strength belong to God
4. He holds times and seasons together
5. He is the one that sets up kings and removes them
6. He is the one that gives wisdom to the wise

7. Knowledge to those who have understanding
 8. He reveals deep and hidden things
 9. He knows what is in the darkness
 10. And the light dwells with him
- To God of his father, he gives thanks and praise
 - Daniel thanks God for giving him wisdom and might
 - Also to have made known what “they” had asked. Here is the kicker when it comes to his humility. They had prayed together and it was revealed to Daniel, he did not take credit for it, but accorded their due as he prayed.
 - God had made know to Daniel the King’s matter.

VS 24-30 Daniel meeting with the king through Arioch. Daniel again wisely first meets Arioch to ensure that he conveys the message that he has the interpretation and he would not need to kill anyone. Arioch’s introduction as he brought in Daniel, is in contrast to Daniel’s remarks and posture. Arioch claims that “he found” a person “among the exiles from Judah” (Daniel was probably distinguished and Assyrians looked down on “exiles”, or that Daniel was known to them because of his customs and who he was).

When the King asks him if Daniel was able to tell him his dream and the interpretation, Daniel repeats what his colleagues had mentioned that none of the wisemen, enchanter, magicians or astrologers could reveal, but God. Observe not gods as the Chaldeans said, but “God in heaven who reveals mysteries”. He says that God has revealed that Nebuchadnezzar might know the things to come to pass in the days ahead. He uses some phrases that possibly pierce the king’s heart, as he displays the enormity of the revelation as he prostrates before Daniel after the interpretation of the dream. Phrases like “visions of your head”, “thoughts of what would be after this”, “what is to be”, “thoughts of your mind”, all of these to say and know that the king was troubled and this dream had really upset him and he could not but think about this all the time.

God brought this dream to accomplish many things, to reveal to Nebuchadnezzar the future, to reveal to him who is the “Real King”, to bring Daniel and his friends to the front of the line, to ensure that the message of the God of Israel is front and center, to reveal to us living at this time how God’s prophecy is true, to also warn us of the things to come as the things that were hidden to Daniel are now open to us as we see history and the current age.

Daniel humbles himself and confesses that this mystery revealed is not because he had more wisdom than anybody alive, but for the revelation of the mystery to Nebuchadnezzar. This was the first time God was revealing himself to Nebuchadnezzar. It took years and multiple revelations for the king to finally bow his knees to the true

God in heaven. He has to hit the rock bottom and becomes like an animal before confessing that it is God who is sovereign and the great king and not him.

VS 31-45 Daniel explains the dream that Nebuchadnezzar had. The dream is of a statue with multiple kinds of metal gold, silver bronze, iron, iron and part clay. Also about a stone that was cut out, not by human hands and it struck the feet that was made of iron and clay and the whole statue became as chaff and the wind carried them away, not a trace was found of them, the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. The interpretation of the dream is made plain to the king and Daniel explains how he is the head of gold and subsequent kingdoms after him will come and then eventually when the kingdom that has iron and clay mixed feet ruling, there will be a stone that God has set up come and destroy that kingdom and also all other kingdoms before it, not a trace to be found of the kingdoms, they will be forgotten. This new kingdom created by the stone will become a mountain and grow to fill the whole earth.

This stone is Jesus Christ Son of Man who would come and establish a new kingdom, interesting to see that the material is “stone” that destroys all of the other strong and precious metals.

VS 46-49 Daniel’s revelation of the mystery and the interpretation overwhelms king Nebuchadnezzar, he falls down upon his face and pays Daniel homage. Daniel came into the palace that day as a “exile from Judah” and now you the king of kings paying him homage like a god. The king also asks to give him an offering and an incense to be offered up to Daniel. He made him ruler of all of the province of Babylon, and chief prefect of all the wisemen of Babylon. Daniel did not forget his friends and they were given assignments as well, but Daniel was favored and remained at the king’s court.

The king also confesses to the nature of God as he understood it:

- God of gods
- Lord of kings
- Revealer of mysteries

Chapter 3

VS 1-7: The setting: The price for disobedience that King Nebuchadnezzar set was the price that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were willing to pay for obedience.

- The king’s pride is seen in the size of the image. The gigantic size of the statue 90 feet high and 9 feet wide, covered with gold was the reflection of the dream that the Lord had given Nebuchadnezzar. He had forgotten about the stone, and he was ready to erect this statue for his own glory.
- Worship of self was the deception that Satan laid down as the trap for man in the garden of Eden.

- The leadership of the kingdom did not question, but bowed down to the worship, it was mandated. The king was the sovereign. Another proof how wicked king Nebuchadnezzar truly was. Who can love this man? Daniel did!
- They used music to indicate the worship service, everyone had to drop everything and bow down to the image wherever they were and wherever they were doing did not matter
- Peoples, nations and languages bowed down a counterfeit to the “true” worship in heaven
- There was a consequence for disobedience, the consequence was deadly, to be burnt into the fiery furnace
- This probably set the precedence for Darius’ officials to trap him and have Daniel be put in the Lion’s den.

VS 8-16 Q & A

- The Chaldeans came forward and “maliciously” accused the Jews.
- The accusation was multifold: They do not pay any attention to you, they do not serve your gods and they do not worship the image that you have set up
- The king is in furious rage and summons them and asks them plainly why they have disobeyed and throws the gauntlet at them saying, “who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”
- The men’s graciously truthful response, it has a beautiful edge to it
 - They had experienced how the Lord had saved them from sure death when Nebuchadnezzar had issued a rash order when the Lord revealed the dream to Daniel. Also previously how God had saved them from defiling by not eating the King’s food. May be other circumstances in which God saved them from certain death.
 - Life and death were in the hands of God not the king
 - Sovereignty of God is evident and understood, above the king who was a mere man, who had made himself God
 - Death was sure as the people who went to throw them into the furnace all died, the heat was so extreme with 7 times the normal heat
 - There is a line that they draw irrespective of the outcome, their faith went beyond a “good outcome”. Their faith was not built on the outcome, but on the reverence that they had with God.
 - “Known to you”, a testimony. Have people died without being saved? Many.
 - Different people who witnessed

- King
- Officials
- Folks that brought the complaint
- Soldiers
- Servants of King
- Other Jewish people

VS 17-25 Punishment to Miracle

- Nebuchadnezzar's reaction gives us a sense of how much he disliked the response. He had built a statue that was almost 20 times his size and now he asked the furnace be heated seven times more than it was usually heated. It also says his countenance changed
- The king's command was urgent and it caused the death of the best soldiers of the nation who were supposed to "strongly" tie them up with their cloaks, "expertly" throw them off into the furnace. The soldiers died, their ropes were untied and they came back with their clothes without the smell of soot and the king was now humbled as #3. God used the fire to cut their ropes from them to free them. By implication all that the heat can do for us is to release us from bonds and free us to have a fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, in the fire.
- The Lord had mercy on the king and while he was watching those men be put in the furnace, he saw the miracle of the saving of the faithful men. He saw clearly and he also could count (4 men unbound walking in the midst of the fire), they weren't hurt and the king saw Jesus, "son of the gods"
- The destructive path of pride. Pride (image) -> False worship (self) -> Encourages malice (strife) -> Brought everyone in the kingdom to a false God (idolatry) -> Brought trouble to the ones that believed in God (persecution/ Trial) -> Rage (anger) -> death of the soldiers -> But God's mercy brought peace and another revelation to Nebuchadnezzar the king. One step closer to accepting the Lord's sovereignty

VS 26-29 Declaration and promotion

- The miracle was witnessed by the king, his officials and all that were present there
- No one could dispute the nature of the miracle, against all odds and even with men dead right before they were thrown in. They even examined them and saw what had happened to them, there was not a singe. They were in the fire but never burnt by it, similar to the burning bush.
- "Blessed be God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego", this is a very important lesson that we ought to learn, that God is intricately bound to His people. He wants His name to be known as the "God of". A very critical lesson for us to learn.

- We are always two witnesses, God the Spirit and us, we are witnesses of Jesus Christ.
- Nebuchadnezzar describes the process that he believed that the Lord brought about his miracle
 - Sent his angel
 - Delivered “his” servants
 - Nebuchadnezzar understood this critical fact that the master for these men was God himself. He still did not understand that he was also serving the God of Israel, yet. Jeremiah 27:6 (ESV) Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant, and I have given him also the beasts of the field to serve him.
 - Colossians 3:22-24 (ESV) 22 Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.
 - Who trusted him. Their trust was tested with their very lives
 - Set aside the king’s commands. When it came to obeying God versus man, they chose God
 - Yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any other god except their own God. This is important to understand the price we are willing to pay. There is always a price that we set for obedience. Their price was set beyond their lives.
- Nebuchadnezzar now decrees, setting the price for disobedience equivalent to the price that they had set for obedience. His setting of the price did not change the object of the disobedience changed dramatically. It was all because the Lord worked in the lives of the three men and they were willing to pay the ultimate price.
- The three men were rewarded by God with their lives spared, now gave the best demonstration of the power of God of Israel, bring about the decree to not oppose the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and also moved the king to one step closer to the God of Israel.
- Nebuchadnezzar was closer but never did declare that the Lord was the ultimate sovereign. He did in due time. He personally had to go through his trial to make his faith personal.
- **The three chapters we see challenges that result in the display of God’s favor and power over the faithful, God’s deliverance and power over thought realm and history, God’s indisputable power and sovereignty over nature and love for His people**

- The issue of food that Daniel made particular to himself to take a stand for the Lord of Israel
- The general issue of the Chaldeans that became an issue for Daniel and his friends because they belonged to the context and now had to demonstrate their faith in the Lord of Israel
- The particular issue of worship that became a challenge that the three men had to take a stand on for the sake of their Lord

Chapter 4

Content of chapter 4 is Nebuchadnezzar looking back in history and seeing how he came to believe in the God of Israel as the supreme King of the universe.

- Nebuchadnezzar became a follower of Yahweh! That does not seem like the first thing that we can think of when we meet him for the first time. When he is gouging the eyes off of King Zedekiah, or he has ordered all of the wise men to be killed, or when in his rage raises the furnace's heat to 7 times the normal temperature to burn the ones that have rebelled against his order.
- This should give us hope of the ones that we "feel" we have seemingly given up hope.
- VS 1 the king is proclaiming to everyone, without holding back to all peoples, nations and languages. His testimony is proclaimed to all. He prays for "peace" -> end of the day all of what God has done is for this "Shalom", though the word is a little different than the overall word used in Hebrew, it wants to convey a wholesomeness. Not just to be passed on or added to "us" but "multiplied" to us, similar to how the apostles greeted us. Someone who has been saved by the Lord is always passing on the peace that they themselves enjoy to the ones that they meet. Spiritual things are always an overflow. Something that you don't have you cannot give, something that you have in abundance you cannot hold back, it is like a dam that is overflowing, we see one instance of that in Psalms 23. The primary premise for this reality to come to pass is that the Lord needs to be our Shepherd.
 - Psalms 23:5 (ESV) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- VS 2 the king now wants to show what the Lord has done for him, the "signs and wonders". This time's sign and wonder is going to be a journey of humiliation to restoration of Nebuchadnezzar. But there have been signs and wonders that the Lord did in the past (the first three chapters), that the king will now make a connection and understand the full truth of who is the true Sovereign One.
- VS 3

- Great signs => the greatest sign was His Son Jesus Christ becoming one of us and remaining like one of us, the man Jesus Christ
- Mighty his wonders => the greatest wonder is the resurrection of His Son from the dead, which is the key element of proof of Christ's divinity
- His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom => Jesus came to establish His eternal Kingdom once and for all and we see that in the establishment of the church of old testaments and the new testaments, the hall of faith and beyond
- Dominion endures from generation to generation => That from rite outs Abel to the last person to enter the kingdom of God is going to remain, irrespective of the type of nations that try and control, imagine that they are in control in time and space. God endures for all eternity, we see this promised to the disciples in Matt 28 as Jesus gives the commission, that He is with us until the end of the ages.

Malcolm Muggeridge on history of the world.

We look back upon history and what do we see? Empires rising and falling, revolutions and counter-revolutions, wealth accumulating and wealth dispersed, one nation dominant and then another. Shakespeare speaks of 'the rise and fall of great ones that ebb and flow with the moon.'

I look back on my own fellow countrymen ruling over a quarter of the world, the great majority of them convinced, in the words of what is still a favorite song, that, 'God who's made the mighty would make them mightier yet.' I've heard a crazed, cracked Austrian announce to the world the establishment of a German Reich that would last a thousand years; an Italian clown announce that he would restart the calendar to begin his own ascension to power. I've heard a murderous Georgian brigand in the Kremlin acclaimed by the intellectual elite of the world as a wiser than Solomon, more humane than Marcus Aurelius, more enlightened than Ashoka.

I've seen America wealthier and in terms of weaponry, more powerful than the rest of the world put together, so that had the American people desired, they could have outdone an Alexander or a Julius Caesar in the range and scale of their conquests.

All in one lifetime. All in one lifetime. All gone with the wind.

England part of a tiny island off the coast of Europe, threatened with dismemberment and even bankruptcy. Hitler and Mussolini dead, remembered only in infamy. Stalin a forbidden name in the regime he helped found and dominate for some three decades. America haunted by fears of running out of those precious fluids that keep her motorways roaring, and the smog settling, with troubled memories of a disastrous campaign in Vietnam, and the victories of the Don Quixotes of the media as they charged the windmills of Watergate.

All in one lifetime, all gone. Gone with the wind. (pp. 29–30)

Then according to [Justin Taylor](#), it is Ravi Zacharias who added this fitting postscript.

Behind the debris of these self-styled, sullen supermen and imperial diplomatists, there stands the gigantic figure of one person, because of whom, by whom, in whom, and through whom alone mankind might still have hope. The person of Jesus Christ.”

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/all-in-one-little-lifetime-all-gone-with-the-wind/>

- VS 4 The king was at “ease in his house” and prospering. It seems like a challenge when we are at ease and prospering, we seem to let down our guard. We see that across scripture, 2 Samuel 11, where David instead of going unto war was roaming his balcony and fell into deep sin with Bathsheba.
- VS 5 God gave the King a dream which was to be and which brought him alarm.
- VS 6 Like other dreams he asked for all the wisemen to come and explain to him the interpretation of the dream that the King had
- VS 7 when the King calls them they all come, they all assemble promptly, but they could not help with the interpretation of the dream like before.
- VS 8 Daniel (at last) came before the King, and the King told Daniel the dream. Daniel was highly favored by the King, “named after his god, Belteshazzar and in whom the spirit of the holy gods”
- VS 9 Daniel was the chief of the magicians, the King was confident that Daniel would be able to interpret the dream for him
- VS 10-18 the King explains the dream that was given to God, declaring what would happen to him.
- VS 19 Daniel is perplexed and is dismayed, but the King trusts Daniel and asks him to give him the true and full meaning of the dream without fear. This verse also shows the love that Daniel had for Nebuchadnezzar his king. “My lord”, ascribing the meaning of the dream to the King’s enemies.
- VS 20-26 is the interpretation by Daniel that the dream was about the King and all that was detailed was going to happen to him.
- VS 27 Daniel does not stop there but goes on to give counsel to the King, “to repent, to turn to righteousness and showing (living) mercy to the oppressed”
- VS 28 All of what was shown in the dream happened to the King
- VS 29-30 The pride of the king was his downfall

Daniel Chapter 9

Context of where we are in Daniel Chapter 9

Introduce yourself: Believer in Christ, Married to Maya, we have 2 girls Nehara and Neriah, PK = Pastor's Kid, brought up by my single Mom, Veenas Thampy, strong woman in the Lord. Here in the US for over 7 years, working in a pharmaceutical industry.

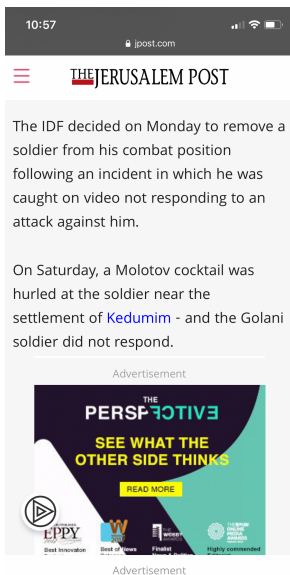
First part of the context: The way we live.

- This year has been hard for everyone, that probably is the “understatement of 2020”. How has this extraordinary year been for you personally and for your family? When you consider and examine your relationship with God, with the body of Christ and the world at large, has it progressed or regressed?
- Hasn't the crisis of COVID “unmasked” a lot that has surprised you or others? It has “unmasked” a lot for the world; man-made structures have come up short, to be able to tackle the crisis' effects, people have died, people have suffered in all paradigms: mental, emotional, relational, social, physical, on the flip side people have made a killing (At least a small part) in business and other enterprises while providing for the “need” of the hour. You have probably heard statements like, “We will over come this”, “Science will win”, “We are resilient”, all of them may be partially true, if God is sovereign and He allowed this to happen, what does it mean to you and what does it mean to the world? Those are questions that we cannot ignore, we cannot but answer them.

- Another thing I have observed is that our “self-righteousness” and “selfishness” has been unmasked among many other things, more than ever before. We have camps and people in different camps whether it is the political dialogue or the churchianity (Christian realm), we have seen divide and rhetoric that has fanned the flame. It’s like the Mandalorian creed, “This is the way”... We have in many instances forgotten as followers of Jesus Christ, what He said, “I am the way”. This passage that we are going to deal with this morning brings us back to the “Root of Jesse”, Jesus himself.

Jesus’ words: The way we should live

- Jesus said in Mark 9:29 He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”
 - Jesus chooses to use the noun version for Prayer instead of the verb version (Proseuchomai), the word used is “Prosueche”, many times used by Jesus for the “temple” of God, Matt 21:13, Luke 19:46, a place for prayers. This was right after transfiguration that Jesus healed the young boy after his dad pleaded with the disciples first and then to Jesus. “Prosueche” = a place set apart or suits for the offering of prayer.



- People in history have interceded to the Lord in prayer, Abraham for Lot and Family, Moses for nation of Israel, the prophets for the nation of Israel, Jesus for the church, even now at the right hand of the Father, Holy Spirit inside of the believer crying out, Peter, Paul, John, you read the epistles you will see a prayer pleading for the church and the lost sheep. We will be discussing one man’s life and the way he lived, reflected in the prayer that is written for us.

- Daniel: Who he was: Young exile dedicated to the service of Yahweh, at this point in his life he is most likely over 80 years old.

- Deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar between 605 - 586 BC most likely 605 and probably around 12-15 years old

- Grew up to be a administrator and taught under the tutelage of the Babylonians

- Never compromised in his stance as a young man and loved God with all his heart mind should and strength, asked the Lord to preserve his temple from defilement
- Had some great friendships that He influenced to live for God without compromise
- What he did personally: Dedicated to prayer and some study of the Word of God in a foreign land

- Was a prayer warrior in the foreign land and never gave up that habit, went to God in prayer 3 times a day, the prayer that sustained him in the foreign land
- What he did professionally: Diligent administrator and brilliant servant
 - Chapter 9, this was the third king that Daniel was serving under and was faithful under all kings that they could not find any dirt in terms of missteps in almost 70 years of service to the king, diligent worker of the King.
 - He loved the Kings that he worked for other than probably Belshazzar, proven by his work for the Kings that he served under

Prayer of Daniel reflects the God of Daniel

- Context: Daniel was a man of prayer and God gives us a glimpse of his prayer life in Daniel Chapter 2, 6 and 9
- Jesus was a man of prayer: Disciples were enamored by the way Jesus prayed and they asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples".

11. The word of the Lord leads us to pray at all times and specific times and stay in a state of prayerfulness: VS 1-2

- God's revelation does not diminish prayer but enhances it. How can we avoid fatalistic thinking and know the God commands us to pray as He fulfills his will, the mystery of God's sovereignty and our prayers is worthy of investigation and intrigue. God's word fill us with confidence to enter into the throne of grace as it says in Hebrews 4: Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.
- Prayerlessness indicates lack of an overflow of the Word and the Spirit of God. The Spirit is always interceding Romans 8:23-27.

12. Prayer is a reflection of our identity: as reconcilers and peacemakers and our posture is always of humility VS 3

- **Spirit:** Turned my face to the Lord God
- **Mind:** Seeking him by prayer
- **Heart:** Pleas for mercy
- **Body:** Fasting, Sackcloth, Ashes

13. Understanding God's character leads us to right comparator and eventually to confession VS 4-11

- Some of the words that Daniel used to describe God, who He is and what He does and how He does.
 - Great, Awesome, keeping covenant, steadfast love with those who keep his commandments, righteousness, mercy and forgiveness, favor of the Lord our God, righteous in all his works, Lord who brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for yourself
- Understanding God then his response for himself and the nation of Israel
 - Sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules, not listened to your servants and prophets, open shame, treachery that they have committed to against you, not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by not walking in his laws, transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice, sinned against him,

14. God's is true to His word and his word is relevant today as it was in the life of Israel, there is hardness of heart, yet entreating God's mercy VS 12-15

- Confirmed his words, bringing upon us a great calamity,
- We have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our inquiries and gaining insight by your truth
- Daniel prays that God would look on them with favor, if they turned from sin and realize truth and remembering what God has done for the nation

15. Leaning on God's mercy is the gospel VS 16-18

- "Lord" = "Adonai", "God" = "Elohim", shows the sovereignty of God (Recurrence: 17 times) and a plea towards God
- Language of prayer is peppered with "your" referring to God. How can we know our Lord if we are not in the Word? How can we know the Lord if we have experienced Him, taste and see that the Lord is good?
 - Your righteous, your anger, your wrath, your city, your holy hill, your people, your servant, your own sake, your face, your sanctuary, your ear, your name, your great mercy, your own sake, your city, your people, your name
- Not because of our righteousness but because of your great mercy

16. Peacemakers between God and Man is the identity of the children of God, With Jesus being the mediator between man and God, Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5) VS 19

- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God
- O Lord = Forgive
- O Lord = Pat attention and act, delay not for your own sake

- O My God = because your city and your people are called by your name

17. Practical steps to consider

- Asking the question, what is our identity? (Phil 1:21)
- Being the house of Prayer that the Lord commanded us to be (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
- Loving, reading, meditating and sharing the word of God (Psalms 1:2)
- Fellowship with the body of Christ, deep friendships in the Lord, to challenge and for safety (1 John 1:1-4)

Chapter 12

- Promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 (ESV) I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” The Law was given to the people of the nation of Israel, through whom Jesus Christ the Savior of the World would come. Romans 10:5 (ESV) For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. Jesus fulfilled the law and released us from the law and He became the end of the law and we see that illustrated in Romans 10:1-4 (ESV) 1 Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.
- Structure of the 70 weeks, Daniel 9:24-27: Trivia: 50th year being a jubilee year after 7X7 years in the Jewish calendar ([Cross](#) way article).
 - 70 weeks declared about “your people”, “your holy city”. To finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for iniquity, to bring everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, to anoint a most holy place
 - This is a finality of all history and time. The timeline is set for a people group.
 - “Your people” - The blessing to Abraham plays a role here and this is “people” is not just limited to the “nation” of Israel, but God’s Israel, as defined by faith. Paul confirms that, Galatians 3:1-14 and in Romans 9:25-26. Many people characterize this as “just” the nation of israel, I think it goes both ways.

- "Your city" - this possibly is the new Jerusalem which is the bride of Christ, Revelation 21:1-8. Many people also believe that the 1000 year rule of Jesus will be actually in the Jerusalem that we have, and there is a final war, called Armageddon, after which Satan and all of the evil is thrown into the lake of fire.
- 7 weeks = 49 years (Nehemiah's time till the end of the OT reign starting with the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to coming of an anointed one, a prince) 450 - 400 BC? (Roughly in that range)
- 62 weeks = 434 years (before the anointed one is cut off), Jesus died in 30 AD
- Church Age in between the weeks. This prompts people to believe that the church will be raptured before the last week begins and the Lord will deal with the nation of Israel.
 - Ephesians Paul talks about this mystery of God revealed. We can read specifically Ephesians 3:1-13. VS 6 has emphasis
 - The mystery of Godliness and righteousness was hidden in God and is now revealed in and through the church. 1 Tim 3:14-16
 - Israel will be saved is a theology that we can ascribe to as Romans 9-11 (Specifically in 11) Paul deals with it in depth.
- 1 week = 7 years we haven't seen it yet (Tribulation and great tribulation)
- VS 1
 - "At that time", time of the end, time of the great tribulation,
 - Michael (One of the chief princes, Gabriel was another prince, Gabriel bring some of the key messages to the people of God and he has appeared to Daniel on multiple occasions and also to Mary and Zechariah, John the Baptist's father) the warrior prince who has featured in the book of Daniel when he was introduced by the angel who came to reveal the dream to Daniel in Chapter 10, where Michael helped relieve the angel who was stuck with the Persian prince (Most likely Satan himself who was behind the Persian prince). Michael is specifically responsible for the people of Israel of their protection. Michael appears in Daniel 10:13, 12:1, Jude 9, Revelation 12:7
 - Chief of the princes, Daniel's prince, archangel (Chief of Angels)
 - We know he spoke 3 words that we have recorded in the scripture (in Greek), while disputing with Satan.
 - Jude 1:9 (ESV) But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

- Time of trouble it is unparalleled in history that the people of Israel will face, this is even beyond what they faced in the past including in world war two. It is also called Jacob's trouble Jeremiah 30:7.
- There is deliverance for everyone whose name was written in the "book", this refers to most likely the Lamb's book of life referred to in Revelation 21:27 (ESV) But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.
- VS 2 talks about the eternal and final judgement (Revelation 20:11-13)
- VS 3 Those who are:
 - Wise = brightness of the sky above. True wisdom is being the doer of the word (Matthew 7)
 - Turn many to righteousness = like the stars forever and ever (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)
- VS 4 instruction for Daniel is simple, write them down and this is not for your time but for later, some of it has not yet come to pass
- VS 5 Daniel sees three more people, one on this side of the bank of the river and the other one on the other side of the bank of the river and another person in "linen" = Most likely Jesus Christ, (The one in Daniel 10:16,18)
- VS 6 One of the folks asked the one clothed in linen, "how long these would take?"
- VS 7 the one who was clothed in linen, lifted up his hands and swore by the one who lives forever and said it would be 3.5 years. It had to be Jesus, no one swears by that name other than God himself. He also mentions that with this end all things would come to an end. Revelation 12:5-6 (ESV) 5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.
 - Daniel 8:15-16 (ESV) 15 When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it. And behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. 16 And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, "Gabriel, make this man understand the vision."
- VS 8 Daniel heard it but this great man of God who had all knowledge of visions and dreams did not understand it. He started off all of this with the prayer for the nation of Israel, having understood the prophecy of the 70 years and that God would start to restore the nation of Israel's fortunes and would bring them back. God now gave him the vision of the 70 weeks and what would happen in the 69 weeks and how the messiah would get cut off and how the 70th week would proceed and what would happen in the second half of the 70th week. Daniel was curious and he did ask the question of what the outcome of all of this meant

- VS 9 But the angel told him that the words were shut, meaning not yet to be understood, until the time was right for the folks who need to understand it
- VS 10 There are two groups of people that the angel talks about
 - The ones that purify themselves, make themselves white and be refined
 - The wicked shall act wickedly
 - The wicked will not understand these things, but the wise ones shall understand it
- VS 11 Timeframe of stopping of the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. Antiochus Epiphanes (Manifestation of God, changed to Epimanes = “maniac”) admired Zeus and he believed he was the incarnation of Zeus and set himself to be God. The critical element is that of “imposition” of cultural norms, hellenization of the Jewish culture was the opposition and the pushback he got. Very interesting phase we are in, where the culture is pushing us to think a particular way, the worldview is changing from the inside to the outside, comply or die! The war against Antiochus and his successor assured that the Israelites got almost full freedom and were now independent.
 - Also interesting to see that Judas Maccabees was a priest who fought the war against the Seleucid and Antiochus
 - Daniel 8:14 And he said to me, “for 2300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.”
- VS 12 Blessed is he who arrives at the 1335 days, 45 days after 1290 days.
- VS 13 Daniel has an allotted place and so will we all have our allotted places. Some of the prophecy was not meant for Daniel to understand but for him to write down and leave it for the rest of us to read, learn and understand.
 - Hebrews 11:39-40 (ESV) 39 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Saturday, June 10, 2023

Stephen, witness (martyr) for Christ: Acts 6-7

Chapter 6

- VS 1 The context and introduction of the need for leadership was because of *discrimination* between the Hellenistic and Jewish widows.
- VS 2 The disciples called all the disciples and discussed the priorities, preaching the word of God versus serving tables. Both were important, it was roles and responsibilities and who would do what.
- VS 3 they lay down the criteria for the character of men to undertake the responsibilities of the underlying issue and beyond. Witness (good repute) was primary, full of the Spirit and wisdom to appoint to this noble task. Serving tables in the church needed men of the Spirit and not of the flesh.
- VS 4 The Disciples had to devote to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, which needed undivided attention given the number of people that joined and were joining the church. Even something good (service in this case) can take time away from what is primary goal which was prayer and word!
- VS 5 that pleased the church and we can see the first choices that the church made and Stephen was the first man who is named in the list of people. It also names a “proselyte named Nicolaus” who according to church history became the leader of the group called Nicolaitans” who had deviant beliefs from the true faith(Revelation 2:6, 15)
- VS 6 When the selection was made of the candidates they were brought to the disciples and they were commissioned through prayer and laying on of the hands
- VS 7 The move of this division of labor of love was rewarded again with the church growing, there is a reference to “great many” priests in Jerusalem becoming followers of Christ.
- VS 8 Not only was Stephen serving, but he was performing great wonders and signs in his ministry for our Lord full of the grace and power of the Spirit.
- VS 9 Stephen’s message was confronted with the synagogue of “freedmen”, which was a reference to people who were slaves and were not freed, jewish people who were part of the diaspora (not of Jerusalem or Judea). Cyrenenians (Reminded by

Simon of Cyrene who carried the cross of Christ), Alexandrians (The famous preacher Apollos came from Alexandria), Cilicia (Paul of Tarsus was part of that province).

- VS 10 The word says, that they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. It is awesome to note that the promise of Jesus that the “gates of hell would not prevail” was and is true.
- VS 11 Then as all of the people of faith have dealt with, whether Daniel, Nehemiah, Jesus our Lord, Paul or now Stephen, have been attacked to be brought down, “secretly instigated” men who bore false witness, accusing him blasphemous words against Moses and God. Christ’s gospel is offensive to the religious.
- VS 12 The secret men stirred up different groups it says, “the people” (common man), the elders (people in authority), the scribes (people who were considered people with knowledge of scriptures). They then seized Stephen and brought him before the council, the Jewish council. Interesting to note that there were not priests as a group that were stirred up (See VS 7).
- VS 13 False witness and kangaroo court is one way of the forces of darkness stemming or stopping the witness of Christ, and as we will see that Stephen’s defense destroys the framework of evil to stop the work of Christ. The sermon he delivered is recorded in the word of God and has been ready by so many generations, including us, now. Their primary purpose was to undermine and bring charges (false) to bring upon death to Stephen. The two things that they brought false charges were on: “the holy place”, “the law”
- VS 14 That Jesus of Nazareth (Who they believe was dead) would destroy the temple and change the customs that were delivered by Moses. By denying the truth they were signifying the power of Jesus and His name.
- VS 15 All the people saw that Stephen’s face was now beginning to shine like an angel. All of Stephen’s life was now visible, as it were, on his face! The glory of God was now shining, for the impending events.

Chapter 7

- VS 1 After the council was assembled and the false witnesses were brought forward and the indictments were made, the high priest asks the question seeking Stephen’s defense.

- VS 2 - 50 Stephen recounts the working of the Holy Spirit through history from Abraham through to Moses and their message which was focused on “The Righteous One”. Stephen accurately describes the history of the people of God, showcasing that he was not attempting to malign or add to scriptures, but we can see how the people never really understood that all of the law and the prophets were talking about our Lord Jesus Christ and their hearts were hardened not to recognize it.
- VS 2 Like the Shema in the old testament, Stephen calls the people assembled to “hear him”, the Spirit was calling them to listen and repent. How the God of glory appeared to Abraham their forefather, even in Mesopotamia, even before he came into the promised land
- VS 3 The command was to leave the land he was in, to go to a land which the Lord would show. This was God’s promise.
- VS 4 Abraham obeyed God and left his land, his people and went out. His Father died in Haran, as he came out of the land of the Chaldeans, and then lived in the promised land.
- VS 5 Abraham was without son and without the land, but the promise was to his offspring.
- VS 6 God also revealed to Abraham how the his descendants would suffer in a foreign land, Egypt, for four hundred years
- VS 7 The nation that had enslaved would be judged and the people of God would come out and worship him.
 - We see a pattern that the Lord were in Egypt (South), God judges the nations that had enslaved His people and the people come to the promised land
 - Then after years in the promised land, they fall away from worship of the true Lord and are not enslaved by the northern kingdom of Babylon, who are then judged and Israel comes back to the promised land and then worship him and establish the nation state
 - Then in 1947 Israel when they are persecuted by the Nazi regime come back to the promised land, the ones that were scattered and became a nation state, once again, in the modern era.

- VS 8 Abraham was given the covenant of circumcision as a sign between Him and His people. The Lord did bless Isaac and Isaac had Jacob and his twelve sons and now the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel was taking shape.
- VS 9 As the Lord had revealed to Abraham, the patriarchs sold Joseph to the Egyptians, but God was with Joseph.
- VS 10 God rescued Joseph from all “afflictions” and gave him favor, wisdom and authority that he was over all of Egypt and the house of Pharaoh. Strength to face and overcome afflictions, he was not spared, but in and through that God was with him.
- VS 11 The famine in Egypt and Canaan, inescapable.
- VS 12 Jacob commanded his sons to get grain from Egypt, first visit.
- VS 13 Second visit Joseph revealed to his brothers who he was and was united with his brothers and Jacob.
- VS 14 Jacob joins his sons and settles in Egypt, all of 75 people in total. Before they left there were millions after 400+ years
- VS 15 Jacob and his sons live out their lives in Egypt.
- VS 16 We see how the forefathers were all buried in the cave in Macpella which Abraham had bought from the sons of Shechem
- VS 17 The promise of God was being fulfilled. God’s word is His doing, He never says something that will not come to pass. The people of Israel grew in number
- VS 18 The way God’s promise was coming true was that there was a king who did not know Joseph, Joseph’s memory faded away, this was again God’s sovereign doing. Sometimes we think that God has forgotten us, He has not, it is all His doing.
- VS 19 This king dealt terribly with the people of Israel by killing the little ones. The forces that kill the little ones or unborn is the evil ones, the agency can be human. After Jesus was born there was bloodshed, before Moses was born there was bloodshed.
- VS 20 The salvation of the Lord came through Moses and God preserved him and he knew how to protect Jesus through the time period.
- VS 21 Not only did God save Moses, he allowed for the leader of the Israel to be brought up right under the nose of Pharaoh who wanted to kill

- VS 22 God used the education of Egypt to train his servant, God's mysterious ways continue to bear fruit
- VS 23 God is moving in the heart of Moses when he was forty years old to visit his brothers, the time was not yet, but even in the mind of God, it is perfect, hard to see how God moves even through all our mistakes
- VS 24 Moses killed the Egyptian, not the right thing, but God's work continues despite that
- VS 25 Moses thought that the Israelites would "supposedly understand that God was working His salvation", it was not yet time for the Lord to move and Moses was not ready
- VS 26 Moses got the confirmation that it was not the time, when he tried to be the judge of God's people and the authority was not accepted by the Israelites
- VS 27 "Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?" Was probably jolting, and it took God and Moses 40 more years of training before that could be answered with affirmation
- VS 28 The message of his killing the Egyptian was known to the community and Moses had to flee
- VS 29 Moses fled to Midian, married Ziporah and became the father of two sons, Gershom and Eliezer
- VS 30 The meeting of the Lord with Moses, changed again the direction of his life. He fled Egypt, now he was asked to go back to Egypt to lead the people of Israel back from slavery to the promised land of Israel
- VS 31 The description in Exodus is that Moses beholding the bush on fire, turned to see the great sight.
- VS 32 God identifies Himself with the names of the forefathers, not of the dead, but those that were alive with Him, "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob", which brought the fear in Moses' heart and did not dare to look
- VS 33 It was Holy ground where the Lord was, and he was asked to remove his sandals!
- VS 34 God has "seen" the affliction, "heard" their groaning, "come down" to deliver them, and "I will send" Moses to Egypt. We see how God uses man's

agency for deliverance. We are sent as witnesses to bring the deliverance of God to the people who He will deliver.

- VS 35 The people that rejected <Theme of Christ as well, whom they rejected, the first time around, will be accepted when He comes back the second time> now God sent as “ruler and redeemer” to the same people. This time Moses was authorized and sent by the great ‘I AM’.
- VS. 36 His sending followed with the signs and wonders in the desert for 40 years. God sending His son was followed with signs and wonders for 3.5 years and beyond that through the disciples of Jesus Christ authenticating the Work of God.
- VS 37 Moses also promised the coming of the Messiah when he said God would raise up another prophet and you should listen to him
- VS 38 This is Moses through whom the oracles of God were brought to Israel and mankind. We are not talking of ordinary person or revolutionary
- VS 39 The forefathers refused to obey even this prophet and their hearts turned to Egypt. In sinfulness and the hardness of their hearts is visible.
- VS 40 They could not wait for him to return back and their demand was to “make gods” so they could be led back to Egypt.
- VS 41 They made a calf, worshipped and rejoiced in their “works of their hands”. We make gods with the works of our hands and worship it and rejoice in it. There is a stark warning for all of us.
- VS 42 “God gave turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven”. We see this deviation in worship the cause of fall of man. We see this clearly explained in Romans 1:18-32 where “god gave them up” is repeated thrice, to the lust of their hearts to impurity, dishonorable passions, to a debased mind. This deviant worship continued even after they entered the promised land.
- VS 43 After they entered the promised land they worshipped Moloch (god of canaanites and accepted child sacrifices). And God as a punishment sent them into exile.
- VS 44 God lived in a tent just like His people in the wilderness journey.
- VS 45 The tent remained until the days of David who had in his heart to build a resting place for God, Joshua brought with him the tent after he drove out the inhabitants of the Canaan. This is critical, because our Lord stays where we stay.

- VS 46 David expresses his desire to God to build a house for God, the word of God says that David found favor. God did not allow David to build the house as his hands were full of blood.
- VS 47 Solomon built the first temple, with all the material that was arranged by David before he had died.
- VS 48 The thing that the people were protecting and accused Stephen of blaspheming against, i.e. the temple, the Lord says through Stephen that He does not live in man made houses. What can contain Him? What is good enough for Him? He is infinite.
- VS 49 - 50 God describes Himself as the one that has Heaven as His throne and the earth is His footstool. God asks the question, what kind of a house will you build for me? Everything that is made is made by the power of His word! But imagine this, we who are but dust, stamped with His image carry the Lord in us! What a privilege it is to be the house of God! (1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 6:16)
- VS 51 - 52 Stephen lets it rip through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, this phrase “stiff necked” has special significance, this is the kind of phrase that God used even through Moses (Exodus 32:9, 33:3, 33:5, 34:9) Hezekiah 2 Chronicles 30:8. Stephen describes the people in three key characteristics that define the nature. Question for us to ask is to check if we are like this?
 - Stiff necked
 - Uncircumcised in heart and ears
 - Resist the Holy Spirit
 - Prophet killing (these people would kill Stephen)
 - Killing also the prophets that announced the coming of the “Righteous One”, including John The Baptist
 - Killing Jesus Himself
 - The recognition of the people of God, even God Himself is gone as people are blinded by the love for themselves to be sovereign
 - They had received the law from the angels and they did not keep the law. Law breakers put everyone who preach to keep the law to death.

- VS 54 There was a visceral reaction that the people had when they heard this message being preached
 - They were enraged in the hearts and minds
 - They ground their teeth
- VS 55 The opposite of it was Stephen
 - He was full of the Holy Spirit
 - He saw the “glory of God”. The glory of God is Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-3)
 - He saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He through the Holy Spirit was now seeing the triune God through the seeing of Jesus!
- VS 56 He describes what he saw in this verse and it is beautiful to hear.
 - He saw the “heavens opened”. Seems like dimension(s) opened up that he could see
 - Son of man standing. Jesus is always described as seated at the right hand of God. We see now through the life and testimony of Jesus Christ, Jesus is standing (almost like ovation for the race that Stephen is running and the grievous outcome that is going to come to him, Jesus is encouraging him to stand firm, Stephen faith has become sight!)
 - At the right hand of God. This was showing that Yahweh was God, in three persons.
- VS 57 The people as they heard Stephen say these words, their reaction grew more violent. Interesting and juxtaposed to Stephen’s posture.
 - They cried out with a loud voice
 - They stopped their ears
 - They rushed at him together
- VS 58 They cast him out of the city and stoned him. The destiny of Stephen the first martyr (witness for Christ) was killed. His voice is still heard even after 2000+ years and will be heard for eternity. They stopped the voice, but the message that could not. Let us not stoop hearing what the Lord is saying to us, He is welcoming us to a sweet fellowship with Him! The people that killed Stephen laid down their garments at the feet of a young man who would become the next terrorist to kill

and torture Christians, only to become the greatest Apostle that ever lived, Saul of tarsus, as we know him, dear brother Paul.

- VS 59 - 60 The Holy Spirit through Luke records the prayer that Stephen made as he was being stoned.
 - “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” -> Just like Jesus prayed when he bowed His head in death
 - He fell on his knees unable to bear the blows that were now raining down on him. Even through the pain he cries out. “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” The Lord did not hold the sin, he wiped them clean and saved His people.
 - The Lord took him after Stephen completed his prayer.
 - It is interesting to see it does not say he was buried, in those days, they would throw stones and the person who was punished would be buried in the stones that were thrown.
- Chapter 8:1 the word of God says that “Saul approved of his execution”. The witness of Stephen was the initiation of Saul’s tyranny and then to Saul’s conversion to Paul!