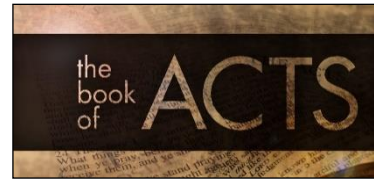


ACTS – Fall 2025 D-Groups

For Wednesday, October 1

Acts 6:8-8:4



The Big Picture - ACTS as a Whole

In this section of Acts, we've seen the Church dealing with challenges that come with its early growth: both internal (*e.g.* in 5:1ff and 6:1-7) and external threats (*e.g.* in 4:1ff and 5:17-42). This week's text specifically focuses on the intensification of the threats from outsiders. *Already*, an odd and unexpected pattern has developed. Opposition - whether in the form of threats or actual persecution - hasn't deterred Jesus' followers who refuse to be silenced (see 4:18-20 and 5:27-32), but instead has prompted ongoing courageous and bold witness (see 4:23-31). In fact, there's an appropriate level of defiance from Jesus' followers toward earthly authorities - one that responds obediently to a far Higher Ruler. Even more, physical chastisement actually produces *rejoicing* (see 5:41). Yet, the irony doesn't stop there. This overall threat leads to an outcome that is directly contrary to what was intended: in the end, the opposition actually sparks growth and the expansion of the Good News (see 5:42). That theme is amplified as we move into this week's text.

An additional note about this overall irony: perhaps it should be somewhat expected given the way faith in Christ and the Good News works. After all, the heartbeat of our story announces salvation because of a death - albeit, one that led to resurrection. Victory comes amidst opposition and even through apparent defeat; life springs forth out of death. God's wisdom confounds as what seems foolish actually accomplishes His purposes - likewise, His strength is powerfully displayed through what seems weakness (see 1 Corinthians 1:18-31). Maybe that pattern should remind us that through God's working and the power of the Holy Spirit, opposition intended to stifle His purposes actually opens the doors of opportunity for a far different outcome - what *He* has intended!

The Close-Up for October 1 - Acts 6:8-8:4 (make sure to read the text!!)

Some notes on the overall flow of this section:

6:8-15 ... the situation - Stephen's arrest based on charges similar to Jesus, in fact, from a very similar cast of characters too (false witnesses in front of the high priest and the Jewish Sanhedrin - sounds familiar!). The accusations against him focused on the way he challenges Moses and the Temple - again, sounds familiar. The Sanhedrin is made up of mostly Pharisees (those who represented Moses and the Law) and Sadducees (mainly priests whose realm was the Temple). In other words, Stephen's preaching struck at the core of both groups' power!

7:1-53 ... Through this OT history lesson, Stephen addresses both of the accusations: even Moses anticipated a greater Prophet that would come after him (7:37, as in 3:22) *and* the Temple *never* could sufficiently contain God's presence (7:48-50). Amidst several other themes that could be noticed in this text (*e.g.* His purposes for Israel), consider this important one: **unfortunately, due to the condition of their hearts, their ancestors' history shows a pattern of rejecting God and His purposes ... just like these people did with Jesus (see the**

rather strong indictment from Stephen in 7:51-53)! Those who were supposed to be the leaders of God's people have actually missed what God has tried to accomplish through Jesus.

7:54-8:4 ... Stephen's sermon leads to a drastic and harsh response as the Jewish leaders stone him to death (yet, notice Jesus' clear approval in 7:56!). Stephen continues to look like Jesus in his response (see 7:60). The one taking responsibility for his death? A Pharisee named Saul - so zealous for preserving God's purposes, he launches an intense persecution against Jesus' followers. Ironically, this only serves to scatter them and spread the Good News. Even more ironically, just wait until you see what happens with this zealous persecutor in Acts 9.

Some of our KEY THEMES specifically on display in this section (we're not repeating the chart every week; however, if you would like one, there are separate sheets with it available in the foyer):

The emphasis on JESUS ... He's the fulfillment of Israel's history, greater than both Moses and the Temple. These are the primary accusations against Stephen mentioned in 6:13-14. There is also "typology" where Joseph's experience - rejected/betrayed by his own brothers who handed him over to outsiders, yet he becomes a ruler - is fulfilled in Jesus; notice the same basic pattern in His final days. *Also, don't miss His role in 7:55 as well - "standing" (as opposed to being "seated") as a sign that He's affirming Stephen's boldness unto death.*

The HOLY SPIRIT's activity (see 6:10 - in the context of 6:3 as well - and 7:55) ... He continues to empower the bold witness of Jesus' followers - here, not even one of the original Apostles (in other words, He's not just active through a special set of people).

The Church's EXTERNAL WITNESS (spreading the Good News) amidst the ANTAGONISM/ OPPOSITION from outsiders - BOLDNESS in the face of it too ... what has been brewing since chapter 4 becomes more intense here with the first Christian martyr. There is a connection between these two realities as well ... odd as it may seem. Understandably, the *bold external mission* leads to increased antagonism as Jesus' followers bear witness to Him publicly - inevitably, "sparks fly" as this happens. Yet, instead of that antagonism limiting the Church external mission as intended (*i.e.* dousing the fire), it actually fans the flame even more - opposition opens up opportunities for further witness and Kingdom expansion (see how this text culminates in 8:4, a scattering that leads to geographical expansion as anticipated in 1:8)!

KINGDOM EXPANSION across boundaries ... the irony of what happens as a result (see 8:4). As one 2nd century Church leader put it, *"the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."*

Some additional questions to reflect on leading-up to next week's D-Group:

- ***What are some major themes that stand out in Stephen's sermon?***
- ***Reflect on the irony that this opposition actually leads to further opportunity for witness.***
- ***What stands out to you about Stephen's overall example - of boldness, of confidence in the face of opposition, of hope even in the face of death, etc.?***
- ***How does his story inspire and motivate you on your faith journey?***

A Challenge for this Week: reflect on how this story - and the overall "irony" of our faith - influences the way we respond to unfortunate realities of life, especially when antagonism comes because of our commitment to Jesus!