

WITNESS OF STEPHEN

6:1-8:3

PREPARATION FOR THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT 1:1-26

TESTIMONY IN JERUSALEM 2-8:3

Foundation of the Church 2-4:31

Administration of the Church 4:32-6:7

Demonstration of love 4:32-5:11

Acceptance and opposition 5:12-42

Appointment of the seven 6:1-7

Appointment of 7 to administer assistance to widows serves 3 purposes:

1) Describes how early church organized to face administrative problem.

2) Introduces Stephen & Philip, spiritual leaders, who become focus of next 2 chs.

=>Stephen marks beginning of formal persecution.

=>Philip marks beginning of ministry to Samaritans

Witness has been exclusively by the 12 until now.

Here we have witness of 2 who aren't part of the 12.

Ministry expanding to include more than just 12 men.

3) Shows how church faced significant problem in Jerusalem.

Division between Hebraistic & Hellenistic Jews.

Judaism was divided by this controversy.

When problem enters the church, apostles recognize secondary importance of issue, but deal seriously with it by naming respected spiritual leaders as administrators.

Result: positive testimony & additional growth of the church.

The problem 6:1-2

What's nature of problem in 6:1-7? Try to read between lines a bit to discover implications of what's happening.

Apostles are caring for all the needs of the people.

But body's continuing to grow. They can no longer handle it.

Work's become too large.

Dispute develops between Jewish Jews & Grk (hellenized) Jews.

Apostles propose that assistants be apptd., to handle this so they may concentrate on their main work => preaching.

Apostles delegate authority to them.

Prerequisites 6:3-4

What're characteristics of men called to solve problem (6:3-7)?

Why were these characteristics so important?

Selection 6:5-6

They identify with them by laying hands on them.

Results 6:7 *"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jeru. increased rapidly, & a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."*

Persecution of the Church 6:8-8:3

Stephen, one of the men named to resolve the previous conflict, became the center of a new

controversy with the Jews.

In one sense we could call 6:1-8:2 **“Witness of Stephen”**

Appointment of Stephen 6:1-7

Preaching of Stephen 6:8-10

His powerful preaching about Jesus results in new wave of persecution which affects course of church history.

Accusation against Stephen 6:11-7:1

What’s nature of accusation against Stephen?

Jews accuse him because he spoke of judgment coming on Jerusalem & of end of the law.

“He speaks blasphemous words . . .

Against this holy place =< Jesus will destroy it.

Against the law =< Jesus will change customs Moses gave to us!”

Explanation by Stephen 7:2-53

What’s main idea of Stephen’s sermon?

Stephen answers charge by reviewing Israel’s history, showing how God cared for Israel from the beginning but Israel always rebelled & rejected His messengers **7:2-33**

Moses sent by God as ruler over Israel & deliver Israel **7:34**

They questioned his authority, but he delivered them **7:35-36**

He promised another would come even as he had come—to deliver Israel **7:37**

In spite of the evidence of God’s provision for Israel, they turned from Him to idols. **7:38-50**

Just like your fathers, you resist H.S. & reject His messengers 7:51-53 ““You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts & ears! You are just like your fathers: You always

resist H.S. ⁵²Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. Now you have betrayed & murdered him— ⁵³you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.”

His message contains nothing prophets hadn't proclaimed repeatedly.

This generation is following same pattern as their ancestors.

They're the ones who have despised the temple & law.

His problem isn't with the temple nor the law;

They profane the temple & disobey the law.

Therefore, judgment is going to come against them.

What are results of this incident (7:54-8:3)?

For Stephen? For Jews involved? For the church?

Response from the council 7:54-60

Religious leaders are convicted by accusations.

They attempt to *plug their ears* & stop Stephen

Note contrast of his actions with theirs. They, “great religious leaders of Israel!”

THEM:

Cut to the heart

Gnashed on him with their teeth

Revealed true nature

“We're children of Abraham” (*This is Abrahamic behavior?*)

Christ: “*You are the sons of your father, the devil!*”

Cried with loud voice

Stopped their ears—symbolism—refusal to hear God's voice

If it's a lie, why stop your ears? Just deny it!

Ran upon him
 Cast him out of the city
 Stoned him

STEPHEN:

Looked up into heaven
 Saw glory of God
 Saw Jesus
 Prayed (for them, no less!!!)

Death of Stephen 7:60-8:1

Finally they stone him to death (7:60-8:1).

What lessons can we learn from Stephen's example & experience?

What elements in 8:1-3 indicate transition to new phase of story of foundation of the church in Acts?

Persecution of the church 8:2-3

Stephen's death marks start of persecution which spreads church through all Judea & Samaria.

1b-3 *"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jeru. & all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea & Samaria. ²Godly men buried Stephen & mourned deeply for him. ³But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men & women & put them in prison."*

The ground is thus laid for the next major movement of the story: testimony in Judea and Samaria.

TESTIMONY IN JUDEA AND SAMARIA 8:4-12:25

What are main events of last 2 ch. that create situation described in ch. 8?

Acts 6 –intro. of new group of ministers, deacons–appointed to take over distribution of goods to needy members.

This frees apostles for ministry of the Word.

These are godly leaders also.

2 are described more carefully for us:

Stephen preaches gospel, is rejected by rulers of Israel & stoned to death.

His death begins period of unprecedented persecution

Philip is another of these godly leaders.

Describes successful evangelistic ministry in Samaria.