



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

Stephen

Faithful to Jesus to the End

The Short Answer

Stephen appears in only two chapters of Acts, yet his life stands at a major turning point in the story of the early Church. He was chosen to help meet a practical need involving neglected widows because he was known as a man “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” His ministry quickly extended beyond practical service. God worked through him powerfully, he spoke about Jesus with wisdom, and opponents arranged false accusations against him. Before the Jewish council, Stephen retold Israel's history—from Abraham through Joseph, Moses, the tabernacle, and the temple—to show that God's presence and purposes had never been confined to one place and that God's messengers had repeatedly been resisted. Stephen confronted his hearers with rejecting Jesus. They killed him by stoning. As he died, he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God and prayed, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Nearby stood Saul. Stephen died; persecution scattered believers; the Gospel moved outward; and Saul would soon encounter the risen Jesus. Stephen's ministry was brief. Its influence was not.

Acts 6:1-15 · Acts 7:1-60 · Acts 8:1-4 · Acts 11:19-21

Opening Memory Anchor

Faithfulness is not measured by how long someone serves, but by faithfulness to Jesus with the life God gives.



PART ONE

BEGINNER GUIDE

1. WHO WAS STEPHEN?

Stephen first appears in Acts 6. The Church in Jerusalem was growing rapidly, and a complaint arose from the Hellenists because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles told the believers to choose seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit, and full of wisdom. Stephen is named first. The other six were Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus. Acts describes Stephen as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” and later as “full of grace and power.” His story begins not with a famous preaching assignment but with a need among vulnerable people. Philip, another of the Seven, appears immediately afterward in Acts 8 as a Gospel witness in Samaria and to the Ethiopian official.

Memory Anchor

No service done faithfully for Christ is insignificant merely because it happens outside the spotlight.

2. WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM WITH THE WIDOWS?

The Hebrews were likely Jewish believers more closely associated with Hebrew or Aramaic language and Judean culture. The Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews shaped more strongly by the wider Greek-speaking world. Acts does not say whether the neglect was deliberate discrimination or administrative failure. Either way, the problem was real. The apostles did not say, “Preaching matters. Food does not.” They created a responsible way to address both needs. Acts 6:7 then says the word of God continued to increase. Healthy ministry did not require choosing between truth and compassionate care.

3. WAS STEPHEN A DEACON?

Stephen is frequently called one of the Church's first deacons. Acts 6 describes seven men appointed to oversee a practical ministry need, and its language of service is related to words later associated with deacon ministry. However, Acts 6 never explicitly gives the Seven the formal title “deacon.” Later passages, including Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13, clearly use deacon as a recognized role. Those qualifications emphasize dignity, integrity, freedom from greed, a clear conscience, tested character, and faithfulness in household life—meaningful overlap with Acts 6's good reputation, wisdom, and spiritual maturity. Acts 6 is narrative description of a specific need, not a complete blueprint for every later church structure.

4. WAS STEPHEN A GREEK-SPEAKING JEW?

Probably. Stephen's Greek name and the Acts 6 setting strongly suggest that he belonged to the Greek-speaking Jewish Christian community. All seven men selected have Greek names, possibly indicating that the Church chose men able to understand and fairly represent the Hellenistic believers whose widows had been neglected. Acts never explicitly says, “Stephen was a Hellenistic Jew,” so this remains a strong historical inference rather than an explicit statement.



5. DID STEPHEN ONLY DISTRIBUTE FOOD?

No. Acts immediately shows Stephen doing much more. Read Acts 6:8-10. He was “full of grace and power” and performed great wonders and signs among the people. Acts gives no details about exactly what those signs were, so readers should not invent miracles the text does not record. Stephen also entered discussions with opponents who could not withstand “the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.” A person who serves tables may also understand Scripture deeply. Spiritual gifts and opportunities do not always fit neatly inside human job descriptions.

6. WHY IS THE HOLY SPIRIT SO IMPORTANT IN STEPHEN'S STORY?

Luke repeatedly highlights the Holy Spirit. Stephen is chosen because he is “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” His opponents cannot withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he speaks. Immediately before his death, Stephen is again “full of the Holy Spirit” as he looks into heaven and sees God's glory and Jesus standing at God's right hand. The Spirit shapes Stephen's character, empowers his witness, and sustains him as he faces death. Acts presents Christian witness as Spirit-empowered rather than merely personality-driven.

Memory Anchor

The Holy Spirit shaped how Stephen served, spoke, and suffered.

7. WHY DID PEOPLE OPPOSE STEPHEN?

Some disputed with Stephen but could not successfully answer his wisdom. Instead, men were secretly persuaded to accuse him of blasphemous words against Moses and God. Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin. False witnesses claimed he spoke against the holy place, the law, and the customs Moses delivered. The accusations distorted issues Stephen was apparently discussing. His speech in Acts 7 shows that he knew Israel's Scriptures deeply and argued that Israel's own history revealed a pattern his accusers were repeating.

8. WHY DID STEPHEN GIVE SUCH A LONG SPEECH?

Acts 7 contains the longest sustained speech in Acts and occupies extraordinary narrative space. Israel's history was Stephen's argument: Abraham → Joseph → Moses → wilderness and tabernacle → David and Solomon → temple → resistance to God's messengers → Jesus, the Righteous One. God's activity had never been limited to Jerusalem: He appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, was with Joseph in Egypt, appeared to Moses near Sinai, and traveled with Israel through the wilderness. Even Solomon's temple could not contain the Most High. Luke's decision to preserve the speech at length also gives it literary importance. It interprets Israel's history, explains growing conflict with Jerusalem's leadership, and prepares readers for the Gospel's movement toward Judea, Samaria, Antioch, and eventually the Gentile world. Acts 7 functions as a major hinge in the book.

9. WHAT WAS STEPHEN SAYING ABOUT JOSEPH?

Joseph's brothers rejected him, yet God was with him, and the rejected brother became the means through which his family was preserved. Stephen never says, “Joseph is a prophecy of Jesus.” Rather, a pattern emerges: someone chosen and used by God is rejected by his own people, yet God vindicates and works through the rejected person. This does not mean every detail of Joseph's life symbolically predicts Jesus.



10. WHY DOES STEPHEN SPEND SO MUCH TIME ON MOSES?

Because Moses was central to the accusations. Stephen describes Moses as chosen by God, sent as ruler and deliverer, recipient of revelation, leader of the Exodus, and giver of living words. Yet Israel repeatedly resisted him: “Who made you a ruler and a judge?” The same Moses they rejected was the man God sent as ruler and redeemer. Stephen’s pattern becomes clear: God sends. People reject. God’s messenger is vindicated. Stephen will argue that this reaches its climax in Jesus.

11. WHAT WAS STEPHEN SAYING ABOUT THE TEMPLE?

Stephen places the temple inside the larger biblical story. Israel first had the tabernacle; David later desired a permanent dwelling place; Solomon built the temple. Then Stephen quotes Isaiah 66:1-2: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.” The point is not that the temple was evil. Nor is Isaiah merely saying God is “too big for buildings.” In Isaiah’s context, God’s transcendence is paired with a challenge to false worship: God looks toward the person who is humble, contrite in spirit, and who trembles at His word. Religious structures cannot substitute for humble obedience. The temple mattered, but the God of the temple mattered infinitely more.

12. WHY DID STEPHEN’S SPEECH BECOME SO CONFRONTATIONAL?

Near the end of Acts 7, Stephen calls his hearers “stiff-necked”, says they resist the Holy Spirit, asks which prophets their fathers did not persecute, and brings the argument directly to Jesus. Their ancestors persecuted those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One; now Stephen says his hearers betrayed and murdered Him. Stephen was not merely giving a history lesson. His speech demanded repentance.

13. WHAT DID STEPHEN SEE BEFORE HE DIED?

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He was standing before an earthly court that condemned him, but he saw a greater reality. Jesus—the One his accusers had rejected—was alive and exalted. Stephen was about to lose his earthly life, but he was not abandoned.

Memory Anchor

The verdict of an earthly crowd cannot overturn the verdict of the risen Christ.

14. HOW DID STEPHEN DIE?

The crowd rushed at Stephen, dragged him outside the city, and stoned him. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell to his knees and cried, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Luke’s description echoes Jesus’ death: Jesus committed His spirit to the Father and prayed for His executioners; Stephen entrusted his spirit to Jesus and prayed for his killers. Stephen did not save himself by imitating Jesus. His response revealed what the grace of Jesus had produced in him.

15. WHO WAS SAUL, AND WHY IS HE MENTIONED?

Acts 7:58 introduces a young man named Saul. Witnesses laid their garments at his feet, and Acts 8:1 says Saul approved Stephen’s execution. This is the Saul later known as Paul. After Stephen’s death he ravaged the Church—until Acts 9, when the persecutor encountered the risen Jesus. Scripture never says Stephen’s prayer directly caused Saul’s conversion, but Luke deliberately places Saul at Stephen’s death and then makes him central to the story that follows.



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16. DID STEPHEN'S DEATH STOP THE CHURCH?

No. Severe persecution broke out against the Jerusalem church, scattering believers throughout Judea and Samaria. Acts 8:4 says, "Those who were scattered went about preaching the word." Later Acts 11:19-21 describes believers scattered because of the persecution associated with Stephen reaching Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. Some proclaimed Jesus to Greeks; many believed. Antioch became one of Acts' most important missionary centers. Stephen did not live to see the results.

Memory Anchor

What looks like the end of one servant may become part of God's work through many others.

PART TWO

WANT TO GO DEEPER?

INTERMEDIATE

17. WAS STEPHEN THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR?

Stephen is traditionally called the first Christian martyr or protomartyr. The Greek word *martyr* means witness, creating an important connection with Acts 1:8: "You will be my witnesses..." Stephen bore witness to Jesus in Jerusalem, before hostile authorities, and eventually at the cost of his life. Over time, martyr became especially associated with Christians whose witness led to death. John the Baptist had already been executed for faithfulness to God, so more precisely Stephen is the first recorded martyr of the post-Pentecost Church.

Memory Anchor

Jesus called His people to be witnesses. Stephen remained a witness even when witness became costly.

18. WHY IS JESUS STANDING RATHER THAN SITTING?

The New Testament frequently describes Jesus as seated at God's right hand; Stephen sees Him standing. Scripture does not explain why. Some understand Jesus as standing to welcome Stephen; others as Stephen's heavenly advocate or witness; still others connect the scene to Daniel 7:13-14 and the exalted Son of Man. The exact posture remains uncertain. What is certain matters more: Stephen sees Jesus alive, exalted, authoritative, and present as he faces death.

19. WHY DOES ACTS 7 SAY 75 PEOPLE WENT TO EGYPT WHEN GENESIS SAYS 70?

Acts 7:14 refers to 75 persons, while Genesis 46:27 in the traditional Hebrew text gives 70. Stephen's number agrees with the ancient Greek Old Testament—the Septuagint (LXX)—whose form of Genesis 46 includes additional descendants in the family count. Greek-speaking Jews commonly used the Septuagint. Acts therefore reflects an ancient textual/counting tradition, not Stephen randomly misremembering Genesis. The central point remains unchanged: Jacob's family went into Egypt and God preserved them there.

Biblical Literacy Note

Ancient biblical manuscripts can preserve differences in counting or wording without changing the central historical or theological point of a passage.



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20. DID STEPHEN MAKE A MISTAKE ABOUT ABRAHAM, JACOB, AND THE BURIAL PLACE?

Acts 7:15-16 says the patriarchs were carried back to Shechem and placed in a tomb Abraham had purchased. Genesis 23 records Abraham purchasing Machpelah near Hebron from Ephron; Genesis 33 records Jacob purchasing land near Shechem from the sons of Hamor; Joshua 24:32 says Joseph's bones were buried at Shechem in land Jacob purchased. Several explanations have been proposed: Stephen may be compressing multiple burial traditions; Abraham may have made another unrecorded purchase at Shechem; or textual/transmission questions may be involved. Multiple faithful explanations remain possible, and this study does not need to choose among them where the evidence does not require one conclusion. No explanation commands universal agreement. The difficulty should be examined honestly, but Stephen's central argument does not depend on which proposal is correct.

Reader Safeguard

A difficult historical detail should be examined honestly rather than hidden. It also should not be made to carry more weight than the passage itself gives it.

21. WAS STEPHEN ANTI-JEWISH?

No. Stephen was Jewish. So were Jesus, the apostles, Paul, and the earliest Christians. Acts 7 is an internal Jewish dispute concerning Israel's Scriptures, Messiah, and response to God's messengers. Stephen's severe language belongs to Israel's own prophetic tradition. Passages criticizing particular Jewish leaders have been misused in Christian history to justify antisemitism, hostility, discrimination, or violence. Such misuse distorts the historical setting. Stephen's accusation was theological and covenantal—not racial.

Pastoral Safeguard

Acts 7 must never be used to justify hatred, contempt, mistreatment, or violence toward Jewish people.

22. WAS STEPHEN SAYING THE LAW AND TEMPLE WERE BAD?

No. Stephen honors Moses and treats Israel's Scriptures as authoritative. His argument is not, "Moses was wrong," but, "Your ancestors resisted Moses even though God sent him." Likewise, he acknowledges Solomon's temple while reminding his hearers from Isaiah that God cannot be contained within human structures. The problem was resisting the God who gave the law and allowing attachment to the temple to obscure what God was doing through Jesus.

23. WAS STEPHEN'S STONING A LEGAL EXECUTION?

John 18:31 records Jewish leaders telling Pilate they were not permitted to put someone to death, reflecting Roman control over capital punishment in Judea. Acts 7 describes no Roman trial, governor, or capital sentence. Instead, the crowd becomes enraged, rushes at Stephen, drags him outside the city, and stones him. This looks more like an extrajudicial mob killing or lynching than a formally sanctioned Roman execution. The witnesses laying aside garments may echo legal procedures associated with stoning, but the overall scene is highly charged and disorderly. Roman control was not always exercised uniformly. A careful conclusion is that Stephen was killed after appearing before the Sanhedrin, but Acts does not present his death as a normally authorized Roman capital proceeding.



24. HOW DOES STEPHEN'S SPEECH POINT TO JESUS?

Stephen's speech is not a collection of hidden predictions. Its Christ-centered force comes from the pattern of Israel's history. Joseph was rejected before becoming the means of preservation. Moses was rejected—"Who made you a ruler and a judge?"—yet God appointed him ruler and deliverer. The prophets were persecuted. Those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One were rejected. Then the Righteous One Himself came. Jesus was crucified; God raised Him; Stephen now sees Him exalted at God's right hand.

Memory Anchor

Human rejection did not cancel God's purpose in Jesus; resurrection revealed God's verdict.

25. DOES STEPHEN'S DEATH INTENTIONALLY ECHO JESUS' DEATH?

Luke presents unmistakable parallels. Jesus prayed, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Jesus prayed for those responsible for His death; Stephen prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Stephen had been transformed into a disciple who increasingly resembled his Lord. This does not mean Christians must remain passively in dangerous situations or refuse lawful protection. Forgiveness does not require pretending evil is harmless, and seeking justice and forgiving an offender are not necessarily opposites.

26. DID STEPHEN'S PRAYER LEAD TO PAUL'S CONVERSION?

It is tempting to say, "Stephen prayed, and therefore Saul was converted." Scripture does not explicitly make that causal statement. Saul's conversion happened because the risen Jesus confronted him and God acted in grace. Still, Luke's placement is striking: Stephen dies praying for enemies; Saul approves the killing and intensifies persecution; then Jesus stops Saul on the Damascus road. Grace reached a man standing on the wrong side of Stephen's execution. For a fuller study, see 3Nails Study #202 — Paul: From Persecutor to Apostle.

27. WHY WOULD GOD ALLOW A SPIRIT-FILLED MAN LIKE STEPHEN TO DIE SO SOON?

Acts never gives a simple explanation. Stephen was full of faith, the Holy Spirit, grace, power, wisdom, courage, and usefulness—yet he died. Faithfulness did not guarantee a long life; miracles did not prevent martyrdom. This challenges any theology implying faithful Christians should always expect protection from suffering. Jesus never promised that. Yet Acts does not portray Stephen's death as abandonment: at the moment of greatest earthly danger, Stephen sees heaven opened and Jesus exalted. Christian hope is not, "Nothing terrible will ever happen," but, "Nothing—not even death—can separate those who belong to Christ from their Lord."

28. HOW DID STEPHEN'S DEATH CHANGE THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH?

Acts 1:8 promised witness in Jerusalem → Judea → Samaria → the ends of the earth. By Acts 7 the Church remained heavily concentrated in Jerusalem. Stephen was killed; persecution erupted; believers scattered into Judea and Samaria, carrying the Word. Philip preached in Samaria. Later scattered believers reached Antioch, where many Gentiles believed; Antioch eventually sent Barnabas and Saul on missionary work. Stephen was a witness in Jerusalem; his martyrdom helped trigger the scattering of many more witnesses. This does not make persecution good. Murder and religious violence are evil. Acts shows that human evil could not stop God's mission.

Memory Anchor

God does not need evil to be good in order to overcome it for His purposes.

29. WHAT DOES STEPHEN TEACH ABOUT COURAGE?

Biblical courage is not pretending danger is absent. Stephen knew he faced hostile authorities and spoke anyway. His courage was not reckless self-promotion; Acts emphasizes the source of his strength: the Holy Spirit. Christian courage does not mean every believer must become confrontational. It means faithfulness to Christ matters more than reputation, comfort, or approval. Sometimes faithfulness speaks. Sometimes it serves quietly. Sometimes it endures. Stephen did all three.



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STEPHEN AND THE BIGGER BIBLICAL STORY

Stephen's speech is itself a tour through the biblical storyline:

God called Abraham → God preserved Joseph → God raised up Moses → God delivered Israel → God gave His Word → God dwelt among His people → God sent the prophets → God sent the Righteous One—Jesus → Jesus was rejected and killed → God raised and exalted Him → the Holy Spirit empowered Christ's witnesses → the Gospel continued outward.

Stephen was not creating a new religion detached from Israel's Scriptures. He believed Israel's story had reached its fulfillment in Jesus, and he was willing to die saying so.

HOW DOES STEPHEN POINT TO JESUS?

Stephen points to Jesus most clearly through his witness. He proclaimed Jesus as the Righteous One, saw Him as the exalted Son of Man, entrusted his spirit to Jesus, reflected Jesus' mercy toward his killers, and died because he refused to deny the risen Christ. Stephen was not another Savior. He needed Jesus like every sinner. The parallel is that a disciple increasingly became like his Lord. Jesus remained the Savior; Stephen remained the servant.

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. DO NOT DESPISE PRACTICAL SERVICE.

Stephen's story begins with neglected widows. God cares about truth and people. Serving practical needs can be deeply spiritual work.

2. KNOW SCRIPTURE FOR YOURSELF.

When Stephen was challenged, he could trace God's work across generations. Biblical courage without biblical understanding can become noise. Open Scripture. Learn its storyline.

3. LET THE HOLY SPIRIT SHAPE BOTH WORDS AND CHARACTER.

Stephen was known for faith, grace, wisdom, power, and the Holy Spirit. Christian witness involves both truth and character.

4. DO NOT CONFUSE GOD WITH RELIGIOUS STRUCTURES.

The temple mattered. God was greater. Church buildings, ministries, traditions, and institutions can serve God's purposes. None should replace God Himself.

5. EXPECT FAITHFULNESS TO SOMETIMES COST SOMETHING.

Following Jesus does not guarantee universal approval. The goal is not to seek conflict but to remain faithful when obedience becomes costly.

6. REFUSE TO LET HATRED HAVE THE FINAL WORD.

Stephen prayed for the people killing him. Forgiveness does not erase justice or make abuse acceptable; it refuses to become spiritually controlled by vengeance.

7. DO NOT DECIDE WHO IS BEYOND GOD'S GRACE.

Saul approved Stephen's death. Jesus transformed Saul. The person who appears most hostile to Christ is not beyond Christ's reach.

8. TRUST GOD WITH RESULTS YOU MAY NEVER SEE.

Stephen never lived to see Antioch become a missionary center or Paul's missionary journeys. Faithfulness sometimes plants seeds whose harvest belongs to another generation.



REVIEW AND RETENTION

1. Where is Stephen's story primarily found? Acts 6–7, with consequences continuing into Acts 8 and Acts 11.
2. Why was Stephen originally selected? To help address the daily distribution in which Hellenistic widows were being overlooked.
3. Who were the other six men? Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus.
4. Does Acts explicitly call Stephen a deacon? No, although Christians commonly connect Acts 6 with later deacon ministry.
5. How does Acts describe Stephen? Full of faith, the Holy Spirit, grace, power, and wisdom.
6. What details are given about his wonders and signs? Acts says they occurred but does not describe them specifically.
7. Why did Stephen retell Israel's history? To answer the accusations and expose the recurring pattern of resisting God's messengers.
8. Why is the speech important within Acts? It interprets Israel's history and forms a major transition toward the Gospel's outward expansion.
9. Which major figures appear? Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, and Israel's prophets.
10. What was his main point about the temple? God is not confined to a building, and structures cannot substitute for humble obedience.
11. Whom did Stephen call the Righteous One? Jesus.
12. What did Stephen see? God's glory and Jesus standing at God's right hand.
13. How did he respond while being killed? He entrusted himself to Jesus and prayed for his killers.
14. Who was present? Saul, who approved of Stephen's death.
15. What happened afterward? Persecution scattered believers, who carried the Gospel into new regions.
16. Why 75 in Acts but 70 in Genesis? Stephen's number agrees with the ancient Greek Septuagint tradition.
17. What burial-place difficulty appears? Acts combines details involving Shechem and Abraham that Genesis presents through separate purchases associated with Abraham and Jacob.
18. Was the stoning clearly a formally authorized Roman execution? No; Acts lacks a recorded Roman capital sentence, making an extrajudicial killing the more likely description.
19. Why call Stephen the first Christian martyr? He is the first follower of Jesus whose martyrdom is recorded after Pentecost and the formation of the Church.
20. How does martyr connect with Acts 1:8? The Greek word means witness; Stephen became a witness to Jesus even unto death.
21. What role does the Holy Spirit play? Stephen is full of the Spirit, speaks with Spirit-given wisdom, and is full of the Spirit as heaven opens before his death.
22. Central lesson? Faithfulness to Jesus matters even when earthly results are unseen.

KEY TERMS

- Antioch — Major early Christian center where believers scattered by persecution helped establish a growing Gentile church.
- Deacon — A recognized New Testament ministry role associated with service. Acts 6 is commonly connected with its development, although the Seven are not explicitly called deacons there.
- Hellenists — Greek-speaking Jews or Jewish Christians shaped by Greek language and culture.
- Martyr — From Greek *martyros*, "witness"; later especially associated with Christians faithful to Christ unto death.
- Protomartyr — "First martyr." Stephen is traditionally called the protomartyr of the post-Pentecost Church.
- Sanhedrin — The Jewish ruling council before which Stephen was brought.
- Septuagint (LXX) — Ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures widely used in the Greek-speaking Jewish world.
- Son of Man — A title Jesus frequently used for Himself, connected especially with Daniel 7:13-14.
- Stiff-Necked — Biblical imagery for stubborn resistance to God.
- Tabernacle — Israel's portable sanctuary before the Jerusalem temple.
- Witness — A person who testifies to what is true; Acts 1:8 uses the idea programmatically for Jesus' followers.



FINAL MEMORY ANCHORS

- Faithfulness is not measured by how long someone serves, but by faithfulness to Jesus with the life God gives.
- No service done faithfully for Christ is insignificant merely because it happens outside the spotlight.
- The Holy Spirit shaped how Stephen served, spoke, and suffered.
- The verdict of an earthly crowd cannot overturn the verdict of the risen Christ.
- Jesus called His people to be witnesses. Stephen remained a witness even when witness became costly.
- What looks like the end of one servant may become part of God's work through many others.
- Human rejection did not cancel God's purpose in Jesus; resurrection revealed God's verdict.
- God does not need evil to be good in order to overcome it for His purposes.

A SCRIPTURE PATH FOR CONTINUED STUDY

Acts 1:8 — Jesus commissions His followers as witnesses
Acts 6:1-7 — Stephen and the other six are chosen amid the dispute concerning neglected widows
Acts 6:8-15 — Stephen's ministry, wonders and signs, opposition, arrest, and accusations
Acts 7:1-8 — Abraham and God's covenant promise
Acts 7:9-16 — Joseph rejected and later used by God
Acts 7:17-43 — Moses chosen by God and repeatedly resisted
Acts 7:44-50 — Tabernacle, temple, and God's transcendent presence

Isaiah 66:1-2 — God's transcendence, humility, and trembling at His Word
Acts 7:51-60 — Stephen confronts rejection of Jesus, sees Him, and is killed
Acts 8:1-40 — Persecution scatters believers; Philip ministers beyond Jerusalem
Acts 9:1-22 — Saul encounters the risen Jesus
Acts 11:19-26 — The persecution associated with Stephen contributes to Gospel expansion toward Antioch
Daniel 7:13-14 — Background to Son of Man imagery
1 Timothy 3:8-13 — Later New Testament qualifications associated with deacons

CLOSING THOUGHT

Stephen's story is remarkably short. He appears in Acts 6 and dies before Acts 8 begins. No long missionary career or New Testament letter bears his name. Yet Scripture shows a life filled with faithfulness. His story begins with overlooked widows. He served, knew Scripture, spoke about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit shaped his character, empowered his witness, and sustained him when witness became costly. He stood before powerful men and traced God's faithfulness through Israel's history. Then the crowd turned on him. The earthly court condemned him; heaven opened; Stephen saw the glory of God and Jesus. The stones, injustice, and pain were real—but so was Jesus. Stephen entrusted his life to Him and prayed for the people killing him. He died sounding like his Savior.

Beside the crowd stood Saul. Saul approved, persecuted, and tried to destroy the Church. But Jesus was not finished. Soon Saul would fall before the risen Christ. The persecutor would become a preacher, the enemy a brother, and the Gospel Stephen died proclaiming would be carried by Paul across the Roman world. Meanwhile the persecution scattered believers. Philip went into Samaria; others reached Antioch; Gentiles believed; a missionary church grew. Stephen did not live to see it. Faithfulness does not require seeing the results. It requires trusting the One who does.

Stephen's confidence was not in the length of his ministry. It was in Jesus—the rejected Jesus who was alive, the crucified Jesus who was exalted, the Jesus Stephen confessed on earth and saw standing in heaven. Stephen's earthly ministry ended. The Gospel did not. The Church scattered. The Word spread. An enemy encountered Jesus. And Christ continued building His Church.

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