



**"Acts of the Apostles: Lesson 14" by
Faber McMullen, Union Grove Baptist
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**"The Martyrdom of St Stephen"
"When Bad things Happen to Good People"**



We last looked on as a dispute arose within the church as one of the ethnic groups in the fellowship felt like their widows were not being giving the attention that others were being given. Seven wise people (who were ethnically different from the Hebrews) were chosen to minister to the needs of their own people. One of these "deacons" was Stephen. Now that attack from within the church had been overcome we see the attacks begin once again from outside of the church. Please follow with me as we read the ending to Acts chapter 6 and we go through Acts chapter 7.

Stephen Accused of Blasphemy

⁸ And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. ¹⁰ And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. ¹¹ Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." ¹² And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. ¹³ They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." ¹⁵ And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

Instead of trying to defend himself, Stephen began to retell the story to the leaders of just exactly what God had done for Israel. A good outline to this would include the following:



1 The Call of Abraham (verses 1-8) - God called Abram ("high father") who lived in what we now know as modern day Iraq. He was from a family of pagans who had household gods, and God whispered into his heart to leave Ur of the Chaldees and to

move south into what we now call Israel. God changed his name to Abraham meaning "father of multitudes". God called him to a place he had never been and did not tell him how he was going to get there. Abram just starting walking. God promised Abraham that he would be a great nation. And when he was old God gave him Isaac, and then Isaac beget Jacob (later called Israel), and Jacob had the 12 patriarchs.

God calls us as well to do things in our lives. It may involve a career. It may involve serving Him. It may just involve adjusting our lives to how He wants us to live. We can hear Him if we listen intently.

Application: Like Abraham, God calls us to do things that often are new to us and that take us out of our comfort zone. We may not always understand exactly what is going on, but we can be assured that He will be wherever He calls us to be and He will empower us to do whatever He has called us to do. I've heard preachers say, "If God has called you to it, God will get you through it." And I will add, not only will He get you through it, He will give you the power to accomplish whatever it is that He has called you to do. He doesn't ask you to do it alone, but He promises to be there with you throughout the whole process. So brothers and sisters, stop talking yourselves out of the things that God has called you to do. In this case, God was calling Stephen to stand before the council, and as we will soon see to become the first martyr for the truthfulness of Jesus the Messiah.

Pick up with me now in verse 9 and let's continue to read.



2 The Patriarchs in Egypt (verses 9-16) - In time those twelve sons of Jacob came into conflict. One of them, Joseph, began to have dreams that the other eleven were bowing down to him and worshipping him. The eleven brothers grew angry and they seized the young boy Joseph and they took a coat of many colors that his father had given to him and they dipped it in blood to make their father believe that his precious Joseph had been killed by a

wild beast. They then threw Joseph in a well as captive and sold him as a slave to a group of travelling Midianites who were in a caravan on their way to Egypt.

Application: Sometimes you'll be the subject of people's jealousy and envy. You just keep doing what you're supposed to be doing. Leave the rest to God. If God calls you to it, God will get you through it!

When Joseph got to Egypt he ended up serving an aristocratic master named Potiphar. Potiphar was one of Pharaoh's officials. The Bible tells us he was a "captain of the guard", so he was a military leader. Joseph administered his household and he did a magnificent job. When Potiphar was away, his wife began to try to seduce Joseph. She tried every way she could to get him to have sex with her. You young people in here

would say that she was trying to cheat with Joseph. Joseph denied her because he loved his master and he wanted to please God. Finally, she got mad at him for resisting her and she accused poor Joseph of raping her. It was all a lie, but Joseph ending up being put into prison.

Application: Guys and gals, just because someone is attracted to you and wants to get intimate with you doesn't mean you need to compromise yourself. Keep yourself and your body holy to the Lord. It may cause some to ridicule you, but you stay faithful to the Lord. He will stay faithful to you.



Joseph was in prison for two years and the story becomes even more interesting. Scripture tells us in Genesis 39 that in everything that Joseph did in prison the Lord caused him to prosper. Soon, he was put in charge of the entire prison. While he was in there, the Pharaoh's head butler and baker were accused of some crime and they were thrown into prison with Joseph. The butler was

the person who ran the palace and specialized in reserving and maintaining the king's wine. The baker was in charge of the king's food provisions. While they were both in prison they had dreams that they didn't understand. Joseph must have had a reputation for being near to God or being a holy person in some way. Both of these officials told their dreams to Joseph and events happened that were exactly like Joseph had said. The butler was forgiven and restored to the king's palace. The baker was killed and the birds came and ate the flesh from his body. The Torah tells us that in time God caused Pharaoh to have a dream that troubled him greatly.

The butler, who had forgotten Joseph, ended up telling Pharaoh that there was this Hebrew guy down in the prison who could interpret dreams. Pharaoh called for Joseph and they cleaned him and dressed him, and then they brought him before Pharaoh. When Pharaoh asked if he could really interpret dreams, what do you think Joseph said?

¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it."¹⁶ So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace." (Genesis 39:15-16 NKJV).

Joseph gave God the glory. The story is long, but in time Joseph interpreted the dream and saved Egypt from a great famine that came to the whole region. Amazed at Joseph's abilities, Pharaoh put him in charge of the kingdom. Everything that Joseph put his hand to God made it to prosper. Eventually Joseph's family were starving up in Canaan and they went to Egypt in search of food. The story is fascinating as Joseph had every opportunity to get vengeance for what his brothers had done to him, but instead he forgave them and put their wickedness behind him. When they finally realized who he

was, they were terrified that he would have them killed as that is what they deserved. Instead he said told them that what they had meant for evil God had used for good.

Application: You will go through many ups and downs in life. Realize that the Lord is with you through it all. Honor Him with your life and give Him the glory for everything. Sometimes what others intend for evil against you, God will use for good. Here we see God calling Stephen to be ridiculed and to be falsely accused. Unlike Joseph who became a mighty prince in Egypt, Stephen was being a faithful Christ-Follower who will end up being killed

Turn with me now to verses 17-36.

3 Moses and the Exodus - After the Israelites had been in Egypt for 400 years, no one remembered the greatness of Joseph. The Hebrews increased and became wealthier. Their herds grew and their families grew. When they had come down to Egypt they numbered only about 70 people and now it is estimated that they numbered a million.

The Egyptians feared them and began to enslave them. In addition, the Pharaoh ordered that all of the young males should be killed. The idea of course was to either exterminate or assimilate the Jews into the Egyptian populace. A little boy was born and his parents refused to have him killed. His name was **Moshe** (we say Moses in English). His mother had him put in a little wicker basket covered with tar and he was found in the Nile River by the Pharaoh's daughter. She took him home and raised him as an Egyptian. The story doesn't tell us how he figured out he wasn't an Egyptian, but it seemed to sort of be the secret that everyone knew. As he grew up the Egyptians increasingly became harsh to the Israelites. They beat them, enslaved them, and used them to build many of the magnificent structures we still see today in Egypt.



Moses was around 40 when he came to the aid of a Hebrew who was being beaten. Moses killed the Egyptian perpetrator, and he fled into the desert of Midian. It was there that he came across a bush that was on fire, but it was not consumed. He heard God's voice. Scripture tells us about the encounter.

⁵ Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." ⁶ Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God." (Exodus 3:5-6 NKJV).

Then Stephen began to tell the council about how Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt, out of their slavery, and into the Promised Land. Instead of being grateful, the Israelites turned their backs on God. They offered their children as sacrifices to the god

Molech, burning them on altars. Stephen pointed out how Israel had rejected God's best each and every step of the way, and how their forefathers had rejected and killed each and every one of the prophets who had come along, and how now in this time, they had rejected the Holy Spirit.

Let's pick up in verse 54 to see how it all ends.

⁵⁴ When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:54-60)

Following God in this life is not easy, but the benefits go on eternally. Stephen was one of the Hellenized Jews we talked about that was called first to minister to the Hellenized Jewish widows in the early church. But, God had more for Stephen to do. Stephen was faithful to the little things that God called him to do. In reading the text for today a statement kept coming before me. The text tells us over and over that Stephen "was filled with the Holy Spirit." Are you living your life in such a way that you're "filled with the Holy Spirit"? If not, agree with God that changes need to be made, and ask Him to make those changes in you. The text tells us that after Stephen was stoned, the murderers laid his clothes at the feet of Saul. Perhaps this event was part of what led Saul to become Paul the Apostle who was God's greatest instrument in the creation of the Church. Saul learned from Stephen what it looked like to serve the Lord with all of your heart, soul, and mind.

When God calls you to it, God will take you through it. When God calls you to it, God will empower you to do it, EVEN if that means giving you the grace to die in a way that brings glory and honor to God. I think Stephen shows us how to live for the glory of God, but also how to die for the glory of God.

All things do work together for good for those who love God for those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28).

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Fryday - Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.
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