

REFLECTION GUIDE

ACTS 6:8-7:60 - FULL OF FAITH AND SPIRIT

KEY TERMS

Covenant of circumcision - A term used to refer to the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 17 that Abraham would have a son with Sarah and become *the father of a multitude of nations*; circumcision was a sign to the people of this promise.

Son of Man - A term used in Daniel 7 to describe a figure who would come in the last days to judge God's enemies and deliver God's people; this term is applied to Jesus, by himself and others, 88 times in the New Testament.

Saul (Paul) - Saul, who later goes by Paul, is first mentioned here in the book of Acts as those who witnessed Stephen's stoning *laid down their garments at (his) feet* (v. 58) out of respect for, as it appears, someone overseeing the execution. Paul later goes on to become a Christian, help spread the gospel around the known world, and write 13 New Testament books.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Son of Man in the OT and Jesus in the NT is always portrayed as *sitting* at the right hand of God (see Ps 110:1, Lk 22:69, Heb 1:3, Rev 3:21). However, as Stephen is killed in Acts 7, Jesus is *standing* (v. 56). Most commentators believe this is significant and indicates Jesus' *readiness* to welcome Stephen and to judge his enemies.

BACKGROUND

Immediately after the Church appoints men to help serve the Hellenist widows, one of those men, Stephen, is seized and brought before the Jewish leaders, accused of blasphemy against God. In response to this accusation, Stephen makes a lengthy speech based in the Old Testament Scriptures to show the people that the leaders have a history of rejecting the way God is working in the world. Stephen traces much of the story of the Old Testament from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Joseph to Moses to David and to Solomon. Stephen's point appears to be less about making a case that Jesus is the Messiah (as in previous speeches by Peter), and more about showing the religious leaders that Israel has a history of rejecting God and his chosen instruments, and suggesting that they've done the same when it comes to Jesus. This becomes clear in v. 51 when Stephen concludes by saying *You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you...you have now betrayed and murdered (the Messiah)*. The leaders are outraged and take action to stone Stephen, but Stephen remains steadfast as he looks to heaven and says *Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God* (v. 55, a fulfillment of Luke 22:69, which says, *But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God*).

GOING DEEPER

Read Matthew 10:28, Matthew 16:24-25, Revelation 2:8-11, and Philippians 1:21-23. What do these verses teach about how Christians should view death? What do they teach about boldness in the face of persecution? How can you apply the Bible's teaching on persecution and death to your context?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Acts 6:8-7:1. Make 5-7 quick observations about these verses. What stands out to you?
2. What do you think the members of the synagogue of the Freedmen were disputing with Stephen about?
3. What kinds of disputes might there be in the church today that would require faith and Spirit to navigate?
4. Read Acts 7:51-60. Make 5-7 quick observations about these verses. What stands out to you?
5. Stephen's boldness in speaking the truth was empowered by faith and the Spirit. Where did this being full of faith and Spirit come from? (Hint: See Jesus words in Luke 12:8-12)

LIVING THE WORD

6. How do you draw on faith and the Spirit to empower your daily life, particularly in moments of hardship or suffering?
7. It's unlikely that we would face this kind of trial and persecution in our context. However, we are faced with all kinds of opportunities in our daily lives to acknowledge Christ before men. How are you doing with that, and what might help build up your faith to share more boldly?
8. Spend several minutes praying together, asking God to fill you with faith and the Spirit and to help you acknowledge Christ before men. Ask God to help you forgive those who persecute you. Ask God to show you where and how you can practice glad-hearted, bold faith in your day-to-day.