

STEPHEN: THE DRAMA IS THE DOGMA

Summer 2021, Acts 6:8-8:3

August 8, 2021

*"You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears!
You are just like your fathers: you always resist the Holy Spirit!
Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?"*
Acts 7:51, Stephen's "defense" before the Sanhedrin

We shouldn't be surprised

⁸ *Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great numbers of miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose, however*

Acts 6:1

1) About Stephen:

2) About the opposition:

The heart of Stephen's response

³⁷ *"This is that Moses who told the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from your own people.'* ³⁸ *He was in the assembly in the desert, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living words to pass on to us.*

³⁹ *"But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.*

Acts 7

1) From Trueman: The drama reveals the dogma (this is why Stephen reveals the drama)

2) A "true Hebrew" would recognize the "prophet like Moses", not be focused on the Temple

3) A "false Hebrew" will have a heart looking back to Egypt

The end of the beginning of Stephen's story (or HWJD)

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!" ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³ you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

⁵⁴ When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. ⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

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⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

⁵⁹ While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 7

- 1) Once again, expect "furious"
- 2) Stephen might not have know Jesus, but he recognizes and follows Jesus' example in death

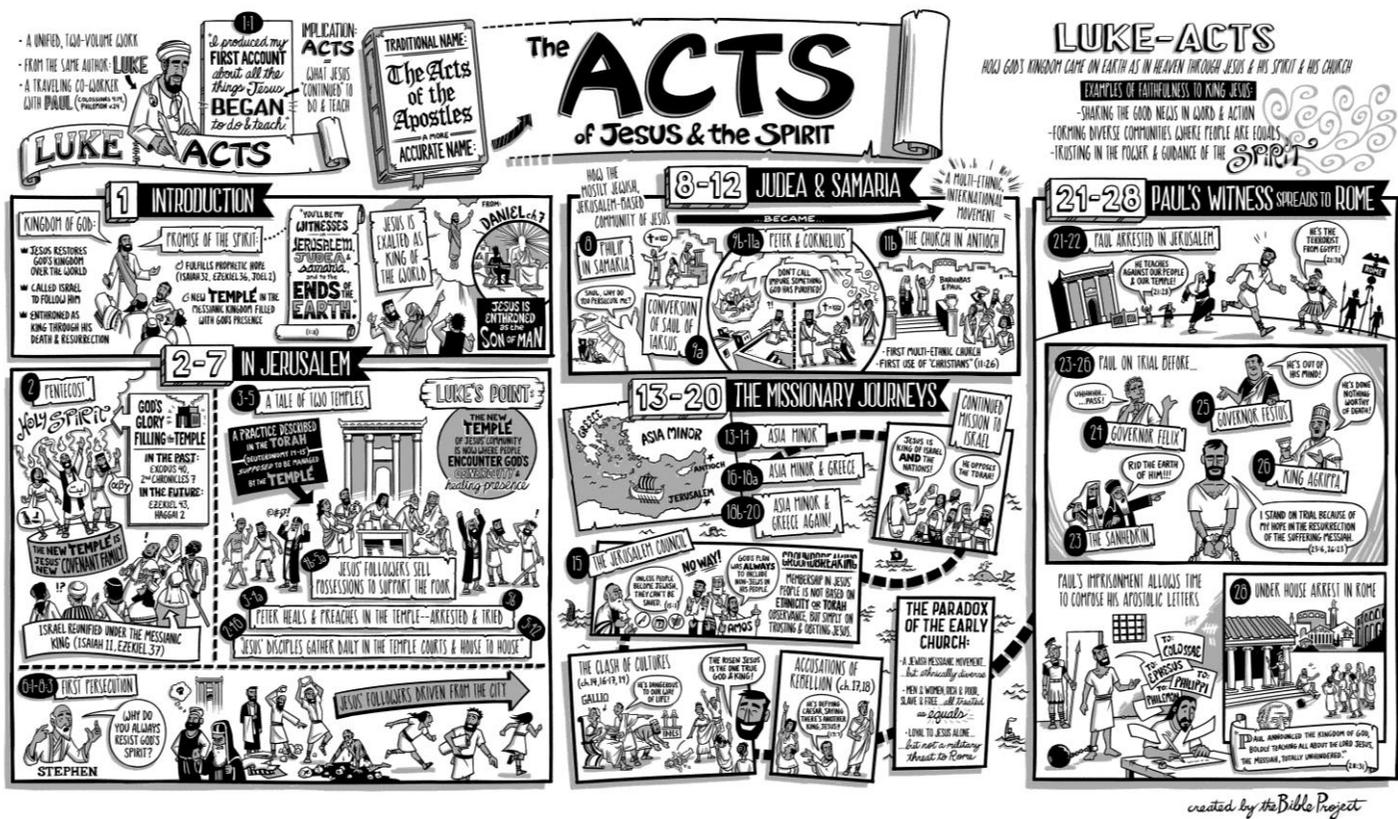
"On that very day"

¹ And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

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

Acts 8 (but the wise Bible reader will continue on to 8:4!)

- 1) Some stay, most go the to where the Gospel is received with joy (see Acts 8:8)
- 2) Sometimes the Farmer gets help in his "scattering" (see the 8:4 to 11:19 connection)
- 3) Saul begins his life as persecuter, ends his life as prisoner
- 4) Who now does the preaching? (see 8:4 which is the key passage in Keller's sermon)



Resources for further studies in Acts

The Bible Project team has great stuff on Acts at <https://open.life.church/items/179224-poster-jpg>

Spurgeon has fewer sermons on Acts available than I would hope at

http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/index/r_ac.htm

I really appreciate J.C. Ryle's essay on conversion in Acts: <https://www.monergism.com/conversion-j-c-ryle>

Alexander Maclaren has an especially helpful commentary on Acts available at

<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8397/pg8397.html>

Deffinbaugh has a helpful introduction at <https://bible.org/seriespage/unique-contribution-book-acts>

His Acts series is at <https://bible.org/series/studies-book-acts> His sermon on this text is at

<https://bible.org/seriespage/first-martyr-or-taking-god-granite-acts-71-60>

Tim Keller has a wonderful sermon at <https://www.monergism.com/signs-king-%E2%80%93-acts-237-47> and his important "Hope for the City" sermon on Acts 8 begins with the Stephen story.

I have really appreciated John Stott's *The Spirit, The Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (IVP, 1990) and F. F. Bruce's work: *New Testament History* (Doubleday, 1980) and *The Book of the Acts* (Eerdmans, 1984).

Carl Trueman has a good analysis of the world's opposition in his recent essay "Dogma Drives the Christian Life" at <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/08/dogma-drives-the-christian-life>

Carl Trueman's conclusion in *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (Crossway, 2020) influenced my thinking on the church. His third point, the importance of proper natural law thinking, is reflected in Kevin DeYoung's blog at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/gods-good-gift-in-making-us-men-and-women/>

