

# The Church: DEFINED

## Study Questions Week 12

Have you been accused of being *against* the very thing you were *for*? Perhaps your words were twisted and distorted, or your position was misrepresented to make you look bad. This is life, isn't it? In our passage, a man named Stephen is charged with being against God's temple and against God's law. He's in a position that might make us want to clench our fists to fight, yet Stephen—"a man full of God's grace and power"—responds with a fiercely reasoned rebuttal in one of Acts' most important speeches. Stephen's boldness will cost him, but the price of his blood will fuel the next stage of the church's mission. Even lies become an occasion for the truth of the gospel to be proclaimed!

**MAIN TEXT:** Acts 6:8-7:60

### CONNECT & OBSERVE

1. What did you find most significant from Sunday's sermon?
2. Read the passage in Acts. What questions come to mind as you consider these verses?

### LEARN

3. As you read 6:8-15, what do you notice that's similar to the circumstances Jesus faced when He was accused? Also, note the charges against Stephen in verses 13-14.
4. What leaders from Israel's past does Stephen refer to in 8:1-43? This may take a few minutes of skillful skimming, but where can we find indications that these leaders were sent by God? What is said about how and why the people of Israel respond to them?
5. Stephen, as Jesus was also, is accused of speaking against the Jerusalem temple. What do you think Stephen's point is, then, by detailing God's past activity in places like Mesopotamia (7:1), the land of the Chaldeans and Haran (7:4), Egypt (7:9), Mt. Sinai (7:30), and Babylon (7:43)? Check your answer using verses 48-50!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell Bock proposes that, "the main point seems to be that God cannot be confined to a specific locale and perhaps, as an implication, to a specific people...This is not a statement against the temple; rather, it places the temple in its proper perspective. The God of creation will not find abode or rest in a single locale that is merely a place made by humans." Acts, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 304.

6. In verses 51-53, how does Stephen relate Israel's past to these leaders?<sup>2</sup>

7. Similar to question 3, what do you notice about Stephen's death in verses 54-60 that is similar to Jesus' death on the cross?

### APPLY

8. Stephen's response demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. Earlier, he was described as being "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (6:5). How can we encourage each other to pursue biblical knowledge, faith, and knowledge of the Scriptures?

9. John Stott wrote the following:

"It is evident...from Scripture itself that God's presence cannot be localized, and that no building can confine him or inhibit his activity. If he has a home on earth, it is with his people that he lives. He has pledged himself by a solemn covenant to be their God. Therefore, according to his covenant promise, wherever they are, there he is also."<sup>3</sup>

In a season where we're restricted from meeting together at our main buildings in Boulder and Erie, how can we draw comfort from knowing that God's presence is unlimited and inescapable (Acts 7:48-50)?

10. Israel's leaders "always resist[ed] the Holy Spirit" and even murdered the "Righteous One." How tragic that they appeared so righteous on the outside! Are there any areas of your life where you feel it's easier to appear righteous than to actually *be* righteous?

11. Verses 55-56 reiterate that Stephen is "full of the Holy Spirit" and that, in a supernatural sense, he has his eyes on Jesus. In fact, Jesus is even standing up for Stephen!<sup>4</sup> How do we too keep our eyes of faith on Jesus during times of distress? Take time to pray that we too would have this kind of faith!

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to the more obvious parallels, scholars point out how the word translated as "You stiff-necked people" refers back to "the accusation of God immediately after the incident of the golden calf" in Exodus 33:3, 5. Likewise, the charge of being "uncircumcised in heart and ears" recalls Deuteronomy 10:16. See, for example, David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 264.

<sup>3</sup> John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1990), 139.

<sup>4</sup> David Peterson suggests this may be "a way of asserting the readiness of the Son of Man to act in judgment against those who deny him (cf. Is. 3:13, where standing is the posture for judgment)." *The Acts*, 267.