

Stephen's Contribution

Acts 6:8 - 7:60

Standing Out

Acts 6:8-15

Stephen is important in the early Church: first, he was chosen by God to serve and proclaim the gospel; second, he was a man of faith and conviction, fearless in his willingness to present the gospel and third, he willingly died for a cause greater than himself.

Luke summarizes Stephen's character in Acts 6:8: Grace & Power - A gracious spirit bolstered by strong convictions and spiritual confidence. Wonders & Signs - This is the first person outside of Jesus' inner circle described as doing signs and wonders.

Precept: What God did in Stephen was more important than what he would do through Stephen. What God does in me always precedes what God will do through me.

Summary: Stephen never traded barbs, he simply pointed out things that they were unable to refute. (Acts 6:15)

Speaking Up

Acts 7:1-53

This speech is an example of apologetics, from a Greek word which means "to speak in defense of something". (1 Peter 3:15; Philippians 1:16)

God and the Patriarchs - Acts 7:2-16 - Psalm 29:3

God and Moses, Joshua, David & Solomon - Acts 7:17-54 - Moses pointed to a greater deliverer/prophet who would rise up amongst the people—a prophet that they again rejected.

God and His people - Acts 7:55-60 - His final words; "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*" (Acts 7:60a) reminds us of Jesus who said, "*Father forgive them, they know not what they are doing.*" (Luke 23:34)

Facing God

Acts 6:15, 7:54-60

Conclusion: Stephen was the first martyr but that is not the emphasis in Acts 6-7; rather we should see that Stephen played an important role in the advance of world missions. World missions rests on the simple idea that when you are sent, God is with you.

It is important to note that opposition to Stephen was not because of his wonders and signs, it was because of his teaching; Why? Biblical teaching is often countercultural—Blasphemy is generally seen as speaking contrary to an acceptable narrative. Paul would experience the same responses in his missionary efforts (Acts 13:13-52; 14:8-22).

Stephen's death pushed Christianity out—into the world that was scary; because Christianity is an outward faith. It begins in the heart, makes its way into our thinking and ends in words that point to Jesus Christ for any and all around us. In God's providence the martyrdom of Stephen was the single most important thing that He used to get the word out, beyond Jerusalem and into the hearing of those whose hearts were ready to hear, receive and obey.