

Aim of lesson

To consider Stephen's faith, and our own.

Bible background

Acts 6:8-15; 7; 8:1-2.

Outline of lesson

Ask the class if they can remember any of the seven deacons and what they were chosen to do. Look together at the description of Stephen in Acts 6:5 as a man full of faith. The object of this lesson is to look at the components of Stephen's faith as we find out what happens to him.

Stephen's defence

Read together Acts 6:8 – 7:1 to introduce Stephen's speech. Allow the class to hunt through the speech to find the names of the people to whom the illustrations in the workbook refer. There are two illustrations for each character. They are Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David and Solomon. The class could note alongside each square the name and the verse in Acts 7 which each pair of pictures illustrates. If you feel your class would find this difficult, write the six names of the six people Stephen mentions on a sheet in a random order and ask the class to tell you which pair of pictures relates to each name. Get the members of the class to look through the speech for one name each.

Help the class to answer the first two questions in the workbook to see one of the reasons Stephen refers back to past events. Jesus is God's chosen king even though the people had rejected him.

Nearly all the events that Stephen described happened away from Jerusalem, and did not involve any permanent place of worship. Stephen is making the point that it is not a temple, or a city, that is important, because God is with his people wherever they are.

Forgiveness

Read together Acts 7:51 – 8:3 and have the class look at the words Stephen prays as he is being stoned. Discuss what he meant by "Lord, do not hold this sin to their charge", and why he said this. You may like to refer back to Jesus' words on the cross "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Stephen had learned well from his Master. The class can fill in his words in the workbook.

Full of faith

Using a blackboard or large piece of paper, have the class discuss and list what it means to be a man "full of faith" (Acts 6:5). Look at what Stephen believes and how he acts. You may like the class to suggest ideas from all that they have read at this stage or build up the picture from the beginning of the lesson. Encourage them to find the following points:

- He believed in the importance of the Bible (only the Old Testament at that time). He knew it well and what it said mattered to him.
- He believed in God. He believed that God had acted and been concerned throughout history.
- He believed it was important to preach about Jesus.
- When he died it says "he fell asleep", Acts 7:60, because for believers in Jesus that is what death is. Stephen committed his life to the Lord Jesus, v59, confident that he would be raised to life at Christ's return.
- He believed in helping those in need. He was chosen by the believers as a man suitable for that job.
- He believed in the teaching of Jesus on forgiveness. The final thing he does is to ask for forgiveness for his killers as Jesus had taught, Matthew 5:44.
- He believed in prayer.

The church was scattered because of the persecution, but their faith was still strong and the gospel reached many more people as a result.

Digging deeper

Forgiveness

Remembering how Stephen asked forgiveness for those who were stoning him, this section asked the students to understand what our attitude should be to the sins of others.

Relevance to our lives

Ask the class if they believe what Stephen believed. Go through the seven points, but bring out also that real faith does not require just a nod of assent, but a life of acting on what you believe.

Prayer

The class could think of people who have treated them badly and pray for them, following the example of Stephen.

Other suggestions for activities

- The class could follow through in more detail the development of God's purpose as seen in Stephen's speech, noting how the events of each life pointed forward to the work of Christ.
- The class could write the script of a 'television' interview just after the death of Stephen. They could interview a Christian who is leaving Jerusalem, a member of the Sanhedrin and perhaps Saul.