



Stephen

Acts 6:1-15, Acts 7:1-60

Church Structure

- The seven men chosen to care for the widows was the first evidence of a church structure being formed.
- They were the first deacons of a church.
- Deacons were beneficial because they cared for administrative tasks so the leaders could continue to teach and preach.
- When you come into a church you expect to find structure.
- You do not create structure to encourage growth, but when you have growth, structure follows.
- Structure is part of a church.

Responsibilities

- The two requirements for these first deacons was that they be full of the Spirit and wisdom.
- As Baptists, we generally take the stance that at conversion you receive the Spirit of God.
- Some denominations say you receive a second filling of the spirit that manifests itself in what is called sign gifts.
- At a minimum, full of the Spirit means you have a close walk with God.
- Wisdom is knowledge that is applied.
- Wisdom takes knowledge learned from life experiences and applies it to complex situations.

Stephen

- An ordination service means you are being set aside for a special purpose.
- Stephen was an extraordinary person not only because he was full of the Spirit and wisdom, but he was also full of faith.
- God must have been satisfied in Stephen's willingness to wait tables, as He had bigger plans for him.
- Stephen becomes a man full of grace and power.
- He pleased God so God's favor was upon him.
- Stephen began pointing people away from their old religious traditions to the resurrected Christ.

Opposition

- The Synagogue of the Freedmen was believed to be a Jewish church made up of former slaves.
- The Jewish religious leaders did not realize that they were not taking a stand against Stephen, they were taking a stand against the Holy Spirit.
- When somebody knows they are losing, they often resort to deceitful methods.
- The Jewish religious leaders hired people to go around and say that Stephen was spreading blasphemous thoughts about God and Moses.

The Trial

- The Sanhedrin was a Jewish court that could be made up of as many as 70 people; priests, elders, and some regular people.
- Stephen was messing with the Jewish religion and its customs, so they thought he was spreading lies.
- Stephen was not trying to overthrow 3,000 years of Jewish history; he was saying something was starting to change.
- The fullness of grace and the fullness of God began to manifest itself in Stephen's outward appearance.
- Stephen proceeded to give the Jewish people a history lesson.

Stephen's Testimony

- Stephen's speech is a summary of the entire history of Israel.
- Stephen implied that even though they had the law, they had rejected it.
- *Stiff-necked* meant a person was obstinate, resistant to change, stubborn, or obtuse.
- Stephen said they failed to demonstrate their true commitment to God in their hearts.
- The idea of gnashing the teeth is a phrase that means rage.

Jesus Standing

- There is nowhere else in the Bible that talks about Jesus standing up in heaven.
- Jesus was standing up to give honor to Stephen.
- Jesus opened the heavens and stood up, and Stephen's eyes were watching it all happen.
- Stoning was an approved form of execution.
- The first introduction of Saul when he stood by at the execution of someone for whom Jesus saw fit to stand.
- Stephen is a picture of Jesus.

Conclusion

- We are all called to be witnesses.
- We are to provide evidence for our faith.
- We are to be filled with the Spirit.
- Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-time thing but a daily thing.
- We all need to be willing to wait tables.
- If we want our gifts to be recognized, we must start by waiting tables and allow God to tell us when it is time to rise up.
- God chooses to use ordinary people in extraordinary ways as long as they open themselves up to His Spirit.