

WHITE MEMORIAL

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Men's Bible Study

Acts

Lesson 3

Read Acts 6 -7

Questions:

Q1: The early passages share a need among the community to care for the widows as they were not receiving a fair amount of food. Read about the plan created by the apostles in 6:2-4. What is the plan, and what question does the plan resolve? Is it a good plan, a fair plan? Would the idea(s) behind this plan work in today's church? What about other areas of life?

Q2: Notice that they put Moses before God, indicating that they held the law in higher regard than they did God. They had their rituals and traditions, and teaching the Jews about Jesus was a threat to them. What does it mean "that he stirred up the people?" Why would they accuse Stephen of blasphemy against God and Moses?

Q3: Often, Christians today will place themselves on the side of the victorious or righteous. We are on Team David as he battles Goliath. We love it when Jesus tears apart the argument of the Pharisees. Of course we are the third man to walk down the road – the Samaritan who stops to offer help. We are more apt to resonate with the Palm Sunday crowd shouting "Hosanna" than the Good Friday crowd shouting "Crucify him!" However, while retelling the story of Moses, Stephen makes an interesting comment found in 7:19. He places the listeners (and himself) as those who were tortured by the plagues – the ones who were on the wrong side of history when it comes to the battle of Moses and the pharaoh. Do you agree with the first statement of this paragraph? What other Bible stories would you add to this list? How does (or could) our understanding of the Bible change if we place ourselves on the other side of the conversation?

Insights:

I1: The conflict that arises in the opening verses is not between Gentiles and Jews, but rather two groups of Jews. While the Hellenists and Hebrews seem to be pitted against each, they were together in sharing all the things they possessed. The Hebrews kept the customs and languages of their ancestors while the Hellenists showed more openness to the Hellenistic influences. This plan would have seven Hellenists to feed the hungry while the twelve Hebrews would continue being the main teachers and preachers. (Stephen was one of the seven.) The earliest persecution was aimed mostly at the Hellenistic Christians while the Hebrews had much less difficult.

(Justo Gonzalez, Story of Christianity: Volume 1, Harper, 19)

I2: Much of Stephen’s story seems to be a parallel to the life of Jesus, particularly as the story is told in Chapter 6 and the last few verses of Chapter 7. Both Stephen and Jesus were outsiders. Their teachings angered the religious leaders. As they neared death, they both lifted up forgiveness for those who wronged them. William Jennings writes, “Stephen appears as the agent of the new order. He is a servant with grace and power who will perform Jesus. [The religious leaders] perceive Stephen as a threat. Like the religious leaders who interrogated the apostles earlier in our story, these anxious souls cannot hear and see the new order coming from Stephen. They only hear one who would take away hard-won freedom to be true to the ancestors and one would render unrecognizable the identity of the faithful of God.” In other words, they liked how things were.

(Jennings, Acts, WJK, 67)

I3: Emerson Powery, Professor of Biblical Studies at Messiah College, on the final six verses of Ch. 7:

“Stephen’s audience reacts negatively to his words and to his vision of Jesus as the ‘Son of Man’ figure on God’s right side. To see the ‘glory of God’ places Stephen in very good company (e.g., Abraham, Moses, Ezekiel), but it is this vision—placing the crucified Jesus in close relation to God—that has angered the people beyond the point of return.”

(Powery, Feasting on the Word: A.2, WJK)

Links to Further Study:

L1: Check out the wooden sculpture of Stephen that is currently located at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Before reading the description of the sculpture, pause and see what you notice. Which part of the story does the artist lift up?

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/466084>

L2: In the “Links” on Lesson 1, you were able to see a Bible Project video on the first half of Acts. Much of this week’s reading has to do with Moses. Here’s the link to the Bible Project video of the section of Exodus that deals with Moses:

<https://thebibleproject.com/videos/exodus-1-18/>