

LESSON 49

The Death of Stephen

ACTS 6:8–7:60



————— BIBLE TRUTH —————

GOD CAN WORK THE SIN OF MAN FOR THE GOOD OF HIS SAVING PLAN

LESSON SNAPSHOT

1. OPENING REVIEW 5 MIN

Use last week’s lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

2. BIBLE STORY 10 MIN

Read Acts 6:8—7:60 from the Scriptures or read story 127, “The Death of Stephen,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

3. OBJECT LESSON 1 15 MIN

They Could Kill Stephen’s Body, but Not His Soul

SUPPLIES:

- large flat stone (the size of a brick)
- seven small drinking cups, each one marked with one of the letters that spell Stephen’s name
- ping-pong balls

4. TEACHING/DISCUSSION 10 MIN

Using the teaching points, teach through the lesson for today.

5. OBJECT LESSON 2 10 MIN

Compare the Life, Trial, and Judgment of Stephen

SUPPLIES:

- paper and pens or pencils
- Bibles for the class

6. SWORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

7. ACTIVITY TIME 10 MIN

Stephen’s Death

SUPPLIES:

- paper
- crayons, markers, or colored pencils

8. CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

9. BONUS OBJECT LESSON 10 MIN

Pass the Stones

SUPPLIES:

- several baseball-sized stones of various shapes

TOTAL 80 MIN

PREPARING TO TEACH

TEACHING POINTS

Stephen is filled with the Spirit and with power—Jesus said, “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). Stephen, like Jesus, was spreading the gospel of the kingdom with power. The religious rulers were angered that the old covenant was being minimized for a new covenant of grace. They didn’t think it was right that their customs be replaced (Acts 6:14). However, they could not withstand Stephen’s wisdom and could not deny the power of God upon him. They incited men to testify that Stephen was a blasphemer, just as they had done to Jesus. But Stephen was not afraid. The Spirit of God was upon him. Even those who sat in the council saw that his face “was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15).

Stephen rebukes the Jews for their unbelief—The rulers of Israel had rejected the plan of God every step of the way. Stephen summarized the history of God’s dealing with Israel and ended with a stinging rebuke, accusing the present leaders of murdering Jesus, the Righteous One. These men were not innocently unaware of the gospel or confused. They were actively opposing the work of God, just as leaders of Israel did when they turned away from God and when they killed the prophets. Stephen, with great courage, rebuked them for not keeping the law they were claiming to defend. In Acts 7 Stephen gives his defense—a rich retelling of God’s saving plan showing Israel’s failure to obey. In doing so, he demonstrated their need for a deliverer, the “Righteous One.” Just as Israel killed the prophets who God sent as messengers to tell of the coming Messiah, Stephen said the religious rulers murdered Jesus (Acts 7:52). And by killing Jesus, they disobeyed the very law of God they put their hope in.

Stephen is stoned for his faith and the gospel spreads—The Jews, along with the Jewish leaders, became very angry at Stephen’s vision of heaven. They took him out of the city and stoned him. Their anger spilled out toward other Christians. As a result of the persecution the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered. At first that might seem like a defeat, but God had a plan. The Christians who were scattered began to preach the gospel in the surrounding countryside. The result was that many who would not have otherwise heard the gospel were saved. Later in Acts we read that because of this scattering “a great many people were added to the Lord” (Acts 11:24). God worked the sin of the Jews’ stoning of Stephen for the good of his saving plan!

A LITTLE BIT MORE

Persecution

Stephen was the first Christian to be martyred for his faith. Before his conversion, Paul, formerly Saul, persecuted Christians to death (Acts 9:1). Jesus spoke of this persecution in John 15:20. In John 16:2 Jesus told the disciples that whoever kills them will think they are doing good—offering a service to God. Historically, persecution has strengthened the church. It has scared away or exposed those who are not true believers. Those who were faithful and stood strong in their faith powerfully witnessed to the truth of Christianity.

Where Is the Gospel?

How does today's Bible story fit into God's greater plan of redemption?

Stephen called Jesus the "Righteous One" (Acts 7:52). The Righteous One means the only one who did what was right. The reason that Jesus can be called the Righteous One is because he never sinned, not once! Not only that, but Jesus obeyed all of God's laws. No one before Jesus and no one after Jesus could keep God's law perfectly. The Bible tells us that there is no one who is righteous, not even one (Psalm 14:3 and Romans 3:10).

Because we have broken God's laws, like the Ten Commandments, we deserve the punishment of hell. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. He lived a righteous life, obeying all the laws for us. Jesus took our sin and gives us his obedience so we can enter into heaven. He is the only righteous one!

THE LESSON

OPENING REVIEW 5 MIN

Use last week’s lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

BIBLE STORY 10 MIN

Read Acts 6:8—7:60 from the Scriptures or read story 127, “The Death of Stephen,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

OBJECT LESSON 1 15 MIN

They Could Kill Stephen’s Body, but Not His Soul

SUPPLIES:

- large flat stone (the size of a brick)
- seven small drinking cups, each one marked with one of the letters that spell Stephen’s name
- ping-pong balls

The object of this exercise is to demonstrate the courage of Stephen. This courage came from Christ who lived inside him. The Jews may have been able to kill his mortal body, but they could not damage his spirit.

Set the rock on a table. Then place the seven labeled drinking cups on the stone. Ask for volunteers to play the angry Jews who stoned Stephen. Tell them to use the ping-pong balls to knock over the cups.

Once they have knocked the cups down, tell them they have only destroyed Stephen’s body. However, his soul, the rock, which is indwelt with the Spirit of Christ, remains. Invite them to try and knock it off the table with the ping-pong balls. Of course, they will not be able to do it.

Read through Acts 7:54–60 and ask the class how the illustration fits the story. (Stephen, even while being stoned, was a man filled with faith. He even asked God to forgive those who were stoning him. Stephen’s body could be killed, but his faith in Christ, his soul, and the Spirit of

God who lived inside of him could not be touched. Likewise, the students could knock the cups off the table, but not the rock.)

Ask the children why a rock is a good representation for God’s Spirit in us. (The rock is immovable, and Jesus is referred to as the Rock in Scripture. Also, a life built on the Rock cannot be touched by the storms—the difficulties—of life.)

TEACHING/DISCUSSION

Select one of the object lessons to use to cover the teaching points.

OBJECT LESON 2 10 MIN

Compare the Life, Trial, and Judgment of Stephen

SUPPLIES:

- paper and pens or pencils
- Bibles for the class

Compare the life, trial, and judgment of Stephen with the trial and judgment of the Lord.

Have the students look up the following verses and compare the life, trial, and judgment of Stephen with that of Jesus:

STEPHEN	JESUS
ACTS 6:8	JOHN 2:23
ACTS 6:9–11	LUKE 20:19–20
ACTS 6:12	MARK 15:9–14
ACTS 6:13	MATTHEW 26:59–60
ACTS 6:14	MATTHEW 26:61
ACTS 7:55–58	MATTHEW 26:62–66

We are all called to give our lives for Christ if needed. Look up John 15:19–21. Ask, “How did Stephen’s persecution follow this prediction by Jesus?” (Jesus knew the truth of the gospel would offend people and result in persecution. Jesus said, “If they persecute me, they will persecute you also.” That is exactly what happened to Stephen. At a time when it might have

been tempting for Stephen to ask why this was happening to him, Jesus already gave him the answer: “They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.”)

Though our lives may not be threatened for our faith in our country, we can still suffer persecution for our faith. Ask the class how young people today can be persecuted for their faith. (Often those who do not believe make fun of those who do. They make fun of their passion in worship. Young people who are not Christians can make fun of those who are obedient, calling them names like “goody-goody.” When Christians are ridiculed for their faith or righteous behavior, they are being persecuted.)

SWORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITY TIME 10 MIN

Stephen’s Death

SUPPLIES:

- paper
- crayons, markers, or colored pencils

Draw a picture of Stephen praying while stones are being hurled at him.

CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

Pick several children to pray prayers based on the day’s Scripture passages.

BONUS OBJECT LESSON 10 MIN

Pass the Stones

SUPPLIES:

- several baseball-sized stones of various shapes

Tell the class that God told Israel that if a false prophet came they should stone him. Then pass around the stones as you read Deuteronomy 13:1–11. Lead a discussion using the following questions:

How does this passage fit into the story about Stephen?

(The Jews who stoned Stephen were accusing him of being a false prophet.)

What did Stephen say that really angered them?

(Remind the kids of today's passage: Act 6:8—7:60. When Stephen said he saw the "Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" [Acts 7:56] he was saying that Jesus, whom they killed, was now reigning with God the Father. That is what really got them angry because they did not believe Jesus was the Son of God.)

Why do you think the Jews rejected Jesus? Did the Jews think they needed a savior?

(Failing to recognize Jesus as the Son of God who came to fulfill [complete] the law, the Jews trusted in their laws instead of Jesus. They did not think they needed a savior.)

Why do people today reject Jesus? Do people today think they need a savior?

(Just like the Jews trusted in something besides Jesus, so people today trust in things other than Jesus. It's easy to think we are good people instead of that we are sinners. Many people do not believe they need a savior.)

Why do we need a savior?

(We need a savior because our hearts and lives are full of sin that must be punished. Jesus took the punishment for the sins of those who would trust in him when he died upon the cross.)