



Acts 7:54-8:4 | Session 18 | Stephen and Saul

Acts 7:54-60

Verse 54—

When they heard these things. Stephen gave his *defense* against the accusations that had been levied against him: 1) He blasphemed Moses and God. 2) He blasphemed the Temple of God. Each untrue and made up by *suborned men*. Stephen put it all back on the Jews (The Council/Sanhedrin) in verses 51-53. **They were cut to the heart.** In 5:33 where we said it is the Greek word *diaprio*, *dia=through* and *prio=to cut in two with a saw*. **And they gnashed on him with their teeth.** Literally, *they chewed him up*. They had SDS (Stephen Derangement Syndrome).

Verse 55, 56—

Being full of the Holy Ghost. This phrase is only used four times in the N.T. This is the third time we see this phrase in relation to Stephen (6:3, 6:5, 7:55). The first time we see it was in Luke 4:1 where Jesus, after his baptism, was *full of the Holy Ghost*. In both cases, Jesus and Stephen, this fullness of the Holy Ghost was to prepare them for come encounter. We don't get any sense that after Stephen there is some special filling of the Holy Ghost for believers. Paul is *filled with the Holy Ghost* after he meets Jesus on the road to Damascus. But later, in Romans 15:13, the apostle Paul wishes for the Romans, twenty-five years later, to be filled *with all joy and peace in believing, and that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost*. He doesn't pray or wish for their *filling*. Rather, it appears all believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and have the same *Spirit*, and are a part of *one body*. The closet we may have to *being full of the Holy Ghost* for our dispensation is in Ephesians 5:18: *...but be filled with [the] Spirit*. The apostolic age in which the Holy Ghost came on people in the same fashion as we see with Stephen, has passed away. Today, the spiritual empowerment we have are joy and peace in believing, and our abounding in hope (which comes through the Holy Ghost which all believers have received).

Looked up steadfastly into heaven, Greek: *atenzio*, his attention was taken off human the scene before him. We typically bow our heads in prayer, but, since God was envisioned as being in heaven, looking up was a familiar posture of prayer among the Jewish people, and even among Gentiles. By looking up, Stephen focused on **the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.** In the New Testament there are several references of the Son of Man (Jesus) *sitting on the right hand of God* (some examples: Mark 16:19; Luke 22:69; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 10:12; 12:2. This is the only place where he *stands*. In some passages, when heaven opens, it is in relation to judgment, and likewise *standing* indicates the same, for example Psalm 7:6; 9:19. This apparently is what sets off the high priest and others.

Verse 57—

Then they cried out with a loud voice. The word **cried** can mean, *to croak, or the cry of a raven*. It is the same word used when the crowd *cried out to Pilate, Crucify him!* Although it can apply to any loud speech, we might even speculate that this was a demonic guttural cry (Mark 1:26; 5:7; 9:26). Stephen also *cries out* in verse 60. This *cry of the Sanhedrin* was loud (Greek: *megas*). **Stopped their ears, and ran upon him,** or, *to run violently*. Stephen is not getting a trial, he is getting lynched by the hostile mob. There was no *Gamaliel* this time to reason with them and to stop them from killing Stephen (See Acts 5:33-39). All **with one accord** were against Stephen. This is in contrast to the Jewish believers who were *in one accord* in their devotion to their Messiah (Acts 2:46).

Verse 58—



And cast him out of the city, (*Greek: cast, ekballo—to throw out*), **and stoned him**. Execution by stoning was a common way for mobs to execute vengeance (See Luke 20:6; John 8:59). Stoning was to take place outside of the city (Numbers 15:35-36). The first to cast stones were the witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:7), although in this case they were all false witnesses. **And the witnesses laid down their clothes**. Probably their outer garments. **At a young man's feet, whose name was Saul**. For the first time we are introduced to Saul, who will later be known as Paul, the apostle.

Saul, *a man of the tribe of Benjamin* (Acts 13:21) was probably named after King Saul, the first king of Israel.

Luke the author does not say why Saul was present at the stoning. Since he was a Jew from Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3), the chief city of the Roman province of Cilicia in Asia Minor, with a large Greek presence, he may have been a part of the synagogue of the Libertines (Acts 6:9). Saul, however, probably moved to Jerusalem when he was young according to Acts 22:3, and grew up being schooled by Gamaliel (See Acts 5:34). The term **young man** could mean he was either side of fifteen and thirty. If we speculate that he was born around A.D. 10, he would be around 23 years old. In the book of Philemon (written by the apostle Paul, vs. 9), Paul refers to himself as “Paul the aged” (*Greek: presbutes*). Philemon was written in A.D. 64 (thirty years later), when he would have been in his mid to late 50's. Owing to what Paul had been through in his short life, being 50 or 60 could have aged him (2 Corinthians 1:8,9; 11:24-27).

Verse 59, 60—

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, that is, Stephen, as they were stoning him was **calling upon God** in a similar fashion of Jesus (Luke 23:46), **Lord Jesus, receive my spirit**. **And he kneeled down**, this is not a formula for prayer. Prayer can be accomplished in any posture or position. There is no right or wrong way to pray. A good rule of interpretation is to not use an historical event to form a doctrine. But oftentimes people do fall on their knees in prayer. Some may touch their face to the ground. Stephen most likely continued looking up since he **cried with a loud voice**. What is amazing is not his posture, but what he said, **Lord, lay not this sin to their charge**. The Greek word for **lay** is *histemi*. It means, *stand*. Stephen saw Jesus *standing at the right hand of God* in anticipation of judgment, now he **cried Lord, stand not!** Literally *Lord do not stand in judgment of these men*. This is not a model of forgiveness for us to follow, rather it is a cry by Stephen to give these religious men, who were so wrong, another chance to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

He fell asleep. This is one Greek word, *koiao* which literally means to fall asleep unintentionally, and it is used for death in most cases where it is used. Here the context indicates he died, since he was being stoned, and chapter 8:1,2 makes it completely clear that he died.

What happens when a believer dies? First, there is never an indication that our soul sleeps as some religions, like Seventh Day Adventists, teach. Second, Paul indicates that when we are absent from the body (i.e., dead), we are present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). Again, while the word “sleep” is used, it's most always used as a euphemism for “death.”

Most Christian churches teach that since our bodies do not rise until the resurrection at the Rapture that our *spirit* goes to be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18). Are we simply *spirits* when we die? Or, do we receive some kind of temporary body? Are we always human and never are just spirits? Maybe. Some of my thinking comes from 2 Corinthians 5:1-4. At this point this needs more study, but it is certainly something to consider.

