

Church – The Beginnings, Part 20
Stephen – the First Martyr of the Church – Part 1
Acts 6:8–8:4 | 03/12/2017
NEW LIFE FELLOWSHIP
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Links to Our Current Teaching Series and Previous Teachings:

Current Series: Church, The Beginnings → NLFJI.org/ACTS

Sections in Acts up to this point and a little peek ahead (similar to “episodes”):

Acts 1 → Transition from the Gospels to just before the day of Pentecost

Acts 2 → The Day of Pentecost, Peter’s Preaching, and the forming of the first church of Jesus Christ

Acts 3:1 – 4:31 → The Healing in the Temple (Miracles), More Gospel Preaching, More folks saved, Persecution and More Preaching of the Gospel

Acts 4:32 – 5:42 → Community of Faith, Finances, God’s Judgment against Ananias & Sapphira, Gospel Preaching, Miracles, Persecution, More Preaching, Community of Faith

Acts 6:1 thru 8:4 → Church Leadership Challenges, the Testimony & Martyrdom of Stephen, Scattering

Stephen – the First Martyr of the Church – Part 1

1. **Stephen – one of the 7 Deacons from Acts 6:1-7 (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit)
He’s a Leader – a Servant Team Leader – leading other servants (also see 1 Timothy 3:8-13)
(of the Leaders of 1000’s, 100’s, 50’s and 10’s)
He was being faithful in his service to the Widows, leading his team. → FAITHFUL
He was also being used by God toward those OUTSIDE of the Body, the Lost → Obedient
God WILL use anyone who is sold-out to Jesus Christ, fully surrendered to Christ.
→ And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people (vs 8)**

2. **Opposition: Synagogue of the Freedmen – (for more research: <http://bit.ly/SynFreedActs6>)
This opposition “arose” – so it was not overnight, but it built up to the point of full force.
Acts 6:10 shows that Stephen wasn’t just putting on a magic show, but he was spreading the Gospel of Christ, and using God’s Supernatural, Biblical Wisdom to reason with those he was sharing the Gospel to. The Great Wonders and Signs were being used by God, through Stephen, to Confirm the Message that Stephen was Preaching/Teaching (God’s Ways)**

**Opposition, Persecution and even Martyrdom are Par for the Course: Predicted & Expected
Reference: Matthew 5:10-12; 10:16-23; 2 Timothy 3:12**

We will not suffer any form of persecution if we hide out and never say anything for Christ’s sake. We will experience opposition ONLY WHEN we Speak Out, WHEN we Spread the Gospel, when we Stand Up for God’s Righteousness ... and that is what we see here in Acts 6:8 – 8:4

Synagogue of the Freedmen?

**Based on Acts 6:9 & History, this synagogue was, most likely, made up of Greek Speaking, former Roman Slaves composed of a mixture of those who were genetic descendants of Jacob (Israeli Jews) and Gentile Proselytes who converted to Judaism - who were all from North Africa (Cyrenians = Algeria, Tunisia, Libya | Alexandria = Egypt) and into Turkey [i.e.: Asia].
(for more research, please, go to: <http://bit.ly/SynFreedActs6>)**

3. **LIFE LESSONS?**
 - a. **Seek to be used of God, no matter your “station” in life or within the Body of Christ.**
 - b. **Be Prepared for Opposition, it will happen. Don’t be shocked, Be Prepared.**
 - c. **Know the Word of God, all of it, Genesis thru Revelation (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-4:4)**
 - d. **When you experience Opposition: be Kind, be Truthful, be Faithful, be Prayerful like Stephen was. He saw those who opposed him and wanted them all to be saved.
(Never Compromise the Truth of God’s Word – John 17:17)**

Acts 6:8-15 - And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then there arose some from what is called the **Synagogue of the Freedmen** (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. ¹⁰ And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. ¹¹ Then they **secretly induced** men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” ¹² And they **stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes**; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. ¹³ They also set up **false witnesses** who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that **this Jesus of Nazareth** will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” ¹⁵ And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

(continue to Read all of Acts 7, as well as Acts 8:1-4)

Hebrews 2:1-4 : Therefore we must give the **more earnest heed** to the things we have heard, **lest we drift away.** ² For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect **so great a salvation**, which at the first began to be spoken by the LORD, and was **CONFIRMED** to us by those who heard Him, ⁴ **God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders**, with various **miracles**, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

(Don't Be Surprised by Opposition and Persecution)

Matthew 5:10-12 – (Jesus said,) **Blessed** are those who are **PERSECUTED** for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ **Blessed** are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you **FALSELY** for My sake. ¹² **Rejoice** and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 10:16-23 - Behold, I send you out as **sheep in the midst of wolves**. Therefore be **wise** as serpents and **harmless** (gentle) as doves. ¹⁷ But **BEWARE OF MEN**, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their **SYNAGOGUES**. ¹⁸ You will be brought before governors and kings **for My sake**, as a **testimony to them** and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they deliver you up, **do not worry** about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the **Spirit** of your Father who speaks in you.

²¹ Now brother will deliver up brother to **death**, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² And you will be hated by all for **My name's sake**. But he who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ **When they persecute you in this city, flee to another**. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

2 Timothy 3:12 - Yes, and **ALL** who **DESIRE** to live godly in Christ Jesus **WILL** suffer persecution.

(BE PREPARED)

2 Timothy 2:15 - Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a **WORKER** who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching (or correctly handling) the **WORD** of TRUTH.

2 Timothy 3:16 – 4:4 : ¹⁶ **All Scripture** is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

^{4:1} I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of His appearing and His kingdom: ² **Preach the WORD**; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. ³ For **THE TIME WILL COME** when they will **NOT TOLERATE SOUND DOCTRINE**, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an **ITCH** to hear something new. ⁴ They will **TURN AWAY FROM HEARING THE TRUTH** and will **TURN ASIDE TO MYTHS**. (itching ear syndrome)