

Sunday School Lesson, March 24, 2024
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Lesson—When the World is Against Us¹

Text—Acts 6:7-15

I. Aim for Change/Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, we will...

1. Consider ways that Stephen was strengthened when faced with false accusations and persecutions.
2. Acknowledge ways that the love of Christ and the Holy Spirit encourage and strengthen our faith.
3. Bear witness to personal faith and trust in Christ in the face of threat and danger.

Why This Lesson Matters: The testimony of Stephen encourages us to be obedient to the faith inspired by the grace, power, and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Key Verse—(Acts 6:9-10) *Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with St. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. (KJV)*

Song of Praise and Worship: “The Blood is Against You” by the Jacson Southernaires

II. Points to be Emphasized

- a. Luke periodically includes summary statements to orient the reader to the general situation at each point in the book.
- b. Stephen was one of the deacons commissioned to address the physical needs of the vulnerable in the church (6:1-6) and thus, held a position of leadership and influence. Stephen’s skill in teaching and debate shamed educated, honored synagogue members; to regain their reputation, these men tried to destroy Stephen’s credibility.
- c. The holy place they referred to is the temple: the temple and the law were the two means that God had given Israel to experience and know him.

¹ Outline Content courtesy of the Sunday School Publishing Board Teacher Manual, which should be purchased at www.sspbnbc.com

- d. *Steven truly suffered for doing good, yet God encouraged him and strengthened his resolve by giving Steven a powerful, more profound experience of God as well as a glimpse of the spiritual reality that Steven by faith had defended.*

III. Historical/Biblical Background and Lesson Context

Steven, whose Greek name in English means “crown”, was the first Christian martyr, the first believer to give his life for his belief in Jesus Christ as the incarnation, the son of God in human flesh. The apostles determined that preaching would be their primary focus but realized that someone had to be put in charge of the distribution of goods to be done fairly. Stephen wound up being one of several men chosen because of his integrity and spiritual sensitivity. The passage where Steven and others are selected offers one of the first examples of leadership selection in the New Testament.

The church in Jerusalem, at that time, remained the center of the new Christian faith. That would change quite quickly in the life of this new faith, with Antioch becoming the center. Culturally, the church was becoming more inclusive, bringing the gentile converge from various religious and non-religious backgrounds. The church's growth had brought about the inclusion of Hellenistic Jews; These were Jews raised in Greek culture and language. It is possible that Steven could have been one of these Hellenistic Jews.

Luke authored the book of acts. The book accounts for the Holy Spirit working in and through the early church after its inception at Pentecost. Scripturally, chapters 1 through 7 cover Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit's coming, and the church's growth in Jerusalem. In chapters 8 through 12, the book's focus is the church's expansion from Jerusalem because of intense persecution. The remaining chapters, 13 through 28, highlight Paul's three evangelistic journeys to the Greeks and other European areas.

IV. Prominent Character(s) in the Lesson

Saul: the great persecutor of the Christian church who became the foremost advocate and preacher of the gospel after his conversion on the Damascus Rd.

Steven: one of the church's first deacons selected for service to handle the distribution of food and other resources shared by the new faith community.

Synagogue of the freedmen: former slaves who were either Jews or Jewish proselytes who started their own synagogue in Jerusalem it is believed that Saul may have been a member of this group.

V. Key Terms in the Lesson (KJV)

- a. **Angel (verse 15)**—Greek: *angelos*: a messenger, generally a (supernatural) messenger from God, conveying news and behests of God to men.
- b. **Wisdom (v. 10)**—Greek: *sophia*: ; skill; knowledge; intelligence; cleverness

VI. Topical Outline of the Lesson

1. Introduction
2. Are you noticing this? (Acts 6:7)
3. Full Of Grace and Power (vv. 8-10)
4. Lies, Lies, And More Lies (vv. 11-14)
5. The Face of An Angel (v.15)

Food for thought and question for consideration: (What have we learned Charlie Brown?)

Are you so committed to your faith in Jesus Christ that you would be willing to give your life if it came to that?

We have learned that oftentimes Christians face persecution because of their conviction and beliefs in the Lord Jesus Christ. How do you usually respond when you know that people are coming against you falsely because of your faith in the Lord?