

The Stoning of Stephen / The Church Persecuted & Scattered

Ice-Breaker

What do you do when you feel angry enough to resort to sticks and stones?

Scripture Passage

Acts 7:54-8:3

⁵⁴When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.

Bible Study

1. Why are Stephen's listeners so enraged (see Daniel 7:13-14)?
2. Stephen's death was illegal (see John 18:31). What does that reveal about the desperation of the Sanhedrin?
3. This begins phase two ("Judea and Samaria") of God's plan (see 1:8). How would you sum up the "Jerusalem phase" (ch. 2-7)?

Reference Notes

7:56 the Son of Man. Jesus used this same image to describe himself at his trial before this same Sanhedrin (Daniel 7:13; Mark 14:62). The fact that Jesus, as the Son of Man, is at the right hand of God means that the way is open for all people everywhere to come to God. **standing.** Perhaps in a posture of coming to receive Stephen, or serving as Stephen's heavenly advocate before the Father.

7:58 John 18:31 indicates the Sanhedrin did not have the legal right of capital punishment, so this may be an act of mob violence. However, Acts 26:10 indicates that perhaps by this time Pilate's ability to control the Sanhedrin had drastically weakened and that it indeed took capital cases into its own hands. Saul. This is the one who was to become the great apostle.

8:1-3 Whether Acts 26:10 is sufficient evidence that Saul belonged to the Sanhedrin is uncertain, but he quickly became the leading figure in a violent persecution of the church. That the apostles remained in Jerusalem indicates the persecution was mainly directed against the Greek-speaking converts who shared Stephen's views of the temple. The church's spread to Judea and Samaria shows that God used even this persecution to demonstrate afresh that he is not limited to Jerusalem (Acts 1:8).

8:3 to destroy. This word is used to describe how a beast rips the flesh off its victim. Saul's persecution led to other Christians being condemned to death as well (Acts 9:1-2).

Caring Time

1. What is one very traumatic event that happened to you in your formative years? Can you see now how God has used it for good?

2. Peter's speech led to mass conversion (ch. 2), while Stephen's led to his death. What does that teach about success in one's service to God?