



LESSON 29

The Jews resist the Holy Spirit

ACTS 6:1-7:60



The Holy Spirit gives faithful believers the ability to honor Jesus.



“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you” (Acts 7:51).

Supporting Truths

1. The Holy Spirit can make you a faithful servant.
2. The Holy Spirit honors Jesus.
3. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin.
4. The Holy Spirit can be resisted.
5. The Holy Spirit brings success.

Objectives

1. List three qualities of Stephen.
2. Compare the rejection of Joseph and Moses to the rejection of Jesus.
3. Explain how the Jews had misused the temple and broken the Law.
4. Describe the way the Jews felt after Stephen preached.
5. Describe the outcome for Stephen and for Saul.

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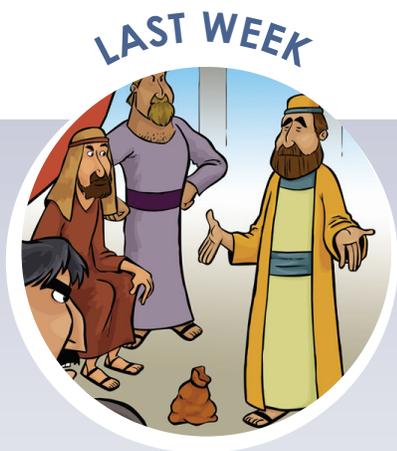


Lesson Summary

The apostles appointed seven men to help meet the needs of the Jerusalem believers. All of these men were full of the Spirit, but Stephen in particular shows how powerful the Spirit is. The Spirit empowered Stephen to perform miracles and preach with great power. Stephen demonstrated that the Jews' rejection of Jesus was part of Israel's pattern of resisting the Holy Spirit. And when the Jews kept resisting, the Spirit enabled Stephen to die with peace, joy, and prayer for forgiveness.

Spotlight on the Gospel

Stephen's words and vision confirm our faith in Jesus as Savior. First, his speech showed that the lives of Joseph and Moses pointed forward to Jesus. Even the way Israel rejected Jesus at His first coming was like the way Israel rejected Joseph and Moses. Second, Stephen's vision also confirms Jesus as Savior, since Jesus allowed Stephen to see Him standing in heaven as Lord of the universe. Stephen's Spirit-filled life encourages us to trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior.



Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit
Acts 4:32-5:11



The Jews resist the Holy Spirit
Acts 6:1-7:60



The Church is persecuted and the gospel spreads
Acts 8:1-25

Lesson Commentary

The Holy Spirit gives faithful believers the ability to honor Jesus.

Like the twelve apostles, every Christian has a life-long mission to show how great Jesus is, both in word and action (Acts 1:8; 1 Pet 2:9–12). This is what true Christians want to do, because Christians love Jesus (John 14:15). But this is not what always happens in their lives. Selfishness and pride undermine holy behavior. Fear erodes the courage to witness. So where can we find the ability to live for Jesus the way we long to? Stephen's life shows us: only by the power of the Holy Spirit can we faithfully live for Jesus—and perhaps die for Him too.

Stephen served full of the Holy Spirit (6:1–10)

Stephen comes into the story because the apostles needed help. There were probably more than 20,000 believers in Jerusalem now (Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:1), and they were from two different backgrounds: Hebraic Jews were from Judea and spoke Aramaic, and Hellenistic Jews were mostly from other countries and spoke Greek. With the large numbers and contrasting cultures, the 12 apostles could not meet everyone's needs. They could not take care of finances and also focus on prayer and preaching. But they also knew that it would take men with three key qualities to handle finances with integrity (6:2–4). They needed to be men of “good repute,” known to be honest and fair; **full of the Spirit**, depending on the Spirit's power and obeying the Spirit's will; and full of wisdom, knowing how to choose what is most just, proper, and useful.



THINK ABOUT IT

A person who trusts God and yields to the Spirit's control will possess great kindness and spiritual power.

All seven men met these qualifications, but only Steven is again described as “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (6:5). He completely trusted God and relied on the Spirit to control his life. Stephen and the other

six served so well that the apostles were able to stay focused on preaching and bring many more,

including many priests, to Jesus (6:7). But Stephen also performed great miracles, and he defended the truth about Jesus so well that no one could prove him wrong (6:8–10a). What gave him such success in living for Jesus? The Holy Spirit (6:10b).

The Jews resisted the Holy Spirit (6:11–7:53)

Unable to refute Stephen, the unbelieving Jews falsely accused him of **blasphemy**, saying things that dishonor God. They claimed he did this by speaking against two things they valued most: the temple and the Law (6:14). To them, having the temple in Jerusalem represented their unique access to God, almost as if they owned God. And the Law of Moses was less about Scripture and more about their own human traditions which they claimed came from Moses. Together, the temple and the Law gave them control. When Stephen said Jesus surpassed the Law and the temple (cf. John 2:19–21), they put him on trial before their supreme court, the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:12).

Stephen answered by the power of the Spirit. His face shined with the holiness and glory of God, showing that instead of opposing Moses, Stephen was speaking with God's approval as Moses had (6:15; Exod 34:27–35). Stephen got their attention by repeating Israel's history, something the Jews were very proud of. But as Stephen went on, he used this history to gradually turn their two accusations against them, as well as adding a third one.

First, he said it was the Jews who violated the temple, because they were wrong to think they could tie God down to one place (Exod 20:24). God had called Abraham in Ur (Acts 7:4) and made a covenant before Abraham owned any land (7:5–8). He was with Joseph and Moses in Egypt (7:9, 36) and with Moses and Israel in the wilderness (7:33, 38, 44–45). Even when Solomon built the first temple, Solomon knew it could not contain God (7:48; 1 Kgs 8:27; Isa 66:1–2a). But instead of humbly submitting to the Spirit, the Jews used the temple to try to control God (Acts 7:51; Isa 66:2b). As a result, they had rejected the presence of God in Jesus.

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Second, the Jews were the ones who were rejecting the Law. Even before Moses had brought the Law down from Mt Sinai, Israel had violated it (Acts 7:39–41), and they kept rebelling against God to the point that God finally punished them by defeat and exile (7:42–43). The Sanhedrin thought they were not like their ancestors (Matt 23:30), for they did not worship the stars. But by killing Jesus, they had illegally killed an innocent man (7:52–53). Even worse, by rejecting the one God sent, they had rebelled against God just like their ancestors.

Third, Stephen added an even more severe accusation. He began by describing how the fathers of Israel had rejected Joseph, the one God had chosen to save them from starvation (7:9–15). Next, the Israelites also rejected Moses, the one God sent to be their “ruler and redeemer” (7:35). Now, like them, the Sanhedrin had rejected the prophet like Moses (7:37; Deut 18:15; John 6:14). Israel had a history of rejecting the men God sent to save them, but the Sanhedrin had rejected not just a righteous man, but the one and only Righteous One (Acts 7:52).

So the speech that had begun like a well-loved story ended with stinging accusation. Like their ancestors, the Sanhedrin were stiff-necked (7:51; Exod 33:5), unwilling to bow humbly before God. They had uncircumcised hearts and ears,

unclean and unresponsive to God. They, not Stephen, were the ones guilty of blasphemy against God. This is how all people end up if they go on resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51).

Stephen died full of the Holy Spirit (7:54–60)

There is a huge contrast between those who resist the Spirit and those who submit to the Spirit. While the Sanhedrin ground their teeth in fury, Stephen enjoyed the most beautiful sight ever: he saw Jesus in His glory

(7:54–56). Peter had seen Jesus like this once, and it was so amazing that Peter thought heaven had come (Mark 9:1–5). That is not surprising, because Jesus’ glorious presence is what makes heaven so good (Rev 21:23). But Stephen did not just see Jesus; he saw Him standing. Normally, Jesus is sitting (Matt 22:44; Acts 2:34; Heb 1:3), but here He stands to honor His faithful servant and welcome him home.

Stephen called Him “the Son of Man,” a title for the Lord of the universe (Dan 7:13–14). The Sanhedrin recognized the name: when Jesus had claimed to be the Son of Man, they had sentenced Him to death (Mark 14:62–64). Still refusing to admit the truth, they turned violent. They threw Stephen out of the city and began to stone him (Acts 7:57–58), even though they had no legal authority to execute anyone. In contrast to the shrieking mob, Stephen was so controlled by the Spirit that he became like Jesus. Like Jesus, He willingly gave up his life (7:59; Luke 23:46). Like Jesus, He prayed for his murderers to be forgiven (Acts 7:60; Luke 23:34). Then, as his killers raged, Stephen died as peacefully as one falling asleep.

In the end, the Sanhedrin did not listen and Stephen died, so what had the Spirit accomplished? No one knew it at that time, but Jesus later answered Stephen’s prayer by transforming Saul from a prideful persecutor into a humble preacher (Acts 8:1; 9:1–20). Because Stephen prayed, Saul (Paul) would one day spread the good news about Jesus all the way to Italy (28:14). And because Stephen prayed, God would direct Paul to write much of the New Testament. The Spirit really does make a difference. Like Stephen, depend on the Holy Spirit and allow Him to control your life. As you do, He will make you a faithful witness to Jesus, and one day He will bring you peacefully home to Jesus.



THINK ABOUT IT

If you resist God’s Spirit, your heart will become hard and unresponsive (Acts 28:25–26; Heb 3:7–19).

THINK ABOUT IT

By entrusting his soul to Jesus, Stephen showed that Jesus is truly God.



Lesson Outline

The Holy Spirit gives faithful believers the ability to honor Jesus.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



1. The Holy Spirit makes good servants (6:1–10).
2. The Holy Spirit honors Jesus through good servants (6:11–7:53).
3. The Holy Spirit brings good servants to Jesus (7:54–60).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. **Stephen served full of the Holy Spirit (6:1–10).**
 - The believers knew Stephen was full of the Spirit (6:1–6).
 - Stephen served, did miracles, and witnessed by the Spirit (6:7–10).
2. **The Jews resisted the Holy Spirit (6:11–7:53).**
 - They accused Stephen of blaspheming the temple and the Law of Moses (6:11–15).
 - But like their ancestors, they violated the temple (7:1–10, 29–38, 44–51).
 - But like their ancestors, they rejected the Law (7:38–43, 53).
 - And like their ancestors, they rejected their Savior (7:9–28, 35–37, 52).
3. **Stephen died full of the Holy Spirit (7:54–60)**
 - Stephen was filled with the Spirit (7:54–55a).
 - Stephen saw Jesus in glory (7:55b–56).
 - Stephen was stoned (7:57–58).
 - Stephen prayed for his enemies and died (7:59–60).



TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

The Jews resist the Holy Spirit • Acts 6:1–7:60



Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. Who was Stephen full of?**
Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit.
- 2. What did the Spirit give Stephen the power to do?**
Power to do miracles. Power to speak about Jesus.
- 3. What did Stephen see before he died?**
Jesus standing in heaven.
- 4. What did Stephen pray for the people stoning him?**
He prayed that God would forgive them.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. What does it mean to be full of the Spirit?**
To be full of the Spirit is to depend on the Spirit's power and obey the Spirit's will.
- 2. What character qualities did the Spirit produce in Stephen?**
Trustworthiness, wisdom, graciousness, and boldness.
- 3. What did the Jews accuse Stephen of?**
Blaspheming God by speaking against the temple and the Law of Moses.
- 4. How did the Jews misunderstand the temple?**
By focusing on the place, they failed to see that God can appear anywhere, and that what God desired was worship. So they failed to recognize Jesus when He came.
- 5. How were the Jews the ones violating the Law of Moses?**
Like their ancestors, they rebelled against God when they crucified Jesus, and they also broke the law by killing an innocent man.
- 6. When the Jews rejected Jesus, how were they like their ancestors?**
They rejected Jesus just like their ancestors rejected Joseph and Moses.
- 7. How did the Sanhedrin respond to Stephen?**
They resisted the Spirit. They became so angry they lost control and illegally and unjustly stoned Stephen.
- 8. How did Jesus answer Stephen's prayer?**
He saved Saul (Paul), who then wrote half of the New Testament and spread the gospel all the way to Rome.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



USE YOUR LIPS

Bring a pair of wax lips to class. Talk about the things we can do with our lips, both good and evil. Explain that of all the things we do with our lips, the most important thing is to share the good news of salvation with others. In today's lesson, we will hear about a man who used his lips to tell others about Jesus. This man's name was Stephen.

NO FOOD

Dress up as a widow (all in black) and introduce the children to the problem that begins today's lesson: no food. Explain how you and your friends are starving (hold empty plate and silverware). However, the problem is not a shortage of food. The problem is that nobody seems to care about your need.



VISUAL AIDS

While teaching the lesson, use visuals such as Joseph's coat, Moses' staff, and the golden calf to illustrate some of the main points of Stephen's message. Past coloring pictures may also be a helpful resource.

SIMILAR REPELS

Using two magnets (the horse-shoe kind or any double-sided magnet is preferable), bring the magnets close together, and show how they repulse each other. Put one magnet on the table and push it off the edge using the other magnet. Then, show how the magnets stick to each other when they are correctly lined up.



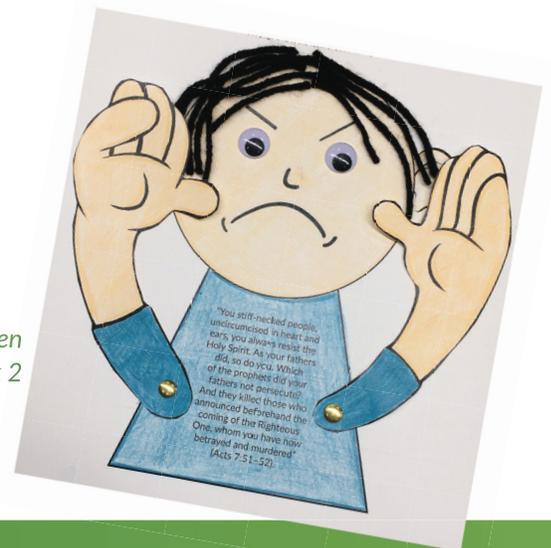
I DO NOT WANT TO LISTEN

See *Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2*.

Materials: Craft sheets, card-stock, crayons, brad, yarn, wiggle eyes, double sided tape.

Directions: Photocopy the craft page on card stock. Color the images. Cut the arms. Draw an angry face. Use the yarn to make the hair (use to double sided tape to tape it). Connect the arms to the body with the brads.

I Do not Want to Listen
See *Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2*



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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT

To teach the children what it means to resist, play a game of tug-of-war. Explain that the goal of the game is not to be pulled over the line in the middle of the room. They are to resist the other team. However, while this game is fun, resisting the Holy Spirit is a great sin. In today's lesson, we're going to learn about a group of people who resisted the work of the Holy Spirit.

SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

Who's the strongest in the class? Allow the children to flex their muscles. Is the strongest in the class also the most courageous? Not necessarily. Talk about the differences between physical strength and spiritual strength. Today we're going to meet someone incredibly strong, but not because he had massive biceps. This man, Stephen, was incredibly bold and courageous when it came to sharing the message of the salvation. Let's find out what made him such a strong Christian.



ILLUSTRATE

ALWAYS RESISTING

Bring a slinky to class. Have you ever taken a slinky and stretched it out as far as it could go? What happens when you let go? The moment you let go it snaps back to its original shape. No matter how hard you pull on the slinky or spring, it always resists being stretched out. Such resistance can be seen in the life of Israel. The history of the Jewish people is filled with instances where they resisted God. Over and over again God dealt patiently with His people, only to have them always return to their original condition—rebellion.

THREE MORE POINTING BACK

The religious leaders accused Stephen of blasphemy, but Stephen rightly pointed out that it was them, not him, who were guilty of this great sin. Illustrate this by accusing the children of something and pointing your index finger at them. However, point out that there are three more fingers pointing back at you. These three fingers could be used to represent the three things Stephen accused the leaders of: violating the temple, rejecting the Law, and rejecting Jesus.



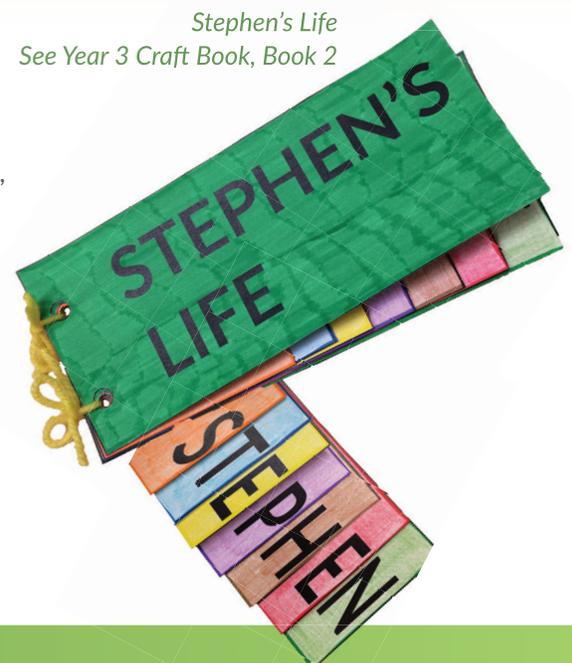
APPLY

STEPHEN'S LIFE

See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheets, cardstock, hole puncher, yarn

Directions: Photocopy the craft page on card stock. Color them. Hole punch all the pages where indicated. Unite with the yarn the name of Stephen in the right order. Complete the blanks with right words.



Stephen's Life
See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 2

AGES 9–11

**THESE TWO THINGS**

Ask the children to name two things they do every day. Point out that these two things are priorities for them: things they value more than anything else. Ask them to identify the two priorities every church leader or pastor must have. Tell them that these priorities are identified in today's lesson: prayer and the Bible (Acts 6:4). As we'll see, the disciples asked Stephen and others to help them in ministry so they could focus on these two things.

CLIFFSNOTES VERSION OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY

Today's lesson contains a summary of Israel's history (Acts 7:2–47). Though long itself, it is much shorter than the actual history of Israel recorded in the Old Testament. Stephen's summary here in the book of Acts is like the "CliffsNotes" version of Israel's history (show a CliffsNotes study guide to class). CliffsNotes are a series of study guides that summarize great literary works in pamphlet form. They allow students to quickly learn the main points of a lengthy book without actually reading it.

**STIFF-NECKED**

Has anyone ever taken a dog for a walk on a leash? If you have, it's likely you've experienced what Stephen meant when he called the religious leaders "stiff-necked" (Acts 7:51). Just as a dog might dig his paws into the ground and stiffen his neck to resist your pull on the leash, Israel's leaders stubbornly resisted God's call though the Holy Spirit.

FLOAT AWAY

Fill a small pan with water. Sprinkle pepper on one side of it. As you talk about resisting, dip one finger in some soapy water and then place your finger in the pan with the pepper. The pepper should spread out away from your soapy finger.

**SOMETHING GREATER**

Look up the following Scripture passages as a class or in groups to identify all the ways Joseph and Moses foreshadowed (pointed to) Jesus.

Joseph & Jesus: (1) Acts 7:9 & Mark 15:10: betrayed out of envy, (2) Gen 50:20 & 2 Cor 5:15: evil done to them was for the good of those who did the evil, (3) Gen 50:15–21 & Luke 23:34: forgave those who wronged them, (4) Acts 7:10 & Phil 2:8–11: exalted from a low position to a high position, (5) Acts 7:11–12 & 1 Thess 2:14–15: savior of Israel (physically or spiritually), (6) Acts 7:12 & John 1:10: not recognized the first time, (7) Acts 7:13 & Zech 12:10: recognized the second time.

Moses & Jesus: (1) Acts 7:22–29 & Phil 2:7–8: gave up glory to save their own people, (2) Exod 3:1 & John 10:11, 14: shepherds, (3) Acts 7:36 & John 20:30: performed miracles, (4) Acts 7:27–29 & John 1:11: rejected by their own people the first time, (5) Acts 7:36 & Rom 10:12–13: saved Israel from slavery (to Pharaoh or to sin), (6) Acts 7:37 & Deut 18:15 & John 6:14: Moses prophesied that a prophet like him would come.