

## **Acts 7: THE GROWING PAINS**

### **Introduction**

At 60 verses long, Acts 7 is the longest of the 28 chapters in Acts. It is also one of the most consequential chapters, not just because of its length, but because of what happened there. Here we see where the first martyrdom in the early church took place. By now, it is fair to say that the disciples are used to persecution and opposition; they've experienced threats, beatings, and imprisonment, but no one has yet to pay the ultimate price of their lives because of the gospel. In this chapter, we are going to read the account of the first person to lose their life for the sake of the gospel. This was clearly a defining moment in the history of the church.

In the previous chapter, Luke introduces us to Stephen, one of the seven Deacons chosen to run the food distribution program. We find out that Stephen somehow evolved from just “serving tables” to becoming a powerful evangelist, witnessing Jesus with power and miracles. Stephen, who himself was a Hellenistic, faced major opposition from his fellow Hellenistic (people from the Synagogue of the Freedmen). When they could not withstand his wisdom, they brought him before the Sanhedrin and falsely accused him of blasphemy. When Stephen was asked to defend himself, he followed the footsteps of his leader, Apostle Peter, and preached a powerful and punchy message. Unfortunately, he met a different audience- a more desperate and exacerbated Sanhedrin who had had it with the disciples' continued defiance of their order to stop preaching Jesus and were looking to make someone a scapegoat. Stephen was mobbed and stoned to death.

The short life and ministry of Stephen were remarkable. He showed his worth by the courage, zeal, and power with which he conducted himself, but even more so by the way he conducted himself in the face of death. He chose to treat his killers the same way Jesus did, What a remarkable disciple Stephen was. There was a casual mention of another man here. In verse 58, Luke mentions a young man named Saul, on whose feet the witnesses laid their coats. This is a strategic mention by Luke, and the reason for this we will find out in later chapters.

### **Study the Scriptures: Read the Passage Acts 7:1-60**

Note your thoughts as you read:

Write down any questions that come to mind as you read:

### **Think Through the Following Questions**

1. What do we learn about the man called Stephen from his exhaustive and powerful speech to the Sanhedrin?
2. What do we learn about the Sanhedrin from their crazy, irrational, and mob-like reaction to Stephen's message?
3. Why do you think Stephen received such a cruel reaction which led to him losing his life despite preaching the same kind of message Peter and other apostles preached? Do you think the same fate would have happened to Peter, given the same circumstances?
4. Why do you think Stephen's speech was so full of Old Testament stories and accounts? Are there things that struck you perhaps for the first time from his account of Old Testament stories?
5. What can we make of Stephen's response to his martyrdom? Acts 7:56, 59 and 60
6. What lessons can we learn that are applicable to us from the life of Stephen as contemporary Christians?
7. Verse 58 says that "the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul." Why do you think Luke chose to specifically mention Saul here?

**Lesson Learned: Are there any new things you learned from this passage today?**

**Application: How do you think this will impact your thinking and/or actions going forward?**