



# Session 7



## STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR

### Acts 6–7

Broadening the horizons of the church's mission to expand beyond Jerusalem, the church now takes up the second phase of Christ's command to preach the gospel in Jerusalem then in all Judea and Samaria.

Still residing mainly in Jerusalem, the early church began to experience typical problems associated with ministry. The widows, those the Scriptures commanded the people to care for, were being treated unfairly, and the apostles were being questioned daily about this treatment. The apostles knew they needed to preach the gospel and decided that an equitable solution would be to find men of good character to take care of the needs of the widows while the apostles focused their ministries on the preaching and teaching of Scripture. The church chose seven men to fulfill this role for the church.

One of those men was a man named Stephen. In the list of early deacons appointed by the church, Stephen is defined as being “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5). Stephen's character was well-known, and when Stephen began to preach the gospel message he met great opposition. Through the Holy Spirit, Stephen was able to answer any rebuke from the crowd to the point of their great frustration.

Stephen eventually was accused of blasphemy by his debaters. These attackers claimed that Stephen had been preaching that Jesus came to destroy the temple and to replace the law of Moses. They found others willing to testify against Stephen as well. When questioned by the Sanhedrin, Stephen's face shone like that of an angel.

Stephen began to preach, beginning with Moses, reminding the people of the law Moses had been given by God and how for centuries the people had ignored the law. Citing other moments in history when God's people had abandoned His law, Stephen finally focused on the current generation and their lack of obedience. The people were enraged, they rushed at Stephen and, as Stephen died, he asked God to forgive those men.