

## Time Audit Chronicles: The Martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6:8-7:60)

---

### Prologue: Stephen's Bold Stand

The Presswood family gathered around, reading **Acts 6:8-7:60**, where **Stephen**, the first Christian martyr, delivers a powerful speech before the Jewish council, recounting the history of Israel and boldly proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. Ariel had been reflecting on how courageous Stephen was, standing up for the truth even when he knew it could cost him his life. Alice, clutching Mr. Fluffernutter, was imagining herself in the crowd, listening to Stephen's speech and wondering why the people were so angry.

"Daddy," Ariel asked, "Why did Stephen have to die? He was doing good things, helping others, and preaching about Jesus."

Ryan nodded, understanding her question. "That's a good question, Ariel. Stephen was full of the **Holy Spirit**, and he had been performing **miracles** and preaching the truth of Jesus. But he was accused of blasphemy because he spoke about how Jesus had fulfilled God's promises and had come to offer salvation to everyone. The religious leaders couldn't stand the message, so they decided to silence Stephen by having him killed. Stephen's death marked the beginning of a **widespread persecution** of Christians, but ironically, it also helped spread the gospel further."

Ariel looked up at her father, a bit confused. "But why did they get so mad about what Stephen said? He was telling the truth, wasn't he?"

Ryan paused. "Yes, Ariel, Stephen was speaking the **truth**, but the religious leaders were more concerned with their own **power** and the threat to their authority. They didn't want to accept that Jesus, whom they had rejected, was the **Messiah**. Stephen's message was a challenge to their **traditions**, and instead of listening, they chose to silence him."

Ariel frowned. "That's sad. But if Stephen hadn't spoken out, maybe the gospel wouldn't have spread like it did?"

"Yes," Ryan said, "sometimes God allows things to happen in ways that we can't fully understand, but His plan is always bigger than what we see. Let's use the **Time Audit Machine** to go back to the moment when Stephen gave his speech and to witness how his boldness became a turning point for the early church."

---

### The Journey Begins: Stephen, Full of Grace and Power (Acts 6:8-15)

The **Time Audit Machine** whirled to life, and the family found themselves standing in a **crowded courtroom** in Jerusalem. Stephen, a member of the early Christian community, stood before the **Sanhedrin**, the Jewish ruling council, accused of blasphemy. He was surrounded by angry accusers who had stirred up the people against him. Yet, Stephen's face was radiant, filled with the **Holy Spirit**.

Ryan pointed to Stephen. “Look, Stephen is full of **grace and power**—the same grace and power that comes from the **Holy Spirit**. Even though he’s facing false accusations, he’s not afraid. His courage and confidence in God are shining through.”

Ariel was amazed. “He doesn’t look scared at all, even though the whole council is against him!”

Ryan smiled. “That’s because Stephen wasn’t relying on his own strength—he was relying on God. Stephen knew that **Jesus** was with him, and that was enough to give him courage. Stephen had **boldness** to speak the truth, even though it would cost him everything.”

As the council questioned him, they couldn’t help but notice that Stephen’s **face** shone, “as if it had been the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15). This was a sign of God’s presence with him, confirming that he was speaking the truth, even though his accusers were determined to silence him.

---

### **Stephen’s Defense: A History of Israel (Acts 7:1-53)**

Instead of denying the accusations, Stephen delivered a powerful speech that recounted the **history of Israel**, from the time of **Abraham** to the **Exodus**, the establishment of the **Temple**, and finally, the coming of **Jesus Christ**. Stephen’s speech was a reminder that God had always been at work, calling His people to faith, but the religious leaders had often rejected God’s messengers.

Ryan pointed to the scene. “Stephen begins by reminding the council of the **faithfulness of God** throughout Israel’s history. He talks about **Abraham, Joseph, and Moses**, and how God used them to bring about His plans. But as Stephen points out, the people of Israel often rejected the prophets and even the **Messiah** when He came.”

Ariel listened carefully as Stephen boldly declared, “**Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.**” (Acts 7:51).

Ryan said, “Stephen’s words were powerful. He called out the religious leaders for their hard hearts and refusal to listen to God. He was **accusing** them of being like their ancestors, who had rejected God’s message and **persecuted** His messengers.”

Ariel thought about this. “So, Stephen was saying that the leaders weren’t just rejecting him—they were rejecting **God** Himself, just like the Israelites had rejected the prophets in the past?”

“Yes,” Ryan said, “Stephen wasn’t just defending himself; he was showing them that their rejection of Jesus was part of a long history of **disobedience** to God. But the difference was that Jesus was the **fulfillment of God’s promises**. Rejecting Jesus was not just rejecting a prophet—it was rejecting **God’s final revelation.**”

---

### **Stephen’s Final Words: A Vision of Heaven (Acts 7:54-56)**

As Stephen continued speaking, the religious leaders became **furious**. They couldn’t handle the truth, so they began to **gnash their teeth** at him. But Stephen, filled with the **Holy Spirit**, gazed into heaven

and saw a **vision of Jesus** standing at the right hand of God. He declared, “**Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.**” (Acts 7:56).

Ariel watched with awe. “Stephen could see Jesus, even though the others couldn’t. That’s amazing!”

Ryan nodded. “Yes, Stephen had a **vision** that confirmed that **Jesus** was alive and was **reigning** at the right hand of God. It was a sign that even though the religious leaders were about to kill him, he was not alone—**Jesus** was with him, and he was about to be **received** into heaven.”

The vision of **Jesus standing** was a powerful image, showing that Jesus, even now, was **advocating** for His faithful servant Stephen. It was as if Jesus was welcoming him home, preparing to receive him into glory.

---

### **The Stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:57-60)**

Enraged by Stephen’s words, the religious leaders dragged him outside the city and began to stone him. As they threw the stones at him, Stephen knelt and prayed, “**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**” (Acts 7:59). Then he cried out, “**Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.**” (Acts 7:60).

Ariel’s voice softened with sadness. “Stephen forgave them. Even while they were killing him, he asked God to **forgive** them.”

Ryan’s voice was full of admiration. “Yes, that was a powerful testimony of **Jesus’ love**. Stephen, like Jesus, forgave those who were hurting him. He followed Jesus’ example, even in his final moments.”

Ariel thought deeply about this. “Stephen didn’t get angry. He didn’t fight back. He just forgave them and asked God to **forgive** them.”

“Yes,” Ryan said. “Stephen’s **forgiveness** was a sign of his deep **faith** in Jesus and the **Holy Spirit**. He knew that Jesus had already forgiven him, and so he extended that same forgiveness to those who were killing him.”

---

### **The Spread of the Gospel (Acts 8:1-4)**

After Stephen’s death, a **great persecution** broke out against the church in Jerusalem. The apostles and many believers were scattered throughout the regions of **Judea** and **Samaria**. But despite the persecution, the believers continued to **preach the gospel** wherever they went.

Ryan pointed to the scene. “Even though Stephen’s death sparked a **wave of persecution**, it also led to the **spread of the gospel**. As the believers scattered, they took the message of Jesus to new regions, and the church continued to grow.”

Ariel was struck by this. “So, Stephen’s death actually helped spread the gospel?”

“Yes,” Ryan said. “Sometimes, God uses even **suffering** and **persecution** to fulfill His purposes. The church was scattered, but that led to the gospel being preached in places it might not have reached otherwise. Even in **suffering**, God’s plan was moving forward.”

---

## Takeaway: Faithful to the End

In **Acts 6:8-7:60**, **Stephen** delivers a powerful testimony of **Jesus** before the Sanhedrin. He recounts Israel's history and points to Jesus as the fulfillment of that plan. His speech was a powerful recounting of **Israel's history**, beginning with the **call of Abraham** and continuing through the rise and fall of key figures like **Joseph**, **Moses**, and the prophets. Stephen showed how, time and time again, the people of Israel had **rejected** God's messengers, culminating in their rejection of **Jesus**, the **Righteous One** sent to them.

Ryan smiled, noticing Ariel's attention. "Stephen starts by reminding the council of the history of Israel—how God called **Abraham** to be the father of a nation and promised him the land. He then talks about **Joseph** being sold into slavery by his brothers, and how God used that for good to save Israel. Stephen shows that Israel has always had a **history of rejecting** God's messengers, and he's drawing a parallel to what they did with Jesus."

Ariel nodded, seeing the pattern. "So, Stephen is saying that the Israelites rejected God's messengers in the past, and now they are doing the same thing with **Jesus**?"

"Yes," Ryan said. "Stephen's speech is a **bold indictment** of the religious leaders. He uses their own history to point out how they, like their ancestors, had **rejected** the **Messiah**, and that their refusal to accept Jesus was part of a larger pattern of rejecting God's messengers."

Ariel looked at the scene, seeing Stephen speak with confidence, his face radiant despite the hostile faces of the council. "Stephen wasn't scared of what they thought. He just told the truth, even though he knew it would make them mad."

"That's right," Ryan said. "Stephen knew that speaking the truth was more important than his own safety. He was full of the Holy Spirit, and he was empowered to **speak boldly** even when he knew it could cost him his life. His message wasn't just about defending himself—it was about proclaiming the **gospel** and calling people to repent and accept Jesus."

---

## Stephen's Bold Conclusion: A Final Rebuke (Acts 7:51-53)

As Stephen continued, he got to the heart of his message. He boldly declared, "**Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.**" (Acts 7:51). He went on to accuse the religious leaders of betraying and murdering the **Righteous One**—Jesus. Stephen made it clear that the **prophets** had foretold of a **Messiah** who would come to bring salvation, and yet the religious leaders had **rejected** Him just like their ancestors had rejected the prophets.

Ariel's eyes widened. "Wow, Stephen didn't hold back at all! He was basically calling them out for rejecting Jesus and for not listening to God."

Ryan nodded. "Yes, Stephen was not just speaking to defend himself—he was speaking **truth to power**. He was calling the council to repentance, telling them they were part of the same pattern of

**disobedience** and **rejection** that had characterized Israel throughout history. But instead of repenting, the council responded with **rage**.”

---

### **The Council’s Rage and Stephen’s Vision (Acts 7:54-56)**

The council members were furious when they heard Stephen’s rebuke. They gnashed their teeth in anger, but Stephen, filled with the **Holy Spirit**, looked up to heaven and saw the **glory of God** and **Jesus standing at the right hand of God**. He declared, “**Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.**” (Acts 7:56).

Ariel looked at the scene in awe. “Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God? That’s incredible!”

Ryan explained, “Yes, this was a powerful moment. Stephen had the **vision** of Jesus standing in honor of him as the first martyr for the faith. Normally, Jesus is described as **sitting** at the right hand of God, but here He is **standing**—as if to welcome Stephen into His presence. It’s a powerful image of Jesus’ **love** and **acceptance** of those who are faithful to Him, even in the face of death.”

---

### **The Martyrdom: Stephen is Stoned (Acts 7:57-60)**

At Stephen’s declaration, the council members became **furious** and **covered their ears**, shouting and dragging him out of the city. They began to **stone him**, and as he was being stoned, Stephen called out, “**Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**” (Acts 7:59). He then knelt down and prayed, “**Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.**” (Acts 7:60). After saying this, Stephen died, becoming the first Christian martyr.

Ryan paused, his voice somber. “Stephen’s death is a tragic moment in the early church’s history. He was the first of many Christians who would be persecuted for their faith. But Stephen’s final words are incredibly significant. He **forgave** his persecutors, just as Jesus had forgiven those who crucified Him. His **prayer of forgiveness** showed the heart of Jesus and the power of the **gospel** even in the face of death.”

Ariel sat quietly, reflecting on the scene. “Stephen prayed for the people who were killing him. He didn’t fight back or get angry. He just forgave them.”

“Yes,” Ryan said. “Stephen’s example teaches us the depth of God’s love and forgiveness. Even when we face persecution or suffering, we are called to **forgive** those who hurt us, just as **Jesus** forgave those who crucified Him. Stephen’s death was not just a **tragic loss**—it was a **victory** for the gospel, as his witness spread to others who would carry on his message.”

---

## The Impact: Persecution Scatters Believers (Acts 8:1-4)

After Stephen's death, a great **persecution** arose against the church in Jerusalem. Christians were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, but this persecution led to the **spread of the gospel**. As the believers fled, they continued to **preach** the word wherever they went.

Ariel looked at the scene with a sense of awe. "So, even though Stephen's death was so sad, it helped the gospel spread to other places?"

"Yes," Ryan said, "Stephen's martyrdom was a **turning point** for the church. The persecution that began with his death caused the believers to scatter, and as they did, they carried the message of **Jesus** to new places. Sometimes, God uses **persecution** to accomplish His greater purpose—to spread the gospel to places it might not have reached otherwise."

Ariel smiled, seeing the bigger picture. "So, even in the middle of something hard, God can use it for good—to spread His message to more people."

"That's exactly right," Ryan said. "Stephen's death, painful as it was, was part of God's bigger plan to **spread the gospel** to the ends of the earth. Stephen's sacrifice wasn't in vain—it was a seed that would grow and bear fruit in the lives of many others."

---

## Takeaway: Stephen's Faith and the Spread of the Gospel

In **Acts 6:8-7:60**, Stephen's powerful speech before the Sanhedrin and his subsequent martyrdom highlight the **cost of faith** and the **courage** to stand firm in the truth. Stephen's bold proclamation of **Jesus as the Messiah** and his recounting of Israel's history convict the religious leaders, but instead of repenting, they stone him. His death is a tragedy, but it also serves as a **catalyst** for the spread of the gospel. The persecution that followed scattered believers, and as they went, they continued to share the message of Jesus. Stephen's example of **forgiveness**, his unwavering commitment to the truth, and his willingness to die for his faith serve as a powerful testimony to the strength of the **Holy Spirit** and the enduring power of **God's mission**. His life and death remind us that **obedience to God**—even in the face of suffering—advances His kingdom in ways we may not fully understand.

---

## Key Lessons:

1. **Standing for the Truth** – Stephen boldly proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, even when it cost him his life. We are called to **speak the truth**, no matter the consequences.
2. **The Cost of Discipleship** – Following Jesus may lead to suffering, but like Stephen, we are called to remain faithful, knowing that our **reward** is in heaven.
3. **Forgiveness in the Face of Persecution** – Stephen's final prayer of forgiveness teaches us that, like Jesus, we are called to forgive those who wrong us, even in our suffering.
4. **God's Sovereignty in Persecution** – Persecution can serve God's greater purposes, spreading the gospel to places and people who would not have heard otherwise.

5. **The Power of the Holy Spirit** – Stephen’s courage and faithfulness were possible only because of the **Holy Spirit**. We, too, rely on the Spirit for strength in moments of trial and persecution.