



*"This is the Story..."*

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## **Week 47: Stephen Sees Jesus**

Acts 6:1-8:1

### **Intro Video: COMING SOON!**

#### **Review the big story:**

God created the cosmos and humans and called it all good. We were created to live in harmony, but sometimes we miss the mark. All of humanity missed the mark, and they had to live with the consequences, but God stuck with them and continued to love them. Then God called a family to be a blessing to the whole earth. Like the humans before them, the generations of this family often missed the mark, but God was faithful.

When the people became slaves, God raised up Moses to be their leader and delivered them. In the wilderness, they learned to be a people of God, trusting in God's provision, living out God's commandments, and wrestling with the law in shalom community. As they prepared to go into the promised land, they were given the shema, words of love to keep with their whole beings. God brought the people into the promised land. They continued to miss the mark, and God sent judges to guide them.

God raised up prophets, but the people demanded a king. Kings continued to miss the mark. The kingdom divided into the north and south. God stuck with the people through leaders and prophets, and continued to call the people back to God, even as first the northern, and then the southern kingdom fell to invading powers. Some of the people were sent into exile, and some were left in the ruins of the kingdom. Through prophets and everyday people, God continued to stick with the scattered people and to reveal that God is so much bigger than they imagined. The people were finally able to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple.

The people of God began to wait for a Messiah. This Messiah was announced through an angel to Mary. Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem, and there, Jesus was born, proclaimed by angels, visited by shepherds, blessed by Simeon and Anna, and sought by magi. When Jesus's life was in danger, his parents fled with him to Egypt, where they remained as refugees until it was safe for them to return and settle in Nazareth. As a child in Nazareth, Jesus grew up in the wisdom of God. His cousin John prepared the way, and when Jesus was ready to begin his ministry, he came to John to be baptized and was proclaimed by God. Jesus called a community of people to follow him.

Jesus showed people God's way of love. He preached fulfillment of the scriptures, walked on water, fed people, welcomed children, told stories, and showed us what was most important.

Jesus entered Jerusalem and was proclaimed as the Messiah. He angered people with his teachings about what was important to God and how we are supposed to live. He was arrested and killed. His friends took care of his body, put him in a tomb, and watched over him. The people really missed the mark. But God stuck with them. God's love is stronger than death. Jesus rose again. He walked, ate and talked with his friends. Then he ascended to heaven and told his disciples that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost. They told people about Jesus, and many people believed and were baptized.

**Tell the story:** Stephen was chosen to be a leader for the new community that was forming. God's Spirit empowered him, and some people didn't like him. They began to plot against him, and they brought him before the council. When the council asked him if the charges against him were true, he answered them with a story. Beginning with Abraham, he told the story of the people of God. He said some things the people didn't like. He testified to Jesus as Messiah. And the people stoned him to death.

- Read Acts 6:1-8:1 (or shorten it to Acts 6:8-7:3; 7:8-15; 7:17-18; 7:30-39; 7:44-8:1).
- Read page 287 in the *Shine On* story Bible

**Prime the pump:**

- **Things to notice:**
  - Notice what Stephen was originally chosen to do. Did he stick to what he was appointed to do?
  - Read 6:11. Notice the irony of what Stephen is accused of - then of what he accuses the people of in his testimony.
  - Notice the theme, continued from the gospels, of misunderstanding or rejecting God's messengers.
  - Notice Stephen's last words, in 7:60. What does this remind you of?
- **Background information:**
  - Why does this one small group of Jews have it in for Stephen? We don't really know, though it seems they feel in some way threatened by him. It's important to remember that this was a small group of Jews. Just like we don't usually want to be associated with all Christians, we shouldn't read into this story that all Jews were against Stephen.
  - If you want to get picky, you can spot places that the story Stephen tells doesn't quite match with the stories in Genesis and Exodus. Is he taking liberties, telling other traditions, referring to midrash...? We don't know, but probably all of the above.
- **Conversation starters:**
  - Stephen has some harsh words in his speech! In his telling of the story, he reminds the people of the times they have disobeyed God in the past - and points out the mistakes they're repeating in the present. He's not the first to make a speech like this (see Nehemiah 9 and Psalm 78). If Stephen were speaking to us today, what do you think he'd point out to us?
  - Stephen gives an interesting interpretation of the building of the temple in 7:44-50. Does this match with what you've learned this year?

**Microsong:** "Stephen Sees Jesus" (Listen: <https://youtu.be/iqayoXle26k>)

The so-called "freedmen" bring a man named Stephen before the Sanhedrin. As his defense he tells God's story which he ends with a challenge that they can't take, rather they pick up stones and hate. Stephen sees Jesus and asks him not to charge his killers with their sin.

**Sing the big song:** (Listen: <https://youtu.be/CyLbr8ljlgl>)

This is the story of how it all began. God made matter, and chaos shattered.

Eve and Adam, they tried to hide. The world got violent and God replied with a mark and a flood and a rainbow sign, God's love written on skin and sky,

*And then God called a family to be a blessing to the earth, oh ohhhh*

A mother and her favorite son wrestle for the blessing, another son becomes a slave, the land is saved from famine.

God's family grows. Egypt oppresses. They groan to God and God sends Moses.

*Ten strange signs say "Please release them!" By the sea God saves them. Oh ohhh.*

The people complain and God rains bread. Daily food and ten new rules.

Five sisters come and ask for land. God says "Yes, amend the law!"

*Moses says, "In your new life across the Jordan, love God with your whole heart and with all your being, and your strength, now listen: God is One, only God! God is One, only God!"*

Cross over Jordan, stories and stones. Circuits and shouts and the walls come down.  
 God sends judges like Deborah and the land has rest.  
 Ruth's worth more than seven sons; Redeem the lost with steadfast love.  
 Corruption in the temple then God sends Samuel.  
 God gives them a prophet, they ask for a king. Does God need a temple? A wise king forgets. And when a  
 bully rules the land, the nation tears apart and loses David's heart...  
 A widow's gift and a prophet's cry. God brings life in desperate times.  
 Josiah reads this misplaced scroll. He turns to God wholeheartedly like David did. In his time.  
 God gives Jeremiah a picture of God's ruined family...  
 Is there any hope left, is there any hope left, is there any hope left for you, Jerusalem?  
 Any hope? Any hope left? Is there any hope left for you?  
 By the streams of Babylon, how can we sing when you are gone, Jerusalem...  
 I'm in a valley of human bones. These bones are Israel, God's breath is hope.  
 Haman plans death for Esther's exiles. She risks her life so they might survive.  
 Finally God's family rebuilds the temple in Jerusalem. God plunges them into a sea of joy and celebration  
 of Only God. God is One, Only God.  
 Comfort to Jerusalem, your warfare finally ceases.  
 Matthew lists these generations, Abraham to Jesus  
 The angel says, "You'll have a son and God will give him David's throne." Mary says, "God looked at me,  
 now I'm the luckiest person around.  
 Mary, now a pregnant fiancé, makes a grueling journey.  
 She has her baby, shepherds see angels declaring God's glory and peace among people.  
 The Spirit sends shepherds and elders and prophets to tell those who wait their Messiah has come.  
 Herod gets nervous, the Magi find Jesus. They hide their discovery and hurry back home...  
 Once again an angel comes to Joseph -- so they make good their escape, oohh.  
 Jesus in the temple, astonishing the crowd. Jesus with his parents. Jesus growing up.  
 Down by the Jordan with the prophet John, Jesus asks to be baptized. And the skies are opened. A dove  
 descends. A voice from heaven says, "This is my son, the son I love. I'm pleased with him."  
 Jesus calls disciples to be with him in the work he's doing. Ohhh oohhh.  
 Jesus teaches the disciples "This is life inside the blessing: You're blessed, you who are empty. You're  
 blessed all you who mourn. You're blessed, you who ache for God, whose inner life is pure. This is life  
 inside the blessing."  
 Jesus walks on the water. Peter tries and begins to sink. Jesus grabs his hand and the wind dies down.  
 Jesus sees the crowds with compassion. So he teaches them for days and days. The people are hungry.  
 There's baskets left over and no one left out.  
 People bring their children to Jesus. Jesus blesses them and says, "You must accept God's good  
 government like a little child would or you won't get in at all" This is life inside the blessing. Oohh ooh.  
 What's most important? Love God with everything and love your neighbor, whoever that may be. Jesus  
 tells Martha, "You're upset about many things; Just one thing's essential; it's what Mary's choosing  
 here." (Life inside the blessing. Life inside the blessing.)  
 Save now, David's son rides on a donkey. He will judge nations, separate the sheep from goats. In the  
 garden Jesus prays "Yes, father, if there's no other way." Jesus dies. The veil rips. . . "Surely this was  
 God's kid."  
 Mary is crying, the tomb is empty. Jesus meets her and speaks her name. Jesus appears to many of his  
 close friends, breaks bread with them, shows them his scarred hands. While he blesses them he's  
 carried up to heaven after he asks them to wait in Jerusalem.  
 Together in one place, sound of wind and tongues of fire. The place where they're praying's shaken and  
 everyone's filled with God's breath. They have one heart and soul and no one claims for themselves  
 alone what they own. Stephen sees Jesus and asks him not to charge his killers with their sin, with  
 their sin.  
*God loves every one of us, it's true. And God loves the universe.*

### **Go do your household project!**