

# Just a Layman

## Acts 6-7

Jerry Root: "I'm Forest Gump." <https://youtu.be/-5mplH-GzVc?t=149>

**\*We often hold up big-name people as the major players in God's kingdom. Today we will see a Spirit-filled, well-versed LAY-PERSON, who God used to advance His Kingdom. (Not a "professional" per se)**

### Recent events: THE ATMOSPHERE

- (1) It is now the early 30's AD 31/34 A.D./CE
- (2) The disciples know that Jesus has come as promised throughout the Old Testament, was crucified for the sin of the world (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-8), and was raised from the dead.
- (3) Jesus has been with them for 40 days after Jesus' resurrection.
- (4) The Holy Spirit arrived in power as Jesus promised would happen.
- (5) People heard their own language when only one person was talking (Peter).
- (6) Fearful disciples of Jesus are now fearlessly testifying that Jesus was raised as promised and is the promised Savior-King.
- (7) Several thousand people have come to believe and follow Jesus as Savior-King (the early church is just beginning in Jerusalem).
- (8) The disciples have been told to shut their mouths about Jesus, but they will not stop obeying God (cf. Acts 5:29). They have been flogged for their faith in Jesus (cf. Acts 5:41)
- (9) The early church, having experienced great grace, is lavishly sharing their lives and possessions as the people of God.
- (10) There has also been hypocrisy within the church at great cost.
- (11) God's word is advancing—a large number of Jewish PRIESTS are becoming Jesus' followers!

1

## A first-century Peacemaker: Acts 6:1-7

- (1) Stephen was a Christ-follower who was: Holy Spirit-filled man; a faith-filled man; a grace filled me; who lived during a significant movement of God in the early church.
- (2) Stephen was recognized by the early church as such and called to help as a steward of practical needs:
  - i. food distribution, etc.
  - ii. Obviously spoke about Jesus as well.
- (3) Peacemaker and Priorities
  - a. Feelings of injustice/imbalance: There was a real need (vs. 1-2)
  - b. Priorities: fervent prayer and preaching about God (without neglecting real needs). (vs. 2-4)
  - c. Church affirmation: calling is usually recognized/affirmed by the people of God (vs. 3-6) cf. Ephesians 4:11-16
- (4) Preaching of God's Word flourished: (vs. 7)
  - i. Large group of priests became obedient to the faith.

**What would it look like for the word of God to INCREASE and MULTIPLY in our community? In your life? In your family? (cf. 6:7; 12:24; 13:49; 19:20)**

## Life-threatening Charges Acts 6:8-15

- (1) Spirit-filled, competent witness about Jesus. (vs. 8, 10)
- (2) Taken into custody under false accusation before the Sanhedrin:
  - a. Stephen is accused of:
    - i. blaspheming God, --God is NOT for him.
    - ii. threatening the Temple in association with Jesus (cf. Mark 14:58),
    - iii. undercutting the law of Moses.
      1. *\*Charges that could have resulted in the death penalty.*
        - a. *FBI infiltrated the Mob—weight of the death sentence*

### What is the Sanhedrin?

A council in Jerusalem that functioned as the central judicial authority for Jews. The Sanhedrin is mentioned in the New Testament as the body that sought Jesus' arrest (Matt. 26:47; RSV "elders" John 11:47-53; RSV "council") and before which Jesus (Matt. 26:57-27:2) and some leaders of the early Church (Acts 4:5-21; 5:21-40; RSV "council," "Senate" 6:12-15; 22:30-23:10) were tried. Ideally at least, the Sanhedrin had seventy members, actually seventy-one when the president was counted among the members...Generally, the Sanhedrin served as the central authority for the civic administration of Jerusalem, for religious instruction, for establishment of policy for the conduct of the temple services, and for justice in cases neither handled locally nor reserved to the Roman authorities, particularly those involving the temple and violations of the Torah. Under Roman rule the authority of the Sanhedrin to impose the death penalty varied with the policy of the governor (cf. John 18:31; Acts 23:27). The Roman governor's authority to halt or investigate any proceedings on his own initiative (e.g., 22:30; 23:28) was the greatest restriction on the Sanhedrin's authority. The authority of the Sanhedrin over Jewish communities outside Judea was exercised through the local synagogues (e.g., 9:1-2) and was not part of the Sanhedrin's direct jurisdiction recognized by the Roman government...<sup>1</sup>

**Imagine if you, your spouse, your close friend, or fellow Christian were accused of this.**

- (3) Staring at Stephen—his face looked like the face of an angel. (vs. 15)
  - i. "Luke here, however, probably wants us to understand that Stephen, being filled with the Holy Spirit (6:3, 5) and possessing a genuine spiritual winsomeness (6:8), radiated a presence marked by confidence, serenity, and courage." ~ Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 337.

## How will Stephen respond? What's his defense?

<sup>1</sup> Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 912.

## Just a Layman Acts 7:1-50

- The high priest speaks to Stephen:
  - Recall the charges: Basically heretic—
    - (1) blaspheming God—obviously against God.
    - (2) undercutting the law of Moses (God's law).
    - (3) threatening the Temple (Likely in association with Jesus's words—about the Temple)

### *\*Stephen's Spirit-filled reply:*

- **\*\*God has been at work throughout history; notably in the people of Israel.**
  - (1) Abraham, (2) Joseph, (3) Moses, (4) the Prophets (5) Jesus
- **\*\*WE WILL ALSO SEE THAT GOD HAS BEEN RESISTED AND REJECTED THROUGHOUT HISTORY TIME AGAIN AND AGAIN.**

### Acts 7:1-8

- **Abraham:** (The one who received promises)
  - God appeared to Abraham and made certain promises (Acts 7:1-8 cf. [Gen. 12:1-3](#))
  - Land included.—land you are now in. (vs. 4b)
  - God promised a period of slavery was coming (vs. 6)
    - Covenant of circumcision—a particular people. (vs. 8)
    - Lineage—until the patriarchs

### Acts 7:9-16

- **Joseph:**
  - GOD AT WORK:
    - God was at work in Joseph's life, but the Patriarchs rejected him, and sold him into slavery. (vs. 9)
  - GOD APPOINTED DELIVERER REJECTED:
    - \*(Rejected a God-given deliverer).
    - YET—Joseph really was a God-sent deliverer. (vs 9b-16, esp. vs. 14)

Pattern:

(1) God at work.  
(2) Deliverer Rejected.

### Acts 7:17-29

- **Moses:**
  - GOD AT WORK:
    - Time of promise drew near for the land (cf. vs. 5-7)
    - God raised up Moses, against all odds (Acts 7:17-29)
    - Moses really was a God-sent deliverer (Acts 7:30-34)
      - *\*Remember: Stephen charged with rejecting MOSES!*
  - GOD APPOINTED DELIVERER REJECTED:

### Acts 7:35-43

- Re-Emphasized just who it was Jewish people rejected in the person of Moses: (Acts 7:35-43)

- Performed 40 years of wonders and signs (Red Sea, wilderness provision, etc.).
- \*Moses promised a descendent who would be a “prophet” like him. (cf. Acts 3:22)
  - **\*\*Come back to this?**
- The angel of God spoke to him at Mt. Sinai.
- Received “living oracles” to give to the people of God.
- **\*(Rejected God-given deliverer). (vs. 39)**
  - **AND turned to Idolatry- (vs. 40-43)**
    - Hand-made IDOLS.

### Acts 7:44-50

- **Briefly: The Temple NEVER DID CONTAIN GOD. It was place where heaven and earth overlapped in a real way, but NEVER did limit God.**
  - The people of God HAD the tent of meeting before the Temple.
  - Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 6; 8; Isaiah 66; cf. Acts 17)

Early Church Christian scholar, Jerome (from 347-420 AD)

*“I will only mention the Apostle Paul, whose words seem to me, as often as I hear them, to be not words, but peals of thunder.”*

4

## Peals of Thunder Acts 7:51-53

- **Jesus:**

### GOD AT WORK

- (1) **Uncircumcised in heart and ears.** (cf. Lev. 26:41; Jer. 6:10; 9:26; Ezek. 44:7, 9)  
 (2) You ALWAYS **RESIST** the Holy Spirit.

### GOD APPOINTED DELIVERER REJECTED:

- (3) You **KILLED** the prophets who announced **Jesus’ coming**; and you betrayed and **MURDERED** Him too. (cf. Moses words above [Acts 7:37](#), [Acts 3:22](#))  
 (4) God at work raising up and deliverer—Jesus—and you rejected Him.

Pattern:

- (1) God at work.  
 (2) Deliverer Rejected.

## The Seen and Unseen Court that Day Acts 7:54-60

- (1) Rage—Stephen’s words were likely cut short
  - a. a call to repent like Peter had done may have come (vs. 54)
  - b. **e.g. university drive –muscle man/minivan encounter**
- (2) Spirit-filled life and a glimpse of the unseen. (vs. 55-60)
  - i. Jesus at Right hand—co-reigning with the Father.
- (3) **A pile of garments that would shake the world (vs. 58; 8:1-3; 22:17-21)**
  - a. **SAUL**= Jewish name Greek name we know as Paul.
    - i. For more: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/no-saul-the-persecutor-did-not-become-paul-the-apostle/>

Acts 22:17–21 (ESV)

<sup>17</sup> “When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance <sup>18</sup> and saw him saying to me, ‘**Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.**’ <sup>19</sup> And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. <sup>20</sup> And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’ <sup>21</sup> And he said to me, ‘**Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.**’ ”

### TO GO:

- (1) God was at work this day.
- (2) There is still an unseen court today—the unseen is eternal.
- (3) Stephen’s life shows the potential impact of “Just a Layman” who is Spirit-filled and surrendered to whatever God calls—Paul was impacted by Stephen.
- (4) God STILL works in powerful ways.
  - i. **E.g. Jerry Root—Reagan**, etc.
- (5) Ordinary people, like Stephen, are called to be voices, ambassadors, for God’s purposes. The cost may be high, may be low.
- (6) Fidelity to the truth does not guarantee a warm response or love from the hearers—

### Response:

**(1) If you already know Jesus:** What is one major way that you are challenged by Stephen’s life or God’s word? How can you adjust?

- a. Is there something else that He is calling you do adjust—do it.
  - i. Share with someone.

**(2) Do you know Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord? Is there anything that is keeping you from coming to Him.**

- a. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved”—allow us to share what the Bible says about how you can become a follower of Jesus Christ.