

LESSON 49

The Death of Stephen

ACTS 6:8—7:60



BIBLE TRUTH

GOD CAN WORK THE SIN OF MAN FOR THE GOOD OF HIS SAVING PLAN

LESSON SNAPSHOT

1. OPENING REVIEW 5 MIN

Use last week’s lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

2. BIBLE STORY 10 MIN

Read Acts 6:8—7:60 from the Scriptures or read story 127, “The Death of Stephen,” from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

3. OBJECT LESSON 1 15 MIN

Persecution Spread the Gospel

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ large bag of round plastic beads with holes for stringing
- ✓ a glass bowl
- ✓ string, elastic, or yarn for stringing beads—eight-inch length for each student

4. TEACHING/DISCUSSION 10 MIN

Using the teaching points, teach through the lesson for today.

5. OBJECT LESSON 2 10 MIN

Persecution Makes More Converts

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ two balls of play dough

6. SWORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

7. ACTIVITY TIME 10 MIN

Color a Picture

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ coloring page for NT Lesson 49—one for each child
- ✓ markers or crayons

8. CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

9. BONUS OBJECT LESSON 15 MIN

They Could Kill Stephen’s Body, but Not His Soul

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ large flat stone (the size of a brick)
- ✓ seven small drinking cups, each one marked with one of the letters that spell Stephen’s name
- ✓ ping-pong balls

TOTAL 85 MIN

PREPARING TO TEACH

TEACHING POINTS

Stephen is filled with the Spirit and with power—Jesus said, “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). Stephen, like Jesus, was spreading the gospel of the kingdom with power. The religious rulers were angered that the old covenant was being minimized for a new covenant of grace. They didn’t think it was right that their customs be replaced (Acts 6:14). However, they could not withstand Stephen’s wisdom and could not deny the power of God upon him. They incited men to testify that Stephen was a blasphemer, just as they had done to Jesus. But Stephen was not afraid. The Spirit of God was upon him. Even those who sat in the council saw that his face “was like the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15).

Stephen rebukes the Jews for their unbelief—The rulers of Israel had rejected the plan of God every step of the way. Stephen summarized the history of God’s dealing with Israel and ended with a stinging rebuke, accusing the present leaders of murdering Jesus, the Righteous One. These men were not innocently unaware of the gospel or confused. They were actively opposing the work of God, just as leaders of Israel did when they turned away from God and when they killed the prophets. Stephen, with great courage, rebuked them for not keeping the law they were claiming to defend. In Acts 7 Stephen gives his defense—a rich retelling of God’s saving plan showing Israel’s failure to obey. In doing so, he demonstrated their need for a deliverer, the “Righteous One.” Just as Israel killed the prophets who God sent as messengers to tell of the coming Messiah, Stephen said the religious rulers murdered Jesus (Acts 7:52). And by killing Jesus, they disobeyed the very law of God they put their hope in.

Stephen is stoned for his faith and the gospel spreads—The Jews, along with the Jewish leaders, became very angry at Stephen’s vision of heaven. They took him out of the city and stoned him. Their anger spilled out toward other Christians. As a result of the persecution the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered. At first that might seem like a defeat, but God had a plan. The Christians who were scattered began to preach the gospel in the surrounding countryside. The result was that many who would not have otherwise heard the gospel were saved. Later in Acts we read that because of this scattering “a great many people were added to the Lord” (Acts 11:24). God worked the sin of the Jews’ stoning of Stephen for the good of his saving plan!

Where Is the Gospel?

How does today's Bible story fit into God's greater plan of redemption?

Stephen called Jesus the "Righteous One" (Acts 7:52). The Righteous One means the only one who did what was right. The reason that Jesus can be called the Righteous One is because he never sinned, not once! Not only that, but Jesus obeyed all of God's laws. No one before Jesus and no one after Jesus could keep God's law perfectly. The Bible tells us that there is no one who is righteous, not even one (Psalm 14:3 and Romans 3:10).

Because we have broken God's laws, like the Ten Commandments, we deserve the punishment of hell. Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. He lived a righteous life, obeying all the laws for us. Jesus took our sin and gives us his obedience so we can enter into heaven. He is the only righteous one!

THE LESSON

OPENING REVIEW 5 MIN

Use last week's lesson outline to review with the children what they learned.

BIBLE STORY 10 MIN

Read Acts 6:8—7:60 from the Scriptures or read story 127, "The Death of Stephen," from *The Gospel Story Bible*.

OBJECT LESSON 1 15 MIN

Persecution Spread the Gospel

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ large bag of round plastic beads

- ✓ a glass bowl
- ✓ string, elastic, or yarn for stringing beads—eight-inch length for each student

The object of this lesson is to help demonstrate how the persecution and scattering of the Jewish Christians spread the gospel.

Explain to the children that the church in Jerusalem began to grow as the gospel was preached. While you speak, pour the beads into the glass bowl and explain that they represent the Christians in Jerusalem.

The people in the surrounding territories, however, were not hearing the message of the gospel. Tell the class that they represent the people outside the city who have never heard the gospel.

Read today’s passage including Acts 8:1. When you get to Acts 8:1, hold the bowl up high and toss the beads up into the air over the class, scattering them everywhere. Have the children pick up the beads closest to them. Then have those who found a bead stand up. Explain to the class how persecution spread the gospel message throughout the surrounding area just as the beads were spread around the classroom. Tell the children they can keep the beads they found as a reminder of how God used Stephen’s persecution to spread the salvation message. Distribute lengths of string, elastic, or yarn for stringing the beads while you ask the following questions:

- **What do you think the Christians did who were scattered?**
(They shared the gospel with those they came into contact with.)
- **How did God use the persecution to further his plan?**
(The Christians in Jerusalem were comfortable where they were. Though the enemy intended the persecution to stop the gospel, it actually caused it to spread.)

TEACHING/DISCUSSION 10 MIN

Using the teaching points, teach through the lesson for today.

OBJECT LESON 2 10 MIN

Persecution Makes More Converts

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ two balls of play dough

This exercise is designed to show how persecution spreads the message of the gospel.

Assign two students to be Christians and two to be persecutors. Give the Christians each a ball of play dough. Explain to them that they need to toss the dough back and forth to each other while the persecutors try to get it away from them.

Give it a try and see if the persecutors can intercept the dough. Then change the rules. Explain that once the persecution begins, they can throw the dough to others in the classroom who aren't on either side. They don't have to throw all their dough at once and, if they throw a piece to anyone else in the classroom, they automatically become a Christian and enter the game. The object is to demonstrate just how hard it is for the persecutors to stop a faith that is being shared with others.

Ask the following questions:

- **How hard was it for the persecutors to capture all the dough once the other classmates joined the game?**
- **What do you think was the result of the Christians being scattered after the persecution?**
(They spread the gospel message just like the dough was spread around the room. Many were converted.)

WORD BIBLE MEMORY 5 MIN

Take time during the class to review the WORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.

ACTIVITY TIME 10 MIN

Color a Picture

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ coloring page for NT Lesson 49—one for each child
- ✓ markers or crayons

While the children are coloring, engage them by asking the following questions:

- **What are the men doing in the picture?**
(The men are holding rocks, getting ready to stone Stephen.)
- **What did Stephen say that made them angry enough to throw stones?**
(The men and elders of the synagogue were jealous of Stephen's powerful ministry. Stephen also shared a vision where he said he saw the "Son of man standing at the right hand of God.")
- **Who did Stephen trust while the men were throwing stones at him?**
(Stephen never stopped trusting God.)

CLOSING PRAYER 5 MIN

Pick several children to pray prayers based on the day's Scripture passages.

BONUS OBJECT LESSON 15 MIN

They Could Kill Stephen's Body, but Not His Soul

SUPPLIES:

- ✓ large flat stone (the size of a brick)
- ✓ seven small drinking cups, each one marked with one of the letters that spell Stephen's name
- ✓ ping-pong balls

The object of this exercise is to demonstrate the courage of Stephen. This courage came from Christ, who lived inside him. The Jews may have been able to kill his mortal body, but they could not damage his spirit.

Set the rock on a table. Then place the seven labeled drinking cups on the stone. Ask for volunteers to play the angry Jews who stoned Stephen. Tell them to use the ping-pong balls to knock over the cups.

Once they have knocked the cups down, tell them they have only destroyed Stephen's body. However, his soul, the rock, which is indwelt with the Spirit of Christ, remains. Invite them to try and knock it off the table with the ping-pong balls. Of course, they will not be able to do it.

Read through Acts 7:54–60 and ask the class how the illustration fits the story. (Stephen, even while being stoned, was a man filled with faith. He asked God to forgive those who were

stoning him. Stephen's body could be killed, but his faith in Christ, his soul, and the Spirit of God who lived inside of him could not be touched. Likewise, the students could knock the cups off the table, but not the rock.)

Ask the children why a rock is a good representation for God's Spirit in us. (The rock is immovable, and Jesus is referred to as the Rock in Scripture. Also, a life built on the Rock cannot be touched by the storms—the difficulties—of life.)

LESSON 49 - THE DEATH OF STEPHEN

