

## Lesson 9

### A Ready Defense

Stephen was in real trouble. He was one of the leaders of the church, working to care for the needy of the congregation and distribute the charity provided by the believers. He was “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5), and along with distributing charity, he was “performing great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8).

The Jewish leaders were determined to destroy the growing body of believers. Their attempts to silence the disciples had failed, so now they focused their opposition on Stephen. The leaders brought Stephen before the highest Jewish court, the Sanhedrin. False witnesses hurled accusations against Stephen. They lied, saying, “He speaks blasphemous words against Moses, against God, and against the Law. We’ve even heard him say that Jesus will destroy the temple.” How would Stephen answer his accusers?

[TM note: Jesus did say the temple would be destroyed, and He would raise it up in three days (John 2:19). He was not referring to the temple building itself. Instead, He was referring to the temple of His body (John 2:21-22).]

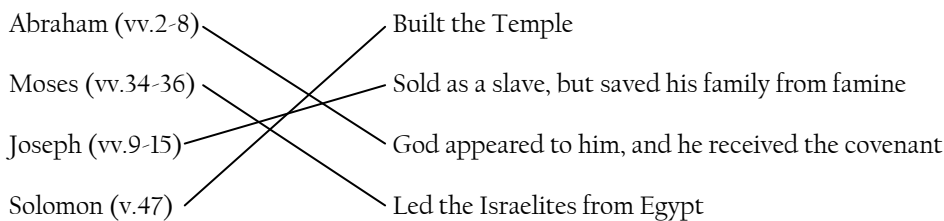
#### The Patriarchs

Stephen’s defense before the Council consisted mainly of an outline of Israel’s history. He wanted to remind the Jewish leaders both of God’s faithfulness and Israel’s faithlessness.

He mentioned several Israelite leaders who played an important role in the history of the nation. What did each of the following men do?

[This section could be used as a sort of test of the students’ Bible knowledge, having students tell the story of each man from memory. Students might also refer to Acts 7, where Stephen outlines each man’s history.]

[TM reference for the following: *Abraham -Genesis 17:1-8, Joseph- Genesis 37:18-28, Genesis 42:1-5, Moses-Exodus 3:7-12, Solomon-II Samuel 7:8-17,I Kings 6*]



## Into the Word: Acts 7:1-53

After the high priest heard all these accusations thrown at Stephen, he asked, “Are these things so?” You might think Stephen would be angry with all the lies being told. But Stephen addresses those present with love and respect by referring to them as brethren and fathers.

Stephen’s response is more a sermon than a courtroom defense. In his review of Israel’s history from the Old Testament, he answers the accusations brought against him.

- v. 9 The patriarchs were *jealous* of Joseph.
- vv. 9-16 Stephen summarized how God used Joseph’s position in *Egypt, Pharaoh’s court* to save their ancestors from *starvation*.
- Stephen outlined Moses’ early life in verses 20-29. Moses was rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter and raised in the palace. At age 40, Moses killed an Egyptian who was mistreating an Israelite. Realizing his own people would not accept him as their rescuer from slavery, Moses fled to Midian.
- vv.30-41 Forty years later, God spoke to Moses through a *burning bush* and instructed him to return to Egypt to lead the Israelites out of slavery.
- After miraculously crossing the Red Sea, Moses received the *living oracles, which are Ten Commandments* on Mount Sinai.
- Oftentimes the Israelites *disobeyed* Moses and *repudiated or rejected* him. (v. 35, 39)
- Stephen reviewed how their ancestors, while in the wilderness, built the (v. 44) *tabernacle*, where God dwelt with them wherever they went.
- vv.46-47 Later the tabernacle was replaced when David’s son Solomon built the *temple, dwelling place for the God of Jacob, house for God* in Jerusalem.
- vv. 48-50 Stephen discounted one of the accusations, stating that God “does not dwell in house made by *human hands*, but in the whole of His creation.” (quotes Isaiah 66:1,2)

Stephen wraps up his defense with harsh accusations to the members of the Council.

- v.51 He accuses the Jewish leaders of being *stubborn and acting as though they did not know God; they always were resisting the Holy Spirit*
- v. 52 He reminds them that they were doing the same as their ancestors who *persecuted and killed* God’s prophets. Now these leaders even betrayed and killed God’s “Righteous One”.

The leaders prided themselves in their passion for the Law. However, these religious experts created their own interpretation of the Law; therefore they, as did their ancestors, did not obey God’s Law (v.53).

### Memory Verse

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

John 14:26

### Extra Memory Challenge

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever.*

Hebrews 13:8

## New Ideas: Does Anything Change?

Stephen's defense before the Council consisted of a review of the Old Testament and what God had done earlier in history, going back 2,100 years. We may tend to think of the Old and New Testaments as being two different stories, but in our study today we can see that they really are two different parts of the same story.

Look up the following verses. What do we learn about God? What do we learn about people?

God's character	People's character
Psalm 102:27 He is the <i>same</i> , and His years will not end. "But Thou art the <i>same</i> , and Thy years will not come to an end."	Exodus 32:9 God saw that the people were <i>obstinate</i> . "...I have seen this people, and behold, they are an <i>obstinate people</i> ."
James 1:17 With God there is no <i>variation</i> . "...coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation"	Acts 7:51 The people were stiff-necked and behaving just as their fathers did. "You men who are stiff-necked...you are doing just as your fathers did."

These verses display the unchanging character of God. Notice the unfailing love, patience, justice, and mercy of God towards stubborn, rebellious, unbelieving humanity.

## Discussion Questions

*Each teacher should encourage, as much as time permits, discussion and inquiry on the part of students. Not every aspect of the following questions is addressed here, and students may have thoughts related to but not mentioned in this guide. The obligation of the teacher, then, is to understand as deeply as possible the Scriptures that are being discussed, in order to answer as well as possible any questions a student might have.*

1. Acts 6:5 tells us that Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit. We see this in how Stephen spoke to the Jewish leaders by using the Scripture. Read John 14:26. How did Stephen's response show the truth of this verse?

*Commentator Matthew Henry provided the above quote; Henry also says, "[Stephen] was filled with the Holy Ghost, not so much to reveal to him new things, or open to him the secret...decrees of God...but to bring to his remembrance the scriptures of the Old Testament, and to teach him how to make use of them for [the Jews'] conviction." The presence of the Holy Spirit is seen in a knowledge and understanding of the Word and a life of obedience to Christ.*

2. A lot of people are amazed at how Stephen answered and may wonder, Could I answer like that? Read and discuss Luke 12:11–12: "When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

*This is a wonderful promise that God will speak through us, we do not have to speak in our own strength. When we face situations where we need to stand for the truth of God's word we need to pray and ask for His wisdom and guidance, the right words will be given to us. Having a habit of reading God's Word daily will give us a good foundation of knowledge so we can use the Scripture to support and defend ourselves or our decision.*

### TM optional questions:

1. God tells us that He does not dwell in houses made by human hands--that is, He is not limited to any one place for us to go and worship Him there. If He is not solely in a temple, a church or any other specific place, why go to church at all? If God is where we are, why is it important to go to a regular worship service?

*God is certainly omnipresent (everywhere at once). Regarding His omnipresence, God is not more present in a church than He is present in a home, in a school, or in a store. However, God is uniquely and graciously present wherever His Word and*

*Sacraments are present. It is especially in the gathering of believers, as the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are rightly administered, that God offers the forgiveness of sins, and He graciously enables and strengthens the hearts of people to believe. Also, God Himself commands believers not to forsake their own assembling together (Hebrews 10:25). In obedience to God's will and command, we gather regularly in worship.*

*Being an active part of a congregation puts a person in a unique environment, one specifically designed to turn our thoughts and attentions to God and to teach us the Word of God. A worship service surrounds us with other believers and is designed to encourage us in our faith, expose us to the Word of God, and teach us from the Word how to live an obedient life.*

2. What gave Stephen the right to accuse the Jewish leaders so strongly (Reread Acts 7:51-53)?

*Stephen had the truth, and the Jewish authorities knew it. The accusations Stephen brought against the Jewish ancestors were commonly known to be true. When Stephen quotes Isaiah 66:1,2 (Acts 7:49,50) the authorities would have recognized the words as part of the prophecies of Isaiah. Stephen's harsh words in verses 51-53 pointed out the continuation of the Jew's disobedience to God and His Law.*

3. When Stephen addressed the Council in Acts 7:2, he addressed them respectfully, as "brethren and fathers," even though they were treating him unfairly. What does that teach us about how we should behave toward those who treat us badly?

*We should be just as respectful of those who treat us badly. Being kind to those who are not kind to us shows others that God is with us. Read Matthew 5:43-44; Luke 6:32, 35; Luke 23:34.*

## Daily Devotions

Monday:	James 1:1-11
Tuesday:	James 1:12-18
Wednesday:	James 1:19-27
Thursday:	James 2:1-13
Friday:	James 2:14-26
Saturday:	James 3:1-12
Sunday:	James 3:13-18

## THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND ITS CONFESSIONS, CREED, AND CATECHISM

### \*Lesson 9: Augsburg Confession – Article 20 (Faith and Good Works)

"If I do enough good works, do I need to believe in Jesus to be saved?" or "If I am saved by faith in Jesus, do I have to do good works too?" The relationship between faith and works is often misunderstood, which is why this article is so long. The article answers that faith in Christ alone saves us. Article 20 also emphasizes that a Christian will want to do good works in response to God's gracious salvation, and it is actually through our faith in Christ that the Holy Spirit strengthens us to do such works.

1. What does Ephesians 2:8–10 teach us in regard to faith and works?

*Faith is a gift of grace, and we were created by God to do good works out of gratitude. Faith alone saves us, but faith also shows that it is alive by what it moves us to do.*

2. According to Matthew 5:16, what is the purpose of our good works?

*To glorify God the Father, your heavenly Father—not for personal glory or to earn salvation.*