



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

# BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

**ACTS**  
Week 2

## DAY 8

# Stephen's Defense and Martyrdom

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Acts 7

**OPENING**  
up to the Word

Have you ever had to defend yourself? Was it to (a) your parents, (b) your boss, (c) a police officer, (d) the IRS, (e) a judge, (f) your spouse?

**DIGGING**  
into the Word

**1.** Which Old Testament characters did Stephen use to set the stage for profound differences in the New Covenant (vs. 2-53)?

**2.** Why was Abraham central to the story (vs. 2-8, 17-32)? What covenant was given to him (v. 8; Ge 17:10)?

**3.** How does the story of Moses lead to the story of redemption in Jesus (Ac 7:20-44)? How and why did the Hebrews reject such a great leader as Moses?

**4.** What was Stephen's main point about Old Testament worship customs (vs. 30-50)?

**5.** What final statement of Stephen resulted in his stoning? Do you think that Stephen's description of Jesus (whom the Sanhedrin rejected as the Son of God) standing at the right hand of God in heaven was the final straw (7:54-60)?

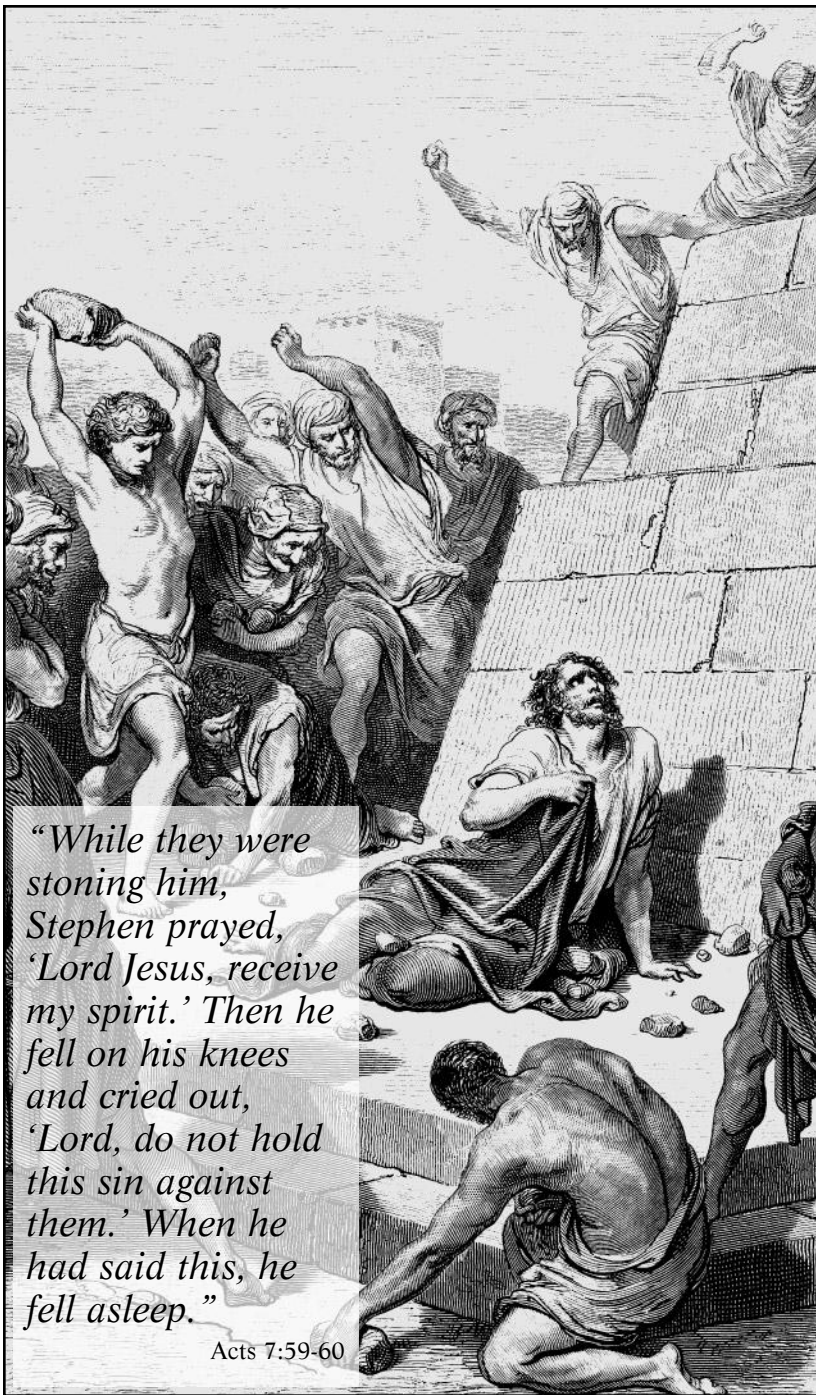
**LIVING**  
out the Word

**1.** How did Stephen portray the journey of God's people? (a) vacation time, (b) an army on the march, (c) upward mobility, (d) migration to greener pastures, (e) a quest for God.

**2.** Does God live in houses made with hands (v. 48)? How does he live in his people (1Co 6:19-20)?

**WINDOW**  
on the Word

*Three heroes of the Old Testament are central to the Jewish story: Abraham was given the covenant of promise; Moses was given the covenant of the law on Mount Sinai; David was given the covenant of a never-ending dynasty. All three covenants pointed to the new covenant in Jesus. Under Moses and Israel, worship centered at the Tabernacle and later, the Temple. But Israelites should not have assumed that God was exclusively confined to the Temple, or even to Israel. His purpose has always included the gentiles.*



*“While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep.”*

Acts 7:59-60

## DAY 9

# Conversion: “To Be or Not to Be..”

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Acts 8

**OPENING**  
up to the Word

Have you ever accused someone only to find out you were mistaken? How did you feel? (a) angry, (b) embarrassed, (c) sorry, (d) apologetic, (e) ambivalent.

**DIGGING**  
into the Word

1. How does Luke introduce us to Saul (8:1-3 with 7:57-58)? How did Saul's persecution help spread the gospel (v. 4)?
2. The deacon Philip (6:5) preached Christ in Samaria (8:5). What was the message he used to reach them (vs. 5-18)? What were the limits of his ministry (vs. 14-17)? How did the apostles serve to coordinate the overall work of Christians?
3. What did Simon the sorcerer want from the apostles (vs. 18-25)? Did his response to the apostles reflect repentance? Can the Holy Spirit be *bought*?
4. How did the Ethiopian eunuch reflect an attitude of openness to God's word (vs. 26-39)?

**LIVING**  
out the Word

1. Have you seen any good result from persecution?
2. What do you want from God? Strength? Power? Miracles? Forgiveness? Reconciliation?
3. Philip used Isaiah 53 to explain the “good news about Jesus” to the Ethiopian eunuch. Isn't this an early example that the gospel would not be limited to Jews?

**WINDOW**  
on the Word

***The proclamation of the gospel now moves north, beyond Jerusalem to Samaria, as Jesus said it would (1:8). Furthermore, the Spirit guides Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch, committed from an early age to the service of his master, was a follower of Judaism and had gone to worship in Jerusalem, even though he would not be allowed in the Temple. As the gospel spreads, it also encounters some opposition—in this case from a false believer, Simon.***



*“The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”*

Acts 8:34-35

## Conversion of the Persecutor

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Acts 9

**OPENING**  
up to the Word

Have you ever known anyone who did an about-face and radically changed their beliefs and lifestyle?

**DIGGING**  
into the Word

1. Now the text turns to the story of Saul, better known as Paul. What was the purpose of his trip to Damascus (vs. 1-2)?
2. What happened to Paul on the road to Damascus (vs. 3-14)?
3. What message did Paul began to preach after his conversion to Jesus (vs. 19-22)? How did his former friends and comrades feel about Paul's new mission in life (vs. 23-25)?
4. Why were believers in Jerusalem afraid of Paul (vs. 26-27)? Who interceded for him? How did the believers react (vs. 28-31)?
5. What miracles accompanied Peter's work in Lydda and Joppa (vs. 32-43)? What human tool did God use to heal Aeneas and Tabitha?

**LIVING**  
out the Word

1. Have you ever persecuted Jesus (vs. 4-5)? If so, in what way?
2. Consider Barnabas' intercession (vs. 26-27) on behalf of Paul. Could you help someone with a grudge against another person to resolve the problem?

**WINDOW**  
on the Word

*Early followers of Jesus were seen by the Romans as one more **sect of Judaism** since they seemed to be monotheistic Jews who attended prayer at the Temple. The Sanhedrin held the power to punish all Jews who taught contrary to orthodox Judaism. Saul, apparently a member or deputy of the Sanhedrin, was granted permission to pursue and stop these "heretics." His about-face is a turning point in Luke's story and an event of great significance for all of Christianity and Western society.*



*“As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’”*

Acts 9:3-4



Artwork by Ken Tunnel

## Conversion of Cornelius

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Acts 10

**OPENING**  
up to the Word

As and when you dream, what are your dreams usually about? (a) frightful nightmares, (b) relationships, (c) family feuds, (d) problems on the job, (e) past events.

**DIGGING**  
into the Word

1. Why didn't the angel send Cornelius directly to Peter (vs. 4-8)?
2. Consider Peter's vision (vs. 9-17). Why was he reluctant to follow instructions from heaven? How did these events help change his perspective (vs. 17-28)?
3. What was the profound message revealed through Peter (vs. 28-43)? How was ethnic favoritism implied in the ceremonies and rituals of first century Judaism?
4. How did the God Holy Spirit verify Peter's understanding (vs. 44-48)? Would Peter have baptized Cornelius had he not spoken in tongues?

**LIVING**  
out the Word

1. Do you consider these visions to be extraordinary events used by God to facilitate change in the church?
2. How patient are you when looking for God's active direction in your life?
3. Are you actively working to bring reconciliation between individuals of differing ethnic backgrounds?
4. Are there any ways in which you show partiality? When is it right—or wrong—to show special consideration?

**WINDOW**  
on the Word

**Cornelius** was a Roman Centurion in Caesarea. Peter, a Jew, was staying 25 miles down the coast in Joppa. Jews were not allowed to eat meals with gentiles because gentiles ate meats that were "unclean" for Israelites (Lev 11). Peter had to be shown that eating meats previously forbidden by the law no longer made someone unclean. The Jew-gentile social-religious barrier was so strong that God used special signs (visions, angels, tongues-speaking) to show Jewish Christians that gentiles were also welcome to accept the Messiah as Savior.



*“He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’”*

Acts 10:11-13



Artwork by Ken Tunell

## On to Antioch

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Acts 11

**OPENING**  
up to the Word

Remember the hymn that proclaims, "I love to tell the story..."? Do you love to tell the story of God's role in your life?

**DIGGING**  
into the Word

**1.** Why were the Christian elders in Jerusalem concerned about the news of Cornelius? How cooperative was Peter with the church at Jerusalem (vs. 1-18)? Had he been as surprised about the events as they were?

**2.** What was the effect of persecution on the followers of Christ (vs. 19-26)? Did it stop the gospel or spread it?

**3.** What kind of character did Barnabas have (vs. 22-26; 4:36-37)? How did he encourage Saul?

**4.** These events occurred about ten years after the resurrection of Jesus. Why do you think it so long for believers to be called Christians (v. 26)?

**LIVING**  
out the Word

**1.** Have you ever known anyone (apart from yourself) who was in the process of being converted to Christianity? How would you attest to that miracle?

**2.** When you pray for those who are persecuted, do you thank God for the spreading of the gospel?

**WINDOW**  
on the Word

*The church was gradually coming to see God's outreach to the gentiles. Some Jewish Christians in Jerusalem believed that **circumcision** (vs. 2-3) and observance of the Old Testament laws were required for anyone to be saved. They understood that God had accepted Cornelius and his family (v. 18), but they also must have felt that these people should be required to follow the Law of Moses. This issue would soon resurface.*

# The Empire Strikes Back!

DAY 13

Acts 12

Apart from Jesus, who do you think is the greatest martyr for freedom? (a) Abraham Lincoln, (b) Martin Luther King, Jr., (c) Peter, (d) Paul, (e) Ghandi.

1. What was Herod Agrippa's purpose in killing James the brother of John (vs. 1-3)? Did this lead him further down the road of evil?
2. Recount the intervention by an angel on Peter's behalf (vs. 4-11)? What convinced Peter that the Lord had sent the angel to rescue him (vs. 12-19)?
3. Does Rhoda's reaction surprise you (vs. 13-14)? After all, weren't she and the others praying for Peter's release from prison?
4. Why was Herod's life taken (vs. 20-23)?
5. What was the effect of this persecution of Christians by the evil ruler Herod Agrippa (vs. 24-25)?

1. Do you know any missionaries who have been martyred or persecuted? Have you read about any? Have you prayed for them?
2. Do you tend to claim credit for your achievements (vs. 22-23)?
3. How has God intervened to lead you out of the prison of sin to the freedom of grace?

**Herod Agrippa I** was the grandson of the despot Herod the Great. He ruled Judea under the guidance of Rome from A.D. 41 to 44. He set out to harass the church, killing one of the original disciples, James the brother of John. To gain further support from the Jewish populace, he planned to kill Peter too.

## OPENING

up to the Word

## DIGGING

into the Word

## LIVING

out the Word

## WINDOW

on the Word

*“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”*

Acts 13:2-5



# The Sorcerer and the Synagogue

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DAY 14

Acts 13

How do you view modern witchcraft? (a) bogus, (b) con artists, (c) harmless entertainment, (d) spiritual wickedness.

1. How important are prophets and teachers to the church (vs. 1-3)?
2. Check the cities Paul and Barnabas traveled to on their first missionary journey (vs. 4-6, 13-14, 51; 14:1, 6, 8, 20, 21, 24-26).
3. Paul had been blinded on the road to Damascus when he met Jesus (9:3-8). How did the blinding of Elymas the sorcerer lead to conversion (13:9-11)? Who was converted (v. 12)?
4. How would you summarize Paul's sermon in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (vs. 16-41)? How did he see the history of Israel and the line of David to Jesus? How are reconciliation and justification received and given (vs. 38-39)? What work was God doing (vs. 40-41)?

1. How would you describe the change from spiritual blindness to sight?
2. Why do you believe in Jesus as Savior? What historical evidence do you have? What does personal experience tell you?

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*The church in **Antioch in Syria** became an important center for the gospel outreach to the gentiles, even as Jerusalem remained the focal point for the whole church. The Jerusalem church had sent Barnabas to confirm the work of the Lord in Antioch (11:19-22). Barnabas brought Paul from Tarsus to assist him in Antioch (11:26). In Acts 13, as the leaders worshiped and fasted, the Holy Spirit told them to select Barnabas and Paul for special responsibilities.*

**OPENING**  
up to the Word

**DIGGING**  
into the Word

**LIVING**  
out the Word

**WINDOW**  
on the Word