

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

JULY 2026 | Acts 6:8-7:60

*But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
Acts 7:55, ESV*

STEPHEN'S GOSPEL

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul disclosed a weapon that would ultimately defeat the powers of hell: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16, ESV) Paul's word for "power" comes from the same root from which we get dynamite, dynamo, and dynamic. This power makes nuclear bombs seem like firecrackers. It can destroy darkness, and it can empower the dead. When proclaimed, creation and re-creation happens. I suspect that the powers of hell know its potential

better than the church. For centuries, the strategies of Satan have aimed at the gospel in attempts to diffuse it. I am grateful to be living at a time in history when the gospel that Paul referenced is being rediscovered and hope is rising with it.

We have already looked at the gospel that Jesus preached: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15, ESV) In His definition of the gospel we see three dynamics. One: The gospel is the declaration that the story of Israel is completed in Jesus. Two: The gospel

is the announcement that the kingdom of God has arrived on earth in Jesus. Three: The truth of these statements demand a response from everyone who hears, and that response determines destinies. We have also looked at Peter's sermon at Pentecost. He followed the same pattern as Jesus. He spoke of Old Testament fulfillment in Jesus, who fulfilled prophecy. He is the Son of Man who establishes the eternal kingdom of God on earth. He demands that everyone repent and believe in Him. It was a powerful message that shook the structures of Jewish religion. A new creation grew up quickly as 3,000 people repented and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. A new Israel of God emerged with both Jews and Gentiles being united in "one new man" (see *Ephesians 2:14*). Peter again had occasion to proclaim the gospel when the temple authorities questioned the healing of a man who was born crippled. Again he followed the pattern of the emerging "apostolic gospel," and another 2,000 people were added to the new community.

And then there was the occasion of one of the first deacons of the

church being stoned as recounted in Acts 6:8-7:60. There were many people in town for the feast of Pentecost, including many widows who needed care. The apostles selected several men of good character to administer this care to them. Stephen was one of them, and as he carried out his assignment, there were miracles and wonders happening around him. This shook up the religious establishment, and he was brought in for a trial, which was a farce. False witnesses accused him and he gave a defense, not of himself but of the message he carried. He told the story of Israel and how its purpose was completed in Jesus. He spoke of the kingdom that had arrived in Jesus. It is worth noting that this incident reveals that it is not the office of apostle that had power to heal and transform, but the message. Stephen gives hope to all ordinary people everywhere that anyone can be a vessel of a power that is greater than all the armies of the world. As he briefly told the story of the "time being fulfilled in Jesus," the Holy Spirit was working through the message, just as He had when Peter preached. This time, however, there were not thousands added to the church. Instead there

was one present in the crowd who would become the world's greatest missionary and take the gospel to the entire known world. It was Saul (Paul).

The audience at Stephen's trial realized that the message he preached did, in fact, demand a response. They responded by killing Stephen. Repent or refuse - that is the choice when the gospel is proclaimed. For those who repent and believe, radical transformation takes place. Aliens become citizens. Rebels become reconcilers. Sinners become saints. Those who refuse invite the wrath of God upon themselves. They yield to their spiritual father, Satan, and do his works:

"Our father is Abraham." They replied. "If you were Abraham's children," Jesus told them, "you would do what Abraham did. But now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You're doing what your father does."
John 8:39-41, CSB

As we look at how Stephen tells the story of Israel and the kingdom, we see that he follows the basic essentials, but brings in other incidents from the old Testament that confirm his conclusion. He begins with Abraham just like Matthew did in writing his account (see Matthew 1:1). He struck a sore spot with the Jews when he spoke of Jesus destroying their precious temple. He had preached that Jesus was the temple of God, the place where heaven and earth came together. The Jews were livid. So, he points out that God gave land to Abraham, but Abraham was not interested in holy land as his inheritance. He instead wanted something much greater and only bought a burial plot. Abraham produced Isaac, who produced Jacob, who produced the twelve Patriarchs. Stephen mentions Joseph who was rejected by his brothers but became their deliverer when they had a famine and came for bread. (He is preaching the story of Jesus who came to his own Jewish people and was rejected.) He tells of Moses who was prepared miraculously to deliver the Jews from Egyptian slavery. (Just like Jesus was prepared to deliver them from sin's slavery.)

Moses was rejected by his kinsmen and fled to Midian. But God sent him back to deliver them. Stephen mentioned that God met Moses in a burning bush in the desert, showing that any place is holy when God meets man, not just their temple. He goes on to mention that Moses prophesied that another prophet like him would come to fulfill all things, and that it was that prophet that had been with Israel in the wilderness - namely, Jesus.

Then Stephen gets very specific. He tells how Israel continued to worship other gods even while they were boasting of their beautiful temple. They carried out the offerings and sacrifices prescribed by Moses, but in fact they were worshipping the demons behind the gods of the pagans. Even though God told Solomon that he couldn't build a house big enough for Him, Israel venerated the building and continued to go astray in their hearts. They had a long history of honoring God's laws with their religious ritual, but denying Him in their hearts. Stephen exposed their hypocrisy and called them out. The angry demons of their

real religion began raging against Stephen.

Stephen was the first martyr, but not the last. A long line of courageous people who had neither title nor office have preached the gospel and died because of it. But, the march of victory secured on Zion's hill has not stopped. It continues today and will continue tomorrow. It is the only hope for peace in the hearts of people and the world. It has not lost its power. It captures people from every walk of life and catapults them into the arena of battle where the lies of hell scream, but the truth of Jesus Christ rules supreme.

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