

LESSON 5

STEPHEN: THE FIRST MARTYR

Read Acts 6-7 & Study Note: Scribes, Pharisees & Sadducees

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What was the problem in Jerusalem among the widows in the church? How did the Twelve deal with the issue? How do you deal with issues in your family, your marriage, your friendships?
2. Seven men were chosen. Who were they and what were their qualifications? What kind of qualifications are required for the work that you do?
3. One of the seven, Stephen, was a man full of God's grace and power. Why was he opposed by others? Who stirred up rumors about him? Have you ever had someone stir up rumors about you? How did you respond?

LESSON QUESTIONS

4. What did Stephen say that made the Sanhedrin so furious that they gnashed their teeth at him? How did they vent their fury? Where else in Scripture do we read about men gnashing their teeth?
5. Describe the scene of Stephen's martyrdom. How did the Lord minister to His dying saint?
6. Who was there giving approval of this execution? Why was this significant?
7. **CHALLENGE:** Stephen gave the Sanhedrin a review of Israel's history going back to Abraham. What did you learn about Abraham and the patriarchs that you didn't know before?

HEART APPLICATION QUESTIONS

8. What are you doing to help someone less fortunate with their practical daily needs? Will you commit to helping at least one person this week who is struggling to meet their daily needs?

9. We are told that Stephen was full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Would you say that this describes you? Where are you lacking and what will you do to be filled with the Holy Spirit today?

10. If you were arrested and brought to trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Memory Verse - Acts 7:56

"And he said, "Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

LESSON 5

STUDY NOTES

SCRIBES, PHARISEES & SADDUCEES

These three are the most prominent Jewish sects of Jesus' day. Each group held a different opinion or interpretation of the Law which led to divisions and the development of these sects.

THE SCRIBES, also called the Teachers of the Law, believed that unless the nation returned to the Lord, and to the faithful observance of the statutes of Moses and the prophets, the glory and grandeur of the Jewish race could not reach its destiny.

Ezra was a Scribe in his day returning with the Babylonian exiles to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem and restore worship for God's people. In **Nehemiah 8**, it is recorded that Ezra brought the Law before the people and read aloud from daybreak until noon. The response of the people was: "they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground."

For the Scribes, their mission was to preserve the Scriptures. These men translated and copied the Bible meticulously, preserving what we now call the Old Testament. These men were learned in the law and capable of interpreting it, and so this sect was formed. They became experts in the Mosaic Law.

But even among the Teachers of the Law there were differences of interpretation and opinion, relative to the observance of the Sabbath and various ceremonies and ordinances as well as the traditions. As time went on they began adding man-made traditions to what God had said. They spelled out the letter of the law but lost the spirit of the law behind it.

Jesus declared in **Matthew 5:20**, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

THE PHARISEES are probably the most well-known sect among Bible readers. They appear over and over again in the Gospel accounts.

This sect sprang into existence as a result of a conflict of opinion over matters of the Law. Their name is derived from the Hebrew word which means "separatists." One Bible scholar said they believed in "salvation by separation."

These pious reformers resolutely opposed all Greek and Gentile influences. They believed in the rigorous observance of the Law as well as separating themselves from the common people and anyone who was ceremonially impure.

To become a member of this sect, a candidate had to pledge to tithe on all produce on his land, to avoid ceremonial uncleanness and to rigidly observe all the laws relating to purity. He must not be the guest of a non-Pharisee or receive him as a guest, and he must have no dealing with Gentiles.

The Pharisees were especially fastidious regarding the observance of the Sabbath (meals, journeys and sacrifices). For many generations they were highly respected by the Jewish people, but their doctrine ultimately degenerated into a cold and selfish formalism, abounding in minute and often absurd observances and regulations. Their superior attitude and harsh judgment of others caused them to be unpopular among the common people.

Jesus pointed out their hypocrisy in **Matthew 23** as he pronounced seven woes on both the Pharisees and the teachers of the law (Scribes).

The third sect is **THE SADDUCEES**. This party represented the aristocratic priestly families, who clung to their ancient privilege and position.

Unlike the Pharisees, they attached little importance to oral or traditional law, but exalted the Torah, the written Law of Moses (the first five books of the Bible). They denied the authority of all subsequent revelation or tradition. They considered the resurrection unprovable from the law, which is why they were “SAD-YOU-SEE.”

Their affiliation with the priesthood gave them greater influence in the affairs of the Temple than the Pharisees enjoyed, but they were even less popular with the Jewish people. They ran the “market” at the Temple where the moneychangers overcharged the people and animals were sold at exorbitant prices. Jesus declared it to be a “den of thieves.”

The Sadducees held offices, both political and religious. They were not exclusive as the Pharisees were, but had no scruples about dealing with the Gentiles. They divided the Chief Council (Sanhedrin) equally with the Pharisees.

The Sadducees were a proud and arrogant sect, and they labeled Jesus as a fanatic. Caiaphas, one of their number, and high priest that year, spoke up against Jesus after the raising of Lazarus, gathering momentum for the plot to take His life (**John 11**).

At His religious trial, Caiaphas led the Council in establishing a verdict, declaring Jesus guilty of blasphemy and taking Him to Pilate.

When Rome destroyed Jerusalem, the sect of the Sadducees fell forever.

LESSON 5: MESSAGE NOTES

LESSON 5: MESSAGE NOTES

PRAISES & PRAYER REQUESTS