

LESSON 4

STEPHEN IS STONED



BEFORE YOU TEACH

The Early Church

As the early church continued to expand, some internal problems arose. Although the believers were Jewish, there were two groups of Jews within the fellowship. There were the Hebrews and the Jewish Christians, who made up the majority. Then there were the Hellenists, the Greek-speaking Jews who were probably converted at Pentecost. The Grecian Jews complained that their widows were being treated unfairly because they were not receiving their share from the food distribution. The apostles had been responsible for the entire ministry up to this point, but now it was difficult to oversee all aspects of the church life. Therefore, they decided to appoint seven men to be in charge of the food distribution. This solution allowed the apostles to focus on preaching and teaching about God. To show that there was no favoritism, seven Grecian Jews were elected to this work.

Stephen

Stephen was one of the seven who had been chosen to supervise food distribution to the needy in the early church. However, this was not a menial task. It required men who were honest and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Stephen met these requirements, so he was entrusted with such responsibilities.

Stephen was not only a good administrator, but also a powerful speaker who always defended his faith in Jesus, even to the point of death. He was the first Christian martyr, sacrificing his life for God's work. In many ways, his death was very similar to Jesus' death.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR STUDENTS

Stephen was very knowledgeable about the Old Testament and was able to bravely preach about God's message of salvation. Because of his complete trust in God, his faith did not waver even when he faced imminent death. Your students may not face this kind of persecution, but they will still encounter difficulties. Therefore, it is important for the students to understand why even the most fervent believers will sometimes face hardships. Faith in Jesus can bring great blessings, but God did not promise to keep His followers from all trouble. However, Jesus did promise to be with His believers during times of suffering. Your students can always experience comfort from the heavenly Father. Matthew 28:20 records that Jesus promised to be with His followers until the end. Encourage your students with these words. Whether they are preaching to others or facing personal problems, they can turn to God in prayer. When they have this kind of understanding, their faith will remain strong as they mature.

BIBLE TEXT

Acts 6; 7

BIBLE TRUTH

Stephen was stoned because he believed and preached the words of Jesus.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To learn to bravely preach the truth.
2. To learn to trust in God and rely on His power.

MEMORY VERSE

"But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one."

(2 Thessalonians 3:3)

PRAYER

In the name of the Lord Jesus, we pray. Lord, thank You for all of Your love and for giving us the Holy Spirit to help us walk on this heavenly path. We want to be good workers for You. Please fill us with the power to be witnesses for You. Please help us rely on You at all times. May all the glory be unto Your holy name. Hallelujah! Amen.

VOCABULARY

- widow:** a woman whose husband has died
reputation: character, quality
Sanhedrin: the Jewish high court
blasphemy: the act of insulting or disrespecting God
martyr: a person who sacrifices himself for his religion

REVIEW

Last week, we learned about two different types of givers. Barnabas was a cheerful giver who willingly offered his money to help the needy in the church, but Ananias and Sapphira were the opposite. They only sold their land because they wanted people to praise them for their generosity. They even lied about how much they offered. However, God knows everything, and He revealed their lie to Peter through the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira were severely punished—they died instantly after lying to God. When the people heard about this, they were scared because they realized what a great sin it was to lie to God. We learned that God searches our hearts. He knows everything, and we cannot hide anything from Him. We also learned to always do things willingly and cheerfully. This is the only way to please God.

BIBLE STORY

The Church Grows

Has anyone ever told you a very important thing? [Discuss.] When they told you, you must've listened very carefully because you knew that it was very important. Wow, right now, I see that you are listening very carefully! Some of you are sitting straight up. Some of your eyes just got very big! And some of you are barely moving! [Please cater the aforementioned physical descriptions to your class.] Well, before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told the apostles a very important thing, and they also listened very carefully, just like you are doing right now. He gave them a very important job. Does anyone know what that was? [Discuss.] Jesus told His apostles to preach the gospel, or the word of God. Since God loves everyone so much, He wants them to hear the gospel and be saved. He wants them to go to heaven. After the apostles were commanded by Jesus to preach to the people, they worked hard at obeying Him. They walked a lot and visited many places to tell everyone about Jesus' resurrection. Thank God that many people who heard the message believed and turned to God. They were baptized and often worshipped together. The apostles were very happy to see so many people join the church.

Do you remember how many apostles Jesus chose? [Discuss.] Yes, He chose twelve! But, what happened to one of them? [Discuss.] Since Judas had betrayed Jesus and later committed suicide, the eleven apostles had to find someone to replace him. They prayed to God and chose Matthias, who was a man of faith. Then, there were twelve apostles once again.

The apostles had many responsibilities. Does anyone know what a responsibility is? [Discuss.] A responsibility is

a duty, or something that someone needs to do. For example, we all have responsibilities. Can you think of a responsibility that you have? Many students do chores at home. What kind of chores do you have? [Discuss.] So, doing chores would be one of your responsibilities. One of the apostles' responsibilities was to take care of all the believers.

Sometimes, the apostles didn't even have time to preach because they were busy taking care of the church and the needs of the people. You can imagine how busy the apostles must have been since they had to take care of an entire church. At home, your parents are probably very busy taking care of everyone in the family. In church, there is more than just one family!

There was a certain responsibility that the apostles were very concerned about: they had to take care of the widows. [Discuss the meaning of "widow."] If a widow had a family, like children or relatives, then it was the family's responsibility to take care of her. But if the woman did not have a family, the church had the responsibility of taking care of her. The church would look after her home and make sure that she had food and clothing. As more and more people joined the church, it became too much work for the apostles to take care of the widows.

The Choosing of Seven

The apostles began to worry about this problem. They wanted to take care of the widows, but they did not want to stop preaching God's salvation. So they decided to have a meeting with the believers to try and solve the problem.

The believers gathered together and the apostles began to speak. What did the apostles say? Let's turn to

Acts 6:2 and read together: "Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.'" The apostles wanted to help the widows but they had to keep preaching the gospel.

When the people heard this, they agreed with the apostles. But who would help the needy if the apostles were preaching? The apostles continued to speak. Let's read verses 3 and 4: "'Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'"

The believers thought that this was a wonderful idea. They chose seven people. Their names were Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. After these people were picked, the apostles prayed and laid hands on them. Now they had the job of looking after the church in Jerusalem, similar to the deacons in the church today.

Stephen, a Powerful Speaker

So, the seven newly chosen workers began their job. They made sure that the widows who needed help received it, whether it was food, clothing or money. The believers were very happy that there were people taking care of them now. Sometimes, the workers also preached to the people and helped believers who had any questions about the gospel. This was because the apostles were not always in the church. They had to go out to preach.

One of the seven workers was a powerful speaker who was full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. He also performed many miracles. His name was Stephen. If anyone said that Jesus was not God, he spoke boldly with them. Stephen always stood strong in his faith. One day, there was a group of men who talked with Stephen about the gospel. When Stephen spoke, the group of men could not think of anything to say against him. These men were afraid of losing power, so they came up with a plan to stop Stephen from speaking.

Stephen Is Arrested

The group of men talked among themselves. They wanted to stop Stephen but they didn't know how. They were so desperate that they even arrested Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. Does anyone remember what the Sanhedrin is? [Discuss.] Right, it's the Jewish high court. They set up some false witnesses to lie to the court. The false witnesses told the court that they heard Stephen blaspheming, or cursing, against God.

"We heard this man say that Jesus will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses had given to us," they said.

Of course, these were all untrue. They twisted Stephen's words to make it sound like he was a bad person. When Stephen heard these false charges, he

remained calm. He did not become angry or fight with the false witnesses. He did not yell in protest. He was calm because he knew that God was with him. In fact, the people who were there thought that his face was like the face of an angel.

When the high priest finally asked Stephen if the charges were true, he spoke powerfully about God. He reminded the people of how God had led the Israelites from the time of Abraham until now. Stephen talked about how God had used Moses to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt. He even spoke about the temple that Solomon had built. Even though the people believed in these things, they did not believe that Jesus was God, the Messiah. So Stephen told them what they really needed to hear.

"You stiff-necked people," he said. "You always resist the Holy Spirit. You killed the prophets who announced the coming of the Just One. Then you murdered Jesus Himself, you people who were given the law, but did not keep it."

Stephen Is Stoned

When the people heard this, they became very angry. Stephen was accusing them of betraying Jesus. Even though Stephen's words were very powerful and he spoke the truth, they still refused to believe that Jesus was God. Then suddenly, Stephen looked up to the skies.

He cried out loud, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

When the judges heard this, they shouted against Stephen. They covered their ears and became even angrier. They did not want to hear Stephen say that Jesus was God and that He was in heaven. They took Stephen out of the city and began to stone him because they did not believe his words.

It was painful to have stones thrown at him but Stephen remained faithful to God. As the stones hit him and angry words were shouted at him, he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and prayed, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." He knew that God was with him. He even asked God to forgive the people who were trying to kill him.

After Stephen said this, he fell asleep and died. Everyone who stoned him was happy to see him dead. Now, he could not talk about Jesus anymore. But the believers were very sad. Stephen died because he stood up for Jesus. To them, he was a martyr, someone willing to sacrifice his life for God's work. He had even prayed to Jesus to forgive those people. The believers remembered him as a kind person who loved God very much.

Final Thoughts

So, what did we learn from the story of Stephen? [Allow students to think and share. Encourage the students to share one thing.] Yes, it's wonderful that our class was able to learn all these things.

We know that Stephen was faithful and trusted in God

even until his death. In the beginning of today's lesson, we learned that Stephen was one of the seven workers who helped the church to make sure that the widows were taken care of. To be chosen to be a worker, Stephen had to possess very good qualities. He had to be of good reputation, and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

We also learned that Stephen bravely preached the gospel and defended the truth. When the group of men didn't agree with the truth, Stephen boldly told them about God's words. He could have just sat back and listened to people say that Jesus wasn't God. That would have been easy! But, Stephen defended the truth. Even though the group of men arrested Stephen and brought him to the Sanhedrin, he bravely told the Sanhedrin the truth. He was able to speak so bravely and powerfully because he was full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Stephen trusted in God all the way until his death. Today, we learned that if we trust in God, He will always be with us. Let us also bravely preach the gospel!

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. **How many workers did the disciples choose to take care of the widows?** Seven.
2. **Why was Stephen arrested?** A group of men couldn't find anything to say against Stephen's words, and they were afraid of losing power.
3. **What were the qualities of the seven people who were chosen to be workers?** They had to be of good reputation, and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.
4. **What did the high court do when they heard Stephen talk about the Bible stories and about how the Israelites did not listen to the prophets?** They became very angry and refused to believe that Jesus was God.
5. **What vision did Stephen see?** He saw the heavens opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
6. **Did Stephen trust in God? If so, how?** Yes. Even as people were stoning him, Stephen continued to pray to God.
7. **Why wasn't Stephen afraid of death?** He was full of faith and trusted in God. He knew that God was always with him.
8. **How can you rely on God's power?** Answers may vary.

MEMORY VERSE PRACTICE

Please reinforce the memory verse every week.
You can practice the memory verse with your students anytime during class.

"But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one." (2 Thessalonians 3:3)

HOMEWORK ANSWER KEY

1. False; the people appointed seven people to take care of the widows.
2. False; Stephen was arrested because a group of men didn't agree with him.
3. False; they became angry with him and started to stone him.
4. False; he asked God to forgive the people.
5. lied
6. heavens, Jesus
7. God
8. B
9. C
10. We need to pray to God, humble ourselves, and ask God for guidance. We can also talk to our parents and ask for help.

SPIRITUAL TEACHING & LIFE APPLICATION

Bravely preach the truth and rely on God's power.

From today's lesson, we learned that Stephen trusted in God and bravely preached the truth. Although a group of men spoke against the truth, Stephen bravely defended the truth. He knew that Jesus is God and spoke about it. He even told the Sanhedrin the truth! He was not afraid because he knew that God was with him. He completely trusted in God's power. Through the fullness of the Holy Spirit, Stephen was able to preach the word of God and glorify His name. He was also able to forgive the people who harmed him and stoned him.

How can we also bravely preach the gospel and tell others about the truth so they can also be saved?

1. God's Constant Abidance

Matthew 28:20 records that Jesus is "with [us] always, even to the end of the age." That means that Jesus is always with us! This is one of Jesus' promises! Sometimes when people make promises, they break them. Maybe they forgot. Maybe they just didn't want to keep the promise anymore. But, Jesus always keeps His promises. Since Jesus is with us, we don't need to fear! If we are ever afraid, we should pray to God and ask Him to help us. If our friends ask us why we pray before we eat, we don't need to be scared! Even if people laugh at us for doing so, there is no need to feel bad. We just need to explain and know that since God is always with us, He hears our prayers when we say them before eating a meal.

2. Fullness of the Holy Spirit

What three things did the workers have? [Discuss.] One of them was the fullness of the Holy Spirit! We know how important it is to have the Holy Spirit. Why do we need it? [Allow for answers.] We need it to go to heaven! While we are on earth, we also need the Holy Spirit to help us! Stephen spoke powerfully through the fullness of the Holy Spirit! So, the Holy Spirit can help us when we don't know what to say. It is a wonderful Helper! It can also give us strength to say the right things to our non-believing friends if they ask us about the truth. Let us keep praying for the Holy Spirit! If we have the Holy Spirit, let us pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit! We know that Stephen had the fullness of the Holy Spirit, not just the Holy Spirit. Let us ask, seek, and knock!

3. Preaching Through Our Actions

1 Peter 3:1 records that if we have good actions, we can bring others to church without even saying a word! Of course, we should always preach, but this verse encourages us to have good actions as well. Imagine if we spoke kindly to people but stole things from them. Would that be good? Of course not! Our actions must also be good. What are some actions that are good? [Reflect and discuss.]

ACTIVITY

1

Stand Up for Jesus Role-Play

Objective: To help students prepare themselves for answering anticipated questions.

Instructions

1. Ask the students, "Have your friends ever asked you about church or the truth?"
2. If "yes," list the questions they've been asked on the board.
3. If "no," write these questions on the board:
 - a. Why do you always pray before you eat?
 - b. The Bible is a boring book. It's not interesting, and it's so old.
4. Discuss possible answers together.
5. Choose students to act out scenarios in which one student asks a question and the other answers. Ensure that each student has had a turn.

Make sure the students are comfortable giving those answers if their friends were ever to ask them questions. Emphasize that we don't need to worry about what others think, or whether or not they will laugh or tease us. We know that God is always with us, just as He was with Stephen. Remind the students that when we answer honestly, we are standing up for the truth and faithfully testifying for God.

2 A Good Witness for Jesus Booklet

Objective: To help students defend their faith.

Materials




- Colored construction paper
- Pencils
- X-Acto knife

Instructions

1. Look at each picture and read the scenarios.
2. Ask the students, "How would you answer your friends if they asked you these questions?"
3. Brainstorm possible answers in small groups or together as a class and ask the students to write down their answers.
4. Then, have the students cut out the questions and answers into 6 separate boxes.
5. Take one piece of colored construction paper and fold it in half lengthwise.
6. Have students write "Be a Good Witness for Jesus" on the top of the cover. Then, have them paste the questions on the cover. (The 3 boxes don't need to touch.)
7. Afterwards, help the students to cut the top, right, and bottom of the boxes using the X-Acto knife, leaving the left side of the box attached. Make sure only to cut the cover only. The result should be 3 "doors" on the cover.
8. Then, have students paste the "Answers" inside the booklet. The spacing of the "Answers" should correspond to the "door" of the "Questions." The students can open the doors to outline the boxes on the inside if they need.

Questions

Answers

 <p>My mom says that Jesus was just a man from a long time ago.</p>	<p>I would say _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
 <p>Why do you pray every day? It's so weird.</p>	<p>I would say _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
 <p>Why do you have to go to church on Saturdays? Come and play with us instead.</p>	<p>I would say _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

3

Rely on God Interview

Objective: To help students rely on God by recounting God's guidance.

Materials

- Pencil
- Interview Sheet

Instructions

1. Guide the students to remember how God has guided them in their daily lives. Just as God guided Stephen all the way until his death, God also guides us. Have the students think about one time when God helped them.
2. Explain that the students will be interviewing another student and listening to how God has helped that student. In this way, they will learn about how God has guided others in their class. This also gives all the students the opportunity to be good witnesses for God by sharing their testimonies.
3. Pass out the "Interview Sheet."
4. Have the students complete it with a partner.
5. Afterwards, have the students share their interviews. Encourage the students to remember God's grace and how He guided them with His power.

4

We Are Good Helpers Poster

Objective: To help the students reflect and identify people to help.

Materials

- Chart paper or poster board
- White paper rectangles (8" x 11" paper cut into fourths)
- Colored construction paper (slightly bigger than the paper rectangles, to create a frame)
- Pencils
- Colored pencils or crayons
- Glue

Instructions

1. The seven deacons helped the widows because they did not have a family to help them. Ask the students, "Who can we help today?" Think of people at church, at home, or at school.
2. After the students have thought of someone to help, show them a white paper rectangle. Explain to the students what they should do:
 - a. Write their name on the top left.
 - b. Draw the person in the rectangle, leaving some space underneath.
 - c. Underneath their drawing, write how they can help the person.
 - d. Color the drawing.
 - e. Glue the paper rectangle onto the construction paper rectangle.
3. Then, distribute the rectangles.
4. On the chart paper or poster board, write "We Are Good Helpers!" as the title (this is only a suggested title; you can work with your students to come up with a different title).
5. When the students are finished, have them tape their rectangle onto the chart paper or poster board.

Interview Sheet

Name _____

Date _____

1. I am working with _____.

2. How did God help him/her?

3. What did you learn from his/her testimony?

4. How can I trust in God?

E1 Year 3 Book 3 Lesson 4—Stephen Is Stoned

Homework Assignment

Name: _____ Parent signature: _____ Date: _____

Bible Truth: Stephen was stoned because he believed and preached the words of Jesus.

Lesson Objectives: 1. To learn to bravely preach the truth.
2. To learn to trust in God and rely on His power.

Bible Reading: Please put a check mark in the space when you complete the reading each day.

Prayer: Please put a check mark in the space on the days you prayed to God.

	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
Bible Reading							
Prayer							

Memory Verse

Please write down this week's memory verse.

(2 Thessalonians 3:3)

What I Learned from the Bible This Week

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Homework Assignment

Understanding What You Have Learned

True or False

1. The twelve apostles stopped preaching to take care of the widows in church. _____
2. Stephen was arrested for stealing money from the church. _____
3. When Stephen told the high court Bible stories about how the Israelites did not listen to the prophets, the high court believed and repented. _____
4. Stephen was angry with the people who stoned him. _____

Fill In the Blank

God	lied	heavens	Jesus
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5. The false witnesses _____ to the high court and said that Stephen was blaspheming against God.
6. Stephen saw a vision of the _____ opened and _____ standing at the right hand of God.
7. Even while Stephen was being stoned, he knew that _____ was with him.

Multiple Choice

8. _____ : The disciples chose seven deacons who had _____.
 - a. Wealth, food, and wisdom
 - b. Good reputation, fullness of wisdom, and fullness of the Holy Spirit
 - c. Good reputation, food, and the Holy Spirit
9. _____ : Why was Stephen a powerful speaker?
 - a. He went to school to learn how to be a good speaker.
 - b. He was funny.
 - c. God gave him wisdom and the Holy Spirit.

Life Application

10. What can you learn from Stephen about what to do whenever there is trouble?
