



1. Can you remember a time in your life when you knowingly resisted God, either as an unbeliever or as a believer? What made you decide to respond in that way? Did you experience any consequences in your life as a result of your decision? What caused you to yield to God in the end?
2. Have you ever tried to work with someone who was consciously resisting God, specifically to help bring them to a point of repentance? What was it like for you? Was your input well received? As a result of that experience, what did you learn about hardness of heart, its symptoms, and its cures?
3. (6:8-10) If Stephen was obviously speaking the truth, and if this irrefutable truth was also accompanied by great wonders and signs, why did the Synagogue of the Freedmen not believe? Do you think they realized that they were fighting against the truth?
4. (6:11-15) Obviously the charges brought against Stephen by the false witnesses were highly offensive to the Jewish people. And, while false, there was obviously some ground in what Stephen had said previously or the charges would not have stuck.
 - Do you think Stephen should have avoided these topics in the first place, so as not to cause offense? How would his message have been different if he had?
 - Why did the Law of Moses and Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple need to come up as Stephen was speaking to the Jews earlier?
 - What gospel truths are offensive to people today? How should we handle speaking about these truths with unbelievers?
5. (7:1-50) What specific instances of God's faithfulness do we see in this sermon? Why do you think Stephen included so many references to this?
6. (7:1-50) What specific instances of rebellion and hardheartedness do we see in the sermon? In what ways do each of these instances parallel the current situation in our passage?
7. (7:51-54) Why does Stephen close his sermon in such an accusatory and confrontational way? What do you think he was hoping to accomplish? Do you think he considered his listeners beyond hope?
8. (7:55-60) What vision did Stephen have of heaven? What purposes do you think God was accomplishing by giving Stephen this vision? What effects do you think that vision had on the events that followed, both from the perspective of the Sanhedrin and from Stephen's perspective?
9. (7:58) In what way do you think Stephen's previous testimony might have influenced Saul, either favorably or unfavorably, toward the gospel? In what way might Stephen's martyrdom have witnessed to Saul in a way that the debating in 6:9 could not have?
10. Considering this passage as a whole, in what different ways did Stephen's witness and subsequent martyrdom serve God's eternal purposes? In what way would the members of the Sanhedrin ultimately experience God's accomplished purposes? In what way would Stephen? Dwell on these two different outcomes for the participants; in what ways can these two very different experiences impact your life this week?



The Root of the Problem
Leader Notes for Acts 6:8-7:60

Twice now, God has brought a clear witness to the work of the Lord Jesus before the Sanhedrin, and twice they have effectively resisted God's Spirit. Now, though it appears that it is the Sanhedrin who are upping the stakes, it is actually God who is doing so. This will be the Council's third and final witness in this portion of the book of Acts, and they will be clearly confronted with their hard-heartedness and their continual rebellious attitude toward God.

It all begins with clear, irrefutable arguments by a follower of Jesus. Those who attempted to oppose Stephen bring him before the Sanhedrin on sketchy charges, and the Council responds in a way that they have not previously: they bring the very message of God's redemptive plan through Jesus Christ under fire, claiming that the content of Stephen's message was illegal.

Once before the council, God's Holy Spirit speaks through Stephen to these stubborn religious leaders, bluntly accusing them of rebellion and of culpable blindness to God's gracious working. Their response to this challenge in many ways sets the course for the rest of the book of Acts.

While there were some priests who became believers in Christ (6:7), there was still much opposition to the gospel message from the Jewish leaders. God graciously confronts them with the truth repeatedly, until the day would come when their nation would be taken away from them by the Roman armies. That event took place in AD 70, after the book of Acts concludes. We can learn from the different responses people had to the gospel and what happened to them as a result.

It has been speculated that Saul, who would later become the apostle Paul, might have been a member of the Synagogue of the Freedmen, considering that he was from Tarsus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia.

