



Making disciples for Christ  
and helping them grow

# Acts 1-7

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## The Jerusalem Church

Term 3, 2013 Bible Studies

Merrylands Anglican Church

*Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Title 'Acts of the Apostles' was probably not in the original manuscript. Many of the titles for the biblical books were added later so that people could identify which scroll they were to read from. Some early manuscripts were simply called 'Acts' and others 'Luke the evangelist's Acts of the Holy Apostles'. The thing is, Acts is not about the Apostles. There are a number of characters who were not 'apostles' who feature in this book and all these characters look beyond themselves to something greater. Ultimately, 'the key character in Acts is God, his activity, and his plan'.<sup>1</sup>*

*Most people agree that Acts was written by Luke. Luke was a physician and historian but never met Jesus during his earthly ministry. However, Luke did know many of Jesus' disciples and even travelled with Paul on some of his missionary journeys.*

*Acts is the second book that Luke wrote (after his gospel) and they probably should be thought of as one continuous work. The maximum length for a papyrus roll was 35 feet and each of Luke's two volumes would have each taken up the full measure of a roll. The fact that they are not placed together in the NT today has more to do with the way that the Bible was put together centuries after Luke wrote his accounts. The people who canonised the Bible saw them as different forms of literature that needed to be put in different sections of the NT. So, the NT starts with 3 Gospels that are similar in structure (Matthew, Mark, Luke) and then the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel which has a different structure (John), followed by a historical narrative that tracks the spread of the gospel through the early church (Acts). After this they placed the letters of Paul, then other letters, and then finally Revelation. However, this structure of the NT should not distort the fact that "Luke" and "Acts" should be read together.*

*This Bible Study series is meant to be done alongside the preaching program of Merrylands Anglican Church, 3<sup>rd</sup> term 2013. We will be working our way through the first 7 chapters of Acts noting how God used people to be witnesses for the good news of Jesus Christ. This gospel made such an impact that people were converted to Christianity and so began the early church.*

*We also hope to be learning lessons from Acts and the impact the gospel had through the power of the Holy Spirit as people spoke it. Many were converted but many were persecuted. As we seek to bring the gospel to Merrylands we need to think about both the great benefits of seeing people converted to Christ but also the possibility that this may come at a personal cost.*

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *BECNT: Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 2.

## COMMENTARIES

Bock, Darrell L.

*BECNT: Acts*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007.



Though a technical commentary focusing on the Greek, it is one of my favourite commentaries. Bock is seen as an expert in Luke's writing and this commentary doesn't disappoint.

★★★★★★★☆☆

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Bruce, F. F.

*NICNT: The Book of Acts: Revised Edition*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988.



Bruce's commentary has long been the standard. It is a helpful commentary but a little stodgy at times.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

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Cook, David.

*Teaching Acts*. Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2007.



A really good resource but is more of a big picture or outline commentary rather than verse by verse analysis.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

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Marshall, I. Howard.

*TNTC: Acts*. Leicester, England: IVP, 1980.



The oldest out of all of these commentaries but still very helpful. Relatively concise verse by verse commentary and probably the one for most Bible Study leaders to use.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

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Peterson, David G.

*PNTC: The Acts of the Apostles*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2009.



This is a very detailed verse by verse commentary and is one of the better commentaries. It is a high end commentary but you don't need to know any Greek to read it. A good reference by an Australian author.

★★★★★★★☆☆

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Stott, John.

*BST: The Message of Acts*. Leicester, England: IVP, 1990.



This commentary is not technical and Stott is always easy to read. This is also more of an overview rather than a verse by verse commentary.

★★★★★☆☆☆☆

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Of course there are other good commentaries but these are commentaries I have on my bookshelf and have used.

## ACTS 1 “BUT YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES”

*The disciples have been with Jesus after his resurrection and Jesus commissioned them to be his witnesses. After seeing him ascend into heaven, the disciples return to Jerusalem and choose a replacement for Judas.*

- › How important is leadership when it comes to fulfilling a ‘mission’?

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### THE INITIAL INTRODUCTION

*Read Acts 1:1-5.*

- › Compare and contrast Acts 1:1 to Luke 1:1-4. How are they similar and how are they different?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- › Some people say that Luke is trying to summarise his first book in Acts 1:1-5. Do you think that is what he is doing? Why or why not?

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### THE COMMISSIONING

*Read Acts 1:6-8.*

- › In Acts 1:4-5 Jesus spoke of a gift that the disciples were going to soon receive. What was the gift according to verse 5? What was foremost in the disciple’s minds in verse 6?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- › Jesus shows them how small and futile their thinking really was. What will the Holy Spirit give them the power to do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- › If the commission that Jesus gave them was to be his witnesses, what should we be doing in Merrylands?



## ACTS 2:1-41 "I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT"

*The disciples had seen Jesus ascend and they had chosen a replacement for Judas. They were now a full complement of 12 apostles and were ready for the mission that Jesus had commissioned them to do. They were now simply waiting on the Holy Spirit.*

- If someone asked you what the Gospel was, what would you say? What things need to be in the Gospel and why? (Check out some outlines on pg 27)

### THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

*Pentecost was a Jewish celebration day that had a few levels of meaning. It was 50 days from the first Sunday after Passover and was also known as 'The Feast of Weeks' or 'The day of the Firstfruits' because they would pick the first fruits from the wheat harvests at this time. Pentecost also had associations with the anniversary of law being given at Mount Sinai. For these reasons people were in Jerusalem to celebrate but with the coming of the Holy Spirit a whole new celebration began and Pentecost took on a new meaning for Christians.*

*Read Acts 2:1-13*

- As we saw in chapter 1, the disciples were now regrouping and they were all together in one place waiting for the gift that Jesus had promised them (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5). What evidence is given that the Holy Spirit had come in Acts 2:1-4?
- The gift of tongues caused a great commotion, so much so that it caused people nearby to gather and react to it. What did the Holy Spirit empower the disciples to do?
- While the disciples spoke in 'tongues' it is important to note that they spoke intelligible words. What was it that the disciples spoke about?
- How did the crowd respond to this situation?

### PETER'S SPEECH

*Peter's speech is the first recorded evangelistic sermon and it is worth reading the whole of the (abridged) speech in one go. Read Acts 2:14-41*

- How does Peter address the objectors in the crowd (those who thought they were drunk)?

- How did Peter introduce Jesus into his speech?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- We often talk about ‘sin’ in our gospel presentations, what were the people guilty of doing according to Peter?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What did the majority of Peter’s speech concentrate upon? Why?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What kind of reaction did Peter receive when he gave this speech?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What did Peter tell the crowd to do if they were to respond to this message?

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#### APPLICATION

- How was the gospel presentation that Peter used different to what we would use (e.g. 2W2L, Bridge, etc)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Why would Peter’s presentation work in that situation but might not work in ours?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What should we take into consideration when we tell people about Jesus?





- Where did they meet? What is so significant about these meeting places?
- How did the general community feel about this community of believers?
- What was life like for the growing community of believers?
- How does our church compare to the community of believers we see in Acts 2?

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#### THE COMMUNITY: INSIDE AND OUT

In Acts we never see a community turned so inward that taking the message to those outside and engaging with those outside is forgotten or ignored.<sup>2</sup>

- In the table below, list ways in which the community of believers were focused inward and/or focused outward.

Inward	Outward

- How can this help us when we assess the effectiveness of our church?
- How could we ‘enjoy the favour of all the people’?

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<sup>2</sup> Bock, *BECNT: Acts*, 149.





### PETER AND JOHN DETAINED

*In the last summary of life in the community of believers (Acts 2:42-47) we saw that the believers enjoyed the favour of all the people. However, today's reading is at least an exception or possibly the turning of the tide. For, Peter and John were detained and questioned by the Sanhedrin in order to give an account of what they had said and done.*

Read Acts 4:1-4

- Why were Peter and John seized and put into gaol? (Also check out John 11:47-48 and then Acts 23:8)
  
- What impact did their message have?

### THE TRIAL

Read Acts 4:5-12

- Peter and John were held overnight and the next day a 'court' came together to question them. What do we know about those who were there to question him? (Check out Luke 3:2 and John 18:12-14)
  
- The question that the 'court' asked of Peter and John had two parts: By what power? And by what name?
  - ↳ Whose power were the Sanhedrin really concerned with? (Check out Luke 20:1-2)
  
  - ↳ How did the issue of 'what name' help Peter? (Check out Acts 3:6, 13, & 16)
  
- What did the Holy Spirit enable Peter to do? How does this compare with the miracle in Acts 3:1-7?
  
- How did Peter explain 'by what name' they had healed the man? What was so confronting about this? (Check out Luke 20:1-2 & 17)

- › Why would salvation be such an issue for the Officials to deal with?

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## DELIBERATION AND JUDGEMENT

*Read Acts 4:13-22*

- › What made the officials so astonished about Peter and John? (Acts 4:13)
  
- › What was the final piece of evidence that dumbfounded the officials?
  
- › What ironies can you see when the officials passed judgement upon Peter and John? (Acts 4:18-22)

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## OUTBREAK

*Peter and John survive the court proceedings unscathed but as they report back the community of believers they know that things have now changed.*

*Read Acts 4:23-31*

- › What was the immediate reaction of the people who had heard what had happened to Peter and John when they reported back?
  
- › Summarise their prayer
  
- › What did the filling of the Holy Spirit enable them to do? (Acts 4:31)

*The 'favour' that the community of believers had been enjoying (Acts 2:47) was now under threat. Peter and John's words and actions had drawn the attention of the officials and they began to feel threatened by the Christians and the gospel they proclaimed. However, Christianity was growing and with this first taste of persecution came prayer for God to empower them to be even bolder than they were before.*

## INTRODUCTION

*As has already been noted in previous studies, early on in Acts Luke gives us a glimpse into the life of the community of believers. Two such passages are Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37. Both passages are short and are very similar in content and style, both passages come after a sermon by Peter which saw numerous converts added to their number, and both passages seem to act as a bridge between one narrative to the next. Today, we will see how Luke used these passages to not only connect the narratives but also to make a peculiar point.*

- Compare and contrast Acts 2:42-47 with Acts 4:32-37 (Hint: look at the structure of the passages).

- What is peculiar about the stories that follow these passages?

## SHARING AMONG THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

*Having already looked at the way Luke used some literary techniques to introduce the next section of the narrative, we can now come to the passage again with fresh eyes.*

- In our time and culture, how do we express the idea of being ‘one in heart and mind’?

*Read Acts 4:32-37*

- How did the community of believers express their unity?

- What was it that unified them? (4:33)

- What had this unity begun to eliminate and why was this significant (see also Deut. 15:4)?

- Do you think that this unity demonstrated an inward focus or an outward focus for the early church?
  
- How was Joseph/Barnabas a prime example of this kind of “unity”?

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#### EXCURSUS: POVERTY IN LUKE-ACTS

*One of the themes that is developed throughout the Gospel of Luke and then into the beginning of the book of Acts is that of “poverty”. Luke introduced this theme (Luke 4:18) with Jesus quoting Isaiah 61, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor (πτωχός)” and then in Luke 6:20, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God”. **But who are the poor?***

*Initially, Luke associates poverty with those who are physically poor. In the parable of the Great Banquet, the master tells the servants to “invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:13). In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Lazarus is described as a “poor man” (16:20 the NIV translates πτωχός as beggar here). When the Rich Ruler came to Jesus for eternal life, Jesus told him to “sell everything you have and give to the poor” (18:22) and though the Rich Ruler couldn’t do this it was exactly what Zacchaeus did in Luke 19:8. The final example of this physical poverty was that of the poor widow who put two copper coins into the temple treasury (21:1-3).*

*What is worth noting is that the poor were often contrasted to the rich in their reliance on God. This made them examples of “godly people” and even “godly living” when compared to the rich, which was the exact opposite to the way people thought at that time (wealth symbolised God’s blessing = godly person). Luke therefore developed the meaning of πτωχός from simply being “physically poor” to being a person reliant on God and even the example of a godly person.*

*However, if the Kingdom of God was what the poor would inherit and the Kingdom had come with Jesus’ death and resurrection then the poor should no longer exist and yet there were still those who were physically poor within the early church in Acts. Luke therefore no longer used the more common word πτωχός to refer to the poor in the early church as he had redeveloped its meaning, rather, he used ἐνδεής (which the NIV rightly translates as “needy”) to the physically poor Christians who were no longer spiritually poor as they had now become part of the Kingdom of God.*

- How can we demonstrate Christian love to the poor and needy?





- How do you feel when someone teases you, slanders you, or even makes life hard for you (e.g. won't give you a promotion at work) because you are a willing to speak about Jesus?

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#### INSIGHT TO COMMUNITY LIFE

*Once again Luke breaks up the different scenes and stories by giving us another insight into the community of believers. However, this passage looks beyond the community of believers to the reaction of the people around them.*

*Read Acts 5:12-16*

- Let's start off with the hardest question of the study!!! How can we reconcile the apparent contradiction in verses 13 & 14, where “no one else dared join them” is counteracted with “more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number”? (Hint: consider the context of the previous stories)
- 
- What kind of impact did the Apostle's ministry have upon the greater community?

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#### THE APOSTLES GAOLED, SORT OF...

*The Apostles were meeting in Solomon's Colonnade in the Temple. There they taught people about Jesus and testified to his resurrection. They had already had success at reaching people here and now they return to preach some more despite the warnings that the Sadducees had given them.*

*Read Acts 5:17-26*

- Why did the Sadducees arrest the apostles?
- 
- What happened during the night?
- 
- What did the apostles do?
- 
- What surprises were in store for the temple guard and the high priest?

- › What is so interesting about second arrest of the apostles?

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## QUESTIONING THE RECAPTURED

*Read Acts 5:27-33*

- › What did the high priest have against the apostles?
  
- › How did Peter respond to these charges?
  
- › Why would the authorities want to put the apostles to death?

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## A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR

- › What was Gamaliel's reasoning for not having the apostles killed?
  
- › What kind of influence did Gamaliel's speech have?
  
- › Does the passage indicate whether the apostles were of God or not?

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## CONCLUSION

- › What does this passage say about how we should face opposition as Christians? And are you willing to do likewise?

*Going up against God is ultimately futile. God will work his purposes out no matter whether we are for him or against him. Our call is therefore to be loyal to God and his message as we recognize Jesus as our Prince and Saviour.*

- All churches have their problems. What problems do growing churches have?

#### A CHANGE IN CHURCH GOVERNMENT

*In many ways Acts 6:1-7 is both an ending and a beginning. It is the last of the “glimpses into the life of the community” and so in some ways it finishes of the first section of Acts in which Peter has been the star character or witness. However, this section also introduces some new characters who will become the focus of the next section and therefore acts as a beginning or introduction to the next section.*

*Read Acts 6:1-7*

- People have often portrayed the “early church” as being the most pure form of church yet it wasn’t without its own troubles. What problems were rising to the surface in the life of the community of believers?
  
- What is the initial response of “the twelve”? (6:2)
  
- What do they suggest is the best way to move forward and why?
  
- Was this ministry to the ‘widows’ important given that the apostles were handing it on to someone else?
  
- What do you notice in the list of names in verse 5? Do you recognise any of the names?



## INTRODUCTION

*The focus of things has begun to change. Up to this point, the temple has been the location for where the gospel has been proclaimed and defended (though we know they also met in homes) and the apostles were the main characters. Now, there are new locations and new characters, the gospel is on the move and soon an “explosion” is about to happen as the gospel spreads from the centre of Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.*

- If we were to suddenly grow as a church what opposition do you think we would face and where do you think it might come from?

## A NEW PLACE TO FEAR

*Stephen has just been given a new job; making sure the welfare is distributed properly, but he also is involved in more than just one ministry.*

*Read Acts 6:8-15*

- Before Stephen says or does anything, what do we know about him? (check out 6:3, 5, 8, 10, 15)
  
- From where did his opposition rise up and why do you think this might be significant?
  
- Verse 10 tells us that they couldn’t stand up against Stephen’s wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke, so what did they do?
  
- By the end of this scene, what do we know about Stephen now?

## STEPHEN’S SPEECH

- What do these verses say about God and his relationship to his people?

v. 2-3

v. 32

v. 5

v. 34

v. 8

v. 35

v. 9b-10

v. 37

v. 17

v. 44

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v. 48

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- › What do these verses say about how the prophets related to God?

v. 4

v. 25

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v. 8

v. 35-36

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v. 45

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- › What do these verses say about how the people responded to God and his prophets?

v. 9

v. 39

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v. 25ff

v. 41-43

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- › What point do you think Stephen has been trying to make throughout this speech up to this point?

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#### SPIRIT REJECTION (51-53)

- › Stephen called the leaders “stiff-necked” with “uncircumcised hearts and ears!” Why is that significant?
- › How were they like their fathers?

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#### LESSONS FOR US

- › How should we respond to God’s message of salvation?
- › How can we also listen to the rebukes in this speech today?

## INTRODUCTION

Last week we studied Stephen's Speech and we saw how Stephen turned the allegations made against him back onto the very leaders who were opposed to him. Stephen was able to show that it was actually the leaders of the temple who were ignoring the precedents set by Moses and that the temple was not the place where God really dwelt. In this study we will be looking at how Stephen's day in court and then execution mirrors Jesus'.

Read Acts 7:54-8:3 and get a feel for the passage as a whole and then we will look at it in smaller pieces.

## THE CHARGES AGAINST STEPHEN

**Acts 6:12-14** <sup>12</sup> So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. <sup>13</sup> They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. <sup>14</sup> For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

**Mark 14:53** <sup>53</sup> They took Jesus to the high priest, and all the chief priests, elders and teachers of the law came together.

**Mark 14:56-59** <sup>56</sup> Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. <sup>57</sup> Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: <sup>58</sup> "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.'" <sup>59</sup> Yet even then their testimony did not agree.

- Where were they both taken and before whom were they tried?
  
- How does the testimony of the witnesses compare?

## THE ISSUE OF "THE SON OF MAN"

**Acts 7:54-56** <sup>54</sup> When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. <sup>55</sup> But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. <sup>56</sup> "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

**Mark 14:60-62** <sup>60</sup> Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" <sup>61</sup> But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" <sup>62</sup> "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

- It is interesting to note that Jesus was not really mentioned in Stephen's speech, yet ultimately the issue still revolves around Jesus and who he is. Who did Stephen see when the leaders became irate?



- The Son of Man quote is important. Before we compare what Jesus said to what Stephen said let's look at the background to this statement in Daniel 7:13-14. What can we learn about the Son of Man from this passage?
- What was the weight of Stephen's testimony as he described what he saw?

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#### THE VERDICT AGAINST STEPHEN

**Acts 7:57-58** <sup>57</sup> *At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, <sup>58</sup> dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.*

**Mark 14:63-64** <sup>63</sup> *The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. <sup>64</sup> "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.*

- Why do you think that the leaders had such a strong reaction to Stephen's speech?
- Clothing seems to play an important part in these passages, what was the significance behind the role of clothing in these passages.
- Saul is mentioned here but almost in passing. What was Saul's role in this stoning and why would that be significant?
- What were the results of the two trials?

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#### THE DEATH OF STEPHEN

**Acts 7:59** <sup>59</sup> *While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."*

**Luke 23:46** <sup>46</sup> *Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

- Compare the two statements, how is Stephen's statement a reflection of Jesus' statement?

*Acts 7:60* <sup>60</sup> 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. | *Luke 23:34* <sup>34</sup> Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

- Again, compare and contrast these statements.

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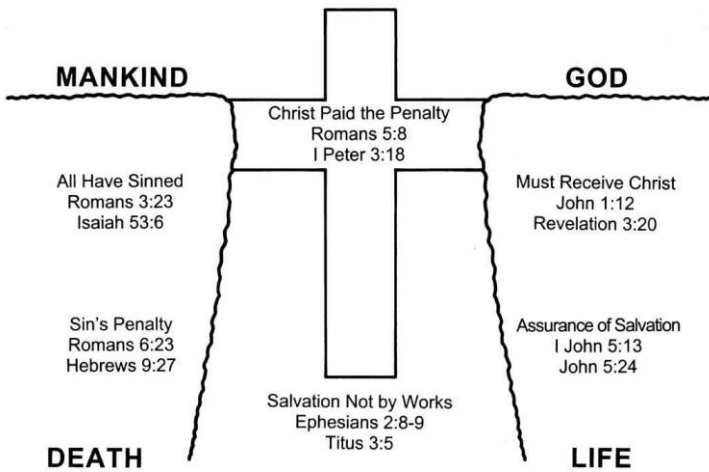
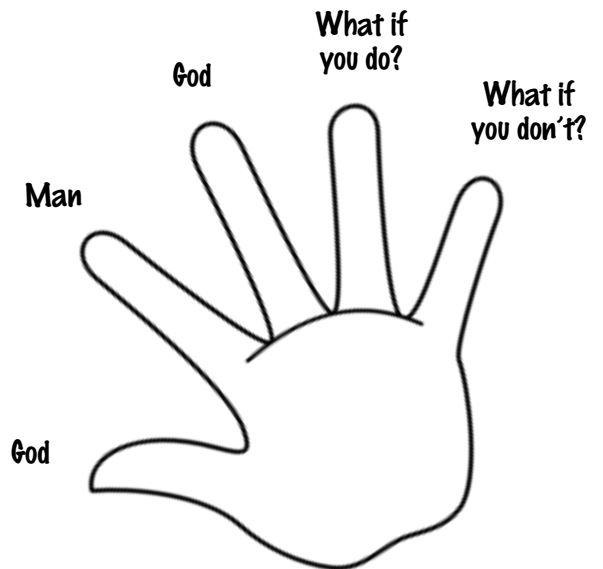
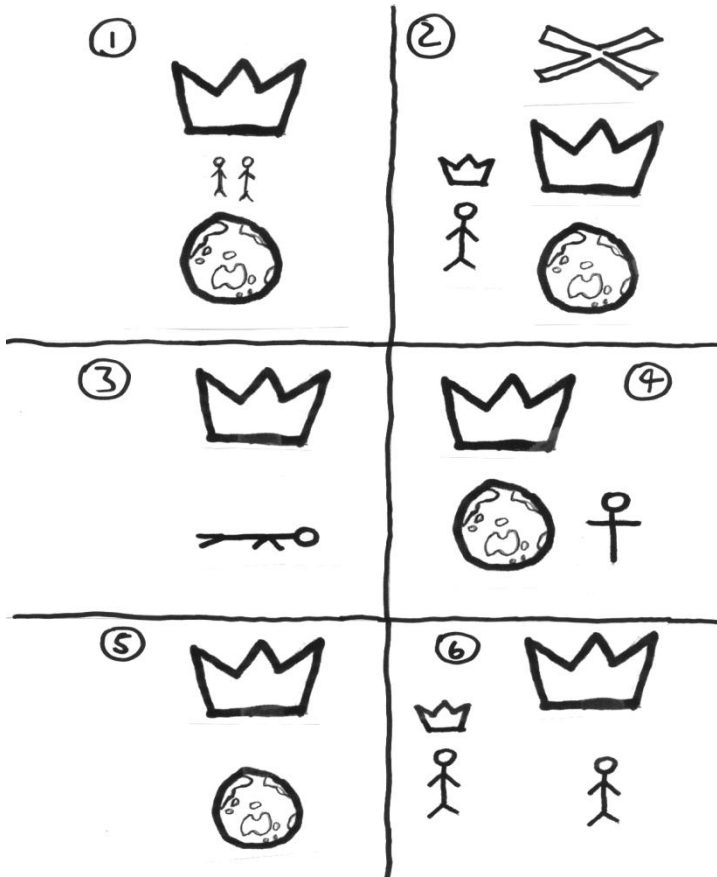
## THE RESULT OF THIS DEATH

*Read Acts 8:1b-3*

- Compare Acts 8:2 to Luke 23:5-53. How was Stephen cared for?
  
- What ended up happening because of Stephen's death?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How can we be inspired by Stephen like Stephen was inspired by Jesus?

*Stephen was obviously considered to be a great Christian and the similarities that can be seen between what happened to him and what happened to Jesus would have been inspirational to those who were to undergo further persecution in the future.*

GOSPEL OUTLINES



**God:** made the world and everything in it.  
**Man:** rebelled and sinned against God  
**God:** has done something about it in sending Jesus to rescue us from our sin  
**What if you do** (accept Jesus as Saviour)? then you will have eternal life  
**What if you don't** (accept Jesus as your Saviour)? Then you will face God's judgement.