

God's Strategy for Church Planting

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[0:00] Bible, Acts 7, starting in verse 1. And the high priest said, Are these things so? And he said, Stephen that is, Hear me, brethren and fathers.

The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, Depart from your country and your relatives, and come into the land that I will show you.

Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. And from there, after his father died, God removed him into this country in which you are now living.

And he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground. Yet, even when he had no child, he promised that he would give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him.

But God spoke to this effect that his offspring would be aliens in a foreign land, that they would be enslaved, and mistreated for 400 years. And whatever nation to which they shall be in bondage, I myself will judge, said God.

[1:06] And after that, they will come out and serve me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision. And he became the father of Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day.

And Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob, the twelve patriarchs. Verse 9. And the patriarchs became jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him. And rescued him from all his afflictions.

And granted him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And he made him governor over Egypt and all his household. Now a famine came over all Egypt and Canaan.

And great affliction. And our fathers could find no food. But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our fathers the first time. And on the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

And Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and divided Jacob and his father, Jacob's father, and all his relatives to come to him. Seventy-five persons.

[2:02] And Jacob went down to Egypt and passed away, he and our fathers. And they were moved to Shechem and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamer and Shechem.

But as the time of the promise was approaching, which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt until there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph.

It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive. It was at this time that Moses was born.

He was lovely in the sight of God. He was nurtured three months in his father's home. And after he had been exposed, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and nurtured him as her own son. And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians.

He was a man of power and words and deeds. But when he was approaching the age of 40, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. And when he saw one being treated unjustly, he defended him, took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptians.

[3:10] He supposed his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance to him. But they did not understand. On the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together. And he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, Man, you are brethren.

Why do you injure one another? But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?

And at this remark, Moses fled and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. Verse 30, And after forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai in the flame of a burning thorn bush.

And when Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight, and he approached to look closely. There came the voice of the Lord, I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. And Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. But the Lord said to him, Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

[4 : 12] I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt, and have heard their groans, and have come down to deliver them. Come now, and I will send you to Egypt. This Moses, whom they disowned, saying, Who made you a ruler and a judge, is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush.

This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, God shall raise up for you a prophet like me from your brethren.

This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness together with the angel who was speaking to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. And he received living oracles to pass on to you.

Yet our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, but repudiated him, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make for us gods who will go before us, for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt, we did not know what happened to him.

Verse 41, And at that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands, but God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven as it is written in the book of the prophets.

[5 : 28] It was not to me that you offered victim and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel? You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god of Ramphah, the images which you made to worship them.

I also will remove you from Babylon. Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen. And having received it in their turn, our fathers brought it in with Joshua upon dispossessing the nations whom God drove out before our fathers until the time of David. And it was he who found favor in God's sight.

And he asked that he might find a dwelling place for the god of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. However, the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands, as the prophet says.

Heaven is my throne and earth is the footstool of my feet. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord? What place is there for my repose? Was it not my hand which made all these things?

[6 : 30] You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit. You're doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?

And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the righteous one whose betrayers and murderers you have now become. You who received the law as ordained by angels yet you did not keep it.

Now when they heard this, verse 54, they were cut to the quick and gnashed their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God and he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

But they cried out with a loud voice and covered their ears and they rushed upon him with one impulse and when they had driven him out of the city they stoned him. And the witnesses laid aside the robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

And they went on stoning Stephen as he called out and said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And falling on his knees he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against him.

[7 : 44] Having said this he fell asleep and Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem. They were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles.

And devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul ravaged the church entering house after house and dragging off men and women he would put them in prison.

Do you believe in square circles? Do you believe in round squares? And when somebody asks you that question you say I can't really answer that because there's no such thing.

It's an oxymoron. To say that there's round squares to say that there's square circles is kind of odd isn't it? I'm not being flippant.

I want to be gracious. But that's what it's like when you say same-sex marriage. It's an oxymoron.

They don't go together. There's no such thing according to the Bible.

[9:02] The Bible doesn't classify it that way. And yes as we reflect upon the Supreme Court's decision this past week about the definition of marriage or how they redefine marriage.

And yes it's a rejection of the Bible's definition of marriage in Genesis. That's true. But friends do you realize there's something deeper than that? There's something a whole lot deeper than this. It's a rejection of the Gospel. It's a rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ His life death and resurrection. That's really the issue.

But you know what the irony is in all that? When it's a rejection of the Gospel do you know the amazing part of this? God's strategy is to use the rejection of the Gospel to spread the Gospel. God's strategy which is kind of an oxymoron in and of itself He uses the rejection of the Gospel to bring about the spread of the Gospel.

[10:18] And that's exactly what you see in our text. As we look at the book of Acts just do it be who you are let God use us to proclaim to fulfill His mission.

We see in our text here God's strategy for church planting. We're actually going to see five steps that God uses to bring about church planting. Now there might be more I'm not saying this is the only five steps but you actually see five steps God uses to bring about the planting of churches. To bring about the spread of the Gospel. This is what He does. The scenario Stephen is before the council he was arrested remember we looked at that last week he's before the council they had all these charges you're against the law you're against the temple you're against Judaism blah blah blah and then the high priest says is it so?

Well then Stephen launches into this dialogue the longest in the book of Acts how Israel rejected God and they rejected the one sent to them by God to fulfill God's purposes they resisted the prophecy to disobey God's law climaxing in the betrayal and the murder of Jesus.

So his point will be this as we begin to look at God's strategy for church planting Stephen's point is God raised up leaders and used them but they were rejected by Israel they disobeyed God and the law by embracing idolatry they didn't respond to God in faith and obedience yet God remained faithful to his promises saving his people that's what Stephen brings up that's what he shows them he also shows them God had a true living vital abiding relationship with his people apart from the law apart from the temple even before there was a temple before there was law God had a relationship with people God's law and his temple were merely expressions of his relationship with his people not the focus the whole point of the law the whole point of the temple the whole point of the Old

[12:38] Testament is this it points this way to Jesus so the Old Testament is pointing to Jesus that's the point of the law that's the point it's the point get it that's what it's supposed to do these things were not the relationship in and of themselves but expressions of God's relationship with his people so if Judaism even today Orthodox Jews Jews if it's seen in the right way the way God has a relationship with his people then Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism Christianity is the end of Orthodox Judaism but if Judaism is an end in and of itself just law temporal doing all this stuff then you're going to have conflict there's going to be tension between Christianity and Judaism there's going to be tension conflict and yet

Jesus is the Messiah fulfilling all that the law and the temple pointed to see it wasn't about loyalty to that sacred space but to the God of that space it's about dedication and loyalty to God not to a building blow up the building big deal we'll still meet together this building is nothing it's a building that's all it is God's not anymore in this place than in your bathroom it's true though and though Joseph and Moses and then Jesus though they're rejected by Israel they were vindicated and God calls Israel and all people to repent and put their trust in Jesus alone that's true obedience that's truly responding to God so having said that introduction all that stuff what's

God's strategy for planting churches five steps five God given steps for biblical church planting or five steps God gives to achieve the spread of the gospel to the world in church planting or another

way you can say it five steps God uses to grow his church you want true church growth follow these five steps and believe you me you probably won't find this on the front page of outreach magazine it's Christian magazine never never this is not the invoke thing in church growth this is not they tell you how to grow churches it's not what they tell you you won't find this in outreach magazine I'll tell you these are five steps God used to bring about church growth you get all those you write all those real fast okay good you guys are fast riders yeah right fella first one number one first step confrontation proclaim the gospel and I use confrontation because a preacher's got to use tion words and stuff like that you gotta have alliteration you're supposed to do stuff like that that's a joke anyways hey okay but we do this in grace we graciously give people the gospel we proclaim the gospel you could even say proclamation how about we put that down proclamation and you see notice the verses verses 1 through 53 50 verses on this proclaiming the gospel and there's so much we can go through here but we're gonna quickly breeze through

Stephen's sermon and we're gonna look at four main parts to this he talks about Abraham he talks about Joseph he talks about Moses and he talks about the tabernacle or the temple he splits up into those four parts and I'm gonna give you some things up on the screen but I really want to get to the implications of that but I'm just gonna quickly go through what he does and how he shows things with Abraham with Joseph with Moses and with the tabernacle or the temple we're gonna quickly go through that okay so first Abraham verses 1 through 8 now what you see here first I'm not gonna put this on the screen I'm just gonna tell it to you God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia God revealed and initiated a relationship with Abraham God had a relationship with Abraham while he was a nobody he was a nomad he was wandering around God had a relationship with him notice how

Stephen begins verse 2 the God of glory that's important because the Jews are thinking the glorious God in the temple right he says the God of glory appeared here to Abraham not in the temple not in the tabernacle he revealed himself to Abraham out in the middle of nowhere Mesopotamia that's kind of far away from the promised land Abraham enjoyed a covenant relationship with him notice verse 8 he gave him the covenant of circumcision he had a special relation with Abraham that was way before the law you don't need the law to have a relationship with God you don't really want to have a relation with God through the law the law does not have a relationship with you God does not have a relationship with you through the law if you want that what the law is going to do is just condemn you you don't do this you don't do this you don't do this you should do this you should do this what kind of the law does is condemns us it's no relationship but God initiated a relationship with

[18:39] Abraham he Before there was a holy place, God had a holy people. Joseph. Verses 9-19.

Almost the same thing. God appeared to Joseph in Egypt. God revealed and initiated a relationship with Joseph. But then there's another point that Stephen brings up here. God sent Joseph to be his leader, but he was rejected.

Verse 9. The patriarchs became jealous of Joseph. Sold him to slavery. And yet God was with Joseph. Rejected by the brothers.

But here's a way he introduces the fact that God is faithful. He brings up a leader. The goal is to bring salvation to his people through the leader, and yet they reject him. Hmm.

That sounds a little familiar. What do you people think? God raises up a leader. Shows him to the people. He's doing all these signs, and they kill him.

[19:40] They did that with Jesus. Notice, the Old Testament is pointing to Jesus. Joseph is a type of Jesus. And Stephen is showing them that. Next.

Moses. 20 through 43. And we'll spend a little bit more time with him. Once again, though. God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Not in the temple. There was no temple. Duh. God revealed and initiated a relationship with Moses. But once again, God sent Moses to be his leader. And what did they do with Moses? Moses. They rejected him.

And they kept rejecting him. Golly. What's this guy Moses? Let's get him out of here. We want to get some other. Let's go back to Egypt. By the way, notice verse 22.

Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians. He was a man of power and words and deeds. Well, that sounds familiar. Just like Jesus was equipped, wasn't it? Notice verse 23.

[20:40] Proceeds before he entered his mind to visit his brothers. 24. He saw one of his brothers be mistreated. He takes vengeance. He defends his brother and kills the Egyptian.

25. He supposed his brother understood. God was granting them deliverance through him. But they didn't understand. So somehow Moses knew he was the one who was going to deliver them. So then in the next few verses, he sees his brother of Aragon. He walks up and says, hey guys, come on. Let's have peace and everything. And then notice what happens. 27. But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away. You can imagine. Pushed him back. Says, who are you? Who made you rule and judge over us? Are you going to kill me like you did that Egyptian? That's what's going on here. And then what happens, Moses, verse 29. He fled. He became an alien in the land of Midian. [21:44] And he became the father of two sons. So what's the point? What's he trying to say? This is exactly what they did with Jesus. The point is, Jesus is the one who was rejected.

He was supposed to come and deliver. And what did they do? They pushed him away. Who are you? And they killed him. Notice what happens.

Verse 35. Oh, excuse me. Verse 30. After 40 years, angel appeared to him in the flame of a burning thorn bush. Verse 31. When Moses saw, he began to marvel at the sight.

Proceed, look closely. A voice came. I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There's an appearance of God in the wilderness. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Then notice the next part of the verses. Verse 33. Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place in which you're standing is holy ground. Holy ground. Holy ground was where God was.

[22:43] Not just the temple. Notice how he's combating what they're thinking. Oh, the temple, that's everything. No, it's anywhere where God is, that place is holy. Stephen challenged their idea that the temple was the only and the ultimate place where God was present.

The Old Testament was pointing to that. God revealed himself to Moses. Outside the promised land. Notice what happens in verse 35.

This Moses, whom they disowned, is both the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and deliverer. Notice verse 36. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs.

Verse 37. This is the Moses who said, God will raise up a prophet like me from your brethren. Verse 38. This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness. This is the one.

Notice how many times. This one. This one. This one. It's Moses. So, this one, Moses, was rejected by the people. He became the ruler.

[23:50] He was there delivered through signs and wonders. He is God's prophet. He was the mediator between God and people. He received and gave words of life. Yet he was rejected by his people. A very type of Jesus himself.

All of this that was happening with Moses was pointing to what was going on, what was going to happen in the future to Jesus himself. That's what Stephen's point was. He was trying to show them this.

And notice, despite all these things that God did, look at verse 39. The fathers were unwilling to be obedient. And you see that word where it says repudiated him?

It's actually the same word that's used earlier that said the guy pushed him away. So it's actually what they did. They pushed Moses away. And they said to Aaron, Aaron, make us God's.

We don't know what happened to this dude. I mean, Moses, what happened to him? Where did he go? They showed their disobedience by having Aaron make this golden calf.

[24:54] Where's Moses? Friends, to reject one of God's leaders is to reject God himself.

Interesting, isn't that?

Here's the most significant example of rebellion against God. They had not even been given the law yet. It was not even written down. It was actually just written down.

And Moses is coming down. And he throws them down. Remember that? And notice something interesting too. The end of verse 41.

They brought the sacrifice to the isle and rejoicing in the works of their hands. Hey, look at what we made. That was the very thing they were doing with the temple.

Hey, look at what we made. You see what Stephen's doing? He's calling the fact that you, your father's gloried in this calf. You're doing the same thing with the temple.

[25:52] You're glorying in the temple. You're glorying in this building. And what you guys have made, you're not glorifying the God of the person who's over that building. So what has happened?

What's he doing? As Moses was the leader prophet, calling the people to God, so also Jesus. He called the nation to God through turning to him.

But as they were unwilling to obey Moses, they're unwilling to obey with Jesus. It's the same thing. So what does God do? Look at verse 42. He gives them over.

He delivered them to the hosts of heaven. Then he quotes from Amos chapter 5, verse 25 to 27. He just let them go their own way. They worship the stars of heaven.

Moloch, the god of the Canaanites. A sun god. And Raphon, referring to Saturn. Or even possibly the Egyptians on God. Whichever one, basically what they did, they rejected God's leaders and they rejected God's word.

[26:58] And just like they did in the wilderness, Israel continued its trend of committing idolatry. And then notice what he says at the end of verse 43.

I also will remove you from Babylon. I will move you beyond Babylon. Interesting. This was spoken to the northern kingdom. It should say Damascus. Stephen changes it here. It says Babylon because the very thing that the northern kingdom was doing was the very thing that the southern kingdom was doing.

What was it? Idolatry. All of them were disobeying the Lord. There was no faith. There was no obedience. They rejected him. So here you see Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and then the tabernacle. Or the temple. He says our fathers, they had the tabernacle. And these directions were given to Moses on how to build it. Why? Because Moses saw this was supposed to look like.

Okay, this is what I'm supposed to do. He saw something and that's how he built it. According to the pattern that he saw. And then they brought it with them when they conquered the nations with Joshua. God was with them via the tabernacle doing great works of deliverance.

[28:08] Wait a second. There was no temple. Wasn't the temple itself a change to the customs given to Moses by God himself? The things which Moses himself saw?

And yet they were accusing Stephen of changing the customs. He wasn't changing anything. God was with his people until the time of David. And notice it says in verse 46.

He asked that he might find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him. God didn't say, I want you to build a temple for me. He didn't say that. David was the one who said that.

And Solomon was the one who did it. God didn't demand that of them. God was with them even before there was a temple. In other words, the goal was to have a special permanent home for God with his people to have relationship with them.

Hello. This temple wasn't built until hundreds of years later after God delivered his people through Moses. It was about his prophet speaking. And God wanted a relationship with them through his leaders.

[29:12] Listen to his leaders. Listen to his word. But they would not have it. And then he says this in verse 48. There's this temple made, but it's almost silly.

The Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands. What about what, this is what Solomon prayed, which is what the Lord spoke to the prophet Isaiah. Verse 49. Look it.

Heaven is my throne. Earth is the footstool of my feet. What kind of house were you built for me? What place were you built for my rest? Was it not my hands that made everything? God doesn't dwell in a place made with human hands.

That's kind of silly. Here, Lord, let me build something for you which you actually own and you're actually bigger than that. All right, okay. You cannot confine God to one locale.

So don't give all the significance to the temple. Don't give all the significance to this church building. Don't give all the significance to this church building. He's rebuking them for their myopic, skewed understanding.

[30:18] Their thinking about the temple. The problem wasn't the temple. It was how they viewed it. How can the temple contain God?

If God made everything, God is the biggest of the biggest. How can a little temple contain Him?

That's ludicrous. It's crazy. It's crazy. As one writer puts it, God dwarfs the earth.

So how can a building constructed on it contain Him? And you know what though? You know who He's close to? God is close to those who obey Him.

By obeying His servants, those who obey His prophets. With these, God abides. And that was the point Stephen was trying to make to them. So now we've gone through this.

50 verses. What's the implication? What does all this tell us? I got four points for you. What does all this tell us?

[31 : 27] Number one. God will reveal Himself wherever He wants. It's not tied to a certain locale. And He's revealed Himself in His word.

That's how God reveals Himself. That's how God reveals Himself. It's not tied to some building. It's not tied to this building. Or to the building in Israel. Or to some building in Russia. Or to some building in Timbuktu. It doesn't matter. It's His word. God reveals Himself here. Number two.

God initiates a relationship with people. Calling them to respond to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ in faith and obedience. That's what He does. God is like this. His arms are open.

Why? Have a relation with me through Jesus Christ in faith and obedience. Come, He says. He initiates a relationship with people. Three.

[32 : 29] The messenger. Or messengers. The messenger God chose and used to speak to and deliver the people. Was rejected by the people. That's Jesus.

He came to save. He came to His own. But His own did not receive Him. They rejected Him. They killed Him. They betrayed Him. And they murdered Him. The messenger God chose and used to speak to and deliver the people.

Was rejected by the people. But number four. God remains faithful to His promises. In spite of the lack of faith and obedience from the people. And He will always, always, always have a people for Himself.

Like the little button that Sadie had on this morning. God always keeps His promises. God always keeps His promises. God always keeps His promises. He will always have a people for Himself. So this is the point that Stephen is trying to make.

This is the point that Stephen is trying to make in this long sermon that he gives. And then he applies it. Verse 51. You men who are stiff-necked.

[33 : 39] You unfaithful rejecters. You haters of God's revelation. You disobeyers. Stubborn. In other words, you're so stubborn, you're stiff-necked, you can't turn your neck.

Circumcised, uncircumcised, excuse me, in heart and ears. In other words, they don't listen. They consistently resisted the spirits or the prophets with hard hearts.

You are acting just like the pagans that you hate so much. You're acting just like them. They're just like your father.

Which ones are they now persecuting? They killed those who announced the coming of the Messiah. The coming of the righteous one. And notice what he says.

The righteous one whose betrayers and murderers you have now become. You killed him. You betrayed him and murdered him. As they killed the prophets.

[34 : 44] They killed the righteous one. They killed Jesus. You guys haven't changed a bit. They were resisting the spirit as they always had done. They were persecuting and killing the prophets as they always had done.

They were breaking the law of Moses as they always had done. Friend, is your heart hardened to the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ today?

Is your heart hardened to this truth? Is it hardened to the truth of the gospel? Be soft. Listen to what I'm saying through Stephen. What he's saying. Don't be like this.

Be soft to the word. Listen. God has his arms open wide to you. Don't resist him. Come. He will love you. He will forgive you. He will give you grace.

You guys should have known better, he said to them. He said, the law that came to you, ordained by angels. You're not obeying it.

[35 : 39] You guys think I am breaking the law? You guys are breaking the law. The nation resisted God's will.

And rejected his leaders. And God chose to live for them. The temple wasn't the single place where God would dwell. Because the creator, he rules everything. He's present everywhere.

He exhorted them to respond to God in obedience by trusting the Lord Jesus, the righteous one. He is their ruler. He is their deliverer.

Don't be like your fathers. Embrace him. Come. Repent and trust. Repent and believe. And to you, if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, that's to you. Repent and believe. Trust in Christ. God should bring judgment and condemnation upon you. And yet he's gracious and kind in Jesus. Come. Repent and trust in him. And you'll be saved. Repent and trust in him.

[36 : 39] Repent and trust in him. So this is all. This one point. We confront people. We proclaim the people this gospel. Proclamation.

Confrontation. Graciously tell them. This is the first step in planting churches. Step number two. And these other four are going to go fast.

Detestation. You see, you've got to have the T-O-N words. It's that kind of cool, huh? Shun, shun, shun, shun. So you remember. Okay, I'm stupid. Okay. Just humor me. Say, wow, that's really cool. Expect their hatred.

Verse 54. Expect their hatred. Ooh, they were mad. Cut to the quick. They gnashed their teeth. Oh, that's interesting.

Grinding their teeth. Interesting. In the Old Testament, this was a sign of hostility and rage from the wicked to the righteous. Oh, that's interesting. They were obtuse and rebellious like their ancestors.

[37 : 45] They were blind and deaf. Friends, when you proclaim the gospel, when we confront people with the gospel, some won't like it. At all.

Expect people to respond with hatred and vehemence toward you. Just like they did with Stephen. If they did this to Stephen, they'll do it to you.

If they did this to Jesus, they'll do it to you. Not everybody. Some will. Many will. So here's God's step.

First is proclamation or confrontation. Next, detestation. Expect them to hate you. Number three. Number three. Vindication. Rest in God's faithfulness.

Verse 55 and 56, and then we'll drop to verse 2 of chapter 8 in just a moment. Full of the Spirit.

Dominated by the Spirit. God gave them the real vision of seeing Jesus standing at God's right side.

[38 : 43] Behold, I see heaven open. God granted Stephen a glimpse of heaven to show them that he was vindicated.

He's testifying to the resurrection and ascension and exaltation of Jesus. And it's like, here's Jesus. He's sitting at the right hand of the Father. It's like he stands up. He's like, go like this. He's like, that's right Stephen. That's right.

I'm with you. He's vindicating his claims. God dwells in glory. Jesus shares that glory. Because Jesus is God the Son.

It's as if Jesus was welcoming his servant who spoke truth. So friends, rest in the fact that God will be faithful to us as we speak his truth.

He's using us as his instruments to proclaim truth to people. God stands there. God is standing.

Jesus stands. He says, yes Peggy. Yes Travis. Yes Michael.

[39 : 47] Yes Daniel. Yes. Yes. You're proclaiming me? Yes. I'm on your side. I'm with you. I will vindicate you.

A judging Jesus standing beside God the Father. The crucified Jesus was resurrected and exalted and he is working. That's what Stephen sees. He's just blown away.

Stephen, Jesus was Stephen's advocate, the vindicator of Stephen's claims. In other words, in other words, heaven stood against the claims of the council.

Heaven stood against Judaism. He was standing against them. But he was standing for his servant. That's right.

So you got confrontation, detestation, vindication. Oh wait, I gotta give you verse two because there's something else here. Verse two, devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him.

[40 : 54] Why is this important? Why is this important? We're kind of unsure but I kind of go with the guys who said this. I don't think these guys in verse two are Christians. It says devout men.

I don't think they were Christians. Interesting too, blasphemers were never buried. They would not be buried. That was almost like, it's like they were blasphemers.

They would almost like just throw them, kind of throw their body. So the point is here, even when he died, after he was dead, Stephen was still being vindicated.

Even after he died, you had people, if they weren't Christians, okay, if they were, okay, but if they weren't Christians, if they weren't disciples of Jesus, they mourned over him and they buried him.

That's huge. You see God vindicating him even after he died. So now, we have confrontation, detestation, vindication.

[41 : 54] Number four, execution. Prepare to suffer. Execution, prepare for suffering. 57.

Have you ever seen that? We're like, you can imagine, they're going, that's what they were doing. Oh, and then they grabbed him.

Poor Isaiah. But that's the idea. They're like, no! They're screaming, and they run, they have their ears covered, they scream, run towards him, and they took him, they grabbed him.

I don't think this is a legal case. What do you think? It seems more like a mob lynching. Oh, interesting too, as they're covering their ears, remember he said, they're uncircumcised in their ears?

I think that's interesting. They run at him, they grabbed him, they dragged him outside the city, threw him out there, and then they, the stones, they're not the little stones, right?

[43:03] They're like the huge, big old whoppers, and they're throwing them at him. And then it says, the witnesses laid aside the robes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

We get introduced to Saul. They did exactly what Stephen warned them not to do. They resisted, they rejected.

And yet, even in all this, Stephen followed Jesus to the point of how he died. First, as it went on stoning Stephen, he cried out and said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit, just like Jesus said to the Father.

Father, receive my spirit, right? And then second, just like as Jesus did, falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, Lord, do not hold this sin against him.

He turned and called upon Jesus, asked for his spirit to be received, and then he said, Lord, don't hold this sin against him. He prayed for those who were killing him. Stephen died with forgiveness as the last thing said.

[44:09] He asked for mercy from the one who was vindicating him. The one who was like this, saying, that's right, I'm with you. I'm going to judge these guys. He says, Lord, don't do them. Show mercy to them.

This is amazing. Maybe the answer to his prayer was Paul being converted. Maybe the answer to his prayer was the fact that the church scattered and was preaching the gospel.

Maybe those were answers to his prayer. But then he fell asleep, a euphemism, for he died. And notice verse 1 of chapter 8, and Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death.

Stephen paid the ultimate price for the truth of the gospel. He was martyred. But this is not defeat.

This is not defeat. This is victory. What's the worst they can do to you?

Kill you? Big deal. I get to be in heaven. I get to be with the one who's going like this. Who's saying, yeah, man, I get to be with him.

[45:11] So you kill me? Go ahead. That's the benefit for me. It's a loss for you. Friends, understand though, we may have to suffer for the sake of the gospel.

Be prepared. Be prepared to suffer for the gospel. And notice Saul in verse 3, he ravaged the church entering house after house.

He would drag them, dismantling their fellowship, dragging them, putting them into prison. Whether you were a man or a woman, he didn't care. He believed there were imposters.

It's a challenge for us, a challenge that we mirror Stephen's witness to the truth in whatever context we find ourselves, knowing that we may have to face this same kind of suffering. And maybe it might not be death.

It would be mocking, ridiculing you. Maybe you have to quit your job. Those types of things. We stand for the gospel. We confront and we proclaim the gospel, realizing people are going to hate us, but Jesus will vindicate us, but we're going to have to suffer for it.

[46:19] And guess what's the next step that God uses? Distribution. Distribution. Anticipate moving elsewhere. And that's chapter 8, verse 1.

And on that day, a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem, and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. Persecution arose as a reaction to Stephen's word yet, faithfully and joyfully, the positive effect is that God's church grows numerically. This led to church growth. You want to talk about church growth? This is how God does church growth. You proclaim the gospel, people will hate you, and you'll have to suffer for it, but God will vindicate you, and then He'll scatter you everywhere, so you have to proclaim the gospel to all these different people everywhere else.

That's how God does church growth. Notice, human opposition will never defeat God and His gospel. Never. You can't stop it.

The Christians scattered through all the regions of Judea and Samaria. Proclaiming the gospel, but notice, interesting, just a little side note, except the apostles. Why? I think that's weird. Maybe the persecution was against Hellenist Christians only, not Hebrew Christians.

[47:44] Maybe the apostles felt safer. I don't know why. Maybe they felt obligated to stay. Maybe because the people held them, the apostles, in high respect. Remember, we saw that earlier?

I mean, we don't know. It's hard to know. But we do know they led to Jerusalem Church. We do know, actually, later on, they faced persecution. They killed James. They beheaded him. But here you see, with persecution, suffering, God scatters His people. And then, the funny part of this, proclamation, detestation, vindication, right?

And then, execution, distribution. And then it starts all over again. Proclamation, detestation. That's how God does church planting.

That's how God moves the gospel outward. He has His people proclaim the truth. They may be hated for and possibly suffer.

[48:45] But God vindicates them, being faithful to them. And He scatters them abroad to different areas to proclaim the truth. That's how God does church planting. Here's God's strategy for planting churches.

Here's God's strategy for church growth. Wow. Thank you, Lord, for Stephen and his ministry. Lots that we covered, isn't it? Take a few moments and have a few moments of silence to let yourself reflect and ponder what we've seen in God's Word. What we've seen in the message from Stephen here.

And his death. So take a few moments and ponder and think. We'll have a few moments of silence. We'll do our time of giving where you can respond in giving. You can respond.

We'll sing our last two songs in our closing prayer. Sit, think, ponder. Let yourself consider what God has said to you from His Word this morning. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[49:43] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.