



## READING PLAN FOR WEEK OF January 17, 2021

### DAY 1

#### READ ► Acts 6:1-7

One of the basic patterns of the early church was their insistence on serving others and being sacrificial with their resources and their very lives. Some of the most vulnerable among them— widows, who had almost zero cultural or political power or benefits—were being overlooked.

The church was growing in number and their ability to meet needs became unsustainable. How could the Apostles continue to be faithful to preach the gospel with the ever-growing needs of the church and community? The Apostles decided to enlist more leaders whose entire job was to care for the widows among the community. This passage reminds us that the early church did not rely on the Apostles to do all of the “ministry.” They appointed men, but not even these servants did the majority of the ministry. We have seen throughout Acts that the church’s ministry was shared by all. Everyone contributes, and everyone was accountable.

**What needs do you see in your church and community that you could help meet?**



### DAY 2

#### READ ► Acts 6:8-15

As we reflect on the beginning of Acts 6, we should not think of the servants as glorified assistants or errand boys for the Apostles. Here, we see that Stephen, a servant of the church, was preaching the gospel. Why? Because this is the calling of all Christians. Stephen also modeled for us the fact that believing and preaching the gospel will bring hardship. As the Book of Acts continues and we see the martyrdom of Stephen, perhaps what stands out most clearly is not only his boldness, but also his integrity. Even those who persecuted him noticed something different about his ministry and disposition (v. 15)—he was full of the Holy Spirit, and he had been with the Lord. They might have decided to persecute him, but they knew they were persecuting a righteous man.

**In what ways does your life show that the Holy Spirit lives in you?**



## DAY 3

### READ ► Acts 7:1-43

In response to charges raised by the Jewish leaders against him, Stephen explained that Jesus fulfilled the purposes of the Law and the temple, thus casting Jewish laws and customs in a different light. First, Stephen reminded them of God's promise to Abraham and how quickly his descendant Jacob was rejected. Second, he mentioned Moses's rejection by his own people as he sought to help them. Third, he reminded them that Moses spoke of a better prophet who would come.

Here is Stephen's point: Israel has a history of rejecting God's messengers and prophets. So, as they tried him for blasphemy, he wanted them to see that *they* were the blasphemers for rejecting Jesus. God the Son had Himself come in the flesh to save people. Not believing in Jesus is a rejection of God's work in the worst way.

**Why is Stephen's point so important to understanding how to read the Bible as one story?**



## DAY 4

### READ ► Acts 7:44-53

Stephen continued his sermon: Israel's rejection of God's messengers and prophets was a similar situation to that of the Jewish leaders seeking to prosecute him. Indeed, they ultimately rejected and killed the Messiah Himself, the Son of God who had come to rescue Israel and the world.

Stephen's main point was that the Holy Spirit had been speaking plainly in their own Scriptures— and Jesus' life and ministry was the culmination of that. Listening to Him trumps all other priorities and perspectives. Unlike the religious leaders at the time, we should listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks to us through the Scriptures and makes Himself known to us.

**How can you prioritize hearing the Holy Spirit speak to you through God's Word this week?**



## DAY 5

### READ ► Acts 7:54-60

As we have mentioned so many times in this study, persecution is an expected part of following Jesus. Stephen stood before the Jewish crowds, pleading with them to believe their own Scriptures about Jesus. He begged them not to make the same mistake their ancestors made. And yet, they still executed another one of God's messengers in Stephen, even after having executed the Messenger Himself.

They were so opposed to Stephen's message and to the Spirit's speaking that they covered their ears and yelled at the top of their lungs in protest. They dragged Stephen out of the city and killed him outside the camp as they had done to the Lord Himself. But no one can drown out the Spirit. He cannot and will not be silenced or ignored—not even the gates of hell can stop the Spirit's work, the gospel, or the kingdom's advancing.

**Who needs to hear your Spirit-filled plea to come to Christ? How will you make this plea?**

