

***International Bible Lessons Commentary***  
***Acts 7:51-8:1***

***International Bible Lessons***

**Sunday, October 14, 2012**

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, October 14, 2012**, is from **Acts 7:51-8:1**. You might like to study (or mention in your class) all of the “**Let us**” verses in the *Letter to the Hebrews* that are listed below.

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking**

**Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lessons Commentary* (formerly, *Bible Lesson Forum*) below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further** discuss the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive **International Bible Lessons Commentary Index**. The weekly **International Bible Lesson** is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at **<http://InternationalBibleLessons.org>** and in *The Oklahoman* newspaper.

## ***International Bible Lesson Commentary***

### **Acts 7:51-8:1**

**(Acts 7:51) “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do.**

Stephen’s speech in the preceding verses gave a good summary of Old Testament history and indicates that a study of the Old Testament remains important for the Church. In this verse, Stephen called his hearers to moral accountability as the Holy Spirit guided him. The Holy Spirit was upon the Old Testament prophets and the Holy Spirit filled the apostles and all of the true followers of Jesus Christ to guide them as they taught and preached about Jesus the Messiah. The “stiff-necked” were stubborn, who would not bow their heads before God to honor God. The uncircumcised in heart were those who would not give their heart to God to obey God and do God’s will. Those with uncircumcised ears would not listen to the prophets, or to those who proclaimed the will of God, or to those who rightly interpreted the Scriptures to them. Perhaps worse than their refusal to obey God was their active opposition to the Holy Spirit, who inspired the writing of both the Old Testament and the New Testament, as well as the prophets and apostles. When they opposed the Holy Spirit, they did all they could to prevent the Holy Spirit from doing

the work God wanted done in their lives and in the lives of other people.

**(Acts 7:52) Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers.**

The Old Testament Scriptures and their traditions revealed the names of the prophets that their ancestors persecuted and how they persecuted and killed them. Jeremiah and others had been persecuted for telling the truth about God's coming judgments upon His people. The names of some of God's persecuted prophets the Holy Spirit did not guide the Old Testament writers to record; just as the New Testament does not record the names of all of the Christians that Saul persecuted before he became the Apostle Paul. Stephen accused them of being similar to their ancestors, for they became betrayers and murderers of Jesus the Messiah, the Righteous One, Who lived a perfect life as only God could do. The Holy Spirit inspired Stephen to declare that Jesus the Messiah is the Righteous One, Jesus is divine (the divine Son of God), as the Bible teaches.

**(Acts 7:53) You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it.”**

Since they refused to believe in Jesus the Messiah, and since they used false witnesses (who lied about Jesus and who also lied about Stephen and what Jesus and Stephen had taught), they obviously had not obeyed the law of God. They murdered the Righteous One, and they would sooner murder Stephen; so, as murderers they did not obey God's law.

**(Acts 7:54) When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen.**

When the Holy Spirit inspired Stephen to call them to moral accountability and show them how they were liars and murderers (just as their fathers were), they could have repented of their sins and they could have asked God to forgive them for their sins. Instead, they acted predictably (just as their fathers or ancestors had acted); they became so enraged, they physically ground their teeth.

**(Acts 7:55) But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.**

The Holy Spirit fill Stephen once again. We know the Holy Spirit filled Stephen with love, joy, peace, righteousness, and the satisfaction that he had spoken the truth as the Holy Spirit had led him to speak. He also gazed upward and saw the throne room of God. Instead of Jesus remaining seated at God's right hand,

Jesus stood at God's right hand to personally receive Stephen's spirit when he died physically and entered spiritually into heaven.

**(Acts 7:56) “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”**

Stephen proclaimed what he saw. He saw the Messiah, the Righteous One, and he called Jesus by the name Jesus preferred to call himself, “the Son of Man.” Stephen had a faith in God that was so strong, and a wise message about Jesus that was so true and powerful, and a salvation message that sinners so needed to hear and receive, that Stephen preached to everyone no matter the possible painful personal consequences to himself.

**(Acts 7:57) But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him.**

Because they had uncircumcised (spiritually and morally speaking) ears, they demonstrated by their physical action that they did not want to hear the truth or any more truth about God and Jesus from Stephen and the Holy Spirit, Who inspired Stephen's preaching. Because they opposed the Holy Spirit, they rushed toward Stephen to silence him. Not only did they not want to hear any more truth, they did not want anyone else to hear the truth about Jesus either.

These men, who rejected the truth about God, would do anything to suppress the truth about God.

**(Acts 7:58) Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.**

The New Testament shows that Jesus had a message and a mission worth dying for. Peter had a message about Jesus and a mission worth being imprisoned and suffering for. Stephen had a faith and trust in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior worth preaching and dying for. Later, all of the apostles except John would die a martyr's death. The story of Stephen's ministry and death shows that the truth of Jesus Christ is worth living and dying for, and Jesus himself will stand up at the right hand of God to receive the spirit of His children when they live and die with faith in Him. Saul, who would later become the Apostle Paul, heard all that Stephen preached, prayed, and declared as he looked into heaven before he died.

**(Acts 7:59) While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."**

Stephen knew that Jesus stood at the right hand of God to receive his spirit when his body died, and Stephen prayed this prayer to let Jesus know that he wanted to come to Him in heaven. Much praying was spoken aloud in those days, and the Holy Spirit, Who

often directs our prayers, informed the crowd that Stephen looked forward to being with Jesus, the Righteous One, that they had crucified.

**(Acts 7:60) Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died.**

Being stoned to death was a type of execution that gave the sinner time to repent of his sins and ask God’s forgiveness before he died. Neither Jesus nor Stephen had any sins to confess. They both lived righteous before God, as the Bible tells us. Neither was being stoned to death for a crime that they had committed. So, they both prayed (with Jesus having set the example) that God would forgive the sinners who killed innocent men, men God had filled with the Holy Spirit to teach them the truth. God did not hold this sin against Saul, for he became an apostle.

**(Acts 8:1) And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.**

We do not know how many of the followers of Jesus witnessed Stephen’s stoning or heard what Stephen prayed. We do know that Saul (later the Apostle Paul) saw, heard, and approved of the killing of Stephen. So, Paul could have told about Stephen’s prayer and death

to Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, and who was a traveling companion of Paul. Still, the church would remember the first martyr, and when the persecution of the church began. Jesus had commanded them to preach about Him in Judea and Samaria, and persecution scattered the followers of Jesus to fulfill the command of Jesus and also the prophecy of Jesus that the good news about Him would be preached in Judea, Samaria, and eventually around the world.

### **Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Why do you think some people refuse to listen to the truth?
2. Compare the meaning of Stephen calling Jesus “the Righteous One” and Luke 18:19 — “Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone’.”
3. Why do you think Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God and the Holy Spirit inspired Stephen to tell the crowd what he saw?
4. Why might a believer pray as Stephen did, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

5. Why might the persecution of Christians influence some unbelievers to become Christians?

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