

Presentation 4—Acts 6.1-8.40

Stephen and Philip: The Gospel goes into Samaria



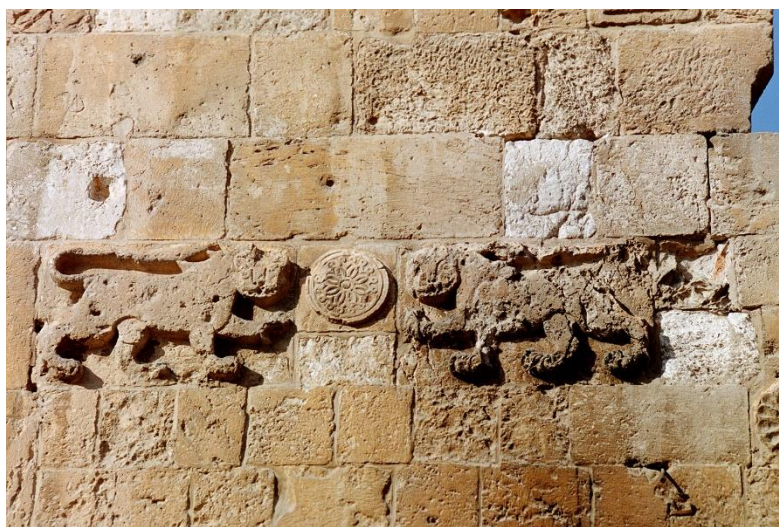
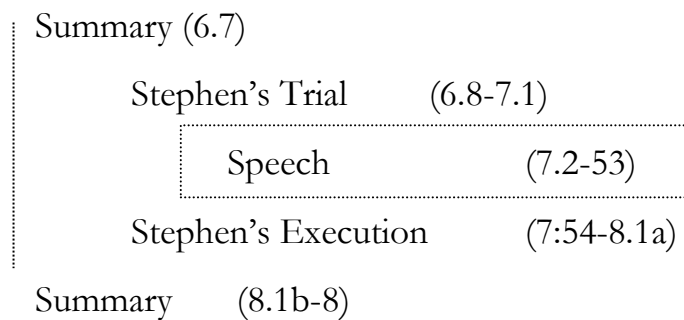
Moonrise from Jerusalem's Old City looking towards Mt of Olives

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- Acts 6.1-6—Problem of internal division, ethnic tensions between Greek and Jewish-speaking Jesus followers. Neglected by *diakonia*, service. Apostles respond and appoint Seven, especially first named Stephen and Philip,

anticipating their stories next to emerge. Ministerial structures adapted to the pastoral situation and circumstances.

- Acts 6.7—*Summary*: Numbers grow, reflecting God’s presence bearing fruit.
- Acts 6.8-8.1a—*Stephen’s story*: leadership disputes Stephen’s intention and accuse him of undermining the Jewish Law and heritage. Stephen responds to his accusers in the longest speech in Acts, as Luke intends to demonstrate the fidelity of Stephen to his Jewish heritage and the growth of the Jesus movement as an authentic development. The religious authorities are criticised as bankrupt. The invective against the leaders is met with Stephen’s execution, endorsed by the presence of Saul (“Paul”). Stephen dies as faithful witness to God, like Jesus, forgiving his executioners. Saul’s presence will unfold more prominently in the second half of Acts.
- The Literary Structure of the Stephen Story in Acts 6.7-8.1:



The façade at Lion’s Gate, eastern entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem. Also called “Stephen’s Gate”, remembering the site of Stephen’s martyrdom
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- Acts 8.1b-3—The persecution of the Jesus household.
 - Acts 8.4-25—Philip’s preaching and success amongst the Samaritans. The Gospel is beginning to move outside of Jerusalem.
 - Acts 8.26-40—Philip continues his preaching mission: An Ethiopian is converted, is baptised and joins the Jesus household. This cements the expansion of the Jesus movement beyond Jerusalem. Philip ends his journey at Caesarea, signalling the next stage of Luke’s story in Acts and the spread of the Gospel into the Greco-Roman world.
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FOR FURTHER REFLECTION & CONVERSATION

- Acts 6 reveals the ability of the apostolic community to adapt to a pastoral issue and inner tension that emerges. They appoint Seven. What are the kinds of ministry needs and structures that the Church needs today?
- Stephen reveals his communion with Jesus and in death reflects Jesus’ death as he forgives his persecutors. What is your reaction to those who criticise you?
- Philip accompanies the Ethiopian official as he seeks to understand the Bible. Who accompanies you in your spiritual journey?

IN PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT PRESENTATION

- The next session will focus on Acts 9.1-18. In preparation for this session, spend time with this section of the *Acts of the Apostles*.

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