

The Book of Acts

Community and Mission

Interpreting the Text:

1. Stephen's speech offers a strong criticism of a focus on a particular sacred space. Is that criticism just a part of the tension between early Christians and their Jewish neighbors or does it have something to say to a twenty-first century audience? Are there "sacred spaces" that we revere more than we should?
2. Stephen's speech also offers a model of how one can appropriate the history of God's people to make a point about what faithful people should do in the present. Can his way of reading the past be adapted for our own use? If so, how would you tell the tale of the community of the faithful to shed light on the present situation of the Church?
3. The apostles are going out, teaching and performing miracles, throughout Acts 5, much to the concern of the local civic and religious authorities. Their response is "We must obey God rather than any human authority" (5:29). How does Luke's account of early missionary work frame the apostles and their goals? How does it frame their opposition? What might Luke's objective be?
4. Stephen's speech, the longest in Acts, has a lot of callbacks to Jesus' final words on the cross. What would the impact of this connection be for the initial readers of this text? How might these similarities frame the act of martyrdom for early followers of Christ?

Applying the Text:

1. The story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26-40) is often cited when demonstrating the wide embrace of this early Christian church. The Eunuch, who has many "othering" qualities in this story, seeks to learn about Jesus and is baptized. How can we use this model of unconditional welcome to build up God's church?
2. While martyrdom is mostly a thing of the past, it served a significant role in the early church. Reflecting on the story of Stephen's martyrdom, how does this practice speak to contemporary Christians?

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