

Week 3: Acts 6-7

A truth worth dying for & worth killing for.



This account is very important for many reasons. But the **four** that we will primarily focus on today are;



(1) Many attributes of Stephen's life,
ministry and death mirror the life,
ministry and death of Jesus.
Emphasizing their parallel purpose.



(2) Stephen was willing to die for a specific truth. A certain theology that he was teaching led to his death...a concept that he promoted even in his final breaths.



(3) The Jewish leaders were willing to kill for a specific truth. A certain theology that Stephen was teaching led to their murderous act.

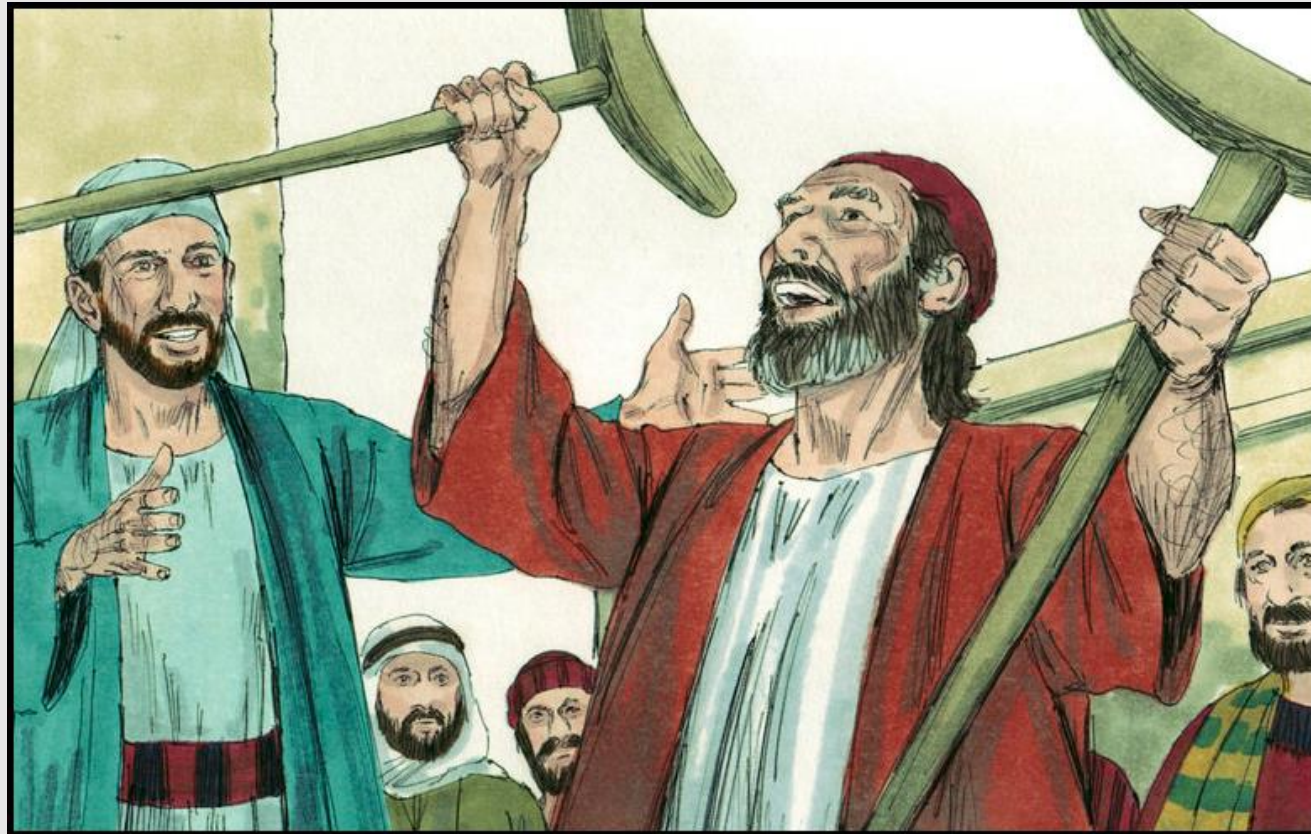


(4) We must be willing to follow Stephen, as he followed Jesus, as He followed God, even unto death for certain truths.

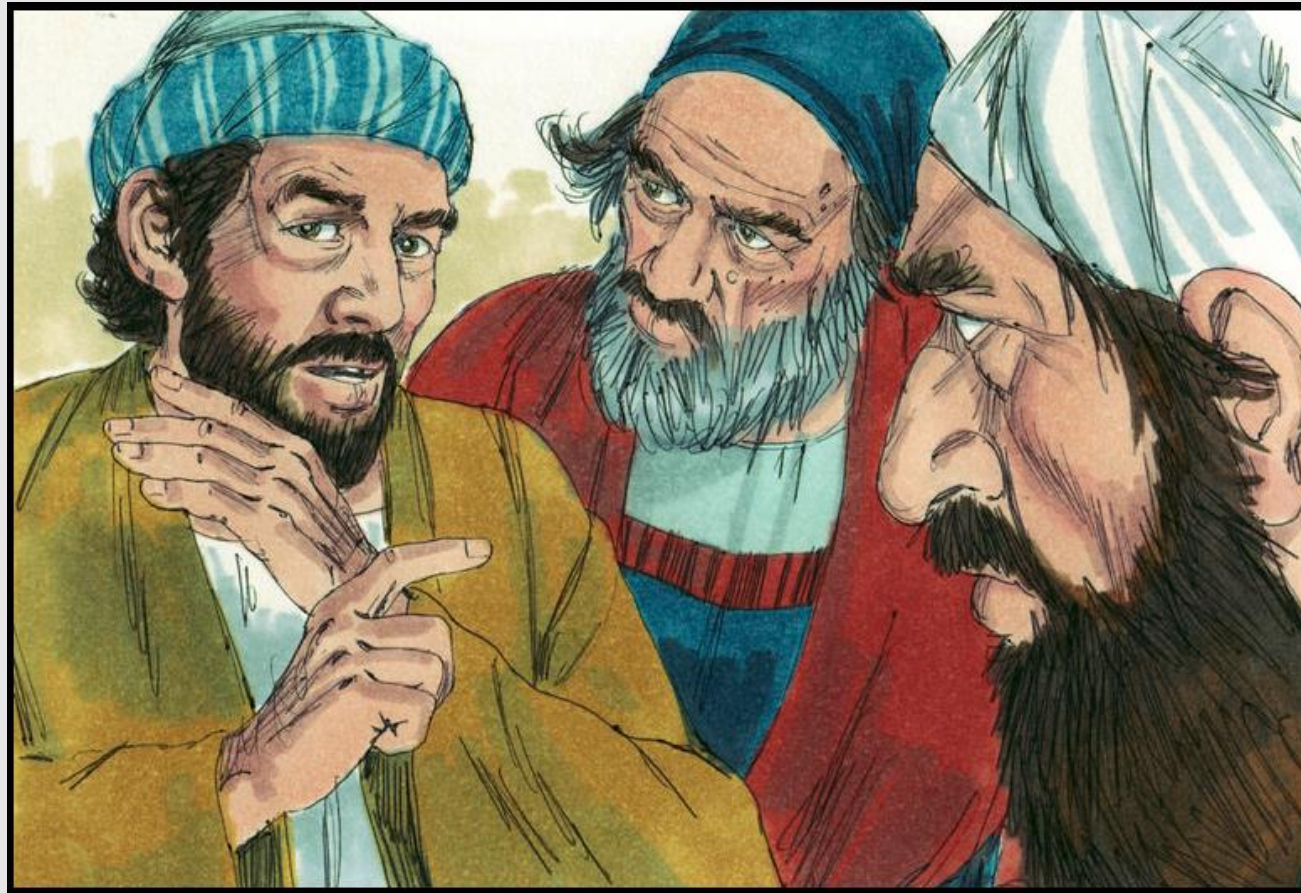


Let's read a **brief summary** of the account in Acts 6-7 and then make some observations;

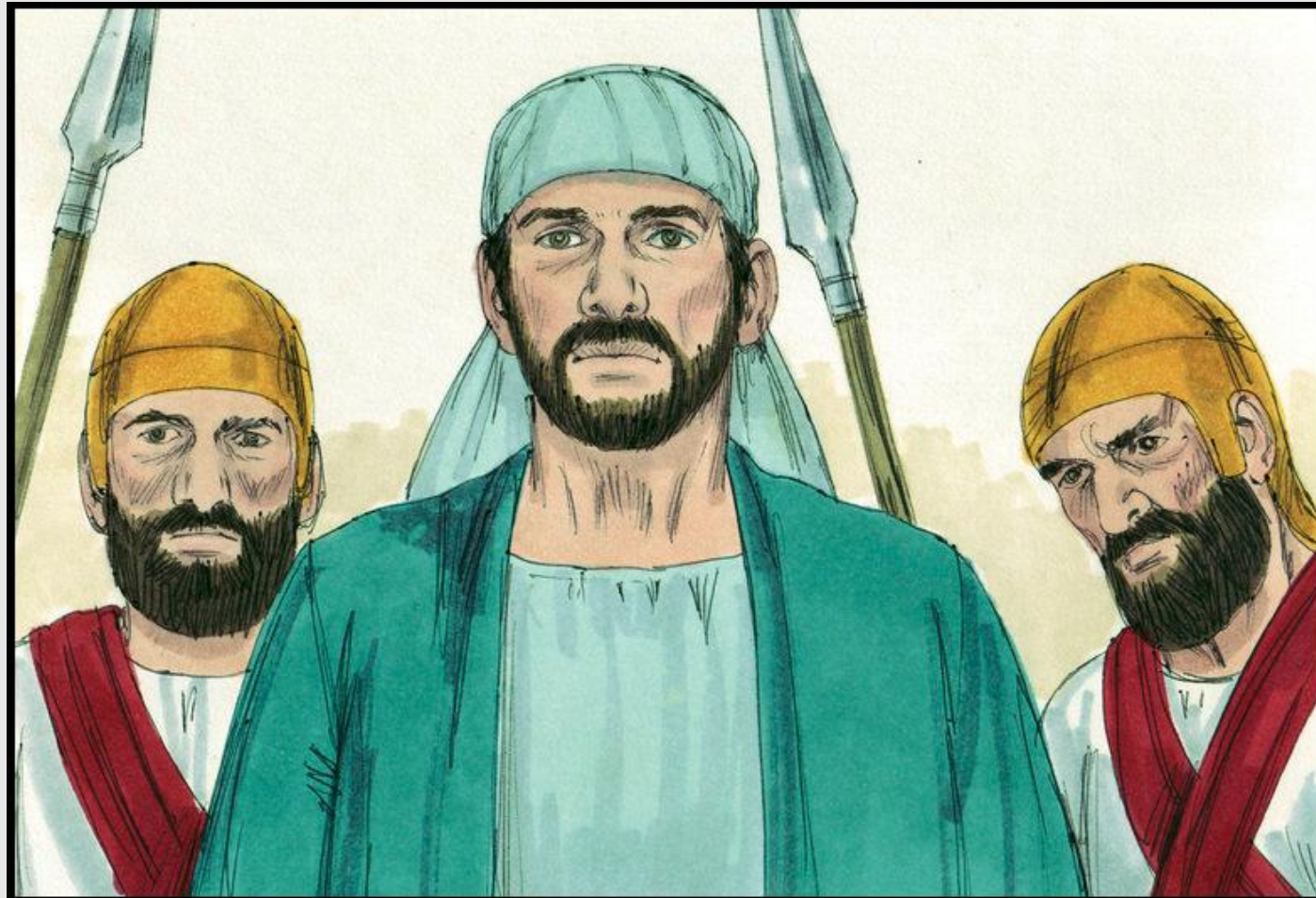
And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen, and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen. (Acts 6:8-9)



But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” (6:10-11)



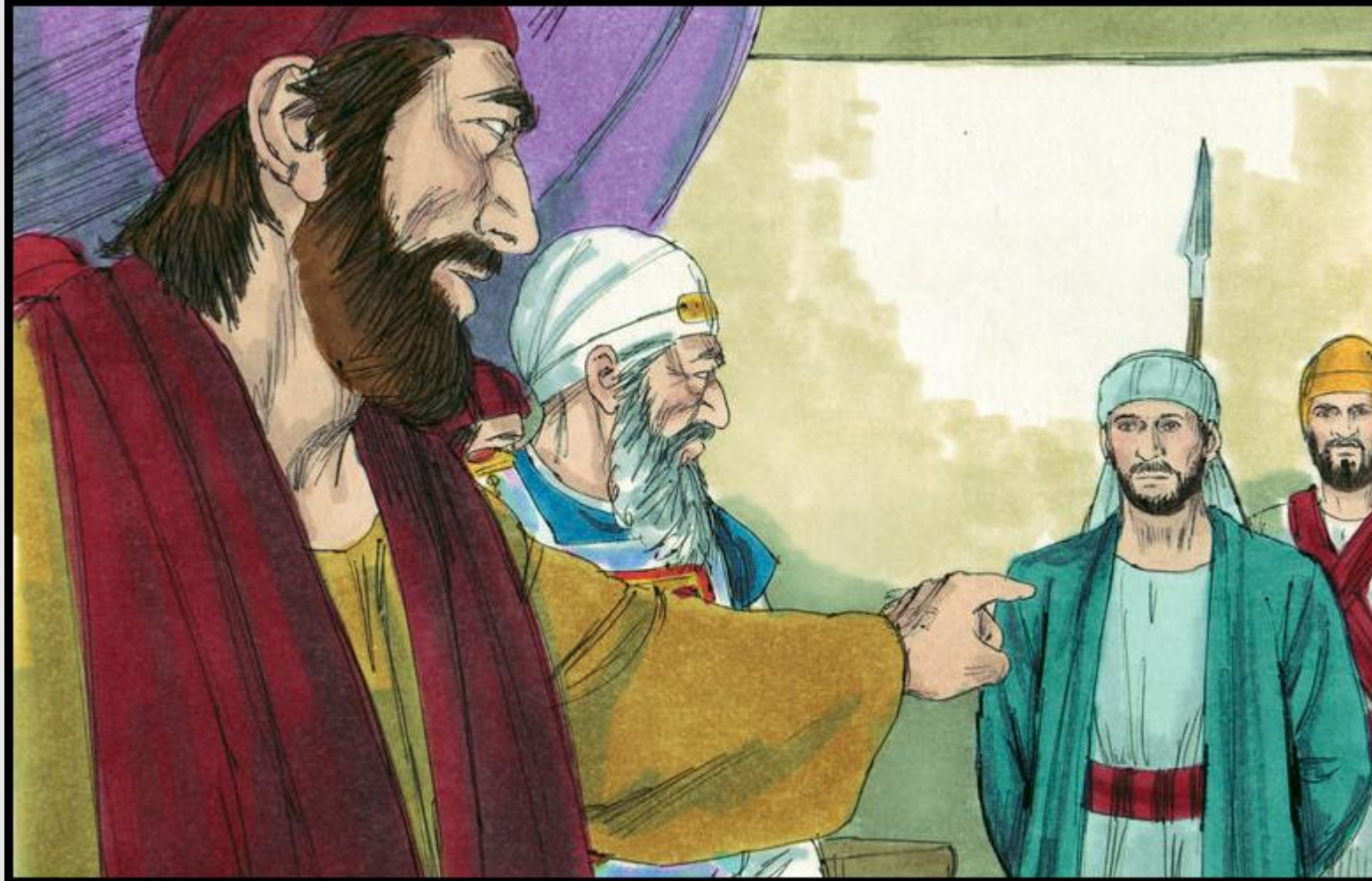
And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council... (6:12)



...and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law, for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us. And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel.”

(Acts 6:13-15)

And the high priest said, “Are these things so?”
And Stephen said: (7:1-2)



“Brothers and fathers, hear me. The
God of glory appeared to our father
Abraham when he was in
Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,
and said to him, ‘Go out from your land
and from your kindred and go into the
land that I will show you.’ (7:3)

Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran... And God promised to give it to him as a possession and to his offspring after him, though he had no child... And so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day, and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs. (7:4-5, 8)

And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household. (7:9-10)

Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food...when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit. And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all. And Jacob went down into Egypt, and he died, he and our fathers. (7:11-15)

But as the time of the promise drew near, which God had granted to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt until there arose over Egypt another king who did not know Joseph. He dealt shrewdly with our race and forced our fathers to expose their infants, so that they would not be kept alive. (Acts 7:17-19)

At this time Moses was born...And he was brought up for three months in his father's house, and when he was exposed, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. (7:20-22)

Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord. (7:29-30)

I have surely seen the affliction of my people
who are in Egypt, and have heard their
groaning, and I have come down to deliver
them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’
...This man led them out, performing wonders
and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in
the wilderness for forty years.

(7:34, 36)

This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us. Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt.

(7:37-39)

They said to Aaron, ‘Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. But God turned away and gave them over to worship the host of heaven...

(7:40-42)

Our fathers had the tent of witness in the wilderness, just as he who spoke to Moses directed him to make it, according to the pattern that he had seen. Our fathers in turn brought it in with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations that God drove out before our fathers. So it was until the days of

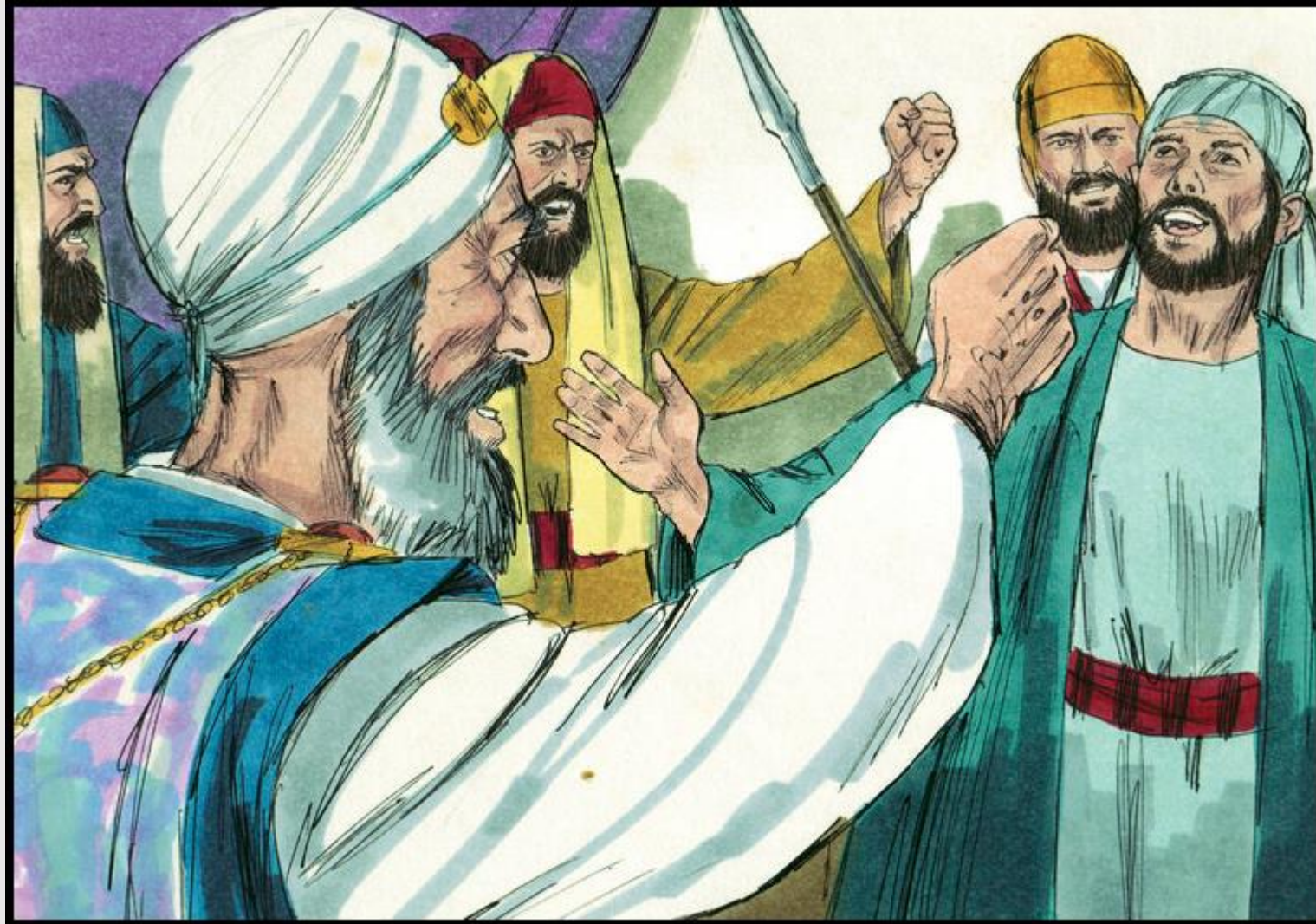
David, who found favor in the sight of God and asked to find a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. (7:44-46)

But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says, “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?’ (7:47-50)

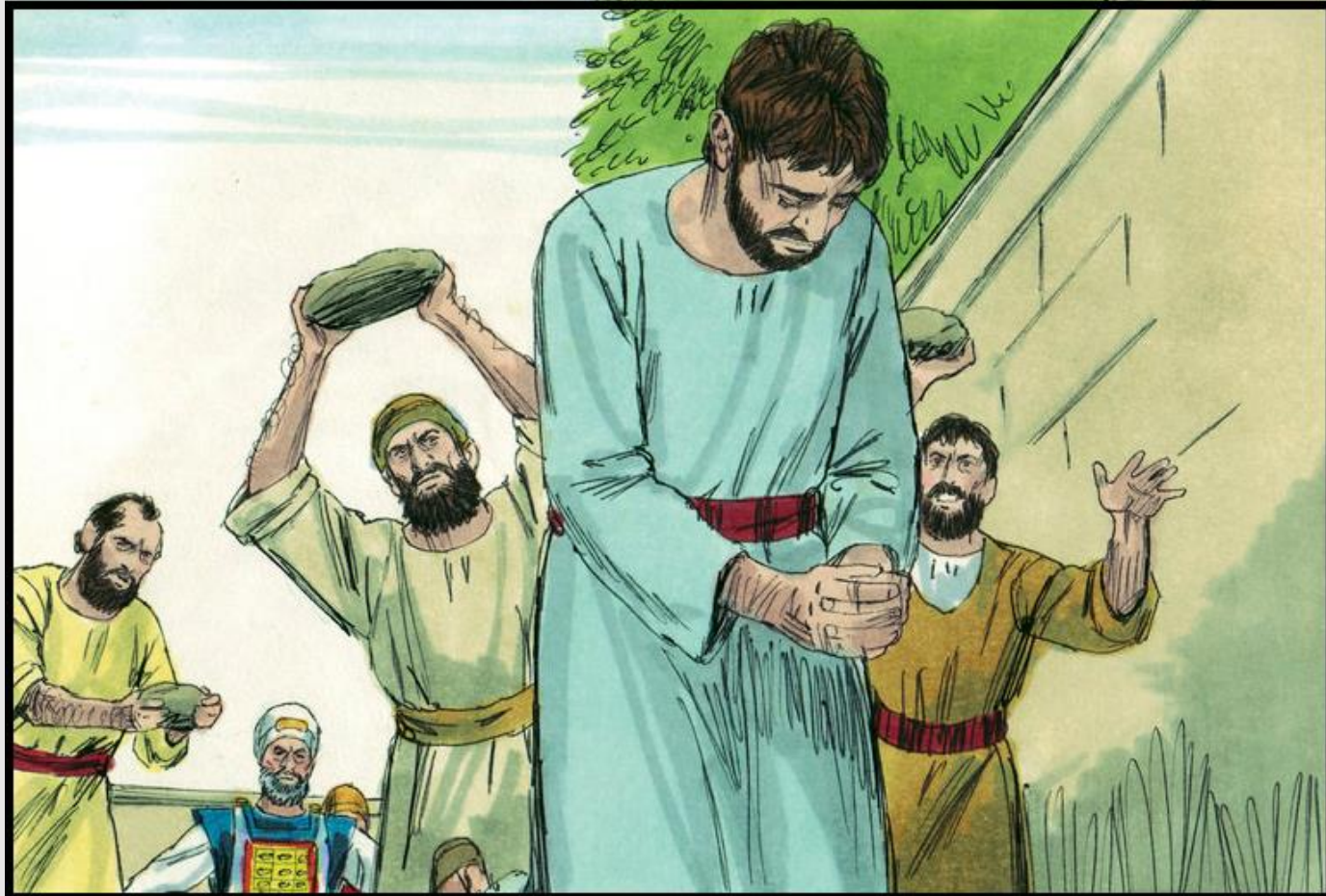
“You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”(7:51-53)

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.

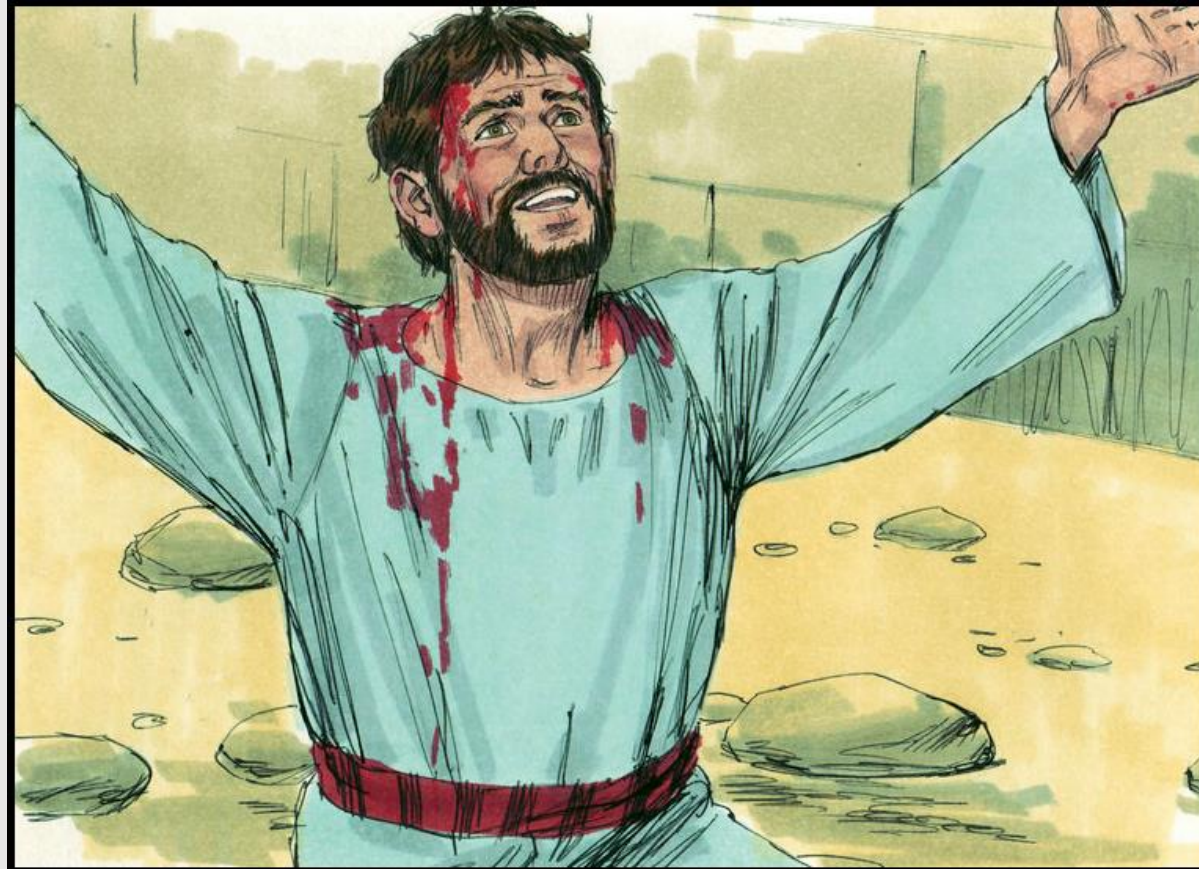


But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into
heaven and saw the glory of God, and
Jesus standing at the right hand of God.
And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens
opened, and the Son of Man standing at
the right hand of God.” (7:54-56)

But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.



And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (7:57-60)



First, Stephen's life, ministry and death **mirror the life, ministry and death of Jesus**. Eight specific parallels are mentioned that give us a clear idea that God viewed Stephen as a worthy follower of Christ and that they both died defending/proclaiming the same truth.



(1) Stephen, **full of grace and power**, was **doing great wonders and signs** among the people.

(1) ...the one and only Son, who came from the Father, **full of grace and truth**. (John 1:14) Even after Jesus had **performed so many signs in their presence**, they still would not believe in him.
(John 12:37)

(2) ...they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.

(2) ...the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

(Matt 7:28-29)

(3) they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and **brought him before the council...and they set up false witnesses...**

(3) ...the chief priests and **the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus** to put Him to death, and they were not finding any. For many were giving **false testimony against Him**, but their testimony was not consistent. Some stood up and began to give false testimony...

(Mark 14:55-57)

(4) ...all who sat in the council saw that **his face was like the face of an angel.**

(4) There he was transfigured before them. **His face shone like the sun**, and his clothes became as white as the light. (Matthew 17:2)

(5) ...we have heard him say that this Jesus of
Nazareth **will destroy this place and**
will change the customs that Moses delivered to
us...

(5) Jesus answered them, "**Destroy this temple, and**
I will raise it again in three days."
(John 2:19)

(6) **You stiff-necked people**, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. **Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?**

(6) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, **the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her!** How often I wanted to gather your children together...and **you were not willing...**

(Luke 13:34)

(7) Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

(7) Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.
(Luke 23:46)

(8) ...he cried out with a loud voice, “**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**” And when he had said this, he fell asleep...witnesses **laid down their garments** at the feet of a young man named Saul.

(8) Jesus said, "Father, **forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.**" And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

(Luke 23:34)

Second, Stephen was willing to die for a **specific truth**. A certain theology that he was teaching led to his death...a concept that he promoted even in his final breaths.



What was this truth? And why was
it worthy of death?

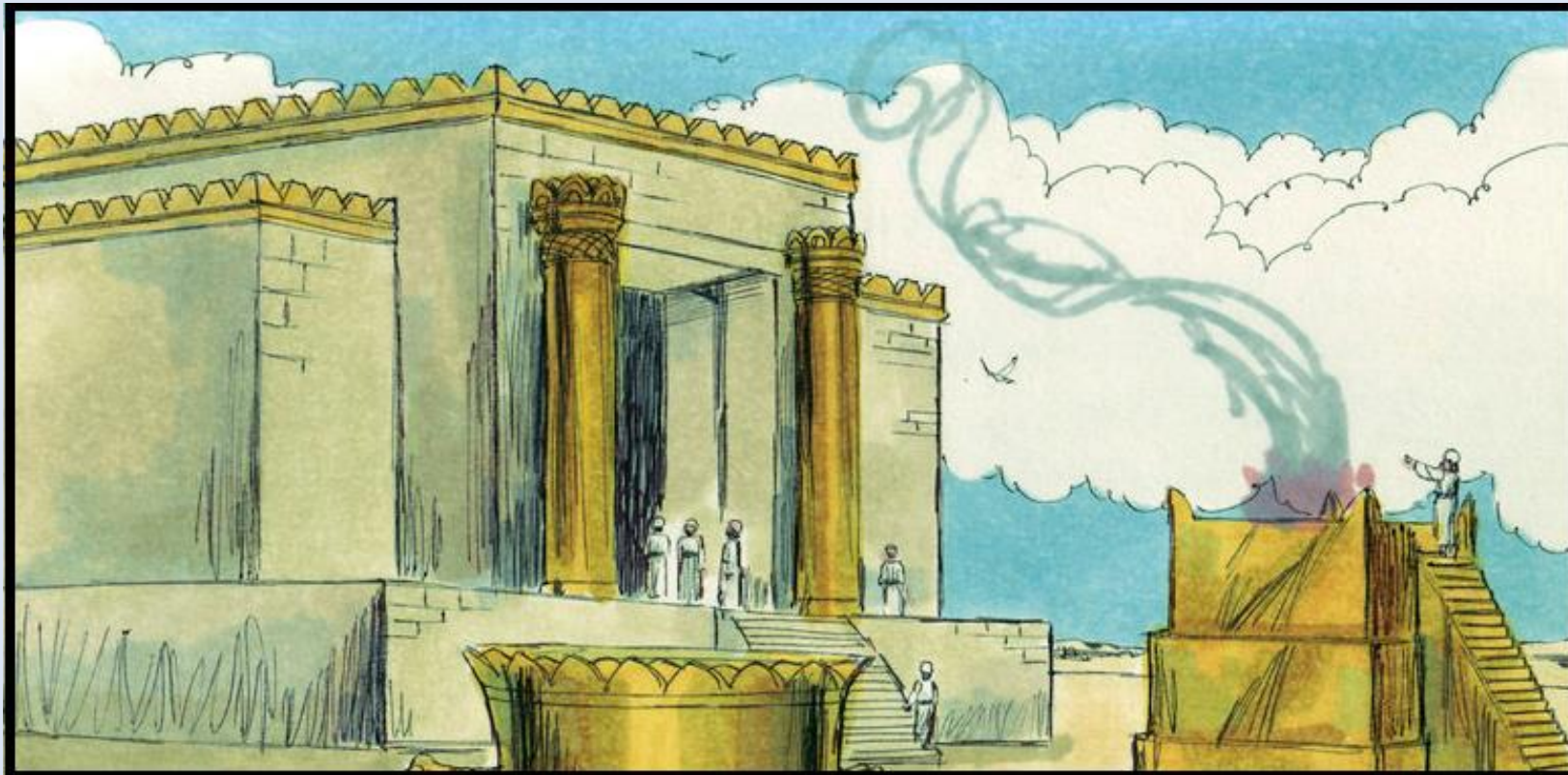
“This man never ceases to speak
words against this holy place
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Nazareth **will destroy this place**
and will change the customs that
Moses delivered to us.”

Essentially, Judaism was preserved
by three traditional beliefs
regarding; land, law and temple.

The problem was thinking that God could only actively work and save through this land, law and temple.

They were mistaken in believing
that God's historic presence in the
temple guaranteed God's blessing,
protection and salvation.

In other words, their overconfidence was rooted in their mistaken notion that the promise of land, law and temple ensured God's favor, regardless of their sinful actions and attitudes.



In his speech, Stephen challenged their mistaken ideas about the land, law and temple and charged them with rejecting and killing the Messiah.

The essential accusation was that Stephen (like Jesus) was changing the way to come to God, and therefore was blaspheming against God by speaking against their beliefs, specifically the temple.

Stephen was willing to die in defense of the **new covenant** which had destroyed (done away with) the old covenant of land, law and temple.

Third, the Jewish leaders were willing to kill for a specific truth.



What was this truth? And why was
it worthy of death?

Essentially the Jewish leaders were willing to kill in defense of the **old covenant** which Jesus and now Stephen were threatening to destroy (do away with).

But let's be more specific.
Why were they so angry and
willing to kill for this old
way?

Rather, why were they
willing to kill because
someone threatening to take
away the temple?

Was it really because they
loved God so much and
really felt that the temple
was the only way to God?

The core problem is actually
much deeper;

“Make for us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol and **were rejoicing in the works of their hands.”**

“...it was Solomon who built a house for him.

Yet **the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands**, as the prophet says, “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. **What kind of house will you build for me**, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? **Did not my hand make all these things?**”

The Jewish leaders were willing to kill over a belief system that made them the benefactors of the works of their hands. They wanted a religion that allowed them to be the gods because of their works.

The temple, that they built with their hands and the system of laws they contrived...were not in honor of the one true God, but the god of self-effort and self-exaltation.

Stephen condemned them for this self-worship and died for the belief that God only accepts what ‘God builds with his hands’ for the praise of his glory.

Stephen was proclaiming that God had sent Jesus to do away with this self-serving religion and destroy the temple by becoming the temple himself.

This why the apostles were told in **Acts 5:20** to “*Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.*”



They were told to go to the old temple to proclaim the good news about the new temple...to tell them that the old temple of worship had been destroyed and a new one had been rebuilt during the three days in the tomb.

This why the high priest and temple officials were so angry in **Acts 5:24**

“...when the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them, wondering what this would come to...”

This why many priests believed in **Acts 6:7** because they were admitting their role was finished... *“So the word of God spread.*

*The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and **a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.**”*

This why the New Jerusalem will have no temple in **Rev 21:22** *“I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”*

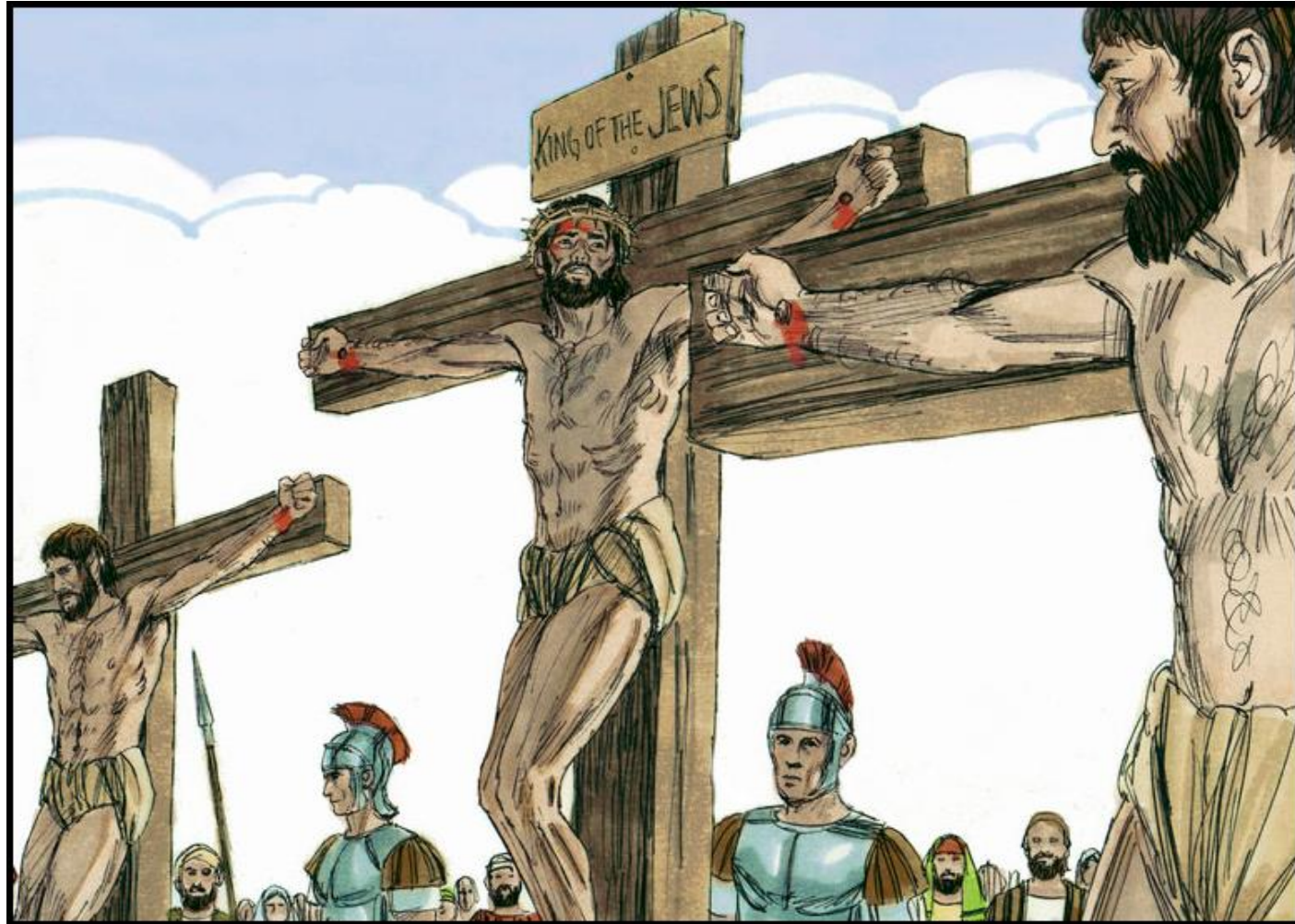
Forth, we must be willing to follow
Christ even unto death for certain
truths...



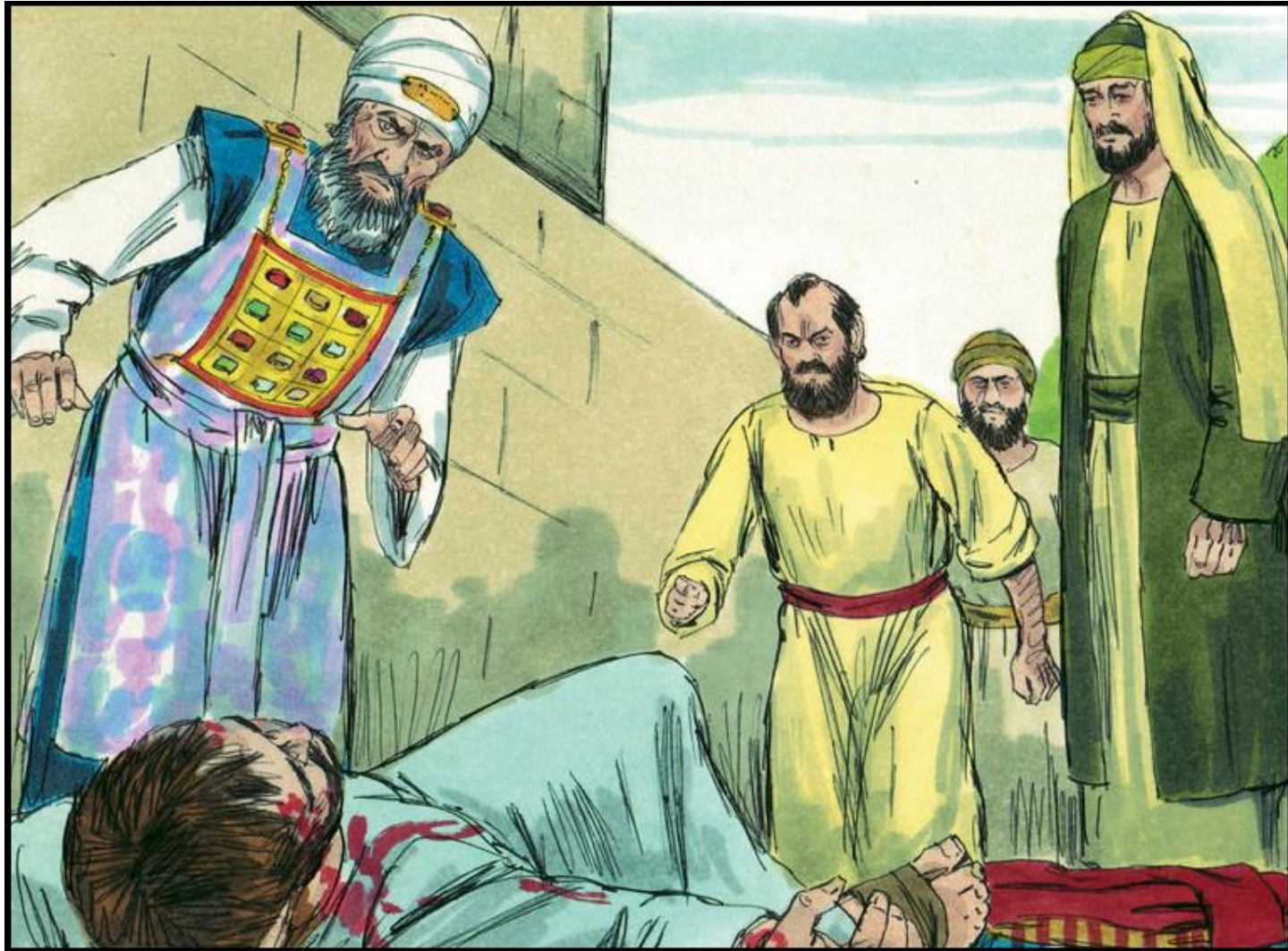
...and the truth of a crucified Christ who fulfilled the law and abolished the need for and earthly, physical temple is a central truth that both Christ and Stephen died for.



Christ died to accomplish it.



Stephen died in proclamation of it.



Next Week: Saul's Conversion

