

54The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. 55But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. 56And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

57Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him 58and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. His accusers took off their coats and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60He fell to his knees, shouting, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

8:1 Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen.

Acts 7:54-8:1 (NLT)

Observation (what does the text say?) **Interpretation** (what does it mean?) **Application** (what does it mean to me/us?)

Discussion/Topic Starters (Ice Breakers)

- How do you typically feel about those who hate or hurt you?

O: What things in the text strike you or jump out at you? Why?

v.7:54-8:1

O: Discuss who Stephen is and what he has done up to this point.

Follow-up: Would you consider him a guy of marginal faith, or great faith?

O: How is Stephen's death reminiscent of the death of Jesus?

*****KEY Follow-up:** How did God directly minister to Stephen as he faced the angry leaders and his own death?

O: What is Saul's part in the killing of Stephen and its aftermath?

Follow-up: Paul also wrote Romans 8:28.... Discuss how this could be!!!

O: Ch.8, 1-3 describes what happens as a result of Stephens death.... discuss.

*How did God end up using both the stoning and the ensuing persecution of the church (note see Acts 1:8)

I: Stoning is an agonizing death... think about it. What is significant about Stephen's response to it (v.59-60)?

I: Keith Discussed the tension of this passage (Paul is delivered from the mob in Acts 5, Stephen is killed by the same mob).

He then discussed the broader reality of this, using the concept of "already/not-yet" of God's kingdom.

Any Questions/responses/thoughts? Note: the following pages flesh this out.

A: How do you typically feel about those who hate or hurt you? Can you follow Stephen's example?

A: Are you willing to risk persecution or be marginalized to proclaim and live out the gospel of Jesus?

Be specific, think about all the different sphere's your life intersects (work, home, neighborhood, hobbies, etc.) are you as bold as you could be with the message of Jesus?

A: How ould you like the way in which you follow Jesus to be influenced by Stephen's example?

NOTE: the following two pages build upon the tension of the "Already/Not-yet" of God's Kingdom here on earth.

* As discussed in Riverside's HGLT (Home Group Leader Training), these guides are to be starting points for home group leaders to develop their own guides and approaches to leading group discussions. This is a resource tool, not a rigid "go through this guide word-for-word." There are intentionally too many questions for a single home group time. This guides rely heavily on a few other study guides; including: Serendipity NT for Groups by the Young Life ministry (ISBN is N/A), "Acts: Seeing God's Power in Action" by Phyllis LePeau (ISBN 9780830830077), "Acts: Seeing the Spirit Work" by John Stott (ISBN 0851113907), "Acts" by N.T.Wright (ISBN 9780830821853), "Acts" by NavPress (ISBN 0891091122), "Acts" by Blackaby (ISBN 9781418526429), "Acts: The Spread of the Gospel" by John MacArthur (ISBN 9781418508746), "Book of Acts" by Max Lucado (ISBN 0849953006).

JESUS' MINISTRY EXAMPLE COUPLED WITH THE ALREADY/NOT-YET OF GOD'S KINGDOM RIGHT NOW:

With Jesus' examples in mind, as well as the difference between things being descriptive and prescriptive, the below table fleshes out the previous discussion (from last time) on the framework of the ALREADY/NOT-YET of God's Kingdom.

Discuss the below, review the previous I-XII examples of Jesus' ministry, and then discuss how the already/not-yet framework coupled with Jesus' ministry example can lead to a ministry framework for us.

Already of God's Kingdom	Not-Yet of God's Kingdom
Repent of your sins and turn to God, <u>for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.</u> (Matt 3:2)	6 So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, " <u>Lord, has the time come</u> for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?" 7 He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, <u>and they are not for you to know.</u> (Acts 1:6-7)
"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, <u>he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!</u> " (2 Cor. 5:17).	<u>My dear children,</u> for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth <u>until Christ is formed in you,</u> how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!" (Gal. 4:19-20)
"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have <u>crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires</u> " (Gal. 5:24).	<i>Romans 7 - I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. 22 I love God's law with all my heart. 23 But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power <u>makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.</u> 24 Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? 25 Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. 7:21-25</i>
We know that Christ already purchased our healing (1 Peter 2:24; Matthew 8:17),	but we still groan with sickness (Romans 8:23; 2 Corinthians 4:16).
We have already passed from death to life (1 John 3:14), ... and there is a difference NOW between those "alive" and those "still dead."	but we still die (1 Corinthians 15:26).... Really 1 cor. 15:21-28 is a great picture of the not-yet part of the Kingdom.
We already have the Holy Spirit to guide us (Ephesians 1:14),	but the war between flesh and Spirit goes on every day (Galatians 5:16–18).
We have already been forgiven of all sin in Christ (Romans 5:1),	but must go on every day praying, "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" (Matthew 6:12).
We already have our citizenship in the kingdom of God (Philippians 3:20),	but for now must still submit to the rulers of this world (Romans 13:1).
Every blessing of the age to come is already ours in Christ (Ephesians 1:3),	but God tells us to wait for our inheritance patiently (Romans 8:25)
the Kingdom of God to have arrived (Mark 1:15-16)	the eschatological hope of the kingdom of God in the future (Matt. 6:10, Luke 19:11-27, Titus 2:13, Rev.22:20)

As George Ladd describes, the kingdom of God is both today, as well as tomorrow.

"The Bible looks to the final realization of God's Kingdom in a realm 'beyond history'... yet there is a very real sense that God has already manifested His reign, His will, His kingdom, in the coming of Christ... the Kingdom here and now... there are two advents of Christ, one in the flesh which we call the Incarnation, the other in glory which we call the Parousia or Second Advent, so there are two manifestations of God's Kingdom: one in power and glory when Christ returns, but one which is present now because God's Son has already appeared among men."¹

In chapter 3, Ephesians then turns to the task that the church has to spread this Good News message. It is in this chapter that the already/not yet tension of the kingdom becomes apparent.

For example:

- On one hand, the hidden message of God's kingdom plan had been hidden until the N.T. time period (3:5,9), when it then becomes clear. Yet the reality of the message won't become fully realized until the future inheritance (3:6).
- **Verses 10-11** indicate that Christ has carried out His eternal plan already, yet **verse 17** indicates that there is a continual process of growth that each believer goes through in which Christ is the active agent.
- **Verse 12** says believers can come confidently into God's presence. Yet directly following this Paul writes that believers should not lose heart, that there will be very real suffering where God's presence will not feel as apparent (v.13,18).
- There is the reality that the Kingdom of God is now, "*the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church*" (3:10 NASB), but will not be fully realized until the future, when believers "*will*" be filled and fully complete in Christ (3:19).

Hebrews 6:4 For it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened—those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, **5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come**
