

Acts 7: Cut to the Heart

One of the greatest sermons ever preached is found in Acts 7, and it's preached by a guy who's only been an "official" apostle for a short amount of time. Starting with Abraham, Stephen powerfully retells all the spiritual history that has led up to this point in time. In fact, the Jewish religious leaders would have agreed with Stephen and supported his retelling of the history... right up until verse 51: "*You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you!*" I even wrote next to this verse in the margin of my bible, "uh-oh."

As I read this, I pictured the council listening intently up until the point of Stephen calling them murderers of the Messiah. It's no wonder the leaders killed Stephen, but there's something in the language of verse 54 that began to stick out to me.

Acts 7:54 (NLT) ⁵⁴ *The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage.*

Go Deeper

When I read scripture, I NEVER want to read it for face value. Sure, there are times we can read it for what it is, but we need to constantly be asking, what else is going on? For me, the word "infuriated" stuck out. Simple word; but when you go deeper and look at the difference in translations, this word becomes very, very, important. The reading above is from the NLT but let's look at the NKJV. The differences are underlined:

Acts 7:54 (NKJV) ⁵⁴ *When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.*

I know I'm a bible nerd, but my nerd flag was flying high...as you'll see. These are the moments that I look for in my daily reading of God's word. What is the context, what is the author saying, and what does the Holy Spirit want to say to me? These are important questions to ask each time you engage God's word.

Cut to the Heart

The scripture here indicates that the Jewish leaders were "cut to the heart," so I wanted to see where else this phrase has been used in scripture, this is what I found:

Acts 2:37 (NKJV) ³⁷ *Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"*

So on one hand we have the Jewish leaders being "cut to the heart" and choosing to kill Stephen. On the other hand, we have the people being "cut to the heart" after Peter's Pentecost sermon and wanting to know what they should next. Same expression, two different meanings.

So What Can We Learn?

Remember what Stephen first said to the Jewish leaders in verse 51: "*You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth.*" What a challenge to those who believe! We are forced to ask ourselves, am I heathen at heart? Am I deaf to the truth? Unfortunately for many of us in the church, we are leaned more towards being like the Jewish leaders in Acts 7 than we are the possible new believers in Acts 2.

The word "heart," in all occasions is the Greek word "*kardia*," which, you guessed it, is where we get our English word "cardio." However, in Acts 7, "cut to the heart" is preceded by the Greek word "*diapriō*," meaning, "to saw in two or divide." So this means that the Jewish leaders weren't challenged by *Stephen's* words, but rather the conviction of the Holy Spirit! Remember the words of **John 16:8 (NLT)** *And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.*

Now in Acts 2 the word that precedes *kardia* is "*katanyssomai*," (*don't hurt yourself: kätā-nū's-so-mī*) meaning, "to prick or pierce." Again, it wasn't the words of Peter that made an impact on the people, but rather the Holy Spirit's penetration *through* Peter's words.

Look at the emotional response of to the Spirits conviction:

Acts 7:57-58 (NLT) ⁵⁷ *Then they put their hands over their ears and began shouting. They rushed at him* ⁵⁸ *and dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.*

Think about this: The last moment of Stephen's life was in the hands of the so called "religious leaders."

Prayer for Today

"Lord, I pray that your Spirit of conviction would not fall on deaf ears, but rather penetrate deep within our hearts and guide us into your Truth. I pray also we will respond with humility and grace when confronted by your Spirit. Help us Lord in this today we pray.