

Stephen

Acts 6-7



The Story

There were many Christians in the church at Jerusalem. When the Christians brought their money to the apostles to share with the needy, some of the needy were passed by. The apostles needed help so that they could continue to pray and to preach the Word of God to.

The apostles asked the Christians to choose seven good men who were wise and had the Spirit of God. These men would take care of the needy people in the church. Stephen was the name of one of these men. Another man chosen was Philip.

The seven men were brought before the apostles. The apostles prayed and laid their hands on the men to set them apart for the work of caring for the needy.

The Word of God spread, and the number of believers in Jerusalem grew a lot. Stephen looked after needy Christians and also preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to many people, including the Gentiles. Stephen preached with such power and did such wonders that people felt he was preaching the truth.

Some Jews who thought Gentiles should not hear about God, spoke against Stephen. These Jews could tell that Stephen had great wisdom. They could tell that the Holy Spirit had filled Stephen and that he spoke the truth.

These Jews hired men to be false witnesses and tell lies about Stephen. They made the people and their rulers excited and angry with Stephen. The people seized Stephen and brought him before the Jewish council.

The false witnesses said, "This man

speaks evil words against the Temple and God's Law. We heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses gave us."

When Stephen stood up to answer the high priest and the council, everyone looked at him. They saw Stephen's face shine like the face of an angel.

Then the high priest asked, "Are these things so?"

Stephen began to speak of the great things God had done for the people of Israel. He reminded them that God called Abraham to leave his home and go into a new land. God had promised Abraham that He would give Abraham's descendants that land. (Abraham's descendants were called the people of Israel.)

Stephen now reminded these Jews and the Jewish council how God had given the Israelites great men like Joseph and Moses and the prophets. These men had told the people of Israel to believe in the promised Savior. Stephen showed the council how the Israelites had not been faithful to God, even after God blessed them. They had not listened to the prophets and had even killed many of them.

Stephen said, "You are like your fathers. You shut your ears to the Holy Spirit. Your fathers killed many of the prophets. When God sent His Son, Jesus, the promised Savior, you killed Him!"

These words of Stephen made the Jews very angry. They were so angry that they ground their teeth together. But

Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked toward heaven and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But, the unbelieving Jews could not see Stephen's vision of heaven.

Stephen's enemies were so angry that they shouted at him. They plugged their ears and rushed at him. They dragged him out of the city and threw stones at him until he was dead. Even as they threw stones at him, Stephen knelt down and prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

When he had said this, Stephen fell asleep in death, believing in Jesus, his Savior. Stephen was the first believer to be

killed for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Stephen's friends carried his body away and buried it. Many Christians were very sad.

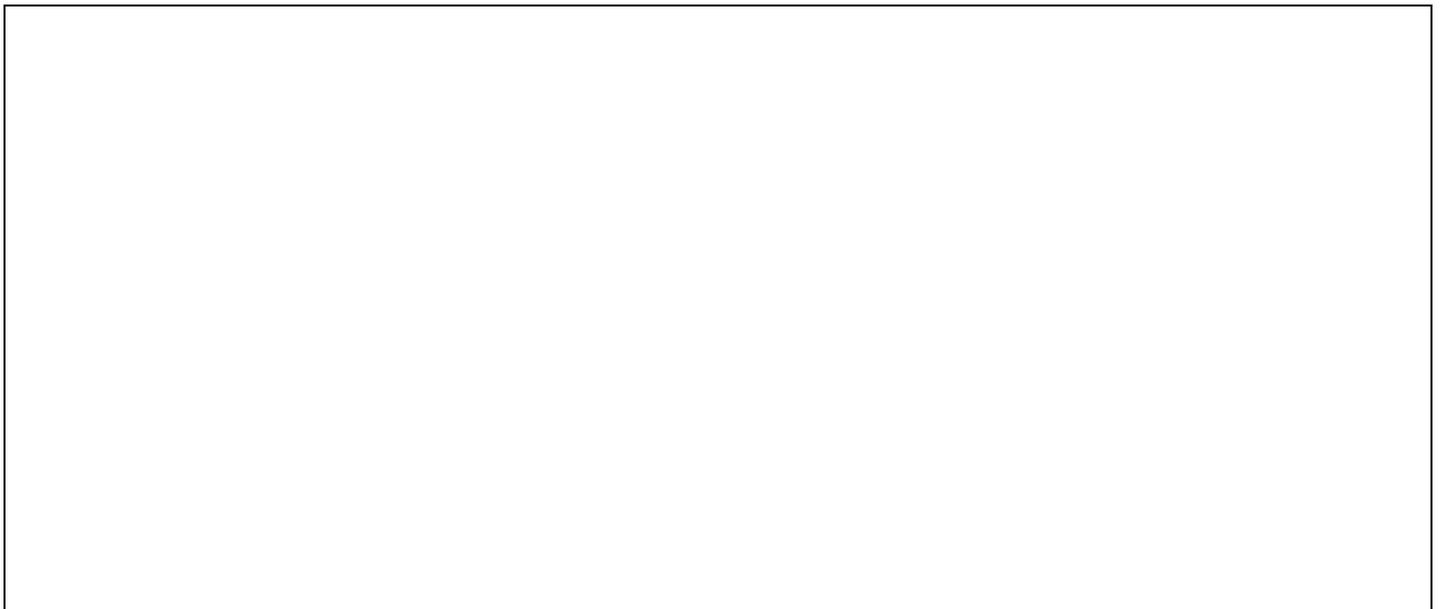
One of the enemies of Stephen was a young man whose name was Saul. When the false witnesses took off their loose outer garments so they could throw stones at Stephen, Saul held their garments. This young man had heard Stephen's speech and saw his shining face, but he thought it was good to put Stephen to death. He became an enemy of the Christians and began to put many of them into prison for their faith in Jesus. The Christian church seemed ready to end, but God had His plan.

Review

How was Stephen put to death?

Why was Stephen put to death?

Draw a picture of Stephen's vision of heaven.



Passages

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

The Fifth Commandment
You shall not murder. Exodus 20:13

Hymn

Hymn 445 v. 1

Am I a soldier of the Cross,
A follower of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own His cause
Or blush to speak His name?

Prayer

Dear Father in heaven,
Thank you for giving us the good example of Stephen, a child of yours who did not deny You. He was willing to suffer and die because of his love for You and also his enemies. Help us when we have troubles to take them to You. Make us strong Christians so that we will be willing to die, if need be, rather than give up our faith. Help us to be loving Christians for Jesus' sake. Amen.