

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 11



STEPHEN'S STIRRING SERMON

Scripture Texts: Acts 7:1-60; Matthew 10:39

Our last lesson left Stephen as he was falsely accused of blasphemy, and the council, waiting for his answer, **saw his face as . . . the face of an angel.** Stephen knew and used the Bible, and his sermon traced the working of God's plan leading to Christ. It showed the disobedience and rebellion of Israel. Stephen was bold in the face of danger, and as he preached, God gave him a view of Heaven and Jesus. Stephen loved his enemies with the same love and forgiveness that was in Christ. Saul consented to the killing of Stephen.

MEMORY VERSE: *He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*

—*Matthew 10:39*

DAILY READINGS:

- Mon.—**Mark 13:5-23** Receiving the words to speak.
- Tue.—**Revelation 2:8-11** Have no fear.
- Wed.—**Matthew 5:10-20** Persecution is a blessing.
- Thu.—**1 Peter 4:12-19** Partakers of Christ's sufferings.
- Fri.—**Romans 8:14-21** Glory revealed in us.

Devotional Reading: Matthew 10:16-25 Facing persecution.

Stephen's Sermon

Acts 7:1-50 Questioned by the high priest, **Are these things so?** Stephen began, **The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham.** Study the whole chapter. He went on to outline the history of the Israelites, with two points in mind: (1) that God's plan and promises led to Christ, quoting the promise (**verse 37**), **A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up;** and (2) that Israel had always rebelled against God. His message was that Jesus is God's Son, and these people, rebelling, had killed Him.

Have Not Kept the Law

Acts 7:51-53 **Ye stiffnecked**—stubborn, rebellious—**and uncircumcised**—uncleansed, not pure—**in heart and ears**—in inner motives and outward actions. They would not hear God. He accused their fathers of persecuting and slaying those who **shewed before**—foretold, prophesied—**the coming of the Just One**—Jesus—and accused them of betraying and murdering Him. They had **not kept** God's Law, Stephen told them boldly.

Mad Men

Acts 7:54-56 **They were cut to the heart**—convicted, convinced of their guilt and unwilling to accept the truth of their condition. Instead of repenting, they were angered. **Gnashed on him with their teeth**—irrational behavior, that of mad men, full of the devil. **He**—Stephen—**full of the Holy Ghost**—in His full control—**looked up . . . into heaven**—to God from Whom came his help. **Saw the glory of God**—his help was there immediately—**Jesus standing on the right hand of God.** He told what he saw.

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In times of great trial, we may ask ourselves the question, "Does Jesus care?" Yes, He cares. Here is another proof that He knows and He cares.

They Stoned Stephen

Acts 7:57-60 Angered still more, the people became a mob. **Cried out . . . stopped their ears**—to hear no more—**ran upon him with one accord**, all as one—**cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes**—outer garments—**at a young man's feet**. The young man was from Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and may have been one who disputed with Stephen (**Acts 6:9**). No doubt he heard Stephen's sermon and saw his face. What effect this and the death that followed had upon him, we cannot say, but he did not forget them (**Acts 22:20**). These heroic events left their mark on his intelligent and sensitive nature.

They stoned Stephen, calling upon God. His trust was in God. **Lord Jesus, receive my spirit**. He knew his spirit was to live on with God. (Compare **Luke 23:46**.) **Cried . . . Lord, lay not this sin to their charge**—the same love and forgiveness that was in Christ (**Luke 23:34**). Then **he fell asleep**—died, his spirit left his body and went to Heaven.

We see many things in this lesson to indicate that Stephen belonged to God. Stephen was full of the Holy Ghost, and he looked into Heaven where his heart and mind were centered. He was given a vision. He called upon God to receive his spirit. He had love for his enemies, and the beauty of God was revealed in his face. Paul called him God's martyr (**Acts 22:20**). We can be certain that God took him to Heaven where he lives forevermore. His death was peaceful rest. Around him were anger, chaos, and violence, but in Stephen's heart were peace, trust, and even joy in the midst of pain. The mob had power over Stephen's body, but they could not touch his soul.

A Statement of Profit and Loss

Matthew 10:39 He that findeth his life shall lose it. Stephen went to Heaven. Had Stephen silenced the Gospel message to save his life, he would have been lost spiritually. **He that loseth his life for my sake**—gives to Christ for Him to use—**shall find it**—keep it safe. There had been a time when Stephen had died to himself and given his life and all to Christ. In so doing, he found true and eternal life, which nothing could take away from him.

The punishment God prescribed in the Law for blasphemy of God was stoning (**Leviticus 24:16**). There must be at least two witnesses before the accused could be put to death. The witnesses were to be first to take a hand in the stoning (**Deuteronomy 17:6-7**), which was done outside the camp or city (**Numbers 15:35-36**). These rules were observed, but the one concerning false witnesses was not (**Deuteronomy 19:16-19**).

Why did God let Stephen be killed? He never promised freedom from suffering. Hatred, persecution, and possibly death are part of the Christian life here, but the love of God through it all and complete deliverance in the end more than repay for all. Read **Romans 8:35-39**. Stephen died for Jesus. Many have followed. They are now enjoying the blessings of Heaven.

JUST A THOUGHT

This life has great importance because in it we choose where to live the next one.