

EPISODE NO. 303

Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-2,39,48-60; 8:1-4

Stephen, the First Christian Martyr

8 Since Stephen was full of God's favor and power, he was working miracles among the people to show great proofs from God. 9 But, some Jews stood up and argued with Stephen. They were from a synagogue called "A Synagogue for Freed Men." (This synagogue was also for Jews from the cities of Cyrene and Alexandria.) Jews from Cilicia and Asia were with them. They all came and argued with Stephen, 10 but the Spirit was helping Stephen speak with wisdom. His words were so powerful that the Jews could NOT argue with him. 11 So they secretly paid some men to say, "We heard Stephen say some evil things against Moses and against God!" 12 In this way, they stirred up the people, the Jewish elders, and the teachers of the law. They became so angry that they came and grabbed Stephen. Then they took him to the Jewish Council. 13 They brought some men into the meeting. These men were told to tell lies about Stephen. The men said, "This man always says things against this holy place and against the law of Moses. 14 We heard him say that Jesus from Nazareth will destroy this place! He also said that Jesus will change the customs which Moses passed down to us!" 15 Everyone sitting in the Jewish Council stared at Stephen. They saw that his face looked like the face of an angel.

Stephen's Speech

7:1 Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these things true?"

2 Stephen answered, "My Jewish brothers and fathers, listen to me:

39 Our ancestors did NOT want to obey Moses. They rejected him. In their hearts, they wanted to go back to Egypt.

48 "The Highest One does NOT live in houses which men build with their hands. This is what the prophet Isaiah wrote:

49 The Lord God says,

"Heaven is My throne.

The earth is a place to rest My feet.

What kind of house could you build for Me!?

There is no place where I need to rest!

50 Remember, **I** made all these things!" ' "

51 Stephen continued speaking: “You stubborn leaders! Your hearts are NOT circumcised! YOU won’t listen to God! YOU are always against what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you. Your ancestors did this, and you are just like them! 52 Your ancestors persecuted every prophet who ever lived. Those prophets said long ago that the righteous one (Jesus of Nazareth) would come, but your ancestors killed the prophets. And now, YOU have turned against this righteous one and murdered him! 53 YOU are the people who received the law of Moses, the commands which God gave through the angels — but YOU do not obey the law!”

They Killed Stephen

54 When the Jewish leaders heard Stephen say these things, they became very angry. They were so mad that they were grinding their teeth at Stephen. 55 But Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit. He looked up into the sky and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God’s right side. 56 He said, “Look! I see heaven open. And, I see the Son of Man (Jesus the Messiah) standing at God’s right side!”

57 Then they all shouted with a loud voice. They covered their ears with their hands. Together they all ran at Stephen. 58 They took him out of the city to stone him to death. The men, who told lies against Stephen, left their robes with a young man named Paul. 59 Then they began to throw stones at Stephen, but Stephen was praying. He said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” 60 He fell on his knees and shouted this: “Lord, do NOT blame them for this sin!” After Stephen said that, he died.

Paul approved of the killing of Stephen.

The Congregation Was Persecuted

8:1-3 Some good men buried Stephen. They cried very loudly for him. On that day there was a fierce attack on the congregation in Jerusalem. Paul was also trying to destroy them. He even went into their homes. He dragged out men and women and put them in jail. All of the believers had to leave Jerusalem; only the apostles stayed there. The believers went to different places in Judea and Samaria. 4 They were scattered everywhere. And everywhere the believers went, they told people the Good News about Jesus.