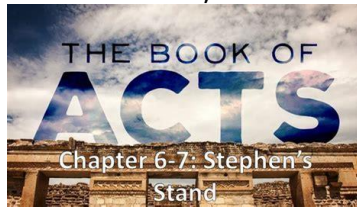




March 5, 2023



“Stephen’s face and More”

51 “You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, 53 who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.” 54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56 and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”

Stephen’s funeral service

Eulogy: A man who stepped up in time of crisis and willingly and passionately followed Jesus. A man of integrity and certainly a great example of a Jesus follower. Stephen showed his faith by being a strong leader and never backed down from declaring the message of salvation. He continued to be passionate about the Word and he had a great love for people. He sets the supreme example of how to gracefully enter the throne of heaven. He will be missed, but his memories will go on for centuries as we will reflect often of his devotion and commitment to Jesus Christ.

STEPHEN

Let us pray.

✓ He was a man of Face

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. ¹⁰ And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. ¹¹ Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." ¹² And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council. ¹³ They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." ¹⁵ **And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.**

Psalm 17:15- As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness;
I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.

Exodus 34:29-35

Ill. I can see it in your face- Alphonse

✓ He was a man of Faith

³ Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; ...

⁵ And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, ...

⁸ And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

Popular opinion can be easily shaped. The same crowds that praised Jesus ([Luke 19:35-40](#)) soon called for His crucifixion ([Luke 23:18-23](#)). The crowds that loved the apostles ([Acts 2:47](#), [5:26](#)) cry out against Stephen. This is why we should never let popular opinion shape the vision or focus of the church, but let it rest on God's eternal Word.

“Such a speech as this was by no means calculated to secure an acquittal before the Sanhedrin. It is rather a defense of pure Christianity as God's appointed way of worship.” (Bruce)

✓ He was a man of Familiarity

He knew the Bible and God's plan of salvation!

- Abraham- God's appearance and message to go
- Isaac- the promised heir
- Jacob
- 12 patriarchs
- Joseph
- Reappearance of Jacob and Joseph's brothers
- Moses
- In Midian and had two sons
- 40 years later- the burning bush
- Verses 32-34 a deliverer
- Rebellion and the golden calf

- Tabernacle
- David
- Solomon builds God's house
- Verses 45-50

✓ He was a man of Fearlessness

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, ⁵³ who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*."

As a follower of Jesus, Stephen faced death without fear.

Not without conflict. Not without persecution. Not without suffering. Not without grief. Not without trouble. Not without pain. Not without a lot of things that most of us would just as soon do without.

But without fear.

as your fathers did, so do you

Almost 20 times in the Old Testament, God calls Israel **stiff-necked**. These religious leaders were acting just as their forefathers acted.

The chain can be broken and a new pattern can begin!

Ill. Angry family, alcohol abuse, physical abuse, etc.

Proverbs 9:8; 13:1; 29:1

"He takes the sharp knife of the Word and rips up the sins of the people, laying open the inward parts of their hearts, and the secrets of their soul...He could not have delivered that searching address with greater fearlessness had he been assured that they would thank him for the

operation; the fact that his death was certain had no other effect upon him than to make him yet more zealous.” (Spurgeon)

Exodus 32:7-10 ⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted *themselves*. ⁸ They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’ ” ⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed it *is* a stiff-necked people! ¹⁰ Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.”

Jeremiah 9:25-26- ²⁵ “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh— ²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the wilderness in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.”

Paul would later claim of his pre-Christian thinking: concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (Philippians 3:6).

Not surprisingly, the context and the content of this message, and its immediate sequel, only served to demonstrate that this same murderous spirit was still at large. At Pentecost, Peter’s hearers had been faced with a similar accusation (Acts 2:23; Acts 2:36), and were ‘pricked in their heart’ and asked, ‘What shall we do?’ (Acts 2:37). Stephen’s hearers, on the contrary, were ‘cut to the heart’ - but chose rather to ‘gnash their teeth’ at him (Acts 7:54).

The idea of **gnashed at him with their teeth** can't help but remind us of the imagery of Hell. Seven different times, Jesus described Hell as a place of *weeping and gnashing of teeth* ([Matthew 8:12](#)). These men were prominent, successful, and appeared to be religious; yet they were rejecting God and associating themselves with hell, not heaven.

They began grinding their teeth before Stephen finished his speech. "All they could do in their frenzy was to gnash with their teeth. It was not a sudden outburst but the tense rather shows that it was prolonged." (Gaebelein)

⁵⁴ When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their teeth*.

You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool. You can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon. Or you can fall at His feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about Him being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. C.S. Lewis-, "Mere Christianity"

✓ He was a man of Forgiveness

⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ **Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.**

J.B. Phillips' translation has insight: *Stephen, filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit.*

Then they cried out with a loud voice: When Stephen declared that he saw Jesus *standing at the right hand of God*, it was too much. The Sanhedrin reacted quickly, violently, and together. When Jesus, before this same body of men, declared that He would sit at the right hand of God, they had the same reaction and sealed his death as a blasphemer ([Matthew 26:64-66](#)).

The threshold of death is a hard place to learn the art of forgiveness, though. When the muscles of forgiveness are weak from disuse in life, the threshold of death can be a font of bitterness unleashed. On the other hand, if the art of forgiveness has been well-practiced in life, then the threshold of death offers no obstacle to forgiveness and no platform for bitterness.

Luke 23:32-36a-³² There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death.³³ And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.³⁴ Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.³⁵ And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."³⁶ The soldiers also mocked Him,

✓ He was a man of Future

⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

The second-century Jewish writing *Mishnah*, described the practice of stoning: "When the trial is finished, the man convicted is brought out to be stoned...When ten cubits from the place of stoning they say to him, 'Confess, for it is the custom of all about to be put to death to make confession, and every one who confesses has a share in the age to come'...Four cubits from the place of stoning the criminal is stripped...The drop from the place of stoning was twice the height of a man. One of the

witnesses pushes the criminal from behind, so that he falls face downward. He is then turned over on his back. If he dies from this fall, that is sufficient. If not, the second witness takes the stone and drops it on his heart. If this causes death, that is sufficient; if not, he is stoned by all the congregation of Israel.” (Cited in Bruce)

“The fires... in the olden days never made martyrs; they revealed them. No hurricane of persecution ever creates martyrs; it reveals them. Stephen was a martyr before they stoned him. He was the first martyr to seal his testimony with his blood.” (Morgan)

Stephen wasn't a superman, but he was a man filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit. Many have little idea of how greatly they can be used of God as they walk in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What an amazing man of faith. Let's remember Stephen and be the Jesus followers that God wants us to be.