

# A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

# THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

*An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely*

### ACTS 5:31-32

*"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."*

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

### Lesson #34

### COMMENTARY ON: 7:54-60

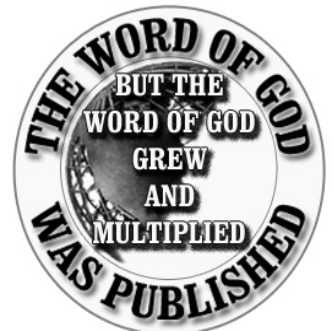
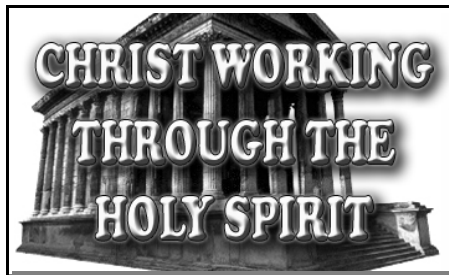
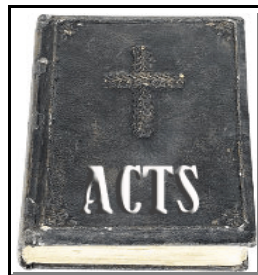
#### THE STONING OF STEPHEN

Having delivered an insightful summation of Israel's history, confirming they had always been obstinate, Stephen has forthrightly charged the Council with having the same spirit. Their hearts and ears, he affirmed, were uncircumcised, and they were continually resisting the Holy Spirit. In his denunciation he is not speaking hastily or rashly. This is not an outburst of fleshly anger. Nor, indeed, is it driven by a kind of carnal disappointment. This is not only a discerning response to the hard-heartedness of the people before him, it is one that is being prompted and directed by the Holy Spirit. Here is an exhibit of "the mind of the Spirit" (Rom 8:27), as well as "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). It is an expression of "the mind of the Lord" (Rom 11:34), and is the result of Stephen's fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9). It is a confirmation that He is partaking of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). That is, he is experiencing and expressing oneness with the God of heaven, through Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit. Because of this, there can be no question about the absolute validity and appropriateness of his words.

### ACTS 17:26-27

*"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."*

"... and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)



Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ





## The Book of Acts

### Lesson Number 34



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

**TRANSLATION LEGEND:** ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God'S Word (1995), IE = International English, ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), L.ITV = Literal Translation of the Bible ((1976), LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833),WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

**LEXICON LEGEND:** FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

# THE STONING OF STEPHEN

“ 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. <sup>55</sup> But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, <sup>56</sup> And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. <sup>57</sup> Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, <sup>58</sup> And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. <sup>59</sup> And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. <sup>60</sup> And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:54-60)

## INTRODUCTION

Having delivered an insightful summation of Israel's history, confirming they had always been obstinate, Stephen has forthrightly charged the Council with having the same spirit as their fathers. They belonged to a generation noted for its unbelief, yet who presented themselves as being righteous. This is the generation of Satan's seed, as Jesus said to certain of that day, “*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your*

*father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it*” (John 8:44). As God said in the first prophecy of Scripture, “*enmity*” is prevalent between the “*seed*” of the woman, and the “*seed*” of the serpent (Gen 3:15). That enmity, or aggressive hostility is found between the “*children of*

*the wicked one*” Matt 13:38), and those who are joined to Christ (1 Cor 6:17), as well as between Him and Satan.

Stephen has declared that their part in the generation of the wicked is confirmed by their uncircumcised hearts and ears. This also accounted for the fact that they were as he declared, continually resisting the Holy Spirit, stubbornly refusing to yield to His holy

*Stephen, having uncovered the hardness of heart in the council, now faces the ultimate expression of hatred – by Given O. Blakely*

## CONTENTS

- THEY WERE CUT TO THE HEART (7:54)
- BEING FULL OF THE SPIRIT (7:55a)
- HE SAW THE GLORY OF GOD (7:55b)
- STEPHEN REPORTS WHAT HE SEES (7:56)
- THEIR VOICE, THEIR EARS, AND THEIR ACTION (7:57)
- THEY CAST HIM OUT OF THE CITY (7:58a)
- A YOUNG MAN NAMED SAUL (7:58b)
- STEPHEN WAS CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD (7:59)
- STEPHEN'S LAST SUPPLICATION (7:60a)
- HE FELL ASLEEP (7:60b)
- CONCLUSION

influences.

In his harsh denunciation Stephen is not speaking hastily or rashly. He was **not** a man *"hasty in words,"* whom Solomon said was a fool (Prov 29:20). He was a man whom James described as being *"swift to hear, slow to speak,"* and *"slow to wrath"* (James 1:19). Some, not having cultured their spirits with the word of the Lord, consider any words like those spoken by Stephen to be spoken swiftly and in sudden wrath. However, this is not at all the case. Stephen has been patient, holding back harsh words until the time was appropriate to speak them.

This is not an outburst of fleshly anger. Nor, indeed, is it driven by a kind of carnal disappointment. **This is not only a discerning response to the hard-heartedness of the people before him, it is one that is being prompted and directed by the Holy Spirit.** Here is an exhibit of *"the mind of the Spirit"* (Rom 8:27), as well as *"the mind of Christ"* (1 Cor 2:16). It is an expression of *"the mind of the Lord"* (Rom 11:34), and is the result of Stephen's fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9). It is a confirmation that He is partaking of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). That is, he is experiencing and

expressing oneness with the God of heaven, through Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit. Because of this, there can be no question about the absolute validity and appropriateness of his words.

### WHAT STEPHEN HAS SAID

In order to confirm the hardness of the hearts of these people, a brief review of what Stephen has said will be in order. **It should also be noted that all of his words were based solidly upon Scripture, and did not reflect a perspective that originated with him.** His words are found in Acts 7:2-53.

- ⇨ He addressed them as *"Men, brethren, and fathers"* (7:2a).
- ⇨ He called upon them to *"hearken,"* listening carefully to what he said, and weighing it thoughtfully (7:2b).
- ⇨ He reminded them that *"the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham"* (7:2c). The record of this appearance is found in Genesis 12:1. Nehemiah also referred to this record (Neh 9:7). Isaiah also referred to this as a calling (Isa 51:2).
- ⇨ God appeared to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees (7:2d). The fact that God appeared to Abraham before he was in Ur of the Chaldees is confirmed in Genesis 11:31-12:1.
- ⇨ God told Abraham to leave his country, and his kindred, and *"come into the land"* that He would show him (7:3). This record is found in Genesis 12:1.
- ⇨ Abraham did come out of the land of the Chaldeans, dwelling in Haran

until his father Terah died. He then removed from Haran and headed for the land of promise (7:4). This record is found in Genesis 11:31-32 and 12:4.

- ⇨ Stephen reminded the people that Abraham himself had no inheritance in Canaan, not so much as a place to put his foot (7:5a). This is confirmed by Abraham's testimony to the children of Heth, as recorded in Genesis 23:4).
- ⇨ He also recalled that God told Abraham that He would give the land to him and his seed after him, even though at the time he had no child (7:5b). This is confirmed in Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 15:3,18; and 17:8.
- ⇨ He reminded his audience that God had told Abraham his progeny would journey in a strange land, and that the people there would treat them evil for four hundred years (7:6). This is confirmed in Genesis 15:13,16, and Exodus 12:40-41, which recorded their deliverance.
- ⇨ Stephen declared that God had promised Abraham He would judge the nation who oppressed his seed (7:7a). This is confirmed in Genesis 15:14 and Exodus 7:1-14:31.
- ⇨ God also told Abraham He would deliver the people from the nation who oppressed them, and whom He would judge (7:7b). This is confirmed in Genesis 15:16; Exodus 12:36-14:31).
- ⇨ God told Abraham the people would come forth to serve Him (7:7c). This was the revealed purpose of the deliverance as declared in Exodus

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| <p>3:12.</p> <p>⇒ Stephen testified to the covenant of circumcision (7:8a). This is confirmed in Genesis 17:9-14).</p> <p>⇒ He reminded them that Isaac was circumcised on the eighth day (7:8b). This is confirmed in Genesis 17:12 and 21:1-4.</p> <p>⇒ Stephen also declared that Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs (7:8c). This is confirmed in Genesis 25:21-26 and 29:31-35; 30:1-24; and 35:16,23-26.</p> <p>⇒ He rehearsed how the patriarchs were moved with envy, and sold Joseph into Egypt (7:9a). This is confirmed in Genesis 37:4-11.</p> <p>⇒ He then reminded them that God was with Joseph (7:9b). This is confirmed in Genesis 39:2,5, and 21-23).</p> <p>⇒ God delivered Joseph out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor in the eyes of Pharaoh (7:10a). This is confirmed in Genesis 41:12-46.</p> <p>⇒ Stephen testified that Joseph became the governor over all of Egypt (7:10b). This is confirmed in Genesis 41:6.</p> <p>⇒ He recalled how a dearth came over all of the land of Egypt and Canaan (7:11a). This is confirmed in Genesis 41:54-5; 43:1 and Psalm 105:16.</p> <p>⇒ During this time the Jewish fathers found no sustenance in their own land (7:11b). This is confirmed in 42:1-43:1 and Genesis 47:13</p> <p>⇒ He referred to the first time Jacob obtained corn from Egypt (7:12). This is confirmed in Genesis 42:1-24).</p> | <p>⇒ He referred to the second time Jacob send the patriarchs to Egypt for food (7:13). This is confirmed in Genesis 43:2-3.</p> <p>⇒ Stephen recalled how Joseph made himself known to his brethren during the second time (7:13a). This is confirmed in Genesis 45:1-18.</p> <p>⇒ He told how Joseph's brethren were then made known to Pharaoh (7:13b). This is confirmed in Genesis 46:31-34 and 47:1-10.</p> <p>⇒ Stephen then related how Joseph called for Jacob and all his kindred to come to Egypt (7:14a). This is confirmed in Genesis 45:9-11 and Psalm 105:23.</p> <p>⇒ He mentioned that 75 souls were brought into Egypt (7:14b). The is confirmed in Genesis 46:26-27 and Deuteronomy 10:22. There only seventy souls are mentioned. Stephen's count includes the number of the sons of Ephraim and Manasseh, who were the sons born to Joseph in Egypt. They were the ones among whom the inheritance of Joseph was divided (Num 26:35; 27:1).</p> <p>⇒ Jacob went down into Egypt and died there (7:15a). This confirmed in Genesis 49:33).</p> <p>⇒ All of the twelve patriarchs also died in Egypt (7:15b). This is confirmed in Exodus 1:6.</p> <p>⇒ Jacob and his sons were buried in Shechem, on a piece of land that Abraham had bought (7:16a). This is confirmed in Genesis 49:29-32; Exodus 13:19; and Josh 24:32.</p> <p>⇒ He mentions that Abraham bought the parcel of land from the sons of Emmor, the father of Shechem</p> | <p>(7:16b). This is confirmed in Genesis 23:16; 49:30; and 50:13.</p> <p>⇒ Stephen then pointed out that as the time of the promised deliverance drew near, the people began to multiply in Egypt (7:17). This is confirmed in Exodus 1:7-12,20, and Psalm 105:24-25.</p> <p>⇒ This growth continued until a king rose who did not know Joseph (7:18). This is confirmed in Exodus 1:18.</p> <p>⇒ This king dealt subtly with the Jews commanding that they not permit the male children to live (7:19). This is confirmed in Exodus 1:9-22 and Psalm 105:25.</p> <p>⇒ It was during this time of jeopardy that Moses was born, and found to be a most unusual child (7:20). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:2a.</p> <p>⇒ Moses was kept in his father's house, being nourished up for three months (7:20b). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:2b).</p> <p>⇒ When Moses was put outside of the house, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and raised him as her own son (7:21). The details of this are provided in Exodus 2:3-10.</p> <p>⇒ Stephen recalls that Moses was learned in all of the wisdom and ways of Egypt (7:22). This is a detail that is not provided in the Exodus record, but is concluded from the fact that Pharaoh's daughter raised him as her own son (Exodus 2:10).</p> <p>⇒ At forty years of age, Moses visited his brethren, during which time, he avenged one of his brethren that was being oppressed by an Egyptian. The whole matter was not understood by his brethren (7:23-25). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:11-12.</p> <p>⇒ Stephen recounts how Moses visited his brethren again the next day. Upon finding two of them fighting, he tried to make peace between them, only to be rejected (7:26-28). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:13-15.</p> <p>⇒ Moses then fled from Egypt because</p> |
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of that saying, and came into Midian, where he beget two sons (7:29). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:15-22 and 4:20; 18:3-4.

- ⇒ After forty years had expired, God called Moses through an angel who spoke in a burning bush. When Moses saw the burning bush, he turned aside to consider it (7:30-31a). This is confirmed in Exodus 3:1-3.
- ⇒ The voice of the Lord then came to Moses, declaring all of the details of the coming deliverance that would be wrought by his hand (7:31b-34). This is confirmed in Exodus 3:4-4:19.
- ⇒ Although Moses was sent by God, the people did not initially receive him (7:35a). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:14.
- ⇒ God sent Moses to be a ruler and deliverer, providing an accompanying angel, even the one who had spoken to him in the bush (7:35b). This is confirmed in Exodus 14:19,24; 23:20-23; 32:34; 33:2, 12-15.
- ⇒ Stephen reminds the people how God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt with all manner of signs and wonders, continuing to show them wonders throughout their forty years in the wilderness (7:36). This is confirmed in Exodus 12:41; 14:21-27; 33:1; Numbers 9:15-23; 11:1-35; 14:1-45; 16:1-17:13; Deuteronomy 4:33-37; 6:21,22; Nehemiah 9:10; Psalm 78:12-13; 105:27-36, etc.
- ⇒ Stephen declared that Moses had foretold a coming Prophet, to whom the people would hearken (7:37). This is confirmed in Deuteronomy 18:15-19.
- ⇒ It was through Moses that the law was given to Israel (7:38). This is confirmed in Exodus 19:3-17; 20:19-20.
- ⇒ Stephen reminded the council how the people did not obey Moses, but turned back to Egypt in their hearts (7:39). This is confirmed in Exodus 14:11-12; 16:3; 17:3; Numbers 11:5; 14:3-4; 21:5; Psalm 106:16,32,33;

Nehemiah 9:16-17.

- ⇒ He then told them of that shameful occasion when they made the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai (7:40-41). This is confirmed in Exodus 32:1-8, 17-20; Deuteronomy 9:12-18; Nehemiah 9:18; Psalm 106:19-21.
- ⇒ God then gave them up to worship the host of heaven, giving them over to their own lusts (7:42). This is confirmed in Psalm 81:11-12 and Second Kings 17:16-17.
- ⇒ Stephen declares how they took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and practiced idolatry (7:43). This is confirmed in Second Kings 17:16-18; 21:6; and Amos 5:25-27.
- ⇒ God had given to them a visible testimony of His presence in the Tabernacle, which was made according to as revealed pattern (7:44). This is confirmed in Exodus 38:21; Numbers 1:50-53; Exodus 25:40; 26:30.
- ⇒ The fathers brought the Tabernacle into the land of Canaan, and set it up (7:45a). This is confirmed in Joshua 18:1.
- ⇒ Following the setting up of the Tabernacle, the land was subdued before the Israelites (7:45b). This is confirmed in Nehemiah 9:24; Psalm 44:2 and 78:55.
- ⇒ The Tabernacle remained for over four hundred years, until the time of David, who found favor with the Lord. He desired to build a house for

⇒ However, Solomon was the one commissioned to actually build the Temple that David conceived (7:47). This is confirmed in 2 Samuel 7:13; First Kings 5:1-18; Second Chronicles 2:1-4:22.

⇒ Stephen finally affirmed that God does not dwell in temples made with hands, seeing he has made the heaven and the earth and all things in them (7:49-50). This is confirmed in First Kings 8:27; Second Chronicles 2:5-6; and 6:18.

I have taken the time to briefly outline the message of Stephen in order to emphasize several things.

- ⇒ First, he started by identifying them as “brethren” and “fathers.”
- ⇒ Second, up to this point he has not upbraided the council.
- ⇒ Third, he has said nothing that any informed Israelite did not know.
- ⇒ Fourth, he has made no personal assessment of the Israelites in the past, but has confined his remarks to what Moses and the Prophets have said. Every remark has been buttressed with the Word of God.

Now, it is important to note that **holy men in the past have been driven to repentance when hearing of the sordid past of Israel.** For some, it has been forgotten, but the reminder of the

**Now, it is important to note that holy men in the past have been driven to repentance when hearing of the sordid past of Israel. For some, it has been forgotten, but the reminder of the waywardness of their fathers had moved them to godly sorrow and repentance.**

the ark of the covenant (7:45c-46). This is confirmed in Second Samuel 7:1-5; First Kings 8:17-19; First Chronicles 17:1-4, etc.

waywardness of their fathers had moved them to godly sorrow and repentance. Here are some examples.

- ⇨ **THE PSALMIST:** *"We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked Him at the sea, even at the Red sea"* (Psa 106:6-7).
- ⇨ **JOSIAH:** *"Go ye, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us"* (2 Kgs 22:13).
- ⇨ **HEZEKIAH:** *"For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken Him, and have turned away their faces from*

*LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God"* (Jer 3:25). *"We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against Thee"* (Jer 14:20). *"Our fathers have sinned, and are not: and we have borne their iniquities"* (Lam 5:7).

- ⇨ **DANIEL:** *"O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee"* (Dan 9:8).

**STEPHEN'S REFERENCE TO CHRIST**

Stephen's solitary reference to Jesus Christ was this: *"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear"* (Acts 7:37).

designed to prepare men for Christ (Gal 3:24-25).

- ⇨ They knew of the promise God made to Abraham, which was sufficient to provoke hope, as it did in the progenitor of their nation (Gen 22:18).
- ⇨ They had the Scriptures, which testified of Christ (John 5:39).
- ⇨ They had been subjected to the preaching of John the Baptist, who specifically came to prepare the way of the Lord (Matt 3:3,7).
- ⇨ They had been subjected to the ministry of the Christ Himself (Matt 16:1; 22:23).
- ⇨ They had been directly subjected to the preaching of Peter and the Apostles (Acts 4:13-20).
- ⇨ The chief priest and this very council had admitted that Jerusalem had been filled with the doctrine of Christ (Acts 5:27-29).

**He had further preached extensively in the synagogue, displaying a "wisdom and spirit" that those who disputed with him were not able to resist. There was no need to again deliver the message of Christ to these men. They had already received abundant testimony.**

There was no excuse for the obstinance of these people, or for their pretentious request that Stephen defend himself. They knew very well what he had been preaching, for it had been done publicly, and even amidst much dispute.

*the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs"* (2 Chron 29:6).

- ⇨ **EZRA:** *"And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day"* (Ezra 9:6-7).
- ⇨ **JEREMIAH:** *"We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the*

That is it! Not one single word more. And why was this? Why did he not deliver more positive preaching about the Messiah?

The answer ought to be obvious. **He had been arrested for preaching about Christ!** Not only was he *"full of faith and power,"* he had done *"great wonders and miracles among the people,"* confirming that he was a man of God – just as Moses confirmed he was from God with various signs and wonders (6:8). He had further preached extensively in the synagogue, displaying a *"wisdom and spirit"* that those who disputed with him were not able to resist (6:9; 7:83). **There was no need to again deliver the message of Christ to these men. They had already received abundant testimony.**

- ⇨ They had the Law, which was

Stephen had told them what the patriarch's knew, and that was sufficient to have prepared them for the Christ, and draw them away from idolatry. That record was also sufficient to have induced earnest inquiry among the members of the council before whom Stephen stood.

**STEPHEN' WORDS WERE ENOUGH TO INDUCE REPENTANCE**

I have given these examples to confirm that a recollection of the sins of the Israelites consistently moved those of honest and good hearts to a lamentation of the past, an association of that past with their present circumstances, and to repentance. **The reports themselves moved sincere men to call upon the name of the Lord, and to revenge the disobedience that had cluttered their past.**

The fact that this is not happening in the council being addressed by Stephen has verified they are still in the grips of sin, and that no repentance is found in them. They are nothing at all like the people who were moved to fear when they heard of Ananias and

Sapphira being judged by God. It is in view of this circumstance that Stephen now speaks concerning the audience itself. There is no need to speak any longer about their past, and how such remarkable propensities to sin had been

among them. Now, Stephen will force their iniquitous hearts to overflow. He will reflect the same intolerance for sin that Moses had when he came down the mount, and which Jesus had when He cleansed the Temple.

## THEY WERE CUT TO THE HEART

<sup>7:54</sup> **When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.**

Here we will be subjected to the wickedness of the flesh, the sinful nature. **Not only does it lash out against the Law of God, it also stubbornly rejects the promises of God and the Gospel of Christ.** The more spiritual information that is heaped upon the flesh, the more hostile it becomes. The more the truth in any of its many facets is presented to it, the more it aggravates the whole situation. That is the nature of the carnal mind – *“it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be”* (Rom 8:7). It is not possible to educate *“the natural man”* into a state of submission to God, for he *“receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1 Cor 2:14). **He cannot be trained, schooled, or cultured in the things of God.** No amount of patience and longsuffering will knock the edge off of his hostility. Reducing the things of God to childish babble will not help the situation of the person denominated a *“natural man,”* or who is ruled by *“the carnal mind.”*

**If we entertain any doubts about this, the text before us will confirm this is the case.** There is no way to account for the response of this council other than the fact that they were at enmity with God – and God has been the subject of Stephen’s words. He has mentioned *“God”* not less than seventeen times in thirteen verses (7:2,6,7,9,17,25,32,35,37,42,43,45,46). He mentioned *“the Lord”* five times (7:30,31,33,37,49). The word he has delivered concerned what God had said and done, and what He had promised and delivered. He has not yet

referred to anything that the council has done. In fact, **he has not referred to them personally a single time.** Yet they will respond just as though he has spoken about them personally.

### THEY WERE CUT TO THE HEART

*“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, . . .”* Other versions read, *“they were cut to the quick,”*<sup>NASB</sup> *“they were furious,”*<sup>NIV</sup> *“they became enraged,”*<sup>NRSV</sup> *“they were moved with wrath,”*<sup>BBE</sup> *“they were enraged in their hearts,”*<sup>CSB</sup> *“their hearts burst with anger,”*<sup>GENEVA</sup> *“they became noticeably furious,”*<sup>GWN</sup> *“they were filled with rage in*

διεπρίοντο (dee-ep-ri-on-to), this word has the following lexical meaning: “to saw asunder, or in twain, to divide by a saw, to be sawn through mentally,”<sup>THAYER</sup> “to divide with a saw, hence cut to the quick, infuriate,”<sup>FRIEBERG</sup> and “to saw quite through.”<sup>LIDDELL-SCOTT</sup> Robertson says of this word, “Here Stephen had sent a saw through the hearts of the Pharisees that rasped them to the bone.”  
WORD STUDIES

**The meaning is that the words of Stephen were like a saw, moving back and forth through the hearts of his audience, ripping them open so their inward thoughts would be exposed.** The religious mantel they had thrown over

**The meaning is that the words of Stephen were like a saw, moving back and forth through the hearts of his audience, ripping them open so their inward thoughts would be exposed. The religious mantel they had thrown over themselves in a kind of feigned dignity would be exposed as nothing more than empty appearance.**

*their souls,”*<sup>MRD</sup> *“they were infuriated,”*<sup>NLT</sup> *“their hearts clave asunder,”*<sup>PNT</sup> *“the Jewish leaders were stung with fury,”*<sup>LIVING</sup> *“they became very angry,”*<sup>AE</sup> *“they became more and more furious,”*<sup>ISV</sup> *“these words stung them with fury,”*<sup>PHILLIPS</sup> and *“they were cut through to their hearts.”*<sup>ALT</sup>

The word *“cut”* is translated from an unusually strong word. It is a spiritual way of referring to a conviction that incenses instead of producing godly sorrow. Taken from the Greek word

themselves in a kind of feigned dignity would be exposed as nothing more than empty appearance. Their religion did not expose who they really were, but was more the mask of an actor, who pretends to be someone else.

Although I have alluded to this before, it is appropriate that I do so again. **It is God’s manner to expose the hypocrisy of those who feign an association with Him.** As it is written, *“But the word of the LORD was unto*

them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; **that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken**" (Isa 28:13).

This also is fulfilled in the words God told Isaiah to speak to a hard-hearted people: "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. **Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed**" (Isa 6:9-10).

This is also what is involved in Jesus being a Stumblingstone. "And He shall be for a Sanctuary; but **for a Stone of stumbling and for a Rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a Gin and for a Snare to the inhabitants of**

resolution or some form of entertainment.

**In all of this, they are totally unlike Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, the Apostles, and Stephen.** They have created a compromising form of religion that cannot possibly be a stumbling stone. It cannot unveil what is really in the hearts of the people. It brings no honor to Jesus, and opens the door for the subtle working of the evil one.

These modern-day methods and techniques would never have produced the results Stephen's words had on the council. Modern leadership-gurus would probably have made friends of the council, and heralded them as noble people who simply lacked an understanding of the deeper things. They would have chosen a course that would have lessened the opposition of wicked men, who are "destitute of the truth" (1 Tim 6:5). **It is not possible to adequately**

appropriate effects. Paul stated this in an usually strong manner in Second Corinthians 2:15-17. In this text he also confirms the seriousness of seeking to avoid this manner. "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? **For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.**"  
NKJV This is precisely what Stephen has done, and it has brought out the perishing state of the men before him. He has sawn through their hearts with the their own Scriptures.

**THEY GNASHED ON HIM**

"... and they gnashed on him with their teeth." Other versions read, "gnashed at him with their teeth,"  
NKJV "began gnashing their teeth at him,"  
NASB "ground their teeth at him,"  
NRSV "ground their teeth against him,"  
RSV "shook their fists at him in rage,"  
NLT and "ground their teeth in rage."  
LIVING

The language is most vivid, and takes hold of our attention. What does "gnashing" mean? Lexically, the word means "to grind,"  
THAYER "making sounds by striking the teeth together ... grate, grind,"  
FRIEBERG This is an extreme expression of anger that seems to be involuntary when either rage or pain dominates a person, and they are under the control of emotion, as opposed to the their rational capacities.

Many people have experienced extreme frustration of some sort that has caused them grit their teeth with all of their strength – almost to the point of breaking their teeth. There is even a medical disorder called bruxism in which people clench and grind their teeth in their sleep, often causing jaw disorders, headaches, and damaged teeth.  
MAYO CLINIC

**However, in this text the grinding or gnashing of the teeth is a conscious response to a circumstance.** Stephen has sawn through the hearts of the council, and in doing so has exposed what was in their hearts. Remember his charge?

⇨ They were stiff-necked.

**Sound preaching produces effects in both the save and the lost – appropriate effects. Paul stated this in an usually strong manner in Second Corinthians 2:15-17. In this text he also confirms the seriousness of seeking to avoid this manner.**

Jerusalem" (Isa 8:14; 1 Pet 2:8).

Now, observe the sharp contradiction that exists between this revealed manner of God and that of the modern church. Today we are faced with vast numbers of professing Christians who have little or no appetite for the things of God. In substance, they differ nothing from the audience to whom Stephen is preaching. And what course of action are the church leaders taking? They actually **reduce** the people's exposure to the Word of God. They **shorten** their church gatherings. They invent all manner of novel activities. They **reduce** the frequency of the gatherings. They engage in activities that do not require a proclamation of the truth of the Gospel. They create other ministries that have to do with problem

**state the reprehensible nature of this kind of approach.** It not only reveals a state of spiritual ignorance, but also one that is at sharp variance with "the mind of the Lord." It confirms the individual is not operating in accordance with the Divine agenda. That is the reason for the variant approach. I will further affirm that it is not possible for the blessing of God to be upon a method or technique that is at variance with his nature.

**However, confirming that he had no part with such an approach, Stephen has spoken as the Spirit has directed him, and not as the carnal mind would have preferred.**

**In Them that are Saved, and In Them that are Perishing**

Sound preaching produces effects in **both** the save and the lost –

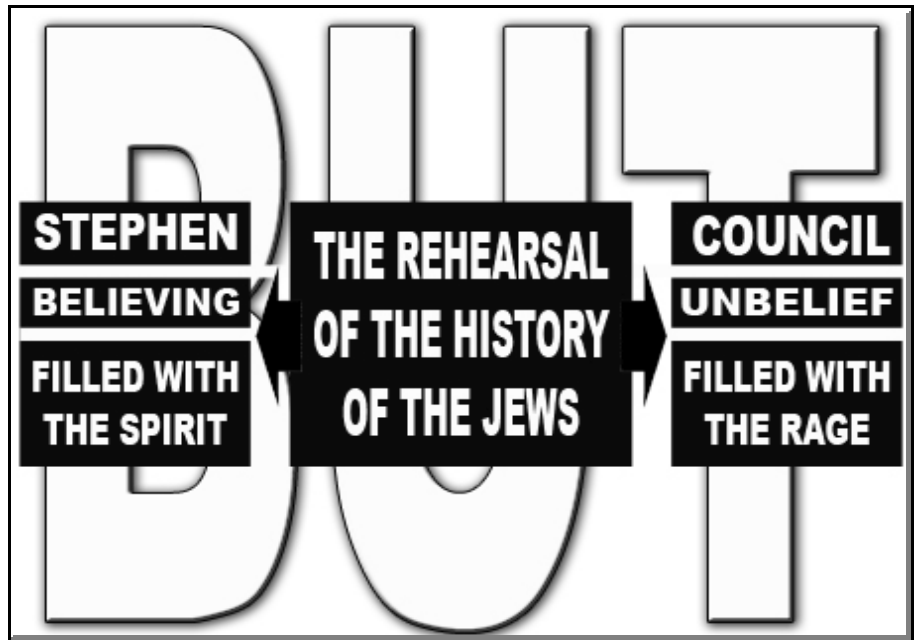
- ⇨ They were uncircumcised in heart and ears.
- ⇨ They always resisted the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers did.
- ⇨ They were the betrayers and murderers of Jesus.

Until this point, Stephen had not said a solitary word about them personally. However, it had become apparent that they were thrusting his words from them – even though they were a precise rehearsal of Jewish history from the Scriptures. Their rejection of this word, and their refusal to associate it with themselves, made it necessary for Stephen to expose their gross hypocrisy.

This exposure was something with which their rationality could not contend. The uncovering has thrown them into a irrational rage. Now, under the total control of the wicked one, there is no extent to which they will not go to rid themselves of this preacher.

At this point, they speak no words. Their minds are no longer capable of either processing or expressing thought. Now the flesh, with all of its dreadful propensities was operating beyond any boundary of moral restraint. There was now little difference between this council and the wild man of Gadera.

Keep in mind that this condition has **not** been brought on by severe pain. It is rather the result of hearing a spiritual assessment of their condition. They could have received this assessment and repented – as those on the day of Pentecost and in Solomon’s porch. However, they resisted the word instead.



While those who preach and teach must take care to *“not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves,”* **there is a boundary to that manner.** Such conduct is in hopes that God will *“give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves from the snare of the devil”* (2 Tim 2:24-25). When, however, it is evident that the people continue to thrust the word from themselves, **there comes a time when they must be exposed for what they really are.** Jesus did this with the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:13-33). Paul and Barnabas did this in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisida (Acts 13:46). Paul also

did this in the synagogue of Corinth when he first went there (Acts 18:6).

Paul also instructed Timothy not to receive an accusation against an elder, except on the basis of two or three witnesses. However, should the charge against an elder be substantiated, he told the young evangelist, *“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear”* (1 Tim 5:20).

The point to be seen here is that the wicked are thoroughly exposed by godly assessment and denunciation. Yet the servant of God must not shun to upbraid those who stubbornly continue in unbelief. We have godly Stephen as an example of this, as well as Jesus Himself and those He commissioned to preach.

## BEING FULL OF THE SPIRIT

<sup>65a</sup> **But he, being full of the Holy Ghost . . .** Other versions read, *“being full of the Holy Spirit,”* <sup>NKJV</sup> *“filled with the Holy Spirit,”* <sup>NRSV</sup> *“full of faith and of the Holy Spirit,”* <sup>MRD</sup> *“full of the Holy Spirit and controlled by Him,”* <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and *“filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit.”* <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

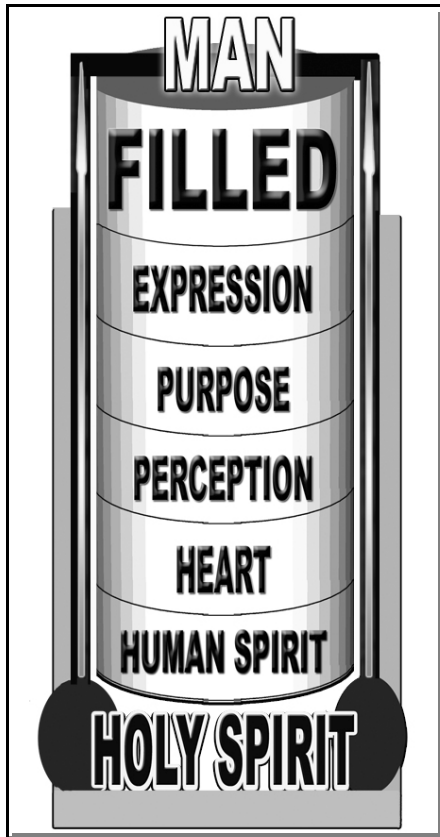
### “BUT”

The word “but” is significant. It comes from the small Greek word *δέ* (deh) which means “but, or moreover, and is used universally, by way of opposition and distinction; it is added to statements opposed to a preceding statement,” <sup>THAYER</sup> “used to emphasize contrast.” <sup>FRIEBERG</sup>

Here Stephen is contrasted with the council – one man with a whole body of men. They are all in the same place at the same time. Their minds have been directed to the same subject – the rehearsal of the inspired history of the Jewish people. Yet, their responses are as different as day from night. Here we have

*Stephen, having uncovered the hardness of heart in the council, now faces the ultimate expression of hatred – by Given O. Blakely*

a child of God and the children of the wicked one in juxtaposition, or opposite of one another. They have two different natures, so we should expect them to react differently to the unvarnished



truth. In this case, the saying of Paul is fulfilled: *“But all things that are reprovved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light”* (Eph 5:13).

The light has illuminated the condition of both parties – Stephen, and the council. Jesus said this would be the effect of light, particularly as shining forth from His own person. *“But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God”* (John 3:21).

### BEING FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The text does not say that **at this time** Stephen was filled with the Spirit, but that this was His condition – *“being full.”* There two words, *“being full,”* are a translation of two individual Greek words (Υπάρχων – being, and πλήρης – full, and πνεύματος – Spirit). The word

translated *“being”* has the following lexical meaning: *“to be there, ready, at hand,”* THAYER *“exist, be present, be at hand,”* FRIBERG *“be at one’s disposal,”* UBS *“to be in a state,”* LOUW-NIDA and *“really exist, be present.”* GINGRICH

Therefore, this text is not saying that as they began to gnash their teeth upon Stephen, he was suddenly filled with the Spirit, or experienced the Spirit coming upon him. This is an example of a **state** into which all believers are called: *“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess: but be filled with the Spirit”* (Eph 5:18). That is, this is not a mere experience, as some allege, but is a condition or state of being.

### Full of the Spirit

And, what does it mean to be *“full of the Spirit”*? **Technically it means to be filled up, with no room for anything else.** It involves being *“controlled by the Spirit,”* and is so translated in the Amplified Bible. In representing a passage in Romans 8:6-8 that concerns being *“spiritual minded,”* the New International version uses the word *“controlled”* twice: *“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace”* (Rom 8:6), and *“Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ”* (Rom 8:8-9).

Men may choose to philosophize about the matter of being *“controlled”* by an influence outside of themselves. However, all such reasoning is nothing more than an exercise in vanity. It is written that there are people who are **taken captive** by Satan *“at his will”* (2 Tim 2:26). Jesus also told His disciples that there would be times that their speaking would actually be directed by the Holy Spirit: *“For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you”* (Matt 10:20).

There is also a condition that has been revealed as the Divine objective for the body of Christ: *“And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God”* (Eph 3:19). This is associated with salvation itself, and not with a particular

office like that of an apostle or prophet. The ultimate objective of the salvation of God is to conform those who are justified to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). That involves the transformation of the body, which is described the *“purchased possession”* (Eph 1:14). However, it is not limited to that *“change,”* which will take place at the appearing of Christ (Phil 3:20-21).

**While we await the time when we will put on immortality, our spirits are being cultured to be compatible with the bodily “house” that is reserved for us in heaven** (2 Cor 5:1-5). This transformation is fundamentally within our basic nature, which, in turn, brings about a change in our conduct. It therefore includes our heart, which is the seat of our affections, and the fountain from which all of our expression flows.

**Our perception is also being refined, as well as our purpose for living, and our capacity for expression.** This all occurs when the individual is *“filled with the Spirit,”* or *“filled with all the fulness of God.”* It is in this condition that one is said to be walking *“in the Spirit”* (Gal 5:16,25). This is the state in which *“the deeds of the body”* are *“mortified”* (Rom 8:13), and the individual has a mind that is *“controlled by the Spirit”*<sup>NIV</sup> (Rom 8:6).

All of this is done without any element of coercion. It is not necessary for the Holy Spirit to subdue men, or throw them down to the ground in order for this to be accomplished. **Salvation makes men malleable in the hand of the Lord, and fillable, if I may coin a word.**

Therefore, when Stephen is said to be *“full of the Spirit,”* a state is being described in which his mind – thoughts, affections, and expressions – are being controlled by the Spirit. This is not *“control”* in the sense of coercive domination. **The Spirit is not acting as a conqueror of the human will, but as the Director and Leader of the one who has chosen to follow Jesus.** Strictly speaking, although it is outside the realm of nature, **being filled with the Spirit is not a miracle.** It is rather the manner of the Kingdom in which one is consciously and cognitively walking in heavenly places. There is a keen awareness of what is going on, a glad participation in it, and

the ability to correlate it with truth.

These days, a lot of what is represented as being “filled with the Spirit” is a kind of subduing of the recalcitrant will and ways of the people. It is something like God putting a halter on the people and making them do what

they would not otherwise consent to do. But this is not at all the manner of the Kingdom. In Christ, as prophesied by the Psalmist, the people are “willing in the day of His power” (Psa 110:3). **They are willing because of preference, not force.** The laws of God has been put into their minds and written upon their hearts

(Heb 10:16), and their fundamental inclination is to the Lord. That is the nature of regeneration. A person who has to be forced like Balaam to do the will of God has not been regenerated – or has departed from the living God through unbelief. That is a sign of unregeneracy.

## HE SAW THE GLORY OF GOD

<sup>45b</sup> . . . **looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.**”

Stephen had been addressing the council and was therefore looking at them. Now, however, having finished the word he was given to say to them, he fixes his gaze upward – he “looked up.” **The posture of looking up was also assumed by the Lord Jesus, confirming His constant awareness of the heavenly realm and the Father’s residence there.** When He blessed the five loaves and two fishes, He “looked up to heaven” (Mk 6:41). When He healed a deaf man with an impediment of speech it is said of him, “and looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened” (Mk 7:34). On the night in which He was betrayed, when He poured out His soul in a powerful intercessory prayer, it is written, “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven” (John 17:1).

And what is the significance of this? It is simply this, **Jesus and those who walk with Him are more conscious of heaven than of earth!** Those who are walking in the light as Jesus is in the light (1 John 1:7) are keenly aware that “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26), and therefore they are not subject to happenstance. They resort to the Lord in their time of trouble – often even in their physical posture. They bring their bodies into subjection, governing them with a mind to the Kingdom of God rather than the circumstances of life.

### HE LOOKED UP STEADFASTLY

“ . . . looked up steadfastly into heaven . . . ” Other versions read, “gazed into heaven,” <sup>NKJV</sup> “gazed intently into

heaven,” <sup>NASB</sup> “looked up to heaven,” <sup>NIV</sup> “having fixed his eyes on heaven,” <sup>DARBY</sup> “looked towards heaven,” <sup>MRD</sup> “looked up intently to heaven,” <sup>NAB</sup> “gazed steadily upward into heaven,” <sup>LIVING</sup> “looked straight into heaven,” <sup>ISV</sup> “he looked right into heaven,” <sup>WILLIAMS</sup> and “looked steadily up into Heaven.” <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

His heart was “fixed,” and his eyes were riveted on the heavenly realm.

such things are removed from the mind, and blessed is the person who prepares for it!

Here Stephen lives out in a visible manner that was happening in his heart. He was “looking unto Jesus,” and doing so at the completion of his race. **He was able to do this because he had run the race in this posture, and therefore for him it was, so to speak, natural to gaze**

**The fact that Stephen looked into heaven accents the expectant nature of faith. He did not look with a questioning stare, but with a confident gaze. He was, in a very practical sense, being “saved by hope.” I can tell you that at this time, Stephen is not thinking about possessions, or houses, or lands. He is not pondering treasures laid up upon the earth, or a career, or his status within the church.**

**The eagle eye of his faith pierced through the the domain of nature, reaching into the unseen realms.** Like Moses, he was seeing Him who is invisible (Heb 11:27). He had a concentrated and extended gaze, focusing on the domain to which he was about to be carried by angelic hosts.

**The fact that Stephen looked into heaven accents the expectant nature of faith.** He did not look with a questioning stare, but with a confident gaze. He was, in a very practical sense, being “saved by hope.” I can tell you that at this time, Stephen is not thinking about possessions, or houses, or lands. He is not pondering treasures laid up upon the earth, or a career, or his status within the church. There comes a time when all

even more intently at this time. This is, after all, one of the great benefits of living by faith. This enables the individual to also die by faith, as he fights the last and greatest battle of life. The gaze that enabled Stephen to overcome in life, will also cause him to conquer in death.

Here Stephen fulfills a wonderful word delivered by Solomon: “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Prov 18:10). Stephen is running into the tower, and will thus find safety during his closing hours. Oh, the stones will still pummel his body, finally crushing the life from it. However, I do not doubt that he was given such grace as made him

superior to pain, if not altogether oblivious of it. There is great power in heavenly distraction from this world.

**HE SAW THE GLORY**

“... and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” Other versions read, “He saw God’s glory, with Jesus standing at the right hand of God,”<sup>CSB</sup> “saw God’s glory, and Jesus in the position of authority that God gives,”<sup>GWN</sup> “saw the glory (the splendor and majesty) of God, and Jesus standing at God’s right hand,”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and “he saw our glorious God and Jesus standing at his right side.”<sup>CEV</sup>

sense of its marvelous scope.

- ⇨ “. . . everyone shall speak of His glory” (Psa 29:9).
- ⇨ “. . . the eyes of His glory” (Isa 3:6).
- ⇨ “. . . the throne of His glory” (Matt 19:28).
- ⇨ “. . . the riches of His glory” (Rom 9:23; Eph 3:16).
- ⇨ “. . . the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:12,14).

something that He Himself makes known, for the characteristics of God’s Person cannot be seen with the naked eye. Thus God’s glory has been made seen in a cloud (Ex 16:10), fire (Ex 24:17), and visions (Ezek 8:4), etc.

However the most precise and thorough manifestation of the glory of God is found in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. This is experienced in regeneration, and the spiritual growth that results from it. As it is written, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of **the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**” (2 Cor 4:6). This glory has transforming power, changing the spirit of man like the visible glory of God changed the skin of Moses face, causing it to glory as the sun (Ex 34:29-30). Therefore it is written, “But we all, with open face **beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed** into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

**From these, and other texts, it is apparent that the glory of God is a central consideration. It therefore behooves us to obtain some intelligent concept of what it is.**

What a marvelous statement! After leaving Egypt, Israel saw “the glory of the Lord” as it appeared in a cloud (Ex 16:10). They also saw “the glory of the Lord . . . like a devouring fire on the top of the mount” (Ex 24:17). When the Temple was dedicated, Israel saw “the glory of God” (2 Chron 7:3). Three different times Ezekiel said he “saw . . . the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God” (Ezek 1:28; 3:23; 9:4). Isaiah saw “the glory” of the Lord (Isa 6:1-3; John 12:41).

**What Is The Glory of God?**

The phrase “the glory of God” occurs fourteen times in Scripture (Psa 19:1; Prov 25:2; John 11:4,40; Acts 7:55; Rom 3:23; 5:2; 15:7; 1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 1:20; 2 Cor 4:6,15; Phil 2:11; Rev 15:8; 21:11,23). Referring to the Lord, “His glory” is mentioned thirty-four times (i.g. Deut 5:24; 1 Chron 16:24; Psa 78:61; Isa 60:2; Hab 3:3; Heb 1:3). There are several intriguing phrases used in connection with the glory of God. They provide a

- ⇨ “. . . the brightness of His glory” (Heb 1:3).
- ⇨ “. . . the presence of His glory” (Jude 1:24).

From these, and other texts, it is apparent that the glory of God is a central consideration. It therefore behooves us to obtain some intelligent concept of what it is.

There is no Scriptural definition of the glory of God – like there is of faith (Heb 11:1), hope (Rom 8:24-25), love (1 Cor 13), and God’s longsuffering (2 Pet 3:15). Most of the references to the glory of God have to do with manifestations or expressions of the Lord – something that could be seen, either by faith or, as at Sinai, a visible appearance of His glory.

These references indicate something of what is meant by the glory of God. **His glory is what can be seen or discerned of Him** – and that is always

The glory of God is what He is pleased to reveal about Himself. At its apex, this glory has to do with salvation, which is nothing less than the execution of the eternal purpose of God. **Therefore, when Stephen saw the glory of God, it is most appropriate that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God – the place reserved for carrying the salvation of God to its completion.**

By its very nature, the glory of God involves His expression of Himself, whether in the confirmation of His presence, words that make His mind known, or works that reveal some aspect of His Person or purpose. **In regard to what Stephen saw, the glory of God consisted of a revelation of what is taking place in heaven regarding the salvation of men.** For Stephen, this will prove to be a confirming sight, and will assist in preparing Him for his departure – kind of departure that requires much grace.

**STEPHEN REPORTS WHAT HE SEES**

“<sup>56</sup> And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”

*Stephen, having uncovered the hardness of heart in the council, now faces the ultimate expression of hatred – by Given O. Blakely*

As anyone who has knowingly been exposed to the glory of God, **Stephen will tell us what he saw.** For those of tender heart, this is standard procedure. Isaiah “*saw the Lord*” in the year that king Uzziah died – and he testified about it (Isa 6:1). Ezekiel “*saw visions of God*,” and he told about it (Ezek 1:1-28; 3:23-24; 8:4-18; 10:15-22). This has been a consistent practice of holy men. When they saw or heard from God, they related the occasion to the people. Moses did this, together with all of the prophets. The pinnacle of this manner is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Savior said that He spoke what He had heard from the Father (John 8:26,40; 15:15). He declared that the works He was showing were “*from*” His Father (John 10:32). In fact, He referred to His works as “*the works of My Father*” (John 10:37). He told His disciples that both His words and His works were directly related to the Father (John 14:10).

This is a Kingdom manner that is sorely needed in our day – speaking that have been “*seen and heard*” (Acts 4:20). **There is far too much second-hand religion in our day.** Many who come in the name of the Lord rarely make known something that they have seen, perceived, or comprehended of the Kingdom of God. This is why there are so many professed experts in family life, raising children, governing finances, starting churches, and other interpersonal human relationships. You will search the Scriptures in vain to find ministries of this sort. They are all of human origin.

### I SEE THE HEAVENS OPENED

“*And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened . . .*” Other versions read, “*I see heaven open*,”<sup>NIV</sup> “*Look, I see the heavens opened*,”<sup>LIVING</sup> “*I can see Heaven wide open*,”<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> and “*Look! he exclaimed, ‘the heavens are opened.’*”<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

Prior to Christ, the only person who ever said he saw the heavens opened was Ezekiel: “*Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God*” (Ezek 1:1). The only other reference to either heaven or the heavens being perceived as being opened pertains

to God sending rain (Gen 7:11; Psa 78:23; Isa 24:18.<sup>NIV</sup> Through Malachi, God told the people if they would bring all of the tithes into the storehouse he would “*open*” the “*windows of heaven*” to them, and pour out a blessing “*that there would not be room enough to receive it*” (Mal 3:10).

Aside from these references, there are no other texts that directly say that heaven, or the heavens, were **seen** as open. Isaiah said he saw “*the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up*” (Isa 6:1). Micaiah the prophet said, “*I saw the Lord sitting on His throne*” (1 Kgs 22:19). Amos said, “*I saw the Lord standing upon the altar*” (Amos 9:1).

**But with the advent of Jesus, we are given to understand that the heavens have been opened in a new and fresh way!** When Jesus was baptized “*the*

Heaven has been “*opened*” because a reconciliation between God and man has been accomplished by Jesus Christ (Col 1:21). He had “*made peace through the blood of His cross*” (Col 1:20), and now men can draw near to God “*with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water*” (Heb 10:22). Now Jesus has consecrated “*a new and living way*,” by which we can come to God (Heb 10:20). Men are no longer held aloof from God, as they were under the Old Covenant. Now, through Jesus, they have “*access*” to God “*with confidence*” (Eph 3:12).

This is why Stephen could see the heavens opened – because a reconciliation had been effected by Christ, and he by faith had appropriated it. Now, as his life was being pounded out

**The heavens being opened is the direct result of Jesus taking away the sins of the world. That is precisely why, when he died, “the veil of the Temple was rent in twain,” signifying that “the way into the holiest” had been opened for the**

*heavens opened*” (Mk 1:10). When He first met Nathanael, Jesus told him, “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man*” (John 1:51). In our text, Stephen said he saw “*the heavens opened*” (Acts 7:56). When Peter was on the rooftop of Simon the tanner’s house, he “*saw heaven opened*” (Acts 10:11). When John received the Revelation on the Isle of Patmos, he “*looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven*” (Rev 4:1). He also “*saw heaven opened*” (Rev 19:11).

**The heavens being opened is the direct result of Jesus taking away the sins of the world.** That is precisely why, when he died, “*the veil of the Temple was rent in twain*” (Matt 27:51), signifying that “*the way into the holiest*” had been opened for the sons of men to come to God (Heb 9:8).

of his body, he is afforded a glimpse of the land toward which he was about to embark.

### THE SON OF MAN STANDING

“*. . . and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*” Other versions read, “*and the Son of man at the right hand of God*,”<sup>BBE</sup> “*the Son of Man in the position of authority that God has given him*,”<sup>GWN</sup> and “*and I can see the Son of Man standing at God’s right hand!*”<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

Every other reference to Jesus’ posture in the heavens say He is seated.

⇨ “*The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool*” (Psa 110:1; Mk 12:35; Heb 1:13).

⇨ “*So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God*” (Mark 16:19).

⇒ “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, **sat** down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3).

⇒ “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, **sat** down on the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12).

Stephen had this vision **before** they cast him out of the city. Having made his pronouncement of the depravity of this council, it is as though Jesus rose to give honor to Stephen, and to tell him it was now time for him to enter into the rest that remains for the people of God (Heb 4:9).

How did Stephen know it was

#### A Word About Preaching Jesus

This is why pure Gospel preaching is so essential – preaching that clarifies the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is done throughout the Epistles, which contain the exposition of the Gospel. **In fact, we would know very little about the nature and content of the Gospel if it was not for the Epistles – what was written to the body of Christ, which is the church.** Ponder some of the aspects of the Gospel that are opened up in what the Spirit says to the churches.

⇒ Christ is the end of the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).

⇒ The Gospel declares that God is just in justifying those who believe in Jesus (Rom 3:26).

⇒ Jesus was delivered for our offences,

⇒ We have been made accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6).

⇒ In Christ Jesus we are made nigh unto God through His blood (Eph 2:13).

⇒ Through Christ’s death believers will be presented holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight (Col 1:21).

⇒ In His death Jesus spoiled principalities and powers (Col 2:15).

⇒ Jesus died that we might live together with Him (1 Thess 5:10).

⇒ Jesus gave Himself to redeem to Himself peculiar people, zealous of good works (Tit 2:14).

⇒ Through His death Jesus destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14).

⇒ Jesus was raised from the dead in order that our faith and hope might be in God (1 Pet 1:21).

⇒ Jesus suffered once for our sins in order that He might bring us to God (1 Pet 3:18).

⇒ Jesus was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

**How did Stephen know it was Jesus, and not an angel, or cherubim, or seraphim? It is because Jesus cannot be seen as He is without instantly knowing Who He is! When He returns in all of His glory, and “every eye” sees Him, there will be no questions about who He is! God only has to “show” Him, as He has determined to do, and He will be at once recognized.**

Jesus, and not an angel, or cherubim, or seraphim? **It is because Jesus cannot be seen as He is without instantly knowing Who He is!** When He returns in all of His glory, and “every eye” sees Him (Rev 1:7), there will be no questions about who He is! God only has to “show” Him, as He has determined to do (1 Tim 6:15), and He will be at once recognized. For the damned, the horror and pain of that moment defies all description. They will at once see how foolish it was to neglect “the Man Christ Jesus,” choosing their own worldly interests over the Lord of glory.

But this is not how Stephen sees the glorified Christ! He does not shrink back in horror at the sight of the standing Jesus, as though he was going to be judged! Instead, this is his time of triumph!

and raised for our justification (Rom 4:25).

⇒ When we were enemies, we were reconciled by the death of God’s Son (Rom 5:9).

⇒ By the obedience of Jesus, many are made righteous (Rom 5:19).

⇒ The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus frees us from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2).

⇒ God delivered Jesus up, and will much more freely give us all things through him (Rom 8:32).

⇒ Jesus gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4).

These are just a few examples of the Gospel found in the Epistles. Those who affirm that the Gospel is only preached to those outside of Christ could not possibly be more wrong. **The vast majority of what we know about Jesus has been addressed exclusively to the church.** No person can afford to be ignorant of this fact.

**When Jesus is seen as He really is, it brings enabling power to the discerning soul.** This is precisely why Stephen was able to conduct himself as he did. He knew the Christ of the Gospel, otherwise he never would have been given to see Him standing at God’s right hand. **In my judgment, much of the modern church has been robbed of this blessed benefit – knowing Christ.** The impact this has had upon Christendom as a whole, is so significant that it cannot even be estimated.

**THEIR VOICE, THEIR EARS, AND THE ACTION**

<sup>57</sup> **Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord**” cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears, and they rushed upon him with one impulse.”<sup>NKJV</sup> “At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him,”<sup>NIV</sup> “But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “But with loud cries, and stopping their ears, they made an attack on him all together,”<sup>BBE</sup> “At this, they began yelling at the top of their voices, so that they wouldn’t have to hear him; and with one accord, they rushed at him,”<sup>CJB</sup> “then they screamed at the top of their voices, stopped their ears, and rushed together against him,”<sup>CSB</sup> “But the council members shouted and refused to listen. Then they rushed at Stephen with one purpose in mind,”<sup>GWN</sup> “All the members of the council shouted out and stopped their ears with their hands; then they made a concerted rush at him,”<sup>NJB</sup> “Then they mobbed him, putting their hands over their ears, and drowning out his voice with their shouts,”<sup>LIVING</sup> “Upon this, with a loud outcry they stopped their ears, rushed upon Stephen in a body,”<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> “But they raised a loud shout, held their ears shut, and together they all rushed at him,”<sup>ISV</sup> “But they raised a great shout and put their hands over their ears and rushed together upon him,”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and “At this they put their fingers in their ears. Yelling with fury, as one man they made a rush at him,”<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

Do you wonder what unbelief can do to the hearts of men? **Wherever the Word of God is not preached with**

discernment, no one will ever know what is in the hearts of men! It is the truth that exposes men for what they really are – whether they have honest and good hearts, or whether they have wicked

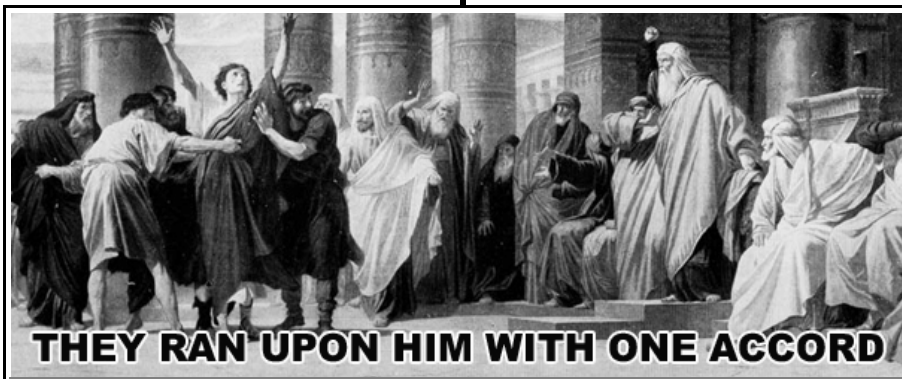
hearts.

Paul was alluding to this when he spoke of the reputation he and his colleagues had gained through their

**HOW MINISTERS WERE APPROVED**

LIVING	DYING
NOT DISTRESSED	TROUBLED AROUND
NOT IN DESPAIR	PERPLEXED
NOT FORSAKEN	PERSECUTED
NOT DESTROYED	CAST DOWN
IN MUCH PATIENCE	IN AFFLICTIONS
IN LABORS	IN NECESSITIES
IN WATCHINGS	IN DISTRESSES
IN FASTINGS	IN STRIPES
BY PURENESS	IN IMPRISONMENTS
BY KNOWLEDGE	IN TUMULTS
NBY LONGSUFFERING	BY DISHONOR
BY KINDNESS	BY EVIL REPORT
BY THE HOLY SPIRIT	AS DECEIVERS
BY LOVE UNFEIGNED	AS UNKNOWN
BY THE WORD OF TRUTH	AS CHASTENED
BY THE POWER OF GOD	AS SORROWFUL
BY THE ARMOR	AS POOR
BY HONOR	AS HAVING NOTHING
BY GOOD REPORT	IN MANY STRIPES
BEING TRUE	IN PRISONS MORE
BEING WELL KNOWN	IN DEATHS OFT
BY LIVING	BEATEN W/STRIPES 5 TIMES
BY NOT BEING KILLED	BEATEN W/ RODS 3 TIMES
AS ALWAYS REJOICING	IN 3 SHIPWRECKS
BY MAKING MANY RICH	24 HOURS IN THE DEEP
BY POSSESSING ALL THINGS	IN MANY PERILS
	IN WEARINESS
	IN PAINFULNESS
	IN WATCHINGS
	IN HUNGER AND THIRST
	IN COLD AND NAKEDNESS

**2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-9; 6:4-10; 11:23-27**



preaching. “But **IN** all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, **in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown,**

Stephen, having uncovered the hardness of heart in the council, now faces the ultimate expression of hatred – by Given O. Blakely

and yet well known; **as dying**, and, behold, we live; **as chastened**, and not killed; **as sorrowful**, yet always rejoicing; **as poor**, yet making many rich; **as having nothing**, and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor 6:4-10).

It is in the crucible of conflict that the real ministers of God are approved. There is where both life and death are made known – particularly when the conflict has been uncovered by the Word of God. The preaching of Stephen has drawn a line between himself and his audience. It has uncovered what they **did not have**, and what he **did have**.

Of course, when men compromise the truth, in the hopes of placating the people, they never really know whether they are dealing with wheat or tares, the children of the Kingdom or the children of the wicked one. When one caters to the whims of people with itching ears, he is always preaching in the dark, never knowing whether he is standing before goats of sheep, a generation of vipers or the generation of the godly.

In this text we have a sterling example of how our “members,” or capacities of expression, can be employed. The exhortation to those who are members of the household of faith is this: *“Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God”* (Rom 6:13).

Stephen yielded his members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

- ⇨ He preached the truth.
- ⇨ He assessed the situation correctly.
- ⇨ He looked steadfastly into heaven.
- ⇨ He told what he had seen.
- ⇨ He prayed for his murderers.

dogs. That is the nature of the flesh. That is one reason for the rigid commandments under the Law against harming ones neighbor, or treating them unjustly. **It was only under the threat of death that such outbursts could in any way be minimized.**

**Of course, when men compromise the truth, in the hopes of placating the people, they never really know whether they are dealing with wheat or tares, the children of the Kingdom or the children of the wicked one. When one caters to the whims of people with itching ears, he is always preaching in the dark, never knowing whether he is standing before goats of sheep, a generation of vipers or the generation of the godly.**

The council yielded their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.

- ⇨ They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears.
- ⇨ They ran upon Stephen.
- ⇨ They dragged him out of the city.
- ⇨ They stoned him.

In an outburst of rage, they screamed out, covering their ears so they could hear no other words from Stephen, and rushed upon him like a pack of mad

However, when ones religion is used to justify their flesh to the fullest extent allowed by civil law, they attack the truth and those who speak it. But make no mistake about this, in order for outbursts like this to take place, the people must be uncircumcised in heart and ears, be stubborn and rebellious, and resist the Holy Spirit. Of course, that is precisely how Stephen described them. His description was marked by the precision of an inspired mind.

## THEY CAST HIM OUT AND STONED HIM

<sup>58a</sup> **And cast him out of the city, and stoned him . . .**” Other versions read, *“And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him,”* <sup>NASB</sup> *“dragged him out of the city and began to stone him,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“Driving him out of the town and stoning him,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“threw him outside the city and began stoning him,”* <sup>CJB</sup> *“and after they had thrown him out of the city, they began to stone him to death,”* <sup>GWN</sup> *“And they seized him, and hurried him out of the city, and stoned him,”* <sup>MED</sup> *“thrust him out of the city and*

*stoned him,”* <sup>NJB</sup> *“and having cast him forth outside of the city, they were stoning him,”* <sup>YLT</sup> and *“and hustled him out of the city and stoned him.”* <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

There was nothing gentle about their treatment of Stephen, and there were no laws in place to protect his “rights.” **Here we are being exposed to raw religious flesh – which is the worst of all flesh.** This very council, and probably many of the very same people, had opposed Jesus throughout His ministry,

seeking ways to rid themselves of His influence (John 5:18; 7:1, 30; 11:6; Matt 21:46; 26:4; Mk 12:12; Lk 19:47; 20:19). They eagerly fulfilled the words of Jesus, *“Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again”* (Mark 10:33-34).

Now, after some time had passed, the hearts of these men have only grown more hard. At first, they were content to attempt a form of civil proceedings, asking Stephen to defend himself against the charges. However, as the mock trial had continued, they could conceal their hatred no longer. Now, it is too large to hide under the veneer of religion.

The picture is of the men dragging Stephen out of the city, and stoning him as they went. They did not even wait for the pronouncement of a

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sentence. At least with Jesus, there was the pronouncement of the final decision: “And they condemned Him to be guilty of death” (Mk14:64). But no such condemnation is pronounced against Stephen. They just proceed to execute him. **When flesh is backed into a corner, it will not repent, but push forward with every ounce of energy it has.** That is the nature of flesh. It cannot learn, reason, or back away from its desires.

To this point, the Jewish leaders have been absolutely consistent in their response to the truth.

⇨ **JOHN THE BAPTIST.** When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, these leaders did not submit to it. It is

written, “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him” (Luke 7:30). Yet, their opposition was somewhat subdued, because they feared the people, whom they knew took John to be a prophet (Mk 11:32).

⇨ **JESUS CHRIST.** When Jesus came, the opposition of these men increased in its intensity. They repeatedly sought to trap Jesus in His words (Matt 16:1; 22:35; Mk 10:2; 12:13;

John 8:3-6). From the first part of His ministry, they sought to kill Him (Matt 21:46; Mk 12:12; Lk 19:47; John 5:18; 7:1,25,30). Finally, they paid to have Him betrayed, hurried Him through a mock trial, and delivered Him to Pilate to be crucified (Matt 27:1-2; Mk 15:1).

⇨ **PETER AND JOHN.** Early on, the Temple authorities opposed Peter and John as they taught in the Temple. They laid hold, of them, examined them, and told them not to preach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:1-3,17-18,21). Later they arrested them again, and put them in prison (Acts 5:17-18). After the angel of the Lord had released them, they found the apostles in the Temple

preaching, and arrested them again. This time they had them beaten before they released them, again commanding them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, even though they had intended to kill them (Acts 5:26-28,33,40).

⇨ **STEPHEN.** Now they have confronted Stephen, and their animosity has increased even more. They do not have Stephen beaten, but drag him out of the city, stoning him as they went. This time they will carry out their evil intent. They will not ask the Roman government to do their work, as they did with Jesus, but will do it themselves. After all, it was not a high day at this time as it was when Jesus was delivered up. They were therefore free from the restraints of the formalities of their religion.

#### SOMETHING TO BE NOTED

It ought to be noted that when the church allows *the flesh* to enter the assembly, it has embarked on a course they will not be able to control. **The only way to overcome the flesh is to mortify or crucify it.** God has passed the death sentence upon “*the flesh*,” and those who wear His name must do so also. The reason for this is owing to at least two things. First, the flesh cannot be tamed, and therefore increases in its wretched manners. Second, God cannot bear the flesh, having permanently excluded it from His Kingdom. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the church to keep “*the flesh*,” the “*carnal mind*,” and “*the natural man*” out of its assemblies. There is to be a zero tolerance for all fleshly expressions and exhibitions, for the carnal mind is enmity against God.

## A YOUNG MAN NAMED SAUL

<sup>58b</sup> . . . and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.”

We will behold here how the flesh can be meticulous in its ways, careful to fulfill some requirements, while it

presses into forbidden areas with zeal. You may recall, they did not want to kill Jesus on “*the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people*” (Matt 26:5). That is another one of the unreasonable manners of *the flesh*.

#### THE WITNESSES LAID DOWN THEIR CLOTHES

“ . . . and the witnesses laid down their clothes . . . ” Other versions read, “*the witnesses laid their robes*,”<sup>NASB</sup> “*laid their coats*,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “*laid down their garments*,”<sup>RSV</sup> “*laid down their cloaks*,”

*Stephen, having uncovered the hardness of heart in the council, now faces the ultimate expression of hatred – by Given O. Blakely*

NAB *“laid aside their robes,”* NAS *“His accusers took off their coats and laid them,”* NJB *“The official witnesses – the executioners – took off their coats and laid them,”* LIVING *“The men, who told lies against Stephen, gave their robes,”* IE *“the witnesses throwing off their outer garments and giving them,”* WEYMOUTH *“Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet,”* ISV *“in the meantime, laid their clothes at the feet,”* WILLIAMS *“placed their garments at the feet,”* AMPLIFIED and *“The witnesses of the execution flung their clothes at the feet.”* PHILLIPS

The Law had addressed certain sins worthy of capital punishment, and had outlined how the sentence was to be carried out. Here is what it said.

*about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage”* (Deut 13:6-10).

*put the evil away from among you”* (Deut 17:2-7).

There are other capital offenses, but these represent the nature of them all. They involved either spiritual or moral corruption. **I have mentioned them to point out that no such charges were even leveled against Stephen.** The official charges were as follows: *“And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us”* (Acts 6:13-14). There was no charge of idolatry, being a false prophet, and indulging in immorality or curious arts!

**Yet these people have grown worse, not better. As children of the Kingdom, we make it our aim to get more of the Word into our society, and to proclaim the Gospel with insight and power. But we are not juvenile in our view of this. This could make things worse, not better.**

The Law required that a careful examination of charges against the person take place. The judges were to hear the charges, examine them carefully, and determined if they were true (Deut 17:9). None of this had been done in the case of Stephen. We ought to learn from this not to be surprised if those who walk in the flesh are not just in their assessments, or are unreasonable in their opposition. **The children of God cannot afford to be naive about the nature of the flesh – especially religious flesh.**

The witnesses to which our text refers were those men who raised a false report against Stephen. They took off their outer garments, because stoning was a vigorous activity, and would not allow them to do so while wearing their coats. So they removed them.

You may remember the time when the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus who had been taken in the very act of adultery. Being sticklers for the letter if the law, and thinking that Jesus was not, they reminded the Lord concerning the requirements of the Law, then asked Him what He had to say about the matter. Jesus stooped down, *“and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not”* (John 8:6). When they continued asking Him what He had to say about the matter Jesus *“lifted up Himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her”* (John 8:7). He

⇒ **SOMEONE GIVING THEIR CHILDREN TO MOLECH.** *“Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones”* (Lev 20:2).

⇒ **A PERSON WITH A FAMILIAR SPIRIT, OR A WIZARD.** *“A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them”* (Lev 20:27).

⇒ **SOMEONE SAYING THEY SHOULD WORSHIP OTHER GODS.** *“If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers: Namely, of the gods of the people which are round*

⇒ **A PERSON FOUND SERVING AND WORSHIPPING OTHER GODS.** *“If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the LORD thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant, and hath gone and served other gods, and worshiped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded: And it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and inquired diligently, and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel: Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die. At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death: but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt*

did not say for the witnesses to cast the first stone, but for the one who was without sin. All of them were apparently witnesses, for they said the woman had been taken in the very act of adultery. After saying these words, Jesus stooped down and continued writing on the ground. Perhaps He was writing a list of names. At any rate, the men who had brought the woman to Jesus “being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst” (John 8:9).

But this is not what happens here. The witnesses are more bold – even though they were false witnesses. They did not find Stephen in any unlawful activity. Yet, they were bold and brash, and conducted themselves just as though the false charges were the truth. This is how sin can harden people, so that men actually become worse than their predecessors.

**SOMETHING TO BE NOTED**

There is something to be noted here. Some are of the opinion that if we could get prayer back in the schools, and better preaching in the churches, a recovery of the moral degradation of our country could be realized. That this is possible cannot be denied. That it is something the godly desire is certainly the truth. Yet, we cannot be overly simplistic in this matter. The people in our text lived in the time when John the Baptist prepared the people for the Messiah with powerful preaching. They

had been exposed to the greatest Preacher of all, who had gone about their country doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil. They had often heard the powerful preaching of the Apostles, and witnessed their confirming miracles. Now they had heard the effective preaching of Stephen, who was himself a worker of signs and wonders.

**Yet these people have grown worse, not better.** As children of the Kingdom, we make it our aim to get more of the Word into our society, and to proclaim the Gospel with insight and power. But we are not juvenile in our view of this. **This could make things worse, not better.** Yet, just as surely as Stephen proceeded speaking insightfully, so must we. Our aim in all of this is to be men in understanding, and not children (1 Cor 14:20).

**THE YOUNG MAN SAUL**

“... at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.” Other versions read, “a certain young man who was called Saul.”<sup>MRD</sup> “A young man called Saul.”<sup>YLT</sup> “a young man named Paul.”<sup>LIVING</sup> “giving them into the care of a young man called Saul.”<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> and “a young man by the name of Saul.”<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

In a public display, the false witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man whose name was Saul.

⇒ **A YOUNG MAN.** It is not certain what age is reflected in this term, Lexically, some say this is a “youth; (1)

used of a man in the prime of life, between twenty-four and forty years” old.<sup>FRIBERG</sup> Others say “a young man beyond the age of puberty, but normally before marriage-‘young man’”<sup>LOUW-NIDA</sup> We do not know of the age of this young man, only that he was not a man of any significant age.

⇒ **SAUL.** The name of the young man is given, and from this point on, he will be a prominent figure in the book of Acts. It might appear that being a young man, Saul had been exposed to the preaching of Jesus. We know, however that this was not the case, for Paul categorically says he was “born out of due time” (1 Cor 15:8). He does not say he was born in the wrong place, but out of the time span in which the other apostles were born.

**PAUL RECALLED THIS INCIDENT**

Later, during his ministry, when he was in Jerusalem, Paul recalled this incident. During his defense before Jewish accusers, Paul recalled what he had said to the Lord Jesus Himself. When Christ commanded Paul, “get thee quickly out of Jerusalem.” he replied “And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him” (Acts 22:20). This will prove to be a defining moment for Paul. **He will never be able to forget what he saw and heard on this memorable day, when he kept the coats of those who lied against Stephen.**

**STEPHEN WAS CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD**

“<sup>59</sup> **And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**”

Admittedly, this is one of the awful accounts of history, when **the details** of the murder of a man of God are recorded. There are not many detailed accounts of such deaths, but there are enough to establish the absolute hostility that exists between the flesh and the Spirit, unbelief and faith, and the children of God and the children of the

wicked one. The detailed accounts of such murders are as follows.

- ⇒ Cain killed Abel (Gen 4:3-6).
- ⇒ Zechariah (2 Chron 24:21-22).
- ⇒ John the Baptist (Mk 6:18-28).
- ⇒ Stephen (Acts 7:58-60).
- ⇒ Jesus Christ. The death spoken of the most in Scripture, and

concerning which more details are provided, is that of the Lord Jesus Christ (Psa 22:1-18; 34:20; 69:21,25; 109:25; Isa 52:14; 53:7-12; Zech 13:6-7; Matt 27:1-53; Mk 15:1-38; Lk 22:64-23:46; John 18:28-19:37).

In these accounts the variance between man and God is brought out. With the single exception of Abel, all of them were carried out by a covenanted people – chosen and cultured by God. The death that was most driven by Divine

purpose was that of Jesus, and it is the death which has accomplished the most. Furthermore, if it were not for the Person of Christ and His work, the other deaths would not have occurred.

It is good to maintain a profitable recollection of the details of these deaths – particularly that of our blessed Lord. It will serve to destroy any delusion that would lead us to imagine that the world is our friend, or that we can be friends of it without becoming the enemy of God (James 4:4).

### THEY STONED STEPHEN

*“And they stoned Stephen . . .”* Other versions read, *“they went on stoning Stephen,”* <sup>NASB</sup> *“While they were stoning Stephen,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“as they were stoning Stephen,”* <sup>RSV</sup> *“while he was being stoned,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“While council members were executing Stephen,”* <sup>GWN</sup> *“They continued to stone Stephen,”* <sup>NET</sup> and *“And as the murderous stones came hurtling at him.”* <sup>LIVING</sup>

In the stoning of Stephen they followed Scriptural procedures, but for the wrong reason. The people corrupted religion even further in what they had already done to justify their deeds. Sin, having slain the human race, has introduced this dreadful propensity to sin in the name of the Lord, attempting to justify what is done by asserting that the righteous have actually broken some law of God in fulfilling their ministry.

Here, by stoning Stephen, the people have put him in the class of the following people.

- ⇨ One who has called for the people to worship false gods (Deut 13:6-10).
- ⇨ One who has *“gone and served other gods”* (Deut 17:2-5).
- ⇨ An adulteress (Deut 22:13-21).
- ⇨ Achan, who coveted the forbidden things, and brought a curse upon Israel (Josh 7:19-26).

Thus we again see that corrupt human nature will go to any extent possible to justify one’s own refusal to hear the Word of the Lord.

Stoning is not something that can

take place accidentally. It requires the wholehearted involvement of those who do it. They must exert both their will and the body, and do so over an extended period of time. It is a work that men must be intent upon doing if they are to carry it to its intended conclusion. Oh, that men would be as intent upon

sense of the text, but are not in the text itself. Here, the One to whom the call is directed is associated with **the content** of Stephen’s petition. Strictly speaking, rather than the sentence emphasizing the act of calling, the stress is placed on what was said in it. Some of the literal translations provide this perspective:



knowing Christ and obtaining heaven as these men were upon Stephen dying!

### CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD

*“ . . . calling upon God . . .”* Other versions read, *“as he was calling upon God,”* <sup>NKJV</sup> *“as he called upon the Lord,”* <sup>NASB</sup> *“Stephen prayed,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“made prayer to God,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“as he called out,”* <sup>CSB</sup> *“invoking,”* <sup>DOUAY</sup> *“said in invocation,”* <sup>NJB</sup> *“he kept praying,”* <sup>ISV</sup> and *“as he continued praying.”* <sup>WILLIAMS</sup>

*“calling and saying,”* <sup>YLT</sup> and *“invoking and saying.”* <sup>LITV</sup> This does not change the meaning of the text, but moves us away from a mere consideration of grammar.

Having seen the heavens opened, the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, Stephen calls upon the name of the Lord – framing a petition as his life was being pounded out of his body. **What a marvelous dispensation of grace must have been dispensed to him at this time to enable such a thing.**

**However, true spiritual life requires that the individual be ready to sincerely and zealously say these words. If people – any people – find themselves reluctant and unable to speak in this manner, they are in a condition that requires immediate attention**

Some versions say Stephen called *“upon God”* (KJV, NKJV). Others say that he called *“upon the Lord”* (ASV, NASB). If you have a Bible that uses italicized print to indicate words that are not in the original Greek text, you will note that *“God”* or *“Lord”* are italicized. They have been supplied to give the

Under ordinary circumstances, an experience like stoning would prove too painfully distracting to allow for sound thought and precise expression. Yet, at this very time, Stephen’s rational powers elevate to a peak, and he calls upon God.

What does it mean to call *“upon*

God"? The very expression is intriguing to me. The words "calling upon" are translated from a single Greek word ἐπικαλούμενον (ep-ee-kal-eh-ou-en-on). As used here, the lexical meaning of the word is "to invoke, to call upon for oneself, in one's behalf anyone as a helper . . . to appeal to one, make an appeal unto," THAYER "appeal, call or summon as a witness." FRIBERG Still, these academic definitions do not satisfy my own heart as to what was involved here. Stephen is not calling for help. He is not supplicating for deliverance. He appears to be reconciled to his death, realizing that his work has now been concluded. He does not call out for retribution, or for judgment to be executed against his offenders. Nor, indeed, is he simplistic or naive in his assessment of the situation. For him, calling "unto God" evidences his trust and his discernment, his reliance and his readiness.

Here is an example of someone keeping under their body in the most dire

God that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:38-39). **It is one thing to know this intellectually, it is another thing to be persuaded of it.** In Stephen we are beholding someone who has been "persuaded" of this reality.

The power of God is not devoted to the purely personal interests of the servants of God. Even the "signs of an Apostle" are not intended to keep Paul from being beaten, shipwrecked, in countless perils, and even stoned. **Men should not be surprised if all of their earthly problems are not resolved by their godliness and commitment to Christ.** They should not expect God to provide a smooth road for them in order that they might be more comfortable. Should this occur, and an angel supply a miraculous meal for weary Elijah (1 Kgs 19:5-8), that is good. But should the path to glory lead through the furnace and the flood, that is also good. There is more at stake in our spiritual lives than our

"Lord Jesus, take my spirit," BBE "Lord Jesus, welcome my spirit," GWN "Lord Jesus, receive and accept and welcome my spirit!," AMPLIFIED "Jesus, Lord, receive my spirit!" PHILLIPS and "Lord Jesus, please welcome me!" CEV

**Notice that Stephen calls upon the Lord Jesus Himself. This was not an ordinary approach to the Lord.** In fact, this is the only occasion in the Bible where a prayer was addressed to Jesus Himself. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus told His disciples, "And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you" (John 16:23). He also taught His disciples to address their prayers to the "Father" (Matt 6:9). That this is the ordinary posture of prayer cannot be denied. When Paul petitioned for the church to be strengthened with might, he said, "I bow my knees to the Father" (Eph 3:14). That is the ordinary manner.

Yet, this is not intended to be a lifeless and legalistic approach. All conditions are not normal. **The situation before us is also made most unique by the fact that Stephen was seeing Jesus standing at the right hand of God.** He therefore addresses his petition to Him, for it was apparent that Jesus was taking special notice of him in this difficult hour.

And what is Stephen's petition to Jesus? He had the spirit of Jesus who, as He approached His final hour, said, "and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour" (John 12:27). **Eventually, there will come a time when temporal deliverance must not be sought, and blessed is the person who knows when it arrives.** There is that appointment when the person must say, "I am now ready to be offered, and **the time of my departure is at hand**" (2 Tim 4:6). We have good reason to believe that when we live by faith, the Lord will alert us to the imminence of death. Peter said of his appointment, "knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me" NASB (2 Pet 1:14). While there is a certain element of uncertainty associated with death, that appointment is not altogether uncertain. **A focused awareness of that hour is really not**

**Although Stephen was a great miracle worker, he does not seek to advantage himself by means of a supernatural work. He does not strike down his enemies, as did Elijah (2 Kgs 1:10-12). He does not call for plagues upon the people, as did Moses (Ex 9:14). Stephen knows in his spirit that death belongs to him (1 Cor 3:21-22), and that it cannot separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus**

outward circumstance. **He has the rule over his own soul, and has quieted it so he can consider the Lord and frame an intelligent petition to Him.** From the human point of view, this is a most remarkable achievement.

Although Stephen was a great miracle worker, he does not seek to advantage himself by means of a supernatural work. He does not strike down his enemies, as did Elijah (2 Kgs 1:10-12). He does not call for plagues upon the people, as did Moses (Ex 9:14). Stephen knows in his spirit that death belongs to him (1 Cor 3:21-22), and that it cannot separate him from the love of

earthly life and advantage. **A religion of ease and convenience is lethal.** It pushes a person further and further from the Lord, until they at last topple over the precipice of eternal ruin. Woe to that person who actually dares to promote such an approach to life in Christ Jesus.

And what ought men and women of God be able to do when they contend with experiences that are "footmen," when Stephen so conducted himself when contending with "horsemen" (Jer 12:5)?

#### RECEIVE MY SPIRIT

". . . and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Other versions read,

necessary until it arrives. If you will live by faith and walk in the Spirit, you will be able to address death in a state of readiness and confidence – without fear.

### Receive My Spirit

Stephen does not ask for Jesus to receive his body, for he knows that will not take place until the resurrection. He also is aware that his spirit and body will be separated at death – which contradicts the soul-sleeping heresy. Neither, indeed, does he speak as one who is going to be unconscious when he departs from the body, for what possible purpose would be achieved by Jesus receiving an inactive and unconscious spirit?

Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit, speaks almost identically as did Jesus when He died. Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Father, into thy hands I commend **My spirit**” (Luke 23:46). Christ’s words differed in that no man was taking His life from Him. He was laying down His life of His own self, for

He had the power to do so (John 10:17-18). Stephen’s life **was** being taken from him, and he did **not** have the power to dismiss his own spirit. Therefore, He asked Jesus to receive it. In this, Stephen would fulfill a statement that would later be made by the young man who was caring for the garments of the false witnesses who were stoning him: “*We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:8). Stephen was also “*confident*” and “*willing*,” and therefore framed this petition.

**It ought to be noted that Stephen had committed himself to the Lord in his life, and that is why he could make this request in his death.** He had taken advantage of the fellowship of Jesus, into which he had been called (1 Cor 1:9). He had walked in the light as Jesus is in the light (1 John 1:7), and could therefore look forward to joining Him in the ultimate light.

It really is not possible to look forward to being forever with the Lord if one is not walking with Him in this world. In my judgment, there is a level of awareness of this that is reflected in the posture of much of the religion of our time. The removal of many of the hymns concerning heaven appear to justify this view. The accent upon life in this world also confirms this to be the case. **A spirit of at-home-ness in this present evil world will not allow a person to even say the words, “Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit.”**

However, true spiritual life requires that the individual be ready to sincerely and zealously say these words. If people – any people – find themselves reluctant and unable to speak in this manner, they are in a condition that requires immediate attention. **The person who is not ready to die, is not ready to live, and is actually in an unacceptable state.** Nothing must be allowed to upstage a proper preparation for departure from the world!

## STEPHEN'S LAST SUPPLICATION

<sup>60a</sup> **And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.**

The fact that Stephen “*kneeled down*” suggests that he had remained on his feet as the stones were hurled at him, and began taking his life from him. The sight of Jesus standing at the right hand of God had strengthened him to stand up during his final trial. I do not question that angels had been dispatched to fortify this man of God, as they had strengthened his Lord before him (Lk 22:43). Those blessed ministering spirits who have been sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation will surely not abandon them in their final hour. So now, in a display of remarkable composure and deliberateness, Stephen bows the knee to the Father, kneeling down, accepting his appointed hour of departure.

### CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE

“*And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice. . .*” Other versions read, “*falling on his knees, he cried out*

*with a loud voice.*”<sup>NASB</sup> “*he fell on his knees and cried out.*”<sup>NIV</sup> “*he knelt down and shouted.*”<sup>GWN</sup> “*he knelt down and said aloud.*”<sup>NJB</sup> “*he fell to his knees shouting.*”<sup>NLT</sup> “*Then, rising on his knees, he cried aloud.*”<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> “*And falling on his knees, he cried out loudly.*”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> and “*Then, on his knees, he cried in ringing tones.*”<sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

As his life was ebbing from his body, Stephen musters the vestiges of his strength and focuses them on a single petition. He does not whisper it, but shouts it out so all could hear. He cries out in faith and hope. This is also the manner in which Jesus spoke when He died, crying out “*with a loud voice*” – so much so that even a centurion heard Him (Matt 27:50; Mk 15:37,39).

### LORD, LAY NOT THIS SIN TO THEIR CHARGE

“*Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*” Other versions read, “*Lord, do not charge them with this sin.*”<sup>NKJV</sup> “*Lord, do not hold this sin against them.*”

<sup>NASB</sup> “*Lord, do not make them responsible for this sin.*”<sup>BBE</sup> “*O Lord, establish not this sin against them.*”<sup>MRD</sup> “*Lord, don't blame them for this sin!*”<sup>IE</sup> “*Lord, do not reckon this sin against them.*”<sup>WEYMOUTH</sup> “*Lord, do not charge this sin on the book against them!*”<sup>WILLIAMS</sup> “*Lord, fix not this sin upon them [lay it not to their charge!]*”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> “*Lord, forgive them for this sin.*”<sup>PHILLIPS</sup> “*Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!*”<sup>GNB</sup> and “*Lord, do not make stand this sin to them.*”<sup>LITV</sup>

Again, having the Spirit of Jesus, Stephen’s final words were much like those of Jesus when He died. The Savior prayed, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (Luke 23:34). Jesus’ prayer was answered fifty days later when three thousand souls received the remission of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Yet, Stephen’s words are not identical to those of Jesus. I do not believe that “*lay not this sin to their charge*” is synonymous with “*forgive*

them.” **The idea here is that of holding sin against the people, or shutting the door to recovery.** The prophets referred to condition this as sin being marked against the people. *“For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is **marked before Me, saith the Lord GOD**”* (Jer 2:22). And again, *“The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron”* (Jer 17:1). Because of this condition, God instructed Jeremiah, *“Therefore **pray not** thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me: for I will not hear thee”* (Jer 7:16). Again He said to the prophet, *“Therefore **pray not** thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble”* (Jer 11:14). And again He said, *“Then said the LORD unto Me, **Pray not** for this people for their good”* (Jer 14:11).

**There is a condition in which God turns the people over to their own wickedness, removing all restraints and rendering them hopeless** (2 Chron 30:7; Psa 81:12; Acts 7:42; Rom 1:24,25,28). There is a sin from which people cannot recover – like that committed by the Israelites who refused to possess the promised land. God consigned them to die in the wilderness, and there was no door opened for that sentence to be reversed. In fact it is written, *“So I swear in my wrath, **They shall not enter into My rest**”* (Heb 3:11) – and they did not!

Knowing this aspect of the Divine nature, David prayed, *“If thou, LORD, shouldst **mark** iniquities, O Lord, who*

*shall stand?”* (Psa 130:3).

This was not an emotional plea for God to forget about what was happening, and to overlook the fact that the council was stoning Stephen to death. Even on the other side, after that have finished their lives on earth, martyrs do not think in this manner. John saw a group of them *“under the altar,”* and in their purified state they asked the Lord, *“How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”* (Rev 6:10). They were not rebuked, but were given white robes and told to wait for a season, until further blood would be shed (Rev 6:10-11). **The modern church is being submitted to a lot of inaccurate and corrupt teaching on this subject.** The forgiveness of offending parties is actually being approached from a psychological point view rather than a spiritual one.

Stephen **did** have a regard for the salvation of these people. He knew that Jesus had died for them, and that He had been sent to bless them in turning them away from their iniquities (Acts 3:26). **What he was asking is that the Lord not consign them to a state of reprobacy, or swear in His wrath that they would be shut out of eternal rest.** He was praying that they would be kept from *“the great transgression”* (Psa 19:13), which ushers men in a condition that cannot be remedied. **He was pleading that this sin would not be the last one written in the record books, and that the door of**

salvation would be left open.

Jesus declared that there was a sin that *“hath **never** forgiveness”* (Mk 3:29). A person can commit a sin that *“shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come”* (Matt 12:32). Stephen is praying that this dreadful deed – one in which the people were resisting the Holy Spirit – would not be so considered.

While this may introduce some questions in the minds of some, all do well to take them to heart. **There is an aspect to the Divine nature that is being concealed in our time by frothy preaching and teaching that has no substance.** There is too much of the carnal mind in it, and it is far removed from reality. It disarms the soul, moving it into a state that will not hold up the individual in the hour of need. **The mouths of those who deliver such a message must be stopped,**



**and the imaginations fostered by their words must be thrown down.** This is not a day for Christians to be simplistic in their views of God, sin, and salvation. After all, eternal life is knowing God!

## HE FELL ASLEEP

<sup>60b</sup> **And when he had said this, he fell asleep.** Other versions read, *“he died,”* <sup>NRSV</sup> *“he went to his rest,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“and he fell asleep in the Lord,”* <sup>DOUAY</sup> *“he slept,”* <sup>GENEVA</sup> *“he fell asleep in death,”* <sup>WILLIAMS</sup> and *“he fell into the sleep of death.”* <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

**This confirms that the words of Stephen were said at the very threshold of his departure, thus**

**emphasizing his strong and confident faith.** The same faith that sustains men in life, will also sustain them in death, and all of the circumstances that surround it.

Death is frequently associated with *“sleep.”*

⇒ When God told Moses he was going to die, He said, *“Behold,*

*thou shalt **sleep** with thy fathers”* (Deut 31:16).

⇒ Job spoke of death as **sleeping** *“in the dust”* (Job 7:21). He said that in the resurrection men would be *“raised out of their sleep”* (Job 14:12).

⇒ Daniel also was told of a time when *“many of them that **sleep**”*

*Stephen, having uncovered the hardness of heart in the council, now faces the ultimate expression of hatred – by Given O. Blakely*

*in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”* (Dan 12:2).

- ⇒ When Lazarus died, and after waiting for two days, Jesus said to His disciples, *“Our friend Lazarus **sleepeth**; but I go, that I may awake him out of **sleep**”* (John 11:11).
- ⇒ The record of David’s death states that he *“**slept** with his fathers”* (1 Kgs 2:10). Paul also said that when David died he *“fell **asleep**”* (Acts 13:35).
- ⇒ Speaking concerning being clothed with immortality, Paul said, *“We shall not all **sleep**, but*

They have the same view of death that Solomon had – before life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel (2 Tim 1:10). Solomon said, *“the dead know not anything”* (Eccl 9:5). However, that was not the ultimate word concerning the dead. We know, for example, that Moses came back to earth and appeared with Jesus in glory – after he had died (Lk 9:31). Jesus delivered the account three men **after** they had died. Two of them, Abraham and a rich man, spoke to one another in an extended dialog. Abraham spoke of things of which he knew nothing when he lived on the earth. The rich man was capable of feeling and reasoning. Lazarus was being comforted, and was not located in the grave, but in Abraham’s bosom. Those who embrace the soul-sleeping

condition. Of course, if the dead are not conscious, there could not be any teaching based upon the supposition that they were conscious.

**The employment of “sleep” in relation to death accents the fact that death is temporary – like sleep.** It also views death from the standpoint of the resurrection of the dead, not of the present condition of the personality who has left this world. When Jesus comes again, He will not only raise the dead. God Himself will also *“bring with Him”* those who *“sleep in Jesus”* (1 Thess 4:14). The angels will not only gather together the saints on earth, but will also gather them *“from one end of heaven to the other”* (Matt 24:31). Mark says they will gather the elect *“from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven”* (Mark 13:27). This captures the idea of the seen and unseen parts of men being joined together as the essential part of man will be *“clothed upon with our house from heaven”* – the resurrection body (2 Cor 5:2-4).

Thus, when Stephen fell sleep, he did so because Jesus had received his spirit, leaving the body lifeless. He died in hope of the resurrection, however, his purchased possession, like ours, will be redeemed – ransomed from *“the power of the grave”* (Hos 13:14).

Thus ends the life of Stephen, the first person martyred for Jesus. He was not a martyr for the church but was Jesus’ martyr (Acts 22:20), dying for the sake of his Lord and Savior, who had given His life for the sake of Stephen. He is surely a noble example for us all!

**Thus, when Stephen fell sleep, he did so because Jesus had received his spirit, leaving the body lifeless. He died in hope of the resurrection, however, his purchased possession, like ours, will be redeemed – ransomed from “the power of the grave”**

*we shall all be changed”* (1 Cor 15:51).

- ⇒ Believers that had passed from this life are referred to as them *“which **sleep** in Jesus”* (1 Thess 4:15).

Some take the position that the totality of the man sleeps in death – the seen and unseen parts, the inward and the outward man.

heresy say that this was only a parable, and not a factual account. There is no evidence for this view. It is only an attempt to stuff the word of God into the bag of human reason. Further, even if we pretend as though there is possibility that this is true, the explanation provides no haven for them, for a parable is a likeness to a very real condition. In it, a point is made by comparing a known condition with an unknown

## CONCLUSION

The account of Stephen provides some essential insight into the nature of life in Christ Jesus. Stephen is first introduced in Acts 6:5, where he was chosen as one of those appointed over the daily distribution of food. From that

introduction, Stephen is the focus of Scripture through Acts 8:1 – seventy-two verses, or just under 1,800 words. Of those verses fifty-three of them are Stephen’s message, and four of them inform us of what he said while he was

being stoned. The passage covering Stephen contain two verses that say something about Stephen himself. He was a man full of faith, the Holy Spirit, and power (Acts 6:5,8). At one time, his face was seen *“as it had been the face of*

an angel" (Acts 6:15). We know several things that he did. He did great wonders and miracles among the people (Acts 6:8). He disputed with certain Jews in the synagogue of the Libertines (Acts 6:9). He delivered an insightful summation of Jewish history before the Jewish council (Acts 7:2-50). He sharply rebuked the hardhearted people to whom he spoke (Acts 7:51-54). He saw the heavens opened, the glory of God, and Jesus standing at His right hand (Acts 7:55-56). As he was being stoned, He called upon Jesus to receive his spirit (Acts 7:59). He asked the Lord not to lay the sin of his murders against them (Acts 7:60). He was also stoned to death by his own countrymen (Acts 7:58-60).

While that may not appear to be very much, it is actually more than I

personally know about a great many well known preachers and teachers. Also, everything we know about him pertains to his life in Christ Jesus. We do not know who his parents were, where he was raised, or if he had a former occupation. We do not know if he was married, or how old he was. We do not know of any education he may have received. We do not know where he lived, or how long he and been in Jerusalem. We know nothing of when he was converted, where he first heard the Gospel, or who it was that brought it to him. And keep in mind, that all of the information we do know about him came from the One who knew everything about him.

As impressive as this record of Stephen is, it would not be impressive if he was seeking entrance into a local Bible

College. It would not qualify him to enter a contemporary seminary. He would forthrightly be rejected for any political office. Yet, he is written up by the Spirit as a special person in heaven's eyes. How does Stephen compare to modern preacher and teachers? How does he look next to the average church deacon? – because that is how he got his start. How does his manner of summarizing inspired history compare with a Bible College history course? What about the way he handled stubborn people? Or the manner in which he prayed as he was dying?

Oh, there is much profit, indeed, in perusing the record of Stephen, his preaching and his death. He was a man with a strong faith, and the impact of faith upon a person is seen in him!

**Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 8/17/2007. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Thirty-fifth lesson will cover verses 1 through 4 of the eighth chapter: "PERSECUTION AND SCATTERING." After Stephen is stoned, the enemies of the faith gain more confidence, and their aggression against the disciples waxes stronger. For the first time, those who have embraced the preaching of Christ are vigorously opposed. A persecution is unleashed that forces believers to leave the area in which the church was inaugurated. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.**

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**A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.**

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WORD OF TRUTH FELLOWSHIP Website: <http://wotruth.com/wotf/wotindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Hebrews: <http://wotruth.com/hebindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Revelation: <http://wotruth.com/revelationindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on First John: <http://wotruth.com/1stjohnindex.htm>

COMMENTARY on Romans: <http://wotruth.com/Romans.htm>

COMMENTARY on Daniel: <http://wotruth.com/Daniel.htm>

COMMENTARY on Colossians: <http://wotruth.com/Colossians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Second Corinthians: <http://wotruth.com/2Corinthians.htm>

COMMENTARY on Acts: <http://wotruth.com/Acts.htm>

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## *2007 Refreshing Waters Renewal*

**August 7-9, 2007  
First Christian Church  
Carl Junction, Missouri**

**Theme: WHAT IS JESUS DOING NOW?**

**An exposition of the heavenly ministries required  
to complete what is begun when we are justified.**

**BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
SPEAKING/LEADING IN THE ASSEMBLY  
DURING JULY 2007**

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| 1. <i>Given O. Blakely</i> (PM Sermon, PM Sermon, PM Sermon).  | AM Singing).  | 19. <i>Amanda Miller</i> (Lead Scripture Shower, Closing Scripture and Prayer).  |
| 2. <i>Aaron Hutchcraft</i> (AM Sermon, AM Exhortation, AM Table Meditation, AM Sermon, AM Table Meditation, PM Table Meditation, PM Introduction, PM Exhortation, PM Exhortation). | 10. <i>Barbara Hutchcraft</i> (Lead PM Singing, PM Opening, PM Opening, PM Opening).  | 20. <i>Baylie Sims</i> (Read PM Sermon Text, Read PM Sermon Text).   |
| 3. <i>Ricky Sims</i> (AM Class, Lead AM Singing, Teach AM Class, AM Sermon, PM Exhortation, PM Table Meditation, PM Exhortation).  | 11. <i>Jonathan Blakely</i> (AM Opening Word, PM Exhortation).  | 21. <i>Annie Sims</i> (AM Closing Scripture and Prayer, AM Closing Scripture and Prayer, Read AM Sermon Text, Read PM Sermon Text) |
| 4. <i>Robert Cobb</i> (AM Table Meditation, AM Sermon, Teach AM Class, AM Table Meditation, Teach AM Class, AM Exhortation, Lead PM Singing).                                      | 12. <i>Matthew Cobb</i> (Lead Scripture Shower, AM Calling, Lead AM Songs, PM Table Meditation).                                    | 22. <i>John Hill</i> (PM Intercessory Prayer).   |
| 5. <i>Anita Cobb</i> (Leading AM Singing).   | 13. <i>Benjamin Blakely</i> (Lead Scripture Shower)   | 23. <i>LaVaine Murphy</i> ().  |
| 6. <i>Jeremy Williams</i> (AM Opening Word, PM Sermon, PM Table Meditation).   | 14. <i>Tasha Sims</i> (Lead AM Songs, AM Sermon, Lead PM Singing).  | 24. <i>Isaac Murphy</i> (AM Calling, Lead PM Singing).   |
| 7. <i>June Blakely</i> (Teach AM Class, Lead PM Prayers, Pead PM Singing).   | 15. <i>Nichole Williams</i> (Lead Scripture Shower, AM Opening Word).   | 25. <i>Michaela Murphy</i> (Read AM Sermon Text  |
| 8. <i>Tony Parker</i> (AM Calling, AM Exhortation, AM Exhortation, PM Sermon).   | 16. <i>Michele Cole</i> (PM Introduction)   | 26. <i>Mariah Murphy</i> (Read AM Sermon Text, Closing Scripture and Prayer)   |
| 9. <i>Melissa Parker</i> (AM Opening Word, Lead  | 17. <i>Judah Hutchcraft</i> (Closing Scripture and Prayer, Read AM Sermon Text, Read PM Sermon Text).                               | 27. <i>Gene Hutchcraft</i> (AM Exhortation, AM Table Meditation, AM Opening Word, PM Table Meditation)                             |
|  | 18. <i>Logan Williams</i> (Play AM/PM Communion Music,AM Calling, Read AM Sermon Text, Lead Scripture Shower, Read PM Sermon Text). | 28. <i>Preparing Lord's Supper</i> (Various sisters).  |