

Acts 7 Stephen's Speech

Introduction

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats^[b]; do not be frightened."^[c] ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

1 Peter 3:13-18

This advice, part of Peter's letter to a collection of early churches, would have been steeped in the background of having seen many of his fellow Christians suffer for the Gospel.

Today we learn about the testimony of Stephen, one of the Deacons of the early Jerusalem church, first Christian martyr, and friend of Peter's.

1. Setting the Scene

The church has been on a growth trajectory since Pentecost Sunday, with the Powerful Spirit working in God's People. In 6:7 we see the Jerusalem church at its peak:

Read Acts 6:7

2. Stephen's Trial

It doesn't take long for people to react against the work of the Holy Spirit in the spreading of Jesus' name.

Read Acts 6:8-15

Question: What were the charges brought against Stephen?

Read Deuteronomy 19:15-19

3. Stephen's Speech

Stephen answers these two accusations in a dramatic retelling of God's work throughout Israel's history.

3.1 God's Law

Read Acts 7:1-8

Read Acts 7:36-38

Questions:

What was God's promise?

How was it fulfilled?

3.2 Israel Rejects the Law

Read Acts 7:39-43

Question: How did God deal his people who had rejected his Law?

3.3 The Temple

Read Acts 7:44-47

3.4 God's Dwelling Place

Read Acts 7:48-50

Read John 2:19-22

Question: Where does God dwell? (Answer: Jesus' body, the church, is the temple of the Spirit)

3.5 Israel Rejects God's Dwelling Place, Jesus

Read Acts 7:51-53

Question: How had the Israelites rejected God?

4. Stephen's Testimony of Jesus

It was at this point the Sanhedrin were furious, however, the words that Stephen uttered next led to his death.

Read Acts 7:54-58

Questions:

What do we learn about Jesus?

Why were the Jewish Religious Leaders so offended?

5. Stephen Dies for Jesus

Read Acts 7:59-60

Read Luke 23:32-34

6. The Church Suffers

Read Acts 8:1-3

Question: How does the situation here contrast to Acts 6:7?

Conclusion

1. Make Christ your hope above all and be ready to give a reason for your hope (1 Peter 3:15)
2. It is Jesus who reigns, not the powers of this world (Acts 7:56)
3. Sometimes the church will be in good times (Acts 6:7), and sometimes in bad times (Acts 8:1-3), but God keeps his promise to build his Kingdom and it's being fulfilled no matter what the circumstance may be today