



Church of God Sunday School

STEPHEN—THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR

Acts 6-7:60

Have you ever had a lie told about you? How did it make you feel?

What did you do about it? This lesson is about a man who had terrible lies told about him. These lies led to his death. This man is remembered as the first Christian martyr. (A martyr is someone who chooses to die rather than give up his or her religious beliefs.)

As the church in Jerusalem began to grow, there was a need for some men to take care of the "widows" and to "serve tables." Many people sold their possessions and gave their money to the Apostles. This money was used to help others. When the Grecians said that "their widows were neglected," the Apostles chose "seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom" to take care of "this business." One of those seven men was a man named Stephen.

Stephen, a man "full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Certain Jews "of the synagogue" (*SIN-uh-gog*) began to argue with Stephen. But these Jews "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which [Stephen] spake." This must have made them angry, for they convinced other men to tell lies about Stephen. They said that Stephen spoke "blasphemous [disrespectful] words against Moses, and against God."

Soon Stephen was brought before the council (Jewish rulers), where more lies were told about him. False witnesses said, "This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law."

Then the false witnesses went on to say, "For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth . . ." Many of the Jews rejected Jesus (John 1:11). They did not believe that He was the

Messiah. No doubt, here was the real reason they were so angry with Stephen.

As Stephen stood before the council, hearing the lies that were being told about him, his face looked like the "face of an angel." The high priest asked Stephen, "Are these things [true]?" The council had the power to put Stephen to death, but Stephen was not afraid. He used this opportunity to begin preaching to all who were there.

Stephen began by telling the history of the Jewish people, beginning with Abraham. He told how Moses had brought the children of Israel out of Egypt and led them to the Promised Land. Stephen spoke of King Solomon building a house (temple) for God to live in. (But Jesus came and made a way for God to live in our hearts.)

Then Stephen said, "You stubborn people! . . . Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you!" (New Living Bible). Just as their fathers had persecuted the prophets, they were also persecuting God's people.



Stephen's message made the Jewish leaders very angry! "They were so mad that they were grinding their teeth at Stephen" (The International Children's Bible).

Stephen looked up into Heaven and said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." The Jews "cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears." They did not want to hear any more.

The Jews cast Stephen out of the city. The false witnesses took off their clothes (coats) and laid them at the feet of a man named Saul. Then they began to throw stones at Stephen. (Can you imagine how this must have hurt?) Stephen called upon God and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

The last words Stephen spoke were, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Not only was Stephen willing to die for Jesus, but he forgave the very men who were killing him (just as Jesus did; Luke 23:34). What a beautiful attitude!

Stephen could not have acted so Christlike without God (the Holy Spirit) living in his heart. God is the One who helps us to act right when persecutions come or when lies are told about us. What would you do if

someone mistreated you because you are a Christian? Could you be like Stephen and forgive them? You can with God's help!

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**MEMORY VERSE:**

*"... great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."*

*—Matthew 5:12*  
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Stephen's Last Words



"Lord, lay _____

this _____

to their _____."

Stephen Spoke of Four Men in the Bible

(Match the names of these four men to the correct picture)



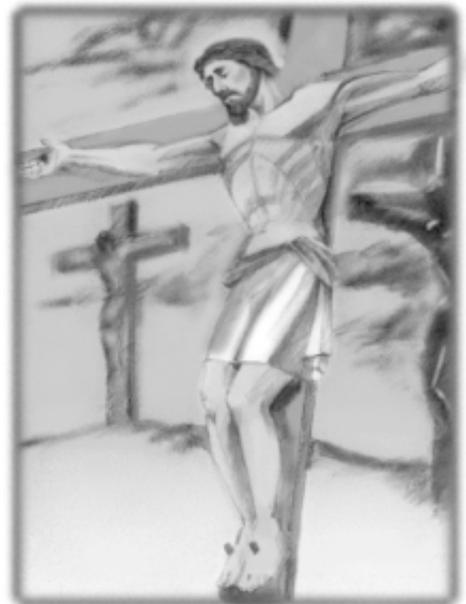
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Stephen Is Stoned to Death