CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
FEBRUARY072026

Scripture Story: Acts 6:8-15; Acts 7:44-59.
Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles (or Unlikely Leaders), chapters 10, 11.

the first Christian martyr



Photo by Colleen Cahill

flashlight

"As Stephen stood face to face with his judges to answer to the charge of blasphemy, a holy radiance shone upon his countenance, and 'all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.' Many who beheld this light trembled and veiled their faces, but the stubborn unbelief and prejudice of the rulers did not waver" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 99).

keytext

"Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen . . . who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke."

(Acts 6:8-10, NIV)

what do you think?

Big entertainment stars often complain about the nonstop attention that they receive.

If you were a public figure, which of the following would upset you most:

____ stalkers hanging around your property?
____ people rummaging through your trash?
____ photographers following you 24/7?
____ newspaper tabloids publishing lies about you?
____ fans constantly asking you for autographs?

did you know?

Stoning was a punishment given for various offenses in the ancient Jewish legal system. For instance, in the laws that God gave Moses for the Israelites, one of them stated that a person could be stoned for leading family members, relatives, or friends to serve foreign gods (Deuteronomy 13:6-8). Isn't it ironic that Stephen was stoned for just the opposite reason—rebuking false worship and declaring that Jesus was the Messiah and worthy of true worship?



INTO THE STORY

The Setup: "Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

"Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, 'We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.'

"So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. They produced false witnesses, who testified, 'This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us.'

"All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel."

Stephen's Defense: "'Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built the house for him.

"'However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me?" says the Lord. "Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things?"

"'You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.'"

The Stoning of Stephen: "When the members of the Sanhedrin

heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

"'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul."
(Acts 6:8-15; Acts 7:44-58, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Had you ever read this story before? Describe some of the emotions you are feeling now, having read the story.

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Go through this week's Scripture story and *put an X* by parts of the story in which you see tension.

Who are the main characters in this drama? Why are the Jewish leaders so upset with a man like Stephen who does wondrous miracles?

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At what point does Jesus enter the story? What is the significance of that moment?

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What two lessons do you take away from this biblical episode?

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What similarities do you see between the stoning of Stephen and the crucifixion of Jesus?

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punch lines

"Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them'" **(Revelation 14:13, NIV).**

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" **(Isaiah 53:5, NIV).**

"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" **(2 Timothy 3:12, NIV).**

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die'" **(John 11:25, NIV).**

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" **(John 16:33, NIV).**

further insight

"The martyrdom of Stephen made a deep impression upon all who witnessed it. . . . His death was a sore trial to the church, but it resulted in the conviction of Saul, who could not efface from his memory the faith and constancy of the martyr, and the glory that had rested on his countenance."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 101

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read 2 Timothy 3:12.

Did you complete the *What Do You Think?* activity? If you were a celebrity, what behavior would anger you most? Well, thankfully, you probably don't have to worry about being stalked by some deranged person, or chasing snoops out of your trash can.

However, if you are a follower of Christ who faithfully lives out your calling, you will face opposition. Get your Bible and read John 15:18-27. In your own words, write two sentences explaining why the world will mistreat followers of Christ.

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Sunday

Read Isaiah 53:5.

After reading the *Into the Story* section, complete the *Out of the Story* questions. There's much more to Stephen's defense of his faith. Read Acts 7:1-53 to get the rest of the story. And if it's too much to read at one sitting, read some of it in the morning and then finish in the evening.

Stephen was ready to defend the faith that he had come to believe in. The Jewish leaders and their angry followers didn't go into a murderous rage until the end of Stephen's defense. What did Stephen say that set them off?

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Monday

Read Acts 6:8-10.

This Sabbath's *Key Text* focuses somewhat on the aura that surrounded Stephen. Let's see. He loved God, had a great reputation, was a persuasive speaker, and he worked miracles on the side. How do you think the Jewish opposition reacted to reports of Stephen's awesome ministry in Jerusalem?

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According to the *Key Text*, who was the source of Stephen's wisdom and power?

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Who or what is your source of wisdom? If you spend little time with God, can you really call Him your source of wisdom and power?

Tuesday

Read John 16:33.

Place yourself in the gallery described in this week's *Flashlight* quotation by Ellen G. White. All around you are spectators and agitators. Leaders mill about, whispering to each other and casting deadly glances at the calm man standing before them. Some cannot bear to look at him; others tap their feet nervously as he speaks.

Find a dictionary and look up the word "radiance." Write the definition here:

_____

If you were in the presence of someone who had that kind of luminescent light around them, would you want to harm them? Why did the Jewish leaders press on in their desire to kill Stephen? What drove them?

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Wednesday

Read this week's *Punch Lines*. Choose one or more to commit to memory today.

Read Acts 7:54-56. Whom did Stephen see as he looked up to heaven?

_____

Why do you think God allowed Stephen to see this scene before He died?

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Stephen had probably heard of Jesus' words found in the John 11:25 *Punch Line* from the disciples and/or other followers of Jesus. He believed in the resurrection of Jesus, but seeing Jesus standing to the right of God the Father sealed his faith. He knew that though he was about to die, he would one day rise again, as will all faithful followers of Christ.

Thursday

Read John 11:25.

The trial and murder of Stephen touched off a wave of persecution against the people of God. One of the chief architects of the persecution was a young man named Saul. Later after he converted to following Jesus and became known as Paul, he talked sorrowfully about how he had hurt followers of Jesus. Read what Paul said (Acts 26:9-11).

At the time, Saul believed that he was doing God's bidding by persecuting Christians. He was actually working against God. Are you on God's side? How can you tell? How did Stephen die in the hope of the resurrection? (See reading for today.) How was Stephen's death a seed that helped spread the gospel of Jesus?

Friday

Read Revelation 14:13.

Stephen did not die in vain. In fact, his life gave courage to persecuted believers during his time, and it still does today. The reading for today found in Revelation 14:13 reminds us that the righteous works of those who die in the Lord will continue to follow them.

Think about this question as you go about your day today. What will your legacy be? What will you be remembered for? Ask God to help you leave a mark on earth for His glory.

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this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapters 10, 11.

* Unlikely Leaders is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.