

Stephen the First Martyr

Stephen, full of faith and power, becomes the first Christian martyr after delivering a powerful speech before the Sanhedrin.

Acts 6:8-15 • Acts 7:1-60

CHARACTERS: Stephen, Saul, The Sanhedrin, The People

THEMES: Martyrdom, Faith, Persecution, Witness

STEPHEN WAS A man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, chosen among seven to serve the early church. He did great wonders and miracles among the people, speaking with wisdom and the Spirit that none could resist. His boldness stirred up opposition from certain synagogues, who suborned men to bring false accusations against him, claiming he spoke blasphemous words against Moses and against God.

Brought before the council, Stephen's face shone like the face of an angel as he stood accused. When asked if these things were true, he delivered a masterful speech recounting the entire history of Israel, from Abraham through Moses, Solomon's temple, and the prophets. He demonstrated deep knowledge of Scripture and God's dealings with His people throughout the ages.

Stephen's speech built to a devastating climax as he turned the tables on his accusers: 'Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.' He accused them of betraying and murdering the Just One, Jesus Christ, just as their fathers had persecuted the prophets. His words cut them to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth in fury.

But Stephen, 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. He

declared this vision aloud, which drove his accusers into a rage. They cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord. They cast him out of the city and stoned him, with the witnesses laying down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

As the stones rained down upon him, Stephen called upon God, saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' With these words of forgiveness echoing Christ's own words from the cross, Stephen gave up the ghost, becoming the first martyr of the Christian faith and setting an example of faithful witness unto death.

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