

Stephen's Death

In large part by Jeff Hamilton
Acts 7:51-60

Introduction: Many times we read a story without paying close attention to the details. I believe the death of Stephen is one of those stories. Have you ever wondered why Stephen was murdered other than observing that the Jews were mad (Acts 7:51-60)? The focus of this lesson will be to answer that question, "Why was Stephen stoned to death?"

I. At the time of Stephen's death, the gospel was spreading rapidly (Acts 6:7).

A. Converts were no longer just common people. Leaders within Judaism were obeying the truth.

B. Stephen had a leading role with these new converts (Acts 6:8).

II. Jewish scholars, desiring to put an end to this movement, looked to destroy it by ruining its most prominent leaders (Acts 6:9-10).

A. Stephen was one such leader. They wanted to discredit him.

B. They debated Stephen but were unable to win their arguments.

C. Stephen's wisdom was too much for them to destroy through knowledge.

Jesus foretold of these times (Luke 21:15).

D. The Judaizing teachers intended to make Stephen look foolish against their scholarly arguments. Instead they became the fools (1 Cor. 1:22-25; 3:18-20).

III. Since the Jewish scholars couldn't defeat Stephen honestly, they resorted to dishonest tactics (Acts 6:11).

A. As in most smear campaigns, they sought to ruin the movement by ruining Stephen's reputation.

B. Notice the lies were promoted in secret and that they did not want themselves to be revealed as the true source of the lies.

C. People have a tendency to give greater weight to the words of those who are perceived to have nothing to gain in an argument. Hence, Stephen's enemies made sure they were not connected to the lies.

D. This is why Christians should live a pure life. When enemies of the cross seek to slander us, all they will be able to do is lie about our good deeds (Titus 2:7-8; 1 Pet. 2:12).

E. Unfortunately, people are quick to believe lies (Acts 6:12-14).

1. James has warned us to be slow to wrath (Jas. 1:19-20).

2. People who are angry are no longer rational or reasonable.

IV. The Jews weren't getting the reaction they desired out of Stephen (Acts 6:15).

A. When people tear down others, they often enjoy watching the despair of their victims. It especially irritates them when they don't get the reaction they desire.

B. What they saw in Stephens face in spite of the slanderous witnesses was the face of an angel. Wisdom shows in a person's face (Ecc1. 8:1).

C. Many Christian martyrs have gone to their death in peace; some even with a smile on their face.

V. Stephen told the truth and they hated him for it (Acts 7:51-54).

A. Part of a preacher's job is to rebuke error (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

B. Some of the rebuked will turn from their sins while others will turn on the preacher. The latter is what happened to Stephen (Acts 7:57).

VI. Stephen died because others stood by and let it happen (Acts 7:58; 8:1).

Conclusion: Are you ready to face death? Stephen was ready when he died (Acts 7:55-56). However, if you are not ready to die, then the consequences could be far worse than being stoned to death.