

"On the Way" 365 Bible Reading Plan

ACTS 7

Acts 7

The Story of Stephen, the first Christian Martyr after the inauguration of the Church in Acts 2, begins in Acts 6 and verse 8. It was to be expected after the solving of the great debate that could have splintered the church in its infancy. The plan of the Apostles and the birth of what later became the ministry and office of deacons was a great success.

Acts 6:7 reads, ***"Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith."*** The great success of the witness of the early followers of Jesus caused an uproar and fear in those religious leaders who had been the instigators of the crucifixion of the Lord. They knew that lives were being changed, and they came after these believers called people of ***"The Way."***

"And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council

saw his face like the face of an angel." (Acts 6:8-15)

Miracles were being performed. People were being healed, and lives were miraculously being changed. It was obvious a movement had been created of men and women whose lives had been transformed by Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was alive, and the people had witnessed that and would not be silenced. Stephen was by far the most articulate and feared of all the early witnesses in the church in Jerusalem. He had the countenance of an angel as he spoke, and, in the minds of the religious leaders, he was dangerous and must be stopped.

The axiom that was true then is still true today. When someone is out to get you, to stop you, they will stop at nothing, and the truth becomes irrelevant to anyone in that mindset. The religious leaders resorted to their usual way. They found people willing to do anything for money- lie, cheat, or even kill.

Chapter 7 is a template for how the message of God is presented. Stephen knew the story of God's salvation history from creation, through Abraham, and the story of redemption up until the time of Jesus. He knew it well. As he told the story, he eventually came to Jesus, which we all must do, and that is where the rage came. ***It always is!*** Sooner or later, we have to deal with Jesus. Jesus was crucified on behalf of sinners, buried, rising again, and hundreds witnessed that at one time. This is the Good News, the Gospel story. No matter where we begin with someone, we must make our way to the message of the substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It was the power of God that changed lives then and today!

Prayer and Action Steps

Read the story of Stephen again, and this time, look for the historical landmarks in the story of redemption that he emphasizes and go and do likewise. Lord, please help us to learn the story of redemption and share it. Amen