

# Stephen is killed

Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June

Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-8:3

<sup>8</sup> God gave Stephen the power to work great miracles and wonders among the people. <sup>9</sup> But some Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria were members of a group who called themselves 'Free Men'. They started arguing with Stephen. Some others from Cilicia and Asia also argued with him. <sup>10</sup> But they were no match for Stephen, who spoke with the great wisdom that the Spirit gave him. <sup>11</sup> So they talked some men into saying, 'We heard Stephen say terrible things against Moses and God!'

<sup>12</sup> They turned the people and their leaders and the teachers of the Law of Moses against Stephen. Then they all grabbed Stephen and dragged him in front of the council.

<sup>13</sup> Some men agreed to tell lies about Stephen, and they said, 'This man keeps on saying terrible things about this holy temple and the Law of Moses. <sup>14</sup> We have heard him claim that Jesus from Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses gave us.' <sup>15</sup> Then all the council members stared at Stephen. They saw that his face looked like the face of an angel...

<sup>7</sup> <sup>54</sup> When the council members heard Stephen's speech, they were angry and furious. <sup>55</sup> But Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit. He looked toward heaven, where he saw our glorious God and Jesus standing at his right side. <sup>56</sup> Then Stephen said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the

right side of God!'

<sup>57</sup> The council members shouted and covered their ears. At once they all attacked Stephen <sup>58</sup> and dragged him out of the city. Then they started throwing stones at him. The men who had brought charges against him put their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

<sup>59</sup> As Stephen was being stoned to death, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, please welcome me!' <sup>60</sup> He knelt down and shouted, 'Lord, don't blame them for what they have done.' Then he died.

Acts 6:8-15; 7:54-60

## Commentary

The first church in Jerusalem was growing so fast that people like Stephen were appointed to care for its members properly. His job was to make sure that everyone, particularly the widows, had enough to eat. But Stephen was also a great speaker. As one of the new disciples, he aroused jealousy in his former Greek-speaking, Jewish friends. They made up lies about him and brought him before the temple officials.

Jesus warned his disciples that they would face opposition, and Stephen ends up on trial like his master, accused of insulting the Jewish religion. He is given the grace to stay calm, explaining what God has done for everyone through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Maybe he knows that this means he will be killed, as Jesus was, but he is ready for it. He even sees Jesus standing up to welcome him into heaven, which only infuriates his accusers further. And just like Jesus, he dies with words of forgiveness on his lips.

The way Stephen died must have made a huge impression on Saul, who was watching. But more of him later!

## Questions

- ▶ Why were Stephen's former Jewish friends jealous of him?
- ▶ In what way do you think Stephen had the face of an angel?
- ▶ Why do you think God gave Stephen a glimpse of heaven just before he died?
- ▶ What gave Stephen the power to forgive his enemies?

## Visual aid

Find a variety of ideas from books or the internet of what angels might look like. Which pictures do you like best, and why?

## Activity idea

It's not easy keeping calm when people argue with us. Share your best tips for keeping calm under pressure. Is it to do with staying silent, or speaking softly, or perhaps counting to ten in your head before you speak? What might Stephen have suggested as good advice?

## Prayer idea

Stephen knew his Old Testament very well. Use this Family Bible to help you pray today by opening it up at any of the stories in the Old Testament part and using the headings to help you praise and thank God. For example:

- The story of creation: 'Praise you for making such a wonderful world.'
- God's promise: 'Thank you that you have given us so many amazing promises.'
- God speaks to Samuel: 'Thank you that you promise to speak to us when we pray.'

## Key verse

'Then Stephen said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!"' (Acts 7:56).

## Old Testament story link

**2 Chronicles 24:20-22:** Like Stephen, Zechariah is murdered for speaking the truth. However, notice how his last words are very different from Stephen's.

Taken from **The Barnabas Family Bible**

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