

The Power of Praying and Preaching

International Bible Lesson

Acts 7:51-8:1

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L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

“But Stephen, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55-56—KJV).

“But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw God’s glory and Jesus standing at the right side of God. ‘Look!’ he said. ‘I see heaven opened and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!’” (Acts 7:55-56—GNB).

“But filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’” (Acts 7:55-56—NRSV).

In order to refute the lies and false charges brought against him, Stephen preached a short summary of the teachings in the Hebrew Scriptures beginning with Abraham. Then he concluded, “You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it” (Acts 7:53). Bringing false charges against Jesus and later Stephen in order to murder them “legally” through a court system certainly violated the Law of God.

When those who heard his defense “became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen,” the Holy Spirit filled him once again and the heavens opened for him to see Jesus standing at the right hand of God. God approved Stephen’s defense of his faith, and God approved Stephen’s calling to moral accountability those who became betrayers and murderers of Jesus. Jesus stood and honored Stephen for his testimony, knowing that after Stephen’s death a severe persecution would begin against His church.

Though Stephen died, God used his teaching and call to moral accountability. God answered Stephen’s prayer and did not hold this sin against those who murdered him. God began a work of deliverance in some of those who approved Stephen’s death. We do not know how many repented of their sins and came to faith in Jesus after they murdered Stephen. We do know that Saul heard Stephen preach and pray, and he watched how Stephen died. We do know that Saul later repented and became the Apostle Paul.

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Thinking Further

1. Why do you think some people refuse to listen to the truth?
2. Compare the meaning of Stephen calling Jesus “the Righteous One” and Luke 18:19 — “Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.’”
3. Why do you think Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God and the Holy Spirit inspired Stephen to tell the crowd what he saw?
4. Why might a believer pray as Stephen did, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”
5. Why might the persecution of Christians influence some unbelievers to become Christians?

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