



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The First Christian Martyr-Lynched by his Leaders!

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Acts 7:54-8:1a *“When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. 55) But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, 56) And said, ‘Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!’ 57) Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58) And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59) And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ 60) Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not charge them with this sin.’ And when he said this, he fell asleep. 8:1) Now Saul was consenting to his death.”* (NKJV)

FOCUS ON FUTURE BIBLE STUDIES:

- APRIL 22-24: ACTS 8:1-8 PHILLIP THE DEACON EVANGELIZES THE NEXT CLOSEST CAPITOL
- APRIL 29-MAY 1: ACTS 8:9-24 A LEADER WITH FALSE FAITH—TRUSTING FINANCES

This is a most astounding account! How can a national assembly of religious legislators act in such intensely childish ways? Stephen had reversed their accusations and had proven from their own history, their Scriptures, and their own murderous actions of tyranny against Jesus, that they were guilty of the most heinous crimes. Not only had they blasphemed Moses by betraying and treasonously accusing the prophet like Moses whom they were to honor (Dt. 18:15), who had cleansed the Temple which they had made into a “den of thieves and robbers,” but they had blatantly disobeyed the very law which they claimed to fastidiously uphold by brutally murdering their Messiah with the most cruel instrument of execution possible, the cross! In the process, when unable to get false accusations to match, they had required Jesus to indict Himself by demanding, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.” Then they accused Him only of blasphemy, saying He deserved to die (Mk. 14:61-64). Though Peter had verified Christ’s claim twice, when Stephen does it again, they burst into a mad, vicious, lynching mob!

“STEPHEN WAS TO PAY FOR HIS BOLDNESS WITH HIS LIFE. IT IS A DRAMATIC, MOVING PASSAGE. ALTHOUGH HE WAS KILLED, STEPHEN WAS NOT THE VICTIM, HE WAS THE VICTOR. DEATH MERELY USHERED STEPHEN INTO THE PRESENCE OF HIS LORD. MOST OF THE MURDERING MOB (WITH THE NOTABLE EXCEPTION OF SAUL OF TARSUS), THOUGH THEY LIVED ON, WOULD PERISH ETERNALLY.”
JOHN MACARTHUR

Where else do we find people gnashing their teeth? Do Spirit filled people have great boldness which can excite persecution? Who did Stephen have his eyes upon as he faced this overwhelming persecution? What specifically had Christ told these same lynching leaders which Stephen verifies, proving their condemnation?” Why did these legislators become a frenzied mob reacting like spoiled children in stoning Stephen? How are Stephen’s actions in his death similar to Jesus Christ? Did Jesus answer the dying prayers of the first martyr? How?

“THIS WAS A LYNCHING, BECAUSE THE SANHEDRIN HAD NO RIGHT TO PUT ANYONE TO DEATH. IT WAS A SURGE OF BLIND, UNCONTROLLABLE ANGER THAT KILLED STEPHEN.”
WILLIAM BARCLAY

I. FIERCE HOSTILITY VS. FULL OF HOLINESS 7:54-55
Could the contrast have been greater between these arrogant, unrepentant leaders and their accused,

BIBLE STUDIES

- THURSDAY @ 6:30 AM –PRAYER MEETING – GAB 3RD FLOOR WEST CONFERENCE ROOM
- THURSDAY @ 7:00 AM –BIBLE STUDY – GAB 3RD FLOOR WEST CONFERENCE ROOM
- THURSDAY @ 4:30 PM –BIBLE STUDY – GAB ROOM 330 - SENATOR CARRICO’S OFFICE

Virginia

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innocent, yet heart-piercing prey? His powerful sermon had effectively cut their very heart open and forced them see the depth of their depravity so that they “*continually gnashed their teeth upon him.*” No matter how wrong they were or how clearly their treachery was proven, they absolutely refused to repent, therefore fierce hostility was their only other option. The seven other times “*gnashing of teeth*” is mentioned in the New Testament, Christ reveals the horrors of hell associated with it (Mt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28). In contrast, Stephen has demonstrated by his glowing face and his continual proclamation of Scripture that he has no other motivation than the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Ignoring the hostility, his only focus is heaven and his final reward.

“LOOKING UNTO JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF OUR FAITH, WHO FOR THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM ENDURED THE CROSS, DESPISING THE SHAME, AND HAS SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE THRONE OF GOD.”

HEBREWS 12:2

II. FEINDISH HATRED VS. FINAL HONOR ACTS 7:56-58

Stephen has the distinct privilege of seeing the “*glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.*” He could not have planned this privilege, but Jesus decided that this final sermon to the leaders was not complete without it, so He granted Stephen this incredible opportunity to see the eternal throne room of God before he arrived. His vision is so clear and the reality so vivid that he invites these wicked leaders to look up and view this divine and supernatural spectacle! “*Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!*” The greatest glory of God’s sovereignty and supernatural presence was so obvious to Stephen that he expected that they would relish this unparalleled privilege as he did. But their violently wicked hearts demanded only destruction. Indignantly refusing to hear any other evidence proving their murderous hearts, simultaneously they shout him

down while holding their ears! How juvenile can they get? Then with a demonic madness, the opposing parties are united as these brutal legislators ferociously rushed upon him. This wild mob literally throws Stephen out of the city and cruelly begins to break his bones as they furiously hurl stones at this great champion of truth. Yet he calmly stands with undaunted courage, facing his vicious foes. Meanwhile the leader who seems to have instigated the entire mock trial cheers them on as they drop their formal cloaks at his feet so they can angrily throw their rocks with greater velocity and accuracy.

“THIS WAS THE FIRST PERSECUTION AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS; THE FIRST IN A SERIES THAT TERMINATED ONLY WHEN THE RELIGION WHICH THEY WISHED TO DESTROY WAS FULLY ESTABLISHED ON THE RUINS OF BOTH JUDIASM AND PAGANISM.” ALBERT BARNES

III. ARROGANT PERSECUTION VS ANSWERED PRAYER

ACTS 7:59-8:1

As the stones inflicted their crushing blows, Stephen is only focused on his Sovereign Lord and matching His prayer upon the cross, he cried out, “*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!*” Then likely remembering Christ’s prayer for His enemies and His words in the Sermon on the Mount, “*Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you*” (Mt. 5:44), Stephen knelt down and literally shouted his prayer for his leaders, “*Lord, may not this sin stand against them!*” This was his final will and testament. No one ever acquired a more dramatic answer to prayer!

“THE CHURCH OWES PAUL TO THE PRAYER OF STEPHEN.”
AUGUSTINE

Questions to Ponder:

- 1) Have you recognized the authority of Christ at the right hand of God and received Him as your Savior and Lord?
- 2) Do you take of every opportunity to be a bold witness as Stephen to the leaders around you and even above you?
- 3) Are you obeying Christ and following His example in praying for those in authority over you, seeking their salvation?