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A Biographical Study of Stephen

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Stephen

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- I. The complaint of laity—“And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations” (Acts 6:1).
- II. The conference of the leaders—“Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables” (Acts 6:2).
- III. The choice of the laborers—“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3-4).
 - A. The maturity of Stephen—“And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost (Acts 6:5a).
 - B. The miracles of Stephen—“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:8).
 - C. The maligning of Stephen—Stephen was viciously slandered by a group of religious men.
 1. Who they were—“Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen” (Acts 6:9).
 2. What they did—“Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:11-14).
 3. Why they did it—“And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10).
 - D. The meekness of Stephen—“And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15).
 - E. The message of Stephen—As has been seen (Acts 6:13-14), the charge against Stephen was that he had been predicting the future destruction of both the Jewish temple (the Herodian, the second temple) and the Jewish Law. In his defense, Stephen pointed out the following:
 1. Israel had been blessed by God even before possession of the first temple, built by Solomon.
 - a. God had led Abraham into Canaan (Acts 7:2-8).
 - b. God had protected his seed while in Egypt (Acts 7:9-17).
 - c. God had brought Israel out of Egypt (Acts 7:18-36).

- d. God had led them back to Canaan (Acts 7:37-45).
- 2. Israel had nevertheless turned from God.
 - a. During the days of its first temple
 - b. During the days of its second temple—“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts 7:51-53).
- F. The martyrdom of Stephen
 - 1. His persecutors—“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. . . . Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul” (Acts 7:54, 57-58).
 - 2. His preview of glory—“But he, 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).
 - 3. His prayers
 - a. For himself—“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59).
 - b. For his enemies—“And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60a).
 - 4. His passing—“And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:60b).

STATISTICS

First mention: Acts 6:5

Final mention: Acts 22:20

Meaning of his name: “Crown, wreath”

Frequency of his name: Referred to seven times

Biblical books mentioning him: One book (Acts)

Occupation: Deacon and evangelist

Place of death: Jerusalem

Circumstances of death: He was stoned to death.

Important fact about his life: He was the first recorded martyr in the early church.