

A YOUNG BELIEVER STONED



MORE and more of the Israelites believed that Jesus was the One whom God had sent to make all his promises come true. One of these was a young man named Stephen, who became a believer and a disciple. He was made a deacon among the believers. A deacon was one who helped serve the other disciples by waiting on the tables when they ate their meals. It was very important to have some who did this kind of work for God. Any work that is done for God is important, and whatever we do for him, should be done as well as possible.

Stephen was very faithful in serving God in other ways, also. Whenever he could, he told the people about Jesus, and the wonderful blessings God would by and by give to them through Jesus. So the religious rulers became jealous of him, just as they did of Jesus, and of Peter and John. Jealousy is certainly a terrible thing!

Stephen was arrested and put on trial before these jealous rulers, and when he was given in opportunity to answer for himself, he told

a wonderful story about the promises of God, and how Jesus was the One who would make those promises come true.

Stephen told the wonderful story of Abraham, and the promise God made to him. Then he told about Isaac and Jacob, and the twelve sons of Jacob. He told about Joseph, and how he was sold as a slave into Egypt. He also reminded his accusers of Moses, the great leader of the children of Israel, who led them out of the land of Egypt.

Stephen said to these jealous rulers that it was people just like themselves who had persecuted all of God's servants, and that they were doing the same thing. Stephen told them the truth, all right, but it made them even more angry.

And what do you suppose they did? Why, they decided that Stephen should be killed; so they stoned him to death.

Stephen was the first disciple who was put to death because he believed that Jesus was the One whom God had sent to make his promises come true. It was really a great honor to die for this reason. It did not mean, of course, that God failed to take care of Stephen. God took care of Jesus, but he let him die, because it was necessary for Jesus to die in order that others might live.

And now others were to have the privilege of dying as Jesus died, because God plans to use them by and by to work with Jesus in making his promises come true—those wonderful promises that he will bless all the families of the earth. All those who die as Jesus died will be made alive just as he was. Just as Jesus will be a king, so they, too, will be kings, and will work in his kingdom with him. I don't mean, though, that all the disciples of Jesus have to be stoned to death in order to be made alive with him. The Bible says that they all die "like Jesus" because they spend their lives in the service of God and of others.

Some believers, or disciples, spend their whole life serving God, and thus they die in this service.

Some have lost their lives because they served God, just as Stephen did.

And all those who die doing what God wants them to do will be with Jesus when they are made alive again, and they will be kings together with King Jesus.

QUESTIONS

- Who was Stephen, and why does the Bible say he was a deacon?
- Why did the religious rulers decide to stone Stephen to death?
- Why did God allow Stephen to be stoned to death?

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