

Stephen's Arrest and Speech

Key Verse:
*“Stephen, full of
faith and power,
did great wonders
and miracles
among the people.”*
—Acts 6:8

Selected Scripture:
Acts 6:8-7:50

AS THE EARLY CHRISTIAN

church grew, the Apostles found it needful to select certain ones to serve as deacons. These were given the responsibility of overseeing the pastoral portion of the work. Seven were chosen as deacons, including Stephen. (Acts 6:5) Although the primary role of the

deacons was the pastoral work, they also took advantage of opportunities which came to spread the message of truth. In fact, the Apostles had laid their hands on them (vs. 6), conferring on them the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In our Key Verse, we are told that Stephen had great faith, and was using the power of the Holy Spirit to do “wonders and miracles among the people.” One of the special abilities Stephen evidently had, through the Holy Spirit, was that of speaking to the people in such a way that was very convincing. Some in the synagogue, who began to dispute his message, found that they were unable to “resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” (vs. 10) They found men who agreed to purposely stir up the people, and also act as false witnesses against Stephen, accusing him of blasphemy. They took him into custody and brought him before the Jewish

council.—vss. 11-14

The high priest demanded that Stephen defend what he had been preaching. Acts 7:2-50 gives the account of his defense to the council, and what a defense it was! Stephen, beginning with Abraham, spoke of God's dealings with their forefathers. He spoke of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and how God gave them the promise of an inheritance through a future seed. He spoke of how Joseph's brethren sold him into Egyptian slavery, but that this entire experience was overruled by God for Israel's benefit. Stephen continued by recalling how, while in Egypt, the Israelites multiplied, and when the proper time came, he raised up Moses as their deliverer from bondage and the Pharaoh "which knew not Joseph."—vs. 18

One of the important lessons Stephen recalled was how the Israelites refused on many occasions to follow the instructions given to them by God through their leader Moses. He reminded them that Moses spoke of another prophet who God would "raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear." (vs. 37) This statement was particularly troubling to the council, because they knew Stephen and others had been preaching that Jesus was that "prophet . . . like unto me" foretold by Moses. Stephen continued speaking, however, recounting the many ways in which the Israelites had been disobedient to God, even though he had provided them with a Tabernacle, and later a Temple, in which to worship and offer sacrifice.

As Stephen closed his discourse, he reminded the council that, in reality, God is not to be found in literal temples or buildings. Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Stephen said, "The most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; . . . Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?"—vss. 48,49 ■