

Remembering God's Faithfulness

***Key Verse: "He, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."
—Acts 7:55***

***Selected Scripture:
Acts 7:2-53***

Having established a communal living arrangement in the church based on sharing earthly possessions, problems began to arise with the influx of new believers concerning the administration of the brethren's daily needs. In response to this the apostles appointed deacons "of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom," to oversee this business while they committed all of their time and efforts to the preaching of Jesus Christ.—Acts 6:1-4

Among those chosen was Stephen, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." (vs. 5) Of the seven deacons selected, he appears to have been perhaps most talented in witnessing to the Truth. "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

OUR LESSONS THIS MONTH

have focused on the early activities of the Gospel Age church. We have considered the principles of prayer for one another, of giving all to the Lord, and of being faithful in witnessing to the Truth whenever opportunities arise. Today's lesson concludes the examination of these principles with the record of Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

Then there arose certain of the synagogue . . . disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.”—vss. 8-10

As a result of his preaching, false accusations were made against Stephen that he spoke blasphemous words against the holy Temple. The Jewish council found itself confronting yet another disciple of Jesus in an attempt to put an end to the spread of the Gospel. In this case, they perhaps should have known better, for as Stephen was brought before them, “All that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”—vs. 15

Asked by the high priest, “Are these things so?,” Stephen answered by presenting a history of Israel’s repeated failure to follow the commandments of God. He accused them of being “stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears” and of resisting the Holy Spirit. In so doing, Stephen presented a defense of the Truth rather than of himself.—Acts 7:1-51

He reminded them that as Israel had at first rejected Moses, they now had rejected Jesus. Then, concerning Jesus, he said, “This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.” (vs. 37) Concluding his discourse, Stephen stated: “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, . . . and have not kept it.”—vss. 52,53

Stephen’s speech angered the council as they realized it was a condemnation of their actions. Their anger turned violent when he told them what he beheld in the heavens, recorded in our Key Verse—“Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” They immediately cast him out of the city and stoned him to death. (vss. 55-58) May we be as courageous as Stephen in witnessing for Jesus! ■