Glad Tidings

"And we bring you good of the promise made unto the fathers…" (Acts 13:32)

Vol. XXXV | September 21, 2025 | No. 38

Reflections From The First Christian Martyr

(Jerry Fite)

Stephen was a Hellenist Jew who became a Christian, and a member of the local church in Jerusalem. Luke reveals that Stephen was a man *"full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5).* Being from a Hellenist or Grecian region, he headed the list of seven men chosen to serve the needs of the neglected Grecian widows in the church. Being full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen was graciously endowed with God—inspired wisdom, being empowered to work miraculous *"great wonders"* and confirming *"signs"* among the Jews *(Acts 6:8).*

Stephen promoted the cause of Christ through dialog. He met men of the synagogue of the Hellenist Jews who were "freedman" ("Libertines"-freed slaves). They were from Cyrene in Northern Libya, Alexandria in Egypt and Celicia in Asia Minor. These Jews disputed with Stephen, but were not able to *"withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:10).*

Stephen, the faithful servant of the church, also engaged openly in religious dialog with disputants. He soon learned how dark the world can get when people cannot withstand or overcome the wisdom orally presented to them. The speaker of those words must be destroyed. The Hellenist Jews from the synagogue "suborned" men to lie about the godly Stephen. They "induced" or "persuaded" men maybe with money, to spread the lie that they had heard Stephen speak *"blasphemous words against Moses and God" (Acts 6:11).* This stirred up the Jews and their leaders to deliver Stephen before the Jewish council for trial.

The darkness of evil continued to come down upon Stephen as false witnesses testified lies against Stephen. Instead of answering the charges one by one, he totally ignored them, and guided his accusers through 1,130 years of Jewish history. Stephen began with Abraham leaving Mesopotamia, and ended his historical trip with Solomon building the Temple in Jerusalem.

While there were prophetic pointers left open which pointed to Christ, and factual declarations of Israel's idolatrous heart displayed in the wilderness, this verbal history did not cause Stephen to be put to death. It is what he said next that led to his martyrdom. He labeled his listeners as "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears..." who had, like their fathers "resisted the Holy Spirit." Stephen indicted his listeners as being those who had "betrayed" and "murdered" the "Righteous One" (Jesus Christ). Hearing this, they were cut to their heart and gnashed their teeth against him.

Stephen, then looking up to heaven, declares he *"saw the glory of God and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God"* When his accusers hear this, they rush upon him, closing their ears. Stephen was then cast out of the city and stoned to death. Before he took his last breath, he asked the Lord to *"receive his spirit,"* and kneeling in death, cried out, *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7: 54-60).*

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was not an entrepreneur who established a political organization, while personally testifying of his love of Jesus, and defending the Bible as God's Word. Stephen became a martyr of Christ having a single focus of promoting the cause of Christ. His testimony was not mixed with promoting any political agenda or party. Stephen was purely a "Christian martyr," not a "political martyr."

Are you willing to die for your faith? All disciples of the Lord should be willing to lose their lives for Christ's sake, *(Matthew 16:25).*