

Who was Stephen in the Bible?

Acts 6:5 introduces a faithful man of God named Stephen: "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." It is noteworthy that there have always been those faithful believers whose love for and commitment to the Lord seem to shine through so greatly that others around them notice, and Stephen was such a man. Nothing is known about the personal life of Stephen—his parents, his siblings, or whether he had a wife or children; however, what is known about him is what is truly important. He was faithful, even when faced with certain death.

Stephen was one of the seven men chosen to be responsible over the distribution of food to widows in the early church after a dispute arose and the apostles recognized they needed help. He was also "full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). Opposition arose, but the men who argued with Stephen were no match for the wisdom given him by the Holy Spirit. So, the men decided to falsely accuse Stephen, labeling him a blasphemer and having him arrested (Acts 6:11-14).

Acts 7 is the record of Stephen's testimony, which is perhaps the most detailed and concise history of Israel and their relationship to God of any in Scripture. Stephen was not concerned about his earthly existence, determining instead to stand firmly on the side of Jesus Christ, no matter the consequences. God inspired him to speak boldly, rightly accusing Israel of their failure to recognize Jesus, their Messiah, rejecting and murdering Him, as they had murdered Zechariah and other prophets and faithful men throughout their generations. Stephen's speech was an indictment against Israel and their failure as the chosen people of God who had been given the law, the holy things, and the promise of the Messiah. Naturally, these accusations, though true, were not well

received by the Jews.

In his speech, Stephen reminded them of their faithful patriarch, Abraham, and how God had led him from a pagan land into the land of Israel, where He made a covenant with him. He spoke of the journey of his people, through Joseph's sojourn in Egypt to their deliverance by Moses 400 years later. He brought to mind how Moses had met God in the wilderness of Midian in a burning bush, and he explained how God had empowered Moses to lead His people from idolatry and slavery to freedom and times of refreshing in the Promised Land. Throughout his speech, he repeatedly reminded them of their continual rebellion and idolatry, in spite of the mighty works of God to which they were eyewitnesses, thereby accusing them with their own history, which only irritated them until they did not want to hear any more.

The law of Moses states that the sin of blasphemy deserves a death sentence, usually by stoning (Numbers 15:30-36). Just before these arrogant, unredeemed Jews followed the prescribed penalty and began stoning Stephen, Acts 7:55-56 records his final moments of earthly life, just before he stepped through the veil between heaven and earth: "But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'"

The words of Colossians 3:2-3 could have been written about the life of Stephen, even though they are applicable to all believers: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God." Stephen's life—and even more so his death—should be an example of how every believer should strive to live: committed to the Lord even in the face of death; faithful to preach the gospel

boldly; knowledgeable of God's truth; and willing to be used by God for His plan and purpose. Stephen's testimony still stands as a beacon, a light to a lost and dying world, as well as an accurate history of the children of Abraham.