

## The Best Defense Ever Delivered

About a week or so ago, my Bible Study group at Zion had the opportunity to study the defense put forth by a man named Stephen from the church of Jerusalem (he was one of the Seven "Good Men" chosen by the Apostles of the church to look after the needy and care for the poor in their era).

Our Lesson was entitled: "**Standing Firm Against Opposition**", and it was grounded in the Book of Acts, Chapter 7.

Stephen was so effective at his work and in his outreach ministry that he drew the attention of the Sanhedrin (the Leadership Council of Israel), and they were none too happy about the work he was doing or the messages he was preaching. So they set-out to prosecute, and then persecute, him, just as they had done to Jesus. But Stephen knew his P's & Q's about the Ruling Council, as they soon found out.

Never have I seen the foundation for a defense laid out so well as that of Stephen in defense of the charges levied against him. Stephen was accused of, among other things, speaking out against the Temple of God and trying to destroy it, and nothing could have been further from the truth. As Stephen was such an enormously great man of God, this was all highly preposterous.

But never-the-less, the Sanhedrin were determined to perform yet another injustice on an innocent man. So the prosecution continued, in spite of Stephen's amazing argument, and the result was tragic. Stephen was put to death even though everyone knew, and the evidence clearly showed, that he was innocent of the charges levied against him.

(Click-on the link, then the speaker icon to read along)

[Acts 7:2-4,8-10,17,33-34,45-47,52-Acts 7:2-4,8-10,17,33-34,45-47,52-53 \(NIV\)](#)

<sup>2</sup>To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. <sup>3</sup>'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'

<sup>4</sup>"So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.

<sup>8</sup>Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

<sup>9</sup>"Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him <sup>10</sup>and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

<sup>17</sup>"As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased.

<sup>33</sup>"Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.'

<sup>34</sup> I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

<sup>45</sup> After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, <sup>46</sup> who enjoyed God's favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob. <sup>47</sup> But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

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**Here's how the Commentary sums it up:**

### **The Story of Stephen, The First Martyr (Biblehub.com)**

In the New Testament, in the book of Acts, you will learn how the members of the church in Jerusalem gave their money freely to help the poor. This free giving led to trouble, as the church grew so fast; for some of the widows who were poor were passed by, and their friends made complaints to the apostles. The twelve apostles called the whole church together, and said:

"It is not well that we should turn aside from preaching and teaching the word of God to sit at tables and give out money. But, brethren, choose from among yourselves seven good men; men who have the Spirit of God and are wise, and we will give this work to them; so that we can spend our time in prayer and in preaching the gospel."

This plan was pleasing to all the church, and they chose seven men to take charge of the gifts of the people, and to see that they were sent to those who were in need. The first man chosen was Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Spirit of God; and with him was Philip and five other good men. These seven men they brought before the apostles; and the apostles laid their hands on their heads, setting them apart for their work of caring for the poor.

But Stephen did more than to look after the needy ones. He began to preach the gospel of Christ, and to preach with such power as made every one who heard him feel the truth. Stephen saw before any other man in the church saw, that the gospel of Christ was not for Jews only, but was for all men; that all men might be saved if they would believe in Jesus; and this great truth Stephen began to preach with all his power. Such preaching as this, that men who were not Jews might be saved by believing in Christ, made many of the Jews very angry. They called all the people who were not Jews "Gentiles," and they looked upon them with hate and scorn; but they could not answer the words that Stephen spoke. They roused up the people and the rulers, and set them against Stephen, and at last they seized Stephen, and brought him before the great council of the rulers. They said to the rulers:

"This man is always speaking evil words against the Temple and against the law of Moses. We have heard him say that Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the laws that Moses gave to us!"

This was partly true and partly false; but no lie is so harmful as that which has a little truth with it. Then the high-priest said to Stephen:

"Are these things so?"

And as Stephen stood up to answer the high-priest, all fixed their eyes upon him; and they saw that his face was shining, as though it was the face of an angel. Then Stephen began to speak of the great things that God had done for his people Israel in the past; how he had called Abraham, their father, to go forth into a new land; how he had given them great men, as Joseph, and

Moses, and the prophets. He showed them how the Israelites had not been faithful to God, who had given them such wonderful blessings.

Then Stephen said:

"You are a people with hard hearts and stiff necks, who will not obey the words of God and his Spirit. As your fathers did, so you do, also. Your fathers killed the prophets whom God sent to them; and you have slain Jesus, the Righteous One!"

As they heard these things, they became so angry against Stephen, that they gnashed on him with their teeth, like wild beasts. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up toward heaven with his shining face; and he saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on God's right hand, and he said:

"I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God!"

But they cried out with angry voices, and rushed upon him, and dragged him out of the council-room, and outside the wall of the city. And there they threw stones upon him to kill him, while Stephen was kneeling down among the falling stones, and praying:

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit! Lord, lay not this sin up against them!"

And when he had said this, he fell asleep in death, the first to be slain for the gospel of Christ.

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When I read the highlighted parts of this chapter in the Book of Acts, Chapter 7, I was amazed at the foundation Stephen laid out, citing the Council's abhorrent behavior toward one Godly man after another, after another (from Abraham to Joseph, to Moses, to David, to Jesus and now to him).

This infuriated the Sanhedrin. So what did they do? Proving Stephen's very point (that they were acting unGodly and out of control) they put him to death, just as they had done countless times before to countless innocent men and women who opposed and challenged their views and practices.

Doesn't it make you wonder how such people ever rise to the top levels of leadership. it's almost as if a person has to be either already corrupt or corruptible in order to get to the top of some organizations, including some governments, and even including some churches.

I pray that we are nothing like those people, and that as we are blessed into leadership roles and positions, I pray we have the audacity to stand for what's right according to the laws of Christ.

I hope you have an amazing week!!

- Jack