

Stephen

In Jerusalem

Foundation

Bible passage : Acts 6 & 7

Stephen was an early follower of Jesus and was chosen by the early disciples to help look after money given to care for those in need. But Stephen wanted others to know about Jesus too. We are told that God did signs and wonders through Stephen. But others, who didn't like the message about Jesus stirred up trouble and said that Stephen had blasphemed against Moses and God.

Having opportunity to respond to the accusations Stephen, gave what can seem like a long history lesson about Israel. But, speaking through the Holy Spirit, Stephen was showing how God had blessed the people of Israel in the past and how the people had often rejected God's blessings.

Then, just like the prophets in the Old Testament, Stephen told that the people were disobeying God, despite their apparent religious devotion. He particularly accused them of turning the Temple into something it was not meant to be and of rejected Jesus in the same



Model of the Temple at the time of the Apostles. Now in the Jerusalem Museum.

way that in the Old Testament people had often rejected the prophets sent by God.

The people did not repent of their wrongdoing but instead put Stephen to death in their anger. Luke underlines that Stephen was speaking by the Holy Spirit and that Jesus is Lord. We see therefore that Stephen was not afraid to die in order **to spread the light of Jesus.**

"Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" Acts 7:56

As a result of this there was a fierce persecution of the disciples in Jerusalem. Having previously targeted the Apostles without

success this time the leaders of the Jews targeted the ordinary disciples so that all the followers of Jesus fled from Jerusalem.

Jesus had told his disciples to tell people about him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samara and to the end of the earth. But so far all they seem to have done was in Jerusalem. Now, by the guiding of God in what looked like a bad situation, the disciples were scattered in Judea and Samaria and we learn that they went about preaching the word (Acts 8.4) that is **spreading the light of Jesus** in other places.

Judea and Samaria

Judea was roughly the old kingdom of Judah covering the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Samaria was to the north and the Samaritans claimed to be from the tribes of Ephraim & Manasseh but the Bible says they were people forcibly removed there about six centuries earlier. Nevertheless Jesus preached there and singled them out in His command to go and make disciples.



The gospel is so important that, beginning with Stephen, Jesus' followers have been willing to die to tell others.