

Wednesday, May 24, 2023
SHAKEN: THE AUTHENTIC CHURCH
PART 6: FIRST BLOOD

Last time we opened the book of Acts, our attention was directed to a young man named Stephen. Stephen was one of the Greek speaking members of the early church chosen to oversee the distribution of resources to the congregation. God was working powerfully through Stephen. Greek speaking Jews who were not Christians – maybe Stephen’s former associates – began to come against his testimony of Jesus. They contrived lies about him and he was detained by the Sanhedrin for questioning. Allowed to speak in his own defense, Stephen told the story of God’s history with the people of Israel beginning with Abraham. You know what comforts me about this sermon?

God can use us even if our sermons are not perfect!

Stephen said that God spoke to Abraham before he left dwelt in Haran and told him to get out of his country and go to a land that “I will show you.” When you read the biblical account in Genesis 12 & 11, you see that God spoke this direction to Abram after he was in Haran. He also threw a little of Exodus 3 into God’s promise to Abraham. Thank God! We don’t have to be perfect to be used! Stephen’s speech focused on God’s step by step process to bring His presence into the hearts of His people. Then, he exposed the opposition of the leaders to God’s plan:

[Acts 7:51-53 \(NKJV\)](#)

Think of who is in this audience: priests, scribes – those entrusted with the integrity of the Law of God. Another man who was there was a man about 30 or 40 years of age named Saul. A man who prided himself in keeping the Law, he along with the others were cut to the quick by Stephen’s exposure of their disobedience. Their reaction? They gnashed at Stephen with their teeth. Meaning “to grind”, it is used in scripture to denote the rage of those who are damned:

[Matthew 8:11-12 \(NKJV\)](#)

Suddenly, Stephen sees a vision:

[Acts 7:55-56 \(NKJV\)](#)

This is unusual. Most of the time Jesus is mentioned in heaven, He is seated at the right hand of the Father. In this instance, Jesus is standing. Scholars debate

the meaning of this. Daniel 7 and Revelation 5 show us Jesus being “brought to the Father.”

Daniel 7:13-14 (NKJV)

Another instance:

Revelation 5:6-10 (NKJV)

Jesus acknowledges the presence of the kingdom in Stephen and rises to receive it. The announcement of Jesus’ lordship further enraged the leaders. They took Stephen outside the city and stoned him. Stoning is the most mentioned method of capital punishment in the Torah. It was listed as punishment for those who were convicted of enticing Jews to be apostates. Of such, Stephen was accused. It is mentioned that witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. The witnesses are those who gave testimony against Stephen. If convicted, the witnesses were to be the first to cast a stone at the accused. Often, a pit was used for stoning. The accused would be tossed into the pit, and the witnesses would gather around a large stone and together, would lift it and throw it upon the accused. Jews wore long flowing robes, so these were taken off to allow for freedom of movement to throw stones. Saul acts to certify that the witnesses fulfilled their duty. Stephen’s passing reminds us of Jesus’ death.

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:46).

“Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34)

Fell asleep – died; became calm.

Stephen is the first martyr for Christ. According to research by the Voice of the Martyrs, 70 million Christians have been martyred since the time of Jesus. It is estimated that 45 million have been martyred in the 20th century alone.

Today’s Scriptures:

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