

## Purple Heart

### Scripture:

*Acts 7:54-60 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.*

**55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.**

*56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*

*57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,*

*58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.*

*59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

*60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

### Introduction:

The early church was administered by the very people that had walked with Jesus. They in turn presented Christ and believers were added very swiftly to the early church as the Gospel spread.

As is the case today, some folks accepted Jesus and others totally rejected Him.

The religious community of the time began to imprison, and to kill those that would take a stand for Christ. Stephen is the First Martyr of the Christian faith as recorded in the Book of Acts.

The definition of a martyr is someone willing to die for their faith. You might think that was all ancient history and does not happen anymore, but that is not so. In many countries around the world, people are persecuted, put in prison, and sometimes killed because they believe in Jesus as Savior or even have a Bible.

Stephen was willing to die for his faith. But he probably never dreamed he would until the day it happened.

### Full of the Holy Spirit

*Acts 7: 55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,*

As the early church grew, the number of people needing social help grew also. There was no social system in place to care for the needs of the widow, the orphan, the sick, or the elderly.

Federal or government programs like Medicaid or Social Security to assist with housing, food, and health needs did not exist. The local church took oversight of the needs of its own people.

The church leaders that were supposed to be getting the Gospel out to the masses had to travel and be in synagogues and in public forums and church gatherings to proclaim the Gospel.



#### Teacher side note:

Stephen is considered the First Martyr of the Christian faith. After his stoning the widespread persecution of the Christians began in earnest; including the killings assisted by Saul [who would later become Paul after his experience on the Road to Damascus.]

Of the original disciples all met with martyrdom with the exception of John the Apostle who lived to be right at 100 years old and of course Judas Iscariot who died by hanging himself shortly after he betrayed Jesus in the Garden.

There are only a 24 hours in a day. Those hours were precious for proclaiming the Gospel, for leading folks to the Cross, for establishing more churches and growing folks in grace.

And although the social issues were relevant and necessary, there was little time to be side tracked with hospital visits for non-life threatening issues; little time to distribute food and clothing; little time for day to day good causes.

The apostles were getting bogged down in day to day maintenance of the born-again crowd.

Stephen is first mentioned in Acts 6 when the apostles decided they needed to appoint godly men to look over the maintenance issues of the people within the church.

Seven men were first appointed.

### **THESE MEN WERE NOT “ABOVE” THE CHORES AND DUTIES WITHIN THE CONGREGATIONS.**

Stephen is particularly singled out in the scripture:

*Acts 6:5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:*

### **STEPHEN’S REPUTATION IS THAT HE IS “FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.”**

*Acts 6:8-15 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.*

During his time serving as a servant and helper in the local church, you see him performing miracles.

You see him debating with the established religious leaders trying to explain to them Jesus was the Son of God.

They are so frustrated trying to argue their points that Jesus was not the Son of God [because they had been the ones to crucify Jesus] that they got very angry.

They began to BRIBE people to lie about what Stephen was telling!

He is summonsed to the court to answer! And he answers with the longest speech recorded by any of the disciples or apostles in the Book of Acts. He does not even blink; he just tells it like it is. He is VERY BOLD.

### **THE BIBLE SAYS THAT THE COUNCIL LOOKS RIGHT AT HIM, AND CAN SEE HE IS TELLING THE TRUTH, BUT THEY REFUSE TO ACCEPT IT.**

### **THEY WANTED TO HAVE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS RATHER THAN ACCEPT CHRIST.**

*9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.*

*10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.*

*11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.*

*12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,*

*13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:*

*14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.*

*15 And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*

### **BUT WHY ARE WE SO AMAZED? THIS IS HOW PEOPLE REACT TODAY!**

## **Looked up Stedfastly**

*Acts 7: 55 But he, being filled with the Holy Ghost, **looked up stedfastly into heaven**, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.*

*Acts 7: 1-53* contains the Bible record of Stephen addressing the council. This is the SAME court system that had crucified Jesus.

**BUT THEY LISTEN TO HIM.** Stephen boldly tells them the truth about Jesus. But they are stubborn. But more than that, they are wicked and react like wild men!

*Acts 7:51-53 Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.*

*52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:*

*53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.*

The council was so angry that they broke their own rules. They unlawfully took Stephen right out and began to BITE on him and torment him then stoned him to death.

*Acts 7:54-59 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.*

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## **STEPHEN'S STAND COST HIM HIS EARTHLY LIFE.**

This time Satan would be mistaken if he thought this would slow down the spread of Christianity.

Instead, the Gospel would spread even wider and further both geographically and through time as well.

## **Saw the Glory**

*Acts 7: 55 But he, being filled with the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and **saw the glory of God**, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.*

King Jesus we are told by many New Testament writers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, sits at the right hand of the Father making intercession for those that have accepted His blood atonement. BUT NOT THAT DAY!

That day we see Him standing. *Acts 7:56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God*

## **WHAT AN HONOR! KING JESUS IS STANDING AT THE STONING OF STEPHEN.**

*Acts 7:59-60 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

Just think, Stephen, the Bible says, went to sleep; he died. But before he ever left the earth, he saw Jesus standing up to welcome him into Heaven. What a tribute!!

## IF HEAVEN WERE HANDING OUT PURPLE HEARTS, STEPHEN GOT ONE THAT DAY FOR SURE!

### **Conclusion:**

At the beginning of Stephen's journey, he did not foresee his stoning. He did not set out to earn the Purple Heart; no normal thinking person would do that.

But he did earn it. He stood by the stuff! Even unto death.

If you have that life, that born-again life that Christ offers, are you willing to pour out your life as a sacrifice to Him?

Do you know Him?

Or are you like those fellows on the council? Not the part about willing to put someone to death! But the part about not accepting Jesus as your Savior, do you know Him as your Savior?

[Present Salvation here.]

### **Activity:**

Refer to: *War Heroes 2-Wranglers Workbook*