

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.



Teacher Side Notes:

1. The Stoning of Stephen is NOT to be feared as part of the lesson presented.
2. Stephen is considered the First Martyr of the Christian faith.
3. Reading the account directly from the Bible establishes God's Word as the authority in contrast to a Bible storybook.
4. Set out rocks to aid in visualizing this lesson. Just seeing the rocks setting on the table is sufficient.
5. Have a picture of a Purple Heart [easily downloadable from the internet.]
6. We have written the story somewhat as we would do so in a setting of 4s, 5s, and 6s with the emphasis on the life of a man who understood Who God is.
7. Exposing children early to truth leads them to accept it, not reject it.
8. The next generation needs to be prepared, not scared, to stand on the Gospel truths.

Introduction:

The first churches were administered by the very people that had walked with Jesus. When they presented Christ 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 have to 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 care 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.

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 needs were a real problem, there was little time. They were side tracked with hospital visits for non-life threatening issues; distributing food and clothing; and getting rabbit trailed with “good causes.”

The apostles were getting bogged down in day to day maintenance of the local church.

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 He was not [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 WOULD RATHER HAVE RELIGIOUS TRADITION 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 is 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!

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.

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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.

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!

Activity:

The Purple Heart Medal is awarded to United States Military Personnel who are wounded or killed while serving.
If Stephen had been in the US Armed Services in our time in history he would have earned a Purple Heart.

Print on White Card Stock.

Cut out the Purple Heart Medal.

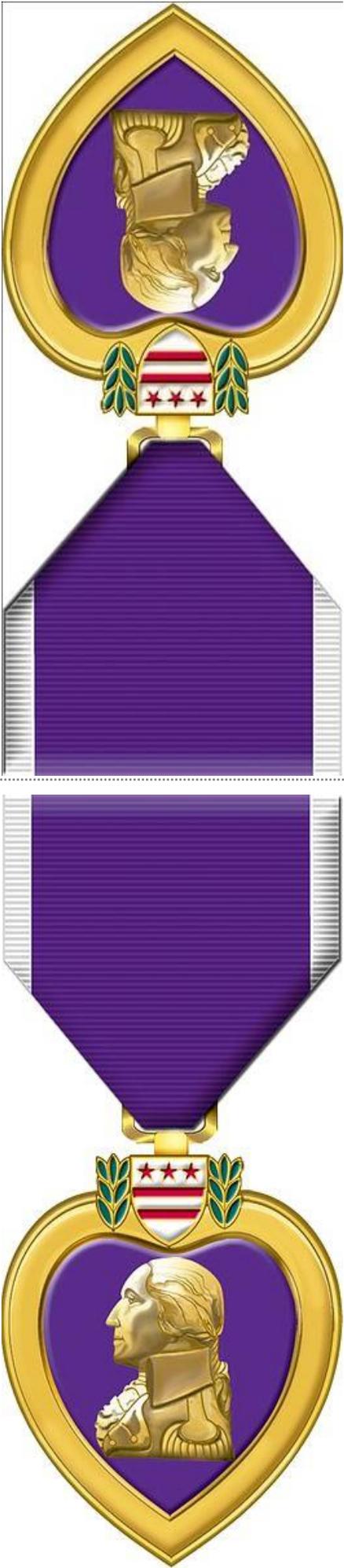
Fold on the dotted line so that it will stand on the table.

Discuss WHY Stephen would deserve the Purple Heart in the Lord's Army

Worksheet follows.

Cutting Line

Cutting Line



Folding Line