

⁸ And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. ¹⁰ And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. ¹¹ Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." ¹² And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon *him*, seized him, and brought *him* to the council. ¹³ They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴ for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." ¹⁵ And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

^{7:1} Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"

² And he said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, ³ and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' ⁴ Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. ⁵ And *God* gave him no inheritance in it, not even *enough* to set his foot on. But even when *Abraham* had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession, and to his descendants after him. ⁶ But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress *them* four hundred years. ⁷ 'And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,' said God, 'and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.' ⁸ Then He gave him the covenant of circumcision; and so *Abraham* begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac *begot* Jacob, and Jacob *begot* the twelve patriarchs.

⁹ "And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him ¹⁰ and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. ¹¹ Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance. ¹² But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. ¹³ And the second *time* Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh. ¹⁴ Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to *him*, seventy-five people. ¹⁵ So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers. ¹⁶ And they were carried back to Shechem and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, *the father* of Shechem.

¹⁷ "But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt ¹⁸ till another king arose who did not know Joseph. ¹⁹ This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live. ²⁰ At this time Moses was born, and was well pleasing to God; and he was brought up in his father's house for three months. ²¹ But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son. ²² And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

²³ "Now when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. ²⁴ And seeing one of *them* suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. ²⁵ For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand. ²⁶ And the next day he appeared to *two* of them as they were fighting, and *tried to* reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' ²⁷ But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? ²⁸ Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?' ²⁹ Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

³⁰ "And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai. ³¹ When Moses saw *it*, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him, ³² *saying*, 'I *am* the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses trembled and dared not look. ³³ Then the LORD said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. ³⁴ I have surely seen the op-

pression of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.” ’

³⁵ “This Moses whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one God sent *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

³⁷ “This is that Moses who said to the children of Israel, ‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear.’

³⁸ “This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us, ³⁹ whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, ‘Make us gods to go before us; *as for* this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ ⁴¹ And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. ⁴² Then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the Prophets:

‘Did you offer Me slaughtered animals and sacrifices *during* forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?

⁴³ You also took up the tabernacle of Moloch, And the star of your god Remphan, Images which you made to worship; And I will carry you away beyond Babylon.’

⁴⁴ “Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He appointed, instructing Moses to make it according to the pattern that he had seen, ⁴⁵ which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua into the land possessed by the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers until the days of David, ⁴⁶ who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob. ⁴⁷ But Solomon built Him a house.

⁴⁸ “However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

⁴⁹ ‘Heaven *is* My throne, And earth *is* My footstool.

What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, Or what *is* the place of My rest?

⁵⁰ Has My hand not made all these things?’

⁵¹ “*You* stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers *did*, so *do* you. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, ⁵³ who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept *it*.”

⁵⁴ When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth. ⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him*. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” ⁶⁰ Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

^{8:1} Now Saul was consenting to his death.

At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

Introduction

The Martyrdom of Stephen is a major turning point in the book of Acts.

Although it happened in very sad circumstances the narrative does introduce us to Saul, who would later become the pioneer missionary to the Gentile Church.

The persecution that followed the death of Stephen was the means that God used to spread the gospel into Samaria.

Through this persecution it would eventually result in the establishment of the Gentile Church in Antioch.

(Acts 11: v. 19-20)

The third point that we need to note is that Stephen's defence of the Christian faith in our text, is the longest written presentation on this subject in the whole of the New Testament.

The way in which Stephen defended the Christian faith is very interesting.

I will try and make some application about this method of Gospel presentation at the end of my sermon.

Before we engage with the text we do need to know a little background information about Stephen.

Stephen's name means "Crown."

He was one of the Deacons elected in Acts Chapter 6: v. 5. Therefore we know that he would be spiritually mature in his faith and life-style.

Stephen was described as being "Full of the Spirit of wisdom," (Acts 6: v.3) and

"Full of faith and the Holy Spirit." (Acts 6: v.5)

He had the ability to perform wonders and signs, (v.8) and to speak with insight. (v.10)

The way in which Luke describes Stephen makes his qualities similar to those of Moses from the Old Testament.

There was no doubt about it; Stephen was under God's control doing an amazing work in the early Church.

Although it was sad that the life of Stephen ended abruptly after being very faithful to the gospel, we can be encouraged that his life and ministry did impact people's lives, who later went on to be used by God.

Christian history records many believers who died early in life but the impact of their lives still lives today.

David Brainerd, 1718-1747, died at age 29.

Noted for his work as an American missionary to Indians in the northeast of the country, he was raised in a Puritan home but rebelled against much of his upbringing. However, while walking through a forest in his early twenties he saw himself as a lost sinner in need of salvation.

He entered Yale University and then became a licensed minister in 1742. He bravely and devotedly ministered to various Indian tribes for a few short years, despite all sorts of hardships and sufferings. But he died of tuberculosis while just 29. His life and his spiritual diary became well known throughout the world when Jonathan Edwards published *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd* in 1749. It has become a spiritual classic and is still touching lives even today, leading many into missions work. William Carey, a famous missionary sent from the U.K. to India was just one of many who was greatly touched by Brainerd's Life.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne, 1813-1843, also died at age 29.

M'Cheyne was a minister in the Church of Scotland from 1835 to 1843. He studied at the University of Edinburgh, and was licensed to preach in 1835. He was keen on missionary activity to Jews in Palestine, and held a number of evangelistic campaigns in Scotland and North England.

As an evangelist and pastor he had a remarkable impact for the Kingdom, even though he died so young.

He left behind plenty of memorable quotes, such as: "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likenesses to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."

The Memoirs of Robert Murray M'Cheyne have been used mightily since then to touch many. For example, Jonathan Goforth (1859-1936) devoted his life to missions and evangelism after reading the book, and his decades of service in China and Korea were mightily used of God, even though he paid a heavy price for it (five of his eleven children died while he was ministering in China).

Stephen was the first to impact future lives with his early death and therefore our study today about him is very important.

With Stephen's background in mind let us now engage with the text.

There are **four points** that we need to note from the passage that I read.

1. The Charge against Stephen – Chapter 6 : v. 8-15.

In v.8 it tells us that Stephen had a very dynamic ministry.

On top of all the miracles that were happening Stephen must have had a good teaching ministry.

He was well taught about the history of God's chosen people and understood the Gospel well.

In v.10 we are told that the leaders of the synagogue were not able to resist the wisdom of Stephen. The Holy Spirit was dynamically working through Stephen's ministry. Therefore, not being able to stop the impact of Stephen's ministry, the religious leaders decided to persuade men to lie against what he was teaching.

They stirred up people saying that Stephen had said blasphemous words against Moses and God. The allegations were twofold.

- a) **Stephen was accused of speaking against Moses**, by speaking against the Law of Moses. (Chapter 6 v.11, 13) Stephen was accused of proclaiming that the ministry of Jesus would change the customs of Moses. (v.14)
- b) **Stephen was accused of speaking against God**, by speaking against the Temple. (Chapter 6 v.11,13) He was supposed to have said that Jesus would destroy the Temple. The people of Jerusalem would have been easily stirred up by these charges. Their livelihood depended upon the Temple and the Law. (Chapter 6 v. 12)
It is interesting to note that the same charge was made against Jesus before the same Council.

(Mark 14: v. 58 in N.K.J.)

⁵⁸ "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.' "

This was actually not true. If we go back to Jesus's words in **John 2: v.19** we will discover what Jesus actually said.

(John 2: v.19. in N.K.J.)

¹⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The Jewish Council also wrongly quoted Stephen in v. 14.

We know this by reading v. 13. (in N.L.T.)

¹³ The lying witnesses said, "This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses.

Stephen was under attack for his faith in the truth of God's word.

However, God was honouring the defence of his faith and the truth that he spoke by making his face shine as bright as an Angel.

This is something that happened to Moses in Exodus 34: v. 29.

God's favour rested upon Stephen because **he had the truth**, he **spoke the truth** and he was **not afraid to declare it even though he risked his life in the process**.

I wonder about us?

How many of us know the truth, will speak the truth, even though it might cost us persecution or something unpleasant?

This is the challenge if you want to take the Gospel to a hostile world!

There will always be negative comments about the Gospel, because those who oppose the Gospel of Jesus Christ, are instruments in the hands of Satan.

Jesus even rebuked Peter when he unknowingly opposed the Gospel in Matthew **Chapter 16: v. 21-23**.

Matthew **Chapter 16: v. 21-23. –in the N.K.J.**

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

²² Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

²³ But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."

We need to be very careful when we go against the revealed will of God as taught in the Bible. When we do this we are opposing the God of the Bible.

So the two main charges against Stephen which were made by the Jewish Religious leaders were blasphemous words against Moses and also blasphemous words about God and His dwelling place, the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

These were serious charges and Stephen needed to defend himself.

2. **Stephen's defence speech. – 7: v. 1-53.**

As I said in my introduction, Stephen's defence of the Christian faith is the longest recorded speech of its kind in the New Testament.

Stephen's defence speech can be divided into three parts.

We will cover each part and as we do so, not only will we be reminded of Old Testament history, but we will also see how it is needed in order to present New Testament truth.

a) **The Period of the Patriarchs. (A deliverer in Joseph) v. 2-16.**

This period covers the story of Abraham, Isaac and Joseph.

The story concludes with the death of Jacob and Joseph. We are told that their bodies were taken from Egypt and buried in Abraham's tomb in Shechem in Israel.

Q. What was the point of telling the Jewish Council the story of their origin?

Firstly Stephen **identified himself as a Jew** and reminded them of **their common heritage**.

Stephen addresses the charge of blasphemy by reminding them about Joseph in v. 9.

(v. 9 in the N.L.T.)

⁹ "These patriarchs were jealous of their brother Joseph, and they sold him to be a slave in Egypt But God was with him

God was with Joseph, rescued him, and gave him wisdom and success.

Although Joseph was initially sold as a slave, he was eventually recognised as a **deliverer** of the Jewish nation, although only small at the time. (75 people)

b) **The period of Moses – (Also a deliverer) v. 17-43.**

In these verses Stephen told the story of the life of Moses.

Although it was only a brief summary of his life he made the point that Moses was a **beautiful child**, v.20, and a person who **brought peace and reconciliation**. However Moses too was **rejected by his own people**. (v. 24-26)

It was when the Jewish people saw Moses a second time that he was recognised as a **deliverer**.

(v. 35)

³⁵ "This Moses whom they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' is the one God sent *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the Angel who appeared to him in the bush.

Moses gave God's people **the Law and the covenant**.

These were God's living words, or words to live by.

Nevertheless the Jewish people **rejected God and His word** in favour of an **idol and lifeless calf**. **(v. 41)**

Now we need to put these two stories together as one and note how Stephen was trying to reach the Jewish Council, **using the truth behind their own history and religion**.

The key word that connects Moses with Joseph is the word **"Deliverer."**

Joseph **delivered** the 75 Jewish people from starvation.

If Joseph had not done this, then there would be no Saviour of the Jewish or Gentile people.

Moses rescued the Jewish nation from slavery in Egypt. There were now, 400 years later, over 2 million people rescued.

Both of these people were **"Deliverers"** of the Jewish nation and yet they **did not recognise the person who delivered them**.

This speech by Stephen is moving to a climax as we will see later in v. **51-53**.

There is one practical application to note here.

The people God raises up and sends to His people are **not always recognised** by God's people, **nor do they always heed the words of their leader.**

The Old Testament Prophets are an example of this.

Many Pastors and Church leaders around the world can tell us a similar story of rejection by God's people, even though they brought a great message, and gave a great opportunity for Churches to move forward in faith and growth.

Sadly these congregations rejected their leaders to their detriment.

c) The period of the Tabernacle and the Temple. – v. 44 -50.

In these verses Stephen reminds the Jewish leaders that they had made an idol of the Temple. He quoted Isaiah chapter 66: v. 1-2 which teaches us that God can't be restricted to a building. God is everywhere present.

In other words, the God of the Bible is the only person who can be in all places at any one time.

Stephen's point was that the Jewish leaders had used the Temple to contain God in one place.

Stephen is saying to the leaders that they are the ones who are speaking against God, by denying His ability to be everywhere at any one time.

It is nice that we can come together to worship God on a Sunday.

However, we can worship God in our homes every day.

We may not have the music, but we can sing in our quiet times, we can read the Bible and we can pray.

Our Sunday worship service should not be the only time in which we should worship God. The God of the Bible is available every day, 24 hours a day.

The conclusion that Stephen comes to about the religious leaders of the day are contained in v. 51-53 of Chapter 7.

Acts 7:51-53 in the N.L.T.

⁵¹ "You stubborn people! You are heathen at heart and deaf to the truth. Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit? That's what your ancestors did, and so do you! ⁵² Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered. ⁵³ You deliberately disobeyed God's law, even though you received it from the hands of angels."

Stephen's main point is that he tells the leaders that they are **resisting the work of God's Holy Spirit.**

This is a serious charge against these leaders, but nevertheless it is true.

Sometimes this can happen in a Church, where leaders who are appointed to take responsibility, actually resist the work of the Holy Spirit.

We now move to the third main point in this section. That is the death of Stephen.

3. The death of Stephen – Chapter 7: v. 54-60.

It is never nice when a Christian is martyred for their faith. This happens around the world, mainly in Muslim countries, and it is very sad.

However to be killed by people who profess to worship the same God, is even more painful.

So what can we note in these verses that will encourage us?

The first thing that we note is that the leaders were angry.- v. 54.

Their attitude may not be very encouraging, but at least from their reaction, we can assume that the Holy Spirit was convicting them, but they resisted His work in their hearts.

It is always the case that people become angry when they are not willing to receive God's truth into their hearts.

Becoming angry towards God's truth, is a sign of rebellion against God Himself.

A famous evangelist in England by the name of Charles Wesley who was ministering over 250 years ago in England used to say these words to his trainee evangelists before he sent them out to preach.

He said when you go out to preach the Gospel it needs to be preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. When you preach in the power of the Holy Spirit, then there should be two reactions. Either people will get mad at you with angry words, or they will desire to become a Christian. Charles Wesley then went on to say that if you do not receive any of these reactions, then perhaps God has not called you to preach.

There is definitely some truth in Wesley's words. People being angry is not always a negative thing. It can be a sign of God at work.

2 Corinthians Chapter 2: v.14-16 in the N.K.J.

¹⁴ Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. ¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things?

In v. 55-60 we have an account of the death of Stephen.

v. 55-60 in the N.K.J.

⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

The two interesting things in these verses is what Stephen saw, and what Stephen said.

In v. 55 Stephen saw the glory of God in Heaven, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

In Hebrews Chapter 10: v. 12, and Ephesians 1: v. 20 and Colossians 3: v.1 we read about Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. The significance of this is that Jesus had a place of honour, power and exaltation.

However Stephen tells us that Jesus was standing at the right hand of God.

Many Bible commentators have suggested various reasons for why Jesus was standing rather than sitting, but perhaps the most appropriate in the context of the situation, was the fact that Stephen had spent some time declaring about Jesus and now Jesus was about to declare to God about Stephen and his willingness to be killed for the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Bible does teach us that God honours those people who honour Him.

1 Samuel 2: v.30 in the N.K.J.

³⁰ Therefore the LORD God of Israel says: 'I said indeed *that* your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.' But now the LORD says: 'Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.'

Therefore, I believe that Jesus was honouring Stephen for His faith and obedience in spite of the cost that was involved.

God will honour us when we take steps of faith to honour Him and declare the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In v. 59 as Stephen was being stoned to death, he called out to God saying, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit."

Stephen's prayer was similar to that of the Lord Jesus, just before His death.

(Luke 23: v. 46)

The main difference was that this was not the last words of Stephen. He had one more thing to say, which is quite significant.

He said "Lord, do not charge them with this sin."

The first words of Jesus from the cross, were the same as the last words of Stephen.

(Luke 23: v. 34)

The difference is that Jesus addressed His words to the Father, and Stephen addressed his words to Jesus.

Stephen placed Jesus on the same level as God. Yes Jesus was God in human form.

It was very commendable of Stephen to ask Jesus not to charge his murderers with their crime. However to receive forgiveness for your sins, you need to go directly to Jesus in order to receive that forgiveness.

Sadly the Roman Catholic Church do not teach this doctrine.

Joseph Zacchello in his tract entitled "**The Priest who found Christ**" said these words, "I was teaching my people to go to Mary, to the Saints, instead of going directly to Christ. But a voice within me was saying, who has saved you upon the Cross? Who paid your debts by shedding His blood? Mary, the Saints? Or I, Jesus?.....

People were coming to me, kneeling before me, confessing their sins to me.

And I, with a sign of the cross was promising that I had the power to forgive their sins.

I, a sinner, a man, was taking God's place.

The voice said to me, "You are depriving God of His glory."

If sinners want to obtain forgiveness for their sins they must go to God and not to you. It is God's Law that they have broken.

To God therefore they must make confession, to God alone they must pray for forgiveness.

No man can forgive sins, but **Jesus can forgive sins and does.**

In his tract this converted Catholic Priest then quotes 1 Timothy 2: v. 5.

(in N.K.J.)

⁵For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus,

The converted Catholic Priest then went on to say, "I could not stay any longer in the Roman Catholic Church because I could not continue to serve two masters, the pope and Christ.

I could not believe two contradictory teachings, tradition and the Bible.

I had to choose between Christ and the pope, between tradition and the Bible.

I left the Roman Priesthood and the Roman religion in 1944 and now I have been led by the Holy Spirit to evangelize Roman Catholics."

Taken from the tract – The Priest who found Christ by Joseph Zacchello.

Free Tract Society, P.O. Box 50531 – L.A. California 90050.

There is one final thing to mention from the text and that is Chapter 8: v.1.

4. What was achieved by the death of Stephen? – Chapter 8: v.1.

There were two things mentioned in Chapter 8: v.1 that are significant.

The first is that Saul was consenting to the death of Stephen.

A young man named Saul was present and witnessed the testimony of Stephen.

In Chapter 9 we will hear that this young man was eventually converted and used by God's Holy Spirit in a wonderful way.

The second thing of note is that as a result of this incident a great persecution arose against the Church and the Christians were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.

This persecution led to the development of world mission.

Jewish believers were forced to travel to other parts of Judea and Samaria, where they witnessed about Jesus.

Application and Conclusion.

1. When we present the Gospel message about Jesus we must not do this in isolation from the Old Testament scriptures.

People need to have a foundation in the book of Genesis and a knowledge of God's chosen people, the Jewish nation.

Jesus is a Jew and He will return to this earth as a Jew. Therefore we need to see ourselves as believers who have been grafted into what God started with His chosen people.

By reading and studying **Romans Chapter 9-11** we will notice that God has a plan to bring Salvation to His people through Jesus.

Without God selecting Abraham and blessing him with a nation, whom we call the Jews, **there would be no Salvation for the Gentiles.**

Old Testament History and Prophecy is important to understanding the New Testament Gospel of Grace, through Jesus.

This is why I have used this method for over 20 years now.

The version of this book, which is culturally sensitive to Asian people is called "In this name" and available in many languages but not Japanese yet. However I do have a short evangelistic version available in Japanese.

2. If you live and work in Japan then it is always challenging to present the Gospel message to people at work or in any social sphere that we might be involved with.

The challenge for all of us is **not to shy away from witnessing about our faith in Jesus.** We need to pray for opportunities, and then take these opportunities to witness for and about Jesus. It is always good to be ready to give a testimony about your faith in Jesus. I travelled to Heathrow Airport in London by taxi on the 5th September and the driver escaped from Afghanistan about 10 years ago.

He was very positive about the U.K. being open to all religions.

I lost an opportunity to witness to him about Jesus, but I am going to get my son Andrew to send him the book "In this Name." He reads English well and I hope one day he will come to know Jesus. His name is Kahn.

I am going to pray for Kahn, but also carry a few good tracts in my bag in future.

3. **We need to be encouraged that God can do good things from bad situations.**

God is sovereign in everything that happens both in our lives and in the lives of other people, who may not yet have become Christians.

In our text today, we were introduced to a young man called Saul who would later be involved in persecuting the Church before he became a Christian.

The Church grew in other places because of this persecution.

We worship in a Church where people are always coming and going. This can be unsettling and sometimes disappointing. However God moves some people on to other things and other places in order to further His kingdom.

May God bless us as we seek to follow Him, wherever He leads.