

# Stephen

Acts 6:1-8:2

## **MEMORY VERSE**

ACTS 6:7-8

And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.

## **WHAT YOU WILL NEED:**

As many pieces of black, red, white, green and gold or yellow construction paper as the number of children in your class, scissors, and a stapler.

As many 3" to 4" stones as the number of children in your class and markers.

## **ATTENTION GRABBER!**

### **Stump the Witness Game**

Have the children role-play witnessing to one another. Have one child, the "believer" share his faith, and have the other, the "skeptic," ask as many questions as he can about Christianity. If the sharing child gets stuck, have the class help him out; if the class can't, then help the student find the right answers for the "skeptic."

## **LESSON TIME!**

Stephen was the first Christian to be killed for his faith. He was a witness for God because of his service to others and his profession of faith in Jesus. We first hear of Stephen in Acts chapter six. Stephen's example shows us that **We should be bold and tell others about Jesus without fear.**

It's not always easy to share our faith. We might think that people will laugh at us or not like us any more. In this story we will learn about how Stephen was killed for sharing his faith. There are still many people in the world today who are persecuted for their faith. That means that they suffer because they believe and make a stand for Jesus. In our lesson today we will learn about what it means to be a martyr and to suffer for the truth.

### **ACTS 6:1-7**

**Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.**

**Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.**

**"Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;**

**"but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."**

**And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,**

**whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.**

**And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.**

Stephen was full of faith, meaning He trusted in God; he was full of the Holy Spirit and led by God. Stephen was chosen, because of these characteristics, to serve in the church and make sure that all of the needy received help. These are all good characteristics to have in leaders. These men became known as deacons and they served the church in a special way.

When a leader in the church is chosen it is important that they are filled with the Holy Spirit and are living a life according to God's word. Deacons are leaders in the church. They lead by example. They are kind of like "servant-leaders" because they are leading by serving. They take care of so many things in the church, like cleaning up or helping others. They have a very important job in the church.

### **ACTS 6:8**

**And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.**

Stephen, empowered by God, did signs and wonders among the people. This was a display of God's power. Some people who did not like Stephen's message wanted to stop him from telling people about Jesus, but Stephen is an example to us that **We should be bold and tell others about Jesus without fear.**

We learn here that God used Stephen in a powerful way. He told others about Jesus and the Lord used him to help others. God also wants to use our lives if we will let Him and live our lives obediently to His will.

### **Share Your Faith**

Have your class make copies of the "Wordless" book. You will need a piece of black, red, white, green and gold or yellow construction paper for each child in your class. Staple a small booklet of the sheets in the following order and explain what each color stands for:

- BLACK: The condition of each of our sinful hearts.
- RED: The blood that Jesus shed to wash away our sins.
- WHITE: The condition of our hearts after we receive Jesus.
- GREEN: Our growth by the Holy Spirit after receiving Jesus.
- YELLOW: The streets of gold in Heaven promised to all believers.

Have the children think of someone in their lives they can share the gospel message with. Pray with the class for boldness to share this message with the person they think of, or any other needy person the Lord brings into their lives.

### **ACTS 6:9-12**

**Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.**

**And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke.**

**Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."**

**And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council.**

Everything Stephen spoke of concerning his faith in Jesus was so wise and true that the people could not argue with him. They decided to make up stories about Stephen so that everyone would want to get rid of him. Since he spoke of grace and salvation by faith, they said he was dishonoring God, Moses, and the law. The people became angry and took Stephen to the authorities.

Sometimes there may be people who are not very happy with what you have to share about Jesus. They may not be comfortable with changing their lives or repenting from sin in order to come to Jesus. Or they just aren't comfortable with Jesus. So they try to take it out on the person giving the message about Jesus.

### **ACTS 6:13-7:1**

**They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law;**

**for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."**

**And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.**

**Then the high priest said, "Are these things so?"**

They continued to come up with false charges against Stephen. The Jewish High Priest asked Stephen if it was true that he said things to dishonor God and the law. Stephen defended himself by telling the Jews of their history. He told of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He told of Joseph and the Jews in Egypt. He spoke of Israel's deliverance by Moses. Then Stephen spoke of how Israel had many times rejected God, turned to idolatry, and sought their own desires.

### **ACTS 7:2-53**

**And he said, "Men and brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,**

**and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.'**

**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.**

**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.**

**But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would sojourn in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress them four hundred years.**

**'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.'**

**"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.**

**And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him**

**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.**

Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance.

But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

And the second time Joseph was made known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh.

Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people.

So Jacob went down to Egypt; and he died, he and our fathers.

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.

“But when the time of the promise drew near which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt

till another king arose who did not know Joseph.

This man dealt treacherously with our people, and oppressed our forefathers, making them expose their babies, so that they might not live.

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.

But when he was set out, Pharaoh's daughter took him away and brought him up as her own son.

And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds.

But when he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel.

And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian.

For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand.

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?'

But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?'

Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?'

Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a sojourner in the land of Midian, where he had two sons.

“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.

When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he drew near to observe, the voice of the Lord came to him,

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.

Then the Lord said to him, "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.

I have certainly seen the oppression 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." '

“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.

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.

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.'

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,

whom our fathers would not obey, but rejected. And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt,

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.'

And they made a calf in those days, offered sacrifices to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

“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?

Yes, you 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.'

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,

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,

who found favor before God and asked to find a dwelling for the God of Jacob.

**But Solomon built Him a house.**

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

**'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?**

**Has My hand not made all these things?'**

**“You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.**

**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,**

**who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it.”**

Stephen told the people they were guilty of the same thing their ancestors were guilty of. Their ancestors had killed the prophets who spoke of Jesus' coming and now the Jews had killed Jesus who was greater than any of the prophets. Stephen called them betrayers and murderers and he pointed out the fact that they defended the Law of Moses but they did not obey the law themselves. The people knew Stephen was right and they became angry with him.

Stephen was very direct with the religious leaders. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and he spoke with great boldness to the leaders. God used him that day to speak forth His truth. He also wants to use us in situations we come across everyday. Are there things we could say to help people understand who Jesus is?

**ACTS 7:54-57**

**When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.**

**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, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"**

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

Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and as he witnessed he saw God in His glory and Jesus standing at God's right hand. The people were so angry that they wouldn't even listen to him any more. They closed their ears and ran at him. Like Stephen, **We should be bold and tell others about Jesus without fear.**

It is interesting that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. We are told everywhere else in the Bible that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God. But He knew what was about to happen to his precious servant Stephen. His standing up seems to indicate great interest in Stephen's situation. God is also concerned about His people who are persecuted today. They have a very special place in His heart.

#### **ACTS 7:58-60**

**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.**

**And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."**

**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.**

Then the people took hold of Stephen and threw stones at him. Even as Stephen was dying he called on God. And he was not angry with the people who were stoning him. He asked God to forgive them of what they were doing. Stephen did not preach to prove he was right, he truly wanted the people to believe in Jesus and be saved. We can learn from Stephen's example that **We should be bold and tell others about Jesus without fear.**

Even though it caused him harm, he still stood for what was right. We may not have to worry about being killed for what we believe in, but there are times when we need to make a stand for what is right. Even if others laugh at us or think we are different.

## **ACTS 8:1-2**

**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.**

**And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.**

Stephen was the first of many who would die for their faith. After his death, the church was heavily persecuted. The church was scattered as they attempted to flee from the persecution. All of the Christians who knew Stephen were greatly saddened by his death.

Stephen is a great example to us today. He was faithful in the little things; he was a servant. He was a witness in many ways; he was not afraid to talk about Jesus. He trusted in God and did not fear what man would do to Him. We should follow his example by being a witness for Christ and seeking to bring others into a relationship with Him. **We should be bold and tell others about Jesus without fear.**

## **Martyr Memorial**

Bring as many 3" to 4" stones as the number of children in your class. After hearing the story of Stephen, give each child a stone and a marker (test ahead of time to make sure the marker will work on the type of stone you have).

Have the children write part of the memory verse on their stones or the scripture reference. Ask them to remember to pray for the people around the world today who suffer for sharing their faith and refusing to bow to other gods.

## **PRAYER**

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to share their faith in Jesus Christ with anyone the Lord brings into their lives. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them an opportunity to do so.