

Everyday **FAITH** Family Page

New Testament 5

Law/Gospel

Sin brings disorder and chaos. **Christ brings order and control to the chaos of my sin with His grace and mercy.**

Bible Words

[Forgive] as the Lord has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:13

The Big Picture

Why were the Jewish religious leaders free to kill Stephen when they were not allowed to inflict the death penalty upon Jesus? Rome controlled Judea when Jesus was arrested, and only a Roman official could impose the death penalty (John 18:31).

Dr. Andrew Steinmann suggests the high priest and Council killed Stephen during a power void. Procurator Pontius Pilate was distracted by trouble with the Samaritans. Then Vitellius, the Roman governor of Syria, dismissed Pilate, and Tiberius Caesar insisted he appear in Rome to answer a Jewish complaint. Pilate sailed to Rome, but Marcellus, his replacement, had not yet arrived.

With Pilate distracted or absent, the Jews exerted their power against Stephen and violently persecuted the Church.

See *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*, Dr. Andrew Steinmann, copyright © 2011 CPH, p. 301.

God's Servant Stephen

Acts 6–7

The Early Church experienced growing pains as more people believed in Jesus. When Greek Christians complained that the Hebrews neglected their widows during the daily distribution of food, the apostles decided the Church needed more leaders. They asked the Church to pick seven men with good reputations, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, to manage food distribution.

The Church chose Stephen as one of the seven men to do this work. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Stephen also did great wonders and signs among the people. However, some people in the synagogue accused him of false teaching and took Stephen to the religious Council for judgment.

When questioned, Stephen spoke about the Jew's pattern of rejecting God's messengers. He said, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit" (7:51). Stephen said this resulted in killing Jesus, the Righteous One.

Enraged, the leaders ground their teeth. Full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and said that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Incensed religious leaders dragged Stephen out of the city and threw rocks at him until he died. Stephen asked Jesus to receive his spirit and became the first Christian to die for faith in Christ.

Saul, a respected Pharisee, witnessed and approved of Stephen's death. Later, Saul became the prolific Christian missionary we know better by his Greek name, Paul.

All people sin. We are stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears. We resist God's Word and hate rebuke. Accusations crush and enrage us. But the Law shows us our sin and propels us to repent. Christ Jesus offers forgiveness of sins. He quiets us and assures us of God's love.

Prayer

Jesus, the Lamb of God sacrificed to pay for our sin, lead us to repentance and forgive our sins by Your grace. Amen.

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