



**(SLIDE #1) “GREAT EVENTS OF
THE BIBLE -- THE MARTYRDOM
OF STEPHEN!”**

(Slide #2) Introduction:

A. The Events During The Last Days Of Jesus’ Life And Events After His Ascension Lead To This Tragic Event!

1. The opposition of the Jewish religious leaders rose to a fever pitch as Jesus’ ministry continued and as people were drawn away from them and to Him!
2. He cautioned His Apostles that the chief priests and scribes would violently oppose Him in Jerusalem. Mt. 16:21 (This was immediately after their confession that He was the Son of God.) 20:18
3. At the same time, it seems that most of the opposition was directed at Him only, not much seemed to be directed against His Apostles.
4. What was the underlying impetus for their opposition to Jesus?
 - a. Early in His ministry He condemned their concept of “righteousness.”
 1. Mt. 5:20 “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”
 2. They majored in externals and appearance; they minored in the heart!
 - b. The scribes knew the jots and tittles [the smallest letters and markings] of the Law; they did not assimilate It or embrace It in their hearts!
 1. They could tell you the words and the letters, but they did not comprehend or practice the message!
 2. The people readily saw a difference in His teaching and that of the scribes! Mt. 7:28,29 “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, ²⁹for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”
 3. It was academics to them, NOT
 - c. When He told the paralytic that His sins were forgiven, they went ballistic!
 1. Mt. 9:2,3 “Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.’ ³And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, ‘This Man blasphemes!’”
 2. Mk. 2:6,7 “And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷‘Why does this *Man* speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’”

- d. They criticized Him for eating with tax collectors and sinners at Matthew's house. Mk. 2:14-17
 - e. They accused Him of performing miracles by the power of Beelzebub. Mk. 3:22
 - f. He did not submit to their traditions! Mt. 15:1-9 (They practiced ritualistic washing of hands, Jesus and His disciples did not practice those ritualistic actions; the Jews declared that their wealth was a "gift for God" so they could negate helping their parents.)
 - g. After He raised Lazarus from the dead, they feared that all the people would turn away from them and that they would lose all their positions of authority! Jn. 11:48 "If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."
 - h. When He cleansed the Temple the second time! Mk. 11:15-18 "And the scribes and chief priests heard it and sought how they might destroy Him; for they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching." (18); Mt. 21:12
 - i. They saw His miracles; too they observed the people turning away from them, following Jesus, and worshiping Him as the Son of David! This made them indignant! Mt. 21:15 "But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' they were indignant."
 - j. He scathingly condemned their hypocrisy! Mt. 23
 - k. The chief priests, scribes, and elders plotted to kill Him. Mt. 26:3
 - l. When He was arrested, Caiaphas, the High Priest, the scribes and the elders were all assembled, ready to try and condemn Him to death! Mt. 26:57
 - m. The next morning they delivered Him to Pilate. Mk. 15:1
 - n. They mocked Him as He hung on the Cross. Mt. 27:41
5. Perhaps at His Death, they sincerely believed that they had CRUSHED this "Messiah movement!"
- a. However, they were very cognizant that His disciples might plan a ruse or stunt to claim that He had arisen; therefore, they tried to squelch that by seeking guards for the tomb!
 - b. Mt. 27:62-66 "On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, ⁶³saying, 'Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' ⁶⁴Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first.' ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard; go your way, make *it* as secure as you know how.' ⁶⁶So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard."

6. When Jesus was Crucified, the Apostles were then terrified thinking that they might be next!
 - a. Jn. 20:19 See them on Resurrection Sunday: “Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace *be* with you.’”
 - b. And a week later they were again in the upper room with the door locked. Jn. 20:26
- B. (►) One Might Think That The Death Of Jesus Would Bring An End To The Persecution -- They Had Their Man; Now Their Rage Would Abate!
1. But really, WHY would we think that?
 2. Remember what Jesus said as He had warned and tried to prepare His Apostles: Jn. 15:18-21 “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. ²¹But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.”
 3. Later Paul warned Christians: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” II Tim. 3:12
- C. (►) Their Immediate Plot After His Resurrection.
1. They bribed the soldiers who had been guarding the tomb to claim that Jesus’ disciples stole the body! Mt. 28:11-15
 2. Then they seem to be fairly quiet for the next 10 days; likely they felt that the soldier’s explanation had sufficiently calmed the affirmations that He had risen from the dead.
 3. The next 10 days are relatively quiet as the Apostles wait in Jerusalem for the promise that Jesus made.

D. (Slide #3) BUT, The Events On Pentecost And The Healing Of The Lame Man Caused Another Explosion Of Excitement Throughout Jerusalem; This Was Another SERIOUS Threat To The Jewish Religious Leaders! And They Turned Their Venom Upon The Apostles And Early Christians!

1. After the incredible events and supernatural manifestations on Pentecost and the healing of the lame man, the priests, the captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees went on the offensive! This was propelled by the Sadducees denial of the resurrection! Ac. 4:1,2
 - a. They arrested Peter and John and kept them in prison overnight. Ac. 4
 - b. Realizing that they were losing more of their grip on the hearts of the people, they threatened Peter and John. Ac. 4:16-18 “saying, ‘What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them *is* evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*. ¹⁷But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.’ ¹⁸And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”
 - c. Peter and John’s bold reply was, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” 4:19,20
 - d. They threatened Peter and John and then released them. 4:21
2. As more and more sick people were being healed and more people were being baptized, the Jewish religious leaders went on the attack again! 5:11-16
 - a. Enraged, they arrested Peter and John again!
 - b. Ac. 5:17,18 “Then the high priest rose up, and all those who *were* with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, ¹⁸and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.”
 - c. An angel freed them from prison; they went right back to the Temple and preached! Ac. 5:19-26
 - d. They were brought back to the Sanhedrin and questioned about their disobedience to the command to teach no longer about Jesus! Ac. 5:27,28
 - e. Peter’s impassioned reply was: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” 5:29
 - f. When Peter accused them of killing Jesus, they went ballistic and plotted to kill Peter and John! Ac. 5:30-33
 - g. They continued to teach daily in the Temple and from house to house! Ac. 5:42

I. (Slide #4) The Miracles That Stephen Performed And His Powerful Preaching Enraged The People In The Synagogue Of The Freedman; They In Turn Infuriated The Elders And The Scribes! Ac. 6:8-15

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

B. (Slide #5) Stephen Performed MANY Miracles.

C. The Jews Of the Synagogue Of The Freedman Began To Dispute With Him. They Had Previously Been Slaves But Had Obtained Their Freedom.

D. When They Could Not Answer His Powerful Arguments, They Brought Him To The Sanhedrin And Accused Him Of Blasphemy Against Moses And God.

E. They Hired False Witnesses To Accuse Him Of Blaspheming The Temple And The Law Of Moses; They Affirmed That Stephen Said That Jesus Would Destroy The Temple And The Change The Customs Moses Had Given The Jews.

II. (Slide #6) Stephen Gave A Scathing Denunciation Of The Jews Throughout History! Ac. 7:1-60

A. (Slide #7) This Is Supposed To Be The Sanhedrin Putting Stephen On Trial; However, In This Event, He Puts The Sanhedrin And The Whole Jewish Nation On Trial!

- B. Focus Points Of Stephen's Sermon About Jewish History:
1. God's promise to Abraham of a land for his descendants. 2-8
 - a. Abraham did not possess that land.
 - b. God told Abraham that his descendants would live in bondage in a foreign land for 400 years; after God judged that nation, he would bring Abraham's descendants to the Promised Land.
 - c. God gave them the covenant of circumcision.
 2. Joseph was blessed in Egypt; he saved his family during the famine. 9-16
 - a. His brothers, because of envy, sold him into Egypt. 9
 - b. God gave him favor in Egypt; he became the governor. 10
 - c. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy food; on the second trip Joseph made himself know to his brothers; Jacob went to Egypt to see Joseph; he died there. His sons took him back to Shechem and buried him there. 11-16
 3. Israel's severe bondage in Egypt and Moses' deliverance. 17-35
 - a. As the 400 years was about to draw night, the Israelites multiplied. 17
 - b. A Pharaoh who did not know Joseph arose; he treacherously oppressed them; he even commanded them to kill their baby boys! 18,19
 - c. When Moses was born, his parents hid him in the house for three months; when they tried to hide him outside, Pharaoh's daughter found him and took him to her home and reared him. During the first 40 years of his life, he received great education, training, and wisdom. 20-22
 - d. At age 40, he went to visit his people, the Israelites. He saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite. He killed the Egyptian; he thought the Israelites would understand that God had appointed him to deliver them from bondage; **they did not understand; instead, they asked if he would kill them too!** 23-28
 - e. He fled to Midian for 40 years; there he had two sons. At the end of that 40 years, God, through an angel, in an incredibly holy event, called him to lead His people out of Egypt. 29-34
 - f. **This Moses, whom your fathers rejected, is the one God chose to be the Israelites' deliverer!** 35
 - g. Moses, through many miraculous events, led them out of Egypt, led them through the Red Sea, and through 40 years in the wilderness! 36
 - h. This is the same Moses who prophesied about a coming Messiah who would be a prophet like him. 37 (Dt. 18:15)
 - i. **God gave Moses the Law at Sinai; our fathers did not obey Him; instead they longed to go back to Egypt, asked Aaron to make them a golden calf, and worshiped idols all during that 40 years!** 38-43
 - j. They had the Tabernacle that Moses built by God's pattern; Joshua took It into the Promised Land; It survived until David longed to build God a House! Solomon built the Temple (though God does not dwell in temples made by men's hands!). 44-50

- C. Application Of His Sermon To The Jews Of The First Century: 51-53
1. **You have stiffnecked and uncircumcised ears and hearts! 51**
 - a. You do not act like people of God at all!
 - b. You are not submissive to Him!
 - c. You are not obedient to His Will!
 2. **You always resist the Holy Spirit, just as your father's did! 52**
 - a. You are JUST LIKE your unbelieving fathers!
 - b. Your fathers persecuted and killed the prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah!
 3. Now **YOU have betrayed and killed that Messiah who has come as the fulfillment of the Law of Moses that was given to the Jewish nation! 53**
 - a. This is NOT a statement made in rage as a personal vendetta against the Jewish leaders!
 - b. It is a declaration of God's judgment upon the unbelief of the Jews and a declaration that the Law had ended and that the Temple would be destroyed!
- D. Reactions To Stephen's Sermon:
1. The inhumane and livid response of the Jewish leaders. 54
 - a. They were "cut to the heart!"
 1. What a different reaction these Jewish leaders had than the Jewish people had on Pentecost!!
 2. Ac. 2:37 "Now when they heard *this*, they were **cut to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?'"
 - a. This is the Greek word "katenuvghsan" which means "pierced" or "stung."
 - b. The guilt of opposing Jesus and shouting "Crucify Him" against the Messiah devastated their hearts; they were SO ashamed!
 - c. Those people repented and turned to Christ!
 3. What about Ac. 7:54 which says "When they heard these things they were **cut to the heart**, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth."
 - a. This is NOT the same Greek word as used in Ac. 2:37.
 - b. The Greek word here is "dieprivonto" meaning "enraged!"
 - c. They felt NO SHAME for opposing the promised Messiah; these Jewish leaders seethed in their heart and HATED Stephen for condemning their unbelief!
 - b. They were SO LIVID that they "gnashed at him with their teeth!" (They literally grated their teeth at him!) 7:54

2. The Holy Spirit enabled Stephen to see into Heaven and see the glory of God and Jesus **standing** at the right hand of God! Ac. 7:55
 - a. He vocally declared, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man **standing** at the right hand of God!" 56
 - b. Twelve other passages picture Jesus **sitting** at the right hand of God!
 1. When Jesus spoke to the High Priest, He said, "*It is as* you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man **sitting** at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." Mt. 26:64 (Also Mk. 14:62)
 2. Heb. 10:12 "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, **sat down** at the right hand of God," [His mission has been accomplished!]
 3. Heb. 12:2 "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and **has sat down** at the right hand of the throne of God."
 4. Col. 3:1 "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, **sitting** at the right hand of God."
 5. Eph. 1:19,20 "according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and **seated Him** at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,"
 - c. Why is Jesus **standing** in Ac. 7:55,56?
 1. His beloved Stephen is being persecuted! HE CARES!
 2. He is going to judge the unbelieving Jews!
 - a. Is. 3:13,14 "The LORD stands up to plead, And stands to judge the people. ¹⁴The LORD will enter into judgment With the elders of His people And His princes: 'For you have eaten up the vineyard; The plunder of the poor *is* in your houses.'"
 - b. The High Priest stood when he judged and condemned Jesus. Mt. 26:62 "And the high priest arose [*stood up*]" -- NIV, ESV] and said to Him, 'Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?'" (Mk. 14:60)
3. **(Slide #8)** The Jewish religious leaders stopped their ears and stoned Stephen to death!
 - a. They were not going to listen to anything else he would say! 57
 - b. They took him outside of Jerusalem and stoned him to death! 58
 - c. Those who stoned Stephen laid their clothes at the feet of an up-and-coming prodigy, Saul of Tarsus. 58
 1. Ac. 8:1 "Now Saul was consenting to his death."
 2. He affirms that he was there: Ac. 22:20 "And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him."

4. Stephen's Christ-like heart. 60
 - a. As he was being stoned to death, Stephen was calling on ["praying to"] Jesus, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 59
 - b. "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." 60
 - c. Oh how he sounds like Jesus! "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.'" Lk. 23:34
5. And when the first Christian martyr died, godly men carried his body to be buried; great lamentation was made for him! Ac. 7:60; 8:2

III. (Slide #9) And The Persecution Against The Church Only Intensified Thereafter!

- A. Ac. 8:1,3 "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.....³As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison."
- B. Ac. 22:19 "So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.'"
- C. Saul Left Judea And Went To Syria -- He Was Seeking Christians EVERYWHERE!
 1. Ac. 9:1,2 "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."
 2. The Jewish leaders gave Saul permission; he was a bulldog terrorist trying to root out Christian men AND women, to arrest, imprison, and murder Christians!
- D. Amazingly, God Providentially Used This Increased Persecution To Force The Christians To Leave Jerusalem And To Begin To Take The Gospel to the whole world!
 1. They were SO COMFORTABLE to be with other new Christians in Jerusalem!
 2. This prevented the purpose the Godhead had for Christianity -- to take the Gospel TO THE WHOLE WORLD!

3. Thus, “Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” Ac. 8:4

IV. (Slide #10) Great Lessons From This Text.

A. (Slide #11) Christians Today Expect Our Christian Lives To Be Respected And Accepted By Everyone; What An UNREAL EXPECTATION!

1. Christ was persecuted; the Apostles were persecuted; the First Century Christians were persecuted; YOU WILL BE TOO!
2. Remember Paul’s warning: “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” II Tim. 3:12
3. WAKE UP -- You do not live in a utopia; you do not live in a Christian world!
4. You WILL be rejected, hated, and persecuted!

B. (►) Persecution Will NEVER Destroy Christianity!

1. The Crucifixion of Jesus did not stop His Cause!
2. The persecution of the Apostles did not stop the expansion of Christianity!
3. The martyrdom of Stephen did not deter Christianity!
4. And Saul’s vicious persecutions did not stop It either!
5. And persecution of the Church today will not stop It either!!!!

C. (►) Unbelief Needs To Be Confronted.

1. It provides an opportunity for sincere penitents to acknowledge their sin and to repent -- Pentecost!
2. It may infuriate evil-hearted unbelievers -- the Sanhedrin who hated Stephen’s message!
3. Only when unbelief is confronted is the unbeliever given an opportunity to deal with his unbelief!

- D. (►) It Is SO EASY For People To Imitate The Beliefs Of Previous Generations!
1. The underlying point of Stephen's sermon -- your forefathers were unbelievers; you are just like them!
 2. How we need to be believers and teach and train our children and grandchildren to have legitimate reasons for faith too!
- E. (Slide #12) Jesus REALLY CARES When You Are Mistreated For Believing In Him!
1. You see Him standing because His beloved disciple is being murdered!
 2. You see Him standing because He will judge the unbelieving murderers!
- F. (►) Unbelief Can Take You Farther Than You Imagine!
1. Jewish leaders rejected the very Word of God they knew!
 2. They grated their teeth at Stephen, stopped their ears, and stoned Stephen to death!
 3. Saul was groomed to viciously oppose Christianity and Christians -- to arrest, to imprison, and to murder Christians!
 4. Unbelief can take us farther than we can imagine -- to mistreat our mate, our friends, and Christians. That is why we must realize the serious danger of unbelief!!!
- G. (Slide #13) What Kind Of Heart Do You Have?
1. One stung by sin and guilt that leads you to repent?
 2. One enraged if you are called to repent?
- H. (Slide #14) Will You Stand Up For Jesus NO MATTER WHAT? "Even Unto Death?" Rev. 2:10