

References

- Cranmer, T. (1993). *The Book of Common Prayer*. Barbados: Liturgical and Doctrinal Commission of the Province of the West Indies, (Eds.). (Original work published 1662)
- Jackson, F. J. F. & Lake, K. (2002). *The Beginnings of Christianity: The Acts of the Apostles: Volume II: Prolegomena II: Criticism*. Oregon, U.S.A.: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Marris, W. (1987). *Unheralded Faith: Aristarchus, A Servant of the Living Lord*. U.S.A.: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Pao, D.W. (2000). *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus*. Mohr Siebeck
- Reynolds, S. (2007). *For all the Saints*. Ontario, Canada:
- Snow, E. (2005). *A Zeal for God Not According to Knowledge: A Refutation of Judaism's Arguments Against Christianity, 2nd Edition*. Bloomington, Indiana, USA: IUniverse Publishing Company.
- Williams, J. (1888). *Studies in the Book of Acts*. New York: Thomas Whittaker Publishers.

Martyrs of the Church



*A focus on the Life of
St. Stephen as well as
other saints who died
for the faith.*

Stephen is described by Reynolds (2007) as a martyr and deacon of the Church. He is first seen in the Book of Acts when the Greek speaking Jews complained about the neglect of their widows, in getting a fair share in the distribution of food and financial support of the community. Stephen was one of the Seven Hellenists appointed as deacon via the laying on of hands and prayer to administer the church's resources and care for its poor. According to Acts 6:5, Stephen is said to be a man who is full of faith and Spirit. However, the Book of Acts further demonstrated that his duties were more than administrative. As seen in 6:8, his duties also entailed preaching the gospel and performing many miracles." (Reynolds, 2007) As a result, like Jesus, we see that Stephen was challenged, (because of his preaching and miracles), by the Greek speaking Jews, who shared his background, and was eventually tried and killed by them. Stephen was a man of zeal who really loved the Lord. This paper will, therefore, seek to do a study of this great deacon and martyr of the Church called Stephen, focussing on Acts 6;7:49-8:1 in which the background to the Book of Acts will first be examined, followed by an exegesis of the stated text and three ways in which the text may be applicable to us today as Jamaicans.

Firstly, in examining the background to the text, as we see from the first verse of Acts, it was addressed to Theophilus. Theophilus is often times portrayed as a Roman leader, because of the title that he has been given in the opening chapter of Acts. However, history does not show the name of any Roman leader with such a name, and consequently, it is believed that it may have really been addressed to an individual or a group of people, who according to its Greek meaning, would be considered to be a lover of God. Acts is viewed as a continuation of the *Gospel according to Luke*. This is justified by the fact that they were both addressed to Theophilus, as well as in Acts 1:1, there is an acknowledgement of a former book, "In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning". Whereas the author of Acts is unknown, it is oftentimes associated with Luke the physician. This is justified by Marris (1987) who states that "In recording the min-

joined by five other Anglican missionaries. One of them was Lucien Tapiedi, whose work among his own people had already made him a true apostle of Christ. Under his guidance the small company of refugees tried to reach the coast, but they were ambushed and captured by native collaborationists. Tapiedi stepped forward in an effort to save his companions, only to be cut down and butchered. A few days later Redlich and the others were beheaded, and their bodies were cast into the sea.

May Hayman and Mavis Parkinson were Anglican missionaries at Gona; Hayman was also Redlich's fiancée. When the invading army landed near their mission, these two women fled into the jungle. Encountering other refugees, they attempted to cross the mountains to safety at Port Moresby. When their party was ambushed, the two missionaries managed to get away together — only to be captured a few days later and murdered by the invaders.

None of these martyrs died in vain, for their example has nurtured a strong Papuan Church. This Church particularly rejoices in its celebration of St Lucien Tapiedi, for his witness has given its people a vibrant will to proclaim Christ in what is still one of the main frontiers of Christian mission.

Extract from For All the Saints by Stephen Reynolds

he encountered a mysterious old man. In the discussion which followed, this stranger showed Justin the contradictions of his philosophy. Greatly impressed with the old man's wisdom, Justin asked him how he had come by it. In response, the stranger told him about the prophets and apostles who, "far above all logical demonstration, were worthy witnesses to the truth." The old man who spoke these words proved to be a Christian, and his testimony convinced Justin that Christianity was "the only sure and profitable philosophy." After his baptism Justin continued to wear the garb of a philosopher and made his living by teaching "the Christian philosophy" to anyone who wished to study with him. He also made a name for himself by challenging pagan philosophers to public debates and by writing several treatises in defence of the Christian religion.

At some point — it is unknown just when — Justin moved to Rome. There he continued his work as a teacher and public advocate of Christianity. Around the year 167 he held a disputation with a pagan philosopher, whose supporters revenged his defeat by denouncing Justin to the authorities. He and his students were brought before the chief magistrate of Rome and interrogated. All stood firm for the Christian faith, and the magistrate condemned them to summary execution. Thus, like the prophets of old, Justin proved to be "a worthy witness to the truth," even at the cost of his life.

Extract from For All the Saints by Stephen Reynolds

Thomas Cranmer – *Archbishop of Canterbury, 1556*

Thomas Cranmer was a Cambridge scholar who became archbishop of Canterbury in 1533 and guided the Church of England through its first two decades of independence from the Papacy. When he assumed his office he was already committed to protestant views, but political conditions forced him to keep his sympathies a secret. For over a decade he studied the issues which divided not only protestants from Catholics, but also the protestant movement itself. His studies bore fruit when the political situation allowed him to begin serious reformation of the liturgy.

He had a large hand in drafting *The Book of Common Prayer*, which was authorized in 1549. Three years later he oversaw a second edition of this Book, which he revised in such a way as to make its protestant doctrine unmistakable. Soon afterwards he and his Prayer Book were overtaken by events when Queen Mary I came to the throne and restored England to communion with the Pope. Cranmer was imprisoned and endured a long, humiliating trial for heresy, at the end of which he recanted/withdrew his protestant opinions in hopes of clemency/leniency. The Queen refused to hear his pleas, and he was burned at the stake on March 21 in the year 1556.

As the flames licked around him, he thrust out his right hand — the hand which had signed his earlier recantations — so that it might be the first to be burned; and that was the posture in which the onlookers last saw him, as the fire engulfed his body.

Extract from For All the Saints by Stephen Reynolds

The Martyrs of New Guinea - *September 2*

In the summer of 1942, the forces of imperial Japan reached New Guinea, which lies just to the north of Australia. All white people were ordered to evacuate the northern coast, but a number of Anglican missionaries decided to stay with their people for as long as possible. Their faithfulness resulted in martyrdom.

Among these martyrs the greatest honour is shared by Lucien Tapiedi, a native catechist, and Vivian Redlich, an English-born priest. It was said of Redlich that he "had a constant vision of the Risen Christ," and this vision gave him the courage to stay at his mission when Japanese forces landed on New Guinea. He celebrated the Eucharist with his people one last time, then headed into the jungle. There he was

istry of Paul in the Book of Acts, Luke frequently referred to the travels of Paul and his companions by using words, 'us' and 'we', which [also] served to identify that he had a number of fellow workers with him on his missionary trips."

Additionally, the purpose of Acts is clear, because as seen in Acts 1:1-4, it is obviously a continuation (follow up) of the first book (Gospel according to Luke). From this, one can see that Luke now writes to teach Theophilus about Jesus and the works of the apostles, as they embark on a mission to spread the message beyond the walls of Jerusalem into all the world. Consequently, one can see that the purpose of the Book of Acts is to record the establishment and growth of the early church, in which a vast number of people were converted to Christianity, as the Apostles allowed themselves to be used by the Holy Spirit, to carry out the mission of Christ in the world. This is justified by Williams (1888), "The purpose of the Book of Acts is... to tell the story of the way in which the Lord's commands were carried out, the Faith propagated, and the Church established, that is told." The Book of Acts is therefore very important, as we would not have known what happened in the early church, and would be left 'hanging,' as to what happened after Jesus had ascended into heaven from the earth.

Additionally, according to Pao (2000), the author uses Peter (Acts 9:32-11:18) and Paul (Acts 12:25-28:16) to form the framework in which the story of Acts develops. According to Snow (2005), the Book of Acts is believed to have been written in about 63 AD, when Nero was ruling ruthlessly, thus causing widespread persecution of the early church. This date is also accepted, because the Jerusalem temple had not yet been destroyed, otherwise Luke would have alluded to it. Additionally, Snow (2005) further pointed out that the Martyrdom of Paul and Peter was in the mid 60s, and so Luke would have made reference to them, as he did with Stephen. Also, because the Book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest, awaiting trial in Rome, it is believed that the book could have been written before he was tried or even released by his companion Luke (Jackson & Lake, 2002).

Consequently, it may be that it was written from Rome, at which time the Roman Governor, Caesar, was in charge, who was present at Paul's trial.

Secondly, in exegeting the text, we see from Acts 5:12-16, that the church was growing, because of the witness and work of the apostles. They healed many persons who came to them, as well as those tormented with evil spirit. As a result we see in 5:17-42 that the high priest and all his associates, who were Sadducees, got jealous and sought to persecute them. They had them arrested and placed in jail. However, during the night an angel of the Lord opened the door of the prison and brought them out, after which they were instructed to go into the temple courts and teach the people about the message of this new life.

In the morning, the Sanhedrin was called together. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they were startled at the fact that the jail was securely locked; the guards were standing at the doors, but no one was inside. This startled them. After a while, they were informed that they were standing outside the temple courts, teaching the people. Fearful of being stoned by the people, the captain and his guard went for the apostles without using force, and placed them before the Sanhedrin. There they were tried for continuing to teach in the name of Jesus and further accused of trying to make them feel guilty for taking Jesus' blood. When Peter and the other apostles responded, they were furious and wanted to kill him. However a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel stepped in and advised their release. He said, "If the movement is not of God it will fail, but if it is of God, then nothing they do, can stop it." Having been persuaded by him, the Sanhedrin had the apostles flogged, and order them to not speak in the name of Jesus. The apostles considered it an honour to suffer disgrace for the name of Christ, in that even though they were beaten to stop teaching about Jesus, it seemed as if they were more encouraged to continue to proclaim the Good News that Jesus is the Christ. They never stopped from doing this. As a result of such events, the number of disciples kept on growing.

However, the growth of the church cannot be fully appreciated without

under leaders such as Stephen, as he was fired up for the faith; he was bubbling with love for Jesus, and he was very passionate because the power of the Holy Spirit was working in his life. This is the position we need to take as Christians. Like the Church in Syria that is being persecuted by Muslims for acknowledging that they are Christians, we too need to be bold and assertive in letting others know that we serve a Christ who rose victoriously from the dead, so that we may have life and have it to the fullest. Death, therefore, is a path that we all must take, so what better way to lose our lives, than in a battle for Christ! If we are truly serious about understanding what it means to be committed in service to Almighty God, then we should try to pattern Christian values demonstrated by Martyrs such as Stephen - "A man of God who was filled with the Holy Spirit".

Polycarp – *Bishop of Smyrna, Martyr*

The whole Church joins in honouring Polycarp, a bishop who was martyred on February 23 in the year 156. For over forty years he guided the Christians of Smyrna, a city on the western coast of Asia Minor, and brought healing wisdom to issues which divided the churches at that time.

When the Roman authorities suddenly launched a campaign of terror against the Church, Polycarp went into hiding, but was soon discovered and brought back to face the pagan governor before a large crowd in the public arena. The governor urged him to renounce the Christian faith and to curse Jesus Christ. Polycarp answered: "For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme against my King and Saviour?" At this he was bound to a stake and, as he prayed, the wood at his feet was set ablaze. Eyewitnesses reported that the flames did not touch him, but formed a kind of vault around his body, so that a gladiator had to be sent into the fire to kill him. Afterwards his people gathered his remains and buried them in a cemetery outside the city.

Every year, on the anniversary of his martyrdom, they celebrated the Eucharist at Polycarp's grave, "both as a memorial for those who have already fought the contest and for the training and preparation of those who will do so in the future."

Extract from For All the Saints by Stephen Reynolds

Justin – *Martyr at Rome, Teacher of the Faith,*

On June 1, the Church honours the memory of Justin, a Christian teacher who was martyred at Rome around the year 167. Born in Palestine, Justin received the finest education that money could buy and was steeped in Greek culture. But his mind thirsted for something more, so he began a search for the true philosophy. In his quest, he passed through a variety of teachers and sects before he settled on Platonism, a pagan system of thought which seemed to promise him mystical union with the source of all existence.

Justin was satisfied with Platonic teaching until one day, quite by chance,

the next, and we also did not have a say in terms of labour rights in the workplace and not even the right to vote. No one should want to go back to those days, and we should seek instead to learn from the past; learn to be grateful to God for the ways in which God acted and continues to act, in order to liberate us from the oppression in our lives.

Also, we must be bold as Christians to proclaim the gospel at all times, even if it means taking our lives. Stephen was not afraid to tell the Jews the truth, and he even challenged their intentions of killing the prophets over the years and even Jesus. In doing this, he used strong language so as to let them know that what they did was not right. He was bold and assertive, which demonstrates his passion and love that he had for Christ. In a similar way, we too are encouraged to do the same. When we preach, we should not "pretty up" or "sugar coat" the gospel, by preaching only feel good sermons. People need to be challenged, so that they can make an intentional change in their lives, and in order to do this, we must preach passionately, with conviction. Additionally, we are called to speak out against the unjust practices in our society. We can be assured of the fact that Christ will be with us always, and so even if our lives become at risk, we should remember that if we die, we do so for the Lord. We do not live to ourselves alone! In Jamaica, some of the politicians have served us unjustly. Take for instance the Cuban Light Bulb Scandal, in which millions of tax payers' dollars cannot be accounted for, in the distribution of those 'free' light bulbs across Jamaica. It is practices such as these that the church needs to speak out against, if we really want to be a prophetic voice of the people, as Stephen was. We may be despised, rejected, or even killed for speaking the truth, but as Christians, this is exactly what we are called to do.

In closing, Stephen is an ideal model that Christians should seek to emulate. He was a servant of the people; a historian who challenged the Jews to learn from their past and be consistent with their teaching of being faithful. He was also a prophetic voice for Christ, who never feared in proclaiming His message to the world. It is no wonder the church grew then,

looking at the fellowship, which existed in the early church, as this is the avenue through which Stephen was actually introduced in the Book of Acts. The fellowship that was seen among believers contributed significantly to the growth of this religious sect (which was called The Way, and later on became known as Christianity). They were perceived as a community which looked out for each other as seen in Acts 2:44 - 47, in which all the believers were together and they had everything in common. Many persons also sold what they had and gave to anyone according to their need. There was hence no needy person among them. We see that they also broke bread together in their houses and they ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

However, despite such fellowship which existed among the Christians, there were problems among them, because as seen in 6:1, the Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews as their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Such an incident should never have happened, as they were to look out for the welfare of others. To address this partiality which existed in the distribution of food to the widows of the Grecian Jews, the twelve apostles met with all the disciples and said in 6:4 that "It would not be right for them to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Let us choose seven persons among you who... we will turn this responsibility over to..." In saying this, it seems as if the apostles were forgetting that this is a part of Christ's ministry. In spite of this, we see that they all agreed, and so they appointed seven persons (deacons), of whom Stephen was one of them. Stephen was recognized as a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (6:5b). As a deacon, Stephen's responsibility would be to assist and look after the poor. To wait on tables was a task which demands great humility, and hence must have been a great role model to members of his community.

As seen in Acts 6:8, Stephen who was viewed as a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people, and many were drawn to him. Consequently, this caused some opposition from the members of the synagogue. These persons argued with Stephen, but

could not stand up to his wisdom and the Spirit by whom he was speaking. What they did therefore was to secretly persuade some persons to say that they heard Stephen speaking words of blasphemy. This worked for them, as they stirred up the people, the elders and teachers of the law as seen in 6:12. They then seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin to be on trial. More false witnesses were brought against him, as they testified that they he also spoke against the law (6:13). All this scheme, however, was because of jealousy, as people were being flocked to him and the other disciples and apostles. Therefore, they believed that getting rid of Stephen would contribute to the killing of the religious sect (Christianity).

As the high priest addressed him (7:1) to answer if these charges were true, Stephen instead of answering him, turned to the crowd and gave a long discourse. He started from Abraham, and the history of how he became the father of these great nations, via a promise God made to him. In referring to this genealogy, he was actually making the connection to show them their history and fore-parents in the past, who had contributed greatly to who they are as a people. Such blood lines are very important for Jews, and Stephen appropriately made use of it in his defence. He then went on to show them how God's hand was at work for Moses to eventually leave Egypt, and then forty years later, returned as God's instrument to deliver the Israelites out of bondage. From 7:34-47, Moses is now used as the example to demonstrate what it is that these teachers of the law, rulers of the synagogue and other religious leaders had done to Jesus. This initial part of the speech may have pleased the Jewish audience, but now Stephen having taken them back in time, turned his message around and struck them using very provocative words, while relating to Moses. In verse 35, Stephen exclaimed, "This is the same Moses whom they had rejected with words, 'who made you ruler and judge?' ...Moses was sent to be their ruler and deliverer, by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush..." He further spoke of how Moses led them out of Egypt and did wonders and miraculous signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and for 40 years in the desert

to learn and appreciate the valuable lessons that they have taught us. As we see in chapter 7, Stephen gave them a history of their past, in terms of where they were coming from out of bondage in Egypt, to God delivering them into the Promised Land, as God had promised on oath to Abraham; however, because of their unfaithfulness, to the covenant, they lost the land and went into exile. Stephen then pointed out to them how they had always killed the prophets who brought God's message to the people, including the saviour of the world, Jesus. In doing this, Stephen was demonstrating that they were no different now than they were then. Consequently, he called them, a "stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears!" Obviously, they were not willing to change their ways, and remain faithful to God.

Unfortunately, the same may be said about us as Jamaicans, who often times forget about our past, in terms of God remaining faithful to us. Take the enslavement of our ancestors for instance. We as a people forget that we were in slavery at one stage, and even in our very approach to life, we seem so ungrateful, at times, to God for the fact that we are a free people today, thanks to our National Heroes such as Paul Bogle and Sam Sharpe, who were both ministers in the Church. What we do instead is to abuse our freedom in God by living how we want to live via selling drugs to cause harm to the lives of others, while some are even paid to take the lives of others. We take this freedom for granted, and so rather than serving God, we live a life of sin, believing that we can actually exist without God. Obviously, God was faithful in delivering us from the bondage of slavery, but we have not been faithful in serving God by loving God with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength, and loving our neighbours as ourselves. Even moving past our freedom from slavery, some persons believing that we should still be a colony of Britain, exclaiming that those days were better than now when we got our independence. One would have thought we would have valued our independence, in which we as a people can have an input in the running of our own country. We forgot that back in those days there was no electricity, not many cars and buses to move from one area to

Thirdly, three applications which can be drawn from Stephen's life are the need to care for the poor, knowing and appreciating our past as Christians, and to boldly proclaim Christ. In terms of caring for the poor, the needy and those who are less fortunate than ourselves, are all associated with the role of a deacon. According to Cranmer (1993), "The role of a deacon is to represent Christ and His Church; particularly as a servant of those in need, and to assist the bishops and priests in the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments." Excluding the administration of the sacrament, as seen in Acts, this is the same role that we see Stephen taking on in the early church. His appointment came to assist in addressing a problem which had arisen, in which the Grecian widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food. Such a role is really one of servanthood. As Christians, we must become servants of the people, so that they can see that Christ still remembers and cares for them; hence the need for us to provide cooked meals for street people, the sick and the shut-ins. God has placed us here on earth to look after each other. We must be our brother's and sister's keeper, and if we are to take this servant role seriously, then we would be demonstrating the fact that we truly understand our calling and vocation as Christians. Notice in the early church, as seen in Acts 4:34, "...there were no needy persons among them". In reflecting on where the church is today, in terms of reaching out to those in need, we can fairly say, to some extent, that we have lost our focus. We pay more attention to self as to what people can do for the church, rather than what the church can do for others, especially those who are in need. We must begin to take our outreach ministry seriously, and seek to adopt practices such as Missionaries of the Poor, which is run by the Roman Catholic Church and the ecumenical feeding programme run by the Ministers' Fraternal in Lucea, in which they feed over 400 persons each week. If we are truly God's Children, then we are called to be a servant of the people, in which we bring Christ to those who are truly in need, by seeking to meet their basic needs.

Additionally, we must also, as a people, remember our past, and seek

(Acts 7:35-36). Having said this, he set the tone for the condemnatory message he was about to bring them, as seen in 7:37-53. It is this message of truth, that caused him to become a Martyr for the Church.

As Stephen continued his attack on the leaders, we see him making reference, in 7:39, to their fore-parents refusing to be obedient unto Moses, and what they did instead, was to reject him and in their hearts; they turned back to Egypt. In making this statement, Stephen was really telling them that they are still the same today, (as they would be interpreting Stephen's message in their context.) To further justify their rejection of God, Stephen highlighted the fact that they went as a people to Aaron, to ask him to make for them an idol in the form of a calf. When Aaron did this, as seen in 7:41, they brought sacrifices to it and held a celebration in honour of what their hands had made. As a result, God turned away from them, as seen in 7:42, and gave them over to heavenly bodies. No longer did God want them to be God's people. Stephen hence linked this to what was written in the book of the prophets, in which the prophet explained that because they worship other gods, God is going to send them into exile as seen in 7:42b-43. By making reference to the tabernacle which their fore-parents had, Stephen then emphasized its movement from Moses' time to Joshua's, where it (the tabernacle) remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God's favour, as seen in 7:45. Stephen in continuing his speech, made reference to the desire of David to build a dwelling place for God, (7:45-50). Even though it was later built by Solomon, the text demonstrates that God does not dwell in houses made by human beings. God is omnipresent, and hence cannot be confined to a single space/place; besides it is God who makes all things. Such structures, therefore, are to satisfy the desires of humanity, but it is not the will of God to do so.

Having given this wonderful historical overview, which showed their bloodline as a people, Stephen then launched a more forceful and intense verbal attack on these leaders, as he addressed them as being a stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears (7:51a). In saying this, they

must have gotten angry, as such analogies showed that they were a people who refused to change their ways of thinking. Consequently, we see him linking, in 7:51b, the concept of their present behaviour, to that of their fore-parents, who always resist the Holy Spirit. He then questioned them rhetorically, asking them if there was ever a prophet whom their fathers did not persecute? He further accused them of the fact that their fore-parents had killed those who predicted the coming of the righteous one, then in 7:52c, he said to them, "... and you have betrayed and murdered Him (Jesus)". This must have really hurt them, after having heard such a wonderful story at first, about their fore-parents, then hearing it being turned against them). They were enraged as Stephen accused them of murder - one of the commandments which forms part of their law, and so, we see Stephen adding, in 7:53, that "you have received the law that was put into effect, through angels, but have not obeyed it."

It is no wonder Acts 7:54, explained that when they heard him saying all this, the people were furious and they gnashed their teeth at him. Stephen, however, was not daunted by the crowd. As 7:55 said, him "...being full of the Holy Spirit, he looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." So in 7:56, Stephen made this declaration and shouted, "Look!" I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. Upon hearing this, the angry crowd covered their ears and they yelled at the top of their voices, while rushing at him. His death was eminent as the crowd by now was out of control. They then dragged him out of the city, and began to stone him. This further justifies the point, that Jerusalem was well known for killing its prophets. (The killing of an individual would never happen within the city of Jerusalem, because it would make the city and people unclean.) The stoning of individuals was a common method used for killing persons who break the law; a similar scene was seen in the stoning of the woman caught in adultery, in which Jesus intervened (John 8:1-11). Consequently, Stephen became the first martyr of the Christian Church - a man who was full of zeal and pas-

sion for the Lord.

Before dying, while being stoned, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of the young man named Saul, who was a persecutor of Christians, but would later become the driving force to spread the gospel to the Gentiles. Stephen prayed while he was being stoned, as seen in 7:59-60, for the Lord to receive his spirit. The pain must have been excruciating, but to show the goodness of Stephen's heart, and the love he had for the people, in humility, he asked the Lord not to hold this sin against them. This showed that he was a Christian who was strong in the faith. One who believes that forgiveness of others is important, even if they are persecuting us to the point of death. Also, these two statements are not to be taken lightly, as they are similar to those echoed and acted out by Jesus when he was on the cross. There He asked God to forgive those who crucified him (Luke 23:34) and then he gave up His Spirit. This, therefore, showed that Stephen in becoming a martyr, was truly walking in the path of Jesus. After Stephen said this, the text said that "...he fell asleep." To have fallen asleep means that even though he had died a physical death, his spirit lives on to be with Christ. Him falling asleep could also be referring to the fact that his memories will live on forever with the Christians, as one who was willing to stand up for Jesus, even if it means dying for the faith.

His death by the Jews further resulted in the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem, and as a result they were scattered, excepting for the apostles, according to Acts 8:1. This was spear-headed by Saul, who gave approval to his death. The scattering of the Christians, however, became more of a positive than a negative, as everywhere they went, they told others about Jesus, and so the persecution of the Christians contributed to the growth of the church far and wide. In Acts 8:2, we see that Stephen was buried by godly men, who mourned greatly for his loss. Saul however, as seen in 8:3 continued to persecute Christians, and to seal his determination to wipe out Christianity, he began to destroy the church. This he did by going from house to house, dragging them off to have them placed in prison.