

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR (2)

Acts Seven

Introduction:

- 1. Foxe's Book of Martyrs records numerous accounts of believers who were tortured and killed because of their faith in Christ.**
- 2. Many believers in Christ are being persecuted today.**
 - a. Christians are imprisoned in Communist nations such as China.**
 - b. Persecution of believers by Muslims in Africa and the Middle East are regular occurrences.**
- 3. Paul warned, "All who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).**
- 4. The Jewish Sanhedrin had murdered the Son of God.**
 - a. They had arrested Peter and John without a charge.**
 - b. They had tried and beaten the Twelve, but had to let them go.**
 - c. They are thirsting for the blood of Christians.**
- 5. Stephen contended with the Jews and they could not answer him.**
 - a. They dragged him before the Sanhedrin.**
 - b. They bribed witnesses to say he had spoken against the temple and the Law of Moses.**
- 6. Stephen's defense contains two thoughts:**
 - a. The temple is not necessarily a sign of God's presence.**
 - 1) The patriarchs served God without a temple.**
 - 2) Israel worshipped God when they had only the tabernacle.**
 - 3) Solomon said: "God does not dwell in temples made by man."**
 - b. The entire history of the Jews was that of rejecting the ones God sent to them.**
 - 1) The patriarchs sold Joseph into bondage.**
 - 2) Israel rebelled against Moses time and again.**
 - 3) The leaders of the Jews rejected God's Son and killed Him.**

Discussion:

- I. GOD CALLED ABRAHAM IN MESOPOTAMIA (1-8).**
 - A. God gave Abraham a charge (Gen. 12:1-3).**
 - 1. Leave your homeland and your family.**
 - 2. Go to a land I will show you; I will give it to your seed.**
 - 3. Abraham "went out, not knowing where he was going."**

4. The only part of Canaan he owned was the burial site for Sarah; the promise was for his descendants.
5. God told Abraham of the 400 years in bondage in Egypt.

B. The covenant of circumcision was given to Abraham.

1. Abraham was the father of Isaac who was the father of Jacob.
2. Jacob was the father of the Twelve patriarchs.

II. JACOB'S FAMILY SOJOURNED IN EGYPT FOR 400 YEARS (9-16).

A. Joseph's brothers were jealous and sold him as a slave in Egypt.

1. God was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles.
2. God gave Joseph favor with Pharaoh who made him governor over all Egypt.

B. A great famine came over Canaan and Egypt.

1. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain.
2. Joseph revealed who he was to his brothers.
3. Jacob moved to Egypt and died there.

III. MOSES LED ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPTIAN BONDAGE (17-43).

A. Israel grew into a numerous people in Egypt.

1. A king arose who knew not Joseph.
2. He ordered the Israelites to cast their babies in the Nile.

B. Moses was born during this time.

1. Pharaoh's daughter raised him as her own son.
2. Moses was educated in all the learning of Egypt.

C. When he was 40, Moses intended to lead his people out of Egypt.

1. They rejected him and he fled to Midian.
2. He remained in Midian for 40 years.

D. God appeared to Moses in the burning bush.

1. He commissioned Moses to lead Israel out of bondage.
2. God showed His approval by the miracles Moses did.
3. Moses prophesied of the coming of a "Prophet like me."

E. Israel constantly rebelled against Moses.

1. They even wanted to return to Egypt.
2. They worshipped the host of heaven in the wilderness.

IV. SOLOMON BUILT A HOUSE FOR GOD (44-50).

- A. The tabernacle in the wilderness was “built according to the pattern.”
- B. David wanted to build a permanent house for God, but God forbade him.
- C. God permitted Solomon to build the temple.
 - 1. Solomon said: “The Most High does not dwell in temples made with men’s hands.”
 - 2. Isaiah wrote: “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? Have not My hand made all these things?” (Isa. 66:1,2).

V. STEPHEN WAS MURDERED BY A BLOODTHIRSTY MOB (51-60).

- A. He convicted them of their sins and they did not like it.
 - 1. They resisted the Holy Spirit when they resisted the messengers and the message He had sent.
 - 2. They persecuted and killed the prophets.
 - 3. They betrayed and murdered the Son of God.
- B. The mob was enraged and “gnashed at him with their teeth.”
 - 1. Stephen saw Heaven opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”
 - 2. They stopped their ears, cast him out, and stoned him.
 - 3. Stephen’s last words were, “Do not lay this sin to their charge.”

Conclusion:

- 1. The stoning of Stephen opened the floodgates of persecution.
- 2. He became the first of a multitude of martyrs who have since died for the faith of Christ.
- 3. For forty years the Jews sought to exterminate the Cause of Christ.
- 4. For two hundred more, the might of the Roman Empire unleashed persecution after persecution against the church of Christ.
- 5. Tertullian, an early Christian writer, told the Romans: “The more we are mown down, the more numerous we become. The blood of Christians is seed.”
- 6. Are you ready to take your stand for Christ?