

# Walk in This Biblical Martyr's Incredible Courage Through This Unlimited Source

I know all Scripture is ultimately about God. Still, I find myself putting undue emphasis on the other, oh-so-human characters in the story. I'd always walked away from Acts 7 in awe of Stephen. What faith! What courage! What knowledge of Scripture! But one day, I saw it.

Stephen isn't the hero of this story. The Holy Spirit is.

Now when I read this passage, the role of the Holy Spirit jumps out like it's written in neon lights. Here's what I see:

The Holy Spirit gave Stephen his edge. Stephen was in this situation in Acts 7 because of what happened the chapter before. The Holy Spirit filled Stephen with "faith and power," enabling him to perform amazing signs and wonders (Acts 6:8-10). The religious leaders didn't understand this, so they dragged him to the Sanhedrin under charges of blasphemy.

The Holy Spirit gave Stephen the words to say. During Jesus' ministry, He said this to His disciples: "But when they arrest you and hand you over, take no thought beforehand or premeditate what you should speak. But speak whatever is given you in that time, for it is not you who speaks, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11).

Stephen's situation was exactly that. Face shining like an angel (Acts 6:15), he stood before the Sanhedrin and gave a comprehensive history of God's people, while the faces of the religious leaders flamed with anger.

Stephen's message was all about the Spirit. The chapter might sound like a history lesson to us, but the Holy Spirit was

hurling a verbal spear right at the Sanhedrin's unbelieving hearts. Every time God had changed the system or sent the Israelites a message, they had resisted, turning to idols or killing the messengers—like they were doing now. Acts 7:51 was the clincher: "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you."

The Spirit enabled Stephen to forgive his enemies. As Stephen was stoned, Scripture tells us again that he was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:55a). As he died at the hands of those who claimed to have the corner on religion, he did something unfathomable: he forgave them (Acts 7:60). Nothing but the Holy Spirit's power could produce that kind of radical grace.

It is appropriate to acknowledge the steadfastness and courage of our beloved martyr, Stephen. But let us never forget the God who indwelled and empowered him.

The Holy Spirit stood before the Sanhedrin that day. The Holy Spirit spoke words of truth. And, as the accusations and stones flew, the Holy Spirit ministered peace to our brother, Stephen. May we never try to explain that Spirit away. {eoa}

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